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JIHADI AUDIOVISUALITY AND ITS ENTANGLEMENTS

Meanings, Aesthetics, Appropriations

Edited by **CHRISTOPH GÜNTHER**
and **SIMONE PFEIFER**

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Christoph Günther and Simone Pfeifer
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JIHADI AUDIOVISUALITY AND ITS ENTANGLEMENTS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Christoph Günther and Simone Pfeifer

With his political cartoons, the Copenhagen-based Sudanese artist Khalid Albaih offers his analyses of the socio-political situation and everyday life in the Middle East and North Africa. Many of his cartoons criticise militant movements in the region and the global military and political involvement of local and international actors in conflicts such as that in Syria. In one of his recent cartoons, 'Scarecrow' (Figure I.1, overleaf), he responds to US President Donald Trump's announcement via Twitter of the killing of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī. Alongside the image, Albaih's comment on Facebook on 28 October 2019 relates his cartoon to the killing of Bin Laden:

> #Khartoon - The Scarecrow -#Trump announces the killing of #albagdadi (he was announced dead 8 times as I remembered) this person was seen twice in two videos years apart. Just like Bin Laden this operation took place close to the election and of course just like Bin Laden another a [*sic*] scarier scarecrow emerged very soon after. Treat the cause not the illness.

Albaih's comment points to the social construction of evil antagonists like bin Laden and al-Baghdādī. Unlike the widely circulated iconic image of Osama bin Laden, the depiction of al-Baghdādī's face on the scarecrow is based upon one of his few video appearances in jihadi video productions,

Figure I.1   'Scarecrow' (© Khalid Albaih).

the rarity of which stands in stark contrast to the frequency of references to
him in Western news media. The image of al-Baghdādī's head stuck on the
scarecrow alludes to imagery of the penal-code atrocities of Islamic State (IS)
decapitation videos, and at the same time threatens to scare off any actors
planning to rebuild the devastated landscape.

Albaih publishes his work via his own Facebook website *Khartoon!*, as
well as through Instagram and other social media platforms, and interacts
with his followers. Incorporating the different viewpoints he has encountered
living in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Denmark as a Muslim artist and
activist, through his work Albaih engages with very different kinds of actors.
With his stated aim of '[talking] to people that don't agree with you' he has
also encountered supporters of different jihadi movements on social media.
In a conversation with Larissa-Diana Fuhrmann, Albaih noted that 'some of
them retweet my stuff' (16 December 2017) and said that he had also chatted
with them about the meanings of his cartoons.

The cover of this book, with Albaih's cartoon, and the opening of this
Introduction showing it embedded in the Facebook post raise the central

issues of the edited volume *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements*. Not only does Albaih appropriate global and jihadi image repertoires in his work in order to articulate his critical comments on social and political developments; he also harnesses social media to circulate his work, reaching militant jihadi as well as Muslim activist and Western audiences. Like Albaih, actors from jihadi groups and movements are part of media infrastructures and actively appropriate global media for their own purposes. The forms of media and audiovisuality they create cannot be seen in isolation from the manifold entanglements they are embedded within.

With this volume, we put forward the notion of *jihadi audiovisuality* as a relational heuristic with which to examine the visual and auditory practices of individuals and collectives who either identify themselves and their actions as epitomes of the contemporary jihadi current or reference such practices in their work. We see these as interrelated within the framework of jihadi audiovisuality's entanglements, which encompass, inter alia, the output of global media as well as different journalistic and scientific fields, and the domains of security authorities.

For our purposes here, we use the adjective 'jihadi' to describe a specific realm of human experiences set within particular socio-political trajectories that are established through social interactions, the simultaneity of bodily and technical mediation and cultural artefacts in the form of texts, sounds and (moving) images. The term 'jihadi' does not thereby define the inherent quality of any of these elements, but rather is an attribute that is ascribed by a range of actors – internet users, artists, activists, militants, journalists, politicians, ideologues and researchers – to a certain kind of ideology, doctrine, habit, attitude, and the media through which this is expressed. In other words: while this volume focuses strongly on jihadi imagery and audio, we situate these articulations within a global communicative web, and we seek to provide perspectives that relate the production, dissemination and formative audiovisual linkages of jihadi imagery and sound to various forms of engagement and appropriation.

By bringing the historical and cultural entanglements of jihadi audiovisuality to the fore, we aim to transcend disciplinary boundaries and go beyond the limits of analyses that focus on jihadi ideology. The contributions to this volume provide complementary perspectives that locate ideology

and doctrine in aesthetic practices integrating, for example, material and embodied perspectives. Many of the contributions provide rich examples of ethnographic or fieldwork-based research, showing that empirical studies of jihadi audiovisuality do not only produce knowledge of ideas and their manifestations in texts, images and sounds. They also exhibit a thorough consideration of ethical and methodological challenges (see Sold, Abay and Junk, Chapter 2, and Carvalho, Chapter 3), make it clear that researchers and journalists are part of the entanglements and the politicised and securitised discourses they study (e.g. de Koning, Moors and Navest, Chapter 1), and provide insights into how different groups of Muslims respond to discourses about jihadism (e.g. Salzbrunn, Chapter 7). Moreover, our volume opens a wider perspective that extends beyond the ideologies, strategies and media output of the contemporary jihadi current, to take into consideration the expressions of culture and aesthetics that evolve around them. This includes examining how jihadi actors establish their discursive authority by appropriating religious symbols, media and texts, and addressing specific publics, as well as how such components are (re-)appropriated by activists, artists and religious authorities as a means of contestation (see e.g. Dick and Fuhrmann, Chapter 12).

Calling for a focus on the cultural and aesthetic aspects, as well as everyday practices, of jihadi thinking and action, we wish to draw attention to the ways in which religio-political movements that invoke the Islamic notion of jihad to legitimate their (violent) actions deploy a rich audiovisual symbolic repertoire to appeal to adherents from diverse contexts. This repertoire ranges from a focus on materiality and matter – 'clothes, beard, haircuts, face-veil, manners of walking, greeting, drinking water, [and] eating' (Svensson 2012: 197) – to expressions of belonging like poetry, singing, diction, and certain forms of communitarisation. Additionally, specific concepts of the social and the political are also part of this repertoire, like the staging of flags, military equipment and other signifiers of soldierly prowess as both markers of social identity and expressions of *ittibāʾ*, that is, the imitation of the early Muslim community. Borrowing from Stoever's (2016) conceptualisation of the *sonic color line* as 'the process of racializing sound' where 'listening became a racialized body discipline' (2016), we understand this expression of dominance and resistance as the drawing of an *audiovisual faith line* enacted in the realm

of the quotidian by means of different forms of media to distinguish 'true' Muslims from everyone else.

Jihadi groups and movements such as IS have become media-savvy *entrepreneurs of identity* (Günther 2021, forthcoming). With the increasing accessibility of 'new' forms of media like video and audio cassettes since the 1980s, and digital communication technologies from the 1990s onwards, jihadi actors have used such technologies to promote their cause, distribute their messages to win support and intimidate their opponents (Corman and Schiefelbein 2006; see also Atwan 2015; Bunt 2003, 2018). Especially since the rise of IS and its digital media strategy of producing and disseminating professional and high-quality images, videos and sounds for a wide variety of audiences, journalists, policy groups and researchers alike have paid heightened attention to jihadist media production intended to antagonise (e.g. Winter 2015, 2017; Krona and Pennington 2019). What is more, Gruber (2019: 126) cogently observes that 'many of us have proved liable in boosting the group's global presence and appeal' through our work and our own comport as consumers of these digital audiovisual media.

The vast body of policy briefs, reports and strategy papers that document jihadists' online activities and media strategies are produced within a political and military framework committed to combating terrorism (a few recent examples include Almohammad and Winter 2019, de Leede 2018 and Ayad 2019). This volume, however, dedicates more space to building on the efforts of more rigorous scholarship focused on the 'symmetric dualism' and mutual referencing of audiovisual regimes and practices between jihadi groups and their opponents (Gruber 2019; Mitchell 2011; della Ratta 2018; Shaw 2015). For our conceptualisation of *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements*, research is therefore essential that firstly focuses on the jihadi audiovisual lexicon and its logics (Ostovar 2017). It is this sonic and visual repertoire, with all its local, historical, social and cultural contingencies, that shapes the ability of jihadi actors to powerfully manifest their ideas of the world and the transcendent through audiovisual means. This perspective affords drawing attention to the operational qualities of images of violence in general (Eder and Klonk 2017) and the agency of images of terror in particular (Kraidy 2017). These images stand for the events in which they were taken and 'the event of viewing it' (Azoulay 2012: 252). The visibility and

public display of these images (Friis 2018) relate the different events to the specific digital publics. This leads to the examination of how jihadi media and communication have both modified and been changed by the technologies of the social web (e.g. Ramsay 2015; Lohlker 2019) and discussions about the transformative dimension of 'fast-moving, self-propelled' imagery on the internet that evades regulation and control (Bolt 2012). Secondly, we have been inspired by recent scholarship which highlights how people's experiences are productive of and produced by the digital sphere (e.g. Mühlhoff et al. 2019), and which draws attention to different actors' engagements with the jihadi audiovisual claim for dominance, including (but not limited to) forms of creative dissent such as satire and humour (Ramsay and Alkheder 2020; Kraidy 2018).

