The Caliphate and the Aiding Sword

A content analysis of "Islamic State" propaganda

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Note on transcription

Throughout this study, I have used a formula for the simplified transcription of Arabic words. I have, for example, decided to not mark the letters 'ayn and ta marbutah, and have avoided the use of diacritical signs. Furthermore, I have avoided giving Arabic words their correct plural forms, and have rather rendered this in a simplified, English-style form. To name one example, anashid is rendered as nashids. I mark most Arabic words with italics, with the exception of the ones I regard as well-known enough to not warrant their separate highlighting. Words like Quran, sharia, and jihad can be regarded as examples of this, as they frequently feature in an untranslated form in, for example, non-Arabic newspapers.

The above formula has been followed throughout the parts of the text written by myself – including in cases where I transcribe spoken words. In cases where I quote texts written by other authors, I maintain the transcriptions used in the original.
1. Introduction

In recent years, the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” (IS) has managed to expand dramatically in terms of its abilities to attract worldwide attention and sympathy. While it originated as a guerrilla network in Iraq, it can now be regarded as a truly global movement. Apart from being a localised rebel group in control of territories in both Iraq and Syria, it has also attempted to brand itself as a symbol of global Islamic resistance. The following study will look closer at the thematic narratives that its propagandists use to reinforce this image, as well as at ways in which they argue for the worldwide relevance of their movement.

As indicated by the fact that tens of thousands of men and women from around the world have travelled to join the movement in Iraq and Syria,1 its message is apparently an attractive one. However, this attraction may be somewhat difficult to comprehend at first glance. The various acts committed by it are explicitly violent, occasionally genocidal,2 and widely noted for their apparently unrestrained brutality. Furthermore, the movement is deeply rooted in conflicts related to a certain local and specifically sectarian context. It can therefore be regarded as quite puzzling that a movement which, to a large extent, can be described as a sectarian Iraqi militia has been able to inspire such devoted sympathy among international audiences. For this reason, I want to take a closer look at how the IS movement's official propaganda presents its overall enterprise, the purposes of its various activities, and the benefits of one's engagement with it. In what follows, I will therefore analyse the content of a limited set of official IS propaganda releases, and highlight thematic narratives used to argue for the wider relevance of the movement.

Inspired by ideas on so-called collective action frames (see below), I aim to understand how IS propagandists seek to connect their disseminated messages to variously broader/“global” issues. How do they present engagement with the IS movement as something internationally relevant? What benefits are presented, and are these in any way argued for as connected to specific grievances and interests? By looking at thematic patterns in the analysed material, I hope that I will be able to understand some part of the process through which these propagandists attempt to create a sense of both resonance and relevance among distantly located audiences. In other words, I want to examine the narrative methods employed to facilitate a sort of convergence between the ideas presented by official IS propaganda and the interests of the targeted audiences.

My own view on the relationship between ideas and interests is inspired by that of Max Weber:

Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the “world images” that have been created by “ideas” have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. “From what” and “for what” one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, “could be” redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world.3

Highlighting the potential influence of ideas, Weber's statement seemingly endorses the notion that the diverse ways in which human beings address their various problems are very much coloured by the “world images” (with associated ideas on problems, goals, and methods of change) they have adopted. Propagandists can often be regarded as potential contributors to the formulation of such world images, and the propaganda of, for example, the IS movement does (quite literally) present images of the world. In ways that will hopefully become apparent below, IS propagandists present narratives aimed at making sense of such things as people's sufferings, grievances, and dreams –

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1 See Jones & Chazan 2016.
and elaborate on these as part of an attempt at encouraging people to act in certain ways. Through this, the movement's propagandists are apparently trying to manipulate the directions in which the “dynamic of interest” is pushed. In this sense, then, these propagandising agents may be viewed as a sort of incarnation of Weber's metaphorical “switchmen”. Yet, while Weber's statement highlights the potential impact of world images, it still encourages us to be mindful of their limitations. A switchman may be able to influence the direction in which the dynamic of interest is pushed, but “he” nevertheless has to take the material and ideal interests of his audience into account. The metaphorical “push” is arguably the result of successful appropriations of these interests, and of the switchman's ability to present his world images as somehow relevant for their fulfilment. In short, the resonance of Weberian “world images” is dependent on ways in which their disseminators are able to credibly relate them to variously palpable, recognised, or otherwise relevant issues.

It can certainly be argued that the full appreciation of a “dynamic of interest” has to be largely informed by studies on the affected people, relevant social circumstances, and so on. The cognitive resonance of world images is largely informed by people's subjective experiences, and it may therefore be difficult for researchers to properly evaluate how or why audiences are attracted to a certain message without engaging with or studying these audiences themselves. Given that the following study is focused in the content of a limited set of propaganda material, rather than on its reception by a sympathetic audience, I realise that my ability to answer questions about the presented messages' appeal is severely limited. Instead, I will focus on the presentation and analysis of the material itself, so that we may develop an in-depth understanding of its thematic narratives and arguments. With that said, however, I hope that this thesis may still be viewed as a contribution to the wider study of the IS movement, and as something which can be used to complement studies on, for example, the reception of its propaganda and the history or wider context of its ideas.

Inspired by the above discussion on how propagandists may attempt to highlight the relevance of their messages through appeals to certain interests, I will try to formulate my discussion in a way that simplifies the contextualisation of the presented themes.

In the following study, I will deconstruct the narratives presented within a chosen set of official IS propaganda material (see below). While my overall purpose is to provide readers with a description and analysis of the material's recurring themes and narratives, I hope that I will also be able to partially contextualise these messages by looking at ways in which they are highlighted for their supposed significance. As I map out and analyse the arguments and thematic patterns of the material, I will also pay attention to ways in which its messages are framed as related to various circumstances and interests. For example, I want to know more about the ways in which the IS movement's specific activities are presented as connected to issues with much wider implications. In other words, I want to understand how certain material and ideal interests are addressed in the analysed material. The purpose of this analytical exercise is to reinforce our understanding of the presented messages with a sense of their narrative and symbolic contexts, and hopefully prepare the ground for potential, future research. If we understand how IS propagandists relate the efforts of their own movement to various wider developments, contemporary circumstances, and palpable issues we may possibly be able to both deepen and widen the social and/or historical understanding of the movement and ideas associated with it.

In summary, the fundamental question addressed in this study is one about the ways in which IS propagandists tries to present their messages as relevant. I aim to conduct a content analysis of a limited set of IS propaganda material (see below, for details on method and material), with the primary aim of developing an in-depth, qualitative understanding of the particular ways in which different issues and themes are presented, addressed, and related to each other. I am particularly interested in analysing the ways in which the material presents engagement with the IS movement as beneficial and related to the satisfaction of certain interests, as well as in how it relates the movement's specific and local activities to various wider and international issues.
Before delving into the content analysis itself, I will dedicate a part this introductory chapter to a general description of the IS movement. My ambition here is to provide unversed readers with the ability to understand some basic aspects of the movement, as well as to encourage an appreciation of it as a multi-faceted and complex social phenomenon. Following this general discussion on the nature of the IS movement, I will present and argue for my overall method, as well as discuss my chosen theoretical framework. Finally, I present a brief introduction to the specific subject of “IS propaganda”, survey ways in which it has been studied before by other researchers, and discuss my own approach to the specific material which I have chosen to analyse. As the chosen material is presented, I also provide readers with a summarising outline of the subsequent chapters.

1.1. Making sense of the “Islamic State” movement

The “Islamic State” (IS) movement is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and may therefore be approached from several different angles. In one sense, it is a political entity (a de facto state) that controls territory and governs over populations in both Iraq and Syria. It is also an apparently loose network of various terrorist/criminal cells that operate in a number of other countries. Beyond these organisational aspects of the movement, “IS” is also a media phenomenon – and as such may serve as a source of inspiration and symbolic meaning for various groups and individuals around the world. It is arguably in this latter sense that we should understand the movement's connections to various individual (so-called lone wolf) attackers, as well as its often quite loose affinity to various non-Iraqi/-Syrian rebel groups that have pledged allegiance to its so-called Caliphate. Beyond these violent sympathisers, it is safe to assume that there are also those who are variously inspired, entertained, and hence influenced by the media and ideas produced and propagated by different branches of the movement. Such consumption of media and sharing of ideas is perhaps not necessarily a sign of plans for committing acts of violence in the movement's name, but may rather serve the purpose of, for example, reinforcing certain aspects of one's identity. All in all, these various elements seemingly constitute a common social movement – in the broadest possible sense of that word.

I understand the term social movement in the sense often used within the social sciences. That is, a social movement is a collective effort focused on a certain set of somehow connected issues. In the case of the IS movement, it can be argued that the central issues in question are largely related to the currently ongoing project of constructing and defending the movement's so-called Caliphate. This overall project contributes to the meaning, symbolism, and cohesiveness of a number of initiatives, which may therefore collectively be categorised as parts of a broader movement. With that said, I nevertheless want to stress that any social movement is a complex phenomenon, and that it can vary internally depending on levels of organisational formality and/or complexity. For example, different parts of the same movement may be organised in different ways and to varying degrees. The IS movement may aptly illustrate this point, as the de facto state that governs over territory in Iraq and Syria is a highly formalised social movement organisation, while the efforts of its various sympathising networks may be described as often more informal and far from as centralised.

In the following few pages, I will recount some of the ways in which various aspects of the IS movement have been approached and studied. These include an overall genealogy that focuses on its development as a political organisation within the Iraqi-Syrian context. Under a subsequent headline, I will discuss ways in which the IS phenomenon has been understood as somehow

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5 In simplified terms, a “Caliphate” is a form of Islamic state that is regarded as an extension of Islam's prophetic legacy. This concept, and its implications, will be discussed in more detail below.
connected to militant sub-currents within the broader Salafi trend of contemporary Sunni Islam. As part of that discussion, I will introduce unversed readers to a number of arguably significant ideological concepts which will reappear as part of the content analysis presented below. Finally, I will summarise a number of ways in which the IS movement has manifested itself as a more or less informal and trans-regional network of variously organised sympathisers. Concluding this discussion on a number of what I regard as significant aspects of the IS movement, I will discuss ways in which its complex and varied nature may affect conclusions drawn from content analysis of IS propaganda. This discussion then moves on to a separate one about the methodological and theoretical aspects of this particular study.

It should be noted that the account below is not an attempt at explaining everything there is to know about the IS movement. Rather, it serves the purpose of surveying some of the more basic assumptions that inform the current study of it as a social phenomenon. For the unfamiliar reader, I hope the next few pages will contribute to a sort of appreciation of the truly diverse and fluid nature of the movement. Rather than the mere extension of an organised political entity, the movement is arguably the result of exchanged ideas, images, and narratives, communicated through the use of various forms of international media. As such, it can certainly be argued that it is as much a countercultural phenomenon and revolutionary symbol as it is a “terrorist organisation”.

1.1.1. History and nature of political activities in Iraq and Syria

In its currently organised form, the IS movement originated as a guerrilla network in Iraq. As such, it rose to prominence as it fought against American forces and their supposed collaborators during the war that followed the American-led invasion of that country in 2003.

According to many scholars, the early developments of what would become the IS movement can be connected to a network gathered around the Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006). This understanding of its history is apparently shared (or at least propagated) by the movement itself, since it has repeatedly been promoted in various official propaganda releases. Al-Zarqawi was among the thousands of Muslims from around the world who volunteered to fight in Afghanistan during the 1980's. He returned to his native Jordan in the early 1990's, where he was soon imprisoned for alleged militant activities. In prison he reportedly gathered a small group of followers around him, and upon release in 1999 he and some of them moved to Afghanistan. At that time, Afghanistan was largely ruled by the so-called Taliban movement, and al-Zarqawi's group was allowed to set up a training camp for Arab militants within its territories. In 2001, Afghanistan was invaded by American-led forces, in response to which al-Zarqawi decided to leave the country. He arrived in northern Iraq in 2002, and seemingly went on to establish some sort of network in parts of that country. When Western troops invaded Iraq the following year, al-Zarqawi's network was among the first who started targeting them and their allies. As a result, this network soon became well known for both the ruthlessness and effectiveness of its attacks.

During the years of 2003-2006, al-Zarqawi's network apparently evolved from a group of a few loosely organised cells into one of the most influential guerrilla movements in Iraq. In the context of partial state collapse and violent sectarian conflict, the uncompromising militancy and self-ascribed Sunni puritanism of the movement seem to have resonated among some parts of the population. Al-Zarqawi's followers framed themselves as distinguished defenders of international Sunnism, and it has also been argued that the attention given to them by both their various enemies

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6 Gerges 2016: 50-98; McCants 2015: 7-15. The following paragraph is based on information gathered from these two books, as well as from Günther 2014; Kazimi 2005; Rosen 2006; Wagemakers 2012 (esp. 41-50, 213-217).
7 E.g. the video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It* (*walaw karihu al-kafirun*), released by the al-Furqan Foundation in November 2014. See also *Dabiq*, Issue 1: 34-36.
and by the international media contributed to an attractive image of strength and defiance.⁸

While al-Zarqawi himself was killed in early 2006, the movement for which he had been both a prominent symbol and spokesman endured. Before his death, al-Zarqawi and his followers had formed a formal alliance with a number of other Sunni factions of the Iraqi insurgency. In late 2006, this alliance was expanded and eventually proclaimed an “Islamic State of Iraq” (dawla al-iraq al-islamiyya) that same year. It was at this point that the movement adopted some of its currently most prominent symbols,⁹ and started referring to itself as a “state” (dawla). However, this state-proclamation was largely symbolic in nature, and the movement did not actually control most of the territories it laid claim to.

In 2006-2007, the “Islamic State of Iraq” (henceforth to be referred to as “IS”, for purposes of clarity) seem to have been a fairly large and influential movement, as it was able to fill parts of the power vacuum that had developed as a result of the post-2003 decline in Iraqi order and security.¹⁰ The years mentioned were reportedly the most violent and chaotic during the entire period of American presence in Iraq.¹¹ American-led forces were noticeably overstretched, as violence increased dramatically in the context of increasing tensions between Sunni and Shia Arab communities (primarily in parts of central Iraq). As a result, the American government was forced to acknowledge the failure of their strategy in Iraq, and developed programs that (among other things) aimed at reconciliation with various insurgent factions that had previously opposed them and their allies. For different reasons, various tribal and insurgent groups decided to reconcile with the Americans, and were as a result given both money and weapons by them.¹² IS was among the groups that rejected any sort of collaboration with the Americans, which contributed to conflicts with these newly formed and US-supported militias. Consequently, the movement was severely weakened during the years that followed 2007, and lost much of its previous prominence and operational capabilities. It nevertheless continued to operate underground as a terrorist and criminal network, and remained as such for a couple of years.¹³

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⁸ Günther 2014 & 2015(a); Napoleoni 2005.
⁹ Among these were its current flag. Reportedly designed by members of the movement itself, and unveiled as part of its state proclamation in 2006, it has since been adopted by a large number of other rebel movements. The IS flag features the Islamic declaration of faith (shahada), and thus reads that “there is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s Messenger” (la-ila ila-lah, muhammad rasul allah). The stylised depiction of this declaration contains the so-called seal of Muhammad, with a design borrowed from a relic allegedly used by the Prophet to sign letters. Its use in IS propaganda can thus be interpreted as an attempt at signalling the Prophet's “seal” and approval of, for example, depicted acts. For more on this flag, see Günther 2014: 41-42, 46-47; McCants 2015: 19-22, 48-71. Beyond signalling the introduction of the IS movement's current flag, the “Islamic State of Iraq” declaration also coincided with the founding of the al-Furqan Foundation, which is an official and especially prominent IS media organisation which still operates today (see below for details).
¹⁰ Gaughen 2007; Hamilton 2008; Kimberly 2007; Linzer & Ricks 2006. Notice that the U.S. military and Western press was referring to the “Islamic State of Iraq” as “Al-Qaeda in Iraq” at the time. The latter was the name they had given al-Zarqawi's network, given its 2004-2006 official name “Organisation for Jihad's Base [qaidat al-jihad] in Mesopotamia” (tanzim qaidat al-jihad fi bilad al-rafidayn). Post-2006 the name “Al-Qaeda in Iraq” is something of an anachronism, but apparently continued to be used for purposes of clarity and, perhaps, propaganda. Beyond these contemporary Western reports, which suggest that IS was among the most prominent of Iraq's guerrilla movements at the time, the al-Furqan Foundation (see the above footnote) released a video in September of 2008. It showcased a number of supposed accomplishments of the movement, which seem indicative of the versatility and ambitiousness of its operations during previous years. For details on this video, see Siegel 2008.
¹³ The following articles provide information on IS activities during its time as an “underground” movement, and suggest that it is problematic to regard it as having been defeated during that period – Ryan & Johnston 2016; Al-Tamimi 2012; Whiteside 2015(a); Whiteside 2015(b).
As the so-called Arab Spring phenomenon swept through North Africa and the Middle East, both Iraq and neighbouring Syria witnessed the rise of large-scale protest movements. In 2011, Syrian protestors were met with violence by the state's security forces, and these early confrontations morphed into a large-scale civil war between various loyalist and rebel factions. Iraq also witnessed protests in 2011, and two years later these escalated into violent confrontations between government forces and various opposition groups. Coinciding with these developments, 2012-2013 also witnessed the resurgence of the IS movement. This development was largely exacerbated by the overall rise in violence, as well as by the partial collapse in state control that followed. In Iraq, the IS movement was able to organise increasingly large and coordinated attacks against security forces, Shiites, and other groups it regarded as enemies. Simultaneously, it expanded its activities into Syria and was able to gain a significant foothold in some of the northern and eastern regions of that country. Following its expansion into Syria, the movement changed its official name to “The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (al-dawla al-islamiyya fi al-iraq wa al-sham).

As a result of its resurgence and expansion, the IS movement gained new avenues for increasing its influence, revenues, and number of recruits. For various reasons, it was largely successful in its endeavours, and could in early 2014 boast about being in control of a number of cities in the mostly Sunni Arab-inhabited hinterland regions of eastern Syria and western Iraq. Within these cities, it successfully managed to establish itself as the primary force of political authority, and started implementing a reportedly harsh and puritanical version of Islamic law. Compared to areas ruled by other armed groups, those controlled by IS were reportedly characterised by a relatively efficient bureaucracy, overall stability, as well as by noticeably lower crime rates. These factors may have contributed to local support for the movement, as well as to its wider appeal. Simultaneously, the movement ran an extensive and apparently well-financed media campaign which promoted its various successes and argued for its credibility.

The rest of 2014 witnessed further gains by the IS movement, and on the 29th of June of that year (corresponding to the 1st of Ramadan 1435 in the Islamic calendar), it publicly announced its claim to the religious and political title of “Caliphate”. At this point, any geographic references were dropped from the movement's official name, and it has since simply referred to itself as “The Islamic State” (al-dawla al-islamiyya). This apparently signals its view of itself as the only legitimate Islamic authority in the world. The symbolic value and implications of this proclamation of a Caliphate will be discussed below, and the movement's official presentation of its rationale for it will be analysed at length as part of the content analysis at the heart of this study.

The above narrative may perhaps suggest that the IS movement is a centrally directed and somewhat uniform entity. While its efforts are probably coordinated on many levels, one should perhaps be wary of drawing any hasty conclusions about the nature of the movement's internal workings and practical politics. For example, it has been suggested that the movement's economic activities constitute a complex web of different interest groups, among which are various private actors (such as smugglers) who operate well beyond the immediate control of the movement.
organisation itself. Furthermore, analysis of its political and military activities suggest that local administrators and commanders often operate with some level of autonomy. It is also hard to determine the level of control and influence enjoyed by official authorities connected to the movement's official and symbolic leadership, since we often lack necessary insight into the reality of the its internal politics. This also holds true for much of its historical activities, and similar caution should therefore be observed when drawing conclusions about the political nature of the movement during, for example, the American-led occupation of Iraq.

Whatever misgivings one might have about labelling IS as a “state” or otherwise centrally coordinated enterprise, its various activities within Iraq and Syria nevertheless suggest that it can be considered as a social movement organisation within that particular part of the world. It is a palpable political reality for millions of people, and is seemingly at least partially coordinated by some sort of central authority. Various media campaigns, military activities, financial and logistical endeavours, and jurisprudential pursuits suggest a significant level of formal coordination between the different groups and authorities that operate under “The Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria. For this reason, the Iraqi-Syrian region is arguably the theatre of operations within which the IS movement has reached its highest levels of formalisation and internal complexity.

1.1.2. Proposed ideological affinities

Beyond attempts at tracing the IS movement's trajectory by looking at political developments in Iraq and Syria, the movement has also been understood as connected to various broader trends within contemporary Sunni Islam. Currently, the IS movement organisation is widely understood as a specific manifestation of a militant sub-current within the so-called Salafi trend.

The Arabic word salaf is translatable as “predecessor”. In the context of the contemporary Salafi trend of thought, the concept of “the pious predecessors” (al-salaf al-salih) is invoked as an ideal of properly understood and practised Islam. The predecessors referred to are the earliest generations of Muslims, who were spatially and temporally close to the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad. As a result, they are regarded of as having practised an especially “pure” (and thereby “true”) version of Islam. Contemporary Salafis aim to emulate the religion of these early generations, and regard an often literalist and puritanical approach to the foundational Islamic texts (the Quran and sunna) as the most effective means of achieving this goal. Practices, traditions, and schools of thought that have developed after the departure of the pious predecessors are largely regarded as forms of religious innovation (bida), and therefore often viewed as obstacles that distance and distract believers from a supposedly original and pure version of Islam.

E.g. Al-Tamimi 2015(c) – note here the referenced “Specimen 3E: Call for Reinforcements from Aleppo Province to Anbar and Salah ad-Din Provinces” in al-Tamimi's archive of Islamic State administrative documents, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents (accessed 2 December 2016). See also Al-Tamimi 2016. To name one example of a coordinated media campaign – in October 2015, following violence at the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, a large number of official IS media departments (connected to the various “provinces” of its Caliphate – see below for details on these) released videos that variously commented on the events, urged violence against Jews, and proclaimed their sympathy for the Palestinian people. Beyond this particular series of videos, similar campaigns have touched upon subjects like the political situation in Saudi Arabia (December 2015), the ongoing migrant crisis (September 2015), and the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris (November 2015). Information on the release dates of these videos was provided by www.jihadology.net.
Haykel 2013; Maher 2016: 6-8; Meijer 2013: 1-13; Shavit 2016: 50-75; Wagemakers 2012: 2-5; Wiktorowicz 2000: 113-120. See also Lauzière 2016, for an historical overview of contemporary Salafism's development during the 20th century.
contemporary Salafism is characterised by the ways in which its various advocates argue for interaction with Muslims and non-Muslims based on the concept of “loyalty and disavowal” (al-
wa la wa al-bar a). In basic terms, this concept is used to argue that Muslims should remain loyal to each other (as well as to God and Islam, obviously), while also actively distancing themselves from non-Muslims and their supposedly idolatrous practices. This concept can perhaps be connected to the puritanical vision of Salafism, as the renunciation of non-Muslim society is imagined as something which will counteract the spread and influence of supposedly innovative practices and ideas.

The above described puritanical and retrospective ideals are often highlighted when scholars define the IS movement as Salafi(-inspired). A look at some of the IS movement organisation's own literature indicate that such connections can legitimately be made. One should, however, be wary of regarding everything categorised as “Salafi” as the tantamount expressions of essentially the same thing. It has been noted that there exist considerable differences between how different Salafi groups and individuals approach and apply the various ideals and concepts described above. As part of the content analysis presented below, I will return to this issue and elaborate on some of the specific ways in which ideas presented by the studied material can be connected to things like Salafi puritanism and the concept of al-
wa la wa al-bar a. For now, it suffices to say that some of the ideas propagated by the IS movement can be regarded as the particular expressions of concepts connected to the much wider Salafi trend.

Rather than signalling an internally coherent movement, the word “Salafi” is used in a generalising manner to refer to a basic current of thought. Among the most influential attempts at dividing the phenomenon into a number of sub-categories is one that was presented by Quintan Wiktorowicz in an article titled Anatomy of the Salafi Movement. In his view, Salafis are in basic agreement over the fundamental tenets of faith, yet differ in their approaches to practical politics. It can therefore be argued that share the same, basic doctrine (aqida), but have different views regarding its application and methodology (manhaj). As a result, Wiktorowicz argues that we should categorise Salafi groups and individuals based on their political views and activities. Among the categories proposed by

25 E.g. Shavit 2016: 52, 58.
26 For an overview, see Wagemakers 2013.
27 Bunzel 2015: 8-9; Wagemakers 2016. While researchers often categorise the movement as somehow related to the Salafi trend, the IS movement apparently prefers to simply call itself Muslim/Islamic or highlight that it represents “The people of the Sunna and Consensus” (ahl al-sunna wa al-jamaa). The former implies that the movement regards itself as representing “true” Islam, while the latter is a common term for Sunni Muslims. It refers to the ideals of emulating the tradition/custom/path (al-
sunna) of the Prophet and of creating a unified community based on consensus (jamaa).
28 See, for example, the textbook “Course in Monotheism” (muqarrar al-tawhid), which was reportedly written by IS-affiliated scholars and is distributed and taught throughout its territories. It apparently details the movement's official views on the nature of Islamic faith, and describes various forms of disbelief and innovation. Among other things, it states that “all innovations are forbidden, and there is no good innovation in Islam, but all of it is error as [The Prophet] said”. Defining the proper creed of ahl al-
sunna wa al-jamaa (see the above footnote), it states that “they are the ones upon whom has similarly been upon the Prophet (God's peace and blessings be upon him: SAWS) and His companions, and they are the ones who adhere to the Sunna of the Prophet (SAWS) and they are the companions, the followers, the Imams of guidance who followed them, and they are the ones who have been right in following, and have rejected innovation in any time and place, remaining victorious till the Day of Judgement”. In other words, the emulation of the Prophets way of life and the disavowal of all bida are the cornerstones of what is presented as true Islam. Moreover, the text's attitude on “disavowal” seemingly echoes the doctrine of al-
wa la wa al-bar a. It states that Islam entails one's submission and obedience towards God coupled with one's “disavowing of [idolatry] and its people” (wa al-
bar a min al-shirk wa ahlil). Such disavowal is clarified as entailing one's “disowning and renouncing [idolatry] great and small, as well as its people, in showing hostility to them, hating them, and declaring them to be kuffar (takfir), and not living with them, or eating with them, and not imitating them in words or deeds”. Translation provided by al-Taimimi 2015(d).
29 Wiktorowicz 2006.
30 While Wiktorowicz's basic definition arguably serves my limited purposes (i.e. narrowing our understanding of the IS movement's specific relationship with the broader Salafi trend), it should be noted that other researchers have
Wiktorowicz is one he calls “Salafi-jihadi”. *Jihad* is translatable as, for example, “struggle” or “perseverance”, and is apparently used by Wiktorowicz to signal some sort of militant opposition towards perceived enemies of Islam. Using Wiktorowicz’s categories, it can and has been argued that the IS movement, based on its approach to both politics and violence, should be categorised as “Salafi-jihadi” (or militant Salafi). Nevertheless, a closer look at the militant sub-current of Salafism reveals that there exist internal differences over certain issues. Based on these, there have been attempts at further narrowing our understanding of the IS movement’s ideology.

For puritanical Muslims, the legitimate use of violence is largely presupposed by the proclaiming of one’s enemies to be disbelievers (kuffar) – the act of which is referred to as *takfir*. This is because the Quran explicitly forbids the intentional killing of other Muslims.1 In cases where the enemies one face are obvious and self-identified non-Muslims (such as Jews, Christians, Hindus, and so on) this is rarely a problem. Disagreements arise when one is faced with groups or individuals who call themselves Muslim, yet act in ways that are perceived as hostile to Islam. In the view of some Muslim radicals,2 such is often the case with the sort of secular states that arose in the Muslim world during the 20th century. Nominally Muslim, their rulers have nevertheless promoted man-made laws based on non-Muslim sources, and have therefore been regarded of as working to undermine the authority of the sharia and the sovereignty of God. In response, ideas were developed that provided radicals with rationales for proclaiming *takfir* on supposedly secular leaders, as well as their supporters.3 However, within the various currents of contemporary militant Islam, disagreements often arise over the specific conditions of *takfir*.4

In the context of militant Salafism, the IS movement is often regarded as ascribing to a particularly extreme and widely applied form of *takfir*, which apparently treats most of its opponents as non-Muslims and thereby legitimise violence against them. In 2007, at the time when it still called itself “Islamic State of Iraq”, the movement published a statement wherein those who seek the “Islamic State” are pronounced to be “idol-worshippers” and aiding them against the Muslims” as a nullifier (muqarrar al-tawhid) names the “supporting of the mushrikin [idol-worshippers] and aiding them against the Muslims” as a nullifier (naqid) of one’s Islamic faith. Given that the IS movement frames its own struggle as one between Muslims (i.e. itself) and “idol-worshipping” Christians and heretics, any Sunni who collaborates with the latter or attacks IS forces is regarded of as working to undermine the authority of the sharia and the sovereignty of God. In response, ideas were developed that provided radicals with rationales for proclaiming *takfir* on supposedly secular leaders, as well as their supporters.3 However, within the various currents of contemporary militant Islam, disagreements often arise over the specific conditions of *takfir*.4

1 The online version of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines “radical (ideologist)” as “one who desires extreme change in part or all of the social order” – https://global.britannica.com/topic/radical-ideologist (accessed 16 January 2017). This is the definition I have in mind whenever I use the word as part of this study. In other words, I am not referring to anything more specific than the desire for extreme change, and I thereby want to stress that “radicalism” does not necessarily entail some form of support for violent methods.
2 Bunzel 2015: 39-40
3 See, for example, Paz 2013 for an overview of debates among militant Salafis.
4 The official IS textbook "Course in Monotheism" (muqarrar al-tawhid) names the “supporting of the mushrikin [idol-worshippers] and aiding them against the Muslims” as a nullifier (naqid) of one's Islamic faith. Given that the IS movement frames its own struggle as one between Muslims (i.e. itself) and “idol-worshipping” Christians and heretics, any Sunni who collaborates with the latter or attacks IS forces is categorically labelled as an apostate whose Islam has been “nullified”. Official IS propaganda often refer to its various Sunni Muslim enemies (such as...
notion has apparently been reinforced since the movement proclaimed its Caliphate, whereby it now regards itself as the world's most legitimate Islamic authority.

The IS movement has also been noted for its violently sectarian attitude towards Shia Muslims. While this is not an entirely unique trait, IS ideologues have seemingly combined it with their particularly inclusive application of takfir. Unlike some other militants, who argue that one should at least adopt a somewhat lenient attitude towards Shiite laypeople, the IS movement apparently regards any Shiite as a conscious heretic and legitimate target for violence. Reportedly, this attitude can be traced back to the time of al-Zarqawi's network in Iraq, but may also have been reinforced by various prejudices and hatreds that already existed in Iraqi society, as well as within various older sources used by both al-Zarqawi and subsequent IS ideologues. Regarding the Shiites of Iraq as disbelievers (as well as collaborators with the American occupation), al-Zarqawi declared war on the community as a whole. He argued that laypeople could not be excused for being ignorant about the nature of their supposed heresy, and that the character of modern war and politics meant that there no longer existed any relevant differences between civilians and combatants. This attitude towards the killing of Shi'ite laypeople and nominally Muslim civilians was considered excessive even by the standards of many other militants. Al-Zarqawi was widely criticised by various notable figures connected to militant Salafism, but rebutted their objections and did not alter his approach.

Since al-Zarqawi's death, the IS movement has retained the idea that Shiites are disbelievers. The movement officially regards the reverence of Shi'ite Imams as a form of idol-worship, views Shi'ite festivals like those of Ashura as deviant forms of bida, and condemn supposed Shi'ite “rejection” of the early Sunni caliphs. Anti-Shia narratives are regularly amplified by the use of anti-Jewish themes, which paint the Shiites as agents of an originally Jewish plot (since long supported by Western “Crusaders” as well) aimed at undermining Islam.

Beyond its particularly wide application of takfir, the IS movement has also been noted for the way in which it elevates fighters of jihad (mujahidin) as a group with legitimate religious and political authority. Al-Zarqawi's rebuttal of the criticism levelled on him by other militant Salafis was largely based on the argument that these critics were merely theoretical mujahidin, while he himself was an actual, front-line fighter. His critics wrote from the safety of their offices and libraries, while he and his followers were confronted with the dangerous reality of an actual battlefield. Based on the idea that the ones who fight on the battlefields of militant jihad are closer to God than other Muslims, al-Zarqawi argued that he and other fighters like him had the last word in any discussion on the practicalities of things like takfir and jihad. This attitude was seemingly adopted by the men who founded the “Islamic State of Iraq” in 2006. This “state” was not proclaimed by groups of religious scholars, but by the mujahidin themselves. While they explicitly stated that they lacked much in terms of scholarly credentials, they argued that their experiences in the fields of jihad made up for any such drawbacks. In fact, they argued, the experience they had should weigh heavier than the jurisprudential expertise of any well-educated scholar or jurist. They argued that in a time during which the entire Muslim world is either occupied by disbelievers (as in the case of Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on) or ruled by so-called apostates (the variously “secular” rulers of the

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38 For details on anti-Shia discourse within contemporary Salafism, see Haykel 2010: 208-214; Steinberg 2011; Steinberg 2013.


40 Hassan 2016; Kazimi 2006; Kazimi 2010: 4-5.


43 Wagemakers 2016.


Muslim world), drastic measures like these are to be expected. Hence, in an age supposedly characterised by an unprecedented and urgent need for jihad, those who are actually fighting should be ascribed a special status among Muslims. As the IS movement has expanded, it has been able to attract a somewhat significant group of apparently well-educated scholars, and has thereby moved beyond an earlier stage at which the battlefield credentials of its fighters were one of its only sources of legitimacy. Through the movement's development of state-like structures in Iraq and Syria, it has consolidated its authority by complementing the influence of mujahidin with that of various jurists and scholars. Nevertheless, the movement apparently still values practical “jihadi” credentials above those associated with more theoretical fields of expertise. Jihad is still presented as one of the most admirable, valuable, and important forms of religious activity (see content analyses below for details).

Summarising the above, one may perhaps identify a pragmatic attitude as a significant aspect of the ways in which the IS movement has justified its various activities. While it references various Salafi ideals, it also uses arguments of a militarily and politically pragmatic nature as part of its reasoning. Its inclusive application of takfir is apparently informed by an interest in labelling a multitude of political enemies and rivals as disbelievers, its anti-Shia polemics have been used to justify a certain guerrilla strategy, and as it lacked the ability to properly legitimise its “Islamic State of Iraq” it disregarded established interpretations and instead referenced the supposed importance of special political circumstances. It can certainly be argued that the movement's guerrilla origins have forced an adoption of such pragmatics, and that its ideology can therefore be described as a sort of hybrid between Salafi ideals and a largely situational political strategy. As a result, its 2014 proclamation of a Caliphate can perhaps be understood as an attempt at transcending any eventual contradictions resulting from this combination of ideas. As a “Caliphate”, the movement's Iraqi-Syrian branch has granted itself significant interpretative authority and the ability to rank its own assertions above those of, for example, opposing Salafi scholars. Enemies and rivals are automatically labelled as non-Muslim, as their ways of opposing Islam's foremost authority serve as a sufficient demonstration of their disbelief.

In the above, I have recounted some of the ways in which the IS movement has been understood as connected to the phenomenon of Salafism. While such an understanding may help us make sense of its relationship to a wider history of Islamic ideas, it should not single-handedly serve as an explanation of actions carried out in the movement's name. It has been noted that studies of “Islamic terrorism” and “Jihadism” focus extensively on the issue of ideological justifications for violence, and that this may contribute to a sort of exotification of Muslim militants and their motivations.

Their violence may, for example, be understood primarily as the result of a specific ideology, so that political, social, or otherwise material aspects of its background are not properly examined. This tendency has been variously describes as, for example, one that “ideologise” Muslim violence, as well as the study of Muslim militancy through a sort of separate universe of understanding. Simply put, scholars who criticise this tendency call for more contextualising (historical, social, etc.)

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47 E.g. Bunzel 2014.
48 For a specific example not discussed as part of the below content analyses, see the Turkish-language music video The Path of Jihad released by the al-Hayat Media Center in June 2015. Its lyrics narrate how someone searching for “paths to Paradise” reach the conclusion that the path of jihad is both the most effective and honourable one to follow. The phrase “there is no honour without jihad” is repeated, and echoes a recurring theme of official IS propaganda which will be discussed below.
49 Specifically, al-Zarqawi argued that indiscriminate attacks on Iraq's Shiites would force them to retaliate with comparable violence, so that they would “show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts”. The strategic purpose of this was to “awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent and annihilating death at the hands of [the Shiites]” – see Haykel 2010: 216-217. See also Dabiq, Issue 1: 35-41.
50 E.g. Li 2015.
51 Mullin 2011.
52 Robinson 2004 (esp. 112-113, 135-136).
research on contemporary militant movements in the Muslim world. While these critiques of “ideologisation” are valid and necessary, the study of ideological developments should perhaps not be entirely dismissed, as the above described ideological aspects of the IS movement may help us understand certain aspects of its wider appeal. While the original socio-political context of the movement lies in Iraq, its ability to connect itself to various wider, “Salafi”, issues may perhaps have contributed to its appeal among people in other parts of the world. The referencing of such international issues serves to complement the military pragmatics of its situational politics, and can thereby be regarded of as an example of how the overall movement is legitimised and framed as relevant. By presenting itself as something akin to a vigorous Salafi movement, IS can be framed as relatable and relevant for non-Iraqis as well. Salafism has been widely understood and studied as a transnational identity marker, and is furthermore present among Muslim communities around the world.53 In other words, common affiliation with some form of militant Salafism (or related ideas) may be one of the reasons why people from around the world find some sort of common ground within the IS movement.

1.1.3. The IS movement's connections, affinities, and influence beyond Iraq and Syria

Above, I briefly discussed the idea that social movements can be understood as demonstrating varying degrees of formality and internal organisational complexity. In the case of a multi-faceted and increasingly global movement like that of IS, the levels of formality can be understood as largely dependent on the distance from the political influence of the social movement's organisational “core”. The Iraqi-Syrian branch of the IS movement can be described as constituting such a core, and especially so since its proclamation of a Caliphate in June 2014. This proclamation has reinforced the symbolic significance and overall legitimacy of its potential authority and influence. As was described above, this particular branch of the movement operates in a fairly formalised manner and is apparently able to coordinate various large-scale efforts. This ability is reduced once we leave the areas of its immediate control, which in turn affects ways in which movement sympathisers are able to operate. In the following, I will recount some of the ways in which a number of more informal aspects of the IS movement have been discussed.

Beginning in late 2014, the IS Caliphate started accepting pledges of allegiance proclaimed by rebel groups operating in countries beyond Iraq and Syria. In most cases, these groups have since restyled themselves as so-called provinces (\textit{wilayat}) of the IS Caliphate.54 This often entails a name-change and the ability to link ones struggle to the supposedly world-wide ambitions of the IS movement.55

\footnote{For an overview of these aspects of the Salafi phenomenon, see contributions to \textit{Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement} (2013), edited by Roel Meijer. Contributions by Adraoui, Hamid, de Koning, and Østebø are especially relevant.}
\footnote{The IS Caliphate is officially organised as a number of administrative divisions, designated as \textit{wilaya}. This is true for Iraqi and Syrian territories, as well as for those located outside of this core region. In a video released by the al-Furqan Foundation (see below for details on this official IS media organisation) in July of 2016, an unnamed English-speaking narrator stated the following: “For with the expansion of the Islamic State it became necessary to create effective ways to administer and supervise its territory. This led to the formation of the \textit{wilayat}. They are regional divisions set up in order to facilitate the affairs of governance in the Islamic State. Each region is headed by a \textit{wali} [provincial governor] designated by the \textit{khalifa} [caliph]. The \textit{wali} refers any serious matters to the delegated committee [a central authority connected to the caliph] and governs the \textit{wilaya}'s subjects. Justice is thereby secured and needs of the people are met. The \textit{wilayat} of the Islamic State (may Allah honour it) have reached thirty-five in number, of which nineteen are in Iraq and Sham [the Levant] and sixteen are located distantly.” (\textit{The Structure of the Khilafah}, al-Furqan Foundation, July 2016). While the statement from an official propaganda release may not necessarily tell us much about the practicalities of the movement's internal politics, it nevertheless illustrates how its propagandists seek to frame the movement as a focused and coordinated political project.}

\footnote{For example, the Nigerian rebel group often called “Boko Haram” by mainstream media changed its official name from \textit{“Movement of the people of the sunna for outreach and jihad”} (jamaa ahl al-sunna li al-dawa wa al-jihad) to \textit{“The province of Islamic West Africa”} (al-wilaya al-islamiyya gharb al-ifriqiyya) when they pledged allegiance to the IS Caliphate in March of 2015.}
Notably, becoming an IS province (wilaya) seemingly often result in some form of media coordination with the wider movement. Affiliates publish messages as parts of broader propaganda campaigns, and their videos are seemingly edited so as to be brought to the qualitative standards and overall design associated with official IS media. How this is done is hard to tell without data on the internal workings of the IS media campaign, but it has been a consistent pattern ever since the proclamation of the first distant wilaya in 2014. Beyond these aspects of brand association, the various non-Iraqi/-Syrian wilayat seemingly operate as largely autonomous entities. However, this may vary as there have been reports of how members of the movement's Iraqi-Syrian branch have travelled to other regions to support efforts there, and as the Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement has reportedly attempted to use its influence as a means of affecting the internal politics of distant wilayat. Levels of formal coordination apparently vary between different affiliates, and may be dependent on factors such as geographic proximity and political circumstances.

Officially affiliated groups can be viewed as examples of a somewhat formalised aspect of the wider IS movement. The groups themselves are often fairly large and coordinated enterprises, and whatever their practical relationship to the Iraqi-Syrian branch these connections are nevertheless formalised (or at least presented as such) through political recognition and some form of media collaboration. I would nevertheless categorise this phenomenon as ultimately connected to the more informal and non-organisational aspects of the movement. The groups that have pledged allegiance have apparently not done so as a result of some sort of military expansion of the IS movement organisation out of Iraq-Syria, but rather because of the fact that the IS Caliphate is an international media phenomenon and widely recognised brand/symbol. Given different circumstances (such as, for example, a different level of access to international media and/or other methods of communication), it can perhaps be assumed that these groups would not have been as interested in connecting their own particular struggles to those associated with the IS movement. Through the use of media, the IS movement has been able to communicate its purpose and establish its own particular brand, and can furthermore present itself as a means by which otherwise obscure groups may generate what they regard as necessary attention. As a result, the separation of these affiliated groups from the above described Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement serve an arguably useful analytical purposes. It illustrates how varying interests may converge globally, and how international media and effective branding may be used for various political purposes. In order for us to appreciate these dynamics, we have to understand that the IS Caliphate and its various “provinces” are not some sort of politically cohesive federation. Rather, these “provinces” are a number of organisationally autonomous entities that have decided to associate themselves with the international brand of a particularly successful rebel movement operating in Iraq and Syria.

Recognised wilaya have often been proclaimed in regions characterised by some form of ongoing conflict, where IS affiliates have been able to reach levels of organisational complexity that may have be hard to achieve in places where state control is more pervasive. In these other parts of the world, IS sympathisers often face greater challenges to their ability to mobilise and operate. As a result, they seemingly often operate through largely informal networks. In recent years, a number of such networks have carried out deadly attacks in the name of the IS Caliphate. The people behind these attacks can all be viewed as members of the broader IS movement, but the nature of their involvement with and affinity to various organised branches of it may vary. On one hand, we have witnessed large-scale and coordinated attacks carried out with direct support from the Iraqi-Syrian

58 McGregor 2016; Zenn 2016.
59 It can perhaps be argued that IS activities in Libya represent an exception, as the proclamation of IS wilayat in that country was reportedly preceded by hundreds of IS fighters and their leaders moving from Iraq-Syria to Libyan territories. Even if this was the case, it is nevertheless likely that the success of their further endeavours (such as local recruitment) was made possible by the brand recognition of the IS movement. For details, see Wehrey & Alrababa'h 2015.
branch of the movement. Several of the men who carried out a series of coordinated attacks in Paris in November of 2015 had fought with IS in Syria, and two of the attackers were apparently designated suicide-bombers from Iraq. Furthermore, the expensive logistics of the attacks were reportedly funded with the help of money transferred from either Iraq or Syria, and its overall operational coordinator was supposedly in contact with people located inside Syria. While there are nuances to an attack like this one, it can perhaps be understood as an operational extension of the movement's Iraqi-Syrian branch. Not everyone involved had any direct contact with either Syria or Iraq, however, and the attacks can therefore be used to illustrate how loose networks of distant sympathisers may occasionally coalesce with the more formalised branches of the movement.

Beyond attacks that coordinate the organised efforts of various branches and sub-groups of the movement, there have also been examples of attacks carried out by individual perpetrators. While these individuals seemingly operate independently of any sort of wider organisation, they have for some reason or another decided to explicitly link their actions to the wider efforts of the IS movement. The nature of their relationship with the movement may vary, but often entails them being idealised by sympathisers and recognised as, for example, “soldiers of the Caliphate” by media organisations officially linked to the Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement. The same media organisations regularly broadcast messages that encourage violent action, and argue that the conducting of such acts represents one of the best ways in which sympathisers may support the wider movement. Recent reports have suggested that some of these seemingly individual attackers have in fact been in regular contact with and keenly urged on by others. If this is true, it suggests a level of coordination and formalisation beyond that of an individual feeling of affinity. However, the exact, organisational nature of such coordination is difficult to verify or properly summarise at the moment of writing (February 2017).

Beyond these various militant activities, the IS social movement also constitutes a number of largely non-violent components. Among these are various loose networks of sympathisers who use different means to disseminate and discuss various messages and ideas associated with the movement. Networks of sympathisers have been noticed in a number of countries, where they have reportedly been trying to recruit members, encourage support for IS activities, or merely disseminate official propaganda and share variously connected ideas. Their activities are seemingly not always coordinated with some sort of organisational authority, but rather motivated and carried out autonomously and/or informally. Illustrative of the loose and informal nature of these activities is the fact that British activists Anjem Choudary and Mohammed Rahman could only be convicted of “inviting support” for IS as they were sentenced to prison in September 2016. This was because they had expressed some form of support for the IS movement, and supposedly argued that its Caliphate was a legitimate one. Notably, the judge's sentencing remarks delivered at

The arguably coordinated and measured nature of the attack was furthermore demonstrated by a video released by the al-Hayat Media Center (see below for details on this official IS media organisation) in January 2016. Titled *Kill Them Wherever You Find Them*, it featured prepared statements by the Paris attackers (all appearing in the same, military-style, uniform), which linked their actions to the policies of the French government. The majority of these scenes had apparently been filmed somewhere inside IS-controlled territory, which indicate that they had been prepared well in advance of the attacks themselves. The production and release of this video by an official media arm of the Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement thereby confirmed an apparently intimate connection between the IS movement's political/organisational core and the specific cell that carried out the Paris attacks in November 2015.

Koerner 2016. For examples of this sort of appraisal by official IS propaganda, see *Dabiq* Issue 7: 68-71 and *Dabiq* Issue 8: 5-6.
the end of their trial states that neither of the defendants could be linked to statements involving “direct encouragement of any particular violent action, and the evidence did not show any specific link between anything [they] said and acts of violence by one of more of those who listened to [them]”. 67 This apparent absence of any explicit calls for violence indicates a certain level of nuance in the views and attitudes of these specific IS supporters – something which may have broader implications. 68 Narratives employed and propagated by sympathisers may be constructed out of alternative combinations of themes and ideas associated with the movement – relative, perhaps, depending on the nature of goals aspired to and circumstances experienced by individual sympathisers.

It is safe to assume that there are many different ways in which one can be an IS sympathiser (keeping in mind the inclusive nature of that word). Arguably, these nuances of sympathy are at the moment poorly understood, and there is a wide tendency to instinctively conclude that any sort of affinity with the IS movement necessarily entails an active embrace of violence. This is, indeed, a sensible conclusion, given the nature of the movement activities and the fact that some of its most influential authorities have recurrently called on their supporters to conduct acts of violence. At the same time, the fact that “IS” is as much a media phenomenon as it is an organised entity opens up for the possibility that various symbolisms associated with its brand, media, etc. may be used for entirely different purposes. In-depth, in situ, studies of the various uses of IS symbols and narratives is needed for us to properly understand the implications of their use by different people around the world.

1.1.4. Conclusions

One way to understand “The Islamic State” is as a broad social movement that operates and functions on different levels – ranging from the highly organised to the more informal. The movement arguably originated in Iraq, subsequently spread to Syria, and has been able to establish an apparently formalised organisation in the hinterland regions of those two countries. At this level of organisation, it governs over millions of people using methods and justifications that have been widely described as militant Salafi. This ideological aspect illustrates the multi-layered nature of the movement. As the IS movement implemented its reportedly Salafi-inspired policies, internationally propagated ideas are thereby connected to the Iraqi context, and the movement's struggle there is made explicitly relevant for (militant) Salafis in other parts of the world as well. Looking at this particular development, one might argue that it represents an example of how local circumstances coalesce with the much wider diffusion of ideas, as well as of how developments happening at different levels of our globalised world may reinforce and affect one another.

As the IS movement organisation expanded into Syria, it got itself entangled in a conflict with wide echoes around the globe. Throughout the world, feelings of sympathy for the cause of the Syrian rebels has been widespread, and foreign volunteers started arriving well before IS had officially

67 Ibid.
68 Media organisations and spokespeople officially affiliated with the IS movement's influential Iraqi-Syrian branch have recurrently called for its supporters to carry out acts of violence. As stated by his sentence (see footnote above), Anjem Choudary had openly expressed his support for the IS Caliphate, as well as supposedly signed a “oath of allegiance” to its leader and caliph. At roughly the same time as he reportedly signed this oath, he was interviewed by Martin Krasnik for the Danish TV show Deadline. In this interview, Choudary stated that “I am not encouraging anyone to join ISIS or al-Qaeda, or to carry out any operation in, for example, you know, Denmark or Britain. In fact I believe, as a Muslim, we live in the West, for example, […] under a covenant of security. […] We do not target the life or wealth of the people with whom we live” (interview accessed via YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZnZhuORKOC, 27 January 2017). The combination of this statement, which clearly contradicts statements delivered by figures associated with the highest symbolic authorities within the IS Caliphate, with the reported “oath of allegiance” indicates an arguably nuanced or perhaps individual approach to the IS movement. Some symbols and themes are apparently highlighted, while others are seemingly disregarded.
established itself in the country. By directly engaging with what was happening in Syria, the IS movement organisation related itself to one of the most widely noticed and reported issues at the time. It gained new avenues through which it could disseminate its message, and was granted new arguments which it could use to justify its state-building enterprise. Once again – local circumstances and trans-local ideas/issues affected and were influenced by each other.

In short, the IS movement is in many ways illustrative of how local politics interact with and are influenced by the ways in which people and their ideas travel rapidly around a globalised and highly connected world. There are many ways in which this interaction may be realised. For a social movement organisation like the IS branch in Iraq and Syria, the dissemination of media may serve the purpose of communicating with various networks of distant sympathisers. A global and diverse social movement like that of IS is not necessarily directed by a single authority, yet it is certainly plausible that some of the more respected movement actors (such as the symbolic leadership of the IS Caliphate) may be able to influence the general direction in which movement participants are pushed. It is also likely that these actors are keen on achieving certain levels of control and/or on making sure that sympathisers are realise the values and supposed benefits of acting in a certain way.

Given that the Iraqi-Syrian branch finds itself in a politically precarious situation (engaged, as it is, in warfare with a number of undoubtedly powerful adversaries), it understandably wants to activate the variously passive sympathisers at the organisational fringes of the movement. Activated sympathisers may help the movement in more palpable ways than those who support it in variously passive, informal, and non-spatial ways. Such activation may be attempted at through the use of communicative media wherein sympathisers are encouraged to do certain things in order to strengthen the movement. Within the context of the IS movement, some such media can be categorised as propaganda (see below, for definition and discussion of the term). Such propaganda serves as a sort of bridge between various branches and layers of the movement, and notably so as means by which movement authorities can disseminate their ideas and specific calls to action.

The study of propaganda disseminated by a social movement's internal authorities may possibly help us understand several aspects of the wider movement. For example, such studies may clarify aspects of the often dynamic ways in which a movement's central organisation attempts to generate authority and inspire action, as well as of how such attempts are interpreted by and reverberate among more passive sympathisers. While these are undoubtedly important aspects of, for example, the IS movement's ongoing propaganda campaign, I want to stress that the following study is neither focused on the conscious strategy that motivates it or on the specific nature of its reception by sympathetic audiences. That is, I will not focus on ways in which the formulation of certain messages are related to specific, political interests of the disseminating agent, and neither on the contexts and perspectives of specific receivers. Rather, as was stated in the overall introduction to this chapter, I want to understand how the disseminated messages are formulated so as to enable for their wider resonance. In other words, I want to know how an originally Iraqi guerrilla movement argues for its international relevance. In what follows, I will therefore present a theoretical framework which I regard as largely useful for the purpose of analytically highlighting these specific aspects of communicative media.

