

# **Digitale Medien und politisch- weltanschaulicher Extremismus im Jugendalter**

Erkenntnisse aus Wissenschaft und Praxis

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Arbeits- und Forschungsstelle  
Rechtsextremismus  
und Radikalisierungsprävention



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## **Forschung zu Kindern, Jugendlichen und Familien an der Schnittstelle von Wissenschaft, Politik und Fachpraxis**

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# Vorwort

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CLAUDIA ALVARES

## Mediatising the Radical: The Implied Audience in Islamic State Propaganda Videos

*This essay seeks to analyse the al-Hayat Media Centre's visual propaganda of the so-called Islamic State (IS) so as to trace the visual and verbal recruitment strategies designed to cater to an implied audience. The profile of this implied or intended audience will be examined on the basis of a framing analysis of the key themes identified in seven videos of al-Hayat IS propaganda, presupposing that the videos indicate how recruiters try to impart their message to certain cohorts. The profoundly dichotomous structure of 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' that provides the background for the framing of certain key themes in the videos analysed, affords the justification for Jihad, or Holy War, through the invocation of emotional and moral modes of address.*

### Introduction: Maximising Impact through Visual Propaganda

Violent radicalisation constitutes a challenge to traditional methods of dealing with vulnerable and disadvantaged communities on the part of social work and education practitioners. In effect, the risk of socially alienated individuals becoming involved in violent extremism through the virtual realm of online networks requires that social workers and educators understand the extent to which multimedia platforms facilitate, or amplify, radicalisation processes. The role that new media, and by implication, network culture play in promoting social cohesion, or integration, in contexts of existing discontent, should thus be further scrutinised so as to understand the contexts that may lead an individual to adhere to violent action. This implies that individual mind-sets, such as those conducive to self-radicalisation, be considered alongside collective environments in the analysis of 'e-recruitment'.

Radicalisation is interpreted, in the context of this chapter, as the process leading to affiliation with radicalised movements and perpetration of radical action<sup>1</sup> (Umar/Mustapha 2015, p. 3), which have commonly

1 Radicalisation relates to the concept of extremism due to denoting a process through which individuals affiliate themselves with radicalised movements that legitimise radical action on the basis of extremist ideologies (cf. The Danish Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Housing 2016, p. 7).



come to be associated with Muslim fundamentalism ever since the 2001 attacks on North-American soil. Until the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings, European attention had been primarily centred on al-Qaeda. Subsequent to the attacks that have occurred in various European cities between 2014 and 2017, among which Barcelona, Brussels, Paris, Nice, Berlin and London – not to mention other attacks in Muslim countries, namely Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Turkey and Iran, with the local population frequently being a primary target –, focus has shifted onto the so-called Islamic State (IS), a group that separated from al-Qaeda in 2014.

With the aim of encompassing an imagined or constructed community of believers (*Ummah*) under the self-proclaimed form of a ‘Caliphate’, or so-called ‘Islamic State’, extending beyond any clearly defined territory (Bhui/Ibrahim 2013, S. 217 ff.), the IS has been successful in recruiting disaffected young European immigrants of Muslim origin and converts to Islam, partly through the use of ‘social media’, or ‘internet-based’ propaganda. Although this claim still needs to be buttressed by clear research evidence, it is nevertheless observable that ‘the IS has established a notable online presence’ (Macnair/Frank 2017, p. 2) through diffusion, by its al-Hayat Media Centre, of propaganda materials targeting audience niches. Indeed, there are many accounts by journalists and social workers of social media use on the part of young Europeans who have joined IS (Bouzar et al. 2014; Erelle/Potter 2015; Masi 27/04/2016; BBC News 25/01/2016). Since it was first set up in 2014, the al-Hayat Media Centre has launched various sophisticatedly produced high-quality videos, many of which in English, thus targeting an Anglophone audience. According to Zelin, the Islamic State’s Arabic media output far outweighs that which is translated into English. In fact, its media strategy ‘attempts to use media as a force multiplier to make it appear it is active in many locations even though the vast majority of its activities are in Iraq and Syria’ (Zelin 2015, p. 1). Alongside the existence of media offices at a provincial level, IS has created several dissemination accounts so as to ensure the continuation of communication activities in the case of suspension of any one account. Furthermore, IS has installed ‘media points’ in stronghold locations throughout Syria, Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Libya (Winter 27/03/2016, p. 2). These media points consist of stalls, shacks or vehicles where propaganda material in print, on CD/DVD and/or on USB drives is distributed to locals, namely ‘children and young teenagers’ (Zelin 2015, p. 1).