Whereas a focus on military strategy and related ideology characterises most scholarship on the jihadi current, recently interest has emerged to examine 'the everyday life' and the cultural and social dimensions of jihadi groups and movements. Most notably, the edited collection *Jihadi Culture* (Hegghammer 2017b) focuses on poetry, music, dreams and cinematography (see also Krona and Pennington 2019). Hegghammer (2017a: 2) differentiates ideology in terms of doctrine and aesthetics, remarking that 'the literature on jihadism has mostly treated ideology as synonymous with doctrine that is a set of ideas transmitted through language and internalized through cognition'. While we welcome Hegghammer's insight, we do not see the military, ideological and cultural productions of knowledge and meaning as distinct domains but instead emphasise their intermingling. We therefore take his apt statement as a starting point from which to develop jihadi audiovisuality as a field of research in itself that is not restricted to the analysis of the role of religion and/or ideology. This also means complementing and deepening the examination of various aspects of jihadi iconography, aesthetics and sonic representation with qualitative empirical and ethnographic approaches that focus on the practices and contextualisation of the everyday lives of opponents and supporters of jihadist groups.

While some ethnographic research has pointed to aspects of identity and of belonging to a 'counterculture' (Hemmingsen 2015), and to the gendered dimensions of online jihadi engagement (Carvalho 2018), others are concerned with historical contextualisation and a shift in perspective, not only to

explain why European Muslims support militant movements and depart for war, for example, to Syria (Kublitz 2019), but to analyse how jihad is being presented as a solution to, for example, missing supranational interventions to humanitarian crisis (Li 2020). What is common to this anthropological-ethnographic engagement is a critical and reflexive stance towards socially constructed categories such as radicalisation or securitisation (Fadil et al. 2019). In line with this critical approach to research, we recognise the importance of addressing the ethical challenges that arise when conducting empirical research in the field of jihadi audiovisuality.

Methodology, Ethical and Legal Framework

The methodologies underlying the chapters in *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements* are as varied as the disciplinary backgrounds of their authors. These range from visual and musical analysis to iconology and more theoretical investigations to covert observation and digital ethnography. Since scholarship on the jihadi current is highly politicised and securitised, a reflective approach to security, violence and Islam has become a major issue of debate. The three contributions in the section on the *Methodological and Ethical Challenges of Empirically Grounded Research on Jihadism* (A) seek to inspire critical self-reflection and to raise awareness among researchers about the possible consequences of doing empirical (online) research on jihadi audiovisuality, addressing issues such as transparency and anonymity. They also provide an ethical basis for understanding contributions to the volume that relate to similar methodologies, for example Salzbrunn's examples from Tunisia and Switzerland in her theoretical contribution (Chapter 7) or Berg's chapter (Chapter 11), which draws on extensive fieldwork in Lebanon with Hamas and Hizbullah. Each approach comes with its own trajectory of engagement in ethical debates, three branches of which are of particular interest for this volume.

A first stream of research in terms of ethical considerations can be identified here that critically engages in the trajectories of terms such as radicalisation (see e.g. Fadil et al. 2019) and reflects on the ethical challenges of researchers' positionality as part of this field (Gauvain 2018). The contribution by de Koning et al. (Chapter 1) demonstrates how researchers themselves are part of the entanglements of politicisation and securitisation. The authors

indicate how the interests of governmental, university and media institutions can have significant consequences for researchers and their interlocutors. They emphasise the need for researchers' institutional protection, especially when researching controversial topics like the visuality and aurality of jihadi communication. Furthermore, de Koning et al. explore the limits researchers face and the possibilities they have to resist the identities imposed upon them and to defend the principles of privacy and non-discrimination.

Second, empirical social science and ethnographic fieldwork-based research on jihadi audiovisuality demands a thorough consideration of ethical challenges. Engagement with the digital in militant fields is particularly critical, as it often involves generating research data by accessing (online) spaces that are not intended for a broad public (see also Ess 2009; Zimmer and Kinder-Kurlanda 2017) or relate to the challenges of digital ethnography while being part of the securitised research funding system (Fuhrmann and Pfeifer 2020). In her contribution, Carvalho (Chapter 3) is particularly concerned with the role of the researcher in digital research as she examines access to the field, and the gendered dimensions of fieldwork via Facebook and offline. Carvalho also outlines the legal frameworks pertaining to digital research and recounts how she was obliged to comply with different regulations imposed by nation-states and universities, and different platforms' terms of services. Sold et al. (Chapter 2) also address the close interrelationships between ethical and legal challenges that emerge when tracing new trends and engagements by jihadi actors in social media and digital environments. Focusing on the requirements of the European General Data Protection Regulation and related ethical considerations when working with data obtained via social media platforms, they provide examples from their own research in the field of radicalisation and extremism. Relating their ethical considerations of privacy, transparency, trust and security to the legal principles of proportionality, adequateness, data economy and anonymisation, they develop a framework for designing research with social media data.

The third branch follows the tradition of questioning the ethics of aesthetic projects that deploy images of violence and atrocities, as has been most notoriously done by Sontag (2004), as well as by art historians and in cultural studies research (see e.g. Batchen et al. 2012). With regard to the visibility of violence in IS videos, Krona (Chapter 5) points to viewers'

ethical responsibility towards the victims portrayed in such videos, which leads him to the broader question of whether researchers who show and further circulate such audiovisual material contribute to the reproduction of the violence and humiliation. Additionally, Pfeifer, Fuhrmann and Wevers (Chapter 8) discuss the active and participatory but nonetheless ethically questionable role of victims in re-enactments of violence in which their participation is not always voluntary, especially in cases where it is unclear whether performing victims knew the script of videos that they would live to survive or were subjected to genuine mortal fear. Taken together, these ethical and methodological considerations form the basis of our understanding of *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements* that we will explore in the three following subsections.

Sensation, Mediation and Audiovisuality

In his now-classic edited volume, Foster proposed the dialectics of vision as the physical process of sight and visuality as a 'social fact' (Foster 1998; see also Rose 2011: 6). Mirzoeff (2006: 76) complicated this dialectic and, shifting attention back to the original meaning of the term coined in mid-nineteeth-century England, proposed that visuality should be understood as a complex 'engagement with the politics of representation in transnational and transcultural form', encompassing forms of resistance. Expanding on discussions about vision and visuality, Grasseni's (2004) theoretical and methodological notion of 'skilled vision' conceptualises vision as a multi-sensual practice that is neither an individual activity nor a social representation of experiences, but is rather a learned and situated social activity: 'a sensory practice that needs "educating and training in a relationship of apprenticeship and within an ecology of practice"' (Grasseni and Gieser 2019: 6, citing Grasseni 2004: 41).

Extending beyond the initial emphasis on vision, these considerations have recently been re-examined, with Grasseni and Gieser (2019: 12), Willkomm (2016) and others introducing the concept of 'skilled listening' as a learned practice that makes sense of, orders or categorises audible impressions. This addition not only reflects the observation that 'audition and inaudition are [. . .] equally learned capacities that are constantly being honed' (Daughtry 2015: 19). It also feeds into a paradigm shift in sound studies

where greater attention is being paid to the ways in which 'environments, spaces or processes are not simple vehicles, coordinates, or channels of auditory perception, but parts of feedback loops in which matter and meaning mutually influence one another' (Erlmann 2018: 12; authors' translation; see also Daughtry 2015: 122). Consequently, audition and inaudition are, just like vision and not seeing, embedded in specific mediating formations, routines and contexts.

To further define these contexts, we suggest that skilled listening and vision are practices that are produced by and productive of the different sensory regimes that 'produce, reproduce and change power relations' (Pels 1996: 378). Expanding on Metz's ([1977] 2000) notion of scopic regimes and Daughtry's (2015) work on auditory regimes, we use the concept of sensory regimes to refer to socially acquired, culturally learned, technologically extended and highly dynamic techniques of sensation. They are sometimes local, sometimes global, often interconnected, always historically, culturally and epistemologically contingent, and intersect in complicated ways.