1.2. Presentation of overall method and theoretical framework

In the following few pages, the methodological and theoretical framework that has been employed for this study will be presented and discussed. I will argue for ways in which certain theories can be regarded as useful for my purposes, and relate these to a definition/understanding of the concept of “propaganda”. 
In general terms, the method employed for this study can be described as inspired by what Chad Nelson and Robert Woods, Jr. call *content analysis*. A sort of umbrella term, “content analysis” is used by them to describe a sort of study that focuses on the *content* of communicative material (be it written, spoken, or pictorial). Whatever the nature of the analysed material and supporting theories employed, the basic purpose of any content analysis is essentially the same – that is, researchers look at a chosen set of material and try to examine “the messages embedded” in it.\(^{69}\) Elaborating on the various functions of content analysis, Nelson and Woods, Jr. argue that the method is “appropriate if researchers want to identify patterns or commonalities within a particular genre”,\(^{70}\) and that “content analysis allows researchers to systematically manage and summarize large quantities of relatively unstructured information”.\(^{71}\) One way of doing so is to codify/categorise the analysed material in terms of their thematic attributes.\(^{72}\) Such categorisation is necessarily preceded by analysis that seek to identify and understand recurring themes as well as relate them to each other, and it can therefore be argued that the process of “[c]oding units into nominal [e.g. thematic content] categories produces qualitative data”.\(^{73}\)

Presuming that “official IS propaganda” can be regarded as a sort of genre, I would certainly characterise the purpose of this study as aimed at identifying some of its thematic patterns. As the chosen material is largely made up of videos (see details below), I have attempted to accomplish this identification through the repeated viewing of the chosen material, as well as through the thematic categorisation of its content and the qualitative analysis of its presented messages.\(^{74}\) For example, arguments presented in one video are compared and related to thematically similar arguments in other video, so that these construct an analytical category that helps clarify the seemingly underlying narrative and recurring aspects of the presented messages. Throughout, I have attempted to trace certain thematic patterns in the various releases, so that I may elaborate on the nature of their characteristics, identify their various nuances, and understand eventual messaging coherence across the material. Beyond an attempt at presenting a qualitative analysis on aspects of IS movement messaging, I hope that this focus on recurring arguments may help us appreciate which themes the movement's propagandists regard as especially important, relevant, or useful for their purposes. Finally, I want to stress that my focus is on the *content* of the messages presented, rather than on the ways in which they are presented. While aesthetic aspects of the analysed material contributes to the formulation of its message, the theories I employ (see details below) can be described as not explicitly focused on this particular aspect, and the analysis of it therefore plays a largely subordinate role.\(^{75}\)


\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Nelson & Woods, Jr 2011: 111.


\(^{73}\) Nelson & Woods, Jr 2011: 114.

\(^{74}\) I regard my study as *qualitative* because my stated interest in the nature of the material's potential resonance forces me to study its various formulations in-depth, as well as consider the significance of variously symbolic and thematic contexts. In other words, I am not conducting a study aimed at or based upon the quantitative understanding of, for example, the number of times a certain phrase or word is repeated. Rather, I want to understand how these utterances and images are woven together as parts of a wider narrative of meaning. This is accomplished through the analytical coding of the material's content, which in turn is preceded by a thorough evaluation of variously thematic and symbolic relationships between narratives, images, and other thematic symbols. In other words, the path towards the thematic codification of the chosen material's content fulfils an analytical purpose in itself, as each move is preceded by the elaborate evaluation of its viability. Thus, this placing of a certain utterance or image into a thematic category forces me to evaluate my own understanding of its nature, purpose, and symbolic significance. Such evaluative discussions reinforce my own, in-depth, understanding of the analysed material, in ways that will hopefully become apparent below.

\(^{75}\) This is not to say that the aesthetic presentation is inconsequential (for some sympathisers, it may indeed be an important aspect of their attraction to the movement's messaging), but rather that the detailed study of it should rather be the the subject of focused analysis using tools related to, for example, the study of art and visual culture. I will certainly not be disregarding aesthetics completely, but have chosen to not evaluate its use through, for
The limitations of content analysis can often be connected to a lack of first-hand interaction with the people who produce and consume the analysed material, and conclusions drawn from it can perhaps be criticised as largely speculative and problematically informed by, for example, the cultural prejudices of the researcher. Readers will notice that this study is not using any sort ethnographic research as part of its empirical sources, and this may legitimately be regarded as a serious flaw since the nature of the studied material's appeal may be regarded as an important aspect of its overall nature and wider context. The appeal and attraction of a social movement is a multifaceted phenomenon, and questions about it can not be regarded as solvable simply based on an understanding of the ways in which, for example, movement propagandists argue for its relevance. The resonance of the movement's arguments depend on various local, social, and cultural factors which are hard to identify and appreciate without a deep, contextual understanding of the people who are attracted by these arguments. What I identify as “recurring” or “underlying” may perhaps not be regarded as that important by another person (etc.). Furthermore, attraction to this particular movement may very well have been informed by, for example, the specific way in which one was introduced to it by a credible source (such as a close friend) rather than the nature of arguments presented in official propaganda. In other words, it can certainly be argued that our understanding of the IS movement's appeal have to be further informed by so-called thick descriptions of the various social contexts in which it plays a part. Content analysis can therefore not in itself be used to draw cause-and-effect conclusions about, for example, actions carried out in the movement's name.

Given the above criticism, I want to stress that this study is indeed intended as a mere contribution to our wider understanding of the IS phenomenon. Beyond an understanding of the people who it attracts, it is also relevant to understand the nature of the thing that attracts (even if this serves no other purpose than to contribute to the cultural “thickness” of an ethnographic analysis). Moreover, an understanding of the movement's presented messages may help us appreciate the various ways in which ideological traditions and historical/social developments have contributed to its trajectory. As such, a deeper understanding of the ideas associated with the movement may help us contextualise it as part of the wider history of certain traditions, ideas, and societies – something which, in turn, may open up for additional research. It can certainly be argued that all of this presupposes an actual, in-depth understanding of the messages presented by official IS media. Hence, the focused and systematic study of IS media itself may serve several useful purposes. The content analysis presented as part of particular study is intended as an attempt at such a focused and systematic study, and my ambition is that its conclusions may be used to complement research on the movement's various social and historical aspects. With that said, I believe that it is important to treat the propaganda's message with some form of regard for its wider context. A coherent theoretical framework which addresses this issue may therefore be regarded as a useful tool.

### 1.2.1. Social movement theory and cultural framing

This particular study can be described as focused on analysing the formulation and expression of certain ideas. Through a qualitative analysis, I will attempt to make sense of and connect the various meanings, narratives, and themes employed throughout a limited set of official IS media (see below for details on the chosen material). While the primary focus is on the messages presented by the material itself, it is important to not regard the presented ideas simply as sui generis phenomena, but rather as part of an attempt at addressing certain issues and interests. For example, an in-depth analysis of its technical or cultural aspects. In this sense, my analysis of aesthetics may legitimately be regarded as shallow and bland, but I assure my readers that this is merely the result of my chosen analytical focus and its limitations, rather than a marked statement about the relative importance of aesthetics.


As was stated before, my view on the relationship between “ideas” and “interest” is largely inspired by the above quoted passage from Max Weber's *The Social Psychology of the World Religions* (Weber 1946: 280).
this reason, I want my analysis to be supported by a framework which may assist efforts at contextualising the studied material's use and formulation (for example, the ways in which the presented ideas can be related to more widely held ideas and notions). Furthermore, the fact that the study of this particular movement is a relatively young and unexplored field of research suggests that there may be substantial gaps in our understanding of its development, context, and so on. It can certainly be argued that various forms of inter-disciplinary research may contribute to abridgements of these gaps, and that it may be advantageous to facilitate understanding between researchers of different disciplines. For this reason, I want to formulate my analysis in a way that makes it accessible for researchers of fields such as political science, security studies, etc. In short, I want to formulate a theoretical framework which provides me with an opportunity to elaborate on symbolic and “religious” aspects of the studied material, while simultaneously presenting my various conclusions in ways that ideally enables and simplifies their usability as part of analyses on, for example, social and political aspects of the movement.

To summarise the above, the guiding principles for my choice of theoretical framework are that it should enable me to somehow contextualise the content while simultaneously present my conclusions in ways that simplify their application as part of inter-disciplinary research. Related to the latter concern, Quintan Wiktorowicz has described the contemporary study of Islamic activism in the following way:

Scattered among a variety of disciplines, publications on Islamic activism tend to follow narrow sets of research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies, each determined by a particular disciplinary focus. Political scientists, for example, are mostly concerned with how Islam impacts the state and politics; sociologists are interested in exploring the demographic roots of Islamist recruits; religious studies scholars predominantly focus on the ideas that motivate Islamic activism; and historians details the histories of particular Islamist groups. The result is that disciplinary fragmentation has produced greater understanding about each particular element of Islamic activism without developing models of frameworks that explain how all of these elements fit together, interact, and influence patterns of Islamic contention.

While more than a decade has passed since Wiktorowicz formulated these ideas, they arguably remain relevant. Within the academic disciplines focused on the study of religions, researchers seldom have to justify the study of ideas/doctrines for their own sake. For scholars of other fields, such a focus may perhaps seem narrow-minded and naïve in its attitude (or lack thereof) towards

78 “Religion” is a controversial concept, and scholars of the various academic disciplines that study it have often been criticised for the supposedly arbitrary and uncritical way in which they use it. See, for example, Timothy Fitzgerald's The Ideology of Religious Studies (2000) for a thorough presentation of such a critique. I would argue that Roy A. Rappoport has presented a largely satisfying definition of religion in his Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity (1999), wherein he understands ritual (i.e. “a more or less invariant sequence of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” – Rappoport 1999: 24) as something which may contribute, either directly or indirectly, to experiences, notions, ideas, and structures which may be collectively referred to as “religious”. Recognising the complicated and controversial nature of the concept, I nevertheless abstain from subordinating my analysis to an all-too rigid understanding of its supposed importance. Hence, this is not a study of how or why IS messaging is “religious”, but rather a focused analysis of the specific content of the chosen material. Nevertheless, as stated above, I am not interested in merely studying the content of the material as a set of freely floating ideas and expressions, but rather as related to wider contexts. Hence, I want to remain open to the idea that this context may include phenomena that can be described as “religious”, according to Rappoport's understanding of that concept. In this sense, then, I am consciously searching for ways in which IS propagandists try to act as Weber's metaphorical “switchmen” – seeking to construct “world images” which may guide people's interests in certain directions (Weber 1946: 280).

Islamic activism is defined as “the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes”. The definition is intentionally broad enough to accommodate “the variety of contention that frequently emerges under the banner of ‘Islam’”, and Wiktorowicz further stresses that anyone who frames his/her/their own cause as “Islamic” can be studied as such. Wiktorowicz 2004: 2-3. Whether or not I regard, for example, the IS movement as properly Islamic is therefore largely irrelevant in the context of this particular study, since the movement's own use of symbolic discourse that it explicitly links to “Islam” earns it the right to be studied as “Islamic”.

79 Wiktorowicz 2004: 3-4.
material context, and such differences in approach may inhibit potentially useful dialogue between researchers of these different disciplines. Wiktorowicz suggests that ideas developed within the context of so-called social movement theory (SMT) may be used as a basic inter-disciplinary frame of reference for studies of Islamic movements. The contributions to the book Islamic Activism (2004), edited by Wiktorowicz, may be used as demonstrations of the versatility, inclusiveness, and usefulness of this theoretical framework.

SMT seek to make sense of ways in which collective mobilisation occurs, and studies informed by this framework often proceed from the assumption that the movements studied are on some level informed by a pragmatic reaction to contextual circumstances. Furthermore, SMT posits that social movements are presupposed by the mobilisation of various resources (imagined in the broadest sense possible). In other words, the emergence of a social movement is not only the result of people adopting ideas simply because they like them. The idea has to make some sort of sense and seem relevant to them, its wider dissemination is realised with the help of various resources, and the movement itself depends on people's abilities/opportunities to actually mobilise. Social circumstances presupposes social mobilisation, and social movement theory attempts to explain various ways in which specific circumstances contributes to the rise of movements at certain times and in certain places. In other words, the SMT framework provides researchers with the ability to contextualise, for example, certain ideas as related to a form of social mobilisation. Furthermore, it represents a sort of theoretical language that is easily comprehensible for scholars of widely different disciplines, and incorporates an appreciation of both material and ideal concerns. In short, then, it can certainly be argued that the use of SMT satisfies the above described guidelines for the sort of theoretical guidelines I regard as useful for my purposes.

Beyond these possible benefits, the use of SMT-related theories may support efforts to neutralise the ways in which Western scholars tend to talk about Islamic movements. For example, Glenn E. Robinson has argued that the use of SMT may help Western scholars “deorientalize” the Islamic movements studied by them, so that features shared with other movements around the world are not underestimated. If we focus too much on and overestimate the importance of the pronounced goals and ideas of these movements, there is a risk of excessively highlighting their “Islamic” and/or otherwise “exotic” characteristics. As a result, we may underestimate contextual aspects of their popularity and understand them as if through “a parallel explanatory universe where a completely different set of theoretical tools is necessary”. This, in turn, may inhibit comparative studies, contribute to an underestimation of the social mechanics of mobilisation, and reinforce understandings of Islamic actors as primarily informed by “irrational” loyalty of faith. In short, it may distract us from asking relevant questions about why Islamic symbols are invoked in certain contexts and not in others (i.e. what are their specific purposes, and how are they used?). These concerns echo those presented by Corinna Mullin, who have argued that there is a tendency to “ideologise” the violence of militant Islamic movements:

The ideologisation-of-terror perspective implicitly denies the specific political and security contexts in which these tactics and strategies are chosen, often as a last resort. Instead, it focuses either purely on economic factors, assuming that the Islamist is under the influence of ‘false consciousness’ and merely reacting to material frustration caused by underdevelopment, inequality, globalisation and the like or, in Orientalist fashion, on an essentialised understanding of jihad. By dismissing issues of context, ideologisation-of-terror analyses fail to comprehend the diverse nature of Islamist groups, in their substance and demands.

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81 That is, “pragmatic” in subjective terms. It is arguably useful to once again remind ourselves about what Weber called “material and ideal interests” – Weber 1946: 280 (my italics). One may, for example, act “pragmatically” out of sincere belief in otherworldly reward. Human interest encompasses so much more than merely material concerns.


84 Mullin 2011: 267.
Similarly, Darryl Li argues that many “[d]iscussions of jihad today are like a secularized form of demonology”, focused on merely explaining militant movements’ own justifications for violence, taking these at face value as motivations for their behaviour, and too often uninterested in elaborating on their historical and social contexts.\textsuperscript{85} A recognition of these critiques should not, however, lead one to the conclusion that the study of ideological justifications are entirely irrelevant, but rather make one wary of overestimating its importance. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi has criticised attempts at distancing the IS movement from “Islam” as counterproductive and hampering our understanding of its discourse, world-view, and (indeed) context.\textsuperscript{86} His ideas can be related to those of Russel T. McCutcheon, who believes that the same scientific scrutiny should be applied to every phenomenon describable as “religious” – no matter the researcher's personal opinions about whether or not the studied individual/group is using the religious tradition in an erroneous manner.\textsuperscript{87}

By highlighting these critiques, I want to stress that I recognise the various problems they address, and that my intended goal is to conduct a study that stays clear of falling into any of the various analytical traps described by them. In general terms, these can be summarised as often caused by a willingness to focus intently on one specific aspect of a movement (e.g. its ideological doctrine), which in turn may result in a tendency to overestimate its importance relative to other aspects of the movement's context and development. Samuli Schielke has argued for the need of studying the whole picture of social behaviours and their context, and regard the academic study of Islamic culture as often indifferent to the various ways in which “Islam” interacts and co-exists with the personal, material interests of the people who regard it as somehow relevant for them.\textsuperscript{88} Even though this particular study focuses on the official ideas and doctrines of a certain movement, I regard Schielke's approach as relevant and inspirational. Hence, I will attempt to study some of the ways in which the propagated message is related to material concerns, issues, and grievances. I will regard the analysed material as a discursive whole, rather than as the mere expression of a certain form of “Islam”. Beyond attempts at recounting how certain Islamic symbols are used, I will try to deconstruct the ways in which they are argued for as relevant, as well as analyse seemingly superficial aspects of the presentation itself.\textsuperscript{89} I regard some parts of the SMT framework as suitable for the highlighting of these concerns, but it is necessary to clarify which parts of it can be regarded as especially useful for my purposes.

Among ideas proposed within the context of SMT is one that has been described with terms like “cultural framing” or “collective action frames”. These terms describe the study of ways in which social movements try to justify and make sense of their purpose by relating it to wider issues and sentiments. The specific questions addressed by a movement may be perceived as marginal or banal by wider society unless they are successfully framed as relevant for more widely experienced issues. Describing another aspect of framing processes, Glenn E. Robinson helps us imagine them by referring to ways in which a movement “boils down” its own ideology and goals – presenting its more essential aspects, so that a broader audience can more easily understand and connect with the movement's ideology.\textsuperscript{90} The nature of framing obviously varies widely depending on various cultural and social contexts. Framing a movement as related to a certain religious tradition may, for example, help its endeavours in contexts where that particular tradition is widely respected.

\textsuperscript{85} Li 2015.
\textsuperscript{86} Al-Tamimi 2015(b).
\textsuperscript{87} McCutcheon 2006.
\textsuperscript{88} Schielke 2010: 9-12.
\textsuperscript{89} Regarding this latter aspect of analysis, the focused search for “Islam” in the material can be regarded as especially problematic. For example – can the decision to use a certain type of music (i.e. one with a certain structure, rhythm, etc.) for a certain scene be explained by the analyst's highlighting of the movement's ideology? Or is it rather a purely aesthetic decision, aimed at facilitating certain emotions and connecting these to the scenes depicted? In other words, it can certainly be argued that a narrow focus on ideology may result in the oversight of potentially important aspects of the studied content's appeal.
\textsuperscript{90} Robinson 2004: 129.
Similarly, various culturally informed themes of belonging (e.g. national identity) may be used to reinforce the sense of such things as relevance and importance. Simply put – within the context of SMT, the concept of “framing” is often used to describe various attempts at increasing the collective sense of such things as relevance and resonance. This can be understood as an example of the ways in which ideas may be used as resources for social mobilisation, as the formulation of widely resonating ideas can be understood as the development of a mobilising resource. As such, framing analysis may serve as a useful tool when one is attempting to highlight the social/material aspects of a particular set of ideas, and can, in this sense, help researchers appreciate the wider context of the ideas they study.

Among social scientists, Robert Benford and David Snow are among the most widely cited when it comes to theoretical aspects of framing analysis. Among ideas presented by them is something they call “core framing tasks”. These have been summarised in the following manner:

Collective action frames are constructed in part as movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change. […] Snow & Benford (1988) refer to these core framing tasks as “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing,” and “motivational framing.”

Keeping these core framing tasks in mind could perhaps serve a useful purpose for this particular study. They can be used as a sort of clarifying template, that may serve the purpose of elucidating and highlighting the codification carried out as part of the overall content analysis. As I approach the material and start categorising its content, I aim to codify it based on the thematic nature of the various arguments presented. One way of doing this is with the help of these core framing tasks, as the arguments can possibly be categorised as either diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational. As a result, I hope I will be able to develop an understanding of the overarching narrative (i.e. which are the problems/issues identified by the movement, and how are they to be resolved?), as well as gain a qualitative understanding of the movement's framing of itself and the surrounding world. As the presented arguments are analysed as attempts at fulfilling certain framing tasks, I may be able to gain a deeper understanding of how they are related to certain contexts, variously framed as relevant, as well as connected to and reinforced by each other. On another level of analysis, the variously diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational arguments within the studied material will be discussed as related to arguably similar, yet more widely held, notions (that is, they are/have been experienced and propagated by people that are not a part of or do not identify with the IS movement itself). Through such an analysis, we may hopefully be able to evaluate and understand some part(s) of the ways in which IS propagandists tries to argue for their movement's wider relevance.

In summary, I will be using certain terms borrowed from Benford and Snow as part of the thematic codification carried out as part of my overall content analysis. The highlighting of ways in which the three core framing tasks are addressed in the analysed material is intended as an attempt at clarifying the thematic nature of various arguments and messages, and at understanding their relationships to each other as part of an overarching narrative. The use of this template may inform us about ways in which IS propagandists want their movement to be viewed, how they present it as relevant, as well as about the various forms of active engagement that they believe will serve to further its various goals. By relating the presented arguments to more widely held notions I may, in turn, be able contribute something to our understanding of the their context – that is, I may be able to highlight various international issues appropriated by IS propagandists to reinforce their arguments about, for example, the necessity of proclaiming a Caliphate.

91 Benford & Snow 2000: 615.
92 For example, which are the material and ideal interests highlighted by its propagandists? How is the IS movement framed as able to remedy certain problems, resolve certain issues, and satisfy certain needs?
1.2.2. Propaganda and cultural framing

Up until this point, the word “propaganda” has been used in ways that suggest its meaning is taken for granted. In the following, I would like to present a definition of the term and discuss some of its implications.

“Propaganda” has been variously defined, yet a very basic definition can be found in Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell's book *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2012). They describe propaganda as aimed at the shaping of perceptions, the manipulation of cognitions, and the directing of behaviour. Furthermore, this serves the purpose of achieving “a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” In short, propaganda aims as influencing the ways in which people think and act, so that they may support or otherwise facilitate a certain development. While inclusive, the definition helps us appreciate that propaganda is always used with the intention of achieving a certain type of goal. It is not like any other form of communication, but serves a certain purpose. I argue that the material chosen for this particular study fulfils all of the here presented criteria, and that ideas developed for the analysis of propaganda (i.e. “propaganda” according to a definition similar to that of Jowett and O'Donnell's) are relevant for my purposes.

At this point, it is certainly fitting to stress that I am in no way interesting in dismissing eventual “lies” presented as part of the studied material. The word “propaganda” certainly has some negative connotations, yet my hope is that the inclusive definition presented above is able to clarify that I am interested in using it as an analytical tool rather than as a way of presenting some sort of normative or denouncing argument. Related to this, one should perhaps also address the fact that the movement I study is one that has often (and understandably so) been condemned for its variously violent activities. Whatever the nature of the IS movement and its activities, the content of the studied material, or of “propaganda” as such, I want to remind the reader of the fact that this study is not in any way intended as a sort of denouncing argument. My aim is to study the chosen material in search for what its producers seemingly want to tell their audience about the IS movement's relevance, so that we may perhaps appreciate aspects of its appeal. My recognition of the studied material as “propaganda”, according to Jowett and O'Donnell's definition, is merely an attempt at focusing the scope of inquiry and analysis, as well as at clarifying certain aspects of the studied material for the reader.

Moving beyond a basic definition of propaganda, we may start to discuss the various complications and challenges that often face the propagandist. Influencing the ways in which people think and act are not always simple procedures (and certainly not so if you want them to act in ways that can be described as extreme and/or violent – which, indeed, is the case with the propaganda of the IS movement). It has been argued that propagandists need to take the needs and sentiments of their audiences into account, as it is likely that these may otherwise turn a blind eye to the propaganda aimed at them. This idea can be elaborated on by referencing Jacques Ellul's book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (1973):

> The propagandist must first of all know as precisely as possible the terrain in which he is operating. He must know the sentiments and opinions, the current tendencies and the stereotypes among the public he is trying to reach. [...] One cannot make just any propaganda any place for anybody. Methods and arguments must be tailored to the type of man to be reached. [...] Thus, existing opinion is not to be contradicted.

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94 Ibid.
95 For readers, this will become apparent as the content of the material is presented and analysed below. I regard it as largely unnecessary to elaborate on justifications for this categorisation here, as descriptions of content would thereby have to be repeated.
97 Jowett & O'Donnell 2012: 4-5.
but utilized. Each individual harbors a large number of stereotypes and established tendencies; from this arsenal the propagandist must select those easiest to mobilize, those that will give the greatest strength to the action he wants to precipitate. [...] Of course, when we say that the propagandist has to use existing elements, we do not mean that he must use them in direct or unequivocal fashion. When he does so, he can indeed create something new. The propagandist's need to base himself on what already exists does not prevent him from going further.98

Readers who have read the previous segment on “Social movement theory and cultural framing” will likely spot important similarities between Ellul's ideas on propaganda and Robert Benford and David Snow's on collective action frames. Ellul's book can perhaps be read as a “proto” example of framing theory, since he goes on to describe many of the non-formal and loosely structured forms that propaganda may assume at different levels of society. Jowett and O'Donnell nevertheless argue that Ellul's definition of propaganda verges on the edge of uselessness because of its supposed “magnitude”, which according to them hampers attempts at properly identifying it.99 To counter the supposed inclusiveness of Ellul, they instead propose that we should understand propaganda as in some sense “deliberate” and “systematic”. While I am not in full agreement with their evaluation of Ellul's ideas on the sociology of propaganda, it can nevertheless be argued that the propaganda I am about to analyse can be described as both deliberate and systematic. It has been produced by a relatively definable agent, in the form of an apparently organised network connected to the highly formalised Iraqi-Syrian branch of the IS movement. Below, I will present readers with an overall description of this phenomenon, so that they may appreciate some aspects of the overall and nature and context of the analysed material. I hope, especially, that this will provide unversed readers with the ability to comprehend how and why the specific material chosen for this analysis is significant.

I would argue that the above discussion make clear that framing theory is applicable to the study of propaganda, as the latter can largely be understood as a sort of framing process. Specifically, I will use Benford and Snow's ideas on the so-called three core framing tasks as a sort of clarifying template throughout my own content analysis. In other words, I will be looking at ways in which these tasks are addressed within the analysed material. My hope is that this will enable for the additional discussion on ways in which IS propagandists recognise certain grievances, issues, and interests, and argue for the various benefits of engaging with their movement. In short, I aim at identifying ways in which the material tries to relate to the IS movement to things described by Ellul as “sentiments and opinions, [...] current tendencies and stereotypes”. Through a systematic content analysis, I will deconstruct the narratives presented and thematic patterns seen throughout the studied material. Relating these to the three core framing tasks, I will hopefully be able to clarify the sort of issues (with their associated interests) addressed by the material. This identification of the emphasised issues may, in turn, guide my analysis towards the discussion of some seemingly appropriated sentiments and tendencies. All of this serves the purpose of somehow contextualising official IS messaging, so that we may develop a further understanding of its various connections to the histories, circumstances, and experiences of our contemporary world.

1.3. Propaganda of the IS movement

The propaganda associated with the IS movement is quite multi-faceted, and is both produced and disseminated by many different agents. The reader is thereby encouraged to imagine that both highly formalised and more informal branches of the movement produce various forms of propaganda. A professional video producer working for an officially recognised IS media organisation in Syria or Iraq, a blogger writing about his/her positive experiences with the movement, a sympathetic social media user that disseminates and comments on official IS media,

and a distant sympathiser that tries to convince his/her friends of the benefits of supporting the movement – all of these can be regarded as propagandists, even though operate on somewhat different levels.

While propaganda associated with the IS movement is diverse, media that is officially released by some part of the Iraqi-Syrian branch can be regarded as more influential and prominent. The Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement is apparently the most formalised and well-organised of its various constituents, and is furthermore the one that is most closely associated with the authority of the movement's so-called Caliphate. Given its apparently extensive funds and resources, this particular branch of the movement is able to release media on a scale and of a quality that far supersedes that produced by any individual sympathiser or smaller group. All of this apparently contributes to the relative centrality and importance of such official media. As a result, this study will focus on material released by a number of media organisations that are officially recognised as part of the wider structure of the Caliphate proclaimed by the Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement. They may be described as virtual extensions of its so-called state, and as means by which its official leadership communicates with the wider movement and its sympathisers. This latter aspect is significant, as the framing analysis of material produced and disseminated by these official media organisations may help us appreciate which narratives are regarded as especially important by authorities connected to the IS Caliphate.

In the following, I will present an overall summary of the IS movement's official media apparatus, so that the reader may appreciate the nature of its scope and activities. As part of this summary, special attention will be given to the specific media organisations that produced the material that is to be analysed below. Thereafter, I will discuss a number of ways in which other studies have approached the subject of IS propaganda, and highlight what I regard as a sort of research gap. Lastly, I will present the specific material that is to be discussed as part of this study's content analysis, and elaborate on how I have chosen and subsequently approached it.

1.3.1. Overview of official IS media

As a whole, the IS movement inspires a diverse and multi-layered media campaign. While it should be noted that pro-IS messaging is done by amateurs as well, this particular study is focused on more elaborate releases that can be categorised as official. Official releases are distinguishable by their use of trademarks associated with a number of media organisations that are formally recognised as part of the IS Caliphate's own structure.\(^\text{100}\) Given this, it can certainly be argued that these organisations operate as extensions of the de facto state run by the movement in parts of Iraq and Syria. Indicating that this is indeed the case, alleged defectors have reported that the Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement coordinates and funds a large-scale media campaign from inside its territory.\(^\text{101}\) Moreover, most footage released by official IS media organisations has been filmed inside either Iraq or Syria.\(^\text{102}\) In spite of this, it is far from safe to assume that the entire production process is a centralised effort exclusively associated with the Iraqi-Syrian branch of the movement (contemporary communications technology enables for the ability to spread material to other parts of the world so that it can be edited there – and so on). Whatever the practical aspects of the IS movement's official media campaign, its scope and apparent professionalism should nevertheless be noted. In two separate studies written in 2015, researchers Charlie Winter and Aaron Zelin counted between one and two hundred official media releases per week.\(^\text{103}\) The vast majority of these were

\(^{100}\) See Winter 2015: 14. See also the video *Structure of the Khilafah*, released by the al-Furqan Foundation in July 2016.

\(^{101}\) Miller & Mekhennet 2015.

\(^{102}\) Zelin 2015(b).

\(^{103}\) Winter 2015; Zelin 2015(b).
fairly simple photo reports, but the data also included such elaborate releases as apparently studio-produced audio and hour-long feature videos of remarkable quality.\textsuperscript{104}

While the majority of media releases can be directly linked to the movement's Iraqi-Syrian branch, it should also be noted that a significant minority depict and comment on events in territories beyond this core region of the movement's Caliphate.\textsuperscript{105} As was noted above, however, videos released by the IS Caliphate's distant wilayat have apparently undergone an editing process aimed at reinforcing the uniform impression of the movement's overall media campaign. Since at least 2014, the media branches of the movement exclusively use music that has been produced from within (i.e. they have been officially released by its own audio-focused media outlet). The music used come exclusively in the form of nashid, which is a form of Islamic vocal hymn which does not use musical instrument as part of its arrangement.\textsuperscript{106} Most of these hymns seemingly have designated contexts in which they are used (some for showing aspects of supposedly just rule, others for battlefield assaults, others for suicide-bomber operations, and so on), and this formula is seemingly followed throughout the entire movement – whether a video is released by a media organisation intimately connected to the Iraqi-Syrian branch or by affiliates in, for example, Nigeria or Libya. Moreover, there is a recurring use of speeches by the movement's own leaders and spokesmen, such as the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the movement so-called caliph), and Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (former official spokesman). Finally, each official media office has its own logo, which is used as a trademark that signals the identity of the disseminating organisation. Among wilayat media offices, such logos have been given a noticeably uniform design in terms of the colours and calligraphic style used.

While official IS media should be noted for its consistency in terms of design and quality, it should nevertheless be noted that its production and dissemination is the collaborative effort of a number of apparently somewhat separate media offices/organisations. Each wilaya (whether located in the Iraqi-Syrian region or beyond) has its own media office, which releases material that depicts and comments on local events. These media offices have played an increasingly prominent part in the overall media campaign post-2014, and it can be speculated that this may be the result of an increasing need for organisational outsourcing following the movement's rapid expansion during that year. Beyond these locality-based media offices, there are also a number of organisations which are focused on releasing media of a certain format or nature. Examples of such organisations include that associated with the Arabic-language al-Naba magazine,\textsuperscript{107} the multi-lingual al-Bayan radio station,\textsuperscript{108} and the Ajnad Media Foundation – which focuses on audio releases like nashids and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104] See Dauber & Robinson 2015, for details on the visual and editing qualities of official IS videos. The basic argument presented by them is that official IS videos fulfil what they call industry standards: “That doesn’t necessarily mean standard for Hollywood, it might mean what you see in commercial video or advertisement, but its what we have become accustomed to seeing, what the eye has become accustomed to seeing, what the eye has become accustomed to seeing, what the eye has become accustomed to seeing for anyone who watches a good bit of professionally shot and uploaded media. Neither of us can speak to what is standard outside of Europe and North America, but it seems worth noting that ISIS is systematically working to use visual standards that will give their videos an underperforming professional look to someone whose eye is accustomed to a European or North American industry standard” (writer's own italics).
\item[105] During the single week studied in detail by Aaron Zelin, eighty-one percent of releases depicted events in Iraq and Syria – and, hence, nineteen percent depicted events in other regions (Zelin 2015). Based on my own observations during the last two years, my overall impression is that Zelin’s chosen week is an illustrative example. The relative proportions may vary, but the main point to be made here is that Iraq-Syria is by far the most prominently featured region.
\item[106] This arrangement is apparently informed by certain puritanical ideals. It should nevertheless be noted that IS nashids are often able to fulfill rhythmic and melodic qualities comparable to those of other forms of contemporary popular music, thanks to their use of often large numbers of complementing harmonies. For an overall discussion on the concept of nashid, see Shiloah 2012. See also Gråtrud 2016, for a discussion on themes presented in the lyrics of a number of official IS nashids.
\item[107] The Arabic word al-naba is translatable as “the news”.
\item[108] The Arabic word al-bayan is translatable as “the proclamation” or “the statement”.
\end{footnotes}
recitations of the Quran.\textsuperscript{109} Beyond these offices focused on a certain type of media, there are also a small number of older (i.e. they were founded before the apparent outsourcing that occurred in the latter half of 2014) media organisations that often appear as official disseminators of relatively major thematic releases. Given that the material chosen for this particular study (to be presented in detail below) was released by such media organisations, I will dedicate the final part of this exposition to the presentation of their various characteristics.

The oldest and arguably most prominent official IS media organisation is the al-Furqan Foundation.\textsuperscript{110} Its prominence is connected to the fact that it has consistently been the means by which official statements delivered by the movement's symbolic leadership are disseminated. Notably, the public and official proclamation of the movement's Caliphate was distributed by the al-Furqan Foundation,\textsuperscript{111} and so was the first statement delivered by its newly appointed “caliph”.\textsuperscript{112} Video footage from this so-called caliph's first (and – as of January 2017 – only) public appearance was also distributed by al-Furqan.\textsuperscript{113} The apparently intimate relationship between the al-Furqan Foundation and the IS movement's symbolic leadership indicates that this particular media organisation should perhaps be regarded as especially significant, and this impression is perhaps reinforced by its relative seniority compared to the movement's other official media offices. The al-Furqan Foundation was founded around the same time as the so-called Islamic State of Iraq was proclaimed in 2006 (see above).\textsuperscript{114} As such, it has played a prominent role as part of the official IS media apparatus for more than a decade, and thereby stands as a symbol of a sort of organisational and/or symbolic continuity with the movement's past.\textsuperscript{115} Before 2013, the al-Furqan Foundation released all sorts of media, as it was then the only official media organisation of the IS movement. As the movement expanded beyond Iraq, the production of its official media was outsourced to various newly founded organisations, and the al-Furqan Foundation has since been largely focused on a certain niche within the movement's wider media campaign. Beyond the distribution of statements by leadership figures, the al-Furqan Foundation is characterised by the comparably elaborate nature and notable length of its official video releases. These releases often focus on specific themes and can often be interpreted as seemingly authoritative statements on, for example, a certain religious issue.\textsuperscript{116} The content of one such video will be discussed extensively as part of the content analysis presented below below.

As the IS movement expanded into Syria in 2013, the al-Furqan Foundation's efforts were soon assisted by the founding of a sort of auxiliary media organisation called the al-Itisam Foundation.\textsuperscript{117} While I have not been able to verify whether or not the al-Itisam had any particular profile or focus, its founding and early activities coincided with the apparently large-scale recruitment of non-Iraqi/-Syrian fighters into the military structure of the IS movement. Many of its releases focused on individuals from this emerging community of foreign fighters, and it was often used to disseminate messages delivered by them to people in their various home-countries. Like al-Furqan, the al-Itisam

\textsuperscript{109} The Arabic word \textit{ajnad} is translatable as “soldiers”.

\textsuperscript{110} This name is usually translated as “the criterion” or “the separation”. The use of this concept can perhaps be interpreted as a reference to that which separates Muslim from disbelievers, as well as to the verdict on the day of judgement. It is possible that the producers at the al-Furqan Foundation want to signal that their guiding mission is connected to such an ideal separation, and/or to informing Muslims about the necessary criterion. See Paret 2012(a) for an overall discussion on the meaning of \textit{al-furqan}.

\textsuperscript{111} Al-Adnani 2014.

\textsuperscript{112} Al-Baghdadi 2014.

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Special coverage of the khutba and jumua prayer in the great mosque in the city of Mosul (taghtiyah khutsa al-khuta wa al-salat al-jumua al-kabir bi-madina al-mawsul)}, al-Furqan Foundation, July 2014.

\textsuperscript{114} Roggio 2007.

\textsuperscript{115} For a discussion on some aspects of the official IS media campaign's history, see Whiteside 2016.

\textsuperscript{116} For an illustrative example, see the al-Furqan video \textit{And they give zaka} (\textit{wa atta al-zaka}). It was released in June of 2015, runs at roughly thirty-five minutes, and focuses entirely on the virtues and benefits connected to the paying of obligatory Islamic alms (\textit{zaka}).

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Al-Itisam} is translatable as “clinging” or “adherence”.

Foundation was primarily an Arabic-language media organisation, even though its releases occasionally featured other languages as well. This almost complete domination of the Arabic language changed somewhat in the spring of 2014, as the al-Hayat Media Center was founded. Al-Hayat has since distributed different types of media, as its output in recent years have consisted of magazines, nashids, and videos. Its hallmark is of a linguistic character, as it only releases media in different non-Arabic languages. Most of its releases are either spoken in English or provided with translation subtitles in that language, but French, Russian, and Turkish are also prominently featured languages – together with smaller ones like, for example, Uyghur, Kazakh, and Bosnian. Beyond the distribution of its own material, the al-Hayat Media Center is also responsible for the official translation of material released by, for example, the al-Furqan Foundation.

### 1.3.2. Previous studies on IS propaganda

During the last few years, IS propaganda has been the subject of a fairly large number of studies. Given the obvious risk of being weighed down by their sheer amount, I will not present a detailed survey of everything that has so far been written about this phenomenon. Rather, the following short segment presents a brief overview of what I would argue is the current status of this particular field of study – primarily aimed at identifying certain research gaps.

The historical developments of the IS movement's official media campaign has been addressed in an article written by Craig Whiteside. It details the background, context, and development of some of its more prominent media organisations, and tries to connect these aspects to a more overall understanding of how the movement's operates and of what it hopes to achieve. In this sense, his focus is primarily on the IS movement's organisation in Iraq and Syria, rather than on the nature of its wider appeal and influence. Also looking at the historical development of the movement's media apparatus, Christoph Günther has written a number of articles, as well as a German-language monograph, on such things as the ideology and visual propaganda of the early IS movement. While our understanding of the IS movement's current media may perhaps be amplified by historical studies like those of Whiteside and Günther, they would also have to depend on conclusions drawn from the empirical study of its more recent media. Arguably, the nature of its current “Caliphate” cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the specific narratives used to legitimise this particular proclamation.

A survey of studies focused on more recent examples of the movement's official propaganda suggest that there exist a certain genre of research which looks at the overall nature of the IS media campaign, tries to identify its guiding principles and strategy, and discusses the practical aspects of its media dissemination. A paper written by Charlie Winter in 2015, which looks at official IS media released during the twelve months that followed after the movement's Caliphate declaration in 2014, may serve as an illustrative example. Identifying what he regards as especially prominent themes, and speculating around the intended audience of different releases, Winter presents a quite

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118 Arabic is still, however, the language used for the vast majority of official IS releases. See Zelin 2015(b) for details.
119 Al-hayat can be translated as “the life”. The apparent symbolism of this particular name will be elaborated on in the framing analysis below, as it is related themes presented in a number of al-Hayat videos.
120 To name one prominent example – in late 2014, the al-Hayat Media Center started publishing a dedicated, French-language magazine titled Dar al-Islam.
121 For more on the IS movement's Russian-language outreach, see Fainberg 2016.
122 For a further discussion on the IS movement's official Turkish-language propaganda campaign, see Caucus 2015.
123 Whiteside 2016.
124 Günther 2014; Günther 2015(a).
126 Winter 2015.
sweeping analysis of the ideas and interests that according to him guides the strategy of the IS movement's propagandists. He concludes that its media production has to be approached holistically, and argues that the violent material produced by official IS media (such as graphic execution videos) has been given a disproportionate amount of attention by both researchers and mass media. This, he argues, has resulted in a distorted impression of the IS movement's overall message, which prominently features various non-violent themes as well. A similar conclusion has been drawn by Aaron Zelin, who conducted a detailed analysis of IS media output during one week in 2015. Like Winter and Zelin, they highlighted what they regard as key themes/narratives in official IS media, and furthermore connected these to a number of political interests and motivations of the wider movement (global, as well as local). All of the three mentioned papers also discuss various aspects of the media's dissemination on the internet, and argue that it is the result of a collective effort of official media organisation and variously loosely affiliated activists.

While I sympathise with the holistic and nuanced approach advocated for by the above mentioned authors, I would also argue that we may still delve deeper into the symbolic and thematic aspects of the IS movement's official narratives. All of the three mentioned papers identify a number of themes which, according to their authors, are pervasive and recurring enough to be regarded as fundamental. These themes are identified as specific issues addressed, or simply as categories of things depicted. For example, Charlie Winter present the following as “themes of the Islamic State's brand”: Brutality, mercy, victimhood, war, belonging, and utopianism. While the depiction and discussion of these things can indeed be identified as somehow a part of official IS messaging, it can certainly be argued that Winter does not delve that deep into the specifics of how they are framed, connected to each other, and highlighted as symbolic or otherwise relevant. How is a theme like “brutality” addressed, specifically? What justifications are used to frame its connected acts as legitimate, and can it be said to have an apparently recurring symbolic function? And which ideal and material interests are highlighted as part of such narratives? The same questions can be asked about the other themes presented by Winter, Zelin, and Gartenstein-Ross et al. While these researchers are able to present a more nuanced picture of the movement's official messaging than, for example, the mainstream media, they arguably provide us with little more than an indicative appreciation for the underlying nature of the movement's official image and the nature of its appeal. This is not to say that these studies are somehow flawed, but rather to argue that it is possible to further develop the sort of conclusions presented by both theirs and similarly conducted studies. As a result, I would argue that the qualitative content analysis of specific IS media releases may help reinforce and nuance our understanding of, for example, the movement's official narratives. As of January 2017, the focused study of specific IS media releases is an apparently burgeoning field of research. Examples of such studies are Cristoph Günther's article on symbolic themes presented in the al-Hayat Media Center's English-language magazine *Dabiq*, Remy Low's analysis of certain rhetorical aspects of a speech delivered by the IS movement's caliph, and an analysis of *Dabiq*'s iconography written by Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan and Kay O'Halloran.

As more empirical studies of IS media are published, we may start to develop a virtual library focused on the understanding of its official messaging, the connected world-view(s), and the wider subculture which is variously attracted and inspired by its thematic narratives. While the summarising analysis of this entire phenomenon may seem a daunting and perhaps even unrealistic task for an individual researcher (at the time of writing, at least), I would certainly argue that each empirical study (no matter how limited or specific in nature) may contribute with particular

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127 Zelin 2015(b).
129 Günther 2015(b).
130 Low 2016.
knowledge, highlighting nuance, or otherwise clarifying information which may reinforce our overall understanding of the IS movement. Given that we often lack systematically conducted and focused (in-depth, qualitative, etc.) studies on this type of material, I regard my own content analysis as part of a wider attempt at filling this particular research gap. Specifically, I hope that my own attempts at contextualising the material's content (by looking at ways in which the material's producers argue for its wider relevance) may add some useful nuance to our understanding of its apparent purpose, different messages, and potential resonance. And while this particular study is focused on the analysis of specific material, my hope is that it can be related to similar studies conducted by others and thereby make itself useful as part of a much wider scholarly undertaking.

1.3.3. Overview of analysed material and outline of subsequent chapters

In the above, I have established that this study will be conducted as a qualitative content analysis supported by certain aspects of Robert Benford and David Snow's ideas on what they have called collective action frames. The analysis will focus on a limited set of IS propaganda material that has been chosen based on the temporal proximity its release to the significant events that unfolded during the summer of 2014. In particular, I am interested in releases that roughly coincided with and were deliberately connected to the declaration of its Caliphate on the 29th of June that year, and in whether or not this declaration may be viewed as part of a somehow coherent messaging campaign.

The public declaration of a Caliphate may be regarded as among the most controversial decisions ever made by the IS social movement organisation. Ideological and other implications of this will be discussed in more detail below, but for now it suffices to say that a movement that calls itself a “Caliphate” essentially claims political and religious authority over Muslim communities worldwide. Before June of 2014, the IS movement had claimed to be a “state” with apparently somewhat limited ambitions.132 After, it laid claim something much bigger – and subsequently forced itself onto the central stage of the global discourse surrounding the concept of “Islam”. As the subject of a focused and systematic content analysis, the ways in which such a controversial and far-reaching declaration was presented are interesting for many different reasons. As a result of the attention inevitably given to it,133 the IS movement was given an incredible opportunity to state its case and argue for its relevance, as well as to present its goals and ideology in a coherent manner. A systematic study of official media produced at the time may therefore help us appreciate at least two things. How was this increase in publicity utilised – i.e. what particular issues were highlighted as part of an attempt at inspiring movement engagement among people whose previous knowledge about it may have been limited? And secondly, was this opportunity and its connected Caliphate declaration used to distill the movement's ideology and purpose in any sort of coherent way? If this was the case – may its appeals to certain ideal and material interests tell us anything about the apparent attempts at highlighting the overall relevance of the movement? In what follows, I will trace thematic narratives through a limited set of official IS propaganda material released during the summer of 2014. The here asked questions may be regarded of demarcating my focus, and will furthermore be explicitly addressed in a concluding discussion presented as part of the thesis' final chapter. In a sense, a guiding principle is coherence, and things I am primarily looking for are those themes that feed into narratives used to argue for the IS movement as a legitimate Caliphate.

The analysed material is primarily made up of video releases. This is both the result of constrains connected to the limited nature of a thesis such as this one,134 as well of my overall impression of

132 However, as early as 2006 the then declared “Islamic State of Iraq” was officially framed as a sort of precursor/preparation for the declaration of a Caliphate. See Kazimi 2008 for details.

133 It should here be noted that the Caliphate declaration coincided with dramatic developments in Iraq. At roughly the same time (June 2014), IS forces advanced rapidly through Western and Northern Iraq in a spectacular military offensive which brought the movement onto the front-pages of mass media worldwide.

134 Consider, for example, that Aaron Zelin (2015) identified well over a hundred media releases of different types
video material as the most elaborate media through which official IS propaganda is disseminated. Video material like that analysed is furthermore a multi-layered form of media, which will provide me with the opportunity to analyse both aesthetic and linguistic forms of communication. For this reason, I regard each video as a whole, and analyse how images, language, music, and methods of videography are utilised to communicate and reinforce various messages and themes. Furthermore – while it can certainly be argued that video media plays a central part in the IS movement's official propaganda campaign, the focused analysis of this type of material has so far been the subject of a fairly limited amount of studies. As illustrated by the above mentioned examples of the empirical study of official IS media, other researchers have often focused on textual sources like magazines. Hence, I hope that this particular study's empirical focus on video material will provide our understanding of official IS propaganda with some additional nuance.

Beyond video material, I will also analyse two officially translated speeches that were distributed as text files around the time of the Caliphate declaration in June 2014. These speeches are significant in the sense that they explicitly addressed the issue of the IS Caliphate, in addition to them being delivered by people who can be regarded as central symbolic authorities within the IS movement. At the time, both speakers were prominent, official, leadership-figures for the IS movement's influential Iraqi-Syrian branch. While I regard the analysis of the chosen video material as the study's focus, these speeches may nevertheless help clarify some basic aspects of thematic narratives presented in other releases as well. The speeches, in particular, provide us with a relatively clear summary of these narratives, and are illustrating examples of how different themes and ideas are connected to each other. The next chapter (2.) is therefore entirely devoted to the analysis of their content – aimed at introducing readers to ways in which official IS propaganda addressed the three core framing tasks.

Chapter three is presented as an elaboration on the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing narratives presented and discussed in chapter 2. As part of this elaboration, I analyse ways in which these narratives are addressed as part of the content of eleven official IS video releases. All of these were released during the summer of 2014, and most of them (seven out of eleven) during the single week he focused on. A detailed content analysis of every photo report, video, audio file, text, etc. released by official IS media organisations in connection with the Caliphate declaration would be a huge research endeavour – well beyond the scope of a Master's Thesis. I regard a delimitation based on the nature of the media to be analysed as both sensible and clear, at the same time as it limits my analysis to an arguably both manageable and multi-faceted sample of material.

While I will take variously aesthetic aspects into consideration, my focus is (as has been stated before) still on the explicitly formulated narratives highlighted in the material. For a further discussion on the study of visual culture, see Harvey 2011. The speeches in question is one titled This is the Promise of Allah, delivered what was then the IS movement's official spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani on 29 June 2014, followed by one titled A Message to the Mujahidin and the Islamic Ummah in the Month of Ramadan, which was delivered by the movement's caliph – Abu Bakr al-Baghda – on 1 July 2014. See chapter 2 below, for additional information.

In chronological order, based on release dates reported by Aaron Zelin's online archive www.jihadology.net.net: The Best Umma (al-Furqan, 28 May 2014); O Soldiers of Truth Go Forth (al-Hayat, 2 June 2014); Hayat Alal Jihad (al-Hayat, 15 June 2014); There is no Life Without Jihad (al-Hayat, 19 June 2014); Breaking the Border (al-Itisam, 29 June 2014); The End of Sykes-Picot (al-Hayat, 29 June 2014); Special coverage of the khutba and jumua prayer in the great mosque in the city of Mosul (al-Furqan, 5 July 2014); Al-Gharaba – The Chosen Few From Different Lands: Abu Muslim from Canada (al-Hayat, 12 July 2014); Those Who were Truthful with Allah (al-Hayat, 16 July 2014); Join the Ranks (al-Hayat, 22 July 2014); Eid Greetings from the Lands of the Khilafah (al-Hayat, 2 August 2014).

The earliest is an al-Furqan video titled The Best Umma (khayr umma), which according to Aaron Zelin's database at jihadology.net was released around the 28 May 2014. The most recent release is one titled Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah (al-Hayat Media Center), released around the 2 August 2014 (once again, according to jihadology.net). My study can thus essentially be regarded as one on official IS videos released during June and July 2014. However, I have abstained from drawing an all-too rigid line based on some turn of the month, as it would have excluded the arguably relevant and significant releases mentione previously in this footnote. Both of these were included based on their elaborate nature and way in which the clearly highlight certain themes, and because of
contain explicit references to the newly proclaimed IS Caliphate (and the rest are nevertheless relevant, for reasons that will hopefully become apparent). The nature and purpose of this clarifying analysis will be discussed as part of the chapter's own introduction, but here it can nevertheless be noted that the videos in question are not analysed in full. Rather than a detailed description of their different content, the chapter is arranged thematically. Particular aspects of the videos are analysed based on their variously thematic relationships with recurrent ways in which the IS Caliphate was related to the three core framing tasks. My ambition is that this presentation will provide readers with a deeper and hopefully more nuanced understanding of the narratives presented in chapter two.

The fourth chapter consists of a detailed analysis of a single video release. For reasons presented as part of that chapter's own introduction, I regard this video as especially significant. In short, it is seemingly focused on the presentation of variously practical aspects of the IS movement – such as acts which its official propagandists apparently regard as fundamental aspects properly Islamic conduct, the connection between these ideals and the movement's own activities, etc. Based in my own review and analysis of its content, I conclude this chapter with a discussion on some apparently important aspects of what official IS media presents as proper methodology (manhaj). As part of this discussion, the issue of the IS movement's method is related to previously presented conclusions regarding the ways in which its official propaganda addresses the three core framing tasks.

All of the analysed videos have been accessed via Aaron Zelin's online archive Jihadology, which has also provided me with information about their respective release dates. Most of the dates provided by Zelin have been verified through, for example, contemporary media reports about the videos' releases. Chapters three and four are based on the analysis of videos that contain remarkably many different languages, something which motivates an elaboration on my use of translations. Eight of the twelve analysed videos use English as a primary language – either in the sense of it being the only language spoken, or as (official) hard-coded English-language subtitles imprinted onto the video's image. All of these eight videos were released by the al-Hayat Media Center, and their provided translations into English can thus be safely regarded as expressions of official IS messaging. The four other videos were released by either al-Furqan or al-Itisam and used Arabic as their primary language (similarly to how English was used by al-Hayat in the other eight – statements in non-Arabic languages were translated with hard-coded subtitles), and I have thus had to search the internet for English-language translation that can be regarded as official. Such translations have been released by the al-Hayat Media Center, and distributed throughout the internet. As such, quoted passages from the four Arabic-language videos have been provided by the fact that they were released mere day before/after the months that I have primarily focused on.

139 Upon the Prophetic Methodology (al-Furqan, 28 July 2014).
142 Namely English, Arabic, Kazakh, Indonesian, German, Russian, Flemish, and Finnish.
143 The videos in question were, in chronological order based on release dates reported by Jihadology: O Soldiers of Truth Go Forth (al-Hayat, 2 June 2014); Haya Alai Jihad (al-Hayat, 15 June 2014); There is no Life Without Jihad (al-Hayat, 19 June 2014); The End of Sykes-Picot (al-Hayat, 29 June 2014); Al-Gharaba – The Chosen Few From Different Lands: Abu Muslim from Canada (al-Hayat, 12 July 2014); Those Who were Truthful with Allah (al-Hayat, 16 July 2014); Join the Ranks (al-Hayat, 22 July 2014); Eid Greetings from the Lands of the Khilafah (al-Hayat, 2 August 2014).
144 The Best Umma (al-Furqan, 28 May 2014); Breaking the Border (al-Itisam, 29 June 2014); Special coverage of the khutba and jumua prayer in the great mosque in the city of Mosul (al-Furqan, 5 July 2014); Upon the Prophetic Methodology (al-Furqan, 28 July 2014).
145 Around the time of the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, various actors converged in an apparently concerted effort to expel open IS sympathisers and propagandists from some of the more popular social media platforms (notably Twitter, which was the software I was using at the time to access this particular media sphere). Previously, it had been fairly easy for anyone to be provided with relevant links to official IS releases and translations (often uploaded onto websites like www.archive.org and www.justpaste.it), as searches with hashtags like #AlHayat and
translators at the al-Hayat Media Center.