The fact that around 88 % of IS media content is composed of visual materials (*ibid.*) indicates that the organisation attributes great importance to visual propaganda in successfully maximising a ‘desired response’ (Macnair/Frank 2017, p. 2) on the part of audiences. This emphasis on visuals is used to frame emotions that accentuate message persuasiveness (Seo/Ebrahim 2016, p. 229). Because of the need of terrorist organisations to maximise impact through direct message dissemination to the ‘largest audience possible’ (McNair/Frank 2017, p. 3), organisations such as IS have been quick to exploit the interactive potentialities of new media in bypassing the gate-keeping functions of traditional media outlets.

Indeed, the capacity for the production – and exchange – of user-generated content through blogs, file sharing portals, videos, personal spaces, social networking sites and podcasts (Alvares/Dahlgren 2016, p. 54; Awan 2007, p. 395; Bhui/Ibrahim 2013, p. 221; Sherwood/Nicholson 2013, p. 943) contributes to an ever-increasing far-reaching expansion of the concept of audience from online to offline spaces (Cook/Hasmath 2014, p. 990). This reinforces the disembodied nature of the online environment, which provides a certain degree of anonymity (Erez et al. 2011, p. 3 f.) as well as the possibility of circulating messages beyond their original spatiotemporal context of authorship (Murthy 2012, p. 1067 f.).

The difficulty in obtaining verifiable information from primary sources means that ‘very little is known about how radicalising messages are actually received, interpreted, and internalized, and to what extent their precise role is in the larger radicalisation process’ (Huey in Macnair/Frank 2017, p. 18). This chapter nevertheless explores the profile of the implied or intended audience which is addressed in jihadist online contents. The profile of this implied or intended audience will be examined on the basis of a framing analysis of the preferred encoded meanings (Hall 1984, p. 136) articulated by IS propaganda. In this respect, we posit that such preferred encoded meanings enable us to understand how recruiters try to impart their message to certain cohorts, thus shedding light on visual and verbal discursive strategies designed to cater to specific audiences.

**A Dialogic Approach to Framing:  
Understanding the Implied Audience**

In order to trace the identity framing that prevails in jihadist online contents, seven videos of al-Hayat IS propaganda (see Tab. 1) were subject to thematic analysis so as to distinguish ‘patterns and trends in qualitative data’ (Macnair/Frank 2017, p. 7).

Tab. 1: Al-Hayat Videos Analysed

Video Title	Date of Release	Main Language
No Life without Jihad	June 19 2014	English
Chosen Few of Different Lands	July 29 2014	English (Arabic subtitles)
Join the Ranks	July 22 2014	Indonesian (English subtitles)
Sang pour Sang	May 1 2016	French (English subtitles)
Flames of War (trailer)	September 17 2014	English
For the Sake of Allah	November 5 2015	English
No Respite	November 24 2015	English

These videos were codified on the basis of recurrent key words and key images (Rose 2008, p. 157) and their connection to recurrent frames used as an ‘organising principle’ (Carey 2009) to structure the discursive practices through which a particular ‘ingroup’ tends to be stereotypically constructed against its other(s) (Fairclough 1992; Krzyzanowski/Wodak 2008; Van Dijk 2006, 2001).

Framing can be defined as the attempt to foreground particular aspects of an issue so as to influence the audience’s comprehension of the latter, based on its presentation. Entman describes framing as the selection of ‘some aspects of a perceived reality’, so as to ‘make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (ibid. 1993, p. 52). This heuristic instrument, which ‘gives life an overall form, order and tone’ (Carey 2009, p. 17), conditions the way in which a story is told to a particular audience, conferring meaning on the surrounding world. Indeed, by

providing the social context of interpretation, the heuristic function of framing is profoundly ideological and thus inseparable from an axiomatic dimension, namely the formulation of value judgements.