Together with collective and individual bodies of knowledge, sensory regimes are key to the ways in which 'interpretive communities' (Fish 1982) collectively produce the meaning of any cultural artefact. They mediate the sonic and the visual through learned, performative and socially embedded techniques of (not) looking and (in)audition as well as through (political) ideologies, life histories, memories and experiences. As such, sensory regimes shape the ways in which we do or do not listen to and see ourselves, others and the world around us, and hence our capacity to perceive, appreciate, classify and interpret certain sounds and images. Discussing the Hollywood-esque style of Islamic State's videos as an appropriative strategy, Zywietz and Beese (Chapter 4) make it clear that the potentiality of jihadi audiovisuality lies in the group's ability to imitate aesthetic practices and viewing habits. These have evolved around visual patterns, motifs, codes and metaphors, as well as around narrative devices and technical tools used in film and television across the globe. Moving images are both communicative acts and aesthetic practices.

They not only connect to many sensory regimes simultaneously through their composition of visuals and sounds, use of lighting, camera angles, volumes, tonality and editing, but also provide hooks for latching onto familiar audiovisual codes. It is exactly these audiovisual codes of IS videos that Ali et

al. (Chapter 9) respectively apply in their web videos and pedagogical digital youth work.

The configurations of people's sensations and their receptivity thus shape the ways in which images and sounds are accorded specific qualities and assume a certain kind of status (e.g. as truth or evidence). This applies regardless of any 'power' inherent in a medium itself to change the social reality by 'enchanting or affecting people', that is, to spark emotional, intellectual and physical responses. It should be remembered, however, that these configurations are contingent on 'a recursive feedback loop, subject at any given time to stabilising and destabilising influences' (Grayson and Mawdsley 2019: 433). Expanding on Bleeker's (2008: 1–2) observations on the visual, we want to further emphasise that our (in)abilities and (limited) horizons of knowledge result in us always perceiving more, and always perceiving less, than what is there to be heard and seen, because our sensations are 'rerouted through memory and fantasy, caught up in threads of the unconscious and entangled with the passions'. Furthermore, our sensations appear to alter the mediations we encounter and to transform us at the same time. In other words, the creation of knowledge and meaning through the sonic and the visual is never static, but rather always in the making, resonating between people and their socially acquired and culturally learned (in)abilities, material artefacts, cultural contexts and technological mediators.

Despite this highly volatile structure, we suggest that many actors seek to control the meanings attributed to the audiovisual media they produce by tailoring content to accustomed modes of seeing as outlined above. They also deploy auditive and visual elements such as postures, 'costumes, props, make-up, hairstyle, spaces as a stage or scene (*setting*, in Goffman's terms) to construct images for their sensitive effects' (Mandoki 2007: 146; emphasis in the original). Many of the contributions to this volume address the workings of such elements in terms of how our attention as viewers is potentially managed and how we are implicated in what we see. For example, Günther (Chapter 6) shows how specific settings are affectively loaded and accorded a certain meaning by the use of particular colour schemes to brighten or darken scenes. Krona's (Chapter 5) analysis of the ways in which violence is staged for the camera reveals the techniques by which producers invite distant audiences to relate to and understand what they are shown. Ali et al.

(Chapter 9) compellingly demonstrate how strategies of ambiguity, used in their online youth work to combine familiar elements like jihadi *anāshīd* (a cappella chants or hymns) with new ideas and contexts, have successfully won the critical engagement of young viewers.

Similarly, accessibility, and their audiences' experiences of immediacy, are further regulated through the use of voice and words, and the style chosen, as well as the rhythm, tone volume, intonation and many more variables that are all produced by and productive of body posture and motions – hence displaying markers of social identity that people can relate to. Reflecting these considerations, some of the contributions to this volume attend in particular to the ways in which listening 'can orient people within their environments, connect them with affective stimuli, and open their bodies up to violence and pain as well as to knowledge and pleasure' (Daughtry 2015: 6). Weinrich (Chapter 10) and Berg (Chapter 11), as well as Dick and Fuhrmann (Chapter 12), all show how the discursive and formal aspects deployed in the production and performance of *anāshīd* render the chants powerful modes of production of meaning and knowledge while simultaneously intermingling with other modalities. These three chapters, in varying degrees, also illustrate what Eisenlohr (2018) has called 'sonic movements', that is, the capacity of various acoustic parameters to trigger a sense of being moved, felt as an embodied experience by the listener. This is not a matter of a simple stimulus–response chain, but of a resonance sensed in the listener's body, which blurs the boundaries between subject and object and is particularly significant in the experience of acoustic forms of expression in religious contexts (Allesch 2013: 49–52). Eisenlohr (2018: 49) also emphasises this when he writes that the acoustic movements resemble the spatial movements of an imagined or actual person. Just as many other examples, such as various forms of religious processions, testify, Berg's contribution (Chapter 11) makes it clear that, especially in public performances of *anāshīd*, correlations and overlapping of physical, spatial and acoustic movement can be observed. For a co-present audience, the sensory experience is moulded by 'the natural and architectural environments that absorb, reflect, amplify, and distort sounds' (Daughtry 2015: 35) as well as by visual, olfactory, haptic, thermal and other stimuli.

Producers' endeavours to allow us to see and hear some things but not others do not necessarily result in unambiguous representations, however.

There are many instances where efforts are made to limit the polysemy of specific lexic, spatial, sonic and visual components as much as possible. In doing this, producers seek to prove their capacity to construct an audiovisual presentation that expresses their authority and aestheticises their classificatory power. At the same time, they play with the full creative repertoire that produces ambiguity, in order to cater to the diversity of their audiences' capacities, horizons of knowledge, memories and emotions. Weinrich (Chapter 10) demonstrates this lucidly when she traces the allusions to (and appropriations of) various musical genres and styles found in the development of jihadi *anāshīd*. These are, in turn, potentially destabilising factors that offer potential for the contestation of authority asserted through audiovisual presentations. In discussing several forms of appropriation of Islamic State's nashīd *Salīl al-Ṣawārim*, Dick and Fuhrmann (Chapter 12) offer one case that illustrates such contestation very vividly and shows the subversive force of creativity and humour. More often than not, however, the relational character inherent in these mediations is obscured so that it becomes difficult to discern the ways in which we as an audience are implicated in what we see and hear.

Against this complex backdrop, we define audiovisualities in the plural as a relational heuristic for analysing the multiple and highly volatile links between people's sensation, the mediations they encounter, and the modes deployed to create meaning and knowledge. These links are established through distinct manifestations of visual and auditory experiences and practices: the use of specific tonalities and styles of speech, representations of certain habits, the deployment of certain technologies, and the creation and appropriation of mediations and various forms of engagement with them. This involves (inter alia) significant parts of the sensory field and essential modalities of knowledge and meaning-making through which individual and collective identities are enacted. Hence, we attend to discursive and embodied practices that have material effects and are often hard to distinguish from the prosthetic technologies that connect one's body to the world outside (Jay 2008). The contributions in this volume therefore not only scrutinise the discursive and embodied modes of (moving) images and sounds, but also explore their specific forms of mediation, focusing on the performativity, materiality and audiovisuality of media productions. This also necessitates a focus on the formal aspects of images and sounds, as well as attention to the

dynamics that emerge through the reciprocity of matter and meaning in the spatial, technical, processual or bodily contact zones between images, sounds and human actors.

The *Jihadi* in Audiovisuality

While the constellations described above are applicable to many instances of human interaction, this collection sheds light on the specificities of *jihadi audiovisualities*. In order to identify the inherent particularities, we draw on Gilbert Ramsay (2015: 55), who suggests that 'the sum total of all that is "jihadi" does not add up to jihad, but rather to its man-made allegory'. Li (2020: 108) further helps to clarify this point: 'what requires understanding is not jihad's "Islamicness" or lack thereof, but rather how the jihad performed the work of universalism, of processing difference.' Following this assertion, the concept of *jihadi audiovisuality* enables us to distinguish and examine the ways in which people identify visual and auditory practices and experiences as an expression of jihad. Jihadi audiovisuality in our sense encompasses how people's auditory and visual practices and experiences are productive of and produced by: the visualisation and sonification of contemporary forms of jihadi engagement; the set of ideas, norms and values transmitted through audiovisual media; the processes of production, distribution, collection and consumption of jihadi audiovisual content; the discursive and non-discursive practices of processing and engaging with them; and 'even the way in which information is ordered and structured by the Web' (Ramsay 2015: 77). These material and immaterial configurations are, significantly, not inherently bound to any specific region, culture or even religion, although jihadi ideologues and some of their critics routinely argue otherwise. On the contrary: rephrasing Deborah Poole (1997: 8–10), we suggest that the affective potency of *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements* is contingent upon an audiovisual economy that interrelates people in disparate places who may not share a common language, geographical origin or class, but nonetheless share a common identification with the Arabic nisba *jihādī* or the active participle *mujāhid* as an allegory that helps to relate their social identities, practices and experiences to a wider collective.