Having clarified the messages presented by the material in chapters two to four, I move on to a more general discussion in the fifth. This chapter will focus on some aspects of the potential resonance and credibility of the messages presented in the elsewhere analysed propaganda material, and should be viewed as an attempt at further contextualising some of the narratives presented as part of the foregoing content analysis. As part of this discussion, I do not limit myself to the material analysed in the other chapters, but also relate my previous conclusions to some more general observations about official IS media. For that reason, the chapter features brief discussions of some other official media releases – all of which I regard as variously illustrative of certain ideas and themes. However, my main ambition here is to be able to relate the IS movement's official narratives to ideas, notions, and themes that people have expressed in other contexts as well. In other words, I want to speculate around the possibility that IS propagandists are consciously highlighting connections between their own movement and a number of issues and interests recognised beyond it as well. Thus highlighting the potential credibility of thematic narratives presented by the analysed material, I will conclude with a final chapter (6.). This concluding discussion will be presented as an attempt at highlighting some of the more general conclusions drawn from discussions in previous chapters. Beyond presenting an overall summary, the intended purpose will be to suggest potential avenues for future research, as well as to highlight specific ways in which my own conclusions may be elaborated on.

#AlFurqan would enable for one's access to the pro-IS Twittersphere. As a result of the online “crackdown” in late 2015, most of the websites I had previously accessed are now gone. Relevant links to www.archive.org and www.justpaste.it used to be listed on a website called www.alhatayen.blog.com (accessed 3 November 2014, at which time I downloaded the relevant translations), which can still be viewed via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine software: http://web.archive.org/web/20140909092248/http://alhayaten.blog.com/archive4alhayaten/ (accessed 28 January 2017). A similar list of links can still be accessed via the archived posts of a JoinDiaspora account calling itself “AlHayat Media Center” - https://joindiaspora.com/tags/alhayat_media (accessed 28 January 2017). These translations have also been available on a notably professional-looking website calling itself “Publications of the Islamic State” (isdarat al-dawla al-islamiyya), which serves as a sort of archive of official IS media releases. An archived version of this website can be viewed via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine: https://web.archive.org/web/20160420192150/https://htgfsgdsgez.ga/ (accessed 28 January 2017). As of early 2017, websites like these are regularly and effectively taken down. As a result, the spreading of their updated addresses are shared within variously closed/private chat channels which can be accessed via, for example, encrypted software like Telegram Messenger.
2. The IS movement's leadership addresses the three core framing tasks

In 2014, on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the official leadership of the IS movement declared a Caliphate (khilafā). By doing so, they laid claim to what is one of the most prestigious titles available to a Muslim leader. The term “caliph” (khalifa) is translatable as “successor”, and the succession in question is that of the Prophet Muhammad. The earliest caliphs were former companions of Muhammad himself, and reportedly regarded themselves as ruling in accordance with his vision and making sure that it was implemented and respected. This ideal has since survived, yet has been interpreted in a number of different ways throughout history. The following discussion will deal with ways in which the IS leadership seemingly understands the current relevance and overall meaning of the caliphal institution/authority. Before delving deeper into this matter, however, I want to provide readers with a presentation of the historical context of this particular proclamation, as it may help us appreciate some aspects of its significance and implications.

In 1924, the Ottoman Caliphate was abolished by the secular government of the newly formed Republic of Turkey. For centuries, the Ottoman Empire had enjoyed a high level of influence throughout the Muslim world – being a dominant political force in much of the Middle East, North Africa, and South-eastern Europe. The demise of the Ottoman Empire was a gradual and complex process that was finalised by its disastrous involvement in the First World War (1914-1918). As a result of this conflict, large parts of the Empire's territories were partitioned by various Western powers, and the Ottoman monarchy was replaced by the Republic of Turkey. This new regime apparently sought to strengthen the secular institutions of the state, and the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate may have served a purpose as part of that policy. Following the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, there have been sporadic attempts at reinstating the institution. However, none of these have been able to have any wide, lasting, or otherwise significant impact. A detailed explanation of the various reasons for this lie largely beyond the scope of this particular study, but it suffices to say that the post-Ottoman world has largely lacked any sort of widely recognised Islamic authority that can be compared to a Caliphate. This is certainly true in a political sense, but can arguably be used to describe developments related to religious authority as well.

While the Caliphate has ceased to be a “reality” in political or otherwise spatial terms, the idea still survives as an imagined ideal. The concept has an enduring symbolic value which links it to ideals of, for example, Islamic unity and authority. Furthermore, the ideal of statehood based on the example and principles preached by the Prophet Muhammad may seem natural to many of those that revere him. For those who oppose such things as non-Muslim influence and the rise of secular ideology, the demise of the Caliphate may be viewed as an underlying tragedy that made such things possible. These things are important to keep in mind for the upcoming discussion on official IS propaganda. They help us appreciate that the movement's propagandists are not speaking of

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146 Corresponding to the 29th of June 2014 in the Gregorian calendar.
147 For an overview of the meaning and history of the concept of “caliph”, see Sourdel, et al 2012.
148 The Ottoman Empire was founded in 1299 and was formally abolished in 1922. It was arguably as most dominant between the beginning of the 16th century (following the Ottoman-Mamluk war of 1516-1518) and the middle of the 19th century (it was around the time of the Crimean war of 1853-1856 that it started being referred to as “the sick man of Europe”). In 1517, the rival Abbasid Caliphate was abolished and the Ottomans conquered both of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. These events arguably mark the start of the period during which the Ottoman Empire was regarded as the most prominent claimant to the title of Caliphate.
149 For details on developments surrounding this event, see Guida 2008; Kazimi 2008: 23-26; Pankhurst 2013: 31-62.
150 For an overview of various post-1924 attempts at reviving the Caliphate, see Kazimi 2008: 12-17.
something with only limited relevance, and neither are they trying to revive something that has long since been forgotten. The Caliphate can be described as living history in the minds of large numbers of people, and it can therefore be argued that the IS movement is hereby relating its own efforts to a widely recognised and discussed issue. By claiming to have revived the caliphal institution, the movement has arguably made sure that it can no longer be completely ignored. It can certainly be dismissed, rejected, and ridiculed – but not entirely disregarded. For a relatively marginal and politically extreme group that originated as a largely localised guerrilla network, this is (if nothing else) a significant success in terms of publicity.

2.1. Content of speeches delivered by al-Adnani and al-Baghdadi

In conjunction with the Caliphate proclamation on the 1st of Ramadan (29th of June 2014), two of the most prominent authorities within the IS movement delivered separate speeches which were distributed across the internet as audio files. While both were delivered in Arabic, written translations to English and other languages were provided shortly after their official releases. The following discussion is based on English translations that were distributed by the al-Hayat Media Center, which is one of the IS social movement organisation's official media offices. They can therefore be regarded as officially sanctioned translations, and as a reflection of the way in which the IS movement wanted English-speaking audiences to understand the content of the speeches.

The purpose of looking at these speeches, and of dedicating an entire chapter to the discussion of their content, is that they arguably represent clear examples of ways in which the purpose and relevance of the Caliphate declaration was articulated. Hence, they serve as examples of the overarching narrative, and may furthermore be used to illustrate some of the basic arguments used to frame the declaration of an IS Caliphate. This can largely be understood as the result of the format itself, as well as of the fact that their release in immediate conjunction with the announcement suggest that they were probably intended to clarify such things as its purpose, context, and implications for the future. In this sense, the speeches can be viewed as catalogues of basic frames, and readers are encouraged to view this chapter as a sort of introduction to the various themes and narratives that will be elaborated on as part of various further analyses presented below.

The first of the speeches was delivered by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (1977-2016), a Syrian national who was known as the official spokesman of IS before he was killed by either Russian or American forces in August 2016. The second speech was delivered by the IS caliph himself; Iraqi-born Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (b. 1971). Both of these men were at the time (and al-Baghdadi still is) prominent leadership-figures of the IS movement. For years, they have recurrently delivered speeches meant to clarify various contentious or otherwise important issues, and can both be regarded as central authorities within the IS movement. Beyond the aspect of clarifying purpose

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152 The al-Furqan Foundation was named as the disseminating media organisation.
153 Al-Adnani's speech This is the Promise of God (hadha wad allah) was released on the 1st of Ramadan itself, and can therefore be regarded as the official proclamation of the movement's so-called Caliphate. The one delivered by al-Baghdadi, titled A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan (risalatin ila al-mujahidin wa al-ummatin al-islamiyya fi shahri ramadan), was released on the 3rd of Ramadan. Both speeches were released as Arabic-language audio files by the al-Furqan Foundation, and subsequently translated to English and other languages by the al-Hayat Media Center (distributed as text files).
154 While both of these men are known by a number of different names, I will refer to them using those that have already been mentioned, due to the fact that these are the ones with which they are most widely known. Both “al-Adnani” and “al-Baghdadi” are noms de guerre, rather than given/birth names. “Al-Adnani” signals a supposed descent from the Adnanite Arab tribes, while “al-Baghdadi” references some sort of connection to the Iraqi city of Baghdad. Beyond these noms de guerre, both men have recurrently been referred to with various honorary titles. Al-Baghdadi has often been titled “Commander of the Faithful” (amir al-muminin), while al-Adnani is described as a “Jihadi Shaykh” (shaykh al-mujahid).
155 Aaron Zelin's Jihadology archive records al-Adnani's first statement as having been delivered in early 2012, while
and relevance mentioned above, their speeches were seemingly meant to explicitly link the Caliphate proclamation to the official leadership (and widely recognised authorities) of the movement. In terms of symbolic authority, both of these men are significant, and their speeches may be viewed as means by which the movement was able to grant some credence and authority to the narratives, themes, and frames presented to justify the IS Caliphate. This factor contributes to the eventual fruitfulness of taking a closer look at these speeches, and of using them as a way of introducing readers to the framing employed as part of the media campaign that is to be analysed. They represent the official view of the symbolic leadership, and can therefore be regarded as a sort of prism through which we may view, make sense of, and contextualise the various messages presented in other releases. Assuming a coherent nature of the media campaign launched to announce the IS Caliphate, its various releases can perhaps be viewed as expressions of and elaborations on aspects of the overarching narrative presented in these speeches. This will hopefully be clarified as it develops below, but for now it suffices to say that this discussion on al-Adnani's and al-Baghdadi’s speeches serves the purpose of introducing readers to the IS movement's official justifications for proclaiming its Caliphate. In this sense, it may also help a non-versed reader in his/her effort to make sense of some basic aspects of the world-view presented by official IS propaganda.

2.1.1. The plight of the Muslim community as a diagnostic framing narrative

Among the narratives presented in the speeches by al-Adnani and al-Baghdadi is one that can be described as a lamenting description of the situation in which the contemporary Muslim community (umma) finds itself. While the recent advances of IS forces in Iraq and Syria are described as signs of hope, the state of the wider umma is one described as characterised by various forms of suffering and humiliation. Both speeches acknowledge and highlight a supposedly world-wide pattern of anti-Muslim violence and oppression. Al-Baghdadi describes this in the following way:

Indeed, the ummah of Islam is watching your jihad with eyes of hope, and indeed you have brothers in many parts of the world being inflicted with the worst kinds of torture. Their honor is being violated. Their blood is being spilled. Prisoners are moaning and crying for help. Orphans and widows are complaining of their plight. Women who have lost their children are weeping. Masajid (plural of masjid)\(^{156}\) [masjid – the Arabic word for mosque]\(^{157}\) are desecrated and sanctities violated. Muslims’ rights are forcibly seized in China, India, Palestine, Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, Sham (the Levant), Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Ahvaz, Iran, Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco, in the East and in the West.\(^{158}\)

Al-Baghdadi further clarifies this by referencing a number of recent events and developments. He mentions (among other things) the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Burma, massacres of Muslims in the Central African Republic and during the Bosnian war, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the Indian Army's presence in Kashmir, Russian repression in the Caucasus, and “the waging of war against chastity and hijab” in France and Tunisia. The perpetrators of this violence are the various forces of unbelief (kufr), such as the Christians and Jews, together with the secular rulers of the Muslim world. The motives of these actors are not elaborated on, but al-Baghdadi describes the ascendancy of these disbelievers (kuffar) as having resulted from the

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156 Parentheses with explanatory notes like this one are part of al-Hayat's official translation. This can be observed in several other passages that have been quoted below. Observe the way in which almost all Arabic phrases are followed by parentheses containing explanations/translations (those with brackets are my own explanations). Al-Hayat's translators are seemingly operating under the assumption that many of their readers have a very rudimentary understanding of Arabic and Islamic phrases and it can be argued that this translation policy reflects an attempt at reaching a very wide audience.

157 My own comments are, and will continue to be, placed in brackets.

158 Al-Baghdadi 2014: 3.
weakness and disunity of the Muslim umma. As they lost their Caliphate, the Muslims were left vulnerable to attack and lost the ability to strike back effectively. Hence, “the disbelievers were able to weaken and humiliate the Muslims, dominate them in every region, plunder their wealth and resources, and rob them of their rights”.\(^\text{159}\) Simultaneously, traitors from within the umma used “deceptive slogans” of secular ideologies to lead people astray, distance them from their religion, and strengthen “the shackles of weakness”. According to al-Baghdadi, true Muslims have been routinely labelled and persecuted as so-called terrorists, which has further increased the distance between them and the wider masses.\(^\text{160}\)

Al-Adnani links the current suffering of Muslim peoples to their supposedly sinful abandonment of the Caliphate institution. According to him, the appointment of a caliph (who may lead and unify the umma) is a religious obligation that has been forgotten. He names it “the abandoned obligation of the era”, and argues that the Muslim umma “has not tasted honor since they lost it”.\(^\text{161}\) As with al-Baghdadi’s speech, concepts like secularism, democracy, and nationalism is referred to in a dismissive way and described as if incompatible with properly practised Islam.\(^\text{162}\) Furthermore, Al-Adnani elaborates on ways in which he (seemingly) understands the current suffering of Muslims as a form of punishment from God. By turning to various secular authorities and abstaining from their religious obligations, the Muslims have failed in fulfilling the stipulated preconditions for God's protection (see below for further details). In this sense, the demise of the Caliphate has resulted in the loss of two things; the political/worldly means of unifying and strengthening the Muslim umma, and the fundamental favour and protection of God. Given a belief in the almightiness of God, these two things are not necessarily separable, but such a separation may nevertheless serve an analytical and clarifying purpose within the context of this particular study. If nothing else, it illustrates certain nuances in the frames employed. The justification for the necessity of the Caliphate is not simply a matter of religious symbolism, but is further illustrated by referencing a perceived spatial and political reality. In this way, the political reasoning can perhaps be used to attract the attention and support of those who may have a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards, for example, the concept of Islamic rule. “God” is here made relevant in worldly terms, and the Caliphate is highlighted for the role it may play in correcting the wrongs of the temporal world.

Notably, neither one of these speeches describes the Caliphate in anything but the most general terms. No specific caliphs or Caliphates are mentioned, and there is no attempt at connecting its demise to a specific date or event. Rather, it is described as a general “obligation” that, at some point in time, has been lost and forgotten. This does not necessary suggest anything about the speakers own opinions on certain historical Caliphates, but may rather serve a sort of rhetorical purpose. They abstain from delving into details, and focus on the religious obligations and various benefits connected to the establishment of a Caliphate, as if to avoid eventual controversy that may result from them embracing a certain caliph or Caliphate. Rather, they have apparently chosen a sort of inclusive approach that may attract anyone who agrees with the basic narrative about the necessity and value of appointing a caliph.

In summary, the basic problem addressed in both of these speeches is one that can be described as the world-wide suffering of Muslim peoples. Both speeches imply that there is an actual possibility for Muslims around the world to stand united and protect each other. However, they lament that the contemporary Muslim umma lacks the necessary unity, sense of direction, and defiant attitude – all of which are understood as prerequisites for its ability to withstand aggression and prevent suffering. In both speeches, the lack of these qualities is linked to the disappearance of the Caliphate. For a long time (in non-defined terms), the Muslims have been lacking any sort of unifying authority, and they have therefore been left open to both aggression from outside and

\(^\text{159}\) Al-Baghdadi 2014: 4.
\(^\text{160}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{161}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 5.
\(^\text{162}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 6.
undermining treachery from inside. Furthermore, God's favour and protection have been lost due to failures in fulfilling His obligations.

2.1.2. Prognosis for a solution – the IS movement as a vehicle of faith and defiance

According to al-Adnani's speech, the remedy for the current sufferings of the umma may be found in certain Quranic statements. Citing and elaborating on a number of these, al-Adnani draws the conclusion that God has promised to provide the Muslims with security, as well as to grant them honour and triumph. Nevertheless, these rewards depend on a number of preconditions. In order for the Muslims to grant the protection and blessing of God, they have to worship Him alone and follow His guidance. Furthermore, they are required to defy the agents of unbelief (kufr), and not let themselves become humiliated and subjugated by them.\(^{163}\)

The link between faithfulness and triumph is elaborated on with the help of an historical example. Al-Adnani refers to the incredible conquests accomplished by the early Muslims, and reminds his listeners of the idea that it was only after their acceptance of Islam that the Arabs were able to achieve something of that scale:

Allah (the Exalted) sent His Prophet (peace be upon him), while the Arabs were in the depths of ignorance and blinding darkness. They were the most naked, the hungriest, and the most backwards of peoples, sinking in depths of lowness. No one cared about them or gave them any regard. […] Then, when Allah blessed them with Islam and they believed, Allah unified them, united their ranks, honored them after their humiliation, enriched them after their poverty, and brought their hearts together, all through Islam.\(^{164}\)

This well-known historical example is used to clarify a point that is repeated throughout al-Adnani's speech; it is through piety that the Muslims are united, and ideas that focus on other aspects of community (such as nationalism) serve only to disunite, weaken, and corrupt. Also, governance according to any other than the principles of Islam “becomes nothing more than kingship, dominance and rule, accompanied with destruction, corruption, oppression, subjugation, fear, and the decadence of the human being”.\(^{165}\) Through sincere faith in God and respect of his oneness (tawhid), politics may transcend the corruption of mere worldly ambitions, foster community among diverse peoples, and create conditions for a truly just and safe society. The concept is largely summarised in the following way:

Having faith in Allah, keeping far from the gateways to shirk (polytheism) and its various shades, along with submitting to Allah’s command in everything big and small, and giving Him the level of obedience that makes your lusts, inclinations, and desires to be in compliance with what the Prophet (peace be upon him) came with – only after this condition is met will the promise be fulfilled. For by fulfilling this condition comes the ability to build, reform, remove oppression, spread justice, and bring about safety and tranquility.\(^{166}\)

Beyond formulating a call for sincere faithfulness, al-Adnani also uses the Quran to encourage an attitude of defiance towards the non-Muslim oppressors of the world. He references a number of verses that can be interpreted as speaking about such defiance as a precondition for God's protection of his followers. The Muslim who is being oppressed should do what he/she can to fight back against and counteract such a condition. It is not befitting of Muslims to accept a state of humiliating oppression:

\(^{163}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 2-3.
\(^{164}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 3-4.
\(^{165}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 2.
\(^{166}\) Ibid.
Thus, if faith becomes firm in the heart, honor becomes firm along with it. It is honor that does not hunch, soften, or become disgraced regardless of how great the anguish and tribulation become. It is honor befitting the best ummah – the ummah of Muhammad (peace be upon him) – an ummah that does not accept submission to anyone or anything other than Allah. It does not accept transgression nor oppression. [...] This is an honorable and noble ummah, which does not sleep and ignore grievance. It does not accept degradation.\(^{167}\)

Having identified sincere faith (in God) and determined defiance (of kufr) as the basic preconditions of God's promise about honour and security, al-Adnani goes on to argue that the IS movement represents the pinnacle of these efforts in the contemporary world. The movement supposedly implements and protects the laws of God, respects His tawhid in every way imaginable, and fights defiantly against the various agents of kufr, corruption, and hypocrisy (nifaq). The path towards honour and triumph, and away from the sufferings described under the previous headline, is supposedly being staked out by the IS movement. The movement is presented as a vehicle of both faithfulness and defiance, and as an authority that will be able to fulfil the preconditions of God's promises about triumph, honour, and security:

Here the flag of the Islamic State, the flag of tawhīd (monotheism), rises and flutters. [...] The Muslims are honored. The kuffār (infidels) are disgraced. Ahlus-Sunnah (the Sunnis) are masters and are esteemed. The people of bid’ah (heresy) are humiliated. The hudūd (Sharia penalties) are implemented [...]. The frontlines are defended. Crosses and graves are demolished. Prisoners are released by the edge of the sword. The people in the lands of the State move about for their livelihood and journeys, feeling safe regarding their lives and wealth. Wulāt (plural of wālī or “governors”) and judges have been appointed. Jizyah (a tax imposed on kuffār) has been enforced. Fay’ (money taken from the kuffār without battle) and zakat (obligatory alms) have been collected. Courts have been established to resolve disputes and complaints. Evil has been removed. Lessons and classes have been held in the masājid (plural of masjid) and, by the grace of Allah, the religion has become completely for Allah.\(^{168}\)

In this summary of the IS movement's accomplishment, al-Adnani describe things that can be categorised as either acts of implementing and enforcing the religion, or as acts of defiance against kufr. In short, the IS movement is presented as having created a state that implements the sharia of Islam, and performs aggressive jihad against the enemies of God. Faithfulness is supposedly enforced among the people, and the defiance of the Muslims has been institutionalised through an organised military. The preconditions for God's promises are met, so that triumph, honour, and security will follow naturally. Al-Adnani continues:

The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them to rise. The time has come for the ummah of Muhammad (peace be upon him) to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonor, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone, and the dawn of honor has emerged anew. The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared.\(^{169}\)

“The signs of victory” are represented by the successes of the IS movement. These are connected to its overall ability to implement sharia and perform jihad, as well as to more concrete events. The reader should be reminded of the fact that the time at which these speeches were delivered was one at which the IS movement achieved significant success in both Iraq and Syria. Most notably, June of 2014 had witnessed the rapid military conquests of a number of urban centres in northern, western, and central Iraq. Hence, the way in which al-Adnani spoke about looming triumph may not only have resonated on a symbolic level, but may also have been viewed as both plausible and realistic. These developments probably reinforced al-Adnani's argument about the truthfulness of the IS endeavour, since they may have seemed to imply that the movement was indeed enjoying the

\(^{167}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 3.

\(^{168}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 4-5.

\(^{169}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 4.
Both al-Adnani and al-Baghdadi spoke about the successful trajectory of the IS movement as a sign of a new era – one in which the Muslim umma would be able to move away from the state of suffering and humiliation described above. In both speeches, the proclamation of the Caliphate was presented as a natural next step. Al-Adnani spoke about eventual abstention from its proclamation as “sinful”, considering the ways in which the IS movement had supposedly fulfilled all the necessary requirements. More than anything else, the proclamation of a Caliphate was presented as a mean by which the problems facing the contemporary Muslim umma could be solved. Al-Adnani spoke about this in the following way:

So rush O Muslims and gather around your khalīfah, so that you may return as you once were for ages, kings of the earth and knights of war. Come so that you may be honored and esteemed, living as masters with dignity. Know that we fight over a religion that Allah promised to support. We fight for an ummah to which Allah has given honor, esteem, and leadership, promising it with empowerment and strength on the earth. Come O Muslims to your honor, to your victory. By Allah, if you disbelieve in democracy, secularism, nationalism, as well as all the other garbage and ideas from the west, and rush to your religion and creed, then by Allah, you will own the earth, and the east and west will submit to you. This is the promise of Allah to you.  

Al-Baghdadi summarised it in the following way:

O Muslims everywhere, glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your head high, for today – by Allah’s grace – you have a state and khilāfah, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership. It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. […] Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another. Their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goal, in one pavilion, enjoying this blessing, the blessing of faithful brotherhood.

The highlighting of the IS movement's international character serves yet another purpose as part of the prognostic narrative. The IS movement is not only a successful enforcer of sharia and wager of jihad, but is also a manifestly unifying influence.

In summary, we may view the narrative described above as one that understands the proclaimed Caliphate as an institution and authority that will solve many of the problems described under the previous headline. The speeches delivered by these IS leadership-figures posit that the Muslims of today are suffering, and that their suffering has resulted from their lack of unity, sense of direction, sincerity of faith, and willingness to strike back against transgressors. The IS Caliphate will work to revive and re-enforce all of these things, and is presented as an institution around which supposedly sincere Muslims should unite, let themselves be guided by its authority, and consequently transcend their current state of suffering and humiliation. Furthermore, it is argued that the movement is already well on its ways of achieving these goal. It is presented as triumphant and strong, and as able to enforce the laws of Islam and defy the various enemies of God. As such, it will serve as the vehicle for the important preconditions of faithfulness and defiance (roughly corresponding to the implementation of the sharia and the performance of jihad) – the fulfilment of which will grant the Muslim umma the protection and favour of God.

171 Al-Baghdadi 2014: 5.
2.1.3. Motivating acts through references to the virtues of sincerity and self-sacrifice

In both speeches, the eventual success of the IS Caliphate is explicitly connected to the conduct of its soldiers and supporters. Both speakers elaborate on the virtues of sincere faithfulness and the willingness to make sacrifices, and present the combination of these as essential preconditions for the movement's ability to overcome its various challenges. Hence, al-Baghdadi has the following to say:

You only have one soul, and an appointed time of death that will neither be hastened nor delayed. It is a matter of Paradise and Hellfire, happiness and misery. As for the religion of Allah, then it will be victorious. Allah has promised to bring victory to the religion. […] By Allah, we will never be mujahidin as long as we are stingy with our lives and our wealth. By Allah, we will never be truthful as long as we do not sacrifice our lives and wealth in order to raise high the word of Allah and bring victory to the religion of Allah.\(^\text{172}\)

Al-Baghdadi encourages his listeners/readers to have faith in God's promise about paradise (\textit{janna}), and recognise that worldly and mortal things are perishable and transient and worthless compared to rewards in the afterlife (\textit{akhira}). Hence, any “true” Muslim should have no reason to fear or lament the loss of his/her life. Sincerity of faith is demonstrated through sacrifice, and the act of sacrifice is presented as a way in which the individual Muslim can fulfil preconditions for God's protection. Through it, he/she partakes in the collective effort of the Caliphate – supporting its struggle against \textit{kufr}, and strengthening the supposed favour of God. Al-Adnani speaks about this matter in the following way:

O soldiers of the Islamic State, you will be facing malâhím (fierce battles) that cause the children’s hair to become grey. You will be facing fitan (tribulations) and hardships of many different colors. […] The worst of these fitan is that of the dunyâ (worldly life). So be wary of competing over it. Be wary. Remember the greatest responsibility that is now on your backs. You are now the defenders of the land of Islam and its guards. You will not be able to preserve this trust and defend this land, except by fearing Allah secretly and publically, then by sacrificing, being patient, and offering blood.\(^\text{173}\)

Fear God, and offer blood – these are the things that the IS Caliphate expects of its soldiers. Given that the speeches have already established that the IS movement is the pinnacle of Islam's efforts in our time (see above), “fearing God” implicitly entails that one remains loyal to the movement and its authorities. Through such loyalty, the Muslim \textit{umma} may unite in order to strike back against the supposed enemies of God. A unified \textit{umma} will have the ability to reverse the woes it has suffered, but such an effort is understood in terms of “fierce battles” and “tribulations”. Therefore, a willingness to go through immense sacrifice is idealised as an admirable virtue. As part of this thematic narrative, the deceased fighters that preceded and contributed to the current movement are elevated as role models of sincerity and martyrdom. Their legacy weighs heavy on the shoulders of those still alive, as al-Adnani encourages his readers/listeners to not act in any way that could nullify or otherwise compromise the movement built with the help of their sacrifice:

They are those who carried this banner and under it sacrificed everything. They offered everything generously, even their souls, to pass on this great banner to you. Indeed, they did so. May Allah have mercy upon them and reward them with every good on behalf of Islam. So protect this great trust. Raise this banner with strength. Water it with your blood. Raise it upon your corpses.\(^\text{174}\)

The theme of “sacrifice” is explicitly described in terms of martyrdom and the offering of blood, but it can be argued that it has wider implications than that. It can, for example, be understood as

\(^{172}\) Al-Baghdadi 2014: 3.
\(^{173}\) Al-Adnani 2014: 8.
\(^{174}\) Ibid.
connected to the way in which the movement encourages Muslims from around the world to emigrate to IS-controlled territories. While described as nothing but redemptive and wonderful, the idea of leaving one's old life behind arguably has a sort of “sacrificial” character to it. In this sense, the speeches' appeals for sacrifice are made relevant for other people than those who are already fighting as soldiers of the IS movement. Everyone is encouraged to disregard worldly life, enlist in the fight for the IS Caliphate, and make immense sacrifices in its name.

Al-Adnani elaborates on the theme of “sincerity” through an appeal to members of other “mujahidin” groups around the world. He posits that the proclamation of a Caliphate should serve to unify the ranks of all Muslims. Anyone who does not pledge allegiance (baya) to the new caliph cannot be sincere in his/her supposed wish to see the Muslims united and strong:

Take a stance on account of which Allah (the Exalted) will be pleased with you. The veil has been lifted and the truth has become clear. Indeed, it is the State. It is the state for the Muslims – the oppressed of them, the orphans, the widows, and the impoverished. If you support it, then you do so for your own good. […] It is time for you to end this abhorrent partisanship, dispersion, and division, for this condition is not from the religion of Allah at all. And if you forsake the State or wage war against it, you will not harm it. You will only harm yourselves. […] And know that nothing has delayed victory and delays it now more than these organizations, because they are the cause of division and disagreements that ruin strength. Division is not from Islam at all. 175

Al-Baghdadi also formulates an appeal for unity. In it he focuses on the behaviour of the IS movement's own members, rather than that of those who are part of other groups. Notably, his appeal for unity develops into one about the virtues of fearing God, staying away from sin, and remaining humble even in the face of triumphant victories:

O soldiers of the Islamic State, do not be awestruck by the great numbers of your enemy, for Allah is with you. I do not fear for you the numbers of your opponents, nor do I fear your neediness and poverty, for Allah (the Exalted) has promised your Prophet (peace be upon him) that you will not be wiped out by famine, and your enemy will not himself conquer you and violate your land. Rather, I fear for you your own sins. Accept each other and do not dispute. Come together and do not argue. Fear Allah in private and public, openly and secretly. Stay away from sins. Expel from your ranks those who openly commit sin. Be wary of pride, haughtiness, and arrogance. Do not become proud on account of gaining some victories. Humble yourselves before Allah. Do not be arrogant towards Allah’s slaves. Do not underestimate your enemy regardless of how much strength you gain and how much your numbers grow. 176

In short, these speeches idealise a number of acts and attitudes that are regarded as serving the purposes of the IS movement, as well as of the supposed attainment of God's favour (and these two things are presented as deeply intertwined). One may support the newly proclaimed Caliphate by being a fearless soldier, emigrating to some part of its controlled territories, and so on. These advocated acts can, on different levels, be described as forms of sacrifice. The willingness to make sacrifices is recurrently idealised as an admirable virtue, and as one that is necessary for one's ability to properly support the movement as well as for one's individual salvation. This sacrificial virtue is argued for by references to the concept of sincerity. Specifically, the sincerity of one's faith in the promises of God, and (in extension) the extent to which one is willing to actually work against the suffering experienced by the Muslim umma. The IS Caliphate is presented as the currently most feasible solution to this underlying problem of suffering and humiliation, and one's support of it is therefore argued for as an admirable way in which the sincerity of one's defiance towards the forces of kufr can be demonstrated. The concept of sincerity is pervasive, and it is even used to justify the proclamation itself. As the supposed obligations are met, it would be insincere not to appoint a caliph.

In summary, the acts proscribed are characterised by immense sacrifice, and they are in turn warranted by appeals to the necessity of sincere faithfulness. Together, these appeals serve a motivational purpose that clarifies the sort of actions and attitudes that the IS movement's official leadership in Iraq and Syria expects from its followers.

2.2. Conclusions

Both of the discussed speeches argue that the Muslim umma is experiencing a state of weakness and humiliation, and emphasise how this is the result of its supposed lack of unity and common direction. If Muslims want to regain their sense of unity and direction, the Caliphate has to be reinstated and act as a unifying influence and common authority. Yet, in order for it to be successful, the Caliphate has to be constructed and defended by people who are steadfast and reliable. For this reason, both speeches explicitly promote a number of virtues that can be summarised as related to the themes of sincerity and self-sacrifice. In other words, we are dealing with a narrative that moves from describing something incredibly wide and in many ways abstract (worldwide suffering by many different peoples), via the formulation of a somewhat concrete political program (the IS Caliphate), and finally lands in the encouragement of certain individual virtues. Using terms borrowed from Robert Benford and David Snow, this can certainly be described as a narrative that fulfils the three core framing tasks.

The diagnostic framing task is accomplished by referencing the overarching problem of Muslim suffering around the world. While the suffering is the direct result of non-Muslim aggression, its underlying cause is identified as a lack of internal unity and sense of direction among the world's Muslims. As a result, their faith (in God) and defiance (against kufr) have both been severely undermined – an argument that may perhaps be related to the above described concept of al-wala wa al-barra. Lacking in a sense of loyalty towards both God and each other, and in a properly defiant/disavowing attitude towards disbelief and its people, the Muslim umma has become weak and is therefore unable to withstand and counteract aggression from outside.

The solution to the underlying problem of disunity and weakness is presented as “the Caliphate”. This idea of establishing a powerful Muslim state that will work towards protecting and furthering the rights of the umma, as well as attempt to unify its people under one banner, represents a sort of prognostic frame. The feeling of hopelessness associated with the diagnostic narrative is hence made more manageable, as a somewhat concrete political program is presented. Furthermore, the IS movement is described as the most well-developed attempt at realising this program, given its supposed achievements in enforcing the laws of God and performing jihad against the kuffar.

Moving on, a series of interrelated virtues are invoked. These can be summarised as variously related to ideas about the sincerity of one's faith (in the movement and its leaders, essentially – but the Quran is also referenced extensively, so that lines between trust in God and trust in IS are blurred), and a willingness to make sacrifices. Essentially, these are the attitudes that the movement's official leadership encourage among their sympathisers, and they are presented as personal traits which make individuals useful for the purposes of the wider movement. In this sense, they can be viewed as constituting a form a motivational framing that concretises calls for action (sacrifice) informed by a certain attitude (sincere and uncompromising faith).

Having clarified this basic narrative and some of the frames employed to argue the case of the IS Caliphate, I will move on to discuss a number of ways in which these were elaborated on through a number of videos released during the summer of 2014. By looking at these videos we may, for example, start to make sense of the practical aspects of the idealised virtues.
3. The IS movement's remedies for the weakness and disunity of the Muslim umma

In the above, the so-called three core framing tasks have been presented and discussed as part of an analysis of two separate speeches delivered by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, respectively. I argued that the speakers achieved the diagnostic framing task by highlighting the widespread suffering of Muslims around the world, and by claiming that this is the result of their supposed weakness and disunity. The prognostic framing task was addressed through the elevation of the IS movement, wherein the speakers argue that problems of Muslim weakness and disunity can be remedied through the establishment of an IS-led Caliphate. Answering questions about what individual sympathisers can do to support such an endeavour, the speakers formulate a motivational appeal to the spirit of self-sacrifice, and connect this to a notion of sincere faithfulness. Based on the conviction and steadfastness of its members, the IS movement will build a strong and truthful Caliphate which will work to unite the Muslim umma and counteract its various weaknesses.

In the following, I will look at a number of videos that were released by the IS movement's official media organisations around the time of its Caliphate declaration on the 29th of June 2014 (corresponding to the 1st of Ramadan 1435H). Assuming that the declaration was a planned move, the full month of June and a prominent release in the last days of May will be included, as well as the entire month of July and a video released at the beginning of August. All of the chosen videos can be described as arguing for the righteousness of the IS movement and the legitimacy of its claimed Caliphate. In this sense, we are talking about a fairly coherent narrative that can be argued for as a manageable subject of a content analysis. Limiting myself to a certain media (videos) distributed at a certain time (roughly two months during the summer of 2014) is a largely unavoidable consequence of the time- and space-related constraints on a thesis like this one (see above for further details on my limitations). I want to conduct a somewhat detailed and qualitative analysis, and extending the number of media to be analysed would probably have hampered that effort.

In this particular chapter, I will look at specific ways in which the various videos addressed the three core framing tasks described above. This is part of an attempt at analysing ways in which the associated themes and narratives were elaborated on, so that I may develop a more nuanced understanding of them. As such, the following discussion is organised thematically, so that various statements and depictions from the same video may appear under different headlines. Focusing on such a specific aspect of the videos, the discussion may seem generalising or even superficial to some readers. While I recognise these concerns, I want to stress that the intended purpose is to clarify ways in which the various video releases can be viewed as partially dedicated to a common and coherent narrative – i.e. that associated with the three core framing tasks. Details have been left out, but this serves the purpose of retaining a clear focus on the content analysis, so that it can be fully elaborated on.

The conclusions drawn from this and previous discussions will be used to support a more detailed content analysis, focused on a specific video release, that follows below. Given the content of the video that is to be studied in detail in the next chapter, one might say that the purpose here is to properly prepare the ground for what is essentially a detailed analysis of ways in which IS propagandists frame the violent activities of their movement. Anyone who is familiar with the IS movement is probably aware of the fact that its official propaganda is often consciously focused on depicting and legitimising acts of extreme violence. I want to discuss the narratives and frames
employed as part of that legitimisation beforehand, so that their separate clarification may provide readers with an opportunity to properly appreciate parts of their nature and context, as well as their eventual implications.

3.1. “There is no life without jihad”

In late June of 2014, the al-Hayat Media Center released a video, supposedly filmed in Syria, that features statements by a group of six English-speaking IS members. In it, one man presented as “Brother Abu Bara’ al Hindi – from Britain” delivers the following message,177 worth quoting at length:

[O] brothers and sisters, open the Quran and read the ayas [verses] of Quran. Read the ayas of jihad, then everything will become clear to you. With me, in the UK, when I used to read the ayas of Quran, I used to feel like a munafiq [hypocrite]. You know? When I used to read the ayas of jihad, because I wasn't doing it, I feel like a munafiq. And this is what really made everything clear to me. All these scholars telling you “oh this is fard [obligatory], this is not fard, this is not time for jihad”. Forget everyone! Read the Quran, read the book of Allah, the instruction of life, and you'll find out what is jihad and if we're meant to do jihad or not. […] I mean, this dunya [temporal world] is only a test. Allah has sent you to this dunya to see how much you're willing to sacrifice for Allah subhana wa taala [may He be praised and exalted]. Are you willing to sacrifice the fat job you've got, the big car you've got, the family you have? Are you willing to sacrifice this, for the sake of Allah? Definitely. If you sacrifice something for Allah, Allah will give you seven hundred times more than this.

According to his interpretation, the Quran's attitude towards jihad is crystal clear – “because I wasn't doing it, I feel like a [hypocrite]”. Scholars who muddle, excuse, or otherwise complicate this obvious fact, are not to be trusted. Militant jihad is the way forward, as it is among the things that God expects of and appreciates in His worshippers. The material world and the lives we live in it are transient and temporary, and it is through meaningful struggle and sacrifice that we transcend their inherent meaninglessness and are able to live life fully. He continues:

O my brothers, living in the West – I know how you feel. When I used to live there, in your heart you feel depressed. Mm? Rasulallah (sallalahu wa salam) [God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him)] said, the cure for the depression is jihad fi sabilillah [jihad for the sake of God]. You feel like you have no honour. […] The honour of the umma is jihad fi sabilillah. O my brothers! Come to jihad, and feel the honour we are feeling! Feel the happiness that we're feeling!

The video in which Abu Bara al-Hindi is featured is titled There is no Life without Jihad. It was among the first videos ever released by the al-Hayat Media Center, which is the IS social movement organisation's official non-Arabic media outlet (see details above). Throughout the summer of 2014, al-Hayat released a number of videos that featured statements by foreign fighters of different nationalities. Three of these are interesting in the sense that they were presented in strikingly similar ways. They featured remarkably similar introductions that helped frame their content in ways that connected it to an overarching narrative. This narrative can be described as intimately connected to the ideas presented by al-Hindi above. Together, the videos argued that the depressing life of an abstaining hypocrite is not worth living, and that it is by joining the struggle associated with the IS movement that one is able to live life in the truest sense of that word. In the following, I will discuss parts of the content of these videos. Starting with some specific statements delivered by the men depicted, I will conclude by connecting these to the consistent framing that was employed as part of

177 “Abu Bara’ al Hindi” is a nom de guerre that signals a South Asian heritage (hind is the Persian and Arabic name for the Indian subcontinent). In order to avoid confusion, I will nevertheless refer to him and the other men in There is no Life Without Jihad with the names provided for them in the video. British media has since identified Abu Bara al-Hindi as Abdul Raqib Amin, from Aberdeen, Scotland: “Aberdeen Isis man Abdul Raqib Amin 'willing to die’”, BBC News, 7 July 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-28192584 (accessed 9 December 2016).
the videos’ introductions.

The messages delivered by the small group in There is no Life without Jihad can all be described as appeals for others to join the IS movement in Iraq and Syria. The men in the video speak directly to the viewer, encouraging him/her to travel to IS-controlled territories. While emphasising the supposed piety and strength of the movement, they also ask questions about the motives of those who have “stayed behind”. Several of the speakers address questions about the choices we make in life, and highlight their eventual implications. Above, I used statements by Abu Bara al-Hindi to illustrate one way in which different lifestyles are variously connected to such things as meaningfulness, happiness, and honour, as well as their antitheses. For him, honour and happiness are attained through militant jihad, while a peaceful life in the West is characterised by hypocrisy and depression. Another man, presented as “Brother Dujana al Hindi – from Britain”, has the following to say:

This is a message to all the brothers who stayed behind. […] Look around you, while you sit in comfort, and ask yourself; is this how you want to die? Know that you'll be resurrected on yawm al-qiyama [the day of resurrection] the way you lived your life. And do you want to be resurrected with the dust from bilad al-kufr [lands of disbelief] still in your lungs? Or do you wish to be resurrected showing your wounds and what you sacrificed for Allah azawajal [glorious and exalted]? […] Look around you as you're watching this video and ask yourself; “Is this what I've selected and what I've chosen instead of janna [paradise]?” While you know your brothers are out there on the front-lines, facing the bullets, the bombs, and everything the enemy of Allah azawajal has. While you're sitting in comfort, while you're sleeping, while you're going shopping – they're giving their blood.

Implied here is the idea that while life is transient it should not be wasted on things like “sitting in comfort” or “going shopping”, and that it is through sacrifice that one demonstrates one's devotion to God. Throughout the video, the various speakers highlight ways in which sacrifice for the sake of God will help one attain salvation. They present their messages in ways that take this for granted (presumably, given the supposed promises of God), and the idea of truthfulness is hence implicitly invoked as part of these arguments, as it is used as a way of challenging the sincerity of the viewer's faithfulness. The speakers argue that if you say you are a Muslim, then you have no excuse for not trusting in the promises of God. Since God promises paradise for His martyrs, there are no valid excuses for fearing death. Furthermore, some of the speakers in the video highlight temporal reasons for what they regard as a current need of self-sacrificing fighters. In a time characterised by suffering and humiliation, the Muslim umma is in need of champions. One man, presented as “Brother Abu Yahya ash Shami – from Australia”, highlights this with the following words:

Ya ikhwa [Oh brothers]. Filastin [Palestine], a long time ago, has been going, it's been pounded, the Jews have taken it. Our sisters in Fallujah, day after day they give birth to deformed babies. Look, look, look at the dhul [humiliation], the disgrace this umma is going through. Look, see, and wake up!

Dujana al-Hindi relates the sufferings of the Muslim umma to the ways in which individual

178 Beyond appeals explicitly directed at “brothers”, there are also those that mention “believers” in general, as well as “brothers and sisters”.
181 Fallujah is a city in western Iraq where the American military allegedly used chemical weapons during an offensive in November 2004. It has since been argued that this contributed to a subsequent spike in birth defects and abnormalities in the city. For an example of a media report on this issue, see Jamail 2012.
Muslims will be evaluated on the Day of Judgement:

And know that on yawm al-qiyama, when Allah resurrects you naked with your sins on your neck, Allah is gonna show you the sister who got violated by the shabiha [loyalist Syrian militiamen]. The child that got beheaded for being a Muslim will be brought in front of you. The brothers who gave their lives so the haqq [truth] of Allah can be on the whole world, their bodies will be shown in front of you. And Allah will ask you “Where were you?” And, wallah [truthfully], you won't be able to speak, you won't be able to respond.

At this point, we should remind ourselves about the narratives presented as part of the speeches delivered by al-Baghdadi and al-Adnani. In those speeches, the contemporary suffering of Muslims world-wide was presented as if almost solvable at this point in time. With the rise of the IS movement, the Muslims have been granted a champion that will fight to restore their rights and protect their religion. Any sincere Muslim should therefore do what he/she can to assist the movement, and preferably so through acts of sacrifice. This latter argument is echoed in the statements delivered as part of al-Hayat's *There is no Life without Jihad*. The speakers recurrently state that emigration (*hijra*) to IS territories is easy, and they themselves stand as credible witnesses to that supposed fact. Furthermore, they appeal to both the viewer's faith and to his/her sense of sympathy for victimised Muslims – highlighting that there are no valid reasons for fearing either death or combat. In short, they argue that there are few (if any) valid excuses for “staying behind”. They argue that anyone who does so is evidently not a sincere Muslim, since he/she is neither willing to do what it takes to ease the sufferings of the Muslim *umma*, nor willing to brace materialist fears in order for him/her to earn the favour of God. To make matters worse, the life of the abstainer is presented as “depressing”, since it lacks “honour” and is plagued by hypocrisy.

On the 16th of July 2014, the al-Hayat Media Center published another video. It is titled *Those who were Truthful with Allah* and features a group of armed Kazakh men. One among them delivers a fairly long message in the Kazakh language (subtitled in English by al-Hayat), explicitly directed at Kazakhs who have so far refrained from travelling to IS-controlled territory. The speaker is presented with an English-language subtitle that reads “Abu Anisah al Khazakhi – Killed fighting the sahwat in al-Khayr (may Allah accept Him)”.

The following are excerpts from his message:

To our brothers in Kazakhstan, a short message from the land of Sham, a land of great battles against the disbelievers, a land in which the mujahidin put every effort into establishing the Sharia of Allah. […] We will fight any taghut [idol], whomever it may be. We will strive to establish the Sharia of Allah. I say to my brothers in Kazakhstan, march forth in the path of Allah. Subhanallah! Either come to Sham [the Levant], or begin waging jihad in Kazakhstan. Either way it’s obligatory to wage jihad. No one is excused for leaving jihad. […] Allah will ask us on the Day of Judgement, “What have you contributed? What have you contributed in the path of establishing the Sharia and the rule of Allah?”.

What will you answer be at that moment? That is why we strive to join this caravan, my brothers. This is my message to everyone in Kazakhstan. Subhanallah. Don't sit back from jihad like house plants that

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182 *Shabiha* is translatable as “ghost”. Within the context of the Syrian civil war, it has been used by, for example, rebel sympathisers to describe members of different militias/gangs that took up arms in support of the Syrian government. Loyalist militias of this kind became notorious in the early years of the war, following allegations of various crimes. For more on this issue, see Lund 2015.

183 *Sahwat* is here used to refer to Syrian rebel factions. The term is translatable as ”awakening”, and is recurrently used in IS propaganda to refer to what the movement regards as treacherous Sunnis. This usage is connected to historical conflicts with US-supported Sunni militias in Iraq (see above), who often referred to themselves with names containing the word *sahwat*. *Al-Khayr* (translatable as ”the good”) is the name that the IS movement has chosen for the Deir al-Zour province in eastern Syria, and I have not been able to find any additional information regarding the IS movement's motivations for this name-change.

184 The word *taghut* is translatable as ”to overstep boundaries”, and is often used to refer to things that are worshipped besides God. In this context, it likely refers to secular rulers. *Taghut* and its plural *tawaghit* is often used by militant Muslims to highlight the deviant nature of secular politics, given that they supposedly undermine the sovereignty of God and the sharia of Islam. Those rulers who legislate based on anything other than Islam are regarded as ”idols”, since they expect people to follow their laws rather than those of God.
don't provide any benefit to the religion. You say “maslahah and mafsadah”\(^{185}\) and remain sitting in Kazakhstan. If you really care about “maslahah and mafsadah”, then come here to support the jihad and give yourself and your wealth as ransom for your religion.

Here we are presented with arguments that certainly echo those described above. As in the video *There is no Life without Jihad*, the concept of the day of judgement is invoked and the viewer is encouraged to question whether or not he/she has done enough to satisfy the expectations of God. It is forcefully argued (“its *obligatory* to wage jihad”) that one can fulfil God's expectations if one fights together with the IS movement to establish and protect what it regards as God's law and religion. As in previously discussed releases, the IS movement is presented as a credible force that truly has the ability to benefit the religion, establish sharia, and fight the enemies of God.

Roughly a week after the release of *Those who were Truthful with God*, the al-Hayat Media Center released another video featuring a message explicitly directed at a foreign audience. It was titled *Join the Ranks* and featured a group of Indonesian men. Among them was one presented as “Abu Muhammad al Indonesi”, who delivered a message in Indonesian, subtitled in English by al-Hayat. The following is an excerpt:

We ask Allah the Exalted to bless you [viewers] with His acceptance. And we ask Him to raise your honor and grant you victory over the tawaghit, who have humiliated you. By Allah, we emigrated for the sake of hijrah and jihad in the path of Allah. You've heard the clear and unequivocal call of Allah. We ask you, where's your faith? Why are you worried? What's the reason for your fear? Are your wives and children the reason that you're prevented from jihad? Are your homes, business, and wealth, more beloved to you than Allah, His Messenger, and jihad on His path? Have you forgotten that the companions of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) emigrated from Makkah [Mecca] to Madinah?\(^{186}\) They obeyed without hesitation and did not look for excuses. They went to Madinah seeking Allah's pleasure. They were not half-hearted, my brothers. There were also sahabiyyat [female companions of the Prophet] who emigrated without their families permission. There was a pregnant sahabiyyah who travelled in the hot sun and extreme heat out of love for Allah and obedience to Him.

The argument is here introduced by an appeal towards the raising of honour, and a wish for victory against those who have humiliated the Muslims. At the same time, the speaker implies that none of this will happen if the viewer is fearful for his/her life and well-being. Love for God and a willingness to please Him through acts of militant jihad are presented as much more important. The speaker's way of invoking themes from Islamic history is multi-faceted, as it appeals to the ideal of emulating the earliest Muslims while simultaneously putting one's concern for comfort and safety into perspective: If a pregnant woman was able to cross the desert, how come I am hesitant about a comfortable journey by plane or bus? Abu Muhammad al-Indonesi continues:

O brothers for the sake of Allah, are you pleased with being humiliated, oppressed, and ruled by the tawaghit? Where is your anger when the taghut mocks the Allah and His Messenger? Where is your anger when the rule of Allah is mocked, and His sharia is debased? Do you not find motivation to wage jihad in the path of Allah?

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\(^{185}\) Both of these terms are concepts in Islamic law. *Maslaha* refers to the “public interest” or “public good”, while *mafsada* is its antithesis. Invoking these terms may serve the purpose of reminding viewers about the ways in which Islamic law is supposed to serve the purposes of enforcing what is (common) good and forbidding what is bad/corrupting, and hence of arguing that the IS movement is intent on acting according to these principles.

\(^{186}\) This refers to a famous episode in early Islamic history. Reportedly, the prophet Muhammad started preaching in the town of Mecca, but faced problems as his egalitarian and monotheistic message was poorly received by influential groups there. He and his followers reportedly became victims of persecution, and when Muhammad uncovered a plan for his assassination he decided to relocate to the town which is nowadays called Madinat al-Nabi, “The City of the Prophet” (its name at the time was “Yathrib”). The early Muslim's migration (*hijra*) there is regarded as significant, as it (among other things) facilitated the creation of the first Islamic state. The migration happened in 622 and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. See Watts 2012, for details on the *hijra*.
This lamentation about the supposed apathy and hypocrisy of contemporary Muslims echo ideas that have been discussed above. As the IS movement supposedly has the ability to revive the honour of Muslims and avenge their suffering, each Muslim is faced with questions about whether or not he/she will get involved and act in support of it. Anyone who chooses to abstain is encouraged to question whether or not he/she is really that keen on making the world a better place for Muslims. The speakers of the various releases discussed so far recurrently stress ways in which the IS movement is supposedly working to establish Islam and weaken the kuffar, and thereby implicitly challenge viewers to present anything comparable. Furthermore, viewers are asked whether or not they are doing anything meaningful with our lives, or just “wasting” them on materialist aspirations. Those who answer affirmatively to the latter are accused of apathy towards the suffering of the Muslim umma, as well as of being insincere in their devotion to God. As such, they are seemingly identified as part of the underlying problem.