The ‘central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them’ (Gamson/Modigliani 1987, p. 143) seeks to mobilise cognitive schemes, or ‘schemata of interpretation’ (Goffman 1974), which help simplify complex issues, naturalizing them through the reinforcement of belief structures held in common by members of a group (Leudar/Nekvapil 2000, p. 490). These belief structures, which are activated by the media through framing devices, can be defined as a ‘socially constructed set of categories’ (Hall 1978, p. 53) that contribute to social consensus by articulating a notion of unity, linguistically represented through the pronoun ‘we’ and bearing one dominant perspective of events.

Media producers thus seek to cognitively reproduce the mental representations that are shared by members of any particular ‘ingroup’ rather than alter the world-view of media users (Alvares 2016, p. 665 f.). According to Stuart Hall, this cognitive reproduction corresponds to a ‘preferred’ encoded meaning (ibid. 1984, p. 136), namely the attempt by media producers to define the parameters within which decoding can occur. This means that media producers have an implied audience (Nielsen 2009, p. 24) in mind when encoding their messages, seeking to heuristically reproduce the cognitive structure that collectively characterizes that particular ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983).

The dialogic approach to audience research (Bakhtin 1984; Livingstone 1998; Nielsen 2009) envisages the occurrence of an imaginary dialogue between the media producer and the implied audience. In this way, visual, auditory and verbal texts anticipate rejoinders and are ‘half someone else’s’ (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293).

## **Ingroup: The *Ummah* as Non-Racial Community**

One of the most expressive themes in the videos analysed is that of *Ummah*, understood as being a borderless, supra-national community of believers with a common history, defined against unbelievers as ‘the enemy’. The *mujahideen*, as those engaged in jihad, or holy war, correspond to a (single) brotherhood that is described as the arrows thrown

by Allah against his enemies: ‘Send us, we are your sharp arrows, throw us at your enemies wherever they may be ...’ (*No Life without Jihad*); ‘Indeed, Allah loves those who fight in His cause in a row as though they are a (single) structure joined firmly’ (*Join the Ranks*). Equality among brothers independently of race, is often emphasised, with all *mujahideen* united to fight Allah’s enemies so as to enforce the Sharia State.

‘We understand no borders’ (*No Life without Jihad*) stands out as indicative of both the universalism of the *mujahideen*, as well as their expansionist ideology. The Islamic State is hailed, in *Join the Ranks*, for having ‘freed thousands of Muslim prisoners, united Muslim lands and demolished the Sykes-Picot borders that were made by the kuffar (unbeliever)’. Its ultimate objective is that of liberating ‘all the lands of the oppressed Muslims from tawaghit (false gods) who do not implement the Sharia of Islam’ (*Join the Ranks*). Emphasis is placed on the Islamic State as being ‘established upon pure Tawheed (oneness of God)’ (*Join the Ranks*), with the Ummah constituting oneness in belief: ‘Now the time has come for the battles to be won, Shahadah (the Muslim profession of faith) on our tongues as our hearts beat as one’ (*For the Sake of Allah*).

Visually, the diversity of *Ummah* depicted in some of the IS videos analysed relies on images of soldiers from different origins enjoying camaraderie resembling the racial cosmopolitanism of United Colours of Benetton advertisements.<sup>2</sup> In *No Respite*, the camera slowly sweeps across four bearded soldiers, all of whom wearing beige military camouflage type attire. Curiously, almost for the first time in the videos analysed, the soldiers appear without rifles. They are of different races: on the left is a soldier of Middle-Eastern appearance, the second one, counting from the left, is white, with blondish hair, the two to the right are black, the first being darker than the one at the uttermost right. Each holds on to his comrade’s shoulders in a gesture of friendship. The one of Middle Eastern origin, on the left, points with his right index finger to the sky. The one on the uttermost right points, with his left index finger, to his fellow colleagues. All smile happily at the camera, while the narrator’s voice reminds us that there is ‘no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab, or between a black man and a white man ...’.

2 See for example campaign advertisements on Trendhunter.com, [www.trendhunter.com/trends/benetton-fall-winter-2011](http://www.trendhunter.com/trends/benetton-fall-winter-2011), or Asian Model Blogspot, [www.asianmodelsblog.blogspot.pt/2010/07/noma-han-in-ad-campaign-for-benetton.html](http://www.asianmodelsblog.blogspot.pt/2010/07/noma-han-in-ad-campaign-for-benetton.html) (03/10/2017).