In the case of Islamic State, for example, it could be argued that – at least in the territories under its command – the group managed to shape and

control a distinct body public not only by exerting a range of authoritative measures, but also through its creation of a soundscape comprising a range of sonic events. Calls to prayer sung by members of the *ḥisba* forces, the public performance of *anāshīd*, the screams of victims of atrocious violence and people shouting to warn others against immediate aerial bombardments can all be considered part of these sonic events – all the more effective in combination with the simultaneous silencing of certain musical instruments, musicians, church bells, and versions of *adhān* different from jihadi variants of the Muslim call to prayer. Add to this the sounds of drones, fighter jets, weapons, and the various other 'belliphonic' (Daughtry 2015) expressions brought about by the war between IS and its opponents, and the transformation of the soundscape becomes overwhelming. In many instances, members of IS have cited such sonic events as evidence of the group's existence and power. Considering the sound of an American fighter jet to be equally integral to this soundscape as the voice of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, they construct an ontological framework within which all of these sounds are inherently bound to the *mujāhidīn*'s modes of creating knowledge and meaning – hence jihadi by their very nature.

The establishment of a scopic regime as part of jihadi audiovisuality can be described in a very similar way. Many of the examples mentioned above also rely on visual components – as well as haptic, olfactory and other sensual stimuli. Members of jihadi forces who regulate public life on the ground are usually identifiable from their demeanour and uniforms, while public performances of *anāshīd* are just as carefully stage-managed, as are public corporal punishments or burnings of destroyed musical instruments. The remains of civilian houses clouded in black smoke are as prominent in the visual field as the fighter jets (and sometimes drones) that caused such devastation. Further features of the scenery include the remnants of obliterated shrines, mausoleums and graveyards, as well as the military defences, bureaucratic buildings and IS media kiosks – most of which bear the black banner that is the jihadi totem. When audiovisual representations of these and similar scenes are circulated, they not only provide evidence that jihadi life is a reality, but also testify to the power of jihadi actors to impose upon audiences their particular interpretation of what is to be seen and heard. Moreover, the camera's gaze (and the ways in which it is sculpted in post-production) shapes

the link between the sensations experienced by *mujāhidīn* and the mediations they encounter. It manifests their visual experiences and relates the persons depicted to their ideology, actions, cultural practices, experiences and modes of creating knowledge and meaning, all of which are rendered jihadi.

The same argument can be made with reference to (moving) images appropriated from a range of TV and film productions (see Zywietz and Beese, Chapter 4). These are not only incorporated to save jihadi groups from having to stage monumental battles at great expense. They fulfil an important function, because they evoke well-known ways of how global audiences perceive historical or contemporary events, developments and people. Dislodged from their original context and transposed into jihadi audiovisuality, they offer an audiovisual experience that is filtered through specific lenses toned by jihadi ideology. A similar effect also feeds into a very simple, yet powerful intermingling of several modalities in the use of the epigraphy and/or recitation of the *shahāda*, that is, the Muslim profession of faith, as the audiovisual opening of videos. Jihadi actors use this device to instil in the audience a sense that they participate in a sanctified event created and performed by 'true', authentic Muslims to perform and enact 'true', authentic Islam. This marks the video as not only conforming to but also (re)asserting the self-evident, natural superiority of divine ordinances and those who serve them – the *mujāhidīn*. Using the *shahāda* as an integral element of jihadi audiovisuality is thereby a means to exert classificatory authority, the power to define social order, and a source of aesthetic self-legitimisation.

Although the work done by jihadi ideologues and their supporters to shape jihadi audiovisuality relies on the production, appropriation and dissemination of various audiovisual elements, it does not end with the manifold forms of incorporation traced by several contributors to this volume. Rather, it includes the possibility of exerting authority by (re-)classifying any image or sound within the jihadi ideological framework, for example by assigning it a position within binary categories such as *ḥarām/ḥalāl* or *kuffār/muʾminīn*.

Entanglements and the Performativity of Images and Sounds

As outlined above, our title *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements* is to be understood in a double sense. First, we locate audiovisual media productions and their dissemination by jihadi groups and movements within a field

of global media aesthetics and practices with culturally distinct manifestations. This helps us to identify the ways in which jihadi actors incorporate various artefacts and techniques of material and immaterial culture, re-codify them, and appropriate them to articulate their cause. Practices of cultural and aesthetic appropriation have been productive lenses with which to analyse IS's use of the orange prison jumpsuit as rhetorical resistance (Richey and Edwards 2019) or the co-option of constitutional discourses for legitimising the state project of IS (Bruscella and Bisel 2019). With their analytical intervention, Zywietz and Beese (Chapter 4) describe three different types of interpretive, practical-technological and expressive appropriation that they apply to IS media output to '(en-)counter the Islamic State'. Refining this theoretical underpinning, Günther (Chapter 6) examines the specific format of narratives of conversion to show how key concepts of Islamic intellectual history are appropriated to attract followers. Similarly, *anāshīd* have been appropriated by IS supporters in order to, for example, legitimise the claim for a 'righteous' caliphate, as Dick and Fuhrmann (Chapter 12) show.

Secondly, we consider cultural and aesthetic expressions that evolve in response to jihadi media output as part of the wider field of jihadi audiovisuality. This includes examining how various people use aural and visual means to engage with jihadi expressions in multiple acoustic, visual and audiovisual forms to subvert or resist jihadi audiovisuality. Again, the different sonic and visual appropriations circulated in various – mainly digital – contexts, using techniques like memes, humour or re-enactments, are discussed in several contributions to this volume. The producers of these contestations range from Muslim activists and religious authorities (Pfeifer et al., Chapter 8) to anonymous authors of digital content (Dick and Fuhrmann, Chapter 12) and artists or publicly-funded social workers and former supporters of jihadi groups and movements (Ali et al., Chapter 9). These contributions also highlight and problematise researchers' institutional entanglements – for example, in educational programmes to counter radicalisation or in work intended to undermine the effectiveness of IS's visual output. De Koning et al. (Chapter 1) reflect on how their own roles and performances are part of public discourses about 'jihadism' and demonstrate their entanglements with jihadi audiovisuality as researchers.

In short, the contributions point to the logics and techniques of different

forms of appropriation and the linkages forged by jihadi audiovisuality that connect supporters, religious leaders, civil society actors, artists, activists, journalists and researchers. Mimesis, memetics, re-enactment, camouflage and humour are just a few of the strategies various actors use to engage with, subvert, or resist. We propose framing this setting as *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements*: as a communicative web that is shaped by socio-political contexts, by the ways in which actors deploy practices of appropriation, media technologies and rhetorical strategies and by the interaction of multi-sensory stimuli.

Examining audiovisual artefacts as 'products' of media practices (Dang-Anh et al. 2017; Schüttpelz 2006), we consider the performativity of images and sounds that are at play in practices of engagement with jihadi images and sounds. This performativity is at least twofold: Pfeifer et al. (Chapter 8) describe the embodied and performative practices involved in the production of re-enactments of IS decapitation videos as one link in a media chain that connects embodied experiences of spectatorship to the production of new aesthetic forms. Building on Jeffrey Juris's (2005) concept of the 'performativity of violence', Krona (Chapter 5) combines practical-instrumental dimensions with symbolic-expressive characteristics to shift from a focus on the embodied practices towards the representational interpretation of the performative violent act. In his view, the violent acts in the decapitation videos are re-mediated and re-contextualised by visual means. Taken together, the two approaches to the performativity of the visual and the bodily and performative engagement inherent in audiovisual practices recognise the 'mutual reflection between objects, images and bodies' (Bolt 2004: 8).

Organisation of the Book

While our considerations are based on an approach that emphasises the complex interweavings of multi-sensory stimuli and receptions, many of the contributions to this volume are based upon examples that focus on specific auditory or visual processes. We have therefore structured the book into four thematic sections: (A) Methodological and Ethical Challenges of Empirically Grounded Research on Jihadism; (B) Visualising Jihadi Ideology and Action; (C) Appropriating and Contesting Jihadi Audiovisuality; and (D) *anāshīd*: Soundscapes of Religio-Political Experience.