As was stated above, all of the videos discussed under this headline were released by the al-Hayat Media Center during the summer of 2014. The word al-hayat is translatable as “the life”, and the media centre's official iconography can be interpreted as attempts at highlighting its supposedly life-giving qualities. Its official logo is a stylised drop of water, and the computer-generated graphics used to present it at the start of each distributed video often play with ways in which the logo emerges out of water. During the first few months of al-Hayat's existence, its releases focused extensively on propagating an attitude towards life that looks beyond our material existence in the temporal world (dunya). The video There is no Life without Jihad starts with a photo montage that is accompanied by Quranic recitation. The verse (ayah) quoted is 8:24, which is read aloud in Arabic and subtitled with the following English translation:

Oh you who have believed, respond to Allah and His Messenger, respond to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which gives you life.187

As the words are spoken, we are shown photos of individual IS fighters. These move rapidly from pictures of men in a seemingly peaceful setting, through images of armed men engaging in battle, and ends in a photo of a deceased man. His face looks peaceful, yet is clearly that of a corpse. The last line of the recitation (“When He calls you to that which gives you life”) is read aloud as this last picture is shown, indicating that the thing “which gives you life” is something that in fact presupposes the demise of the body. Our temporal existence is irrelevant, and true “life” is something that lies outside of the material world of dunya. While these are photos of a violent or otherwise unpleasant nature, they have been edited in ways that add an unnatural yet arguably beautiful glow to them. This is then combined with the soft voice of the Arabic reciter in an apparent attempt at dispelling any sort of feeling of unease. Following this photo montage, we hear the voice of what was then the IS movement's official spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani:

It is time that you know the way of honour and authority. The way of prosperity, security and happiness. It is time that you know there are no rights without jihad. No justice without jihad. No honour without jihad. No security without jihad. No hope without jihad. No life without jihad.188

As he speaks, the title of the video appears – There is no Life without Jihad – and the featured fighters walk past, showcasing their weapons and carrying an IS flag. In the background an Arabic-

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187 Beyond the repetition of “respond to Allah and His Messenger”, this translation corresponds to that of the Sahih International. This is seemingly also the case with other translations used by the al-Hayat Media Center. In other words, al-Hayat are not interpreting/translating the Quran's original Arabic themselves, but rely on and apparently recognise those of the Sahih International. I have not been able to find any official statements that somehow explain al-Hayat's motivations for embracing this particular translation/interpretation.

188 This is seemingly an excerpt from a speech released by the al-Furqan Foundation in April of 2014, with a title translatable as “He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them” (wa layumakinana laham diyahnunu al-dhia artada lahun). While the original context of the above quote was an appeal to the Sunni Muslims or Iraq, the statement has been edited for its use in the al-Hayat videos so that the specific reference to Iraqi Sunnis is left out.
language *nashid* is played, wherein the singers repeat phrases like “We are the lions of the struggle […] We are the knights of life” (*nahnu asad al-nizal […] nahnu fursan al-hayat*). All in all, this multimedia presentation manages to establish a connection between the concept of “life” and that of struggle and sacrifice. Furthermore, it clarifies that the video's producers disregard an understanding that perceives life as something entirely material/temporal, and indicates that “true life” is rather connected to the realm of the afterlife (*akhira*). All of this – Quranic recitation, photo montage, al-Adnani's statement, etc. – has happened within the time-span of roughly a minute, and hence the stage has effectively been set for the fighters who will deliver the spoken messages. The central argument has been introduced, and viewers have been encouraged to connect whatever the speakers say to the concept of “jihad as life”, which will widen the implications of their messages. The videos titled *Those who were Truthful with Allah* and *Join the Ranks* are introduced in a remarkably similar fashion. They both start with a Quranic recitation accompanied by images,¹⁸⁹ and the video's title and featured speakers are introduced while we listen to the same al-Adnani statement that was used at the start of *There is no Life without Jihad*.

These three videos can be described as constituting a seemingly coordinated propaganda campaign, aimed at recruiting foreign fighters for the IS movement in Iraq and Syria. They are clearly directed at various foreign audiences, and explicitly encourage viewers to leave their homes and travel to IS-controlled territory. While the speakers are from varying ethnic backgrounds and explicitly direct their messages at different audiences, the arguments they present are remarkably similar. They argue that if “the Muslims” are to solve the problem of their suffering and re-establish the laws of their religion they have to make a move, and that the supposed state that has been established by the IS movement in Iraq and Syria is the most credible champion of Muslim rights and dignity. Anyone who does not join is reviled as a hypocrite, since he/she is evidently more concerned about the pleasures and comforts of the *dunya* than about things like the will of God, the well-being of the wider *umma*, and the honour associated with jihad. Anyone who has sincere trust in God, truly cares about the world-wide suffering of Muslims, and want to see the *umma* united and strong should be willing to make sacrifices – such as the performing *hijra* and leaving an old life behind, or the offering of one's blood as part of the IS movement's jihad. For, according to al-Adnani, “there are no rights without jihad. No justice without jihad. No honour without jihad. No security without jihad. No hope without jihad. No life without jihad”.

A few days before the release of the video *There is no Life Without Jihad*, the al-Hayat Media Center started distributing a music video for a new *nashid*. Titled *Haya Alal Jihad* and sung in German,¹⁹⁰ it featured English-language subtitles that translated the lyrics. The following are excerpts from these subtitles:

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Bombs drop on us! But we continue to call for Shariah!
The promises of Allah are written! Highest Paradise for the shuhadah [martyrs]!
We give our own blood!
The day of judgement is near,
But the people don't want to understand!
Blinded by this dunya!
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As the last two of the lines above are sung, viewers are shown images of food being prepared in

¹⁸⁹ Notwithstanding these similarities, it should be noted that the three videos make use of different verses from the Quran. The verse used in *Those who were Truthful with Allah* is 33:23, which states that “Among the believers are men, true to what they promised Allah. Among them is he who has fulfilled his vow [to the death]. And among them is he who awaits his chance”. These words are accompanied by pictures of injured and deceased fighters, presented in a glossy manner that is comparable to that described above. The verse quoted at the beginning of *Join the Ranks* is 61:4 – “Indeed, Allah loves those who fight in His cause in a row as though they are a [single] structure joined firmly”. Accompanying the recitation is a picture of a large group of uniformed fighters, which seem to imply that the theme of unity and, indeed, the appeal for “joining the ranks” is meant to be highlighted.

¹⁹⁰ The title is translatable as “let's go for jihad”. The Arabic phrase was rendered in the above way by al-Hayat's producers themselves.
restaurants, of people performing the traditional \textit{al-ardha} dance of Saudi Arabia, scenes from a football game, and the skyline of Riyadh (the Saudi capital). All of these images are apparently meant to serve as examples of people who are “blinded by this dunya”. Notably, they depict places and people in Saudi Arabia, which is often regarded as an Islamic society ruled according to the sharia. It is as if al-Hayat's producers are assuming that their various non-Arab viewers regard a move to, for example, Saudi Arabia as a remedy for their depression and/or humiliation. The short montage is presented as if to dispel any such thoughts, and to argue that the societies at the heart of the Muslim/Arab world are just as “corrupt” as any other. The heart of the problem is abstention from jihad, and a lack of sincere respect for God's judgement. In another part of the video, the following words are sung:

\begin{quote}
Brothers, it's time to rise!
Set forth for battle, if you are truthful!
[...]
Do you fear death? There is no escape!
Get dignity! And shahadah fi sabillah [martyrdom for the sake of God] is entrance to paradise
[...]
Your brothers and sister are crying! Shouting! Dying!
And Sham is bleeding to death!
\end{quote}

As the last lines are sung we are shown images of crying children, people who are bleeding out on the street, and of injured children in hospitals. The implied question presented by these excerpts from \textit{Haya Alal Jihad} is an existential one that seemingly plays an important role among the various arguments presented above. Do you want to be a champion of suffering Muslims? Or are you content with drinking sodas and watching football?

Implied by all of this is that people who are not satisfied with worldly pleasures may become victims of a depression similar to that described by Abu Bara al-Hindi above. Set against the “pull” of honour and sincerity, such depression and hypocrisy represents a sort of push-factor of the motivational argument. For IS propagandists, the remedy of this humiliating state of existence is an obvious one: The honour sought after is in jihad, and it is through the attainment of such honour that \textit{life} is truly experienced. And according to them, the IS movement is the pinnacle of defiant jihad, as well as of actual honour and truthfulness, in an otherwise corrupted world of hypocrites.

\section*{3.2. Sincere conviction, dedicated commitment, and the act of sacrifice}

In July of 2014, the al-Hayat Media Center released a video that focused on a Canadian man who had converted to Islam and joined the IS movement. It features statements delivered by him, chronicles the various problems he encountered in Canada after his conversion, and apparently shows his last moments and subsequent death during a battle in northern Syria. Titled \textit{Al-Ghuraba: The Chosen Few of Different Lands},\footnote{\textit{Al-Ghuraba} is translatable as “stranger” or “expatriate”. The thematic narrative about \textit{the strangers} is often repeated in official IS propaganda. In short, it highlights virtues associated with the act of choosing Islam rather than the eventual idolatry associated with the traditions and practices of one's family, tribe, and/or nation. See, for example, \textit{Dabiq}, Issue 3: 6-8. It can certainly be argued that the concept of \textit{al-wala wa al-bara} is hereby invoked, as the underlying assumption is that loyalty towards Islam is necessarily connected to one's active disavowal of anything perceived of as contradicting \textit{tawhid}.} it presents him as “Abu Muslim from Canada”.\footnote{According to Canadian media, his birth-name was Andre Poulin and he lived in the town of Timmins, Ontario before travelling to Syria in 2012: “Andre Poulin: dead Canadian jihadist used in ISIS recruitment video”, \textit{CBC News}, 12 July 2016, \url{http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/andre-poulin-dead-canadian-jihadist-used-in-isis-recruitment-video-1.2705115} (accessed 9 December 2016).} Delivering his statement, he is placed in front of an IS flag, dressed in combat gear, and equipped with a Kalashnikov rifle. Despite these intimidating props, he arguably emits an aura of both calm and
reassurance. Furthermore, in a sort of play with stereotypes, his white face, as well as the sporting of a pair of glasses and a sparsely grown beard, perhaps serve a sort of propaganda purpose in itself. No matter the intended audience, the message signalled is one about the noteworthiness of this man being a part of the IS movement. His first statement serves to reinforce this idea:

My name is Abu Muslim. I'm your brother in Islam here in Syria. I originally come from Canada. I was like any other Canadian. I watched hockey, I went to the cottage in the summer time, I love to fish, I wanted to go hunting. I liked outdoors, I liked sports.

As these words are spoken, we are shown footage of Canada's beautiful scenery – further reinforcing a sense of the exoticism of the video's main character. He comes from a distant land, grew up as a non-Muslim, yet was able to find God who, in his own words, “guided me from the darkness of kufr to the light of iman [belief]”. In the background a calm and beautiful nashid is playing, with a chorus that sings about “victory to whoever obtains martyrdom truthfully”. Abu Muslim continues:

Before I came here to Syria, I had money, I had a family. I had good friends, I had colleagues, you know. I worked as a street janitor. I made over two thousand dollars a month at this job – it was very good job, it was a very good job. And, even though I wasn't rich beyond my wildest imagination, you know, I was making it. It was good. And, you know, I always had family to support me. And, I had friends to support me. So, it's not like I was some social outcast. It wasn't like I was some anarchist, or somebody who just wants to destroy the world and kill everybody. No, I was a very good person. And, you know, mujahidin are regular people too. You know, we get married, we have families, we have lives – you know! We have lives, just like any other soldier in any other army. We have lives outside our job.

Through this statement, the impression of normalcy is seemingly supposed to be reinforced, and viewers are to be given the impression that Abu Muslim's conversion was informed by a sincere inclination towards Islam. The same was apparently the case with his decision to travel to Syria:

You know, life in Canada was good. I had money, I had good family. But, at the end of the day, it's still dar al-kufr [abode of disbelief]. And at the end of the day, you cannot obey Allah subhana wa taala [praised and exalted be He] fully as you can by living in a Muslim country and an Islamic state. [...] My brothers, how can you answer to subhana wa taala when you live on the same street, when you're using their lights and you are paying taxes to them, and they use these taxes to assist in their war on Islam?

In other words, we are once again reminded of the supposed hypocrisy associated with abstaining from participating in the struggle in Syria and Iraq. Beyond the argument about paying taxes that support Western war efforts, practical aspects of hijra are addressed and Abu Muslim stresses how easy it is to join the IS movement and live a good life within the territories controlled by it. In other words, the sympathising viewer is here confronted with fundamental questions about the purpose of his/her life. The viewer is (quite explicitly) scolded as a coward and hypocrite for not having

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193 Grätrud 2016: 1058.
194 The concept of dar al-kufr is often used synonymously with that of dar al-harb, which can be translated as “abode of war”. Together with the opposing concept of dar al-islam (“abode of Islam”), it is often used to categorise different parts of the world based on their basic political/legal circumstances (i.e. whether or not they are ruled by Islamic law). Based on this categorisation, the legitimisation of different political methods may vary. See Albrecht 2016 for a general overview of these concepts.
195 Presumably referring to the fact that the Canadian military participated in the US-led occupation of Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. This is highlighted by a short montage, following Abu Muslim's statement about taxes and “war on Islam”, that shows arguably menacing-looking Canadian soldiers. They sport dark sunglasses, smoke cigarettes, are dressed in combat gear, and sit inside some sort of military helicopter. As these images are shown, the calm nashid is briefly replaced by a menacing, loud, and dark sound, which is reminiscent of that of an air-plane's engine.
sacrificed the worldly pleasures of a comfortable life for the sake of the IS movement and, by extension, the wider umma. The accusation is here reinforced (and made more concrete) by the alleged fact that life in Syria is also comfortable, as well as by the idea that anyone who lives in “dar al-kufr” is supporting the military endeavours of the supposed enemies of Islam. Once again, it is the sincerity of the sympathetic viewer that is being questioned.

Moving on, the video is narrated by an unnamed man with a North American English accent. He describes the trajectory of Abu Muslim in the following way:

Abu Muslim was from the few, of the few, of the few. He accepted Islam in a land at war with Islam. In a land with few Muslims. In a land where evil, kufr, and sin called him from every direction and corner to succumb to shaytan [Satan] and to his desires. He accepted Islam, learned his religion, practised it, called others to it, and did not stop there. He was tested with hardship and imprisonment. Yet, he was patient and firm, in contrast with those who change at the first sign of tribulation. When he was released, by Allah's grace, and heard of the jihad in al-Sham, he rushed to perform hijra, despite all the opposition from the enemies of Allah and their intelligence agencies. He married in al-Sham, but did not allow his marriage – nor the child he was expecting – to deter him from his commitment to his Lord. He eagerly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, seeking to play a role in reviving the khilafa.

Portrayed as tested from all sides, Abu Muslim is idealised for the supposed sincerity of his faith and the extent of his steadfastness. Neither the kufr of his homeland, the tribulations associated with being imprisoned, or the love for his new family were able to distract him from his “commitment”. As the last words of the above statement are spoken, the video cuts to an image of Abu Muslim standing on a battlefield. Wearing a camouflaged uniform and holding a rocket-launcher, the soft-spoken and kind-faced Canadian is here turned into what is apparently meant as an awe-inspiring image of an actual warrior. This image, as well as the narration that has preceded it, serves to remind viewers about the strengthening potential of sincere faithfulness. It furthermore helps reinforce the notion that the IS movement knows how to tap into and utilise such potential, and thereby argues for the idea that anyone is welcomed by and can be properly used by the movement. In other words, it is not merely Abu Muslim's sincerity that is at display, but that of the wider movement itself. A recent convert from “a land at war with Islam” will not necessarily be distrusted or otherwise doubted, but rather given an opportunity to prove his devotion.

The video moves on to show Abu Muslim's various exploits during the battle, as he rushes around the battlefield and fires his rocket-launcher at the enemy. The narrator continues:

On that day, he rushed into the airport hoping to meet his lord and gain closeness to Him. He was a brother with excellent character. Truthfulness, dedication, selflessness, and steadfastness. We consider him such, and Allah is his judge. He moved during the battle like a man who did not know death. Rather, he knew that true life awaited him, and that it was only a matter of being struck down by the weapons of the kuffar. He was a brother who would be pleased with the bare minimum, and still shine with happiness.

This statement echoes many of the themes that have already been discussed, and helps summarise the virtues often idealised by official IS propaganda. Sincerity is arguably the underlying principle, and serves a motivational purpose in the sense that it is here used to argue for self-sacrificial acts. This reaches new levels of palpability as Abu Muslims enters a ditch and is struck by an explosive shell. Dust kicks up, and men around the camera start screaming. As this happens, the video is cut to a new scene, wherein viewers are shown the corpse of Abu Muslim. Still wearing the same glasses, he is lying in the ditch wherein he was killed. The narrator calmly comments of the scene in the

The narrator present this as “the battle for the military airport of Menagh”. Located in northern Syria, the airbase was held by Syrian loyalist forces until August 2013. Before the loyalists lost it, the airbase was besieged by various rebel factions (back when many of them were still allied with the IS movement, given their common enemies) for roughly a year, and IS forces reportedly led the final assault. The video with Abu Muslim does not specify the date at which the shown footage was filmed, and I have not been able to find any reports that state the exact date of his death. For details on the siege and final assault, see Malas 2013.
And thus his Lord had decreed an appointment for their meeting. So he answered the call of his Lord, and surrendered his soul without hesitation, leaving the world behind him, not out of despair and hopelessness, but rather, with certainty of Allah's promise.

With this, the message of the nashid that has hereto been playing in the background is reinforced. Abu Muslim has become one of the truthful martyrs, and has thereby obtained the supposedly sought-after “victory”. The sincerity of his conviction and commitment have been perfected by this act of self-sacrifice. His example is presented as if even more forceful that usual, given that he was not born as a Muslim. In a final statement, he delivers the following message:

And I myself, you know, I'm a convert of only six years. Mashallah [praise God/God willed it], you brothers were born into Islam. You have a Muslim family, you have this Muslim upbringing. It's a big ineam [gift] from Allah subhana wa taala, it's a big gift. Mashallah, you should be very grateful for it. And you probably know Islam better than me even. You have studied, and you know Sahih Bukhari and you know half of the Quran,198 and you know Arabic very well. You have all this knowledge, you know. So apply this knowledge into your life, you know. Put Allah subhana wa taala before your family, put it before yourself, put it before everything.

In summary, then, the highlighting of this Canadian convert is meant to inspire through its appeal to truthfulness. If this man is able to believe in and sacrifice this much for what the IS movement regards as Islam, then the same must inevitably be expected of those who grew up with the religion. The sincerity in question is one with multiple dimensions, as there is both talk about the willingness to struggle and suffer for the common good, as well as about the promises of God. The latter aspect is related at the end of al-Ghuraba: The Chosen Few of Different Lands, as a hadith is quoted wherein the Prophet Muhammad describes God's promise of paradise (janna) for martyred Muslims.199

The presenting of self-sacrificial acts as illustrations of sincere conviction is a recurring theme of official IS propaganda. Martyrs are idealised, their deaths glamorised, and the movement itself is often hailed for its supposedly unique ability to inspire death-defying enthusiasm in its members,200 The motivations for the highlighting of this theme are likely multi-layered and can, for example, be connected to the movement's military challenges. Confronted with enemies that are often materially superior to itself (most notably in the sense that IS forces lack air-support), its battlefield successes are seemingly often dependent on motivated soldiers who are willing to risk their lives in often quite bold battlefield manoeuvres.201 The most dramatic illustration of this is the recurrent and

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198 Sahih Bukhari is a famous, widely respected, and influential hadith collection – named after its collector Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin Bardizba al-Jufi al-Bukhari (810-870). For details on his life and works, see Melchert 2012.

199 The video itself does not reference the collection containing this hadith, but it corresponds to the content of Sunan al-Nasa'i, Vol. 1, Book 25, Hadith 3136. In short, this hadith narrates how “the son of Adam” is tempted by Satan to not accept Islam, and not perform hijra or jihad. Satan argues that acceptance of Islam entails the abandonment of the religion of his forefathers, that hijra will result in him abandoning his land and sky, and that jihad will cost him his life and wealth. In short, then, Satan's arguments stress the importance of various materialist concerns associated with the dunya. “The son of Adam” nevertheless ignores Satan, and the hadith then states that the Prophet continued by saying that “Whoever does that, then he had a right from Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, that He will admit him to paradise. Whoever is killed, he has a right from Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, that He will admit him to Paradise. If he is drowned, he had a right from Allah that He will admit him to paradise, or whoever is thrown by his mount and his neck is broken, he had a right from Allah that he will admit him to Paradise”. The English translation used here was provided by the website sunnah.com (https://sunnah.com/nasai/25, accessed 9 December 2016).

200 Official IS propaganda often highlights the self-sacrifice of both low-level fighters and leadership-figures. Many of its leaders have been killed in battle, and the propagandists utilises this fact as part of their attempts to argue for the overall sincerity of the movement and the credibility of its calls to martyrdom. E.g. Rumiyah, Issue 1 (Dhul-Hijjah 1437): 2-3, 14-17.

201 The aggressive tactics of the movement's forces in Iraq and Syria can be described as a sort of hallmark of their military activities there. Researchers have pointed out that IS forces combine intelligence gathering operations
apparently large-scale use of suicide-bombers, which has an often devastating effect.\textsuperscript{202} Employed as a form of guided bomb, explosives-packed vehicles are used to strike at enemies with high precision and effectiveness. While militarily effective, the use of such weapons is of course presumed by the movement's ability to recruit people who are willing to consciously sacrifice their lives for what is allegedly the greater good.\textsuperscript{203} The recurring way in which martyrdom is idealised (as a dramatic manifestation of one's sincerity, for example) seemingly serves the purpose of motivating acts of conscious self-immolation, which then serve the military purposes of the wider movement. Yet beyond this temporal (political and military) purpose, the highlighting of martyrdom also reinforces the credibility and supposed legitimacy of the IS movement. It is presented as a movement made up of men who embrace the dangers of battle, who apparently have sincere trust in the promises of God, and are more than willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. The people who constitute the movement are idealised as well suited and properly prepared for the realities of jihad, which in turn is presented as a prerequisite for the solution of the various problems experienced by the contemporary umma. In other words, the notion of self-sacrifice is used to concretise the recurring themes of sincerity and defiance (personified by the martyr), and furthermore reinforce notions about the IS movement is the pinnacle of contemporary jihad. Lastly, it can be argued that the figure of the martyr is used in apparent attempts at inspiring distant sympathisers. Above, I described a number of videos wherein various foreign fighters encouraged Muslims in their home-countries to join the IS movement. A recurring theme was that of guilt associated with living a life in comfort while there are Muslims around the world who are suffering. The ways in which martyrs are highlighted and idealised may perhaps contribute to this argument, as it confronts the non-engaged sympathetic with the symbolic antithesis of his/her own apparent apathy and hypocrisy.

A popular nashid of the IS movement is one whose title can be translated as “My umma, dawn has appeared” (\textit{ummati qad laha fajarun}).\textsuperscript{204} While it was released before the period that is the focus of this particular study, I nevertheless regard it as an exceptionally illustrative expression and summary of the above described theme. It contains lyrics that remind listeners of the way in which “the blood of the martyrs” is the material with which the IS movement was built, and posits that its builders were (and are) brave and righteous men who do not fear death. The lyrics can be used to highlight the supposedly fundamental importance that the movement ascribes to the theme of self-sacrifice, and are therefore worth quoting at length:

\begin{verbatim}
My ummah, dawn has appeared, so await the manifest victory,
The Islamic State has arisen by the blood of the righteous,
The Islamic State has arisen by the jihad of the pious,
They have offered their souls in righteousness with constancy and conviction,
So that the religion may be established in it: the law of the Lord of the Worlds.

My ummah, accept the good news, and don't despair, victory is near.
The Islamic State has arisen and the dreaded might has begun.
It has arisen tracing out glory, and the period of setting has ended,
\end{verbatim
By faithful men who do not fear warfare.
They have created eternal glory that will not perish or disappear.

My ummah, God is our Lord, so grant your blood,
For victory will not return except by the blood of the martyrs,
Who have spent their time hoping for their Lord in the Abode of the Prophets.
They have offered their souls to God, and for the religion there is self-sacrifice.
The people of giving and granting are the people of excellence and pride.

My ummah, accept the good news: the Sun of Steadfastness has risen.
Verily we have marched in masses for the hills: the time-honoured glory,
That we may return the light, faith and glorious might,
By men who have forsaken the dunya and attained immortality.
And have revived the ummah of glory and the assured victory.

The above lyrics are laden with symbolism connected to themes discussed above. Through the offering of their blood, “faithful men who do not fear warfare” have established The Islamic State and “revived the umma of glory”. Those who have “offered their souls in righteousness with constancy and conviction” are presented as the inspirational antithesis of the abstaining hypocrite scolded in the statements presented above. Here, a motivational appeal is presented through a call for the granting of blood – for victory will not return except by the blood of the martyrs.

3.3 United by a common sense of purpose and direction

Readers have perhaps noticed that a strain of anti-nationalism runs through many of the narratives and arguments that have been presented so far. In the speech titled A Message to the Mujahidin and the Islamic Ummah in the Month of Ramadan (see above for details), IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stated that “Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis”. Rather, “The Islamic State” is the state of every Muslim, no matter his/her ethnic background. This notion is often referred to in official IS media releases, and is both pointed to as an example of the movement's sincere religiosity and used as a welcoming argument for joining.

The three al-Hayat videos There is no Life without Jihad, Those who were Truthful with Allah, and Join the Ranks can collectively be used to illustrate this theme. At their most basic level, all of them preach a similar message that encourages hijra and appeals to the sincerity of the viewer's beliefs. But while the message is similar, the men who are delivering it are of obviously different backgrounds. Collectively, then, these three videos are seemingly meant to signal that the IS movement binds people together. No matter if born in Britain, Kazakhstan, or Indonesia they all (supposedly) think and dream alike, and the IS movement is able to tap into and help them express the things held in common. It is curious, then, that the men have taken names that signal their place of origin. This sort of naming corresponds to the Arabic practice of nisba (translatable as “attribution”), and is also the guiding principle of above mentioned names like al-Zarqawi and al-Baghdadi. The adoption of Arabic-style names seemingly serves the purpose of signalling identification with a new imagined community, while simultaneously calling attention to the journeys they have undertaken. Notably, all of the English-speaking men in There is no Life Without Jihad use names that apparently signal their Muslim heritage, rather than their connection to Britain or Australia. Hence, they use names like al-Yemeni, al-Hindi, al-Shami, and al-Iraqi, while still presented as “from Britain” (etc.) in the video. This can be interpreted as an attempt at marking a distance from one's immigrant identity, and perhaps reinvent oneself through the highlighting of

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205 Translation provided by Al-Tamimi 2014(a).
206 Al-Baghdadi 2014: 5.
207 “Zarqa” is a city in the northern part of Jordan.
208 Perhaps also from countries likely deemed as “enemies of Islam”. Both Britain and Australia are important allies of
some sort of connection to the Muslim world. Whatever the individual motives for the adoption of a certain *nisba*, the result of this practice seemingly serves to reinforce the anti-nationalist narrative of the IS movement. The original nationality of the various men is made clear, and viewers are thereby presented with an image of a truly multi-national and pan-Islamic movement which welcomes people from around the globe.

In early August of 2014, al-Hayat Media Center released a video titled *Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah*. It featured footage from the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr*, which is the Muslim holiday that signals the end of the Ramadan fasting. Seemingly filmed in the IS-controlled Syrian city of al-Raqqa, it features a number of short statements delivered by various foreign fighters. Delivering messages in their native languages and encouraging others to emigrate to IS-controlled territories, the video was presented as part of the wider propaganda campaign aimed a recruiting new members. At the same time, it was seemingly meant to illustrate the multi-national character of the movement, which arguably served the purpose of illustrating the its apparently global reach.

As was the case with the above mentioned al-Hayat videos, this one also highlighted the remarkably similar messages delivered by the various men. All of them delivered elated appeals for other to join, and praised the IS Caliphate in various ways. The last speaker, a South African presented as “Abu Shuaib al-Afriki”, summarises the message in the following way:

Salam aleykum [peace be with you], brothers and sisters. I'm your brother Shuaib, from South Africa. I'm here in the khilafa. As you can see, there's a big party going on – today is Eid. I wish a very happy Eid to all the brothers from all the world. But my strong wish is that I can see you all here, and celebrate Eid with us. There is no place in the world, at the moment, where you will have such safety in the world. Because when Allah is with you, there is no better place to be. [...] Brothers and sisters, I don't have the words. I don't have the words to express myself about the happiness to be here. There is no word which can describe it. Because this is all, this is the wish of all sincere Muslims. To be in the khilafa. To be part of one umma, of the umma of Muhammad (salallahu alayhi wa salam). Inshallah [if God wills], move forward so that we can be one umma walking hands in hands. And, inshallah, we will open al-Quds [Jerusalem]. Qariban [soon], inshallah.

In other words, the IS Caliphate supposedly represents the realisation of a dream about Muslim unity. In it, Muslims from around the world are united by a common goal, and through it they can accomplish great things (illustrated here by the goal of reconquering Jerusalem). When joining the movement, Muslims become “brothers and sisters” in a common community that is supposedly based on the principles of the Prophet Muhammad. Safety, happiness, and triumph will follow, and anyone who is still living in the lands of disbelief should emigrate to IS-controlled territories in order to support the realisation of these goals. The way in which men of different nationalities are highlighted seemingly serves the purpose of illustrating the plausibility of this narrative, as these emigrants stand as living proof of the movement's mobilising success. Their appeals are seemingly sincere, and the happiness they express does not appear to be faked. Beyond this, things like their supposed sincerity and normalcy are reinforced by the fact that most of them are either surrounded by or holding small children. For example, al-Afriki is holding a girl of about one year, and posits that she is his “fifth daughter in the khilafa”. In most cases, the children add to the relaxed and genuine atmosphere of the scenes, while simultaneously reinforcing the apparent sincerity of the messages and the men who deliver them. It can certainly be argued that a family man is a more reassuring figure than a lone traveller, as it can be assumed that the former will be more anxious about the safety of the place he is emigrating to. At the same time, these fathers lend credibility to the IS movement as a serious enterprise, and their appearance may serve the purpose of dispelling potential allegations about it merely being made up of disaffected loners. Rather, the video can be

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209 The men, in order or appearance, are the following: One British man calling himself “the Ethiopian” (*al-habashi*), one Finnish-speaking man calling himself “the Somali” (*al-somali*), one Tunisian man, one Indonesian man calling himself “the Yemeni” (*al-yemeni*), one Moroccan man, one Belgian man, one Trinidadian man presented as “from the US”, and one South African.
used to argue that the IS Caliphate will be built by families. Its institutions will (supposedly) nurture and educate a new generation, which will know about and be able to experience Islamic governance, Muslim unity, and jihad from as early on as possible.

Looking at these videos, one can argue that they contain a recurring message about the construction of identity and of a new imagined community. It is argued that this new community will use sincere faith as its measure of merit, and that this will not be informed by ethnic or otherwise cultural prejudices. This meritocratic ideal is personified in the above described figure of “Abu Muslim from Canada”, who lacked a Muslim upbringing but was nevertheless able to satisfy the ideals of the IS movement – that is, his faith was sincere and he sacrificed his life for the greater good of the wider movement. This is presented as essentially all that is needed, and it is argued for as not in any way presupposed by one's origins or ethnicity. The IS movement is presented as if particularly keen on achieving these ideals, and this is then used to argue for its supposed truthfulness and credibility as a pan-Islamic movement and authority. Within the boundaries of the movement, Muslims from around the world are united by a common sense of purpose, and guided towards a common good. *Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah* features an Arabic-language *nashid* whose lyrics can be understood as connected to this theme. Al-Hayat translates the lyrics in the following way:

The shari'ah of our Lord is light, by it we rise over the stars
By it we live without humiliation, a life of peace and security
Our State was established upon Islam,
And although it wages jihad against the enemies, it governs the affairs of the people
It looks after its flock with love and patience
[…]

Combined with the scenes of foreign fighters encouraging others to join, the lyrics illustrate the sense of a common purpose that is supposedly cultivated by the IS movement. It is through this so-called state's application of sharia that the Muslims transcend their humiliation, attain peace and security together, and establish Islam. As such, the weakness and disunity of the *umma* will be remedied through a common respect for the authority and guidance of the IS Caliphate. At the start of *Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah*, and Arabic-language sermon is delivered to an apparently multi-ethnic audience. It contains the following statements:

In this month of Ramadan, the world witnessed the biggest and greatest event of our contemporary history, for the Khilafah was announced, a khalifah was appointed to the Muslims who defends the religion and direct the matters of the dunya in accordance with the law of Allah and His religion. […] In this blessed month, the nationalistic borders were broken, borders which divided the Muslims and weakened their strength after decades of division and expulsion. In this blessed month, Allah granted His Muslim slaves and muwahhid mujahidin victories over lands and regions. […] Allah granted His weak slaves consolidation upon the earth. So shari'ah was ruled by, and the hudud and prayers were established. Zakah [obligatory alms meant to benefit the poor or otherwise weak of society] was collected. Jizyah [tax imposed on non-Muslims] was enforced. Good as enforced and evil was banned. And Allah's authority was spread upon this earth.

To summarise, the IS movement is presented as a manifestation of transnational solidarity. Guided by a truthful and victorious state, Muslims from around the globe sacrifice together for a common goal. This anti-nationalist theme is intimately related to narratives described above as expressions of prognostic and diagnostic framing, as it is used to argue for the IS movement as a remedy for the perceived disunity of the Muslim *umma*. At the same time, it reinforces the motivational theme of *hijra*, as it illustrates the supposed ease with which emigrants will be welcomed and integrated into the wider structure of the IS Caliphate. Combining all of these themes, an overarching narrative argues that true happiness can only be achieved in a state where one is measured based on the sincerity of one's faith, as any other measures of merit and value are described as untruthful and distracting from the proper worship of God.
3.4. The truthful and victorious state

A popular Arabic nashid of the IS movement is titled “Oh soldiers of truth, let's go” (ya junud al-haqq haya). It features two verses, which are sung rhythmically and repeated a number of times by a group of male singers. The song was originally released by the al-Ajnad Foundation, which is an official IS media organisation that focuses on audio releases like music and Quranic recitation. In early June 2014, the al-Hayat Media Center released its first video, which was a music video set to the tunes of the mentioned nashid. It consisted of a fast-paced photo montage depicting IS fighters in various settings, and featured subtitles with an English-language translation of the nashid's lyrics. The following are the lyrics of that nashid, as they were interpreted by al-Hayat's translators:

O soldiers of truth, let's go! Repeat the tune of endurance
A light has illuminated in Sham, so rally all the soldiers
The Islamic State is established, so wipe out all the borders
Wherever our war goes, Jewish rabbis are humiliated

Break the crosses and destroy the lineage of the grandsons of monkeys
The state of tawhid will remain in spite of the lies of the hateful people

In other words: Soldiers of truth and endurance have established a state which wipes out borders, humiliates and defeats the supposed enemies of Islam, and will remain (defiantly) despite the lies and scorn of its enemies. In very few words, the song sums up many of the themes that have been discussed above. Themes related to the concepts of truth (sincerity) and endurance (implying, among other things, sacrifice) have been treated extensively, and so have the argument that the IS movement is the champion of jihad against God's enemies. Yet, so far, the specific symbolism of “the borders” have not been addressed, even though it was mentioned in the above quoted sermon featured in the al-Hayat video Eid Greeting from the Land of Khilafah. The following discussion will start by looking at parts of two videos that used the “breaking of borders” between Iraq and Syria as their backdrop, before moving onto a wider discussion on a number of arguments that official IS media used to justify and legitimise the movement's state-building enterprise during the summer of 2014.

On the 29th of June 2014 (1st of Ramadan, 1435H), the same day that the IS Caliphate was publicly declared, two videos featuring footage from the border region between Iraq and Syria were released. Titled Breaking the Border (kasr al-hudud) and The End of Sykes-Picot (original title), they featured IS members announcing that the border between the two countries have been made irrelevant by IS advances on both sides. In both videos, the border was described as a symbol of Muslim humiliation and disunity, and the main message delivered was one that stressed the IS movement's successes in supposedly correcting these problems. In the context of the Caliphate declaration on the same day as their release, these videos were apparently meant to serve as forceful arguments for the movement's legitimacy.

To clarify some of the symbolic significance of the border, a short account of its history may be necessary. The border between Iraq and Syria can be described as a largely arbitrary line, which was drawn by the French and British after the end of the First World War (1914-1918). Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, these Western powers moved in to administer and dominate much of the Middle East. They decided to divide the region into separate spheres of influence and drew

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210 The latter is apparently a reference to Jews. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi posits that the idea of Jews as descendants of apes is a fairly common theme within contemporary anti-Jewish Muslim discourse: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2014/11/oh-soldiers-of-righteousness-rise-up-islamic

211 Break the Border was released by the al-Itisam Media Foundation. The End of Sykes-Picot was released by the al-Hayat Media Center.

212 For a detailed account of the various circumstances that surrounded and informed the shaping of the contemporary political borders of the Levant region and Iraq, see Barr 2011.
largely arbitrary borders that apparently did not take the wishes of local peoples into account. The first draft of the agreement between the two powers was drawn by British diplomat Mark Sykes and his French counterpart Francois Georges-Picot, and the borders they helped create have since often been referred to as those of “Sykes-Picot”. These borders have since largely continued to exist, even though the various countries they created have long since become politically independent of France and Britain. For IS propagandists, the borders apparently represent things like non-Muslim arrogance and aggression, the violation of Muslim honour and dignity, as well as Muslim weakness and disunity in face of humiliation.213

In 2014, IS advances on both sides of the border made a large stretch of it de facto irrelevant. Regions on both sides were conquered by IS forces, and they could therefore move freely across what had previously been an apparently guarded and enforced national border. Videos like Breaking the Border and The End of Sykes-Picot focused on presenting this achievement as a monumental triumph that would herald the advent of a new age for the Muslim umma. Their release on the same date as the public Caliphate declaration suggest that this event was regarded as a prominent and manifest proof of the IS movement's legitimacy and overall significance. A prominent IS military commander, Umar al-Shishani,214 delivers the following message in Breaking the Border:

Today we are happy to participate in destroying the borders placed by the tawaghit to prevent the Muslims from travelling in their lands. The tawaghit broke up the Islamic Khilafah and made it into countries like Syria and Iraq, ruled by man-made laws. Alhamdulillah [praise be to God], Allah blessed the mujahidin with destruction of these borders. […] Alhamdulillah, today we begin the final stage after the ummah was divided. Alhamdulillah we've begun today to unite in the face of the plots of the kuffar. Their plot was to divide and conquer. That is what they had done with us. Alhamdulillah, today we've begun to gather our strength and numbers.

Echoing ideas presented within the above discussed speeches by al-Adnani and al-Baghdadi, this message from al-Shishani argues that the IS movement has appeared as a remedy for the supposed problems of weakness and disunity that plague the umma. A subsequent segment of the video apparently depict civilians who are on their way to cross the border. They are interviewed, and speak about such things as being humiliated by former border guards, the various inconveniences previously associated with crossing the border, and of having been separated from family members on the other side. An old man states that he will now be able to visit his family for the first time in fifteen years, after which he starts crying and is comforted by one of the IS fighters. Together with the above described, this serves to tell us that the conquests and triumphs of the IS movement has supposedly helped unite the Muslims and gather their strength. As a result, the various enemies of Islam can now be confronted forcefully, and the religion can be established and protected by a powerful and victorious state. IS official spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani also appears in Breaking the Border, delivering the following message:

The ember of jihad was lit, the crusade campaign was broken, and the Islamic State was established despite the villainous. America left in humiliation, dragging behind it tails of failure, while broken and defeated. It left the map for the Islamic State, to redraw the world in accordance with the methodology of the prophetic Khilafah.

Here the viewer is reminded of the American-led occupation of Iraq (2003-2011), and is encouraged

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213 E.g. Islamic State Report, Issue 4 (Shaban 1435).
214 A foreign fighter, his nom de guerre is translatable as "the Chechen". Of partial Chechen descent, he was born in Georgia and travelled to Syria in 2012 to fight on the rebel side. Perhaps as a result of previous combat experience during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, he gained prominence as a commander of a group known as “Battalion of the Emigrants” (katibat al-muhajirin), which was largely composed of fighters from the Caucasus region. Together with hundreds of his soldiers he joined IS in late 2013, and subsequently became one of its most prominent military commanders in Iraq and Syria up until his reported death in the summer of 2016. For details on his various activities, see relevant articles published by Joanna Paraszczuk as part of her ongoing online project Chechens in Syria, http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?tag=umar-shishani (accessed 10 December 2016).
to view it as having ended in an IS victory over the powerful "crusaders" of the US military. The victories enjoyed by the IS movement during the summer of 2014 are presented as related to a longer series of triumphs, which began with the proclamation of its so-called state in 2006 (see above). The signs are promising, and point towards an era wherein the Muslims will be able to withstand the aggression of even the most powerful among their supposed enemies. The IS movement is presented as the bringer of such newfound strength and vigour.

Parts of Breaking the Border can furthermore be interpreted as attempts at highlighting the sincerity of the movement's anti-nationalist message. Al-Adnani and al-Shishani appear side by side, as if representatives of a movement that welcomes both Arabs and non-Arabs.\footnote{IS movement discourse often speak about non-local and local (i.e. Iraqi and Syrian) supporters as “emigrants” and “supporters” (muhajirin and ansar), respectively. These terms correspond to those sometimes used to describe different parts of the early Muslim community. The muhajirin were those who joined Muhammad when he emigrated from Mecca, while the ansar were those local inhabitants of Medina who converted to Islam after his arrival.} Al-Shishani's statement is delivered in the Russian language, which strengthens his identity as a non-Arab and signals a welcoming attitude towards Muslims living in distant lands. A segment of the video shows how these two men take turns driving a bulldozer and using it to destroy a sand-berm that marks the border between Iraq and Syria. Symbolically, then, borders described as having separated Muslims are now being destroyed by a new community that has been gathered from around the world. Al-Adnani states that “nothing is after the removal of these borders, the borders of humiliation, and the crushing of this idol, the idol of nationalism, except Khilafah upon the prophetic methodology”. Through this act, the IS movement is supposedly demonstrating its ability to unite Muslims and use their collective energies for the greater good of the umma.

As mentioned above, a video titled The End of Sykes-Picot was released the same day. While apparently filmed in either the same or a nearby location, and at roughly the same time,\footnote{Among other things, fighters who are present in Break the Border can also be seen in The End of Sykes-Picot.} it was less elaborate than its sister-release and did not feature as many speakers and different scenes. Its main speaker was an apparently regular fighter, rather than someone of comparable stature to prominent leadership-figures like al-Adnani or al-Shishani. Presented as “Abu Safiyya from Chile”, his appearance nevertheless has some significant, as it reinforced the above mentioned theme of pan-Islamic brotherhood. While “Abu Safiyya” (his birth-name is reportedly Bastien Vasquez) was born in Europe,\footnote{According to Norwegian media, he was born in the Norwegian city of Skien: Sæthre, S., “Slik ble Bastien fra Gulset IS-kriger”, Varden, 24 February 2015, \url{http://www.varden.no/nyheter/slik-ble-bastian-fru-gulset-is-kriger-1.1379997} (accessed 10 December 2016).} al-Hayat's producers probably highlighted his South American heritage in order for it to reinforce notions of the IS movement's global reach. In other words, Abu Safiyya is used as yet another symbol of the way in which the IS movement supposedly rallies Muslims from around the entire world. Symbolically, he raises the IS flag over a border post. A nashid choir sings that “dawn has appeared, so await the manifest victory” as the title graphic (reading The End of Sykes-Picot) appear below the raised flag.\footnote{The nashid in question is titled “My umma, dawn has appeared” (ummati qad lahaj fajarun). See above for lyrics.} Abu Safiyya delivers the following message:

Right now we're on the side of al-Sham [the Levant – i.e. Syria]. As you can see, this is the so-called border of Sykes-Picot. Hamdulillah, we don't recognise it and we will never recognise it. Inshallah, this is not the first border we will break. […] As Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi used to say, he is the breaker of barriers. Inshallah, we will break the barriers of Iraq, Jordan, Lubnan [Lebanon], all the countries – inshallah – until we reach Quds, inshallah taala. It's the first barriers of many barriers we will break, inshallah taala.

Once again, the triumphant and victorious aspects of the IS movement's advances in Iraq and Syria are highlighted. Defiantly, Abu Safiyya states that the successes will continue to other countries, so that all the borders of “Sykes-Picot” will be made irrelevant. The symbolic significance of Jerusalem (one of the holiest cities in Islam, completely occupied by Israel since 1967) is invoked, and it is argued that the IS movement is the currently most credible candidate for being its re-
conqueror. Furthermore, Abu Safiyya echoes the ideas of al-Adnani (quoted above), when he states the American power is in decline. Standing in front of American-made vehicles that have been captured from Iraqi government forces at the border, he states the following:

Look how much money America spends fighting Islam, and it ends up just being in our pockets, hamdullilah. […] They spend millions. Up ’til now, America spent up to – I read in the news – twenty billion of dollars [sic]. Now they’re bankrupt, they cannot enter back into Iraq, they lost in Iraq, they lost in Afghanistan.

This statement, together with the way in which al-Adnani describes the 2003-2011 war in Iraq in Break the Border; are likely meant to inspire hope among sympathetic viewers, and remind them of the idea that not even a powerful military like that of the USA is necessarily unbeatable. Hence, they emphasise that the eventual triumph of the IS movement is not only a figure of wishful imagination, but also something that is (supposedly) highly plausible. Remaining defiant and steadfast will serve purposes beyond being sincere towards God, as it may also pave the way for temporal triumphs that will enhance the standing of the world's Muslims. The “breaking of the border” is utilised for its supposed significance as an example of a manifest victory against the oppressive kuffar; and is thereby presented as both a symbolic and an evident example of the IS movement's triumphant advance. Its ability to strike at and destroy prominent symbols of the umma's humiliation is here illustrated, and serves a prognostic purpose as part of a narrative about the supposedly hopeful and efficacious nature of the IS Caliphate. As such, this theme is imbued with a sense of wide-ranging significance, and its prominent use in conjunction with the actual Caliphate declaration on the 29th of July 2014 suggests that IS propagandists viewed this particular event as a powerful and recognisable symbol of their movement's accomplishments and potential. It related itself to the imperialist legacy of the Sykes-Picot borders, and framed the IS Caliphate as the vigorous challenger of a supposedly humiliating state of affairs.

Beyond this theme of the IS movement as politically/militarily victorious and pronouncedly defiant, official IS media released throughout the summer of 2014 also argued that the state is a manifest example of supposedly proper and sound Islamic governance. In other words, the so-called state of the movement was presented as both a successful and legitimate enterprise. In late May of 2014, the al-Furqan Foundation released a video titled The Best Umma (khayr umma), which showcased activities of the movement's morality police in IS-ruled parts of Syria. It shows them making sure that people pray at proscribed times, reprimanding shop-owners for the supposedly sexualised nature of their mannequins, conducting raids wherein they seize drugs, destroying supposed signs of idol-worship (such as tomb-shrines and a Shiite mosque), as well as the arrest of an alleged sorcerer (al-sahara). The video highlights the concept of “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” (al-amr bi al-maruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar), which stipulates that Islamic virtues and ideals should

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219 He mentions Jerusalem again later in the video, stating that IS forces will (if God wills) be the one to liberate the city, and that they will pray in its famous al-Aqsa mosque.

220 It is unclear what “news” Abu Safiyya is referring to. However, his overall point still stands – and is even amplified – with access to official cost figures reported by US authorities. The seemingly arbitrary figure of “twenty billion” is a virtual drop in the ocean compared to the staggering figure of more than a trillion dollars named by a US congressional report published in December 2014. See Belasco 2014 for details.

221 The “morality police” is my own interpretation of the term al-hisba (the root meaning is “sum” or “calculation”), which the IS movement uses to designate this specific extension of its state structure. It is apparently a department that cooperates with yet is somewhat separated from the movement’s “Islamic Police” (al-shurta al-islamiyya), which fulfills the role of more general law enforcement – see Islamic State Report, Issue 2: 6. The term hisba refers to a sort of ideal which argues that Muslims should promote what is good and forbid what is evil. For a general overview of this concept, see Cahen et al. 2012.

222 Interestingly, the IS movement's insistence on eradicating supposed “sorcery” as a practice has been interpreted as part of its focus on the theme of sincerity. Faisal Devji has written that “The Islamic State’s obsession with transparency, visibility and sincerity demonstrates a fear of all that is secret, hidden and profound. Remarkable about the ISIS lexicon of blame, for instance, is that it is dominated by sins like hypocrisy, dissimulation and even sorcery, all examples of hiddenness” – Devji 2015.
be protected and promoted, while supposed sin should be forbidden and/or counteracted. The necessity of enforcing this ideal is highlighted by various statements in the video, which argue that the people will become corrupted if Islamic rules are not enforced. Years of secular rule has allegedly produced a generation of misguided people, for whom the committing of sin was easy and good deeds were difficult. The narrator of the video states that:

With the absence of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil corruption spreads upon earth, the wicked gain power and oppression spreads. Good becomes evil and evil becomes good.

The establishment of an IS-ruled state is presented as a harbinger of a new era, as well as of a system that will be able to produce generations of properly pious Muslims. This idea can certainly be related to what has previously been said about both diagnostic and prognostic framing narratives. The lack of means through which Islamic law can be enforced is presented as having contributed to the supposed corruption and weakness of the umma, and the way in which the IS movement is eagerly seeking to remedy this problem is used to argue for it as the problem's solution. In other words, it is a movement that is supposedly motivated by a sincere wish to establish and strengthen the rule of God.

On the 5th of July 2014, the al-Furqan Foundation released a video which depicted a sermon given by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in the Great al-Nuri Mosque of Mosul. Given the fact that al-Baghdadi was already one of the most wanted men on earth, his public appearance in the middle of a large city could perhaps be interpreted as an act of high-spirited defiance, and by extension as an attempted demonstration of the power and influence of the IS movement. Only a triumphant al-Baghdadi would have been able to ascend the pulpit of that mosque and subsequently leave it unharmed, and the fact that he chose to temporarily leave his place of safe (in a relative sense) hiding demonstrates a concern for the state's appearance, as well as for the credibility of its message. It can certainly be argued that the supposed truthfulness and defiance of the IS Caliphate would have been at least partially undermined by it being ruled by an entirely hidden leader, and that al-Baghdadi's public appearance helped reinforce these thematic narratives. It furthermore helped demonstrate the movement's apparent triumph, and reinforced the idealised virtue of brave defiance. Reinforcing this theme of truthfulness, al-Baghdadi stated that loyalty towards him should not be unconditional:

I was burdened with this great matter. I was burdened with this trust, this heavy trust. I was appointed as a leader for you, although I am not the best of you, nor am I better than you. Therefore, if you see me on truth, then aid me. And if you see me on falsehood, then advise me. Obey me as long as I obey Allah in your regards. And if I disobey Him, then I have no authority over you in such.

In summary, official IS media distributed throughout the summer of 2014 often emphasised ways in which the movement's so-called state in Iraq and Syria was supposedly working towards easing the suffering of Muslims, protecting them against their various enemies, and implementing the laws and principles of their religion. In al-Hayat's Join the Ranks (see details above), Abu Muhammad al-Indonesi provides viewers with a summarising overview of the movements accomplishments, worth quoting at length:

By Allah. O brothers, I give you good news that here we have seen with our own eyes that the Islamic State implements the Sharia of Allah in the entire land. The prayer is established. The zakah is collected. The jizyah is collected. Sharia seminars are held and social issues are addressed. Alhamdullilah, the

223 Corresponding to the above mentioned concept of hisba. See Cahen et al. 2012.
224 Special coverage of the khutba and jumua prayer in the great mosque in the city of Mosul, al-Furqan Foundation, 5 July 2014.
225 Since October of 2011, the US government has been offering a ten million dollar reward for “information leading to the location, arrest, or conviction” of al-Baghdadi: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/228989.htm (accessed 10 December 2016).
Islamic State provides help to those who need it, by the permission of Allah. The Islamic State has also freed thousands of Muslim prisoners, united Muslim lands and demolished the Sykes-Picot borders that were made by the kuffar. And insha'allah, it will liberate all the lands of the oppressed Muslims from the tawaghit who do not implement the Sharia of Islam. With Allah's permission, the Islamic State will advance forth and liberate the lands of the Muslims.

[...] My brothers, may Allah have mercy upon you. We inform you that the Islamic State is fighting the rafidah [lit. “rejectionist”, referring to the Shia] and the kafir nusayri sect [the Alawites]. And that it is fighting the salwat, who started fighting the Islamic State first, waging war against it and killing its people. Behind them are the Jews and America, may Allah curse them. They are supported by both Arab and non-Arab tawaghit. And they are enemies who hate Allah's Sharia.

Supposedly disregarded obligations are being revived, kuffar of various strains are being challenged with force, and the Muslims are regaining their strength and dignity. In other words, many of the problems that have been described above are here presented as being corrected by the actions of the IS movement – which is thereby characterised as epitomising the prognostic narrative on a supposedly better future. Furthermore, the movement is successful in its endeavours and have accomplished remarkable things, like the breaking of the border between Iraq and Syria. The movement is presented as victorious in its political endeavours, truthful in its attitude towards Islam, and as a credible remedy for the suffering and corruption experienced by the Muslim umma. Representing a legitimate structure which will usher in a new age devoid of humiliation and weakness, this narrative about a truthful and victorious state also serves the purpose of reinforcing various motivational appeals. This Caliphate is a legitimate and successful enterprise, and one which every sincere Muslim can and should be a part of. It is framed as a unique opportunity at defending, strengthening, and uniting the wider umma – and serves as yet another argument for the hypocrisy of abstention.

3.5. Conclusions

Concluding this chapter, I will try to incorporate the above described themes and narratives into an overarching discussion on ways in which the analysed material addresses the three core framing tasks. While these tasks were introduced in the previous chapter, I argue that an analysis the various themes discussed in this one adds some nuance and depth to our understanding of ways in which IS propagandists identify problems, propose solutions, and seek to inspire certain acts.