Then the image changes so as to focus on rows of soldiers in prayer. The soldiers' heads are slightly bowed down and their eyes are shut. The soldier at the front of the group, at the centre of the image, appears to be Central Asian. The sky behind them is light blue with white clouds. And the narrator's voice continues the previous phrase transcribed 'except through piety. This is the glory of faith that unites us'. In large black capital letters, set against the white-clouded sky, we read the caption: 'UNITED BY ISLAM'. The only divide among men is thus their degree of religious commitment to Allah. The implementation of a non-secular State, based on Sharia, or Islamic Law, illustrates that equality based, not on race, but on piety, is the transversal frame that binds men together.

The concept of *Ummah* frequently intersects with that of 'foreign' jihadists, in a universalistic gesture of inclusion. Canadian jihadist, Abu Muslim, says in the video titled *Chosen Few of Different Lands*: 'We need engineers, we need doctors, we need professionals ... you can come here and help rebuild the place. So come and join before the door's closed.' The land of *Sham* (the region of Syria and the Levant in Islamic historical tradition) is open to the revival of the *Ummah*, to anyone who wishes to bring glory to Allah by fighting in his name.

*Ummah*, in this video, is visually represented by multi-coloured banners which serve to frame various images of atrocities as connected through the jihadist objective of fighting against Allah's enemies. Some examples of such atrocities are as follows: floggings of bodies writhing on the ground, around which men gather; bodies strewn on the ground in military apparel; headless torsos surrounded by male heads on either side; scenes that seem to parody Christian crucifixion, with men tied to bars with a central wooden joist, set against large IS flags; executions by black-masked IS soldiers, with bodies, initially in a coiled up position, rapidly adopting a sprawling and inanimate position; the swinging and throwing of bodies – it not being clear whether dead or alive –, down a valley, over an enormous distance of earth-coloured rugged, hilly terrain.

Another multi-coloured banner, with slightly different colours, without the blues and brighter in hues (composed of yellow, orange, red and green), gives way to what appears to be the dead body of the Canadian soldier who so far has appeared as main narrator. The message may be that he, a 'foreign' soldier, has gained the status of martyr due to his devotion to Allah and the cause of IS.

## Outgroup: The Enemy as Unbeliever

Within the clearly expansionist ideology of the ‘Caliphate’, emphasis is placed on the unity of Muslims against those who have historically sought to divide them against each other through nationalism – the infidels. This division has been enforced through the creation of nation-state borders across a region stretching from Persia to the Mediterranean, subsequently to the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, which secretly split up the region between France and Britain (*Join the Ranks*). Nationalism is an enemy whose symbols IS soldiers have attempted to demolish under the form of Palmyra, for example, in an attempt to ‘destroy the Sykes-Picot borders’ (*No Respite*): ‘For there is no honour to be found in the remnants of *Shirk* (worship of anything other than the singular God)’ (*No Respite*). Against the dark, thundering sky appear the capital letters ‘Sykes-Picot’ in blood-coloured red. The camera zooms in on these red letters, which crash away into fragments, giving way to a massive explosion of gold flames that quickly rise to engulf the black screen.

Professing to be founded not on man-made laws but rather on the prophetic methodology, the so-called Islamic State claims to breathe renewed life into the *Sunnah* (the verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), bringing light to darkness: ‘The *Sunnah* is alive, *Khilafah* (the Caliphate) on the rise, the flag of *Tawheed* (unicity of Allah) shining bright before our eyes’ (*For the Sake of Allah*). This contrasts with secular States, with ‘man-made laws’ (*No Respite*), whose soldiers fight for the interests of legislators, liars, fornicators, corporations, and for the freedoms of sodomites’. Representatives of the ‘secular State’, namely politicians throughout the world, Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), and multinational corporations are uniformly included under the label ‘the enemy’.