The contributions in section A are devoted to the ethical and methodological challenges of doing empirically based and ethnographic research in the highly contested and politicised field of jihadi social media environments involving different groups of people engaged in and with these environments. The contributions firstly draw attention to how the position of the researcher in relation to research ethics and security has become a major issue of debate (Fadil et al. 2019). Secondly, they address the new questions that arise regarding research design and strategies, data management and legal aspects when doing digital research in this field. Thirdly, the chapters in this section review how the internet, particularly social media and messenger services, have proven to be fruitful ground for new and experimental research into the workings of online jihadi networks.

Contributions in section B focus on the ways in which jihadi ideologues, groups and movements use audiovisual media to articulate their cause. Groups such as IS have explicitly announced that media work is akin to jihad on the battlefield, and therefore have invested heavily in the cinematic sophistication and aesthetic quality of their communicative productions by employing skilled professionals. They appropriate the practices and conventions of global media production and adapt formats and aesthetic trends from television, film and popular culture. Contributions to this section employ theoretical and methodological approaches from film studies, media studies, Islamic studies and the sociology of religion to examine the visual rhetoric, graphic and cinematic design principles, and the techniques of meaning construction used in jihadi videos and imagery.

Contributions in section C are concerned with the practices through which activists and artists appropriate jihadi videos, images and sounds to defy, resist or oppose jihadi ideology and action. The chapters focus on examples of civil society commitment and artistic creativity that engage with and react to jihadi image, video and sound production. The different forms of engagement with jihadi material work as a form of cultural resistance, and they shed light on the interlinkages between different groups of actors opposed to jihadi movements. These groups nonetheless differ in the narratives and discourses they relate to and the digital publics they engage with. Ultimately, this section also points to the dynamic interrelations between

anti-Muslim and militant Islamist discourses and strategies (see Ebner 2017), with a focus on audiovisuality.

Section D brings together contributions that examine the often understated but highly significant aural dimension of jihadi mediations. The contributions focus on a cappella hymns (Arab. *anāshīd*), which comprise a widespread genre of cultural and religious expression by Muslim actors, ranging from Sufi chants to Indonesian Pop-*anāshīd*. The chapters delineate the compositional conventions used in jihadi *anāshīd* as well as the ways in which they reflect pre-Islamic traditions of music, song and poetry. This also reveals how *anāshīd* tie in with extra-textual characteristics such as rhythm, vocal timbre and melodies, which are influenced by nationalist songs, military marches and global pop culture. They thereby help to forge a connection between the listeners and the songs – even before the lyrics are considered. Contributions to this section draw on theoretical and methodological approaches from musicology, ethnomusicology, Islamic studies and cultural studies in order to better understand the musical and poetic structure of *anāshīd*, as well as the religious, cultural and social contexts within which these chants and corresponding performative practices are embedded.

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PART A

ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF EMPIRICALLY GROUNDED RESEARCH ON JIHADISM

1

ON SPEAKING, REMAINING SILENT AND BEING HEARD: FRAMING RESEARCH, POSITIONALITY AND PUBLICS IN THE JIHADI FIELD

Martijn de Koning, Annelies Moors and Aysha Navest

In April 2016, we published our article 'Chatting about marriage with female migrants to Syria' in the peer-reviewed journal *Anthropology Today* (Navest et al. 2016).[1] This was a short explorative piece based on an experimental method of private chatting that focused on how Dutch-speaking women who had travelled to jihadi-held areas in Syria entered into marriages. Our article, which criticised the often-imposed label 'jihadi brides', offered new insights into how and where such women entered into marriages and how the proclamation of the caliphate affected the conclusion of marriages. Our last paragraph commented briefly on the prevalent framing of these women as either victims of unscrupulous jihadi men or as militants in their own right. Neither notion fitted well with how most of the women presented themselves to us in the private chats.

Nine months later, a journalist of an upscale Dutch daily, the *NRC Handelsblad* (hereafter *NRC*), authored a three-page article about our publication, which he presented as 'Cyberjihadism' at the University of Amsterdam. He accused the junior researcher, Navest, of jihadist sympathies, and the

seniors, de Koning and Moors, of a lack of transparency – because we had kept our interlocutors anonymous. He also expressed concern that the study could potentially hinder the work of the security services, as it could be used by lawyers defending female migrants to Syria in terrorism trials.[2] This not only led to a huge public outcry in the media, but also sparked twenty-two parliamentary questions, and resulted in the university announcing a reflection audit.

In this contribution, we discuss how these events can help us to understand the effects of the politicisation of a research field (Wright 1998).[3] The main challenge we faced was how to respond when a variety of actors reframed our research project, from a contribution to academic debate on controversial marriages to an instantiation of jihadism in academia. The case we present here highlights the polemics that come about in and through public debate when conducting ethnographic research in the jihadi field, working with interlocutors considered 'repugnant' (Harding 1991). Such processes of politicisation also need to be seen in the context of growing ethno-nationalism, which has targeted Muslims in particular (Bracke 2013; Moors 2014; Fadil et al. 2019; Van Es 2019).

In discussing the formats that such responses to being targeted may take, we build on insights from writers who have engaged with similar issues in other fields (Butler 2009). Those addressed may take over the terms by which they are interpellated, or they may, depending on the positions they find themselves in and the discursive space available to them, reject or ignore the terms of address. Such styles of responding not only vary between individuals or collectives; even a single person may simultaneously draw on different elements of these various formats.[4] Sarah Bracke (2011), who analysed how women involved with 'political Islam' in The Netherlands 'talk back' to the dominant national discourse on women, Islam and emancipation, shows how those who reject the terms by which they are addressed may accept the broader frame of address, while those

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[2] For a more extensive analysis of the *NRC* article and its aftermath see Moors (2019a).

[3] See also de Koning et al. (2010) and Schmidt (2017).

[4] Similarly, in his analysis of how minorities respond to racialised ascriptions, Didier Fassin (2011: 424) points to the various positions that subjects may take in response to being interpellated.

who embrace the terms by which they are addressed may simultaneously resignify them. In our case, the notions both of remaining silent and speaking up also need further qualification. Brian Larkin (2014), who discussed how the use of loudspeakers by competing Muslim and Christian groups in northern Nigeria engendered violence, analysed how people may cultivate inattention as 'a conscious, willful act and not simply an inability to attend' (2014: 1006). Remaining silent may, then, have different meanings, varying from an inability to speak because one is silenced to a conscious act of refusing to engage. Turning from silence to speaking up, bell hooks (1986), reflecting on her experiences of growing up in a black community in the US South, highlights the difference between speaking and being heard. Defining 'talking back' as 'speaking as an equal to an authority figure' (1986: 123), she emphasises that it is not simply a matter of emerging from silence to speech, but of making 'a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard' (1986: 124).

This contribution focuses on how we, as authors, have positioned ourselves in the field and how we have responded, both individually and collectively, to the various ways in which we have been addressed. Up until now, our publications have been authored by the senior researchers, although draft versions were always shared among the three of us to ascertain that we all agreed to the content (Moors 2019a/b; Moors and de Koning 2018). In this multi-vocal contribution, we use a different format in order to focus on the particular ways in which each of us has been interpellated. We are positioned differently in academia as well as in society, in terms of professional seniority and visible markers of gender, religion and generation, which has strongly affected our interactions with particular publics. With different, and sometimes overlapping, circles of friends, family and colleagues, each of us not only had to take into consideration and engage with different individuals and publics, but we were also addressed in different ways – sometimes by the very same individuals and publics.

In order to present our multiple voices, we draw on a wider range of sources and use a different style of writing from in our previous publications. Rather than using publicly available sources only, we also draw on e-mails that we wrote and received, field notes we kept in the course of the process and, especially, posts from our three-person WhatsApp group. This enables

us to provide a 'real-time' narrative, to enhance the multivocality of this article and to include affective elements (ranging from joy to indignation) and coping mechanisms, such as humour, which may enable readers to better understand why we responded in the ways we did.

In order to make our different voices discernible in the text, we cite both the WhatsApp conversations and e-mails, which we have translated from Dutch into English. When one of us is speaking in the text, we use the term 'I'. When we use 'we' to refer to just two of us, the names are mentioned; otherwise 'we' refers to all three authors. In the following, we present how the affair unfolded, the ways in which we were addressed, individually and collectively, how we responded, and how voice, positionality and publics emerged in different configurations for each of us.