A number of the analysed videos address aspects of the underlying problem of Muslim weakness and humiliation, and introduce additional themes which arguably helps concretise this issue. For example, the highlighted confusion and depression of hypocritical abstainers encourages viewers to imagine “humiliation” and loss of honour at an individual level. National borders are described as political obstacles to the ideal unification of the umma, and as something which sows discord among Muslims and distract them from confronting their true enemies. Furthermore, some of the videos posit that the lack of enforced sharia has resulted in the spread of sinfulness and bad conduct, as well as in the subversion of Islamic practices and morality. The depicted activities of the movement's hisba patrols provide us with a number of examples of the supposed corruption of contemporary society – prayer is no longer respected, the presence of drug-addiction is apparent, sexuality is shamelessly on display, and people seek comfort in the superstitious practices of

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226 The term “rejectionist” is a common, derogatory, term for Shiites among contemporary Salafis. It serves to highlight that the early Shiites rejected the legitimacy of the early caliphs (considered “rightly guided” by most Sunnis, including Salafis), as they recognise an alternative trajectory for the Prophet Muhammad's legacy. For more details, see Haykel 2010: 208-209. The term “nusayri” refers to ibn Nusayr, who lived during the 9th Century CE and founded the splinter Shia movement often referred to as “alawi” today (Halm 2012). The Assad family are Alawites, and the wider community connected to the denomination is hence sometimes associated with their much-hated regime. In the IS movement's official discourse, the term “nusayri” is apparently used to signal that Alawites are not “true” Muslims, but rather followers of Nusayr's alleged innovations.
sorcerers rather than in the “truth” of Islam.

The al-Furqan video *The Best Umma* argues that it is through proper enforcement that the true creed and proper morals are spread through society – an assertion which echoes other ideas presented in the various videos. Whether one is talking about jihad or sharia, the forceful agency of a structure akin to a *state* is apparently argued for as important. Islamic morals should not remain a mere guideline of conduct, but should be enforced through the use of things like policing and punishment. Jihad reaches its full potential when supported by the conscious, directed, and political effort of an organised entity. In short, then, what is needed is an *Islamic state* – one with the ability to punish transgressors, enforce Islamic law, and organise the *umma*'s collective defence against the *kuffar*. The speeches delivered by al-Adnani and al-Baghdadi highlighted such things as the subjugation of Muslims and the robbing of their resources. In order for them to make sure that this process will not go on indefinitely, the Muslims have to unite as part of a common, organised structure. Given the above discussions, it goes without saying that official IS media is intently focused on portraying the movement as the realisation of such ideals. In a short amount of time, it has supposedly been able to create a society wherein Islamic principles are enforced and Muslims from around the world are gathered in unity and measured based on the sincerity of their conviction. Strikingly, symbols of disgrace and disunity (“the border of humiliation […] the idol of nationalism”) have been smashed and made irrelevant.

The process of creating a state can be described as a far-reaching and large-scale political effort. While the propagation of such a project plays a prominent part in the above discussed media releases, some of them also highlight an arguably comparable dynamic experienced at the individual level. At a sort of micro-level of the overall conflict against falsehood and corruption, we are confronted with discussions about the life choices presented to individual believers. Abu Bara al-Hindi speaks about the humiliating experience of trying to live as a supposedly sincere Muslim in a society where neither sharia nor jihad is enforced, while the men appearing in *Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah* are representatives of the happiness and honour associated with life in the IS Caliphate's multi-ethnic society. While the propagandists argue for the world-wide rearrangement of politics, they are simultaneously highlighting ways in which their movement may counteract individual feelings of despair, depression, and a lacking sense of purpose or belonging. Beyond presenting their movement as one that may save the whole *umma*, they are arguing that (if nothing else) it may at least be able to redeem individual souls. Redemption through the satisfaction of God is furthermore presented as far from the only benefit of one's engagement with the movement. Beyond presenting a sort of ticket to Paradise, the movement may also provide one with an opportunity to experience life fully, and supposedly reach one's true potential. Honour, hope, happiness, security, and a sense of purpose and belonging – all of these are things supposedly offered by and attainable through one's engagement with the IS movement. The process of their attainment is personified by figures like the Canadian martyr Abu Muslim, and argued for through an overall depiction of a community of apparently coordinated, devotedly cooperating, and sincerely committed “brothers and sisters”. In short, these remedial qualities of the IS movement are presented as motivational pull-factors/benefits, while the supposed depression and insecurities of life without jihad are used to illustrate the disadvantageous and hypocritical nature of alternative lifestyles.

In summary, the purpose and efficacy of engagement with the IS movement is apparently presented in a multi-faceted and dynamic way. It can certainly be argued that the discussion of themes relatable to the three core framing tasks highlight several different benefits, as it presents an overarching narrative about the convergence of variously different interests. For example, it is noteworthy that propagandists often stress advantages experienced in both *dunya* and *akhira*, and that it is argued that true honour and happiness in this life is largely connected to eventual rewards in the hereafter. Individually experienced concerns and problems (e.g. depression and humiliation) are related to the macro-level issues of the *umma*'s world-wide suffering. Engagement with the IS
movement presents one with the opportunity to counteract one's own suffering, while simultaneously working towards easing the problems experienced by the umma as a whole. In this sense, the various propaganda narratives present a sort of prism through which small-scale problems are related to and made sense of through issues with apparently far-reaching implications. A sense of place and purpose is reinforced, and a specific program for the attainment of things like honour and redemption is concretised through references to its supposedly higher purpose.\footnote{Given this, it can be argued that IS propagandists are trying to reinforce their viewer's sense of self-efficacy – i.e. the belief in one's own abilities at affecting change, being in control, etc. By joining the IS movement's jihad, one will supposedly transcend one's status as a passive and powerless onlooker.}

While the basic motivational argument of the various releases is quite straight-forward (i.e. “join the ranks”), it is presented in a nuanced enough way for it to potentially attract people with perhaps largely varying interests. The attainment of worldly honour and power, the pursuit of janna, the enforcement of Islamic law, and the opportunity to reconstruct one's identity as part of a new community – all of these are examples of interests which are variously addressed and connected to each other in these propaganda releases. They all become intertwined in an overarching narrative about the world's problems, their potential solutions, and of virtues to be celebrated. While certainly dependent on a number of fixed assumptions (e.g. the acceptance of certain authorities), the narratives are nevertheless presented in a dynamic and nuanced enough way for them to often simultaneously address somewhat different interests and urges. As such, it can certainly be argued that there are possibly many different ways in which one may be attracted to the messages presented by official IS propaganda. Islamic concepts like Caliphate, sharia, and jihad are not only presented as means by which one may satisfy God, but also for the supposedly effective ways in which they may solve various worldly problems.
4. Caliphate upon the prophetic methodology

Throughout the summer of 2014 (and ever since), official IS media recurrently referred to variations of the phrase “Caliphate upon the prophetic methodology” (khilafa ala manhaj al-nubuwa). Some analysts have described it as something of a movement slogan around the time of its Caliphate proclamation, and it was featured in a number of the al-Hayat videos described above. Official IS media traces the phrase to a hadith featured in the Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal collection, wherein the Prophet Muhammad supposedly foresees what will happen in the future. In the English-language magazine Islamic State Report, published roughly a week before the Caliphate proclamation on the 29th of June 2014, the content of this hadith was translated and commented on in the following way:

But the status quo wasn’t meant to last, for as the Prophet (PBUH) said: “There will be prophethood for as long as Allah wills it to be, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be khilafah on the prophetic methodology and it will be for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be biting kingship (i.e. rulers who would do whatever it takes to hold onto their power) for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be oppressive kingship for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be khilafah on the prophetic methodology.”

The “status quo” in question is apparently the one that has previously been described when discussing the diagnostic framing narrative – a state of weakness, humiliation, and collective apathy that the contemporary umma supposedly finds itself in. This is apparently equated with the era of “oppressive kingship” mentioned in the hadith, and as a result of recent IS victories there is now hope that this era is about to end:

It was only a matter of time before the oppressive tawaghit of the Muslim world would begin to fall one-by-one to the swords of the mujahidin, who would raise the banner of tawhid, restore the hukm [ruling] of Allah, direct the masses back to the prophetic manhaj [methodology] of jihad and away from the corruption of democracy and nationalism, and unite them under one imam [leader].

While this passage serves as yet another example of the diagnostic and prognostic frames that have been discussed above, its immediate context here is as a presentation of fulfilled prophecy. The era of “oppressive kingship” is about to end – signalling the rise of a new and rightly guided Caliphate. When the IS movement's official leadership later proclaimed a Caliphate, the movement had thus already framed the event as the fulfilment of something that had supposedly been foreseen by the Prophet himself. Arguing that the IS Caliphate proclaimed on the 29th of June 2014 (1st of Ramadan 1435H) was indeed the “Caliphate upon the prophetic methodology” mentioned in the hadith subsequently became an apparently important part of the official media narrative and thematic framing. Various videos released after the proclamation were stamped with variations of

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228 E.g. McCants 2015: 126-128. The official currency of the IS Caliphate is a series of coins that feature the phrase as part of its iconography – see Dabiq, Issue 5: 19 (note also the way in which the theme of sincerity is invoked to argue for the benefits of a currency set to a gold standard).
229 The al-Hayat videos The End of Sykes-Picot, al-Ghuraba: Strangers from Different Lands, Those who were Truthful with Allah, and Join the Ranks all featured the same stylised graphic reading (in English) “…And then there will be Khilafah upon the Prophetic methodology…” at the end.
230 Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal (780-855CE) was a prominent Islamic scholar and hadith collector, who is still widely respected by many Sunnis today. See Holtzman 2009 for details on his life, works, and influence. Official IS media has referred to him in a respectful manner, as it has described him as “the Imam [leader] of Ahlus-Sunnah” – Dabiq, Issue 7: 19.
233 Islamic State Report, issue 4, 2014: 3.
234 This can arguably be connected to the theme of sincere faithfulness, as it signals an actual trust in the prophecy.
the phrase, which implies that their content was to be regarded as demonstrations of “the prophetic methodology”. The breaking of borders, the welcoming of emigrants from various lands, the sacrifices made on the battlefield – all of this was thereby presented as related to that methodology.

On the 28th of July 2014, the al-Furqan Foundation released a video titled Upon the Prophetic Methodology (ala manhaj al-nubuwa), which is an obvious reference to the hadith and associated slogan described above. That year, the 28th of July corresponded with the 1st of Shawwal of the Islamic calendar, which is the month that follows after Ramadan. The transition between these two months marks the Muslim festival known as Eid al-Fitr, during which the fast of Ramadan is broken. Eid al-Fitr is one of the most important Muslim holidays, and it can therefore be regarded as significant that the IS movement chose to release this particular video as a sort of official Eid greeting to the world. This apparent significance of the video is also marked by the fact that it was released by al-Furqan, as well as by the title it was given. At around thirty-six minutes it is also remarkably longer than any of the videos that have been discussed so far (most of them between ten and fifteen minutes long). Thus interpreting it as a centre-piece of the official propaganda campaign aimed at presenting the newly proclaimed IS Caliphate to the world, I have decided to analyse it in more detail than the previously described media releases.

It should be noted that the nature of this specific video's content may help us understand how the IS movement frames its specific activities, and that this in turn may tell us something about the way in which these are used to argue for its relevance. While Upon the Prophetic Methodology invokes many of the more or less abstract narratives, notions, and virtues that have been described above, it is much more focused on acts and method than any of the other analysed releases. It can be described as a somewhat elaborate catalogue of acts associated with the movement's political and religious program, and expected of its participants – ranging from peaceful pledges of allegiance (baya) to participation in mass murder. This may, in turn, be connected to the way in which the concept of manhaj is highlighted in the video's title. With the help of a diverse collection of apparently non-staged (i.e. “real”) footage, al-Furqan's producers provide viewers with an emphatic presentation of what the IS movement actually does. Rather than introduce some sort of expository review of the movement's doctrine (aqida), the video's producers instead chose to present the newly proclaimed IS Caliphate as an implementing, enforcing, and punishing agent. As such, the video was perhaps meant as an argument for the supposed vigoroussness of the movement, and as an attempt at highlighting the variously practical hallmarks of its approach to Islam. In short – it is presented as a movement made up of people who do not settle for their mere comprehension of the Prophet's aqida, but are also keen on implementing it as practical manhaj. Given the overall presentation, organisational associations, and chosen release date of the video, it is perhaps safe to assume that this particular message was regarded as especially important.

In the following, I will discuss ways in which the various acts depicted in Upon the Prophetic Methodology are presented and framed. Unlike the thematic structure employed above, I have decided to start with a detailed chronological account of the video's content. The primary purpose of this analysis is still, however, to highlight the video's thematic patterns and use of symbols. While the lengthy review of a single video may seem redundant for many readers, I want to stress that a central purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how IS propagandists present and argue for their movement's use of violence. Given that many of the scenes in Upon the Prophetic Methodology depict acts of killing or desecration, I want to dedicate a part of this chapter to an attempt at summarising what I regard as an official IS logic of violence – something which in turn may have wider implications for the further study of the movement and its official media.236 This logic of violence is largely related to the insistence on the importance of manhaj, as graphic depictions of

235 Above, al-Furqan Foundation was described as appearing to have deep and intimate connections to the IS movement's official leadership in Iraq and Syria.

236 Given the fact that violent executions, the destruction of supposedly idolatrous art, and depictions of the death and killing on the battlefield constitute such a prominent part of official IS media.
violent acts seemingly serve the purpose of demonstrating the assertive and vigorous nature of the IS Caliphate. I will elaborate on this idea in a separate discussion which follows after my description of the video's content, and one purpose of that preceding survey is therefore to illustrate how depictions of violent acts are presented as interwoven parts of a wider narrative.

I hope that readers will be able to appreciate how the video's producers attempt to influence viewers' impressions of the various acts depicted, and how the use of aesthetics and religious symbolism are used to frame and clarify, for example, their supposed relevance and significance. At the same time, I want to illustrate how the video represents a step by step move onto gradually more graphic and intimate depictions of the actual *act of killing*. Interspersed between scenes of an often more peaceful character, these killings are woven into an overarching narrative about the corrupting influence of disbelief and the apparently urgent need for its violent disavowal. Through the continuous move onto gradually more violent footage, the presented logic of violence and action is eventually brought to its extreme head, and a sort of authoritative narrative on the legitimacy of the IS Caliphate's violence is both presented and demonstrated (this apparent *act of legitimisation* will be discussed more below). Literally moving from a scene depicting IS recruits' pledging allegiance to their caliph to one presenting a large-scale massacre, the video furthermore appear as an attempt at highlighting the unavoidable implications of sincere loyalty to the IS Caliphate. I argue that all of this would be difficult to discuss and illustrate without the ability to reference a detailed description of the video's content, and that such a description furthermore grants me the ability to thoroughly analyse the video's pervading use of symbolic themes and attempts at interweaving these as part of an apparently coherent narrative. The significance and implications of the markedly emphasised issue of *manhaj* can thus be evaluated in detail. As a result of such a systematic presentation, this arguably complex (yet coherent) logic of action and violence may be properly appreciated, and readers will hopefully become aware of the seemingly dynamic play with symbols and narratives that surround the ways in which official IS media depicts, for example, the killing and destruction conducted by the movement. As a result, the supposed *relevance* of these graphic and violent images can be thoroughly discussed. The depicted acts do not appear as mere displays of brutality aimed at terrorising potential enemies, but rather as violently demonstrated arguments about the far-reaching and coherent nature of recurring themes like *sincerity* and *defiance*.

### 4.1. From *baya* to massacres

During the first two minutes of *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*, brief statements are delivered that invoke the diagnostic and prognostic framing narratives. Thereby, viewers are made aware of the notion that the IS movement can be a remedy for much of the suffering experienced by the Muslim *ummah*. The video starts by showing us joyous scenes from IS military parades, which signals the strength and triumph of the movement. An unnamed Arabic-speaking narrator utters the following words:

> As a consequence of the Islamic State's growth, the various resources found inside it, and the completion of the components for the pursued tower and the lost hope,237 resolve was made to complete the voyage and awaken the Islamic ummah and lift its burdens by establishing the collective duty of appointing a leader and khilafah for the Muslims so as to progress by such towards the fields of honour and sovereignty. Thus the Khilafah announcement was made.

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237 The Arabic word *sarh* is translated as “tower” in the English-language subtitles released by the al-Hayat Media Center. According to the *Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, it can also be translated with words like castle, palace, lofty edifice, and imposing structure. In July 2016, the al-Furqan Foundation released a video with the Arabic title *sarh al-khilafa*, which it translated into English (the official title was bilingual) as “The structure of the Caliphate”. Based in this, it can be assumed that the “pursued tower” mentioned in the above quote is a metaphor for something akin to “the structure of the Caliphate”. 

After the narrator finishes, the video cuts to a new scene. Rather than composed of real-life footage, this one is a constructed montage of computer-generated graphics and text. The background is decorated with some sort of geometric pattern, a still photo of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is shown to the left of the screen, and a text in Arabic to the right. The still photo has been taken from the al-Furqan video depicting al-Baghdadi's sermon in Mosul,\(^{238}\) and shows him standing in front of a microphone with a raised index finger.\(^ {239}\) A subtitle presents al-Baghdadi as “Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph Ibrahim al-Badri” (amir al-muminin al-khalifa ibrahim al-badri).\(^ {240}\) We then hear a short segment from his speech *A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan* (see above for details), and the text to the right of his picture is an Arabic-language transcription of the words he speak – as if to make sure that viewers do not miss anything he says.

So let the world know that we are living today in a new era. Whoever was heedless must now be alert. Whoever was sleeping must now be awaken. Whoever was shocked and amazed must comprehend. The Muslims today have a loud, thundering voice, and possess heavy boots. They have statement that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its falseness. So listen, O ummah of Islam. Listen and comprehend. Stand up and rise. For the time has come for you to free yourselves from the shackles of weakness and stand in the face of tyranny, against the treacherous rulers – the agents of the crusaders and the atheists, and the guards of the Jews.

Through these introductory statements, the IS Caliphate is framed as a harbinger of a new era. As was stated above, the prognostic and diagnostic framing narratives are invoked again. Furthermore, al-Baghdadi's appeal contain aspects of the motivational, as he urges Muslims to “Stand up and rise” in defiance.

As was noted above, all of what has been described so far is presented within the space of two minutes. While effective, the brief and sweeping nature of the presentation indicates that its full appreciation is presupposed by one's previous consumption of other IS media. One may perhaps suppose that the producers viewed the video as connected to a wider propaganda campaign, and that they assumed that sympathetic viewers would already be somewhat versed in the narratives employed to argue for the necessity of proclaiming a Caliphate. Throughout this discussion, I will periodically return to this idea, in order to further clarify what I mean. For now, it suffices to say that explicit answers to questions about the core framing tasks (much like many of the statements treated in the above discussions) play a largely subordinate role in *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*. Rather, this video is apparently more focused on depictions of specific acts.

The first act depicted in *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* is the public swearing of an oath of allegiance (baya) by a large group of men.\(^ {241}\) The occasion is depicted as joyous and energetic, as

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\(^{238}\) Special coverage of the khutba and jumua prayer in the great mosque in the city of Mosul, al-Furqan Foundation, 5 July 2014.

\(^{239}\) The raised index finger is a common gesture/salute among IS sympathisers. Within the context of this particular movement, the gesture probably signals an uncompromising belief in God's tawhid.

\(^{240}\) “Commander of the Faithful” is a honorific title historically used by Muslim sovereigns, such as caliphs. The name “Ibrahim al-Badri” is reportedly a part of al-Baghdadi's birth-name. Choosing these parts of his name is perhaps symbolically significant. “Ibrahim” is the name of an important prophet of Islam (corresponding to the biblical “Abraham”), and one often highlighted in official IS propaganda for the way in which he embraced Islamic tawhid at the expense of his ancestors idolatrous practices. His examples has thus been highlighted as a symbol of al-wara wa al-bara – see Dabiq, Issue 3: 10; Dabiq, Issue 11: 19, 21; Dabiq, Issue 14: 15. See also Wagemakers 2012: 170-172, for another Salafi example of how references to Ibrahim's has been used to argume for al-wala wa al-bara. For a general discussion on Ibrahim in Islam, see Paret 2012(b). The use of the name “al-Badri” could perhaps be interpreted as an attempt at signalling the symbolic significance of the battle of Badr (624CE). This battle was one of the earliest one's won by the Prophet Muhammad, and its use here can thus be interpreted as an attempt at suggesting a sort of connection to the early victories experienced by IS forces during the summer of 2014. For more on Badr, see Watt 2012.

\(^{241}\) For a general discussion on the concept of baya, see Marsham 2014. For one on its specific significance within the
the men rush to clutch their hands together and shout the oath in chorus. Adding to the vibrant sense of the entire scene, it is filmed by a number of hand-held cameras (and edited in ways so that the video is constantly shifting between different perspectives) that are seemingly being held by members of the crowd itself. Hence, the viewer is not watching the scene from a distance, but is literally thrown into the crowd itself and given a sense of its apparently intense energy. An Arabic-language *nashid* is playing in the background, wherein a calm chorus sings the following:

Convey our greeting to Abu Bakr,
Convey that he is the honourable lord, the Imam,
Raise our banners in each abode,
The State of Islam is safety and peace.  

The cameras move around to show the many IS flags that are fluttering above the crowd, as well as the faces of the men in it. Most of them are apparently IS fighters – a subtitle present them as “mujahidin”, and many of them are brandishing Kalashnikov rifles. One among them starts speaking into a microphone: “We will renew our pledge to the khalifah of the Muslims”. Nothing about him stands out – he is not presented by name or anything else, is apparently not older than any of the other (seemingly) young men of the crowd, and the large beard and *kufiya* worn by him are far from protruding in a crowd where many others have a similar appearance. This adds to the sense of both brotherhood and spontaneity that characterises the entire scene. There is a sense of sincerity and genuineness, as nothing *appears* to be staged. He proclaims the oath of allegiance, with each sentence being repeated by the chorus of the crowd:

We pledge allegiance [...]  
As-Samurra'i [...] Al-Husayni [...] Al-Qurayshi [...] Al-Baghdadi [...] We pledge to hear and obey him [...] in times of pleasure and displeasure [...] and in times of ease and hardship [...] selflessly [...] We pledge not to dispute the authority of the leaders [...] unless we see blatant kufr [...] that we have a proof for from Allah [...] We pledge to say the truth wherever we might be [...] not fearing the blame of the blamers [...] Allah is witness over what we've said.

As the main speaker finishes, he loudly proclaims “*takbir*”, and the crowd answers with deafening shouts of “*allahu akbar*”. The apparently spontaneous nature of the gathering is appealing, as it gives a friendly impression rather than one of something oppressive or forced. The main speaker is not the focus, but the crowd as a whole – the unity of which the viewer could be a part. While the content of the pledge reminds us of several framing narratives described above, the focus of this particular scene is on the act of *baya* itself. Viewers are shown what it looks like, and the seemingly intense energies associated with it are hinted at through the intimate and vibrant way in which the scene has been filmed and edited.

As the scene ends, the title graphic appears for the first time in the video. It is an elaborate design, making use of interlace patterns and reminiscent of traditional Islamic ornamental art. At the centre of the pattern are the words *ala manhaj al-nubuwa* (the Arabic title of the video), written in stylised Arabic calligraphy. The narrator from the beginning read the words shown aloud, as if to make sure that the audience understand what they mean.

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242 context of the IS movement, see Wagemakers 2015.
244 The parts marked with “[...]” signal the crowd's repetition of his words.
245 *Takbir* is the Arabic term for the act of uttering the phrase *allahu akbar*, which is translatable as “God is greater”. The term has multiple applications, as it serves as a reminder of how anything one encounters in the temporal world is “smaller” compared to God. See Wensinck 2012 for a further discussion. Used in times of both joy and distress (as well as being a part of the Muslim call to prayer), it has also developed into a battle-cry among contemporary Muslim militants. Probably as an outgrowth of this latter usage, it is a prominent slogan within the IS movement – often used in the way described above (one man shouts “*takbir*” and is answered with “*allahu akbar*” by a crowd). The clearest example is the way in which it explicitly invokes the notion of sincerity. One is supposed to “say the truth” no matter the circumstances, and even challenge the caliph himself if he transgresses.
The appearance of the title graphic signals a cut, after which we are shown a large group of heavily armed men. They sit and stand, listening to the speech of a large and seemingly middle-aged man. Two types of banners are held by the gathered group – both the IS flag itself, and the standard of a specific unit/training camp. It is apparent that they are some sort of military unit, and that they have gathered before embarking on a battle – an impression quickly confirmed by the content of the speech delivered. The man in front of them is not introduced in any way, but given how he is the one delivering the speech we are left to assume that he is some sort of leader. His speech is about the virtues of defiance and truthfulness, and he argues that sincerity of faith and the resulting blessings from God are stronger than “a thousand cannons”. Notably, he mentions the place they are about to attack, and describes it in the following way:

My beloved brothers, you will enter the capital of shirk [idol-worship] in the areas of Ahlus-Sunnah [People of the Sunnah, i.e. Sunni Muslims]. We did not announce the place of the assault, but we say now that you will enter the city of Samarra by Allah's permission.

Samarra is a predominantly Sunni Arab city, which nevertheless hosts a number of important and widely revered Shiite sites. This may account for the identification of the city as “the capital of shirk in the areas of Ahlus-Sunnah”. Notable is the fact that the statement explicitly identifies the Iraqi Shiites as enemies of the IS movement. In the media releases discussed above, the supposed “enemies of Islam” were often identified in quite sweeping and general terms, while (as will become apparent) Upon the Prophetic Methodology is quite explicitly focused on the Iraqi Shiites. This may be a part of what appears to be the video's overall focus on concretising the thematic narratives of the IS movement. It presents an identifiable enemy (temporal, political, sectarian, etc.), as opposed to an abstract notion like “heresy” or “disbelief”.

After the speech, the title graphic is used to signal a cut to the next scene. We are now shown footage of armed pick-up trucks gathering in the dark. Many of the cars are decorated with IS flags, the men on top them raise their index fingers, and we hear the cameraman shouting “allahu akbar”. In the background, an up-beat and rhythmic nashid is played, with a chorus that sings the following words:

Squadrons of my state, arise. Revive our glory.
Revive our glory, and restore the crown of our Ummah on its head, arise.
[…]

Soon, the battle begins. For lack of better words to describe it, I would characterise it as filmed and edited in ways that are reminiscent of a Hollywood-style action movie. Energetic music and fast-paced video editing work together with scenes of seemingly risky attacks and the sound of gunfire to facilitate a sense of intense excitement and “action”. The battle does not only have some sort of deeper, symbolic “meaning” (as part of the struggle against idol-worship, for example), for the way

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246 In this case, the unit flag reads “Camp (of) the Shaykh Abi Azam al-Iraqi” (muaskar al-shaykh abi azam al-iraqi). I have not been able to find any specific information on this “camp”, but it is possible that its name-sake was a prominent aide of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who was killed in 2005. IS-run camps in Iraq and Syria are often named after prominent martyrs (sometimes after people not officially associated with but nevertheless revered by the movement, such as Usama bin Ladin).

247 Italian journalist Daniele Raineri has suggested that the man delivering the speech is an IS commander known as Abu al-Maghirah al-Qahtani. https://twitter.com/DanieleRaineri/status/690146473745473536/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc %5Etfw (accessed 10 December 2016). Raineri bases his assumption on audio comparisons with speeches delivered by al-Qahtani and reports about his activities as an IS commander in the region where Samarra is located. While the conclusion is somewhat plausible, I have not been able to be verify it.

248 IS forces reportedly attacked Samarra a number of times during June of 2014, but were never able to capture the entire city. The footage used here was probably filmed during one of these assaults. For a contemporary report on the fighting, see Hassan 2014.

249 Translation provided by Al-Tamimi 2014(b).
in which it is presented suggests that is also meant to be exciting, and perhaps even entertaining, to watch. Apparently filmed on the front-line itself, the footage represents a palpable and intimate depiction of the act of battle. While depicting something almost entirely different, the scenes are in some ways reminiscent of the above described depiction of the pledge-swearing crowd. The methods employed are similar (intimate camera-work, energetic editing, and the use of music in an apparent attempt at stirring certain emotions), and the end-result is an arguably comparable experience, as well as an intimate demonstration of a certain set of acts. At the same time, the scenes are apparently meant to signal a certain message. The IS troops give a well-organised and brave impression, and are explicitly contrasted with a supposedly cowardly and disorganized enemy. This serves as an argument for the IS claim to authority, as any Caliphate would need a good army. Furthermore, the recurrent anti-Shia theme of the video is demonstrated by subtitles that refer to the enemy as “the Safawi army” (al-jaish al-safawi).  

After the raid, the corpses of the enemy are shown. The cameraman speaks:

    The corpse of a dead rafidi apostate. Allahu Akbar. Allahu akbar! Corpses of apostates. My Lord, to you is all praise, O Allah! They used to slander the Mother of the Believers, 'A'ishah. Allahu akbar.

These phrases imply that the celebration of triumph is an important motivation behind the showcasing of these graphic images. After all, enemy corpses serve as a confirmation of victory. Referring to one of the dead as a “rafidi apostate” further strengthens the sectarian narrative, as does the invoked notion of Shiites as slanderers of Muhammad's wife Aisha. Thus, it certainly be argued that this scene serves the purpose of demonstrating the IS movement's application of what it regards as al-wala wa al-bara. The killed enemy is marked as “other” based on his sectarian identity, and his death at the hands of the IS movement showcases the latter's insistence on the forceful disavowal of supposed disbelief. The accusation that Shiites are rafidi is far from unique for the IS movement, but is actually quite common among, for example, Salafis in general. What a scene like this one does, however, is that it demonstrates the how IS forces implement this hatred/disavowal in practice. The killing of Shiites and other disbelievers is thereby presented as a part of its manhaj.

Beyond these purposes, one may also wonder whether or not images like these serve yet another purpose. In order to explain what I mean, I have to briefly move beyond the content of Upon the Prophetic Methodology and talk about official IS media in a more general sense. In the context of battlefield depictions, official IS videos often feature the corpses of enemy combatants, and are apparently often eager to focus on those that are especially disfigured. As a result, viewers are often thrown between “exciting” scenes of advancing IS fighters and harrowing images of deformed corpses. The fast-paced nature of the editing makes sure that viewers are never prepared in advance for such images, which are then morphed into the overall structure and rhythm the video. This pattern is consistent and common enough to be labelled as standard practice, and continues to play a prominent part in official IS media depictions of the various battles the movement is engaged in. While it is hard to actually determine the intended purpose of this practice, it contributes to the normalisation of what would otherwise be horribly shocking images. Excitement and horror are

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250 “Safawi” refers to the Safawid dynasty of Persia, which ruled over much of today's Iran and many of its neighbouring countries (including large parts of Iraq) throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. In IS discourse, this label is apparently used to brand Iraqi government loyalists as Iranian lapdogs, as well as to highlight the supposed existence of a revived Persian/Shiite empire that threatens Sunni Islam. Furthermore, the Safawid dynasty is often credited with substantially strengthening the influence Shia Islam, which probably adds to the symbolism of the term within the sectarian discourse of the IS movement. E.g. Dabiq, Issue 13: 10-13.

251 This allegation is arguably quite prominent within the IS movement's anti-Shia discourse. It is argued that Aisha was among the most beloved of the Prophet's companions, and that anyone who “slanders” her must be considered a disbeliever. E.g. Dabiq, Issue 13: 35, 37-38, 43-44. For more on the context of Shiite critiques of Aisha, see Afsarrudin 2011.

252 Haykel 2010: 208-214; Steinberg 2011; Steinberg 2013.
morphed into a coherent and arguably sincere narrative about the realities of battle – and the viewer is seemingly encouraged to view these things as related, rather than as excluding towards each other. Rather than resorting to the censoring of horror and disfigurement as a method of romanticising battle, IS propaganda attempts to “romanticise” through a conscious effort at assimilating horror into an overarching narrative about things like the excitement and necessity of battle. For a sympathetic viewer, these graphic depictions may perhaps serve as a psychological preparation for battle, as well as for the act of killing itself. It can also be argued that these graphic depictions of death have an element of sincerity to them – as if the video producers want to tell us that they are not afraid of showing viewers what battlefields actually looks like. They are thus part of the palpable, intimate and inclusive way in which the acts of battle are depicted.

Following the display of the corpses, viewers follow the military unit as it moves further into the city. The battle-scenes depicted here are comparable to the ones described above, and have undergone a largely similar editing process. The fast-paced battle-scenes are interspersed with footage of related events that are unfolding as the IS forces enter Samarra. At one point, a small group of men exit a building and run up to hug an armed IS fighter. The unnamed cameraman describes the scene as “The joy of the people of Samarra upon seeing the mujahidin”. He repeats the phrase, and grows increasingly emotional as he does so. Apparently breaking into joyous tears behind the camera, he nevertheless uses his broken voice to proclaim “allahu akbar” a number of times. He points his camera towards a large building, on top of which a group of armed men have placed an IS flag. The cameraman, still crying, proclaims that “The flag of the Islamic State flutters in the centre of Samarra”. Throughout these scenes with the weeping cameraman, the up-beat music previously accompanying the footage of the assault has ceased. The broken voice and apparent weeping of the man behind the camera hence serve as the video’s only soundtrack. This adds an element of intimacy to the entire scene. Viewers are presented with an apparently sincere display of intense emotions, and thereby given a perceptible glimpse into the experiences associated with the triumphant “liberation” of a city and its people.

As the video is cut from the scenes depicting the assault on Samarra, the title graphic appear and its words are read aloud by the narrator. It is as if the reading of the words “upon the prophetic methodology” is meant to remind us of the righteousness of what we have just witnessed. Yet, one is struck by how the video abstains from elaborating on the ways in which these scenes are to be regarded as illustrations of such a methodology. The statement may of course be connected to the previously discussed narratives about the necessity for jihad, and the notion that a defiant attitude towards the supposed enemies of Islam is a precondition for God's protection. Fighting is understood as an important aspect of properly practised Islam (“the prophetic methodology”), and the showcasing of a triumphant military therefore serves the purpose of strengthening the IS movement's credentials. But these conclusions presuppose some sort of previous exposure to the
movement and its official narratives, since the video itself does not explore them in any sort of detail. Instead it imposes a short phrase onto a scene, without actually elaborating on the nature of their supposed connection. As an argument it is remarkably visual and arguably quite shallow (as opposed to expository). This may seem like a banal statement, considering the nature of video as a medium, but may nevertheless tell us something about the intended audience. Whether or not the argument is convincing is largely dependent on preconceived notions about the credibility and authority of the disseminating agent. For this reason, it can be argued that Upon the Prophetic Methodology is speaking directly to an already sympathetic crowd, and that it represents an example of how IS movement authorities use their influence to legitimise and justify the various acts depicted.

The next scene is a montage depicting crowds of various supporters marching down streets in demonstrations of apparent support for the IS movement. They are all men of various ages, and there are both civilians and armed fighters walking among them. The nashid “My umma, dawn has appeared” (see above for translated lyrics) is playing in the background, and a subtitle reading “The joy of the Muslims and tribes on occasion of the victories of the Islamic State” appear at the bottom of the screen. As these images are shown, the voice of official IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani can be heard, and the words spoken by him are excerpts from his speech This is the Promise of Allah, as he encourages Muslims to gather around “their” Caliphate and regain their honour and dignity.

As with the previously described segment featuring an excerpt from al-Baghdadi’s speech, this one also serves the purpose of briefly reconnecting to the variously diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational narratives. We have witnessed acts of loyalty and jihad, depicted in ways that focused extensively on showcasing the largely practical aspects and implications of their implementation. Al-Adnani’s statement, together with the accompanying images (implying a united Muslim community), helps remind the viewer of what the IS movement is fighting for — the restoration of Muslim honour and dignity, as well as the strengthening of the umma and its unity. This scene seemingly serves as a sort of interposition that uses a forceful and summarising statement as an effective way of briefly reminding viewers about a central narrative used to argue for the legitimacy of the IS Caliphate.

After another cut using the title graphic, the viewer is shown the entrance of what appears to be an Iraqi Shiite shrine. The narrator that spoke at the beginning of the video delivers the following message:

As soon as Allah grants his muwahhid [monotheist] mujahid slaves victory in an area, city, or town, the callers to Allah rush to remove blatant appearances of evil to prevent anything from leading the people to the shirk and to defend tawhid from being damaged.

As the narrator speaks, the cameraman walks around inside the shrine, and a subtitle reading “The temples of the mushrik rafidah” appear at the bottom of the screen. Viewers are shown an apparently venerated tomb in the middle of the shrine (the name of whomever it is that is buried inside is never mentioned by the narrator). Pictures of the Ayatollahs al-Sistani, al-Hakim, and other influential Shiite figures are shown lying on the floor, so as to highlight the sectarian identity of the place. Soon the video cuts to a view from outside the building, from which its destruction through the use of explosives is shown. As the dust kicks up, the video freezes the frame, and the picture is

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256 I am not necessarily talking about deeply engaged movement sympathisers/participants, but about anyone who (for whatever reason) may be predisposed to the appeal of the IS movement and its message.

257 The specific mention of “tribes” (abna al-ashair) can be interpreted as an attempt at demonstrating power and influence. Iraq’s Sunni Arab tribes have played a somewhat prominent part in Iraqi politics of recent decades (see Osman 2014: 126-127), and the forming of alliances with them is often highlighted as important in official IS media (Günther & Kaden 2016: 5-7).

258 Al-Adnani 2014: 6. The used excerpt is also quoted in chapter 2 above.
covered by an ornamented frame (with the video's title graphic at the top) that contains a text. In other words, this text is placed on top of the image of an exploding Shiite shrine. The narrator reads it aloud:

Ibnul-Qayyim (rahimahullah) said:259 “It is not permissible to leave alone the places of shirk and tawaghit once the ability to destroy them is achieved even for one day. For they are the symbols of kufr and shirk, and from the greatest of evils. So it is not permissible at all to allow them once the ability to remove them is achieved”

In what follows, we are shown similar scenes of destruction. In total, three buildings are destroyed in scenes that are reminiscent of the one described above. Cameramen walk around inside the buildings and showcase various examples of what they apparently regard as examples of religious innovation, idol-worship, or the like. While the narrations and the cited texts talk about unbelief and idol-worship in general terms, all of the shown buildings are clearly Shiite.260 The quite specific sectarian narrative (anti Iraqi Shiite) is hence invoked again, and viewers are probably meant to be convinced of the supposed bida, shirk, and kufr practised by this particular community. Yet, once again, the focus here is not so much on explaining things, as it is on showcasing acts. Like the acts of manifest loyalty and warfare, we have now been introduced to acts associated with the supposed cleansing of the land from signs of disbelief. In this particular context, however, the showcased acts are presented as motivated by references to certain sources,261 which adds to the thematic complexity of the presentation. For while the referenced sources can certainly be described as important for large numbers of people (and well beyond the IS movement), their application as a part of an attempt at justifying certain acts cannot be described as an entirely simple process. Doubts about the specifics of interpretation have to be dispelled, and this is perhaps difficult if one wants to destroy a particular building based on arguably quite general guidelines about the problems of disbelief and idol-worship.262 In the specific context of Upon the Prophetic Methodology, it can be argued that the video's producers utilise the potential authority of the IS movement's symbolic leadership (for which the al-Furqan Foundation is an apparent representative) as a part of the framing of the argument. They invoke the IS Caliphate's interpretive authority, as depicted acts are framed as representing “the prophetic methodology” and presented as if carried out by “the Caliphate”. In other words, the turn from word to action (and the specifics of what that entails) is facilitated by what appear as references to the IS movement's largely internal mechanisms authority.

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259 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah was a Sunni Muslim scholar and student of ibn Taymiyyah (see below), who lived in Syria during the late 13th and early 14th centuries CE. For an overview of his life and writing, see Krawietz 2006. Like that of his teacher, ibn Qayyim's work has been enthusiastically embraced by, for example, contemporary Salafis. He is an oft-quoted and established (i.e. his inclusion does not have to be motivated) authority in official IS media. While a proper analysis of the IS movement's use of his work lies beyond the scope of this particular study, it can perhaps be illustrated by the fact that he was referenced at least once in all but three of the fifteen issues released of al-Hayat's English-language magazine Dabiq.

260 Among the things highlighted are turba stones, headbands reading “O Hussain, O martyr” (ya husain ya shahid), banners with images of Shiite imams, and literature written by various Ayatollahs (al-Sistani, who is the most influential Shiite authority in Iraq, is apparently emphasised, as one of the cameramen zooms in on a picture of his face).

261 Beyond the above quote from ibn Qayyim, there is also a hadith that recounts how the Prophet's companion and cousin, Ali bin Abu Talib, describes how the Prophet sent him on a mission to deface statues and flatten tombs. The referenced hadith is Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith 2115. This particular hadith-collection is regarded by most Sunni Muslim scholars as one of the two most reliable such collections – the other one is the above mentioned Sahih Bukhari. For information on Sahih Muslim and its author, see Juynboll 2012.

262 The hadith mentioned in the above footnote may perhaps be regarded as an example of the contrary, as it specifies that certain things should indeed be destroyed. However, “deface statues and flatten tombs” are the words used by al-Hayat's translators – and their interpretation is apparently not entirely uncontroversial. For example, the translation provided by sunnah.com rather talk about “an image” and “high tombs”, which add potentially crucial nuances. The Arabic words used in the hadith are, respectively, timthalan and qabrana mushrifa. Both of those concepts can apparently be translated/interpreted in different ways (for examples, see The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic), and their application to specific Shiite shrines and mosques should therefore not be regarded as entirely uncontroversial.
As the third of the shown buildings is blown up, the title graphic appear as part of a transition to an entirely different scene. Without any sort of presentation, viewers are now looking at a scene filmed from the back-seat of a car. Inside, sitting next to the cameraman, is a group of masked men armed with Kalashnikov rifles. At the bottom of the screen a subtitle reading “Hunting for rafidi Safawis” appears, which reminds viewers about the pervading sectarianism of the entire video. An energetic, Arabic-language, *nashid* is playing in the background, featuring the following lyrics:

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Clashing of the swords – a nashid of the defiant
The path of fighting is the path of life
So amidst an assault, tyranny is destroyed
[…]
By it my religion is glorified, and tyranny is laid low
So, oh my people, awake on the path of the brave
For either being alive delights leaders, or being dead vexes the enemy
[…]
So arise, brother, get up on the path of salvation,
So we may march together, resist the aggressors,
Raise our glory, and raise the foreheads
That have refused to bow before any besides God.
[…]
With righteousness arise,
The banner has called us,
To brighten the path of destiny,
To wage war on the enemy.
Whosoever among us dies, in sacrifice for defence,
Will enjoy eternity in Paradise. Mourning will depart.
[…]
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Viewers are then shown a number of different ambushes, all of them set to the same music. The lyrics are perhaps meant to encourage viewers to regard the scenes as demonstrations of the IS movement's defiance and willingness to stand up against supposed tyranny – a notion amplified by the guerrilla nature of the attacks depicted.\(^{264}\) As with the rest of the *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*, the scenes are filmed in ways that provide them with a sense of palpable intimacy. The camera is constantly placed as close as possible to the “action”, so as to be intently aware of the nature and implications of the acts committed. As with the previously described scenes of battle, the fast-paced editing and stirring music helps amplify the energy of the depicted scenes, and provide them with a sense of movement and excitement. No matter how uncomfortable this idea may be for many readers, it nevertheless has to be acknowledged and discussed. Turning scenes of actual, deadly violence into a form of morbid entertainment, through the use of music and various editing-techniques (such as the so-called slow-motion effect), is a recurrent and seemingly important aspect of the framing employed by IS video producers. There is a motivational aspect to it that should not be underestimated, as it encourages sympathetic viewers to regard violence as exciting and, perhaps, even entertaining. As the video moves to the next scene, a cut is once again signalled by the appearance of the title graphic and the narrator calmly repeating the words “upon the prophetic methodology” aloud. The violent scenes described above are presented as demonstrations of this methodology, and the viewer is apparently encouraged to regard them as such.

In the next scene, a man is delivering a speech to newly arrived foreign recruits. While it is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the video, the speaker is apparently the man who has often been referred to as Turki al-Binali.\(^{265}\) Al-Binali is apparently a prominent scholarly authority within the

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263 Translation provided by Al-Tamimi 2014(c).

264 “Defiant”, then, in the sense that they strike back with whatever means at their disposal, and no matter how militarily inferior.

265 His name has sometimes also been reported as “Abu Humam al-Athari” and “Abu Sufyan al-Sulami”. Reportedly born in Bahrain during the 1980's, he studied under a number of influential Salafi scholars (including Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi) and visited various militant groups in different parts of the Arab world before travelling to
IS movement, and has written widely circulated texts on what can be described as its official creed and doctrine. In this particular scene he is entirely dressed in black, carries a combat vest apparently filled with ammunition, and has a Kalashnikov rifle lying on his lap. This appearance is seemingly meant to establish him as a sort of warrior, and he delivers the following speech:

"The Chosen One" (i.e. the Prophet) made da'wah [invitation/missionary work] in Makkah, but was not answered. The position and speech then was soft. Then when he made da'wah with the sword strong in his palms, they submitted to him fully. It is true. Just as Shaykul-Islam ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullah) said, "The basis of the religion is a book that guides and a sword that supports". In this area, this matter, your brothers in the Islamic State exceeded all others. Thus they carried out assaults and defeated their foes. Thus they pioneered and prevailed. Thus they became the happiest of all people about this noble promise from the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam); “Then there will be Khilafah upon the Prophetic Methodology”. Not upon the methodology of democracy. Nor upon the methodology of secularism. Nor upon the methodology of sururiyyah ("salafi ikhwani"), nor the deviant murji’ah, rather upon the methodology of the trustworthy prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam. 

Turki al-Binali’s message is one of the most lengthy and elaborate delivered in the entire video. In a sense, it is used to summarise many aspects of the IS movement's official ideology. The importance of defiant jihad is emphasized, the oft-cited scholar ibn Taymiyya is mentioned and praised (see below for further details on him, as well as on certain other aspects of the above quoted speech), the goal of “Khilafah upon the Prophetic Methodology” is highlighted, and clear statements distancing the IS movement from other methodologies are delivered. Furthermore, the overall theme presented is that of manhaj, and it is argued that Islam would never had enjoyed success were it not for the Prophet's use of the temporal “sword” (the concept of “the aiding sword” will be discussed in more detail below).

As al-Binali speaks, viewers are shown footage of what appears to be his audience. Presented as “the new muhajirin [emigrants] who arrived recently in the Khilafah”, the producers of the video are seemingly keen on highlighting the various differences among them. While they are all men, we are shown faces of apparently different ages and ethnic backgrounds. Al-Binali is educating these new recruits, and reminding them about what the movement regards as proper creed and doctrine. Furthermore, he delivers his message with a loud and clear voice, and every sentence is slowly and markedly articulated, so that listeners with a very basic understanding of the Arabic language . Viewers are hereby informed about the ways in which new recruits are welcomed and taken care of, and it can thus be argued that we are once again witnessing an act. While viewers are certainly encouraged to absorb the message delivered by al-Binali, the scene is possibly also meant as a demonstration of the act of invitation/proselytising (dawa). Informing the people about the supposedly proper creed is hence presented as an integral part of the prophetic methodology, and

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266 Syria, and joining IS there, in early 2014. For details, see Bunzel 2014; McCants 2015: 115-116.
267 Black clothing is a hallmark of the IS movement's symbolic leadership. During the previously mentioned appearances of al-Adnani, al-Baghdadi, and al-Shishani, they all wore exclusively black clothes. William McCants has argued that the colour represents a fairly complex set of symbolic themes, which combines reports about the Prophet's own flag and clothing with certain aspects of apocalyptic prophesies. See McCants 2015: 19-29, 123.
268 Sururiyyah likely refers to those inspired by the ideas of Muhammad Surur (1938-2016). A Syrian follower of the Muslim Brotherhood (ikhwan), he combined ideas of that movement with what has been described as a more Salafi approach to Islam – See Haykel 2010: 207; Wagemakers 2012: 34, 77. While Surur has expressed criticism of certain governments in the Muslims world, he simultaneously advocated for non-violent forms of dissent, and criticised those who use militant methods. This may perhaps explain the way in which al-Binali dismisses the methodology of Surur and his followers. Murji’ah is often used to refer to those that “defer judgement” and abstain from declaring takfir on someone based on the way in which he/she acts. For murji’ah, the declaration of faith is supposedly sufficient one's categorisation as a Muslim, and is is up to God to truly judge us in the afterlife. For more on this phenomenon, see Madelung 2012. Furthermore, for a detailed analysis of the origins and historical uses of the term, as well as of its importance for contemporary Muslim militants, see Lav 2011. Official IS media has described the supposed murji’ah as upholders of “the most dangerous bid’ah”, and argues that their attitude of abstention has allowed for the corruption of Islam. E.g. Dabiq, Issue 8: 39-56.
this short scene serves the purpose of demonstrating the ways in which this is done by the IS movement.

In the next scene, viewers introduced to a seemingly quite young Moroccan man (named as “Abu Ayyub al-Maghribi”). He is preparing for a suicide mission, as clarified by a subtitle which describes him as “the martyr” (al-istishhadi). A calm and beautiful nashid is playing in the background, wherein the chorus repeat poetic lyrics on the theme of martyrdom. The suicide-bomber delivers a short message to his “brothers, especially those in West”, encouraging them to “come to jihad and your state”. Hence, the man himself serves as an example of the act of migration, while simultaneously delivering a message that calls on others to follow in his footsteps. At the same time, his is an example of the supposedly powerful potential of the IS movement's dawa.

After delivering his short message, another man shows him how to detonate the explosives inside the vehicle he has been given, almost as if to illustrate (for the viewer) how simple the operation is. As the suicide-bomber drives away for his mission, the title graphic appears and remind viewers about “the prophetic methodology”. In what follows, viewers are shown the bombing itself. It is filmed from several different angles, and the huge explosion is shown for a total of three times (as if to clearly demonstrate its devastating effect). Throughout the entire depiction of the bombing, the same calm nashid is playing in the background, a subtitle reading “The hero targeted the base of the Safawi army in Ramadi” appear at the bottom of the screen, and slow-motion effects are used generously in an apparent attempt at amplifying the sense of drama. After the depiction of the explosion, there is a cut to a scene wherein the bomber is still alive. He delivers a brief message about being “patient and firm”. Editors have added an echo to his voice, and the lighting of the scene has been manipulated in a way that adds an unnatural glow to its shine. In short, viewers have just witnessed an idealising and romanticised depiction of the act of suicide-bombing. As with so much else in Upon the Prophetic Methodology, the scene itself does not elaborate on any sort of theoretical aspects of the depicted act, but is rather focused on giving viewers an impression of what it looks like, as well as of the (supposedly) associated feelings and experiences.

As the video cut to the next scene, viewers are shown a montage of various celebratory scenes. IS forces triumphantly parade various vehicles and weapons, and there is apparent emphasis placed on depicting them as numerous and well-equipped. People gather around them and apparently partake in the celebrations. In the background, a fast-paced and rhythmic nashid is played:

Repeat allahu akbar – it is the evident victory!
It is a Caliphate of glad tidings, promise, and certainty!
[...]270

269 Ramadi is a city in central Iraq that has witnessed heavy fighting in recent years. Throughout most of 2014, the city was defended by Iraqi government forces and local loyalist militias against repeated IS attacks, and it is likely that the scene described above was filmed sometime during the first half of that year (no date is provided in the video itself). IS forces captured Ramadi in the spring of 2015 and held it for almost nine months before it was reconquered by Iraqi government forces and their various allies. In March of 2016, the UN stated that combat-related destruction in Ramadi was worse than anywhere else in Iraq: Kalin, S., “U.N. team calls destruction in Iraq's Ramadi 'staggering'”, Reuters, 4 March 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-ramadi-idUSKCN0W61S1 (accessed 11 December 2016).

270 The original lyrics are in Arabic, and these lines represent my own attempt at a translation and interpretation of their meaning. The original words are the following: radidu allahu akbar ina al-nasr al-mubin, inaha khilafa al-bushra wa wad wa yaqin. Translation based on The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. Cowen, J.M. (2011). While I regard the use of this particular nashid as significant (see below, for details on other scenes in which it is used), I have sadly been unable to find any English translations of its lyrics. This in turn informed my decision to translate parts of its myself, while I am fully aware of my own limitations in this matter. I hope the reader is able to understand my decision, and is forgiving of my stiff-legged and non-poetic interpretation. The purpose here is simply to communicate the literal meaning of the words used in the nashid, rather than convey a sense of its poetic qualities.
Accompanying these celebratory scenes is an encouraging statement, delivered by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani:

Congratulations to you on this victory. Yes, for victory is firmness upon 'aqidah and manhaj, and patience upon this path. You are firmer than the mountains. You are not shaken by hardship. You are not moved by hardship. Congratulations to you. You were patient and received victory. Insh'allah the 'Umari victories have begun. One of you can travel hundreds of miles and will not see a flag high and fluttering except the flag of tawhid. There is not rule beneath it except for Allah's. There is no religion under it except Allah's. The hypocrites are humiliated and degraded here. The muwahhidun are honored, manifest, and powerful.271

Al-Adnani's statement helps remind viewers about the implications of proper doctrine (aqida) and methodology (manhaj), and idealises the virtues of sincerity and steadfastness. In his apparent view, the triumphs enjoyed by the IS movement at the time of the video's release were manifest rewards for its insistence on not straying from a certain path. Given that the movement's members were “not moved by hardship” and remained patient and firm, they were able to defeat their enemies, re-establish the supposed rule of God, so that they were able to experience honour, dignity, and power. The Muslim conquests of the 7th century CE are invoked,272 in an apparent attempt at amplifying the sense of hopefulness resulting from the successes of the IS movement (as if we are now entering a similar era of conquest). All in all, the depicted scenes and the accompanying statement helps reinforce a message about the final fruitfulness of sincere faithfulness and defiant steadfastness. As a thematic interposition, the short scene helps remind viewers about fundamental themes and narratives that are pervasive throughout much of official IS discourse. At the same time, it serves as a reminder of the supposedly righteous motivations and attitudes that underlie the various acts depicted in Upon the Prophetic Methodology. The pledges of loyalty, the destruction of so-called idols, the spreading of proper faith and method, self-sacrifice, and defiant jihad – all of these can be interpreted as demonstrations of sincere faith and determined steadfastness. Al-Adnani argues that it is by patiently staying on this path and performing these acts that victory is achieved. In short, he reminds viewers of the potential fruits of proper aqida and manhaj, and thereby argues that the path staked out by the IS movement is the one that appears to be leading towards the revival of Muslim power and honour. The acts that have so far been depicted are thereby justified – as are the ones that are to be depicted in scenes that follow.