The enemy is embodied in a fusion of symbols such as the UN logo serving as pinnacle to the dome of Capitol Hill, home to the US Congress and the legislative branch of the US Federal Government (metonymic here for ‘manmade laws’). In the *Flames of War* video, we are shown three close-ups: firstly of Obama (representing the caption ‘incompetent legislators’) with Dick Cheney and John Kerry in the background, followed by George W. Bush (with accompanying caption ‘liars’) with George Bush senior, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair in the background, subsequently followed by Bill Clinton (‘fornicators’) with John McCain and Gordon

Brown in the background. This is then followed by the juxtaposition, or overlapping, of various small, black and white squares with corporation names, in synchrony with verbal enunciation ('corporations').

The screen then scrolls down. On a dark background with yellow flames the flag of Iran appears, with the president of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, appearing juxtaposed to the former and the word 'IRAN' sprawled out across him. The screen scrolls down again and flames engulf the Turkish flag, with an image of the Turkish president Erdoğan partly overlapping the latter. The word 'TURKEY' again sprawls over Erdoğan. The screen scrolls down once more and flames violently engulf the Russian flag, with the Russian president Putin being juxtaposed against the centre of the flag. The word 'Russia' is inscribed over Putin. A huge meeting hall at what appears to be the United Nations headquarters then appears. At the centre of the screen, the two intertwining swords appear, in white, set against the words the 'Millah of Kufr' (the religion of unbelief). The image is framed by the white branches of laurel that circle the intertwining swords. This gives way to the image of the black and white UN logo, in which two branches of white laurel frame a world map set against four intersecting black circles.

The camera zooms in on the UN symbol and gives way to an image where sixty small flags are set against the background of a thundering, menacing, dark sky. The caption, in large white lettering, runs as follows: THE GLOBAL COALITION, and, below, in thinner white capital lettering, AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE.

The *Ummah* is thus historically justified, for it is destined to restore the glory of past caliphates which, from an IS perspective, united, a community of believers under a political system. This glory implies fighting against the *rafidah*, a term encompassing the worst unbelievers, namely Shi'a<sup>3</sup> Muslims, secular nation-state projects and those Sunnis 'who fight

3 Despite being Muslim themselves, Shi'as are considered by Sunni radicals to be worse unbelievers than followers of other monotheistic religions, such as Christians or Jews loyal to Israel. This is because Shi'a Muslims are accused by Sunnis of adhering to heretical belief ('*bidaa'*) in the form of polytheism, which allegedly prevents the worship of Allah as singular in nature. To Sunnis, this polytheism manifests itself through veneration of saints, the dead and ayatollahs as mirroring God's will on earth. This contrasts with Sunni belief in the need to focus only on the lived practice and teachings of the Prophet. At the origin of this schism lies a disagreement over the succession to Muhammad in 632 AD: while Sunnis believe that Muhammad's successor – Abu Bakr – was rightly elected caliph by majority vote, Shi'as defend that Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, should have been the Prophet's successor and first Imam due to having been chosen by God through Muhammad (Mamouri 2015; S.B. 2013; Steinberg 2001, p. 238).



against their brothers on behalf of “the West” (*Join the Ranks*): ‘Behind them are the Jews and America, may Allah curse them. They are supported by both Arab and non-Arab *tawaghit* (false deities). And they are enemies who hate Allah’s Sharia’ (*Join the Ranks*).

The jihadists have embarked on a mission to avenge Allah for insults and humiliations suffered, setting the record straight, to grant victory over those who unite to fight the ‘truth’. As such, *Ummah* stands as a community united in belief against an enemy united by unbelief, which deserves punishment: ‘So bring it on, all of you. Your numbers only increase us in faith, and we’re counting your banners, which our prophet said would be 80 in number. And then the flames of War will finally burn you on the hill of Dabiq’<sup>4</sup> (*No Respite*).

Verbal discourse about the enemy in the videos is frequently accompanied by dark thundering clouds that frame Western, usually North American, soldiers in military attire. In *No Respite*, a black and white image of Capitol Hill, topped by the UN symbol on the dome, set against dark, thundering clouds, provides the background to Western soldiers who appear with rifles held transversally across their bodies, pointing downwards. In *Flames of War*, we are given a close-up of a Western soldier wearing a white helmet and facing the ground. The muzzle of a revolver appears within the picture frame. A shot is fired at the soldier’s head and everything goes up in flames. The flames quickly engulf the whole screen, juxtaposing themselves against the contours of a Western military unit and military plane.