Act I: Happiness and Excitement: Cool Research!

We start our tale with the publication of our article in *Anthropology Today*, in April 2016:

> 05-04-16, 18:44 – Martijn de Koning: In case you did not yet see it, our article is online with Anthropology Today.
> 05-04-16, 18:48 – Aysha: oh is it already done 😃? Cool, I am going to look right now
> 06-04-16, 21:50 – Aysha: [. . .] Received today a message from our research field, will include it in my profile document. Do you have a link to the full article? I have a lot of fans (my parents😁), they cannot wait to read it

We were very pleased that our article had been published in *Anthropology Today*. It was the perfect slot for a brief exploratory text, as it was both peer-reviewed and quickly published. The latter was important to us, because our field was changing so rapidly.

Aysha: For me this was even more special, as it was my first publication.

As Dutch academia strongly encourages researchers to share their findings with the wider public, something we also value. Martijn had contacted some journalists to see whether they would be interested in reporting on the publication in Dutch.

Martijn: I had established a good working relationship with several journalists while doing research on Salafism and militant activism. Soon a

journalist from *NRC*, Andreas Kouwenhoven, expressed an interest in our research. I sent him the article and he seemed to like it.

14 July 2016: E-mail Kouwenhoven: Hi Martijn, here is the text. It will be in the newspaper tomorrow, otherwise Saturday or Monday. It would be great if you could have a look at it. Cool research!

In the draft article, he summarised some of our findings and related them to the trial of a female returnee from Syria, Laura H. But that article was never published. *NRC*'s editorial team did not consider it sufficiently newsworthy. We began to look for another outlet, yet before we had found one, something else happened.

Act II: Supporting the Violent Jihad? Seriously?

Martijn: In early October 2016, out of the blue, I was contacted by the same journalist. He enquired whether a post he had found on an online forum, that dismissed certain stories about sexual slavery of foreign women who travel to IS-held areas in Syria as untrue, was evidence that Aysha was biased in favour of jihadists. He also asked who she was married to – he suspected that her husband might have jihadi sympathies – as well as requesting other personal information about her:

> 06-10-16, 18:23 – Martijn de Koning: I have sent you an email from Andreas Kouwenhoven (NRC). He has all kinds of questions about Aysha . . . [. . .]
> 06-10-16, 23:08 – Martijn de Koning: to be honest, in my interactions with journalists I am used to a lot, but I almost fell of my chair in surprise [. . .]
> 06-10-16, 23:09 – Aysha: Yeah, honestly, I was also shocked.
> 06-10-16, 23:09 – Aysha: But that is not at all relevant for the substance of the research project

Annelies: I quickly began to have doubts about this journalist, who seemed to have changed his position quite dramatically regarding an article he had described as cool research just a few months earlier. Following the advice of a senior colleague specialised in research ethics, I decided, as the project leader, to become the spokesperson for our project. I only answered the question related to the content of the article, the story about sexual slavery, which

had already been investigated and found to be a hoax before Aysha allegedly referred to it.[5] But I refused to answer any questions that invaded Aysha's privacy. The journalist then complained to the public relations department of our university about my refusal to engage in discussions about the family relations of a member of our team. The head of public relations called me and advised me to go and have coffee with the journalist to defuse the situation. So I did.

Annelies and Martijn: We were, to put it mildly, astonished by the accusations of 'jihadist sympathies', which seemed so far-fetched. We were, of course, aware that Aysha had known some women before they had left for Syria, which had been one of the reasons we wanted to have her in our team. Working very closely together in the course of the research project, we had never witnessed any indication of a 'pro-IS bias'. On the contrary.

Annelies: On 18 October, I met the journalist over coffee and spoke with him for at least an hour and a half. He appeared nervous; all the more so when I said I wanted to record our conversation, which in the end he agreed to. Within the first five minutes, it became evident that 'the beginnings' of the affair preceded the publication of our article. He explained that he was not really interested in Aysha, but in someone else close to her, with whom he had a long-standing issue. He was not interested in the other two authors of the article, Martijn and me. I explained that it was common in our field not to record or even ask for the official names of interlocutors, and that this was also stipulated by the ethics committee of our funding body. We agreed to have another conversation after I had consulted Martijn and Aysha. More specifically, the journalist asked me to ask Aysha directly whether she supported the violent jihad.

Annelies and Martijn: Odd as it may seem, in the end we agreed to do as he asked. It seemed the only way to avoid a publication that we feared could have very harmful consequences for Aysha, who was then on pregnancy leave. We were all too aware that in the political climate of the time, if an upscale newspaper claimed that a junior Muslim researcher had expressed a

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[5] Reuter, C. (2013), 'Sex jihad' and other lies: Assad's elaborate disinformation campaign. *Der Spiegel*, 7 October 2013. Available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/assad-regime-wages-pr-campaign-to-discredit-rebels-a-926479.html> (last accessed 7 October 2019).

pro-jihadist position online, her – and our – refutation of that claim would not undo the harm to her.

Aysha: My excitement about the publication of the article rapidly turned into astonishment and frustration when the journalist only asked questions about my private life and not about our research. It even came to the point that Annelies and Martijn had to question me about my stance towards the violent jihad (which I do not support in any way). This was a very unpleasant situation for all three of us.

Annelies and Martijn: On 17 November, we went together for a second conversation with the journalist. He acknowledged that publishing his accusations could have 'fatal consequences' for Aysha. Yet our faith in her seemed only to fuel his suspicions. Why would we believe her when she said that she did not support IS? And our arguments for maintaining anonymity seemed to him only further evidence of our complicity; he simply refused to believe that that could be common practice in our field.

Annelies: On 15 December, I received the journalist's draft article and a list of on-the-record questions. I answered the questions about the content of our article, our research ethics and methodology, but again I refused to answer those that concerned private information. I did, however, after consulting Aysha, give him her e-mail address so that he could pose those questions directly. Guided by our public relations department, I also advised her that it might be wise to provide brief answers in order to avoid selective quotations:

> 15-12-16, 12:06 – Aysha: Jihadists amongst family and acquaintances 😂?
> 15-12-16, 12:07 – Annelies Moors: He very often uses the word jihadists . . .
> 15-12-16, 12:08 – Aysha: Yeah, am curious who all those jihadists in my circle are supposed to be . . .

Aysha: I decided only to answer that I do not support the violent jihad in any way.

Annelies and Martijn: While we found it difficult to take the whole affair seriously, we were also becoming increasingly concerned for Aysha's safety. We were well aware that an *NRC* article would immediately be picked up by shockblogs, and its often aggressive publics. The journalist

sent his draft article to the PR department and our university's upper hierarchy became involved: Annelies was invited to visit the Rector. Perhaps this invitation should have alarmed us more than it did at the time. We were, however, far more concerned about the potential consequences for Aysha than about our employer. And we still simply could not believe that our carefully-worded three-page article could actually be read as a pro-jihadist text: . . .

> 15-12-16, 12:57 – Annelies Moors: so, now I am going to see the rector this afternoon . . .
> 15-12-16, 13:01 – Martijn de Koning: The rector??? Next, we will be invited for an audience with the pope . . .
> 15-12-16, 13:01 – Annelies Moors: Well, in this way you get to meet people
> 15-12-16, 13:08 – Aysha: Hahaha! In spite of my irritation, I have to laugh [. . .]
> 15-12-16, 13:11 – Aysha: I am flattered that he thinks that I am capable of misleading you both without any effort
> 15-12-16, 13:12 – Annelies Moors: We feel less flattered of course . . . 😬
> 15-12-16, 13:12 – Aysha: Yes, that is understandable 😂
> 15-12-16, 13:12 – Annelies Moors: We are depicted as a bunch of fools
> 15-12-16, 13:13 – Aysha: Yes that is a bit nasty of him 😬 I am really wondering which societal purpose is served by this

Annelies: So, I went to see the rector after having replied to the journalist. She had also invited the Dean. It was a very civil, friendly conversation. The Rector expressed her full confidence in me, and, just as importantly, appeared to understand and sympathise with my concerns about Aysha. She made a vague reference to the possibility of doing an audit if things got out of hand, which I had no problem with as long as it would be undertaken by auditors familiar with our field. The Dean seemed slightly less at ease and stressed that he would like to be kept informed about any developments in what had become 'our case', including my correspondence with the *NRC*. In the meantime, the journalist's attempt to disqualify our article with the editor of *Anthropology Today* failed. The editor simply pointed out that Aysha had stated that she did not support the violent jihad, that the article had been

peer-reviewed, and that maintaining interlocutors' anonymity is common practice in anthropological research.