As the montage ends, the cut is once again signalled by the use of the title graphic. Next, viewers are presented with a brief scene featuring a statement delivered by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It is presented using the exact same, computer-generated montage described above, and viewers are presented with the following message:273

So rush, O Muslims, with your religion to Allah as muhajirin. We make a special call to the scholars, fuqaha' [Islamic jurists], and callers, and especially the judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specializations and fields. We call them and remind them to fear Allah, for their hijrah is wajib 'ayni (an individual obligation), so that they can answer the dire need of the Muslims for them. People are ignorant of their religion and they thirst for those who can teach them and help them understand it. So fear Allah, O slaves of Allah.

271 This statement is seemingly not an excerpt from any previous speech delivered by al-Adnani, but appears to have been recorded in the context of producing this particular video.

272 The “Umari victories” is an apparent reference of the large-scale victories accomplished by the Muslims during the reign of caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634-644CE). During Umar's reign, Muslim armies defeated the Sassanian Empire of Persia while simultaneously being able to capture places like Egypt and the Levant from the Byzantine Romans. See Levi Della Vida & Bonner 2012 for details on his life and reign. Among other things, they state that Umar is often regarded negatively within Shiite traditions. It is possible that this adds to the symbolic significance of invoking him as part of al-Adnani's speech, given the IS movement's animosity towards Shiites.

273 Once again, an excerpt from the above discussed speech A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan.
The statement is an obvious motivational appeal. It is aimed at distant sympathisers, and encourages them to act in a certain way. Al-Baghdadi uses his newly ascribed authority (as “Caliph”) to argue for *hijra* to IS-controlled territory as “an individual obligation”. The statement is the most explicit motivational appeal delivered in *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*, and echoes recurring messages that where delivered in other official IS videos released during the summer of 2014 (see above). Interposed between depictions of various acts, the message seemingly serves the purpose of reminding distant sympathisers about the need to start acting in the advocated ways. *Hijra* can be described as something of a prerequisite for intimate and meaningful engagement with the IS movement, and is hence stressed in this explicit and recurring fashion. Within the specific context of *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*, this particular appeal nevertheless serves a somewhat subordinate role. Looking at the above described scenes, it can be argued that they are primarily focused on depicting on-the-ground activities of the IS movement in Iraq and Syria (for reasons that will be speculated on below). Yet, given its fundamental importance, the *hijra* appeal is nevertheless inserted between scenes in this way – as if to make sure that its relevance is not forgotten by the viewer. Another important message is contained within the assertion that “[p]eople are ignorant”, as it reminds viewers about the *dawa* aspect of the prophetic methodology. It is implied that the IS Caliphate aims at serving as a vehicle for the proselytising proper Islam, and as a place where supposedly truthful scholars, jurists, etc. can gather to “teach” people and “help them understand” the religion.

Following al-Baghdadi’s appeal, the by now familiar title graphic appears to signal a transition to the next scene. Viewers are shown the entrance of a building, as a group of men enter and are greeted (through hugs) by another group. In the background, a melodic and sorrowful *nashid* is playing, and the chorus delivers the following lamentation:

Oh my ummah, the grief crushes me  
Why are you bowing?  
What is this about your trip ending?  
And that you have taken off the garment of pride?  
If weeping would have helped me  
I would have died of excessive crying  
[...][274]

The use of this particular *nashid* signals an apparent attempt at reconnecting to previously discussed narratives about the contemporary humiliation and weakness of the Muslim *umma*. The unnamed narrator that spoke at the start of the video delivers a statement regarding the supposed disunity among the Muslims, and praise the IS movement as a remedy for this problem:

The Islamic State, since its establishment, strived eagerly to unify the rank and word, because division and difference have obvious results. Division does not contribute anything to the mujahidin except for splitting and waning, so that the fruit of jihad is lost as well as the goal for which the jihad was legislated. So many of the sincere mujahidin platoons, brigades, and groups rushed in the lands of Iraq and Sham to announce their pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State after they experienced and saw the reality of what it does on the ground, and received clarification on some doubts that were spread by the deviant media in campaigns of fabrications by rivals and innovators, those lacking character.

As these words are spoken, we are shown groups of men gathered around and speaking from a lectern. They repeat the words spoken by the crowd in the previously described scene depicting a pledge of *baya*, and thus demonstrate that they are pledging allegiance to the IS Caliphate. A subtitle reading “Ansar al-Islam leave division and pledge allegiance to the Muslims’ Khalifah” appear at the bottom of the screen, signalling that the scenes depicted are supposed demonstrations

of reached unity between different factions. As soon as the narrator finishes his statement, an excerpt from al-Adnani’s speech *This is the Promise of God* (see above for details) is heard:

> And a message to all the platoons and groups on the face of the earth consisting of mujahidin and people working to support the religion of Allah and raising the Islamic banners. This is a message to the heads and leaders of those groups. We say, Fear Allah with regard to yourselves. Fear Allah with regards to your jihad. Fear Allah with regards to your ummah. {O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims, and hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided}. We – by Allah – do not find any shari (legal) excuse for you justifying your holding back from supporting this state. […] It is the State – the state for the Muslims.

As the words are spoken, the men at the lectern finish their pledge and the viewers are shown footage of the crowd gathered in front of them. The men within it are now variously hugging each other and/or prostrating onto the floor. A large number of them are noticeably moved, as they weep loudly. A subtitle reading “The joy of Ansar al-Islam upon returning to their brothers' embrace” appear at the bottom of the screen.

The scenes described and statements delivered combine into an arguably multi-layered depiction of significant action, as well as an expression of certain ideals and virtues. Framing narratives about disunity and weakness are invoked, and loyalty towards a common leader is presented as a forceful remedy. At the same time, we are presented with what can be described as a demonstration of an essentially submissive act. The depicted members of Ansar al-Islam are consciously and willingly abandoning whatever sovereign authority they might have held as an independent movement, and that in order to become loyal subjects of another. Whatever the actual nature of the depicted events, viewers are presented with what looks like an act of sincere and significant bay'a. The statements delivered by the unnamed narrator and al-Adnani make sure that viewers understand that this is all in the service of an imagined greater good, and they explicitly link this to various diagnostic and prognostic framing narratives. The demonstrated act is hence presented as a sort of motivational argument, apparently meant to encourage other factions to abandon their independence and instead subject themselves to the authority of the IS Caliphate. Viewers are thereby informed about ways in which the IS movement works towards solving problems of disunity among the Muslims. As with other scenes in *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*, the depiction of the act itself is significant. By highlighting expressions of seemingly genuine joy (with actual tears present, as a manifest and convincing demonstration), the video’s producers are apparently trying to emphasise things like the supposedly spontaneous and redemptive qualities of the act of bay'a – which in turn might strengthen any sort of motivational argument. The intimacy of the portrayal apparently serves the purpose of conveying a certain experience, and of connecting a specific act to a set of emotional reactions.

As the scene ends, we witness the regular transition using the title graphic. Following this, viewers are placed in front of a small building. Writing on the wall proclaims that it is the “mausoleum of the Shaykh Ibrahim” (*murqid al-shaykh ibrahim*). The scene is cut, and viewers are then shown the inside of the building. The cameraman starts moving around inside it and shows viewers that it is centred around a tomb. The unnamed narrator from the beginning of the video is speaking in the background:

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275 Ansar al-islam (translatable as “supporters of Islam”) was a Sunni Muslim insurgent group formed in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2001. Its members fought against US-led forces during their occupation of Iraq (2003-2011), but was not a part of al-Zarqawi’s network or the succeeding Islamic State of Iraq. Following the proclamation of the IS Caliphate in 2014, many members of Ansar al-Islam announced their movement’s merger with IS, while others retained their old name and endured as a separate movement in Syria. Al-Tamimi 2015(g).

276 Quran, 3:102-103.


278 I have not been able to find much more information on this building, but contemporary IS photo reports state that it was located in the northern Iraqi town of Muhallabiyah – Jones 2014; Danti et al. 2015.
Al-Bukhari and Muslim report that the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, while he was ill before passing away, “May Allah's curse be upon the Jews and the Christians. They took the graves of their prophets as places of worship”.

As was mentioned above, the hadith collections of both Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslims can be described as highly influential and even authoritative texts among Sunni Muslims. A prophetic statement recorded by both of them can thus be regarded as significant, and is here used to lend authority to the IS movement's argument about the unlawfulness of conducting religious rites at grave-sites. As the hadith is recited, scenes depicting the bulldozing of the shrine are shown, and a subtitle reading “Removing the appearances of shirk and paganism after the mujahidin gained control of areas” appear at the bottom of the screen. Once again, then, viewers are presented with this act of so-called cleansing, and are reminded of its supposed importance. The practical, actual implementation of the disowning of so-called disbelief is manifested. As this happens, the narrator moves on to reciting two more hadiths, which appear in al-Bukhari and Muslim, respectively:

He warned of what they had done [i.e. the Jews and Christians – see above]. 'A'ishah (radiyallahu 'anha) said, “If not for this reason, I would have made his grave more apparent. But he hated that it became a masjid”. Jabir (radiyallahu 'anh) reported that Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) prohibited the plastering upon a grave, building upon one, or sitting upon one.

Discussions regarding the interpretations and authenticity of hadith narrations lie well beyond the scope of this particular study, but it suffices to say that the use of these sources lend significant credibility to the argument presented. It is worth mentioning that while none of the referenced hadiths explicitly encourage the act of desecration itself, the IS movement has apparently drawn the conclusion that the prohibition of certain forms of veneration also implies the destruction of their various manifestations. The aqida implied by the hadith is thus turned into manhaj. One is here reminded of the reasoning presented in the previously described scenes of destruction, wherein the narrator described these acts as aimed at preventing “anything from leading the people to the shirk”, as well as at defending “tawhid from being damaged”. While there are echoes of certain older Islamic concepts and ideas of previous scholars, the attitude is seemingly informed by an assumption of the weak-minded inclinations of contemporary Muslims, which in turn fits into the previously described narratives describing the current umma as plagued by weakness and hypocrisy. The concept of al-wala wa al-bara has to be violently enforced, so that manifest idols can no longer distract and sow discord among the Muslims. As such a violent enforcer, the IS movement has risen to cleanse the land and make things right again. If this is to succeed, anything that supposedly turns people away from the exclusive veneration of God Himself has to be eradicated through acts of desecration. These acts are meticulously depicted in Upon the Prophetic Methodology – for example, the destruction of the mausoleum of the Shaykh Ibrahim is almost shown in its entirety, and viewers are at one point literally looking at it from the perspective of the person who is driving the bulldozer used to level the building. Once again, intimate camera-work is here used to make the depictions of the act as palpable as possible.

The statement corresponds to contents of Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 8, Hadith 427 and Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadiths 1081 & 1082. Both texts were accessed via the website www.sunnah.com. Sahih al-Bukhari, vol. 2, Book 23, Hadith 472. Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith 2116. See above, for a brief discussion on what this may tell us about how the al-Furqan producers (and/or whoever they may represent) view themselves as an interpretive authority. The concept of “commanding good and forbidding wrong” (al-amr bi al-maruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar) may perhaps be invoked in this context, as it has been interpreted as advocating an activist approach towards variously interpreted manifestations of “evil”. For discussions on this particular sort of use of the concept, see Meijer 2013(b). The practice of destroying tombs and other forms of supposedly “idolatrous” structures was reportedly common among the followers of the Najdi scholar and preacher Muhammad ibn adh al-Wahhab (1703-1792), who has often been cited as an authority by the IS movement – e.g. Dabiq, Issue 5: 26. For an overview of al-Wahhab's life and works, see Laoust 2012.
After the destruction of the shrine, viewers are walked through three other buildings, apparently used as places of worship. One is another shrine centred around a tomb, while the other two are Shiite mosques. The cameramen meticulously catalogue various manifestations of Shiite ritual (such as turba stones) and veneration of the Prophet's family (especially his grandson Hussain ibn Ali), as if to make perfectly sure that viewers are made aware of the sectarian identity of the mosques. These mosques are apparently placed in the same category as venerated tombs, subjected to the same reasoning based on the quoted hadiths, and described as “temples” (maabid) of “the rejectionist idol-worshippers” (al-rafidha al-mushrikin). The destruction of the second mosque is filmed from afar, with its tall minaret dominating the urban landscape. As it is blown up, a group of men behind the camera enthusiastically shout “allahu akbar” – highlighting the supposedly celebratory nature of the scene depicted, and implicitly informing the viewer of the correct attitude one should have when confronted with images like the ones shown. Throughout the video, it has been argued (or rather, presented as if a given fact) that Shiites are heretics and idol-worshippers, and that acts aimed at defeating them and eradicating signs of their faith should be celebrated or otherwise appreciated.

Following the above described destruction of the mosque, the by now familiar title graphic emerges and covers the screen. It signals a sharp change of scenery, as viewers are now shown what appears to be some sort of military outpost. A man emerges from behind an armoured vehicle, and slowly walks across the screen. A shot rings out, after which he falls to the ground. At the same time, the upbeat nashid that was previously used to accompany scenes of drive-by shootings starts playing in the background (translation of the lyrics presented above). The scene of the man's apparent death is replayed a number of times, accompanied by the energetic music and the generous use of various editing techniques. At one point, a computer-generated effect has been added, that applies a sort of reticle (similar to those seen on telescopic rifle scopes) to the image. Hence, viewers are apparently looking at the death of this man in a way that is likely very similar to that in which his killer saw it. So far, Upon the Prophetic Methodology has never depicted the act of killing in such an intimate, and even personal, manner. In what follows, viewers are presented with a montage of similar killings – filmed and edited in an almost identical way. Given that there are no subtitles that contextualise the killings or identify the victims (although the scenery suggests that they are Iraqi military or police), we are left to assume that the intended focus is on the depicted acts themselves. The use of the imposed reticle suggests that the editors want to convey some sort of associated experience, and put the viewers as close as possible to “the action”. At the same time, the use of the music and various editing techniques are possibly meant to heighten the sense of excitement, and are thereby working in the favour of glamorising the violence depicted. The title graphic appear recurrently throughout the entire montage, thereby reminding viewers about the overarching argument of Upon the Prophetic Methodology.

After roughly two minutes, the video moves on to another topic. We are shown one last act of killing, before the title graphic emerges with the narrator reading the words aloud. In other words, viewers are confronted with the appearance of beautiful ornamentation and calligraphy, together with the calm uttering of the words “upon the prophetic methodology”, after a montage of incredibly violent depictions of apparently actual deaths. It may seem like a bizarre and unconsidered play with symbols and images, but can also be viewed as an attempt at presenting an argument. Above, the way in which official IS propaganda appeals to the virtue of sincerity has been extensively discussed, and it can certainly be argued that the way in which the movement uses uncensored depictions of violence helps reinforce such thematic narratives. Ambushes and sniper attacks are effective means of fighting a materially superior enemy, and it is therefore understandable that a guerrilla movement like that of IS is interested in employing these methods on its various battlefields. Once it has employed them, the way in which its propaganda and official

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284 The second issue of al-Hayat's Dabiq magazine featured a photo report depicting the destruction of various buildings in northern Iraq. The mosque depicted in Upon the Prophetic Methodology is there described as located in the city of Tal Afar, which had a significant Shiite population before it was captured by IS forces in June of 2014.
ideology stresses sincerity requires that the movement does not shy away from their depiction, as its credibility is at least partially dependent on it giving the impression of practising what it preaches. This does not necessarily entail that everything the movement does has to be documented and shown to the world, but that it is somewhat obliged to convey the impression of being sincerely proud of and unwilling to censor or otherwise “lie” about the acts committed by it. In other words, the producers at al-Furqan are apparently telling their viewers about the IS movement's supposedly sincere belief in its own practices, and about the way in which it is convinced that the depicted acts are carried out in accordance with the prophetic methodology.

The next scene starts with footage of celebratory parades. Groups of uniformed fighters ride on horses and armed pick-up trucks, with many of them waving IS flags in front of the camera. The celebratory nashid accompanying a similar scene earlier in the video (see above) plays in the background:

Repeat allahu akbar – it is the clear victory!
It is a Caliphate of glad tidings, promise, and certainty!

[...]

At the same time as these words are sung, viewers can hear the voice of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He delivers a statement, which is an excerpt from his speech A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan (see above for details):

So raise your ambitions, O soldiers of the Islamic State! For your brothers all over the world are waiting for your rescue, and anticipate your brigades. It is enough for you to just look at the scenes that have reached you from Central Africa, and from Burma before that.285 What is hidden from you is far worse.

At this point, the video cuts to an entirely different scene. While the same music is played in the background, viewers are no longer shown celebratory parades, but are instead confronted with footage of trucks filled with captives. A subtitle reading “The murderous Safawi army in the hands of the Khilafah soldiers” appear at the bottom of the screen. As the trucks drive by the camera, al-Baghdadi continues:

So by Allah, we will take revenge! By Allah, we will take revenge! Even if it takes a while, we will take revenge! And every amount of harm against the ummah will be responded to with multitudes more. {And those who, when tyranny strikes them, they defend themselves}. 286 And the one who commences is the more oppressive. Soon, by Allah's permission, a day will come when the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master, having honour, being revered, with his head high and his dignity preserved. Anyone who dares to offend him will be disciplined, and any hand that reaches out to harm him will be cut off.

The notion of “revenge” is hence explicitly invoked. The enemy is described as “murderous”, and the violence committed against him is thereby framed as somehow justified and necessary. The “safawids” are no longer just Shiite heretics, but guilty of temporal transgression and supposedly anti-Muslim violence as well.287 The combination of al-Baghdadi's words and the footage of captured “safawids” can be interpreted as arguing for ways in which the suffering experienced by Sunni Iraqis is deeply connected to the plight of the wider umma. Revenge exacted on these specific tormentors is framed as part of a much wider issue; “Even if it takes some time, we will take

285 The civil war in the Central African Republic started in December of 2012, and has featured communal violence between Christians and Muslims. Earlier that same year, wide-scale rioting hit parts Myanmar's Rakhine state. These riots were described as the result of conflicts between Muslim and Buddhist communities, with reports also emerging of the former being targeted and discriminated against by the country's authorities. In both cases, Muslims were often identified as victims, and al-Baghdadi likely highlighted them as the latest illustrations of the umma's suffering.

286 Quran 42:39.

287 It is likely that the things for which revenge is to be exacted are somehow connected to the largely sectarian civil wars that have characterised much of Iraqi society throughout much the last decade.
revenge” – and it apparently starts right here, in Iraq.

As al-Baghdadi finishes his statement, the video moves on to footage that depicts the desperation of the captured men. The producers are apparently keen on highlighting the supposed non-sincerity of their conviction, as well as their complete humiliation. The footage highlights how some of them tried to disguise themselves as civilians before fleeing, show them being coerced into shouting IS slogans and condemn the then Iraqi president Nuri al-Maliki, and so on. It all adds up to an apparent attempt at signalling the supposedly facile way in which the enemy regards his ostensible cause, which is likely meant to contrast with the alleged steadfastness and defiance of the IS movement and its fighters.  

Soon, viewers are shown detailed scenes depicting the massacre of these men. While I want to spare readers from attacking them with voyeuristic descriptions of the killings themselves, I nevertheless have to describe the ways in which they are framed by the perpetrators themselves and the producers at al-Furqan. Notable is, for example, the fact that the IS flag is present at every execution-site. The flag is either held high above the victims or carried by men who accompany the executioners, and it is seemingly there to remind participants and viewers alike about the sincere conviction with which the acts are carried out. Massacre participants and video producers are far from ashamed of the scenes depicted, and are apparently keen on reminding viewers about this fact. Furthermore, the symbols on the IS flag represent a stylised depiction of the Muslim professions of faith (al-shahada), written in Arabic. The part reading “Muhammad is God's Messenger” is supposed to be a depiction of the seal that the Prophet Muhammad allegedly used to sign, for example, letters. Echoing the underlying argument of the video, we are hence presented with a scene wherein the seal of the Prophet is literally placed onto an image of mass murder – implying that the latter is to be regarded as part of the prophetic methodology. As with other parts of Upon the Prophetic Methodology, the stylised title graphic is regularly imposed onto the scenes depicted, as it is used to signal cuts between different shots. These references to the Prophet serve as a defiant demonstration of the IS movement's manifest conviction in its own righteousness and interpretive authority, and signals that it is not afraid to stand by and endorse the various acts committed in its name – no matter how violent and terrifying.  

Beyond these references to the Prophet, the massacre is apparently framed as a great triumph. The above recounted statement by al-Baghdadi frames it as an act of revenge against a supposedly

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288 In July of 2015, the media office of the IS wilaya Salah al-Din (where the massacre depicted in Upon the Prophetic Methodology took place) released a video that commemorated the previous year's massacre. Titled And Kill Them Wherever You Overtake Them, it featured footage that elaborated extensively on this theme. Among other things, it featured footage of one man trying to escape his captors by stating that he was a Sunni. Granting him the benefit of the doubt, the IS fighters test him with various questions until he is killed for his inability to conduct the prayer (al-sala) in the supposedly correct manner. He is scolded for lying and practising taqiyya, which is an Arabic term for the denial of one's faith in the face of persecution. This act is furthermore framed as something cowardly, insincere, and hypocritical.

289 The scenes shown are apparently footage filmed during massacre in Tikrit some time in June of 2014. When IS forces captured the city, they rounded up Iraqi Air Force cadets who were stationed at a nearby military camp and subsequently killed them. It has been reported that around fifteen hundred of the cadets were killed, and the footage in Upon the Prophetic Methodology confirms the enormous scale and well-organised nature of the killings.

290 I furthermore fail to see how detailed descriptions of these men's deaths will serve the purpose of the study itself.

291 “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is God's Messenger” (la ilaha illa allah muhammad rasul allah).


293 Indeed, a scene from an earlier video release demonstrates that the IS movement regards these mass killings as analogous to acts reportedly committed by the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers. At the end of the above described al-Itisam video Breaking the border (kasr al-hudud), viewers are presented with a short montage that represent a sort of premonition of the scenes depicted in Upon the Prophetic Methodology. Footage from the same massacre is shown, and some of the perpetrators are given the opportunity to justify their acts for the camera. One of them says that “This day reminds me of the day of Bani Quraydah”, referencing the early Muslim's reported massacre of the Jewish Qurayda tribe in the aftermath of their reported treason. For details on this massacre, see Donner 2006: 27.
“murderous” enemy, and one of the cameramen highlights the great number of men captured. For a materially inferior guerrilla force like that of the IS movement, the killing of hundreds (by some reports more than a thousand) of potential enemy soldiers may indeed be regarded as a great triumph – provided that one is willing to look at the killing of unarmed prisoners from a cold-blooded and purely military perspective. The combination of these factors apparently motivate an urge to celebrate the depicted acts, as evident from the triumphant nashid that plays in the background throughout the entire depiction of the massacre. Its lyrics encourages Muslims to rejoice in the victories of the IS movement and regard its Caliphate as a sign of glad tidings, and the atrocities depicted are hence framed as part of the overarching triumph of the movement. As the first group of men are executed, the chorus repeat the following lines over and over again:

The banner of truth will be elevated and the disbelievers will fade/go away.
Restore the glory of the religion and the era of the righteous.294

The conviction and sincerity of the perpetrators is highlighted by their apparent cold-bloodedness. Most of the killings are conducted by individual perpetrators rather than through the use of firing squad, and the video is seemingly keen on emphasising the slow, methodical, and focused way in these acts are carried out. This is yet another aspect of the supposed “steadfastness” that seemingly plays such an important part in the motivational framing presented by the IS movement's official propaganda. There is only one point in the video at which the killers break from this pattern of cold-blooded focus. In one scene, a masked man angrily shouts “O mother of the believers, Aisha!” and is answered with “allahu akbar” by the other IS men around him. At the same time, a subtitle reading “Wallahi, we will get revenge for the mothers of the believers, even if after some time” appears at the bottom of the screen. Echoing previous allegations about Shiites as slanderers of Aisha, these phrases apparently serve the purpose of reinforcing the sectarian narrative, while simultaneously reminding viewers about the theme of defiant revenge.

After about four minutes of footage depicting the massacre, the video fades into black, while the music continues uninterruptedly. The chorus sings about how “the banner of truth will prevail, and the disbelievers will go away”, with the latter phrase by now imprinted with a dramatically reinforced sense of actuality. With the music continuing, viewers are shown footage of a black-clad and armed fighter carrying a large IS flag across the screen. The chorus fades away, at which point we hear the voice of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi:

A spark has been lit here in Iraq, and it will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the Crusader armies at Dabiq.

“Dabiq” is the name of a town in northern Syria where an apocalyptic battle between Muslims and “Romans” will supposedly take place.295 In this sense, al-Zarqawi’s statement can be interpreted as a vision about the unstoppable nature of a metaphorical fire which was lit in Iraq during the American-led occupation of that country. This fire will continue to burn until the day when the temporal world ends, and will furthermore be the thing which destroys the enemies of Islam in an apocalyptic battle. Whether al-Zarqawi’s trust in the Dabiq prophesy was sincere or not, his use of it signals an attempt at framing his own movement's struggle as deeply significant.

It can be argued that the use of this statement at the end of Upon the Prophetic Methodology signals an attempt at reminding viewers about the IS movement's origins,296 and thereby frame the

294 My own, admittedly rough, translation and interpretation. The original Arabic words are: sawf taalu raya al-haqq wa yakbhu al-kafirin – wa nuid al-majd al-din wa ahd al-salihim.
295 Much has been made of the IS movement's use of apocalyptic symbolism. See, for example, McCants 2015. The “Romans” mentioned in the specific prophesy have been interpreted by official IS propagandists as corresponding to contemporary Western powers. According to them, “the Roman Empire never fully fell, but merely adopted new names” – Dabiq, Issue 13: 12.
296 See above, for an overview of its historical activities. It can certainly be argued that both “al-Zarqawi” and “Iraq”
movement as the continuation of something which was described as early as 2004.\footnote{\url{http://www.memri.org/reports/al-zarqawis-message-fighters-jihad-iraq-september-11-2004} (accessed 12 December 2016).} The movement is framing itself as the symbolic protector of the flame described by al-Zarqawi. Simultaneously, it is framed as unstoppable in the sense that “it will continue to intensify” until the end of days. Furthermore, it should perhaps be noted that the montage of which al-Zarqawi’s statement is a part was used at the end of al-Furqan releases throughout much of 2013 and 2014. In this sense, its use here signals a sort of continuity and coherence over time. Beyond the symbolism of continuity and inevitability, one may perhaps add the metaphorical quality of fire as \textit{purifying}. Looking back at the scenes depicted in \textit{Upon the Prophetic Methodology}, it can certainly be argued that the act of \textit{purification} is a fundamental and recurring theme. Its manifestations range from the act of \textit{baya}, wherein which individuals are symbolically cleansed of ambiguity, to violently destructive acts, wherein expressions and incarnations of disbelief are eradicated from the face of the earth. In a sense, the three core framing tasks are here combined into a coherent narrative about the IS movement's purpose as a purifying agent. Spreading through Muslim societies, it will facilitate their supposed purification, and make sure that they are actively working towards preparing themselves for their final battle against the powerful enemies of Islam.

\subsection*{4.2. “The basis of the religion is a book that guides and a sword that supports”}

Compared to previously described media releases, \textit{Upon the Prophetic Methodology} is apparently not as focused on clearly expository examinations of prognostic, diagnostic, and motivational narratives. There are a number of ways in which this aspect of the video can be interpreted. For example, it can certainly be argued that it is primarily directed at an audience of firmly rooted sympathisers, rather than at potential followers and new-comers. Many of the other releases described above are explicitly directed at Muslims in distant lands (i.e. beyond Iraq and Syria), and seemingly serve a sort of introductory role in the sense that they clarify quite basic questions on what the movement is about, what it has achieved, and why one should join it. The intended audience of \textit{Upon the Prophetic Methodology} is harder to identify, but much of the video's content suggest that it is not primarily aimed at merely potential sympathisers. It is largely lacking in introductory expositions, which may suggest that it is rather to be appreciated by those who have already accepted some (or most) of the basic tenets of the movement's world-view. The basic argument put forward in the video (that the IS movement represents an incarnation of “the prophetic \textit{methodology}”\footnote{This definition is inspired by that found in the online version of the \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}: “[a]uthority, the are significant symbols in this context.}) is almost entirely based on the idea that the movement is credible and righteous enough to deliver such a statement – something which may suggest that the intended audience is one that already respects IS \textit{authority}. The al-Hayat releases described above are seemingly aimed at establishing such authority and invite new people to the movement, while \textit{Upon the Prophetic Methodology} appear as an attempt at using already established authority to justify and legitimise, as well as direct and motivate, certain acts.\footnote{I realise that an all to rigid division of various propaganda into different categories depending on their intended audience can be problematic. There may very well have been “new-comers” who were attracted to the movement because of the content in \textit{Upon the Prophetic Methodology}, and the video can perhaps also be viewed as an elaborate explanation of what the movement stands for. What I am trying to highlight (analytically) is an apparent difference between ways in which arguments are presented and formulated.}

“\textit{Authority}” can be defined as an exercise of power and/or influence that has (for whatever reason) been approved by those who are subject to it.\footnote{\url{http://www.memri.org/reports/al-zarqawis-message-fighters-jihad-iraq-september-11-2004} (accessed 12 December 2016).} This separates the concept from the wider notion of
“power”, which can also be exercised through the exclusive use of violence, coercion, and so on. Given that authority presumes some sort of approval, the legitimacy of and/or trust in the authoritative agent is quite important. While a proper discussion on the nature of authority within the IS movement lies largely beyond the scope of this particular study,\(^{300}\) I would argue that the various framing narratives described above are routinely used by the movement's propagandists as part of attempts at legitimising its authority. The movement is described as able to solve a wide range of apparently palpable problems, presented as successful and triumphant, and argued for as respectful of the legal and theological legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (himself, of course, a significant authority for many of the world's Muslims). Furthermore, themes like sincerity and defiance are invoked as part of arguments for the movement's credibility, and the entire message is packaged in a way that can perhaps be described as aesthetically appealing.\(^ {301}\)

Focusing on thematic narratives that can be related to the three core framing tasks, I will dedicate this analysis to a closer look at a certain ideological/political concept that is routinely used to argue for the legitimacy of the IS movement. While apparently a general, pervasive theme throughout much of official IS propaganda, it is often illustrated through the help of a certain phrase which posits that the basis of Islam is “a book that guides and a sword that supports”. As part of Upon the Prophetic Methodology, this particular phrase was uttered by Turki al-Binali, as he delivered his speech to newly arrived emigrants (see above). In it, he ascribed the phrase to one “Shaykul-Islam ibn Taymiyyah”.

The man in question is Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328CE), a prolific scholar who spent much of his life in what is now Syria. Ibn Taymiyya wrote extensively during his lifetime, and developed an elaborate system of thought – parts of which have been noted for their apparent similarities to ideas of contemporary Salafis. He advocated a return to the foundational texts of Islam, as well as for the emulation of the “pious predecessors”, and argued that one should re-evaluate the authority of interpretative traditions associated with the various legal schools of Sunni Islam. The time during which he lived was largely characterised by warfare and political turmoil, as the Ilkhanate Mongols and their various allies launched military campaigns against the Muslim states in the Levant. Ibn Taymiyya himself participated in warfare, and formulated denunciations of Shiites, Christians, and self-ascribed Sunnis who (according to him) rule in accordance with non-Islamic laws. Addressing the various issues of his time, ibn Taymiyya's interpretations and opinions have often been characterised as “radical” and/or “extreme”, and viewed by some as a precursor to (or a source of) today's Sunni militancy. While there are problems with regarding contemporary militant Salafism as a simple outgrowth of ibn Taymiyya's thought, it can certainly be argued that there are aspects of his writing that resonate with some of the ideas advocated by movements like, ...
for example, that of IS. This, however, is not to say that he is nothing but a “militant scholar”, for
the multi-faceted nature of his immense writing has resulted in him being praised by thinkers of
many different traditions and inclinations. Beyond the things described above, ibn Taymiyya argued
for the elevation of things held in common by different Sunni traditions (including the “innovative”
one), so as to facilitate a sense of unity between them. He also advocated for a largely conciliatory
and understanding approach towards those Sunnis who practise their religion based on what he
regarded as non-Islamic innovation.302

Al-Binali is apparently invoking the fame, influence, and respect often associated to ibn Taymiyya,
so that the stature of this particular figure may lend credibility to the idea that the establishment and
protection of Islam are presupposed by the use of violence. The wider relevance of his own sermon
is thereby reinforced, as it is related to an older and fairly established current of thought. As such,
the theme illustrated by the phrase is used to argue for the legitimacy, efficacy, and credibility of the
IS movement. Given its militant credentials, the movement is highlighted for its abilities to
effectively wield and use the metaphorical “aiding sword”, and ibn Taymiyya's phrase instils this
political/military role with a sense of fundamental significance. Al-Binali's speech is a case in point,
as his use of the phrase is followed by him arguing that “[i]n this area, in this matter, your brothers
in the Islamic State exceeded all others”.

Beyond its use by al-Binali in Upon the Prophetic Methodology, the phrase “a book that guides and
a sword that supports” is routinely used in official IS propaganda releases. In what follows, I will
recount some other examples of its use, so that readers may appreciate its recurring significance. So
as to illustrate the apparent coherence of its use over time, I will reference official IS media that was
released both before and after the primarily studied period of the summer of 2014.

When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi delivered his public sermon in Mosul,303 he reminded his viewers and
listeners that the Prophet Muhammad himself used to lead armies into battle and perform jihad
against perceived enemies of God. He furthermore argued that the implementation of Islamic law,
and the enforcement of its religious creed, depend on the believers ability to exercise power and
authority:

O people, indeed the religion of Allah tabaraka wa ta'ala is not established, nor is this goal which Allah
created us for achieved, except by ruling by Allah's law, referring to it for judgement, and implementing
the hudud [punishments prescribed by the Quran]. This is not achievable except with power and authority.
Allah ta'ala said, {We sent down Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the
Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice. And We sent down iron,
wherein is great military might and benefits for the people, and so that Allah may make evident those who
support Him and His messengers unseen. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.}304
So this is the basis of the religion, a book that guides, and a sword that aids.

A recent video released by the al-Furqan foundation helps clarify the matter further. Titled The
Structure of the Caliphate and released on July of 2016, it features an English-language narration
that described the IS Caliphate in the following way:

It is a structure that has become more manifest than the sun in the middle of the sky. It was erected by
the arms of defiant men, and irrigated by the blood of the shuhada [martyrs]. Through patience, conviction,
and hardened resolve, it's methodology is the guiding book and the aiding sword. With respect to
defending the religion and governing the worldly affairs, imama [leadership] was legislated in order to
follow prophethood in upholding these two matters.

302 For an English-language description and analysis of ibn Taymiyyah's thought and legacy, see Rapoport & Ahmed
(ed.) 2010. The general information presented in the above paragraph is a summary of information provided by the
various contributions to their book.
303 Special coverage of the khutba and jumua prayer in the great mosque in the city of Mosul, al-Furqan Foundation, 5
July 2014.
304 Quran 57:25.
The narrator then goes on to describing ways in which the strength and purpose of the Islamic religion were undermined by the lack of Caliphate and authority. Describing the responsibilities of the IS Caliph, he lists things that can be categorised as either juridical or military in nature. He thereby clarifies the notion that Islamic authority is supposed to be based on both “book” and “sword”, and that the implementation of the former is presumed by the support of the latter. Furthermore, a number of al-Hayat releases have stressed the importance of the concept, and used it to legitimise the violent activities of the IS movement. An al-Furqan video series released during 2013 and 2014 divided each video into one segment representing “the guiding book” followed by one representing “the aiding sword” (with accompanying title graphics containing the two phrases), and was apparently used to argue for the versatile nature and multi-layered capabilities of the IS movement.

While the IS movement has been able to establish what appears to be a somewhat substantial and productive network of affiliated scholars, its credentials are more clearly connected to the area of jihad than that of intellectual endeavours. Its origins, activities, and successes as a guerrilla movement result in it being more of an incarnation of “the sword” than of “the book”. It can therefore be argued that this insistence on highlighting the importance of “the aiding sword” serves the purpose of legitimising the authority of the movement, and of emphasizing its specific credentials and purpose. A powerful and experienced militant movement may easily be described as an incarnation of the symbolic sword, and can thereby be presented as the necessary prerequisite by which the establishment and enforcement of Islamic rule is made possible. The following excerpt from al-Baghdadi’s sermon is illustrative of this idea:

Indeed, your brothers the mujahidin were blessed with victory by Allah tabaraka wa ta’ala and were blessed with consolidation after long years of jihad, patience, and fighting the enemies of Allah. Allah guided them and strengthened them to establish this goal. Therefore, they rushed to announce the Khilafah and appoint an imam.

This can all be related to an above described idea about the prominence of the mujahidin. It is the fighters of jihad (the wielders the figurative “aiding sword”) who truly have the ability to establish the sort of authority that is necessary for the implementation, enforcement, and protection of Islam. Scholars and intellectuals are almost framed as a sort of afterthought, whose abilities to operate depend on structural foundations established by fighters. Like al-Baghdadi in his public sermon, official IS media recurrently refer to the IS movement as a sort of pinnacle of “jihadi” efforts, and often stress ways in which the movement was forged by the immense sacrifices it endured during years of conflict. As a result, its various leaders are often presented as armed warriors, and even a dedicated scholar like al-Binali is sporting a Kalashnikov as he delivers a speech in what appears to be a peaceful setting.

The framing narratives described in previous chapters stress that the supposedly disunited Muslim umma is in dire need of direction and authority. They furthermore state that the Muslims need to be

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305 They are listed as the following: “Upholding and spreading the religion, defending the homeland, fortifying the fronts, preparing the armies, implementing the hudud, and enforcing the people's adherence to shar'i rulings.”
306 See, for example, Dabiq, Issue 7: 21; Dabiq, Issue 8: 16.
307 The video series was titled “Messages from the Land of Fierce Battles” (rasayil min ard al-malahim) and was released between August of 2013 and March of 2014. A contemporary video series released by al-Itisam Media occasionally employed a similar structure, and was titled “Windows Upon the Land of Fierce Battles” (nawafidh ala ard al-malahim).
308 Al-Baghdadi was not armed while delivering his sermon in Mosul, but weapons were nevertheless present in the mosque at the time. As al-Baghdadi is kneeling down to pray, the camera is placed in a position so that viewers can clearly see a row of Kalashnikov rifles that are leaning onto the stairs leading up to the pulpit. In other words, the showcasing of these rifles can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of “the aiding sword” that has enabled for the IS Caliph's public sermon and prayer in an arguably prominent mosque.
strong if they want to counteract the suffering imposed on them by the various enemies of Islam. This is apparently interpreted in what seems to be largely military and political terms, and official IS propaganda presents the movement as a uniquely capable performer of militant jihad. Furthermore, the movement's implementation of Islamic law is often highlighted for ways in which “the aiding sword” is used as part of that effort (i.e. the destruction of idols, the execution of transgressors, and so on). In other words, references to “the aiding sword” often serve as symbolic reminders of the movement's abilities as a purifying and punishing agent. Official movement propaganda argues that these qualities of Islam have been forgotten and/or neglected by the contemporary umma, and that this may explain why its religious practices and overall morality have become corrupted. In this sense, it can be argued that the movement's propagandists references the supposed apathy and hypocrisy of contemporary Muslims as an argument for its own legitimacy. Presenting their own movement as one that is sincerely striving towards the re-establishment of Muslim authority (to be followed by the unification of the umma), the highlighting of its manhaj – which focuses on violent acts of punishment and purification – is used to reinforce a sense of the movement's vigorous nature. Its raison d'être is thereby clarified, and the overall relevance of its violent activities is highlighted.

By utilising the wide-ranging respect associated with ibn Taymiyyah, IS propagandists use his formulation on “book” and “sword” as an argument for the fundamental importance of supposedly just violence, political authority, and the forceful measures that result from their combination. By supposedly reviving the neglected principle of “the aiding sword”, official IS propagandists argue that their movement is able to support the religion/book in a way that has not been seen for a long time. Presented as uniquely aware of Islam's “foundation”, and far ahead in terms of its practical implementation, the movement is allegedly the most legitimate Islamic authority of its time, and thereby the only one worthy of carrying on the legacy of the Caliphate and prophetic methodology.

4.3. Conclusions

It can certainly be argued that Upon the Prophetic Methodology represents a significant move away from the largely explanatory way in which previously described releases argued for the legitimacy of the IS movement. Often appearing as staged (or, at least, arranged), these other videos featured men who calmly delivered statements wherein the current state of the umma was lamented upon, the IS movement was presented as an overall remedy, and motivational appeals to things like faith and responsibility were formulated. Upon the Prophetic Methodology, however, represents an aggressive attack on the senses and sensibilities of any viewer. It expects the sympathetic viewer to have an accepting or even appreciative attitude towards mass murder, and seemingly serves the purpose of both legitimising extreme violence (as an expression of one's “disowning” of disbelief) and of formulating a motivational appeal for its further application. Furthermore, it is apparently keen on not showing any staged footage. The speech delivered by Turki al-Binali is arguably the only apparent exception, as the rest of the scenes constitute footage that depict various actual events. Rather than being told what the IS movement is about, viewers are shown what it actually does. In other words, the video is a violent demonstration of the IS Caliphate's manhaj.

The al-Furqan Foundation uses its own authority among movement sympathisers to argue for a supposedly credible connection between the activities of the IS movement and what it regards as the prophetic methodology. Above, I discussed one aspect of the way in which official IS propaganda often argues for the movement's supposed authority (as the “aiding sword” of Islam), and the conclusions drawn there can certainly be related to the way in which the movement's conduct is portrayed in Upon the Prophetic Methodology. The video serves as a reminder of the supposedly violent and uncompromising aspects of Islam, and perhaps also as a confrontational argument

309 Here, I am merely speaking about the particular interpretation of the religious tradition that is advocated by the IS
about the supposedly true nature of both jihad and *al-wala wa al-bará*. Its insistence on depicting acts of violence echoes the previously discussed theme of *sincerity*. Official movement propaganda has elsewhere argued that contemporary Muslims are hypocritical for having abandoned the religious obligations of jihad, and that this is connected to their feeble-minded submission to the enemies of God. By showcasing the violent activities of their own movement, the producers at al-Furqan are apparently arguing that the IS Caliphate represents a sincere and defiant attempt at reviving the concept of jihad, at purifying Muslim societies, and at basing an Islamic state upon the supposedly fundamental principle of “a book that guides and a sword that aides”. The way in which concepts like “Caliphate” and “prophetic methodology” are invoked in this context suggest that they are being utilised as part of an authoritative argument that can be describes as both “bold” and “sincere”. The depicted violence is framed as properly sanctioned acts of *purification* and *punishment*, and apparently regarded as extensions of the just and necessary application of “the aiding sword”.

The violent acts depicted in *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* (whether the things targeted are human beings or buildings) can all be described as preconditioned by the declaration of *takfīr*, as the ones who are targeted have to be properly framed as disbelievers. In other words, we are witnessing the practical aspects of a certain form of *takfīr*, and the arguments for its righteousness are largely based on the *authority* of the IS Caliphate and its particular interpretation of the prophetic methodology. As was noted above, the issue of *takfīr* can be described as controversial. It was also noted that the IS movement has become notorious for what has been described as a particularly wide, inclusive, and extreme application of *takfīr*, and that this has been the case during most of its existence. It can certainly be argued that the declaration of an IS Caliphate partly serves the purpose of strengthening the credibility of the movement's proclamations of *takfīr*. As a Caliphate, and therefore an Islamic authority in itself, the movement and its leaders have given themselves additional interpretative leeway, since they may now declare even more of their perceived enemies as disbelievers (given that those are opposing what is supposed to be the central authority of contemporary Islam).

There are multiple levels at which the content of *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* can be related to the various framing narratives and thematic patterns described above. I have already touched upon the way in which it can be interpreted as a demonstration of *sincerity*, given that it features apparently genuine depictions of actual events – not to mention the fact that it does not shy away from depicting things that can be described as extreme, controversial, or gruesome. The scenes from the massacre, in particular, represent a defiantly sincere statement that proudly recognises the various acts committed in the name of the movement. The notion of *defiance* is reinforced by the possibly predicted reactions of outrage that the footage spawned among non-sympathetic populations around the world. The video, as a whole, represents a virtual dismissal of all challenging authority and codes of conduct. By depicting obvious war crimes in a celebratory and uncensored way, al-Furqan's producers clearly and defiantly stated that the IS movement operates according to rules that are dramatically different from those associated with, for example, the Geneva convention or any other international counterparts. Rather, they consciously and defiantly placed the IS Caliphate above all of those codes and rules, and thereby highlighted its way of choosing to act in its own way. Its sense of “morality” is hereby presented as different from that nominally recognised by the so-called international community, so that its Caliphate can be framed as independent, outspoken, and defiant. This defiant attitude was perhaps not only directed at the international community, but framed as a challenge to other Sunni Muslim authorities as well. The IS Caliphate is hereby marking the fact that it is operating under its own rules, that it has become its own sovereign, and that no other worldly entity is in a position to override or nullify its decisions.

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310 As opposed to, say, “humble” or “cautious”. The al-Furqan Foundation is literally telling us that “*this is the prophetic methodology, and we know what the prophetic methodology is*”.

311 Putting aside its own insistence on the importance of God's rule.
Beyond the interlinked themes of sincerity and defiance, the way in which *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* presents itself as an authoritative argument may perhaps serve the purpose of fulfilling some of the remedial promises made in previously described releases. As part of these, it was argued that the current sufferings of the Muslim *umma* are partially the result of its lack of common authority and sense of direction. Al-Furqan aggressively attempts to fulfil the role of an authority on Islam, and thereby presents itself and the movement it represents as both ambitious and anxious at facilitating change. For sympathetic viewers, the structure of the argument can possibly be viewed as inspirational, and as proof of the sincerity of official IS statements and aspirations. The confrontational and authoritative character of the video's formulation can also be described as constituting an *act* in itself, in the sense that it represents an apparent attempt at fulfilling promises about re-institutionalising what is regarded as the prophetic legacy. Furthermore, the destruction of idols and the punishment of transgressor represent illustrations of the way in which the movement is working towards the actual enforcement of Islam and *al-wala wa al-bara*. Such enforcement represent yet another aspect of the religion that the diagnostic narrative described as all but forgotten. Thanks to the IS Caliphate's aiding sword, an era characterised by ways in which “good becomes evil and evil becomes good” will finally come to an end.

We are apparently dealing with a propaganda release that both depicts, discusses, and itself represents a number of controversial and defiant acts. It therefore seems natural to also analyse it with the help of previously formulated ideas on motivational framing. The video is perhaps motivational in the sense that it represents proof of the pervading sincerity and defiant character of the IS Caliphate. In this sense, it is probably meant to inspire individual movement sympathisers and participants, and apparently serves the purpose of proving that this new Caliphate is in no way characterised by hypocritical abstention or uncertainty. Furthermore, the insistence on a particular sectarian enemy (Iraq's Shiite community) helps concretise the movement's struggle. The IS movement originated in Iraq, is probably still largely made up of Iraqi members, and is deeply engaged in the various conflicts that still characterise much of Iraqi society. It can perhaps be assumed that Iraqi members of the movement (including some of its leaders and propagandists) are keen on motivating foreign recruits into becoming deeply engaged in the largely local conflicts of Iraq, and that the video's emphasis of that particular theatre of operations serves such a motivational purpose.

In other words, the IS propaganda campaign apparently seeks to attract a wide and varied audience through grand appeals to international notions like “Islamic authority” and “Muslim unity”, and thereafter uses such formulations as part of attempt at arguing for the IS movement's own authority. Addressing people who recognise this authority, it uses these grand formulations as part of an attempt at motivating a deep immersion into what can be described as largely localised conflicts. North Africans, Europeans, etc. may be attracted by internationalist ideas that resonate as potential solutions to problems that they themselves have experienced, yet end up fighting and dying in cities far from their homelands. Remarkably, many of these international recruits apparently become capable of killing people whom they might have had no previous – direct or practical – connection to. Above, it was argued that official IS media is dynamic in the way that it apparently recognises and addresses an apparently quite wide variety of interests and urges. While this is arguably the case, it should also be noted that IS media simultaneously attempts to lead those it attracts towards a *certain point*. No matter their initial or underlying motivations, they are expected to become fully capable of performing a certain set of prescribed *acts*.

The credibility of supposed links between the different recognised interests and the acts prescribed depend on the credibility of the IS movement's interpretative authority. Once established, such authority is used as part of an attempt at legitimising and motivating engagement with a quite specific and largely localised program of action. The suffering of Iraq and Syria's (Sunni) Muslims is turned into the *representation* of a world-wide problem, and people from around the world are
encouraged to imagine that their participation in the process of avenging the wounded dignity of these specific communities will feed into the overall strengthening of the wider umma. Arguably the product of a highly inter-connected and globalised world, transnational empathy and an imagined convergence of interests feed into and reinforce the variously dynamic narratives presented by the IS movement's propagandists. At some level, then, we may imagine this entire phenomenon as the successful, political exploitation of imagined international affinity. An originally Iraqi rebel movement is appealing to a certain set of established tropes lifted out of pan-Islamic discourse, and successfully uses these to recruit non-Iraqis and immerse them into the context of its own local and specifically sectarian conflicts. Hence, the destruction of an Iraqi mosque may credibly be turned into an act aimed at “defending Islam”.

In the next chapter, I will relate the above discussed framing narratives to a number of more widely felt and discussed notions. Given that readers have by now hopefully become properly acquainted with the themes and narratives presented in the above analysed media releases, I believe it is time to examine if they can somehow be related to anything akin to what Jacques Ellul called “the sentiments and opinions, the current tendencies and the stereotypes among the public [the propagandist] is trying to reach” 312 In other words, I will try to make additional sense of the ways in which IS propagandists seek to present their movement as internationally relevant.

312 Ellul 1973: 34.
5. Surveying the empirical credibility of official IS narratives

The above has been an attempt at understanding ways in which official IS propaganda uses recurring themes and relate them to each other as part of an arguably coherent narrative of meaning. The propaganda videos released during the summer of 2014 were primarily focused on arguing for the need of proclaiming an IS-led Caliphate, attest to the credibility of the IS movement's claim to this title, and on encouraging deeper engagement with the movement among its distant sympathisers. These were the apparent aims of the propaganda produced at that time, and this particular study has been focused on identifying various framing narratives that were used to strengthen these arguments. In short, I have tried to identify ways in which the studied material argues for the IS movement as relevant, significant, and credible.

Using Robert Benford and David Snow's ideas on the so-called three core framing tasks as a clarifying template, I have argued that the various releases present an overarching narrative wherein the IS Caliphate is presented as a potential remedy for the suffering experienced by Muslims around the world. The analysed media argues that the IS movement is a reviver of supposedly forgotten Islamic institutions and principles (such as properly enforced sharia, militant jihad, and pan-Islamic authority), and that it is largely successful in its various endeavours. Throughout this narrative, as a pervasive theme that infuses it with a sense of seemingly profound meaning, the movement is presented as defiantly standing by its principles (presented as those of “the prophetic methodology” itself), no matter the blame and hatred of its various detractors. Rather than anxious about the judgement of others, the IS Caliphate is presented as intently focused on the supposedly sincere implementation of “true” Islam, and thereby represents the violent and vigorous antithesis of hypocritical abstention. Hence, a theme describable with terms like sincerity, authenticity, and truthfulness plays an apparently fundamental role in the overall narrative.

At this point, I regard it as appropriate to reconnect to some of the above described ideas of Jacques Ellul. Arguing that propaganda cannot operate successfully in a discursive vacuum, Ellul concludes that propagandists depend on the successful employment of narratives, themes, and symbols that are already to some extent established among a targeted population.\(^{313}\) Simply put – messages have to be made relevant for those people that the propagandist want to inspire into carrying out certain actions. Benford and Snow present similar ideas as part of their theories on how successful framing resonates among audiences.\(^{314}\) Beyond the relative importance of “cultural resonance” (i.e. whether or not the referenced symbols are culturally familiar and credible), they highlight such things as the consistency of the presented frames, and the credibility of frame articulators. Interestingly, they also highlight the importance of what they call empirical credibility. In short, this entails that a framing narrative is empirically credible if it can explain things that people are subjectively experiencing.

Given the extreme nature of acts depicted and encouraged in the above analysed material, the question of empirical credibility is quite interesting in this context. In what ways does the sectarian massacres of Iraqi guerrillas resonate with things experienced by people from other parts of the world? The IS propagandists’ appeals to the “empirical” are done through framing that emphasises various macro-narratives (e.g. “Islam versus falsehood”), and utilises such wider notions as part of attempts at connecting otherwise ambivalently related issues to each other. This has already been touched upon above, but will here be related to a number of notions and ideas that have been highlighted in contexts beyond that of the immediate IS movement. In other words, the following is

\(^{313}\) Ellul 1973: 33-37.

\(^{314}\) Benford & Snow 2000: 619-622.
an attempt at presenting a sort of contextualising discussion on the various ideal and material interests addressed by the above analysed material. In short, it is an attempt at examining the empirical credibility of official IS narratives. Can its various formulations about the umma's suffering and the remedial qualities of, for example, jihad be regarded as credible beyond the community of its open sympathisers? Are they, in any way, comparable to narratives and themes that have been highlighted by other actors?

Finally, I want to stress that the discussion presented in this chapter should be regarded as a sort of surveying exercise, as I lack the time and space required for a full explanation of these undoubtedly very complex phenomena and dynamics. Rather than an attempt at truly explaining ways in which different interests feed into the attraction of official IS narratives, I will highlight a number of points at which there appear to exist some form of thematic convergence. In this sense, the following discussion can be read as an attempt at formulating questions for potential future research, and thereby evaluate the perhaps wider implications and analytical potential of conclusions drawn from my own analyses. Elaborating on conclusions drawn from the discussions presented in this chapter, such concerns will be explicitly addressed in the concluding chapter that follows after this one.