## ***Hijrah*: Establishing a Link between Ingroup and Outgroup**

A link between the need to expand the *Ummah* (under the form of the Caliphate) and the need to combat the enemies of Allah is established through the appeal to *Hijrah*. The term currently symbolises migration to the Islamic State, inspired by the Prophet Muhammad’s historic journey from Mecca to Medina, alongside his followers, to escape an assassination plot. The calls to *Hijrah*, or, migration to the land of *Sham* (region of Syria and the Levant) in the videos analysed are very emotive and

4 Dabiq is a town in northern Syria where the IS believes it will eventually confront infidel forces, in accordance with a hadith (account) of the Prophet Muhammad.

articulate a sense of righteous indignation and anger deriving from having been wronged and treated unfairly. The call to wage jihad appears in this context, as a form of reparation for wrongs – humiliation, oppression, rule by false deities (*tanaghbit*) – suffered. Through *Hijrah*, the community of jihadists expands with the ultimate objective of waging war so as to enlarge the *Ummah*, symbolised by the ‘Caliphate’, or the so-called Islamic State. In this context, jihad would thus require a spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of a collective cause, that of obeying Allah in his call to justice:

‘Have you forgotten that the companions of Allah’s Messenger emigrated for Jihad to Sham? Before that they were ordered to emigrate from Mecca to Medina? They obeyed without hesitation and did not look for excuses. They went to Medina seeking Allah’s pleasure. They were not half-hearted, my brothers.’ (*Join the Ranks*)

‘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?’ (*Join the Ranks*)

‘Bring it on. Echo the mighty call of our prophets. Gather your allies. Plot against us and show us no respite. Our ally is the greatest. He is Allah and all glory belongs to Him.’ (*Flames of War*)

‘We are men honoured with Islam, who climbed its peaks to perform Jihad, answering the call to unite under one flag. This is the source of our glory, our obedience to our Lord. We are uncompromising in our call to Tawheed (oneness of God).’ (*No Respite*)

‘BEWARE. Your end is already planned. Our warriors are everywhere, ready to sacrifice themselves. BEWARE. Our orphans<sup>5</sup> are growing. They feed their thirst for revenge in rage.’ (*Sang pour Sang*)

The jihadists are represented as being firm in their resolve to further the cause of Allah, contrary to foreign soldiers who fight without sufficient determination. Indeed, it is a question of ‘honour’ to engage in this continuous battle ‘for the sake of Allah’, the ultimate reward being that of martyrdom:

‘America, you claim to have the greatest army Humanity has known. You may have the numbers and weapons, but your soldiers lack the will and resolve. Still scarred from their defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq, they return dead or suicidal, with over 6,500 killing themselves each year.’ (*No Respite*)

5 In the context of the Sang pour Sang video, the ‘thirst for revenge’ of the orphans referred to in the lyrics derives from their supposedly being the children of dead martyrs.

‘We are men that love death just as you love your life. We are the soldiers that fight in the day and the night.’ (*For the Sake of Allah*)

‘O my brothers – Jihad is the way to bring back the honour of our glorious days. The promise of Allah will always remain that fighting for his sake is the ultimate gain.’ (*For the Sake of Allah*)

‘Going forth, preparing to roar are the brothers of light with Kuffar in sight. Their ranks are many and weapons are heavy but the soldiers of ALLAH (in large letters) are more than ready.’ (*For the Sake of Allah*)

## ‘Chosenness’ and the Visual Metaphor of Light

The videos frequently emphasise that the Prophet Muhammad has chosen the best of people to engage in jihad in the land of *Sham*. Here, ‘best’ is understood as having a righteous spirit and not straying away from the path of Allah, both of which are often visually represented by the metaphor of light in the videos analysed. Described as ‘brothers of light’, the , upon whose necks ‘the hope of this weighs, appear in various backgrounds, where light and darkness are played off against each other.

In *No Respite*, we are confronted with the dark, menacing hues of an imposing sky, where white clouds simultaneously transmit luminosity. The camera travels up towards the sky which becomes dark royal blue, with white stars, against a black background, resembling the Milky Way. Then a satellite image of the upper part of the globe appears, bathed in strong light, accompanied by a verse of the Qur’an and an Arabic chant. In the same video, references to ‘*Shirk* and Nationalism’ appear set against a black visual frame that gradually whitens, when the camera slowly sweeps across four bearded soldiers of different origin and united in faith, representing the *Ummah*.