Shortly before Christmas, we were informed that the *NRC* had postponed publication of the article, and Aysha gave birth to a son.

The whole episode had not yet reached the public eye, but the ways in which positionality was at stake had already became evident. From the start of the affair, the journalist had only focused on the private life of the junior researcher. He had consistently tried to push the seniors to distance themselves from the junior researcher. The seniors were at most collateral damage. Our university officials were very supportive, yet they were also concerned about reputation management. What would happen when this became a public affair?

Act III: Doing Serious Harm

In mid-January 2017, the journalist announced that his article would be published and, on 17 January, the *NRC* article was indeed published. With the headline 'Sister Aicha: Cyberjihadist and UvA-scientist' and pre-announced the day before as 'How cyberjihadists got to influence an academic study of IS', the three-page report with colour illustrations immediately sparked a huge amount of negative publicity. On the same day, the university issued our extensive response to the article online, adding at the bottom: 'To stimulate scientific debate about the methodology used in this research, the University of Amsterdam will invite external experts to reflect on this case':[6]

> 18-01-17, 14:41 – Aysha: I am very shocked by his article, especially because he presents me as some kind of jihad recruiter and also tries to destroy you both completely [. . .]
> 18-01-17, 14:50 – Aysha: I find his statement very scary . . . Next thing, I will have youth services at the door . . .
> 18-01-17, 14:52 – Aysha: Or do I exaggerate a bit.[7]

[6] Reactie UvA-onderzoeker op artikel 'NRC' (Reaction UvA-researcher on article 'NRC'), 17 January 2017. Available at <https://www.uva.nl/content/nieuws/nieuwsberichten/2017/01/reactie-uva-op-artikel-nrc-handelsblad.html> (last accessed 5 November 2019).

[7] Aysha's concerns were by no means unfounded. Not long before, a couple from a nearby town had been accused of planning to travel to Syria, and their children had immediately been removed from their care. When it soon become clear that the suspicions were

As we had predicted, shockblogs such as *GeenStijl* attacked us as well as the university, while its English-language counterparts, such as Jihadwatch and Breitbart, also picked it up. We received personal hatemail.

Aysha: Most of my direct relatives did not read Kouwenhoven's article, because they read the regional newspaper and not the *NRC*. Many of them only knew about the publication when I told them about it. Their reaction was that these accusations could not possibly be true. Although my conversion to Islam had caused mixed feelings within my family, my relatives had immediately recognised that it did not change me as a person. Consequently, they were certain that I did not support the violent jihad. Unlike my mother, most of my relatives did not realise that the publication could have a hugely negative impact on my future career and, even worse, endanger my personal safety. They just regarded it as a tedious event. My mother was keenly aware of these effects and hence very worried about my well-being. Her concerns were all the more intense as I had given birth just one month before the publication.

Meanwhile, a host of parliamentary questions had been posed, raising aspects ranging from the validity of the research method, our interlocutors' presence in Syria and the potential use of our article in court cases to the name of one of our interlocutors and whether the response of the university had been adequate.[8]

We were still confident that once the focus shifted to the actual content of our article it would be evident to all that there simply was no case:

> 19-01-17, 01:45 – Aysha: I am really curious, the uva was also going to investigate the affair, right? That is, the research process
> 19-01-17, 01:46 – Annelies Moors: Yes, but it is still not clear how they will do that. It is very good that from the start we paid a lot of attention to ethical issues.
> 19-01-17, 01:47 – Annelies Moors: Is Ubaydah not asleep?

groundless, the children were returned. Available at <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/het-kalifaatgezin-uit-huizen~b27f8362/> (last accessed 5 November 2019).

[8] Rijksoverheid. Available at <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2017/02/22/antwoorden-3-sets-kamervragen-inzake-jihadonderzoeker-uva> (last accessed 5 November 2019).

19-01-17, 01:50 – Aysha: yes, he is.

No, eating🙂. But with closed eyes, so good hope that he will fall asleep quickly

What keeps you awake at this time?

19-01-17, 01:51 – Annelies Moors: Updating my email, all this stuff with the NRC takes a lot of time . . .

20-01-17, 17:20 – Annelies Moors: Hi Aysha, the NRC will not publish my letter to the editor . . . grgrgr

20-01-17, 17:32 – Aysha: Does not really surprise me

Annelies and Martijn: To our surprise, the *NRC* refused to publish our response to the article. The newspaper also completely disregarded the letter to the editor that Professor Thijl Sunier, who was completely misquoted in the article, had sent. There was no possibility of a rebuttal.

By then, the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) had issued an official statement about the affair on its website, which ended as follows:

> The AISSR, aiming to stimulate exploration of the quality, integrity and ethics of research, is organizing a 'reflection-audit' by external experts to broaden the discussion of the scientific integrity of this research project specifically, and on this kind of difficult-to-research topics in general. This specific case and the results of the reflection-audit will form the basis of a workshop on issues of transparency, personal bias, and ethics regarding anonymity and openness.[9]

The tremendous media attention and the large number of parliamentary questions had made a difference, as this was a substantial shift from the announcement of a few days earlier: the terms 'audit' and 'integrity' now replaced the 'discussion' about methodology.

Then, on 26 January 2017, Pieter Duisenberg, MP for the right-wing liberal party, joined the fray. To start a debate in Parliament, using our article as 'a source of inspiration', he raised the issue of 'political homogeneity

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[9] The text has been removed from the university's website, but can still be found at Archive. org: https://web.archive.org/web/20190529204033/https://aissr.uva.nl/content/news/ 2017/01/discussing-integrity-and-ethics.html (last accessed 8 March 2020).

at university', pointing to his concerns about a lack of 'diversity of views': 'Research such as about those ladies who are with IS and liked it very much there, that is all allowed.' In one sentence, he both misrepresented the content of our article and argued that allowing such research was problematic, rather ironically packaging his complaints as a call to uphold the 'diversity of views':[10]

> 31-01-17, 16:52 – Aysha: Hallo both, how are you doing?
> Sorry have not yet been able to view the documents to see if anything is missing. I am planning to do this . . .
> Unfortunately things are not going so great at the moment. [. . .]
> 31-01-17, 16:57 – Annelies Moors: Don't hesitate to ask for help in time [. . .]
> 31-01-17, 17:01 – Aysha: Yes, [. . .] they're on top of it. That is good. The problem is that care providers seem obsessed with antidepressants. I would rather not have that, so I have to look for an alternative. Thank you for your words ❤

By early February we, and Aysha in particular, had been heavily targeted by the media, both offline and online, by a wide range of influential actors. We had not realised how convincing the journalist's presentation of the case could be to those who had not read our article. And hardly anyone read it, not even after it was made freely available via Open Access. Having provided an extensive response online, and having been denied an opportunity to respond in the *NRC*, we agreed with our PR department that we should not respond to each and every accusation. It seemed better to observe how the controversy would unfold.

Act IV: Publicly Pushing Back while under Investigation

The moment we decided that we needed to act publicly came when a journalist who worked for the right-wing weekly *Elsevier* used our case as the basis of a very negative column about our anthropology department:[11]

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10 Scienceguide: VVD wil onderzoek politieke voorkeur wetenschappers. Available at <https://www.scienceguide.nl/2017/01/vvd-wil-onderzoek-politieke-voorkeur-wetenschappers/> (last accessed 8 March 2020).

11 Sterkenburg, N., Onder antropologen, *Elsevier*, 28 January 2017.

13 February 2017. E-mail Annelies to *Elsevier*, '[This journalist] wrote an excellent article on the Alt Right in the same issue. But how could she write such an abysmal text 'Amongst anthropologists'? [. . .] Copy–paste, no sources, pretending to have talked to people in person, a long list of inaccuracies . . . I attach our article as the author obviously did not read it'

Annelies: To my surprise it worked. The next issue of the magazine included both a rectification and my long letter to the editor, and it offered to do a 1,500-word interview about my life and work:[12]

24-02-17, 21:38 – Aysha: Good evening! How are you? [. . .] Annelies, good to see that your letter has been published, I think it is strong.
24-02-17, 21:41 – Annelies Moors: True, good that it is published, but it was a bizarre bad piece . . .

It was interesting that whereas the more liberal *NRC*, generally considered a 'quality daily', gave us no opportunity to respond, the more right-wing weekly *Elsevier* did. The next months became a rollercoaster. As our 'talking back' started to take effect, we were also confronted with new surprises.