5.1. Diagnosing the state of the Muslim umma

The following discussion is focused on a number of thematic narratives which can be described as resonating with the way in which the three core framing tasks are addressed by official IS propaganda. I will also argue that IS propagandists are exploiting an apparent urge for international political engagement, and that they in the sense often relate their own movement's struggle to a number of transnational “Muslim causes”. As a result, the localised and specifically sectarian programs of the movement are highlighted for their supposedly wider relevance.

The aim here is not so much on detailing the genealogy of the official IS narrative. That is, I am not arguing that the presented ideas have necessarily contributed to the movement's development or otherwise made it possible. As was stated above, I merely want to demonstrate that some of the basic themes utilised as part of IS narratives are accepted and propagated well beyond the movement itself. For this reason, the same themes and narratives can be used to argue for other and sometimes dramatically different ideas and methods. In other words, the following is not a list of ideas that have contributed to the development of the IS movement, but rather one that lists notions that are used by IS propagandists as part of their apparent attempts at reinforcing the impression of their own movement's wider relevance. Narratives detailing such things as the humiliation and suffering of Muslims, the problems of hypocrisy, and the need for pan-Islamic authority and/or unity can all be described as related to a much wider discourse, and therefore as ideas held by large groups that share few (if any) of the more specific ideas propagated by the IS movement.

5.1.1. Imagining a transnational umma

Shibley Telhami's book The World Through Arab Eyes (2013) is an ambitious attempt at surveying public opinion in a number Arab countries. Relating some of his conclusions to the so-called Arab Spring phenomenon, he states the following:

But as much as these chants were a celebration of newfound power and hope for a new era of freedom from autocratic rule, they also say much about the causes of the Arab uprisings and still more about how Arabs define themselves. As Arab demonstrators everywhere made abundantly clear, the uprisings were in the first place about karamah, or dignity, and about ending a pervasive sense of humiliation. The dignity

315 “Muslim causes” is here understood in the same broad sense as when used in Wiktorowicz 2004: 2-3.
they hoped to restore was not simply in the relationship between rulers and ruled, but also in the relationship between their nations and the outside world. Those two relationships cannot be easily separated, because many Arabs saw their repressive rulers as subcontractors to Western masters.  

During the course of his book, Telhami argues that this seemingly regional convergence of priorities and world-views can be related to the strengthening of various transnational identities, which in turn have been reinforced by the advent and increasingly wide accessibility of various forms of international media. These developments have furthermore been amplified by the nature of various political events and developments reported on and experienced during the decade of 2000-2010. Often dramatic and violent in nature, they have helped galvanise public opinion and reinforce already existing narratives about the victimisation of Muslims:

In fact, the history of the decade [2000-2010] tells the story of Arabs rallying behind common aspirations regardless of the particular media outlet they watch. In a region where fear of foreign domination and anger with Israel have been the dominant forces affecting collective political consciousness, the decade was full of galvanizing and destructive events. It started with an American tragedy [the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks] that increased tensions between the West and Muslim-majority countries, and moved from one destructive war to another. All the while, unelected Arab rulers at best seemed inept and helpless, and at worst were regarded as collaborators with the public's enemies.

It should be noted that the current ease with which international media can be accessed enables for more people being affected by reports and images transmitted out of various wars and crises. At the same time, the advent and subsequent strengthening of various Arabic-language media networks (such as the well-financed and highly influential Qatari network of al-Jazeera) has enabled for unflinchingly critical reporting on Western and Israeli policies, as well as for the uncensored depiction of their various effects. A passing note in Scott Atran's book Talking to the Enemy (2011) may be used to illustrate this point:

*Al Jazeera* was reporting on Iraq. The camera fixed on a man, his eyes wild, his distorted mouth silently screaming, his legs running frantically with no direction, a little girl in his arms, blood and brains streaming from her head. It was not the Fox or CNN video game of the Iraq war, […].

This scene is witnessed on a television located inside a Moroccan café, and serves as the backdrop of a discussion with a local man who attests that “if George Bush were here in front of my son, I would shoot him and gladly die”, for “[h]ow can we just sit and watch the children at gunpoint with their hands in the air, terrified?”. He has obviously, then, been somehow influenced by the media’s images and reports. The last decade has, indeed, seen its fair share of such images, all of which may have contributed to the marked concretisation of the suffering of others. Beyond the countless anonymous victims of various wars, the world got to know Muhammad al-Dura, a twelve-year old Palestinian boy, through a graphic video which depicted his violent death (apparently at the hands of Israeli soldiers). And the horrific pictures smuggled out of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq (together with those depicting kneeling and chained prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp) may perhaps be viewed as virtual incarnations of various of ideas on Western arrogance and Muslim humiliation.

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316 Telhami 2013: 13.
317 Telhami 2013: 17-35.
318 Telhami 2013: 37-56.
319 Telhami 2013: 57-94.
320 Telhami 2013: 34-35.
322 Ibid.
323 Scott Atran states that when he “asked detainees in Saudi Arabia who had volunteered for Iraq why they had, some mentioned stories of women raped, the killing of innocents, and desecration of the Koran; all mentioned Abu Ghraib” – Atran 2011: 115. Furthermore, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s network beheaded American prisoner Nick Berg in May 2004, the statement delivered in the accompanying video explicitly names revenge for the abuse at Abu Ghraib as a motive. See Witaker & Harding 2004.
Telhami highlights ways in which, as an overall trend, the inclusive identity marker of “Muslim” has transcended identities related to ethnicity and nationality in Arab societies. Atran talks about a largely similar development, yet in a much broader sense, and links it to the consumption of international media. In his view, “religion and politics are becoming increasingly detached from their cultures of origin, not so much because of the movement of peoples (only about 3% of the world's population migrates), but through the worldwide traffic of media-friendly information and ideas.” In this sense, the global exchange of ideas contributes to the development of internationalist identities, which in turn may enable for an increased sense of affinity with people who live well beyond the borders of one's own country. The development of a sort of “Muslim consciousness”, often connected to ideas about a shared umma, may be viewed as the expression of one such notion of affinity. Given such imagined fellowship, notions of transnational solidarity may become reinforced. Related to this latter point, Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori posit the following:

[A reason] why the transnational umma may be said to have acquired some substance is that Muslims are concerned with a number of “Muslim” issues. We do not mean to imply that these issues are Muslim in the sense that everyone understands them in a uniform of doctrinally defined way. Rather, they are Muslim in the sense that they take on symbolic currency and often play a part in Muslim politics. Examples of such issues include Afghanistan, Palestine, the Rushdie affair, and Bosnia. In each, transnational concern is aroused because of the shared perception that Muslims and Islam are under attack and require defense.

Related to this development, Faisal Devji has discussed a number of recent examples of Muslim mobilisation in response to insulting depiction of the Prophet Muhammad. He argues that these protests “brought into being a hyper-modern global community whose connections occur by way of mass media alone”, and that “these men and women communicated with each other only indirectly, neither by plan nor organisation, but through the media itself”. The accessibility of international media (together with the existence of a global language in the form of English) thus enabled for the rapid, large-scale, and transnational mobilisation around a common “Muslim issue”. Through visual news reports that showed how people from around the world protested simultaneously against the same thing, the ideal of a transnational Muslim umma was turned into something palpable and, indeed, real. The potential power and impact of “Muslim politics” can now, and increasingly so, be imagined as largely realistic, and serious appeals to “the umma” may thus be viewed as far from unreasonable or delusional. The empirical credibility of variously pan-Islamic narratives have thereby been reinforced.

Eickelman & Piscatori detail ways in which the issues of “Palestine” and “Bosnia” have acquired symbolic significance in variously distant societies, and argue that the use of these symbolic may serve a number of different purposes – such as, for example, of presenting indirect and implicit critiques of the politics of one's own society. In an arguably comparable situation, Quintan Wiktorowicz details how the highlighting of various “Muslim issues” are used as part of attempts at recruiting new members to the British al-Muhajiroun movement:

[… activities usually emphasize national and international issues likely to attract interest from a broad

325 Atran 2011: 40.
326 The here mentioned concept of Muslim politics is used by Eickelman and Piscatori to highlight how the notion of “Islam”, together with variously related discourses, may be used as a form of symbolic currency in different political contexts.
327 Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) is a British author whose 1988 book The Satanic Verses caused substantial controversy among Muslim communities for its supposedly blasphemous content.
328 Eickelman & Piscatori 1996: 146.
spectrum of Muslims, rather than narrow subjects that matter only to specific communities.
Although the topics range, a large number address “the oppression” of Muslims. […] The most common topics were U.S. aggression (especially toward Iraq) and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. […] The movement uses language, phrasing, and pictures on the advertisements that suggest genocide against Muslims, a technique intended to prompt emotional responses and enhance the prospects that a reader will attend the events. This appeal to concerns about “oppression” likely plays to a broad cross section of the [British] Muslim community. In the control survey [i.e. that made up of respondents not a part of the movement itself], for example, 93.9 percent indicated that the “oppression of Muslims” is a very important issue to address.331

Victor Jeleniewski Seidler has also written about the influence of such notions among young British Muslims:

A younger generation of Muslims have learned to identify with the suffering of Muslims at the hands of the West' in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya and Kashmir. They have learned to identify across the boundaries of the nation state that no longer define the shape of their care and concern.332

Both Wiktorowicz and Seidler argue that the attraction of transnational identities and issues may be reinforced by feelings of rootlessness and cultural alienation. According Seidler, such notions may become especially strong among young immigrants, who may experience a sort of double alienation in relation to the culture of both their own parents and to that of wider society. Their own identity is often a sort of ambivalent mix of both of these cultures. In this context, the consumption of certain media may serve the purpose of reinforcing a sense of clarity and purpose, as “[w]ith access to global media, they learn to create transnational virtual spaces in which they can communicate and find resonance with their own lives and a sense of belonging that can easily transgress boundaries of geography”.333 The highlighting of variously “Muslim” issues may certainly serve a purpose as part of such identification. Wiktorowicz's discussion on al-Muhajiroun activism describe a comparable situation:

For many of those who became al-Muhajiroun activists, cognitive openings were produced by a sense of cultural alienation and exclusion. In the United Kingdom, many Muslims do not feel accepted by the majority society. While growing up in a British system that preaches tolerance and multiculturalism, they experience both racial and religious discrimination (most Muslims are from ethnic minorities). At the same time, they do not identify with their parents' generation, which tends to practice a nonintellectual form of Islam in ethnic enclave communities separated from the broader British society. Trapped between two worlds, these young Muslims lack a sense of belonging and community. For some, this creates openness to new identities, communities, and ideologies. […]
Al-Muhajiroun works to foster cognitive openings through outreach activism intended to generate a sense of crisis. This is accomplished through collective action like protests and propagation stalls that focus in the “oppression of Muslims” in places like Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya. The movement uses graphic images and rhetoric to highlight the various “genocides” being perpetrated against Muslims worldwide.334

To summarise the above, the thing I have attempted to highlight is the overall strengthening of notions of a global Muslim community. Appeals to the idea of a transnational umma may certainly be used as a mobilising resource by a social movement, as its efforts can thereby be framed as especially significant. Large-scale social mobilisation around “Muslim issues” during the last few decades have likely strengthened this sense of fellowship, and have possibly reinforced beliefs in the efficacy of transnational engagement. While the historical background of this development is undoubtedly complex, it can certainly be described as having been affected by at least two major developments. The first is the increasingly wide accessibility of various communicative media, which in turn was made possible by such things as increased literacy and various

332 Seidler 2007: 106.
333 Seidler 2007: 96.
technical/structural developments. The second is the rise and impact of global Western imperialism, which may have reinforced a sense of affinity between peoples who would otherwise perhaps not have been able to or interested in identifying their supposedly common interests. It should here be noted that practically every “Muslim” country, from Morocco in the West and the Philippines in the East, has experienced some form of Western aggression, occupation, or political meddling in its internal affairs during the last two centuries. It is therefore possible that the notion of common Muslim affinity is (in some contexts, at least) reinforced by a commonly held understanding of the problems posed by, for example, the West's political hegemony.

It should here be noted that perceptions about having been wronged are not necessarily irrational or entirely “imagined”. Palestine is indeed occupied, Bosnian Muslims were indeed mass-murdered at Srebrenica, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died as a result of sanctions and warfare, the Burmese Rohingyas are being persecuted – and so on. Whether one attributes these various issues to some overarching problem or not, the impulse to do so is far from insensible and ridiculous. The empirical credibility of a narrative about an Islamic umma that it under attack has been continuously reinforced by events unfolding throughout much of the last century. And in a globalised world, wherein world-views are increasingly being informed by means of transnational communication, the willingness of some people to identify and explain problems through the use of variously global macro-narratives is perhaps natural. In other words, the empirical credibility of the world as a connected whole has also been reinforced. As argued by authors like Atran, Seidler, Telhami, and Devji, large numbers of people are constructing parts of their identities and world-views with the help of the international media they consume. Visual images transmitted from the other side of the planet (or from outside of its atmosphere, for that matter) may seem just as real as anything experienced on one's own street, and cultural affinity may hence be imagined in an indefinite number of ways.

Given the above, it is indeed possible for an originally Iraqi guerrilla movement to mediate its purpose in plausibly international terms. Its propagandists can pick and choose from a seemingly vast array of transnational issues, and customise the framing of these in ways that serve the specific purposes of their own movement. The above described notion of a transnational Muslim umma is one such issue addressed by and incorporated into the narratives of official IS media. In more specific terms, IS propagandists focus extensively on the issue of Muslim suffering worldwide, and argue that those afflicted by it are in dire need of committed warriors able to champion their rights and violently confront their tormentors. Thus utilising the empirical credibility of diagnostic narratives about Muslim suffering and humiliation, they highlight the significance of the IS Caliphate's supposedly vigorous and confrontational attitude towards Islam and jihad – symbolised by such acts as the “breaking” of imperialist borders. The prognostic and motivational aspects of its official messaging are hereby reinforced, as sympathisers are encouraged to imagine the IS Caliphate as an attempt at solving the various problems experienced by the wider umma.

5.1.2. A militant narrative: On the necessity of jihad, and the hypocrisy of its abstainers

As above presented notions about a truly interconnected umma, the efficacy of transnational engagement, and the overall suffering of Muslim communities worldwide have been reinforced with empirical credibility, related notions about the need for militant confrontation have also been strengthened. Reinforcing the plausibility of such calls to action, the potential of militant mobilisation was demonstrated by the fact that tens of thousands of Muslims from around the world travelled to war-torn Afghanistan in the 1980s. There, they fought together with local rebel

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335 It can furthermore be argued that the phenomenon of “global Western imperialism” represents a structural development which has reinforced the overall globalised nature of our current world.

336 Roy 2005: 297. For examples of similar, but much smaller, movements in support of Muslims in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir, see Roy 2004: 312-315. It should be noted that the recent (2011-) wave of international volunteers in
groups who eventually defeated a Communist regime supported by the Soviet Union's powerful military. Thereby, they (supposedly) contributed to the eventual collapse of that so-called super power. For some, this series of events contributed to the empirical credibility of far-reaching militant programs aimed at counteracting and defeating the aggressive powers framed as responsible for the suffering and humiliation experienced by the Muslim umma.\footnote{Cook 2005: 128-131; Lawrence 2005: 108-109; Roy 2004: 292-302, E.g. Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2016: 14.}

In what follows, I will discuss some aspects of an overall logic presented within a number of statements delivered by various Muslim militant spokesmen during roughly the last two decades. I will try to illustrate that ideas about an ongoing global jihad is by now an apparently established and somewhat credible militant narrative. This narrative contains recurring tropes whose use often transcend the limits of specific organisations, and appear as somewhat coherent over time. The intended purpose is to highlight an apparent resemblance between rationales presented by these men and those used as part of the IS movement's official framing narratives. In short, I want readers to appreciate how the apparent development of a sort of globalist discourse on jihad is utilised as part of efforts at reinforcing notions about the IS movement's international relevance. As such, it represents yet another example of a “Muslim issue” that has become a part of the IS propagandists' symbolic toolbox. As they relate the IS Caliphate to various aspects of this supposedly global issue, the various specific and local concerns of the IS movement is thereby framed as internationally relevant. One may, as has often been done before,\footnote{Ayman al-Zawahiri (b. 1951) is an Egyptian militant who was a close accomplice of Usama bin Ladin (1957-2011) and has been a prominent spokesman of the al-Qaida movement. After bin Ladin's death in 2011, al-Zawahiri became the new leader of al-Qaida.} refer to this as part of an attempt at presenting the IS Caliphate as the currently most well-organised incarnation of an ongoing global jihad aimed at defending Islam and attacking its various enemies.

In December of 2006, militant spokesman Ayman al-Zawahiri delivered the following message, which is worth quoting at length:\footnote{Quoted in Devji 2008: 37.}

O my Muslim Ummah, you must choose between two choices: the first is to live in the margins of the New World Order and international law and under the control of the enemies of Islam, dishonoured, humiliated, plundered and occupied, with them meddling in your beliefs and true religion, sticking their noses in all your domestic and foreign affairs, and you living the life of a vassal, lowly disgraced and defiled.

And the second choice is that you rely on your Lord, renew your Tawheed (worship of the one God), rise up with your true faith, follow the revealed religion of Allah, and stand with it in the face of arrogant criminals, as your truthful and trustworthy Prophet (peace be upon him), his righteous companions, and his purified family (Allah was pleased with them all) stood in the face of the world, inviting, giving the good news, warning and performing Jihad in order that Allah's word be made the highest and the word of the infidels the lowest. And there is no third choice.\footnote{Ibid.}

Readers will hopefully note the various similarities between the basic narrative presented by al-Zawahiri and some of those already discussed as part of the content analysis above. For now, however, it suffices to highlight al-Zawahiri's insistence on the key importance of jihad. It is framed as an essential part of the Muslim umma's ability to “stand with” its religion. There is no other path away from dishonour and humiliation, for “[t]he Crusaders and Jews will only be pleased with the Muslim Ummah if it is satisfied with vassalage, humiliation and repression”.\footnote{Quoted in Devji 2008: 37.} This belief in confrontational jihad as the only, plausible alternative is reinforced by the way in which al-Zawahiri identifies, for example, the United Nations and the wider international community as a mere tool of
the oppressors:

My dear brothers: The facts of international politics which they talk about stem from what they term as international legitimacy, the United Nations, and secular states which are the fruits of the malicious Sykes-Picot Agreement. All these systems have been imposed on the Muslims and the Muslim nation following the fall of the Caliphate state to force it to submit to systems and organizations that violate the Islamic law and to ensure the fragmentation of the Islamic nation. This will ultimately leave the Islamic nation subordinate, humiliated, and pillaged. The time has come for us to destroy these idols and false gods that they forced us to worship instead of Allah.  

While certainly conspiratorial in nature, al-Zawahiri's statement may still be regarded as empirically credible by some. The UN Security Council is, indeed, de facto ruled by a small group of non-Muslim governments, and the organisation's overarching framework is largely informed by Western ideas on nation-state governance. Furthermore, notions about the UN's abilities to protect suffering peoples have possibly been undermined by numerous events that have transpired since its founding. To name but a few of the here relevant examples: Its peacekeepers seemed entirely unable to protect the people of Srebrenica in 1995, the Israeli settlement policy have been able to continue unhindered for decades in spite of the international community's almost unilateral condemnation, and the American military was able to invade and occupy Iraq without the United Nations' approval. For some, these developments may indeed reinforce ideas on the hopelessly toothless nature of the UN – if not contribute to feelings about its use as a mere tool of the great powers in its Security Council. For Usama bin Ladin, Muslims who rely on and trust in the protection of the United Nations do so out of either ignorance of hypocrisy:

Those who refer our [i.e. the umma's] tragedies to the United Nations, and want us to resolve them through it, are hypocrites who are trying to deceive God and His Prophet and those who believe. Aren't our tragedies actually a result of the United Nation's actions? Who issued the decision to partition Palestine in 1947 and gave Islamic lands to the Jews? It was the United Nations. Those who maintain that they are the leaders of the Arabs and are still a part of the United Nations are contravening what was revealed to Muhammad. Those who refer to international legitimacy have contravened the legitimacy of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. It is at the hands of this same United Nations that we have suffered so much. No Muslim, nor anyone in his right mind, should appeal to it under any circumstances. It is merely an agent of this crime by which we are massacred daily, and which it does nothing to stop.  

Thus arguing for the lack of alternatives, al-Zawahiri and bin Ladin state that the only credible option available is that of Muslim self-reliance and self-defence. The umma is left to tend for itself, and it is only through the waging of a reciprocal jihad that the sufferings currently experienced by it can be counteracted. Regarding this, al-Zawahiri posits the following:

The materialistic Crusader western civilization knows not the language of ethics and principles but understands the language of punishment and retribution. So, if they taste some of what they are inflicting on our women and children, then they will start giving up their arrogance, stubbornness, and greed and will seek to resolve the problems between them and the Muslims.  

For both of these speakers, however, many of “the Muslims” act as if unaware of the supposed veracity of this militant logic. Most Muslim governments have supposedly turned themselves into mere vassals of the West, and respected scholars have followed their leaders onto this misguided path of religious and political corruption. Hence, in December of 1994, bin Ladin released a statement framed as an open (yet somewhat passive-aggressive) critique of Saudi Arabia's religious establishment. In it, he detailed a number of Saudi government decisions which, according to him, amounted to blatant and shameless crimes against Islam. He lamented upon the fact that all of
these had been legitimised by many of the country's most respected Islamic scholars, and criticised them for having allowed themselves to become the tools of secular rulers. Notably, a pervading theme throughout his message was that of hypocrisy. The accused scholars were not only guilty of having subordinated the word of God and Prophet to that of the Saudi king, but had furthermore demonstrated that they were capable of contradicting their own word. Furthermore, they had undermined the umma's ability to wage jihad – and this at a time during which the need for its application was regarded as particularly important. In face of obvious “Jewish-Crusader” aggression, the religious establishment had simply abstained from recognising the necessity of jihad:

Honorable and righteous scholars, this is the first, the biggest, and the most dangerous Crusader invasion of Saudi Arabia [referring to the stationing of Western troops in that country following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait], and the leaders that some were counting on to defend our umma from aggression appear in fact to be the tools of that same aggression. And many scholars who were supposed to stand up for truth, support their people and motivate our umma towards their duty of preparing for jihad, have forsaken our umma and pandered to the rulers. [...] Honorable and righteous scholars, this is your role. Today is your day. Our Islamic umma is confronting a very grave challenge and being subjected to terrible aggression, and her rulers and many of her scholars have forsaken her. Who will lead and direct her, if not you?346

Bin Ladin's largely conciliatory tone would change in the years that followed after this statement. As his appeal for the Saudi scholars to change their ways was largely ignored, he switched from the method of dialogue to that of militancy. In 1996, following several Saudi attempts to assassinate him, he issued his own declaration of jihad against the US and its allies – defiantly issued without any sort of consideration for the opinions of the scholarly establishment.347 Their supposed feebleness in face of manifest non-Muslim aggression had thus rendered their authority irrelevant, and bin Ladin apparently thought that the umma had reached a critical stage at which the sincere mujahidin were to be regarded as practically the only ones who can be trusted on the matter of jihad. If respected scholars and Muslim governments will not act towards the legitimisation of jihad, others will have to do it in their place – extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary action.

It should here be noted that the issues addressed by bin Ladin were regarded as important by large numbers of people beyond his comparably small clique of militant radicals. The Saudi government's decision to welcome Western troops into the country in 1991 sparked significant controversy,348 and motivated the mobilisation of an apparently large and influential opposition movement.349 Perhaps in combination with an overall feeling about Muslim weakness in face of aggression, such an event served to reinforce ideas on the need for confrontation. The so-called Oslo Accords had been signed at roughly the same time (1993), and were named by bin Ladin as “contracts of surrender to the Jews that were signed by the traitorous and cowardly Arab tyrants”.350 Moreover – in his own declaration of jihad, bin Ladin lists a large number of examples of Muslim suffering, which serves to highlight the supposed gravity of the situation that the umma finds itself in. Palestine is occupied by the Jews, and Arab governments have repeatedly been unable to do anything about this. Muslims in Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir, etc. are helplessly suffering, and no Muslim power is able to protect them. And finally, the Saudi government and its widely respected religious establishment have turned themselves into mere stooges of the West. Given all of these developments, it is indeed possible that bin Ladin's narrative about the necessity of jihad and the hypocrisy of its abstainers had been reinforced with a significant sense of empirical credibility.

The above narrative, as presented by al-Zawahiri and bin Ladin, has since been repeated by an

346 Lawrence 2005: 17.
347 For the full declaration, see Lawrence 2005: 24-30.
348 In simplified terms, this was connected to the fact that Saudi Arabia houses Islam's holiest sites. For some, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Western troops signalled the de facto vassal status of the country, which in turn served to demonstrate the extent of the Muslim umma's supposed weakness and humiliation.
349 For more on these events, see Okruhlik 2004; Wagemakers 2012: 97-146.
indefinite number of other militant spokesmen. Scott Atran details the circumstances surrounding a number of terrorist attacks, and illustrate how all of these were framed as reciprocally “jihadi” responses to perceived non-Muslim aggression.351 Victor Jeleniwoeski Seidler highlights how similar justifications were used to frame the 2005 London bombings.352 While notions about the necessity of jihad represent the seemingly fundamental point, this is in turn easily turned into one about the manifest hypocrisy of anyone who abstains from its alleged duties. The influential militant spokesman Anwar al-Awlaki (1971-2011) has elaborated on this particular subject in a number of his English-language sermons.353 In one of these, he states the following:

There are more and more Muslims who are coming to the conclusion that jihad must be part of our program of revival and change in the Muslim world, that the occupying enemy must be fought and that the tyrants also must be fought. […] Islam is not limited to praying and fasting. Islam is not a passive religion that restricts itself to rituals that are practised on an individual level and “renders onto God what is to God and unto Caeser what is to Caeser”. There are large sections of Muslims who are content with some aspects of the religion. But they have no role, no contribution, and no participation in enjoining good and forbidding evil, in jihad, in Islamic activism to return the umma back to the rule of Allah. There is a common misunderstanding that somehow Islam doesn’t have a say in a lot of what is happening around us. It is sort of separation between church and state. Brothers, when a band of criminals – hypocrites, who are enemies of Allah and his religion – take over the affairs of this umma, and set aside the law of Allah, and replace it with man-made laws. When their armies and their police unleash their forces against Muslims to fulfill the imperialistic objectives of their masters, the Jews and the Christians. When the wealth of the umma is being plundered, and when oppression becomes widespread, do you think Islam has nothing to say about all of this?354

Elaborating on this in another sermon, he states that:

Subhanallah, you can see that it is the battlefield that separates between the mumin [believer] and the munafiq [hypocrite]. In a peaceful situation, you can't know who is munafiq and who is mumin. […] But what separates between the believer and the hypocrite is battlefield. And this occurs again and again. This is where the munafiqin show up. […] They want to take the worldly benefits from Islam, but they refuse to pay the demands of Islam. They want the gains, but they don't want the pains.355

It is perhaps possible that this theme of hypocrisy may be connected to various older Islamic ideas,356 and furthermore that its empirical credibility has been reinforced by developments that followed the 11 September 2001 terror attacks. As the US and its allies responded with the launching of military campaigns that have killed thousands of civilians, its official discourse on the “terrorism” of its opponents has often been ridiculed by militant spokespeople, given its supposed inconsistencies and overall hypocrisy.357 At the same time, we have witnessed the recurring failures of variously non-violent and democratic attempts at facilitating change. The 1990's peace process

353 For more on al-Awlaki, see Meleagrou-Hitchens 2011.
354 State of the Ummah, [online video] 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itXhos7yFhc (accessed 27 January 2017). I have not been able to verify the date of this sermon's original publication, but an archived snapshot of the website www.anwar-alawlaki.com (http://cryptome.org/anwar-alawlaki/09-0302.htm), which featured uploads of his sermons before it was taken down, states that it was delivered in 2009. Anwar al-Awlaki was killed by the US military in 2011.
355 Characteristics of Al-Munafiqun (The Hypocrites) - Imam Anwar Al-Awlaki, [online video] 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0mF6OXRO4o (accessed 26 January 2017). I have not been able to find any information about the original sermon, but the voice in the video's recording is undoubtedly that of al-Awlaki.
356 While I will refrain from drawing hasty conclusions from the Quran itself, it should nevertheless be noted that the figure of the hypocrite (al-munafiq) plays a somewhat prominent part in a number of its chapters (sura) – see the following search for verses containing the word “hypocrite” in an online Quran: https://quran.com/search?p=1&q=hypocrite. For a specific example of a situation analogous to the above described one about the hypocrisy of those who abstain from jihad, see Quran 3:165-175. Given the content of these verses, it is possible that certain interpretations of their meaning may reinforce militant narratives about jihad and hypocrisy with certain form of empirical and religious credibility.
357 See, for example, al-Baghdadi 2014: 4-5; Devji 2008: 81.
over Palestine devolved into a period of intense violence during the early 2000's, which in turn was followed by the unrecognised Hamas victory in the Palestinian legislative election in 2006. Since then, Hamas has used military means to cling on to a piece of independently ruled territory around Gaza, and now remains as a somewhat credible, militant challenger to Israeli power. And while the full nature of the so-called Arab Spring's aftershock may be hard to evaluate at the moment, military coups and crackdowns in places like Egypt and Syria can nevertheless be seen as indicative of the limited effectiveness of non-violent politics. Together, these various developments have possibly contributed to the empirical credibility of the militant narrative presented above. Yet its credibility is not simply a product of the supposed failure of its alternatives, but also that of the arguable successes enjoyed by the global “jihadi” movement since the 1980's. Following the Soviet military's retreat from Afghanistan, its American counterpart was dragged into two unpopular and humiliating wars, whose final results were ambivalent enough to enable for their subsequent framing as “defeats” by, for example, IS propagandists. Through hundreds of videos depicting the destruction of expensive American equipment at the hands of lightly armed guerrillas, a pervading myth about the US military's invincibility was shattered, and America's subsequent economic crisis likely contributed even further to a notion about its power as something surmountable. In a 2007 video message directed at the American people, bin Ladin delivered the following message:

Since the 11th [September 2001], many of America's policies have come under the influence of the Mujahideen, and that is by the grace of Allah, the Most High. And as a result the people discovered the truth about it, its reputation worsened, its prestige was broken globally and it was bled dry economically, [...] Despite America being the greatest economic power and possessing the most powerful and up-to-date military arsenal as well; and despite it spending on this war and its army more than the entire world spends on its armies; and despite it being the major state influencing the policies of the world, as if it has the monopoly of the unjust right of veto; despite all this, 19 young men [referring to the 11 September 2001 hijackers] were able – by the grace of Allah, the Most High – to change the direction of its compass. And in fact, the subject of the Mujahideen has become an inseparable part of the speech of your leader, and the effects and signs of that are not hidden. Whatever the veracity of these claims, it can nevertheless be argued that developments connected to what American governments used to call “The Global War on Terror” have contributed to the empirical credibility of a number of militant narratives. The suffering of Muslims has become more pronounced as a result of images transmitted out of places like Iraq, and guerrilla-style victories against Western militaries can now be framed as something which is actually possible. In an apparent attempt at utilising such sentiments as part of its overall messaging campaign, official IS propaganda has recurrently highlighted the military, economic, and overall psychological weaknesses of the US and its allies. The supposedly low morale of Western soldiers is compared unfavourably to the death-defying bravery of the IS movement's fighters and suicide-bombers. Various later successes of the IS movement (such as its “breaking” of the Sykes-Picot borders) are used to reinforce arguments about the currently triumphant nature of jihadi endeavours. Combined with the recurrent emphasis on the special need for jihad, notions about the feasibility of “victories” akin to those achieved against the “Crusaders” in Iraq are used to highlight the supposed hypocrisy and cowardice of abstainers, and the motivational narrative is thus reinforced with additional push-and pull-factors. As such, IS propagandists are apparently seeking to appropriate a number of fairly wide-spread interpretations of the political developments of recent decades – and, thus, reinforce their own narratives with additional empirical credibility.

In an arguably comparable development, the Israeli military's recurring inability to militarily defeat the Lebanese Hezbollah movement has perhaps reinforced notions about its waning power. Forced to abandon its eighteen-year occupation of Southern Lebanon in 2000, it subsequently launched an apparently failed offensive against Hezbollah in 2006. Most polled Arabs answered that the 2006 Lebanon war had resulted in an Israeli defeat, and large part of them regarded Israel as “weaker than it looks” – Telhami 2013: 90-91.

Devji 2008: 209.

E.g. And No Respite, al-Hayat Media Center, November 2015. This video focuses extensively on the issue of various mental disorders among American combat veterans, and celebrates the exceptionally high suicide/rate among them.
5.1.3. Summary

Above, I have described a number of apparently widely recognised themes/narratives which figure in the various IS propaganda releases analysed in previous chapters. I have focused on issues connected to the “Muslim issues” of umma and jihad, and on how the empirical credibility of narratives focused on these issues have been reinforced by a number of large-scale developments. The umma has apparently manifested its existence in a apparent enough way for it to merit a sort of “recognition” by large numbers of people. Notions about its various sufferings have been strengthened by televised experiences of oppression, aggression, and humiliation – all of which probably feed into and are reinforced by pre-existing histories on non-Muslim imperialism. Partially as a result of such ideas on suffering, the empirical credibility of calls for various forms of jihad have also been reinforced. And as waves of variously “jihadi” movements have been confronted with the military might of their Western, Soviet/Russian, or otherwise non-Muslim enemies, the various narratives on their supposed raison d’être have seemingly achieved new levels in terms of both feasibility and legitimacy.

As part of their attempts at framing their movement as internationally relevant, IS propagandists utilise recurring references to the overall concepts of umma and jihad. Thus, these propagandists feed (indirectly) on the empirical credibility of these notions, and utilise their wide recognition as part of attempts as highlighting the supposed relevance and legitimacy of the IS Caliphate. In ways that have been described in detail above, they argue that the IS Caliphate represents the virtual pinnacle of contemporary efforts at unifying the umma and defending its honour, and that the vigorous and uncompromising character of its activities demonstrate the sincerity of its conviction. Videos like Upon the Prophetic Methodology are apparent attempts at arguing for the IS Caliphate as the virtual antithesis of hypocritical abstention. However, while their appropriation of these widely recognised “Muslim issues” is an important part of their official narratives, they are nevertheless forced to elaborate extensively on several aspects of these wider concepts. To name one example, they have to modify the definition of the concept of umma, so that the pan-Islamic discourse related to it is not presented as at odds with the specifically sectarian nature of their movement's activities. In what follows, I will therefore elaborate in a theme used by official IS propaganda to highlight the specific nature and relevance of the movement's purpose – that of purification.

5.2. The IS movement as purifier

As part of the above analysis of the al-Furqan video Upon the Prophetic Methodology (ala manhaj al-nubuwa), I concluded that the various acts depicted are framed as attempts at purifying Muslim minds and societies. By proclaiming baya, for example, individuals cleanse themselves of any sort of ambivalence or hypocrisy. The idealised martyr represents the pinnacle of such internal purification, as he has apparently distanced himself from any sort of temporal corruption that may inhibit his ability to sacrifice for the greater good. Moreover, the various acts of destructive violence (whether directed at inanimate “idols” or supposedly corrupted human beings) are framed as attempts at weeding out anything that allegedly subverts tawhid, strengthens disbelief, and leads people astray. The IS Caliphate's manhaj is characterised by its use of “the aiding sword” as a violent tool for the disavowal of disbelief. According to IS propagandists, the various problems described above (humiliation, hypocrisy, etc.) cannot be counteracted unless they are preceded by a thorough campaign of cleansing, aimed at setting things straight again and at strengthening the unity of the umma. In a video released by the al-Hayat Media Center in August of 2015, an unnamed English-speaking narrator describes this fundamental mission in the following way:

361 I refer to this martyr as a “he”, since I am, so far, unaware of any depictions of female martyrs in official IS media.
As the winds of time swept their way through Medina, they carried a call that marked the rise of history's most profound legacy. A legacy exemplified by mankind's greatest witness [i.e. the Prophet Muhammad]. Resonating throughout the ages – defined by the guiding book and an aiding sword. Unsheathed, it is the legacy of the prophetic methodology. Shaped by truthfulness, unshakable resolve, and an unyielding harshness towards the kuffar. To purify the earth from the corruption that had tainted it after it had been set in order. 

Obviously laden with symbolic significance, the above statement highlights such things as the movement's supposed adherence to “the legacy of the prophetic methodology”, which is framed as characterised by its use of both book and sword. This methodology is in turn shaped by truthfulness and unshakable resolve – concepts which remind us of a number of recurring themes discussed above. Finally, the IS movement's mission is framed as one characterised by acts of harsh punishment and purification. The world will once again be purified “from the corruption” that has tainted it. The purpose of such purification is clarified in another summary of the movement's legacy and purpose, presented by the same narrator in another al-Hayat video:

In the face of the dark wave of the Crusader force, the historical land of two rivers [i.e. Mesopotamia] bore life to a mission that would transform the political landscape of the world. A mission that would herald the return of the Khilafah, and revive the creed of tawhid. It was the establishment of The Islamic State, nourished by the blood of the truthful mujahidin. To unite the umma on one call, one banner, one leader.

Once again, every sentence is symbolically significant, and the overall statement expresses a number of themes already elaborated on above. The movement's legacy is here explicitly connected to its historical activities in Iraq (and footage depicting Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is here used to illustrate this period), and its mission is framed in terms that clarify some aspects of its specific, political purpose. In this sense, it can be regarded as complementary to the more abstract and timeless macro-narrative presented by the above quoted statement. The mission of purification (i.e. the revival of “the creed of tawhid”) will serve the largely temporal purpose of unification. In other words, it is implied that the umma can never be united or strong unless it is purified of internal corruption. With the help of “the blood of the truthful mujahidin”, the IS Caliphate will keep this purifying mission alive, until there comes a day when the umma is united by common creed and authority.

Purification can thus be regarded as an important aspect of the particular program of change advocated for by official IS propaganda. As a result, the specific attraction of the IS movement's narratives may perhaps be connected to some sort of wider interest in the notion of purity. This notion nevertheless plays an important role as part of the movement's official attempts at highlighting its specific relevance. Moreover, the framing of certain acts as “purifying” may help legitimise otherwise problematic interests. In the following, I will explore two somewhat separate driving-forces which may potentially converge with the movement's overall program of what it calls purification. The purpose is, once again, to argue for ways in which official IS narratives are framed as relevant and related to certain (ideal and material) interests, issues, and so on. My ambition here is not to explain an entire phenomenon connected to this particular theme's potential resonance, but rather to explore some potential avenues for further analysis.

362 The Rise of the Khilafah and the Return of the Golden Dinar, al-Hayat Media Center, August 2015. This video was used to advertise the IS Caliphate's own currency, and contrasted the IS movements economic principles to those of the wider, capitalist, world. Echoing the elsewhere recurring theme of sincerity, the video argued that the US dollar is merely a “fraudulent piece of paper”, which underpins and symbolises the fundamentally unjust and untruthful nature of the global financial system. The official IS currency is a series of minted coins in silver and gold (embellished with stylised calligraphy reading “Caliphate upon the prophetic methodology”), whose intrinsic value supposedly signifies the sincerity of the movement.

363 Flames of War, al-Hayat Media Center, September 2014.
5.2.1. The wish for revenge

We should, once again, remind ourselves about the fact that the IS movement is a multi-layered social phenomenon, and that the attraction of its message may be informed by different things depending on whether, for example, a person is a Sunni Arab Iraqi or a Muslim European. Somehow, the movement's propagandists have been able to frame their message in an inclusive enough way to attract the attention of and facilitate resonance among people of remarkably different backgrounds. While I have been able to distil parts of the prevailing message, an analytical understanding of the various themes and narratives utilised can never tell us the whole picture. Without more information on the dynamics of reception, it is difficult to say anything conclusive about the nature of the message's appeal. Yet, these analyses may hopefully help us appreciate the various (motivational) ways in which certain narratives open up for engagement with the movement, as they are used to argue for various benefits of such engagement. Identifying these supposed benefits may therefore tell us something about the nature of the addressed grievances and interests, which in turn may help us understand some parts of the presented narratives' attractiveness.

In the Iraqi and Syrian context, it can be argued that the violent application of *takfir* serves a number of purposes within the context of the civil wars being fought in those countries. The insistence on “purification” helps legitimise violence carried out against various enemies, reinforces narratives of othering, and may be used to distil the supposed essence of Sunni Muslim identity. Together, narratives on *takfir*, purity, and *al-wala wa al-barā* are apparently used for political purposes connected to the justification of violent methods, as well as for the construction of credible authority. Hence, it can be argued that pragmatic or otherwise temporal aspects of violence are justified by them being framed as somehow related the symbolic theme of moral/religious purification, and that the empirical credibility and overall relevance of the movement is both reinforced and highlighted by references to this concept.

The massacre depicted at the end of *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* is partially framed as motivated by revenge. This is noteworthy, since it can be argued that the impulse of revenge does not, as something in itself, correspond to the elsewhere stressed motive of religious purification. Moreover, it can certainly be argued that an unspoken motivation is the militarily pragmatic one, since the massacre inevitably results in the elimination of people who could otherwise pose a threat to the IS movement. The application of violence serves several obvious purposes in a warlike context, but IS propaganda nevertheless seeks to frame it in ways that highlight its motivations in purely religious and moral terms. Nevertheless, violence is rarely depicted as presupposed by any sort of particularly complicated reasoning around its means of justification. The proclamation of *takfir* is an apparently quite simple process, and the execution of so-called justice is swift and brutal. It can certainly be argued that this attitude to violence turns the IS movement into an attractive alternative for those who are just as (or more) interested in, say, exacting revenge on imagined tormentors as they are in the establishment of a religious order. One person may be attracted to the idea of revenge, another wants to further his political aspirations through the use of guerrilla tactics, and a third one is driven by a sincere desire for pleasing God and redeeming his soul. Hence, one apparent purpose of the movement's propaganda is to construct a coherent framework which is able to appropriate several different driving forces and interests, and it can be argued that appeals to the notion of purity plays a fundamental role in creating such a framework.

One of the videos published as part of the al-Furqan series titled *Messages from the Land of Fierce Battles* (*rasayil min ard al-malahim*) features an illustrative scene.364 Presented as an example of

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364 This video series was released between August of 2013 and March of 2014, and the video in question was the third one (released in August of 2013).
“the aiding sword”\textsuperscript{365} viewers are shown a scene wherein an armed convoy of IS fighters set up a vehicle checkpoint along a highway in Western Iraq. After this, they intercept three trucks that are driven by Syrian men. An armed IS fighter asks them whether or not they are Sunnis, and the truck-drivers reply that they are. Still sceptical, the fighter asks them for proof, and the men apparently reply by reciting the Muslim call to prayer. Still not convinced, the fighter asks them to tell him the number of times one is supposed to kneel during the dawn prayer (\textit{salat al-fajr}). As the men are unable to answer, the fighters around them apparently draw the conclusion that they are Shiites or Alawites, and start to label them as mushrik\textsubscript{i}n. The truck-drivers are aggressively confronted with questions about what the Alawites (\textit{al-nusayry}) are doing to “the Muslims” in Syria, and made aware of the fact that the IS fighters believe that they can legitimately be killed. Following this, the men are led away and executed, and as this happens a Quranic verse is recited aloud:

\textit{Fight them: Allah will punish them by your hand and will disgrace them and give you victory over them and satisfy the breasts of a believing people and remove the fury in the believers' hearts.} \textsuperscript{366}

Given the choice of the verse, the notion of revenge seemingly plays a prominent part in this presentation\textsuperscript{367}. Moreover, the truck-drivers are presented as agents of the Iraqi and Syrian governments,\textsuperscript{368} and their deaths are thereby given a political dimension. At the same time, this political act of revenge is presented as if entirely preconditioned by one's ability to proclaim \textit{takfir}. Such a proclamation is necessary, so that the act can be framed as part of the struggle between Islam and disbelief. In other words, an apparently military/political situation is almost immediately into a sort of discussion on ritual behaviour and religious orthodoxy. The highlighted “crime” of the accused men is that of disbelief, rather than their work in support of the IS movement's enemies. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the fighters apparently focus on ritual behaviour as proof of one's orthodoxy, and that the accused men's ability to recite the call to prayer (containing the Muslim proclamation of faith) is completely ignored. The bar is intentionally placed higher than that, as faith proclaimed through mere words is not regarded as evidently sincere.\textsuperscript{369} In other words, the armed fighters can be described as playing the role of ritual enforcers, and their act of killing as one that punishes the accused men for their ritual impurity (once again echoing the notion that the IS movement represents “the aiding sword”).

It should be noted that the questioning and killing is all done by the same man, and that he has since been identified by the \textit{nom de guerre} Abu Wahib.\textsuperscript{370} Abu Wahib is (or \textit{was}, depending on the

\textsuperscript{365} As was mentioned above, the video series in question is noteworthy for the fact that most of its videos were divided into segments representing “the guiding book” and “the aiding sword”, respectively.

\textsuperscript{366} Quran 9:14-15.

\textsuperscript{367} There are multiple other examples of how this motive is highlighted in official IS propaganda. The phrase “satisfy/heal the breasts/chest” (\textit{shifa al-sudur}) is often used to remind viewers about the supposed fact that the Quran justifies the exacting of revenge on transgressing disbelievers, and numerous execution videos have either featured the phrase or been named after it. The public burning of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh was justified through the use of this concept (as he had supposedly killed Muslims through his bombings), and the al-Furqan video that showed his execution was titled \textit{Healing of the Believers' Chests (shifa al-sudur)}. This video was released in February 2015, as documented by \url{www.jihadology.net} (accessed 25 January 2017).

\textsuperscript{368} A subtitle at the start of the scene states that the IS fighters are cutting a “supply route” between the “rejectionist” (\textit{al-rafi\textsubscript{d}ha}) Shiites of Iraq and the “nusayris” (i.e. the Alawites) of Syria.

\textsuperscript{369} See Daniel Lav's book \textit{Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology} (2012) for an extensive discussion on intra-Sunn\textsubscript{i} debates on the proper application of \textit{takfir}. Some “abstain” from judging the behaviour of self-proclaimed Muslims, as such judgement should be the exclusive right of God, while others believe that faith needs to be demonstrated through action. Using ritual behaviour as a marker of one's faithfulness, as demonstrated in the here described IS video, can be described as an example of the latter attitude. In this sense, this particular al-Furqan video can be regarded as a horribly violent way of arguing for this stance, and thereby as a sort of statement on the debate discussed by Lav.

\textsuperscript{370} Reportedly born in 1986 as Shaker Wahib al-Fadhawi, he was a student before being imprisoned in 2006 (allegedly for interacting with some part of the contemporary Iraqi insurgent movement). He escaped during an IS-organised prison break in 2012, and subsequently fought during the movement's guerrilla campaigns in Iraq's Western Anbar region. See Abbas 2014.
reliability of an unconfirmed US military claim of his death in May of 2016) a prominent field commander among IS forces in Western Iraq, and is neither an Islamic scholar or jurist (he reportedly studied computer science before he became an insurgent). What this illustrates is that the IS movement puts authority associated with the proclamation of takfir into the hands of anyone who is able to ask the right questions. Concluding that the inability to pray properly constitutes a grave enough sin, and adding to this the element of revenge for Syria's dishonoured (Sunni) Muslims, a man like Abu Wahib is presented as in his full rights to carry out the execution. The beliefs of the IS movement have thereby turned him into a sort of authority within the movement, as they grant him a legitimate license to kill. One can imagine how attractive this may seem to those who are motivated by a desire for revenge and/or power, yet lack the frames necessary for their proper, “Islamic” legitimisation. In a sense, the IS movement is branding itself as an authority which turns takfir into something simple. Virtually anyone can act as an authority with the ability to legitimately destroy another person's life. Among the apparently very few things needed are a deadly weapon, a set of relevant questions, and knowledge about their supposedly proper answers.

While the entire scene may perhaps seem like a brutal display of largely arbitrary violence, I would argue that it is framed in ways that utilise the potential resonance of several notions and themes, and that these infuse the depicted acts with a sense of both symbolic meaning and supposed legitimacy. The killings are related to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and framed as a sort of revenge. Yet, at the same time, the concept of purity is fundamental, as it transforms the act from that of an execution of mere political enemies into a micro-cosmic image of the supposedly fundamental struggle between truth/Islam and falsehood/disbelief (notice, for example, that the “hypocrisy” of the accused men is illustrated by the fact that they start out by “lying” about being Sunnis). Purity, in turn, is here connected to ritual behaviour, which marks the difference between the IS movement's manhaj and those of so-called murjia abstainers. In other words, viewers are confronted with a symbolically complex presentation of violent behaviour, wherein “military pragmatism” (illustrated, for example, by the swift and uncomplicated nature of the entire procedure) and “revenge” are legitimised by references to “ritual purity”. The latter interest reinforces the meaning of the former, and their respective goals are thereby presented as entirely compatible. Takfir is presented as something simple, purification as swift and uncomplicated, and both are argued for as concepts that will reinforce rather than complicate (or otherwise inhibit) the application of violence. The enforcement of supposedly correct morality and ritual is not something that is at odds with the necessary pragmatics of guerrilla warfare and the wide-ranging relevance and versatile applicability of the movement and its puritanism is thus highlighted. The “aiding sword” of the movement is not presented as presupposed by hierarchical or otherwise bureaucratic decision-making. Rather, it operates through the use of general guidelines (essentially, as a framework which details the various impurities that need to be eradicated) that grant individual movement participants the ability to legitimately apply the figurative “sword” to different situations.

Large parts of Iraqi society has experienced bloody conflict for most of the 21st century (if not longer, considering the various revolts during the last decades of Saddam Hussein's rule). It is safe to assume that this development has managed to produce its fair share of trauma, and that some of its victims may be driven by a desire for some form of revenge or retribution. Having developed a framework for supposedly “Islamic” vengeance, the IS movement may be able to tap into similar notions among other people who regard themselves as having been wronged in some way or another. It is, for example, possible that some Muslims who have experienced the supposed

371 At the time of this particular video's release, IS forces were still largely operating as a mobile guerrilla force in the desert regions of Western Iraq. It is therefore likely that the depicted fighters would have been unable to take care of any prisoners, and that they were anxious about the possibility of the captured men reporting on, for example, the location and strength of IS forces if set free. It can therefore be assumed that the depicted executions were somehow informed by some sort of pragmatic decision. In other words, the inclusive application of takfir may very well have served the purpose of lending legitimacy to the swift way in which “justice” was exercised.
hypocrisy of a simultaneously “tolerant” and “racist” Europe may somehow be attracted to this idea, as the messages delivered in the various al-Hayat videos described above often appeal to notions like injustice and humiliation. The official IS narrative attempts to tap into and make sense of these feelings. Its way of granting one the ability to legitimately exact revenge is perhaps emboldening, as it may reinforce an imagined possibility of transcending a state at which one is merely trampled on by others. By connecting various specific notions of “humiliation” to the wider suffering of the umma, individual revenge is turned into a meaningful act with profound implications. Hence – whatever the nature of one's “actual” motives, violent acts can now effectively be framed as “Islamic”. The wide-ranging relevance of the IS Caliphate is thereby highlighted, and the a number of benefits of one's engagement with it has been clarified.

5.2.2. The wish for redemption

Beyond the violent uses described above, the theme of purification can also be used to argue for otherwise personal benefits of engaging with the movement. For those who, like the above quoted Abu Bara al-Hindi, have realised the nature of their own so-called hypocrisy, IS propagandists are apparently portraying engagement with their movement as something which may purify one of uncertainty and ambiguity. Hypocrites will be able to reconnect with “sincere Islam”, sins will be made irrelevant by sacrifices which please God, and one will supposedly be filled by a renewed and sincere sense of clarity and purpose. More than this, official IS propaganda also attempts to portray engagement with the movement as a way of counteracting feelings of humiliation and weakness. Engaging in its jihad, one will supposedly be able to experience things like triumph and strength, while simultaneously contributing the restoration of the umma's honour and dignity. In other words, the official narratives apparently speak about renewal and purification on many different levels, which range from the that of the individual to that of humanity as a whole.