In *No Life without Jihad*, the green leafy setting of the promised land, *Sham*, in which *mujahideen* are frequently pictured sitting in circles among comrades, contrasts with the last shot that is predominantly dark, with rifles being held up against a night sky. Spotlights are used to ensure some degree of visibility, appearing as intense circles of light, set against what becomes a pitch-black setting.

However, the visual focus on light sometimes appears without contrasting darkness. In *Sang pour Sang*, for example, we are shown children in a military queue. The camera focuses on the photogenic face of a child,

who wears a suicide vest and holds the IS flag. The child looks bright-eyed and shows the glimpse of a smile. The image gradually becomes increasingly blurred by an avalanche of light. In *For the Sake of Allah*, the IS flag appears in tandem with the caption ‘Tawheed (oneness of God) shining bright’. In one image, military troops are being transported in pick-up trucks, with headlights switched on, in a military column; they are dressed in beige military camouflage type attire but wear black masks. Rifles are held upwards and the black IS flag is visible upfront in the column. Again, the caption is the same as before, ‘Tawheed shining bright’. Towards the end of the video, ‘the flag of Tawheed shining bright before our eyes’ is chanted repeatedly.

In *No Respite*, a large group of soldiers, dressed in camouflage type military attire and beige caps, point their rifles in the air towards a large IS flag. A black man and a Chinese looking man are visible in the image. The background voice enunciates, ‘answering the call to unite under one flag’. A ray of light shines from below onto a soldier at the centre of the image; rapidly, this ray engulfs the whole image so that only light is seen within the frame. The words that accompany this image are as follows: ‘this is the source of our glory’. In yet another image from this video we are shown a group of six boys, sitting in a circle, dressed in military gear and wearing black caps, with rifles poised to their left, muzzle pointing towards the sky, each of whom reading the Qur’an. They are surrounded by a range of mountains and, above them, the sun gleams out, as if bathing them in glory (‘there are thousands of *mujahideen* schools for our cubs and pearls’, says the narrator). The camera zooms in on this intense light and the whole screen fades into whiteness.

## **Conclusion: Mobilising Emotions to Vindicate a ‘Wronged’ Audience**

The appeal to unity under the form of a raceless *Ummah* which is patent in the videos analysed is intended to appeal to those Muslim youths who feel ‘displaced’ and culturally and socially marginalised, particularly in a European context. The mobilisation of this sentiment of belonging to a particular ‘ingroup’ is stereotypically constructed against many enemy ‘outgroups’, all of whom are ‘infidels’, or united by ‘unbelief’. Unbelief is defined as a creed, opposed to that of the *Shabadah*, the Muslim

profession of faith. The profoundly dichotomous structure of ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’, that provides the background for the framing of *Ummah* in the videos analysed, justifies *Hijrah*, or migration to *Sham*, to serve Allah’s call to justice. The link between the need to aggrandize the *Ummah* and the imperative to restore the justice of Allah by annihilating his enemies is established in very emotive terms, through the appeal to *Hijrah* and jihadism. In this way, the videos analysed insinuate what the implied audience ‘... “ought to feel” through the emotional and moral tones of address’ (Nielsen 2009, p. 25), casting the issues broached ‘in clearly positive or negative terms’ (Boomgaarden/De Vreese 2003, p. 362).

Indignation, anger, and rage are emotions that are evoked through references to wrongs suffered that deserve atonement. The implied audience, from a dialogical perspective, is in this case clearly one who feels victimized by injustice. Calls to defend the ‘honour’ of Islam and the ‘glory of past Caliphates’ strive to appeal to those who wish to sublimate resentment through adherence to a collective cause, where their participation, through jihad, can help rewrite history. There is, as such, a certain romanticism in this spirit of self-sacrifice, that resounds with a hyper-masculinity that is visible in the characterization of jihadists as the ultimate warriors, the ‘best of the best’, chosen by Allah to restore justice to mankind.