It can be argued that this recurring focus on religious purification contributes to a sort of redemptive quality of the movement's message. For people who regard themselves as sinners and/or hypocrites, the IS movement is explicitly offering an opportunity for individual redemption and for the nullification of accumulated sin. Through participation in the movement's jihad of purification, previous sins and missteps are disregarded, and one is given a new opportunity at salvation. Official IS propaganda releases have often depicted sessions of repentance (tawba), wherein former collaborators with the movement's various enemies are forgiven and somehow convinced into joining it. Moreover, some researchers have identified this theme of redemption as an important aspect of the movement's ideology, and trace its development back to the days of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The figure of al-Zarqawi is himself quite interesting in this context, as he reportedly started out as a pimp and street thug before becoming an Islamic militant. While I have been unable to find any example of an official IS media release referring to this particular aspect of his personal history, it can perhaps be argued that al-Zarqawi's contributions to the movement's ideology was partially informed by his own background. The ideas ascribed to and supposedly developed by him (variously described as “neo-Takfirism” or “Zarqawiism”) highlight the redemptive qualities of sincere jihad, and furthermore justify collateral damage as a necessary sin/evil on the path towards the establishment of the Caliphate. Those who struggle, sacrifice, and die on this path are

372 See Sheikh 2016, which highlights how the theme of “revanchism” contributes to the motivations of Danish citizen who have volunteered to fight with IS in Syria.
373 The anti-racist/-nationalist message can arguably be understood as part of this narrative of “purification”. Innovations associated with nationalist/ethnic loyalties have been made irrelevant, so that people may reconnect to their “true” identity as Muslims. The importing of people from around the world can be framed as serving the purpose of eradicating the supposedly disgraceful stain of ethnic nationalism.
376 Alshech 2014; Fishman 2016: 60-74. See also the discussion presented under the above headline “1.1.2. Proposed ideological affinities”.


regarded of as forgiven for all their previous sins, simply because God has promised to reward them for their manifest piousness. Furthermore, one can perhaps imagine that the presence of former Saddam Hussain loyalists within the movement's current leadership contributes to this insistence on the theme of redemption through purification.\textsuperscript{377} The current influence of these men, which could otherwise undermine the legitimacy of the movement's Iraqi-Syrian branch, can be justified by describing them as having been purified of previous sins associated with their former loyalties to a secular nationalist regime. In other words, the IS movement is partially made up of previous sinners – a fact which can be smoothed over by describing engagement with it as something which supposedly purifies the individual and renews his/her relationship with Islam. This renewal of the relationship with Islam may be perceived of as an attractive benefit of joining the movement, and perhaps especially so for people who regard themselves as having an otherwise ambiguous relationship with the religion. Victor Jeleniewski Seidler argues that such feelings exist among young British Muslim men:

They can be 'uncomfortable' in their skins in so many ways. For many, though they might be able to read Arabic, the Koran remains incomprehensible to them. The sermons on Friday will be given in the language of the founders of the mosque, which in Beeston means they are delivered in Urdu. The content rarely considers the lives of the scores of young men present. Rather, both in the mosque and at home they are expected to behave appropriately, even if they do not understand the purpose of what they are doing. Little is said in either place that can possible help young Muslims men come to terms with their ambivalence towards their identities [author's own italics]. This leaves many young men vulnerable to radical groups that seem able to recognise and speak to their spiritual yearnings and sense of social and cultural displacement. Speaking in a language they can understand, the groups 'come to the rescue', filling the gaps with certainties.\textsuperscript{378}

Similar dynamics have been described by other studies focused on the attraction of variously “radical” movements among young European Muslims.\textsuperscript{379} The attraction of, for example, Salafi(-inspired) ideas have been connected to the way in which they bring clarity to questions about “authentic Islam”.\textsuperscript{380} As a result, the adoption of such viewpoints may serve the purpose of clarifying certain aspects of one's identity, place, and purpose. For those somehow dissatisfied with their current place in society, a conscious reconstruction of the self may serve as a sort of exit strategy, as well as a counter-identity aimed at marking some sort of distance to one's previous lifestyle and/or certain aspects of wider society. In this context, one can perhaps imagine that the IS movement's redemptive message is reinforced with some additional empirical credibility, and that engagement with it may be viewed as relevant or otherwise attractive.

In a largely non-Muslim and/or secular society, one is likely often confronted with sinful behaviour and otherwise problematic practices – “good becomes evil and evil becomes good”. One is perhaps largely unable to avoid these supposed evils, while simultaneously not being allowed or able to denounce forcefully. This may contribute to a sense of one's own distance from Islam, and reinforce notions illustrated by Abu Bara al-Hindi's above quoted statement. This dream about a properly Islamic society is an oft-repeated theme in official IS propaganda, as when the Canadian fighter Abu Muslim states that “at the end of the day, you cannot obey [God] fully as you can by living in a Muslim country and an Islamic state”. The IS Caliphate's violent enforcement of supposedly Islamic

\textsuperscript{377} For further discussions on the influence of these men, see Gerges 2016: 144-169; Tønnessen 2015.
\textsuperscript{378} Seidler 2007: 98.
\textsuperscript{380} Here, I want to remind readers of the way in which I have chosen to define the concept of “the radical” – previously presented above. A radical is one who wishes for extreme changes of either the whole or some specific part of the social order. Given this, I would argue that a transition to Salafism is “radical” in many social contexts, as it entails an arguably dramatic (“extreme”) change in one's life-style. It should here be noted that I do not regard the invocation of the concept of “extreme” as necessarily entailing some sort of embrace of, for example, violent or otherwise revolutionary politics. Something as comparably banal as the dramatic shift in one's dress-code or diet can, indeed, be regarded as “extreme” depending on one's social context.
morals may be regarded of as the anti-thesis of religious ambiguity, and as an attractively self-evident remedy for the various problems associated with the ambivalence of non-enforced Islam. Jakob Sheik has argued that the theme of “the state” contributes substantially the IS movement’s legitimacy among its Danish sympathisers.\textsuperscript{381} For one of them, “the state” serves as an institution which ensures that Muslims can live “without fearing that the enemy will make problems for them or disturb them from worshipping Allah”\textsuperscript{382} Hence, the IS Caliphate creates the conditions for one’s true redemption, and can be framed as serving the purpose of providing Muslims with an opportunity to experience a supposedly authentic and properly enforced version of Islam. Through its \textit{manhaj} – “defined by the guiding book and an aiding sword” – the movement makes sure that the good is promoted and the evil is forbidden, and that Muslims remain loyal to \textit{tawhid} and disavow \textit{kufr}. These macro-cosmic principles are presented as highly relevant at the individual level as well, as the one who is unable to respect them is lead astray and becomes corrupted. Through an apparently deeply anti-individualist narrative, the IS Caliphate is framed as able to set things straight, force Islam upon corrupted societies, and help those individuals who feel that they have lost touch with their religion. \textit{Enforced purification} will create the proper conditions for \textit{redemption}.

Based on the above content analysis, it can certainly be argued that the IS movement is framing itself as a provider of existential \textit{clarity}. Its official media posits that engagement with it will enable for one’s supposed reconnection to that which is truthful and sincere, and furthermore that such reconnection will enable for the reaching of one’s supposedly true potential. This “true potential” is epitomised by the motivational appeal to the spirit of self-sacrifice, which in turn may be regarded as related to a number of variously existential concerns and interests. Beyond that of pleasing God, official IS media also highlights connections between self-sacrifice and one’s potential self-efficacy, honour, and “manhood”. The following lyrics, which are excerpts from an Uyghur-language \textit{nashid} released by the al-Hayat Media Center, are illustrative:

\begin{quote}
Those tearful eyes silenced by the tyranny of the oppressors, 
Today they have become honored and those sad faces have rejoiced.

[\ldots] 
Those who rush to have their blood spilled to attain shahadah, sacrifice their lives for Allah, they are thousands and thousands in number, and have ambitions that transcend all ambition. They embody the meaning of manhood, and they are companions in paradise. They always seek Allah’s pleasure.

[\ldots] 
By these men and their pure blood, Islam spreads its light. By the support of the ansar, the religion thrived. Likewise by the blood of the muhajirin. And today there has emerged the dawn of the Khilafah. And we draw strength from our creator. So we have become strong, by His grace. And there has been established with clarity the legitimate Khilafah. And with the return of the Khilafah all the lands have become like roses, joyful at the departure of oppression.

[\ldots] 
And the oppressed Muslim who was weeping before, is now destroying the tawaghit, and their destruction increases day after day.

[\ldots] 
An era of humiliation, we bid farewell to it like a dream, and there does not remain in our hearts today fear of the disbelievers.

[\ldots] 
O you whose heart is split, do not have any doubt, for there is no oppression today in this Khilafah. For Allah is with us, and for that reason we have rejoiced and have now understood the meaning of honor.

[\ldots] 
So join the ranks in the arenas of honor and dignity, so that you may join the caravan of the pure shuhada’. Be a slave thankful to Allah, so that you may attain rewards without reckoning. Is there any honor greater than this?\textsuperscript{383}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{381} Sheik 2016.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{383} Make \textit{Takbir O Muwahhid}, al-Hayat Media Center, April 2016.
It should be noted that the above nashid was released together with a violent music video, which depicts a montage of footage from various battlefields. Intense, exciting, and dramatic in nature, the montage represents a largely romantic and glorifying depiction of warfare. Symbolising the supposed end of “an era of humiliation”, it showcases Muslim men as part of an apparently strong and capable fighting force. Thus, they have supposedly reached their true potential, as they now “embody the meaning of manhood” and destroy the idols of oppression. In this sense, al-Hayat's producers are presenting the IS movement as a vehicle which can carry oppressed, weeping, and doubtful men onto an arena of action where true “honour” and “manhood” can be attained. The empirical credibility of this attestation if of course reinforced by notions about the military successes of IS forces, as well as related ideas about the movement's abilities to inspire sincere and death-defying commitment among its fighters – illustrated by the display of fallen fighters' corpses and smiling suicide-bombers. The fierce battle is presented as something truly redeeming, and as if something that is able to purify the soul of anything that is either superfluous or insincere.

5.2.3. Summary

While the IS movement recognises elsewhere propagated narratives about Muslim humiliation, it argues further that this particular development has been made possible by the supposed weakness and disunity of the umma. Its own program of radical change highlights the importance of purity as a prerequisite for renewed unity, and furthermore posits that the umma cannot become united unless all Muslims recognise one common creed and authority. Through the proper enforcement of sharia, the harsh punishment of its transgressors, and the purifying qualities of violent jihad, the Muslim community will be redeemed in preparation for its unification and eventual final battle against its disbelieving enemies. The concept of purification thus serves the purpose of reinforcing and concretising the prognostic framing narrative, and is used to frame and make sense of the movement's overall conduct and of the acts expected from its members and sympathisers.

Through its supposed revival of pure tawhid, the IS movement is setting the stage for the proper moral and spiritual nourishment of future generations, and it appears as if the movement is hoping that future Muslims will reproduce the supposedly “unshakable resolve” of its own fighters. This particular aspect of the IS movement's hopes for the future are likely an important motive behind the recurring way in which its official media emphasises the importance of children. In a sense, the depicted children seemingly stand as representatives of the movement's ideas on the gradual and long-term nature of its purifying project. The martyrs of today are offering their blood for the survival of the wider cause and as inspiration for future generations. Their blood will act as the metaphorical fuel of the movement's supposedly purifying flame. Eventually, the violence spread through this flame will create a strong, unified, and focused Muslim community – one that will be able to challenge and defeat the omnipresent “Crusaders”, and overturn the humiliation suffered at their hands. Eventually, in an imagined future, the disbelievers will be defeated, and the Muslims will be able to avenge their wounded honour and arise as the new political masters of the world. An often repeated trope of official IS propaganda is the envisioning of an eventual future wherein the umma's political setbacks will be reversed. Above quoted statements wishing for the reconquest of Jerusalem are illustrative examples. Statements like these are often reinforced by a sense of justified and inevitable revenge. In other words, the final goal of the movement's project is not simply to throw off the oppression of the disbelievers, but to answer their past transgression with vengeful

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For an illustrative example, see Blood for Blood, a French-language nashid video released by the al-Hayat Media Center in April 2016. It features vengeful lyrics sung by a choir of young French-speaking boys, and shows how a group of young boys walk around among the bombed-out rubble of an Iraqi or Syrian town, followed by footage depicting the same boys conducting military training. Noteworthy are the following lyrics, which illustrate the above presented point: “Beware, our orphans are growing. They feed their thirst for revenge in rage. […] Your blood will flow for your heinous crimes”.
and humiliating violence.\textsuperscript{385} Notions about Muslim weakness, disunity, and hypocrisy reinforce these thematic narratives with empirical credibility, and experiences of humiliation and suffering contribute to their overall relevance.

To summarise, I would argue that purification serves the purpose of a sort of thematic leitmotif/macro-narrative in official IS propaganda. It is through the forceful eradication of ambivalence, hypocrisy, and corruption that Muslims (whether in an individual or collective sense) will be able to overcome their current problems and reverse their various setbacks. A movement consisting of truly purified Muslims will work towards the further purification and violent penance of the wider umma. Having thus revived tawhid and sharia, an umma that has been united through purification will turn its attention outwards and start working towards spreading Islam to the rest of the world. The redeemed will thereby exact their violent revenge on the dark forces which have wronged them.

Above, I have argued that the empirical credibility of this particular meta-narrative may be understood through the way in which it seemingly recognises and justifies certain interests. The movement's program of purification is presented as essentially something redeeming, and as something which will reinforce various notions of clarity, truthfulness, and sincerity. As such, IS propagandists are explicitly offering people an easily understandable exit strategy, which they argue will enable for the transcendence of conditions characterised by things like ambivalence and/or hypocrisy. On the battlefield, one is supposedly reborn as someone who may sincerely call oneself such things as honourable, truthful, and masculine. Simultaneously, the redeeming quality of the movement's purifying project may serve the purpose of legitimising various pragmatic or otherwise temporal concerns. Killing is made easy, and the wish for revenge is seemingly encouraged and framed as largely acceptable.

Beyond serving the purpose of addressing the above described interests, the framing of IS activities as “purifying” may also be understood as an attempt at appropriating a number of Salafi-related concepts. Above, I defined Salafism as a trend of Sunni Muslim thought which seeks to revive the supposedly “pure” Islam of the earliest Muslims. Given that the IS movement is consciously framing itself as a forceful eradicator of bida and a dedicated enforcer of kufir’s disavowal, the credibility of its messaging can perhaps be understood as partially connected to the contemporary influence of related notions. As such, it represents yet another example of how elsewhere established themes are appropriated into its various framing narratives, so that it is presented as relevant well beyond its original, local context. This is not to say that Salafism is entirely to blame for the rise of the IS movement, but rather to suggest that part of its resonance can be understood by looking at ways in which it relates itself to various “Salafi issues”. To be more specific, the movement is apparently framed as an appeal to those Salafis who regard the mere comprehension and limited application of the Prophet's aqida as insufficient. Its Caliphate is presented as the incarnation of an especially vigorous and uncompromising manhaj, and as the antithesis of supposedly hypocritical abstention, hesitation, and meekness. More than anything else, it is highlighted for its ability to act – something which in turn may be interpreted as an appeal to above described militant narratives about the urgent necessity of jihad. Its hallmark is not simply a recognition of purity in theory, but its implementation of purification in practice.

While the variously addressed themes of purity, truthfulness, and revenge may be connected to a

\textsuperscript{385} A Russian-language nashid video released by the al-Hayat Media Center is illustrative. Titled Soon, very Soon and released in November of 2015, it revels in the depictions of brutal executions and combine such images with lyrics about how “Soon, very soon, the blood will spill like an ocean”. It furthermore posits that the unification and strengthening of the umma will be followed by their invasion and subjugation of disbelieving nations: “We will take through battle the lands of yours we wish. […] We will make your wives concubines and make your children our slaves. Your resources will do you no good. They will not save you from becoming slaves of the nation of sons, the brave knights”.
vast array of interests, the specific ways in which IS propagandists frame their attainment almost invariably invoke the notion of violence as efficacious. It is through violence that things are to be set straight, through violence that the individual soul and wider umma are to be redeemed, and through the violent application of “the aiding sword” that the movement's Caliphate is supposed to revive tawhid. In the following, I will therefore speculate around a number of ways in which violent methods may be viewed as credible means of political change, and discuss developments that may contribute to the empirical credibility of violent narratives. I will try to connect this overall belief to a number of ideal and material interests, and discuss how IS propagandists are seemingly trying to appropriate these interests as part of their attempts at highlighting the wider relevance of their movement.

5.3. Trust in violence as a means of change and a tool of dissent

It should be noted that things like the quest for Muslim unity, as well as dreams of redemption and purity, can certainly be addressed in ways that do not encourage violent action. In some sort of non-temporal or otherwise spiritual sense, “revenge” can perhaps also be attained without having to actually kill and/or humiliate one's tormentors. As should be clear from the above discussions, however, physical violence is an apparently inherent aspect of the various narratives presented by official IS propaganda. Its specific solutions to the various problems presented are almost invariably violent, and its official manhaj is exemplified by various acts of destruction and killing. People and societies are to be redeemed through violence (“there is no life without jihad”), sharia can only be enforced through the physical destruction of that which leads people astray, the umma can only be united and defended by military means, and so on.

Given all of the above, it can perhaps be assumed that the overall credibility of the IS movement's official messaging is at least partially presumed by some sort of belief in the efficacy of violent methods. A person who is deeply committed to some sort of non-violent attitude would, most likely, not find official IS propaganda very attractive. However, this is not to say that everyone who sympathises with the movement and consumes its media are necessarily violent individuals in any actual sense, but rather that they may regard the application of violence as an empirically credible solution to various problems (and such views can be held without one necessarily acting upon them). In the following, I will discuss a number of theories which have been used to highlight how certain conditions may contribute to variously pro-violent attitudes.

While I recognise that there may exist an indefinite number of ways in which violence may become attractive, I will focus on a proposed connection between feelings of marginalisation and an ability to actually commit violent acts. This discussion will serve the purpose of highlighting what I regard as yet another example of how certain ideal and material interests are addressed and appropriated by IS propagandists, and of discussing how certain experiences and conditions may reinforce the empirical credibility of its violent program of change.

5.3.1. The proposed relationship between marginalisation and the attraction of violence

An analysis of the American spree-killer phenomenon, Mark Ames’ book Going Postal (2005) argues that there is no easy way in which the average mass murderer can be properly profiled. While individual factors vary and most killers are only marginally “different” compared to the norm of their respective societies, a recurring factor is stress related to seemingly quite similar experiences in comparable school and office environments (things like overworking, bullying, isolation, and marginalisation). As a result, Ames argues that the phenomenon can partially be

\[386\] Ames 2005.
understood as a violent reaction to these conditions. While one should perhaps not entirely dismiss
the possibility that some sort of psychological illness is largely to blame, Ames' study seemingly
indicates that various forms of stress and social isolation may serve as cognitive openings which
cause otherwise unstable individuals to resort to violence.

Most (if not all) societies have their fair share of grievances, and it can be assumed that some of
those in turn produce people who are desperate and frustrated enough to consider violent action as a
somehow viable alternative. If a certain set of interests and concerns are largely marginalised within
the wider discourse of society, the people who feel affected by them are potentially vulnerable to
experiences of futility and frustration. For some of them, attention-seeking acts of spectacular
violence may present an attractive alternative to the apathetic acceptance of the status quo. British
suicide-bomber Mohammed Sidique Khan, who killed himself and several others during a series of
bomb attacks in London in 2005, explicitly described his act as an attempt at bringing attention to
certain political issues:

> Our words have no impact on you, therefore I am going to talk to you in a language that you understand.
> Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood. […] Your democratically elected governments
> continually perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world and your support of them makes
> you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim
> brothers and sisters. Until we feel security you will be our target. Until you stop the bombing, gassing,
> imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a soldier. Now
> you too will taste the reality of this situation.387

Khan's example illustrates how, given certain circumstances, some people may feel inclined to act
out their frustrated feelings of marginalisation through the use of destructive violence. The explicit
purpose of his act was to “give life” to words that would otherwise be ignored. Spectacular violence
is an undoubtedly potent method of bringing attention to one's grievances and concerns (certainly
more effective in societies which produce and consume sensationalist mass media), which may add
substantially to its attraction as a method of rebellion. The amount of attention given to violent
actors arguable reinforces notions about the empirical credibility of their methods.

Mohammed Hafez has highlighted the apparent connection between political marginalisation and
the resort to violence.388 Primarily looking at two specific contexts characterised by the use of
violence as a tool of rebellion,389 Hafez argues that there existed a correlation between government
 crackdowns of certain political movements and the way in which some of their supporters started
using militant methods. Given this, Hafez argues that the studied activist were essentially left with
few political alternatives, and that the empirical credibility of militancy was reinforced by these
circumstances. The relationship between Hafez's conclusions and recent developments in both Iraq
and Syria are perhaps self-explanatory, and may be interpreted as one reason why some people in
those countries regard an openly and fiercely violent movement like that of IS as a viable political
alternative. I would furthermore argue that Hafez's conclusions have some significance for those
presented by both Quintan Wiktorowicz and Victor Jeleniewski Seidler as part of their analyses of
certain aspects of British Islam.390 While neither of them is necessarily or exclusively talking about
violent actors, they agree that cognitive openings associated with feelings of marginalisation and
relative deprivation may make a person susceptible to variously “radical” ideas. While I have
elsewhere stressed that radicals are not necessarily violent, it should nevertheless be noted that most
(if not all) violent political actors are radical. This, however, does not in itself explain the things that
separate non-violent radicals from violent ones. As a result, it is perhaps meaningful to ask

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389 The terrorist/insurgent campaign launched by an organisation calling itself “The Islamic Group” (al-jama'ah al-
islamiyyah) in Egypt during the 1990's, and the Algerian civil war during roughly the same period. For more on the
Egyptian case, see Hafez & Wiktorowicz 2004.
ourselves if there are additional factors (beyond “marginalisation”, in its broadest sense) which may add to the attraction of specifically violent programs of change.

In 2010, the British think-tank Demos released a study titled *The Edge of Violence*. Focusing on the issue of so-called radical Islam in Western societies, its authors tried to highlight the factors which differentiate non-violent radicals from those that espouse and carry out violent acts. In short, the study concluded that it is rarely the nature of ideological ideas that contribute to one's tipping over the figurative edge of violence, as the same ideas are often shared by both non-violent and violent radicals. Similarly, both violent and non-violent radicals (together with young Muslims in general) have often experienced things that can be related to the above described issues of marginalisation and relative deprivation, often as result of various forms of ethnic discrimination. However, these feelings appear to be more pronounced among those who espouse or commit violent acts. This groups had a (marginally) lower education, were not as likely to be employed, far from as trusting of political and/or religious institutions, and were overall quite disconnected from their wider community. Notably, their experiences of social disconnection was not only one related to the wider non-Muslim society of their respective countries, but furthermore experienced in relation to their “own”, Muslim, community. In short, the violently inclined radicals had thus experienced marginalisation at what can be described as an additional level, and thereby often lacked in a sense of belonging to a large and/or wide community. Perhaps related to this overall sense of social marginalisation, the violently inclined radicals often held more uncompromising views regarding politics and society, which in turn may have hampered their abilities to engage intellectually with others and be taken seriously for their perhaps sincerely held beliefs. In this sense, the adoption of somehow violently inclined attitudes may possibly reinforce feelings of marginalisation, and hence contribute further to the dynamics which may have inspired this outlook in the first place.

In short, conclusions drawn from the Demos study indicate that a heightened sense of marginalisation may contribute to one's beliefs in the efficacy of violence. Distancing themselves from wider society, lacking in ability to be properly heard and seriously considered, those who adopt violent methods are seemingly often those who have relatively few other political alternatives (either in the “true” sense of utter deprivation, or simply because they do not recognise or trust the various political channels deemed legitimate by wider society). This conclusion can be drawn from Hafez's studies as well, as he details how it was the extremists at the radical fringes of the repressed political movements who were most likely to and anxious about resorting to violence. The militant movements studied by him were “exclusive” in the sense that their paranoid outlook inspired them to come relatively few members, something which in turn contributed to a sort of spiral of social encapsulation wherein compromising or otherwise alternative outlooks were frowned upon. Hafez links the development of exclusive organisations to fears associated with state repression, which in turn lend empirical credibility to the framing of violence as the only viable alternative. I would argue that this can be related to the conclusions drawn from the Demos study as well, as the people there described as violent radicals are characterised by a somewhat paranoid attitude to the state. This is far from entirely irrational, given the fact that Western states have increasingly been focusing on the surveillance of people who sympathise with so-called radical Islam. Awareness of things like the possibility of infiltration or arrest may inform an exclusive attitude towards social interaction, and hence contribute to the formation of groups who regard themselves as repressed, counteracted, or otherwise targeted by the state. Hafez argues the following:

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391 Bartlett et al. 2010.
392 Bartlett et al. 2010: 79-89.
394 Bartlett et al. 2010: 67-75, 80-81, 103, 118-125.
397 For an overview and critique of this phenomenon, see Kundnani 2014.
Since the spirals of encapsulation replace external affiliations with in group associations, the “entrapped” activists increasingly cease to give outsiders, who might have a more objective viewpoint concerning the movement's activities, any say over their behaviour. Instead, activists rely solely on their “comrades” or “brothers” for evaluation. At the same time, an exclusive group often “cannot afford an honest, self-critical appraisal of its theoretical premises and positions; questioning its theoretical assumptions would endanger the groups raison d'être and could activate a destabilizing effect on the groups consciousness” (Wasmund 1986, 220). Under such circumstances, objective assessments of the political environment necessary for strategic calculations disappear; groups become increasingly driven by emotive and abstract appeals to justice and retribution.

Arguably related to this dynamic of social encapsulation, the Demos study highlights the potential impact of peer pressure. In short, tight-knit groups of like-minded and similarly frustrated individuals may initiate a process wherein they reinforce each other's increasingly uncompromising world-views. Notably, the consumption and distribution of “jihadi” media (described as simply “al-Qaeda inspired”, as the publication of the study pre-dated the subsequent rise to prominence of the IS movement) apparently often plays a role in the construction of that somewhat isolated environment, and serve to reinforce the world-view of the individual or group in question. In this sense, the propagandists of an influential movement may possibly play the role of sort of virtual “peer” within an exclusive social group of like-minded individuals.

5.3.2. The IS movement as a symbolic amplifier of dissent

It can certainly be argued that the IS movement presents itself as an alternative for the relatively deprived and marginalised. The prominence, scope, quality, and availability of its official media undoubtedly contributes to its potential as a figurative “partner” of variously isolated and tight-knit groups of somehow marginalised individuals. Already in the Demos study of 2010, the appeal of “al-Qaeda inspired” actors was described in counter-cultural terms like rebelliousness and defiance, excitement and adventure, as well as “coolness”.

All of these attractions have likely been reinforced by the rise to prominence of the IS movement's well-financed media apparatus. Through what can be described as a network of apparently highly professional and dedicated media organisations, the movement is able to continually strengthen the coherence and applicability of its narratives, as well as propagate an image of rebellious “coolness” through high-quality productions. In contemporary pop-cultural terms, the visual media of the movement can be described as constituting a multi-faceted yet arguably coherent “reality show”. Sympathisers have the opportunity to easily tune in to this alternative world, get inspired by the messages propagated, and pick up ideas to share with their peers. Beyond the visual media, one can easily be intellectually stimulated by the movement's religious texts and inspiring biographies (in some cases combined into ambitious political/lifestyle magazines like, for example, Dabiq). And this is not to mention the movement's substantial, incredibly versatile, and easily accessible soundtrack of self- and well-produced nashids (evidently the product of one or several dedicated music studios).

Given all of the above, a sense of purpose and belonging may possibly become reinforced by these media, together with a sense of how one's own concerns are recognised and seriously addressed by an influential, powerful, and widely respected/f feared movement. The empirical credibility of

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399 Hafez 2004: 43.
400 Bartlett et al. 2010: 100-103. See also Atran 2011 (esp. 119-226), for specific examples of how small-group dynamics and peer pressure may contribute to the creation of an subsequent activities of terrorist cells.
narratives on “meaning” and “belonging” are possibly reinforced by references to symbolisms associated with the IS movement's vigorous and seemingly successful Caliphate. Through the use of various forms of international media, the IS movement has been able to construct a sort of sub-culture which seemingly has the ability to potentially envelop a person or group who chooses to get involved in it. Depending on their social situation (i.e. the nature of their relative deprivation, the extent of their frustration, and the conditions of their relationships with both peers and their wider community), they may either limit themselves to regarding this sort of media consumption as a source of counter-cultural inspiration and entertainment, or decide to act on the ideas propagated. It is furthermore possible that the more engrossed a person or group becomes by the IS movement's official media, the more likely that they will act in prescribed manners if ever confronted by a setback that initiate a period of distress and/or desperation. For example, a professional or personal failure may easily be framed in terms of the wider humiliation described by IS propagandists, and the prescribed violent solution may appear as more sensible and attractive than it did before.

For someone who regard his/her concerns as largely marginalised by wider society, the use of violence may also serve as part of an exit strategy. Violence may be viewed as able to offset feelings of hopelessness and insignificance, and as a useful tool for restoring one's dignity and sense of self-efficacy. Control and power is somehow achieved, and one's ability to affect others is dramatically demonstrated. I argue that the IS movement is actively encouraging the urges connected to the attraction of violence, and that its messages may resonate among people who are frustrated and/or isolated enough to recognise the supposed necessity of violent action as a sort of political method. Beyond mere encouragement, it can be argued that the movement is trying to appropriate these urges and beliefs, associate them with its own ideological narratives, and thereby give them a concrete form. The above discussion on ways in which the motive of revenge has seemingly been incorporated into movement narratives on “purification” may serve as an illustrative example. In a sense, the movement is branding itself as an authority among those who are attracted to rebellious and vengeful violence, and is thereby reinforcing often ambivalent urges with a sense of a somehow clear, meaningful, and supposedly legitimate purpose.

In exchange for “meaning” and “purpose” (together with wide recognition and associated media attention), violent actors are expected to frame their acts in ways that reinforce IS movement narratives. An illustrative example is the way in which sympathetic actors are apparently expected to accompany their acts with the public proclamation of baya. Quite literally, then, their acts serve the purpose of validating official IS narratives about it supposedly global reach, authority, and unifying potential. This relationship between the wider movement and individual actors can therefore be described as one of mutual recognition and reinforcement. With support from of the IS movement's well-financed media network, individual spree-killers are able to transcend the label of “lone madman” and instead be recognised as ideological/political terrorists. In July of 2016, al-Hayat's English-language magazine Dabiq fulfilled this part of its mission through the publication of the following statement:

Shortly following the blessed attack on a sodomite, Crusader nightclub by the mujahid Omar Mateen [may Allah accept him], American politicians were quick to jump into the spotlight and denounce the shooting, declaring it a hate crime, an act of terrorism, and an act of senseless violence. A hate crime? Yes. Muslims undoubtedly hate liberalist sodomites, as does anyone else with any shred of their fitrah (inborn human nature) still intact. An act of terrorism? Most definitely. Muslims have been commanded to terrorize the disbelieving enemies of Allah. But an act of senseless violence? One would think that the average Westerner, by now, would have abandoned the tired claim that the actions of the mujahidin – who

An interesting examples is illustrated by the French documentary Soldats d’Allah (CanalPlus, May 2016). As the narrating journalist infiltrates a small group of IS sympathisers, we are shown official IS media seemingly serves the purpose of reinforcing their identities, and is a source of entertainment and inspiration. They view official IS combat videos on their cellphones in the park, and listed to official IS nashids inside their car.

For a few examples of how official IS media promotes those distant sympathisers who carry out violent acts in its name and highlights their acts of baya, see Dabiq, Issue 7: 68-71; Dabiq, Issue 8: 5-6.
have repeatedly stated their goals, intentions, and motivations – don't make sense. Unless you truly – and naively – believe that the crimes of the West against Islam and the Muslims, whether insulting the Prophet [Peace and blessings be upon him], burning the Quran, or waging war against the Caliphate, won't prompt a brutal retaliation from the mujahidin, you know full well that the likes of the attacks carried out by Omar Mateen, Larossi Aballa [contemporary attacker who killed two people in Magnanville, France], and many others before and after them in revenge for Islam and the Muslims make complete sense. The only thing senseless would be for there to be no violent, fierce retaliation in the first place!  

The above described dynamic can be described as an attempt at filling a sort of political vacuum. Through its ability to grant “lone madmen” a voice, program, and purpose, the IS propagandists appropriate the frustrations of these individuals. This is arguably made possible by the movement’s wider endorsement of violent methods, as official narratives on things like sincerity, purification, and redemption are formulated in ways that encourage the use of such methods in many different contexts. Whatever the underlying motivations – be they marginalisation, frustration, revenge, or something else – anyone who already believes in the efficacy of violent methods will have that belief reaffirmed by official IS narratives. This may perhaps be a factor which contributes to the empirical credibility of the movement’s official messaging, and something which may reinforce impressions about the overall relevance of its calls to actions.

A video like *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* is a well-produced media release which arguably gives a serious and professional impression, while simultaneously being a sort of catalogue of violent acts. For a relatively isolated and frustrated individual or group, videos like it may contribute to an impression of being far from alone or hopeless. Rather, eventual interest and trust in violent methods are shared and encouraged by an apparently serious, influential, and widely respected social movement. Even the most horrible of execution videos are often largely presented as related to narratives on things like sincerity, defiance, and purification, and if we are to appreciate their propagandistic potency we need to force ourselves to look beyond perhaps preconceived notions about gruesome violence as something inherently (and always) unattractive for everyone. Violence can be regarded as something redemptive and purifying, and as a means of exacting revenge and/or reinforcing one's sense of self-efficacy and control. All of these (and probably many more) motivations are incorporated into and given leeway by the IS movement, as long as one is acting according to an official, prescribed framework. The apparent success of the IS movement is consciously framed as the result of its loyalty towards the principle of “the aiding sword”, and this in turn reinforces a sort of “common sense” attitude to the versatile effectiveness of violent methods.

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405 *Dabiq*, Issue 15: 30.
406 “Respected” in every sense of that word. *Fear* may also be viewed as a form of respect, and hence the IS movement can be regarded as respected well beyond the groups who sympathise with it.
407 In August 2014, the US Military initiated an air campaign against IS forces in Iraq. The al-Furqan Foundation responded by publishing a video titled *A Message to America*, which showed the beheading of American journalist James Foley. While explicitly directed at “America”, the execution was framed in ways that echo the IS movement's regular narratives. It started out with footage filmed from an American military aircraft, and thereby implicitly contrasted that indirect method of killing with the personal (and thereby more *sincere*) way in which the IS executioner carried out his act. Furthermore, the video signalled a stance of defiance in face of unfavourable odds, and the humiliation of James Foley (forced onto his knees and dressed in a Guantanamo-style orange jumpsuit) arguably echoed themes of revenge and triumph, while simultaneously referencing to the legacy of the semi-mythological Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (who had conducted a similarly presented execution in 2004). All of these are symbolic frames which would probably have been easily comprehended by a sympathetic viewer, well-versed in official IS narratives, while being easily overlooked or misunderstood by the average “terrorised” Westerner. For this reason, I would argue that Charlie Winter’s (2015) argument about how “brutal” IS videos are primarily directed at non-sympathetic audiences is problematic.
5.3.3. Summary

Given the fact that depictions of violence is such a prominent feature of the material analysed in the previous chapter, I regard an elaboration on its empirical credibility as justified and, indeed, necessary. While this issue can certainly be related to notions presented as part of the above described militant narrative of figures like Ayman al-Zawahiri and Usama bin Ladin, I nevertheless regard the above elaboration on the attractions of violence as a somewhat separate discussion. The discussion of statements on the necessity of jihad served the purpose of informing readers about a series of political justifications and narratives that have apparently been appropriated by IS propagandists. Above, I have rather tried to summarise ways in which other researchers have described the attraction of violent methods as connected to certain circumstances. In short, then, this discussion was intended as an attempt at highlighting the influence of interests and driving forces of violent actors, rather than the logic of their political justifications.

Looking primarily at a suggested correlation between people's feelings of marginalisation and their eventual resort to violence, I argue that such feelings may perhaps contribute to the empirical credibility of the IS movement's violent program of change. Given the relative/subjective nature of such feelings, it is difficult to relate this dynamic to a single and easily identifiable cause. Marginalisation may come as a result of political repression, religious/ethnic discrimination, or any other sort of social dynamic which enables for an experienced disconnection from politics and/or wider society. As political alternatives become imbued with a sense of, for example, hopelessness, the various attention-seeking and subversive qualities of violence may appear as an attractive alternative. The essentially violent manhaj presented in a video like Upon the Prophetic Methodology feeds directly into such narratives about the necessity of violent action. The same thing can be said about the more general way in which IS propagandists highlight the fundamental importance of “the aiding sword” for the success of Islam. The world described by these propagandists is one wherein violence remains as the only legitimate method of change. Government are to be overthrown, the kuffar should be violently confronted, and idols are to be smashed. Uncompromising, punishing violence arguably represents the practical core of the IS Caliphate's official manhaj.

Beyond eventual correlations between ways in which IS propagandists and movement sympathisers regard violence as necessary and/or effective, official IS media has consciously encouraged its use and potentially contributed to its attractiveness. Its producers have utilised various mechanisms which reinforce the perceived effectiveness of violent methods, as they provide individual actors with the ability to frame their deeds as something properly political/religious. As such, they are provided with an opportunity to become actually become “a part” of a wider movement, and relate themselves to issues regarded as important by wider society. The possibilities of attaining some form of political and ideological recognition may perhaps contribute to the attractiveness of a certain cause, symbol, or movement. The IS movement has thus managed to provide marginalised people anywhere with a program for concretising their dissent, and perhaps make sense of imagined acts of rebellious and/or vengeful violence. As a result, the various acts carried out in its name are often widely recognised for their supposedly ideological meaning, rather than regarded of as acts of individual lunacy. This likely adds to the empirical credibility of official IS narratives about its international relevance and efficacy – and especially so among people who are frustrated, isolated, or otherwise dissatisfied with their place in society. In other words, the IS Caliphate allows for its use as a symbolic tool in the hands of killers world-wide, so that their acts may be framed and perceived of as somehow significant. Someone who would otherwise be labelled a “lunatic” or “criminal” may thus use its symbols to turn him-/herself into an “Islamic terrorist” – i.e. the subject of serious political analysis and debate.
6. Concluding remarks – on the versatile nature of the sword

In the above chapters, I have analysed a set of official IS media releases which accompanied the movement's declaration of a Caliphate in 2014. I have discussed a number of different themes, and have connected these to an arguably overarching narrative about the legitimacy and implications of the IS Caliphate. This narrative references the supposedly fundamental importance of things like the enforcement of sharia, the purification of Muslim minds and societies, and the necessity of jihad – all of which can be described as connected to a metaphor which highlights the significance of the aiding sword.

Arguing that “the guiding book” of Islam cannot maintain its influence unless aided by the sword, this official IS narrative presents a sort of overall cosmology which recognises and highlights the importance of temporal politics. While the *aqida* of the book represents doctrinal truth about the nature of God and His worlds, the metaphorical sword is used to summarise what is regarded as a sort of methodological truth. This truth is framed as an honest declaration about that which is truly necessary, and as one that takes the corrupting influence of the *dunya* into account. The deterring and admonishing qualities of physical violence are highlighted as fundamentally important tools of Islam, as weak-minded masses are regarded of as easily lead astray unless forced onto the right path by rightly guided people with sword in hand. Given that the state can arguably be regarded of as the organised, political extension of the sword, it is probably no coincidence that “The Islamic State” calls itself just that. Its mission is framed as primarily focused on the areas of Islamic *manhaj* and temporal governance, and the supposedly unique importance of this endeavour is highlighted through narratives about how properly enforced Islamic rule has disappeared from our contemporary world.

This overall macro-narrative seemingly serves the purpose of highlighting the specific credentials of the IS movement, as it clarifies the important role fulfilled by its mujahidin and their political/military leaders. As they are the ones who actually implement the *manhaj* of Islam, their importance is framed as comparable to that of those scholars who serve as experts on the religion's guiding doctrines. Truth remains practically hollow unless it is enforced upon society by those with the ability to wield its aiding sword, punish those who transgress, and defend against the powers of disbelief. Framing our contemporary world as one that has become corrupted enough to allow for good to become evil and evil to become good, the correcting mission of Sword and State is reinforced with a sense of arguably dramatic urgency. Adding to this sense of urgency are related narratives about how the Muslim *umma*'s loss of both divine favour and overall strength/unity has allowed for its subjugation by disbelieving nations.

This entire narrative is imbued with a sense of its supposedly self-evident nature. For if Muslim are attacked, they have defend themselves. If the rules of Islam are broken, those who have transgressed have to be punished. And those who explain away these supposed facts, or are otherwise inhibiting the implementation and defence of the truth, are either hypocrites or disbelievers. The supposedly comprehensive nature of the IS Caliphate's approach to Islam is praised for ways in which it is guided by a sincere recognition of the aiding sword's fundamental importance. Its *manhaj* is apparently framed as a sort of common-sense, pragmatic, and realistic approach towards the religion's practical implementation. In doing so, its propagandists does everything but excuse, explain away, or hide the truth. Instead, the “ugly truths” of its *manhaj* are celebrated through uncensored, intimate depictions of its violent activities. And while its propagandists use a number of various techniques to glamorise, glorify, or otherwise manipulate the depiction of the movement's
activities, the largely uncensored nature of the utilised images nevertheless leave viewers with an overall impression about the seemingly sincere nature of what they have just consumed. Through videos like Upon the Prophetic Methodology, the IS Caliphate appears as the virtual antithesis of any sort of existential ambivalence, overall uncertainty, or hypocrisy. Its assured confidence in the truthful nature of its endeavour is demonstrated in a number of ways – such as when the Prophet's seal and Islamic shahada are imposed onto the images of a violent massacre.

As part of this thesis' first chapter, I asked whether or not official IS media released around the 2014 Caliphate declaration served the purpose of distilling the movement's ideology and presenting its overall purpose. I would argue that the presentation of the “aiding sword” narrative served such a purpose. It should here be noted that the above summary is largely the result of my analyses of media released by the al-Furqan Foundation at the time – such as speeches and sermons delivered by the IS movement's symbolic leadership, as well as the major video release Upon the Prophetic Methodology. Perhaps as a result of al-Furqan's apparently intimate relationship with the IS Caliphate's official leadership, its messaging campaign at the time may have been focused on highlighting especially essential parts of, for example, the movement's ideology. Its way of stressing interconnected concepts like sword, state, and manhaj arguably contributes to the impression of a largely coherent narrative used to present the nature of the official IS approach to Islam and politics. Yet beyond this presentation of a somewhat distilled macro-narrative, a number of other videos released during the same period seemingly served the purpose of reinforcing the presented program with additional nuance through different elaborations on its various specifics. I would therefore argue that these releases either served the intentional purpose of or simply resulted in the highlighting of the various benefits of engaging with the movement. Presenting a series of micro-narratives, they explicitly connected a number of issues and interests to the overall program associated with the IS Caliphate.

Official IS videos released at the time addressed a fairly large amount of different issues – something which illustrates the arguably dynamic nature of the movement's messaging campaign. The overall narrative about the aiding sword should therefore be regarded as a versatile one, as it is related to situations and grievances experienced at many different levels. The necessity and efficacy of the movement's state and jihad are illustrated by the military/political triumph demonstrated in videos like Breaking the Border and The End of Sykes-Picot. The presentation of this particular triumph is furthermore laden with symbolic significance, as it explicitly addresses issues connected to the legacy of Western imperialism and the supposed evils of divisive nationalism. In other videos, the benefits of enforced sharia are highlighted, and it is argued that the IS movement (with the help of its “sword”) has created a society wherein good is enjoined and evil is forbidden. The issue of people being lead astray by innovative, non-Muslim, or otherwise problematic practices is recurrently addressed, and the “The Islamic State” is highlighted for its ability to violently counteract such a development. A number of statements argue for the IS Caliphate as a properly Islamic state, wherein one is supposedly able to truly practice one's religion and reach one's full potential. Through messages delivered by men from different parts of the world, as well as through the demonstration of their various deeds, the movement's community of supposedly truthful, pious, and committed mujahidin is highlighted. Their faces and statements are used to present a somewhat convincing argument about the supposedly non-prejudiced and truly multi-ethnic nature of the IS movement. Throughout, the redeeming qualities of jihad are stressed, and the idea that “there is no life without jihad” represents yet another example of the sword's supposedly fundamental importance. With sword in hand, these previously “humiliated” men are able to transcend their various sufferings, and demonstrate the supposedly true and inspiring nature of their sincere conviction and dedicated commitment. They are recurrently idealised as the pinnacle of the umma's efforts at achieving unity, and their sacrifices are presented as the primary precondition for Islam's further implementation and defence.

While the macro-narrative on the need of purity and the efficacy of the sword is quite specific, it is
presented as if directly relevant for situations which range from “depression” in Britain to “revenge” in Iraq. The ways in which IS propagandists have appropriated aspects of more widely recognised “Muslim issues” related to, for example, notions of pan-Islamic sympathy, global jihad, and Salafism enables for an arguably diverse narrative – apparently framed with regards to the potential possibilities of wide-ranging resonance. While the promotion of a local and specifically sectarian agenda plays an apparently important part in the overall messaging campaign, it is arguably framed as if primarily related to a wider concern about the strength and unity of the umma. 

The eradication of supposedly deviant sects in Iraq and Syria will serve the purpose of purifying the umma’s wider body, so that it may proceed with turning its military attention outwards. In other words, Shiites and Alawites stand as obstacles on the path towards the necessary confrontation with the “Crusaders”. Furthermore, this narrative on the various benefits of purity moves from its concern with the overall umma to that of the individual soul. Existential concerns of various kinds are apparently recognised, as the movement's supposedly redeeming qualities are stressed, and the micro-level benefits of, for example, the enjoining of good and the disavowal of disbelief are highlighted. Through its jihad of conquest and political enforcement of sharia, the IS Caliphate is creating a temporal sphere wherein which the sincere believers can live “without fearing that the enemy will make problems for them or disturb them from worshipping Allah”. No idols will lead them astray. No sinful institutions will distract them from God. And there will be no more contradictions to encourage their eventual hypocrisy.

As part of discussions presented in previous chapters, I have also tried to make analytical sense of ways in which certain material and ideal interests are addressed by the analysed propaganda releases. For example, the previous chapter was focused on the empirical credibility of official IS narratives on the various benefits of engagement with the movement, and I argued for ways in which a number of widely recognised notions and interests (as well as various broader developments) are referenced by IS propagandists as part of their attempts at highlighting the supposed relevance of their movement. I have also argued that narratives on the purifying qualities of violence may possibly serve the purpose of legitimising a certain military approach, as well as of framing acts of revenge in properly religious terms, and that this may serve the purpose of addressing interests related to these issues and of highlighting certain benefits of engagement with the IS movement. Furthermore, I have tried to relate official IS narratives on the redemptive qualities of purification to variously existential concerns about the ambivalence of one’s overall identity and/or relationship with Islam. Finally, I would argue that the symbolic significance of the IS Caliphate is reinforced by ways in which it is framed as an attempt at exercising interpretative and political authority, and thereby provide supposedly sincere/authentic Muslims with a structure around which to gather. This can be interpreted as an attempt at addressing interests related to concepts like “belonging”, and at providing somehow aimless individuals with a sense of manifest and significant purpose.

While I regard these analytically formulated “interests” as plausible explanations for the appeal of official IS narratives, I would here like to acknowledge the apparent limitations of my own analysis. I may perhaps be able to highlight issues addressed in the analysed material, and relate their appeal to ways in which certain developments and circumstances may reinforced their empirical credibility (as was done, to some extent, in the previous chapter). But the proper answering of questions regarding the ways in which “interests” guide human behaviour is, almost invariably, a complex process. It depends on the availability of contextual data which highlight ways in which, for example, specific experiences and circumstances contributes to the attraction of a certain framing narrative. While I would argue that I have achieved my intended purpose of highlighting thematic

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408 It is possible that the empirical credibility of this narratives about Shiites as “an obstacle” may have been reinforced by recent developments in, for example, Syria. Shiite powers like Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement have come forward as distinguished defenders of the “taghut” Bashar al-Assad – and, furthermore, formed a de facto alliance with the Russian “Crusaders”.

409 Sheikh 2016.
patterns of the studied material, as well as a number of material and ideal interests explicitly addressed by it, I refrain from drawing any further conclusions about ways in which these narratives may be received by specific audiences. If I were to summarise my ideas on potential avenues for further research on this phenomenon, I would therefore highlight the importance of *in situ* studies on the cultural influence and/or impact of the IS movement and its associated media. Given the apparently dynamic and versatile nature of official IS narratives, it is plausible that different individuals and/or groups may be attracted to different aspects of the overall message, depending on which of its themes they regard as especially relevant for their own situation. It is therefore far from safe to assume that there exist a sort of catch-all answer that may explain the overall nature of the IS movement and its appeal. The actual interaction with people who, for whatever reason, consume IS-affiliated media is arguably the next step on the path towards a more inclusive and substantiated understanding of the movement.

Samuli Schielke has argued that “grand narratives” like, for example, “Islam” are assigned their respective (and varied) meanings through the different ways in which people relate them to their variously lived experiences. For social scientists of various kinds, the study of these narratives should therefore avoid an all-too narrow focus on the their presumed *sui generis* characteristics. If we are to broaden our understanding of the social significance of grand narratives, religions, ideologies, and social movements, we should study how they actually appear and are used in different social contexts. Rather than using the clear definition of a certain “grand narrative” as a point of departure, studies on the nature of its significance should be attentive to “the ambivalence, the inconsistencies and the openness of people's lives that never fit into the framework of a single tradition”.

For Schielke, an insistence on the theoretical definition of a studied narrative/tradition/religion (and by extension, I would argue, “movement”) may serve to inhibit one's ability to appreciate the various social dynamics of its use, such as potentially intimate relationships with phenomena not necessarily regarded as related to the basic definition. Human beings are undoubtedly capable of living contradictory lives, and their various ways of referencing a certain religion or ideology may serve an arguably indefinite number of purposes:

> What I mean is that Islam, like any other major faith, is not simply something – it is a part of people's lives, thoughts, acts, societies, histories and more. Consequently, it can be many different things – a moral idiom, a practice of self-care, a discursive tradition, an aesthetic sensibility, a political ideology, a mystical quest, a source of hope, a cause of anxiety, an identity, an enemy – you name it. [...] To understand the complex logic of lived experience, we will have to take the inherent ambiguity of people's lives as the starting point, just as we have to locate their world-views in both the local concerns they are physically acting in as well as the global connections, both imagined and enacted, they locate themselves in. These are not merely exceptions from some kind of normality [e.g. the ideals of a certain “grand narrative”]; on the contrary they are the normality of people's lives – even those who at times argue for holistic and ideologies.

While Schielke is speaking, in quite general terms, about the anthropological study of variously “Islamic” social contexts, I would argue that many of his ideas are relevant for the study of more specific phenomena as well – such as, for example, the IS movement. The above described IS narratives, themes, and attempts at highlighting certain issues represent mere ideals, and should not be used to draw conclusions about what the IS movement truly “is”. I have recurrently stressed the seemingly dynamic nature of its official narratives, and highlighted ways in which these are framed as related to a number of palpable issues. My hope is that these conclusions may serve the purpose of reinforcing a framework that may contribute to and nuance our understanding of the IS

410 An alternative avenue for further research is that of the proper, *historical* contextualisation of the above presented themes and narratives. That is, which are the overarching social and political developments that can be related to this apparent interest in a violently purifying and punishing Caliphate? Such an historical survey could possibly move beyond the limits of the IS movement itself, and relate its development to various older ideas and events as well.

411 Schielke 2010.

412 Schielke 2010: 1.

413 Schielke 2010: 2-3.
Caliphate's grand narrative, and that such a framework may in turn be used for the purposes of studying the social dynamics of the movement. I argue that social scientists should be wary of getting dragged into ongoing debates about the “is” and “isn't” of the IS movement, so that we may instead focus on the practical nature of its societal impact and significance. No matter its relationship with Islam, Salafism, or comparable grand narratives, an all-too narrow focus those connections may perhaps leave us bewildered when confronted with “the complex logic of lived experience”. This is not to say that the various connections between IS and Islam are entirely inconsequential, or that one's wider knowledge about the former is entirely useless for one's study of the latter, but rather that they are far from the only connections we should remain attentive towards. The potential entertainment value of IS-related media and the connection between this and wider pop-cultural norms and practices, the ways in which its symbolism may serve the purpose of generating counter-cultural credit, and simple schadenfreude emanating from the apparent ways in which the “arrogant” West trembles before its so-called Caliphate – these are all factors that may be entirely overlooked if we only focus on the explicit ideological messaging of IS media releases, or on the supposedly “Islamic” character of their various disseminators.

In other words, we may perhaps need to develop a more in-depth understanding of the specific ways in which peoples relate these images, symbols, and narratives to their various (and subjectively experienced) realities. And while I realise the limitations of conclusions drawn from the above presented content analysis, I hope that they can (at least) be related to the further, contextual study of this particular social movement. If nothing else, I have at least illustrated how IS propagandists attempt to highlight the supposed relevance of their movement, and my hope is that this can in turn be related to an overall understanding of, for example, the dynamic media interaction between propagandists and audiences. At the same time, the various conclusions presented in the preceding chapters are not to be regarded as the summary of a rigid or crystal clear ideology, and I am therefore not encouraging others to approach the IS movement with preconceived notions about the importance of the “aiding sword” narrative. Rather, I want to stress that the perhaps most consequential conclusion drawn from this analysis has been that about the multi-faceted, dynamic, and arguably even inclusive nature of the narratives presented in the studied material. An overall macro-narrative about the relationship between violence and purity is clarified through an apparently vast array of subsidiary themes and variously related issues. And all of these issues are, in turn, presented in ways that apparently enable for their appropriation of different material and ideal interests. During the roughly two years that have passed since the release of the here analysed videos, it is furthermore likely that additional issues have been highlighted, recognised, and related to the movement's macro-narrative. The IS movement's official media campaign is an (as of January 2017) ongoing project, which still results in the release of, for example, several major (i.e. long and well-produced) videos each week.

Given all of the above, I would argue that we are not here dealing with the distinctly stiff-legged or narrow-minded sectarianism of, let's say, an “apocalyptic terrorist group”. Rather, the IS movement oversees and influences a complex set of rapidly flowing and highly adaptable media narratives. It is a truly global and dynamic social movement, and an obvious product of our interconnected world. Its cultural influences range from the aesthetics of MTV and Hollywood, to the religious and political thoughts of figures like ibn Qayyim and ibn Taymiyya. And from what I have gathered, its narratives are almost as anxious about highlighting the temporal benefits of engaging with it as they are with issues related to divine reward and promise. For these reasons, scholars of the social

414 It can perhaps also be used to further our understanding of the movement's historical and social context(s). If we understand its ways of appropriating “Muslim issues”, material and ideal interests, etc., we may possibly be able to discuss its various relationships with different political, social, or cultural developments connected to the overall history of Islam, the Middle East, and/or our contemporary world.

415 Between 16-23 January 2017, the movement's various official media offices released a total of three, major, videos-releases. Accessed via www.jihadology.net. This was in addition to an issue of its magazine al-Naba, its regular radio broadcasts, and various news reports released by its al-Amaq News Agency (specialising on largely unedited footage framed as “news” rather than propaganda).
sciences and humanities, as well as people connected to security analysis and relevant branches of law enforcement, should be wary of drawing hasty, simple, and all-too rigid conclusions about the characteristics of this movement and the nature of its appeal. It can “be” almost any number of things – depending on its specific uses within particular social contexts. For this reason, it can certainly be argued that current research on the organisation known as “The Islamic State” should be further complemented by the contextual study of the social impact of its associated media phenomenon.
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