Despite the *Ummah* being defined as inclusive of all those who are pious, there is one conspicuous absence, particularly in visual terms. Women are, in effect, nowhere to be seen in the videos analysed, despite being referred to verbally a few times. They only appear in idealized terms, either as a reward to be reaped at the gates of paradise, or as ‘sisters’ who have been wronged for staunchly sticking to their beliefs and whose pride deserves to be defended by Muslim brothers. Rather than preventing jihad, due to wishing to maintain family life, women should be seen as adjuvants of jihad.

History is invoked to illustrate that, among the companions who accompanied Prophet Muhammad from his flight from Mecca to Medina, ‘there were also *sahabiyat* (females) who emigrated without their families’ permission’. In particular, ‘there was a pregnant *sahabiyyah* (female) who travelled in the hot sun and extreme heat out of love for Allah and obedience to him’ (*Join the Ranks*). As such, pious women obey the call of Allah to emigrate to the land of *Sham*, and, just as their male companions, they ‘are not half-hearted’ (*Join the Ranks*) in their commitment

to making ‘God’s word the Greatest’ (*For the Sake of Allah*). Indeed, the ‘voices’ of Muslim sisterhood play an important role in motivating men to ‘fulfil the duty’ of jihad (*For the Sake of Allah*). However, because these female voices do not appear in their own right, without reference to male jihadists, the promise of equality that appears to pervade the ideology of the Islamic State on a racial level clearly does not apply to gendered relations. In effect, the concept of the female is only broached through historical and religious idealisation, indicating that the materiality of female bodies requires transfiguration so as to be able to appear in the transnational public space of *Ummah*. Women can thus be seen to constitute a particularly vulnerable spot within the universalist ideology allegedly espoused by IS in the al-Hayat videos analysed, the latter clearly focusing on racial rather than gendered inclusion.

The inclusion signalled by an *Ummah* of various races, under the banner of piety, in a Sharia State, aims to mobilise those who understand that their race or ethnicity makes a difference to political participation in the societies in which they live. Moreover, the fact that the idealised *Ummah* is embodied in a Sharia State means that (religious) justice can be interpreted as a principal concern of the ‘Caliphate’, a sentiment that seeks to appeal to those who consider themselves to be victims of injustice. This particular concept of justice is rooted in the so-called prophetic methodology of the IS, which attempts to apply the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah to all dimensions of life – encompassing prayer, tax collection, social care and education –, to the detriment of man-made laws (*No Respite*). Religious law is arbitrarily used by the so-called Islamic State to legitimate the thirst for vengeance against its ‘outgroups’, thus justifying a host of unjust practices such as ‘mass murders, sexual enslavement and systematic rape’ (The European Parliament 2016/2529(RSP)).

In ‘messianic’ overtones, the videos allude to the rewards that will be reaped through martyrdom. True life is said to be attained through death, as a stairway towards the ultimate reward, which is that of being able to enter the gates of paradise. Equating death with that which gives life, many of the videos analysed (ex. *There is No Life without Jihad; For the Sake of Allah*) represent death as profoundly emancipatory, due to bringing, through jihad, an end to *fitna* (sedition, strife). Visual metaphors of light, often juxtaposed against darkness, are thus commonly used, in the context of the videos examined, to confer an ‘inherent valence’ (Boomgaarden/De Vreese 2003, p. 362) to the themes at hand. As such,

the *mujahideen* frequently appear as beacons of Allah's light in the midst of darkness, with light being associated with glory, truth and justice.

The encoded preferred meanings articulated by IS propaganda with the objective of mobilising certain cohorts reveals that media producers rely strongly on emotive forms of address that cannot be dissociated from value judgements. By associating particular topics with positive or negative emotions, media producers attempt to delimit the boundaries within which decoding takes place. In this way, the implied audience is interpellated as part of an imagined and idealised *Ummah* that is defined against its 'outgroups'. Such interpellation is dialogic to the extent that an emotional response from the audience is anticipated by giving particular topics a positive or negative slant. This research attempted to understand the profile of the intended audience of jihadist contents by analysing the visual and verbal discursive strategies designed to cater to specific audiences on the basis of valence frames. The assessment of whether or not such strategies are effectively successful would require ethnographic studies into the reception by the audiences, which is difficult taking into account the violent and secretive nature of terrorism (Eijkman/Schuurman 2013, p. 1).

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