Annelies: One of my colleagues invited me to do a guest lecture for our first-year anthropology students on methodology, ethics and valorisation. I agreed to do so, because if there was one group of people entitled to discuss the case with us, it was our own students:

10-03-17, 09:06 – Annelies Moors: The students were very open and interested, a relief, they asked open questions.
10-03-17, 09:09 – Aysha: hahaha yeah that is unique nowadays.
10-03-17, 09:09 – Annelies Moors: That is why it is really more important to spend time with students than with journalists . . .

But not all went well. We inadvertently discovered that on 14 March an assistant professor at another Dutch university had written a blogpost for *SHARIAsource*, in which he claimed that the *NRC* had discovered that 'the research assistant was the owner of a Twitter account that appeared to support ISIS. This claim was neither confirmed nor denied by the researchers.'[13]

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[12] The letter to the editor was published on 24 February, the interview on 1 August.
[13] Originally posted at Shariasource blog: <https://islamiclaw.blog/2017/03/14/the-ongoing-public-debate-on-islam-in-the-netherlands/> (last accessed 8 March 2020).

This was outrageous. Aysha had never had a Twitter account, and even the *NRC* had included Aysha's statement that she was not a supporter of IS.

Annelies: This time with the support of our research director, I wrote a strongly worded complaint to the editor-in-chief of the *SHARIAsource* blog. Within a few days, the blog post was substantially revised, 'by the editors to correct factual errors'. Talking back seemed to work, but it was hugely time- and energy-consuming.

In the meantime, the auditors had appeared on the scene.

Annelies: I had been approached for an appointment with the auditors. After repeatedly requesting the university hierarchy, on 6 March, the evening before the appointment, I finally received the terms of the audit as well as the names of the auditors: one was a professor of medical ethics, the other a professor of culture and identity in Africa. Not really 'our field'.

We were unpleasantly surprised to learn what issues the audit was to discuss. Rather than focusing on our research methodology and the content of our article, it was to focus on the need to disclose researchers' political views in publications, including those held prior to commencing employment; on the permissibility of using anonymous sources; and on obligations to make data available in the interests of Open Science.

Annelies: Together with the fact that I was notified at extremely short notice and that I was told to come alone, the procedure began to feel more like a security interrogation than an academic investigation . . . The meeting with the auditors was, however, cordial. They stated their desire to have an open discussion, reassured me that no 'crazy stuff' would happen that would make us unhappy, and said we would have a conversation before publication of the report. Nonetheless, some of the questions they asked seemed odd, such as whether I knew who the researchers in my group were married to . . . Once again, I found it hard to take the questions seriously. Afterwards, we had a good laugh in the larger research group about my new responsibility of registering the nature and quality of intimate relationships, with someone jokingly raising the spectre of making a formal complaint against me for infringing on her rights to privacy . . .

Annelies: I approached the Dean to let him know that none of the researchers in my team recorded the names of their interlocutors, and once again reiterated our contractual obligations to maintain anonymity. While he

did not seem particularly interested to hear that, my comment that the whole thing seemed like a panic reaction led him to exclaim, 'What should we have done then, it was in the *NRC*!'

This made us realise again how much positionality mattered. Whereas no one in Aysha's circle read the *NRC*, it was easy to imagine how uncomfortable our university officials must have felt about the affair, especially when they were confronted about it by people from their own social circles, their colleagues at the university, and possibly officials from the ministry of education.

Martijn and Aysha were also invited to meet the auditors. Annelies decided to accompany Aysha. Although the conversations were once again civil, we all began to feel increasingly ill at ease, sensing that the auditors were on a fishing expedition.

Aysha: At one moment they referred to me as 'part of the community' (of our interlocutors). I felt very uncomfortable and immediately pointed out that I had never been part of any community of people intending to travel to jihadi held areas . . .

Then suddenly, in late May, the auditors became very interested in our research material. Whereas they had initially only asked for a list of the kinds of material we had ('we do not need to see it, just a list to get an idea'), they now wanted to see the material itself. Although that seemed to go well beyond the ambit of an academic reflection audit, we did not object.

Annelies: I had already provided them with a very detailed account of how we had worked. Then, on 23 May, they sent the secretary of the audit commission to my room to look at our material. I had printed out examples of different kinds of material, such as chats, weekly updates and profiles. She looked at them and we chatted a bit, then she left and came back again to tell me that the auditors wanted to take the material with them. I told her that they were welcome to have a look at it in my presence, but that under no circumstances would I hand over confidential material. A few days later I received an e-mail saying that this was not necessary.[14]

We were puzzled. Why this sudden interest in our material to the extent that they made the highly unusual request to take it away with them? Was

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[14] E-mail, 29 May 2017.

this on their own initiative or had other parties become interested in a short-cut to gain access to our material? We honestly do not know and probably never will.

As it turned out, responding to specific publics, whether *Elsevier* readers, our first-year students or *SHARIAsource*, was effective, even if it cost us a lot of time and energy. Our feelings about the audit were more ambivalent. We had been eager to participate, expecting to be given a chance to engage with an 'audience' familiar with our field – a chance to be heard. We were then taken aback when we learned what kinds of questions were to be discussed, but we were all too well aware that refusing to participate would be interpreted as having something to hide. At the same time, we were starting to become concerned about the silence of our university officials on issues that they could easily have clarified. That we were contractually obliged to refrain from registering the names of our interlocutors was well-known to them, but they did not publicly confirm it.

Act V: The Audit Report as a Public Document – and its Afterlife

Finally, on 12 June the draft audit report was completed and sent to Annelies to share confidentially with others, with a request for a response within two days . . .

> 13-06-17, 14:12 – Aysha: I find the way in which they describe the research process really a bit strange, I would have been working too much by myself? [. . .]
> 13-06-17, 22:11 – Aysha: Their conclusions etc. really surprise me
> 13-06-17, 22:12 – Annelies Moors: Us too, huge waste of time
> 13-06-17, 22:12 – Aysha: I had emphasised that I thought that we had really intensively analysed the material together
> 13-06-17, 22:13 – Aysha: It sometimes sounds as if I have been making it all up sitting in the attic, and then once in a while shared a result with you . . .
> 13-06-17, 22:15 – Annelies Moors: If they had been more positive about us, they could have become targeted themselves by the NRC . . .
> 13-06-17, 22:16 – Aysha: I am curious what our journalist will do with such a report

13-06-17, 22:17 – Annelies Moors: We will cross that bridge when we get
to it

Annelies: I confidentially shared the report with a few colleagues who were
familiar with our kind of research or with issues of ethics and integrity, some
of whom had also been interviewed by the auditors. They were unpleasantly
surprised by what they read, and some of them communicated their concern
to our research director.

In our response, we carefully pointed out the many factual mistakes,
omissions, instances of suggestive language use, and the virtually total absence
of our lines of argumentation, which made it impossible for readers to under-
stand our motivations for our actions. On 21 June, we received the second
version, which included some corrections but still had lots of old as well as
some new problems. We responded quickly, but the report had already been
sent to the board of the university. There was evidently no time for the discus-
sion that had been previously promised:

26-06-17, 20:03 – Aysha: I am still astonished about their points of view,
and, as you say, why is my background relevant and yours not? I would
never expect people with their academic background to act like this. My
bad.
26-06-17, 20:10 – Aysha: Yes, honestly, I am really stunned [. . .] During
the conversation they acted like that, very understanding . . . and then
when you read this, you wonder what has been the use of all those conversa-
tions and efforts (especially by Annelies and you)
[. . .]
26-06-17, 20:11 – Aysha: And then that piece about my career and safety
being endangered, and then still putting 'the blame' for that on our actions

Annelies: I finally decided to seek legal advice. I approached our chief scien-
tific integrity officer, and wrote a note to all parties involved that we did not
consent to the publication of the report because of its substantial bias and
factual mistakes, which would be harmful for us and create an unsafe work-
ing environment for our research group. The auditors did not respond and
I never heard from them again. I was invited by the Dean and the research
director, who both tried to convince me that the report was not harmful and

that it simply presented a difference of opinion in an open debate. What they seemed unwilling to admit was that this supposedly open debate was not taking place on a level playing field. The auditors were presented as a higher authority, as 'external experts', and the Board of the university had the power to decide whether to publish their report or not.

Martijn and Annelies: Then we were invited to meet the Rector. It was obvious that no one was pleased with the report. The university Board would not endorse the text, nor its recommendations. They would put it online (because they felt they had committed themselves to doing so), but would accompany it with a statement confirming that we had worked in accordance with ethics and integrity regulations, and they would also upload our response. This might sound like a reasonable course of action and may have been well-intended, but knowing the field, we immediately realised what would happen: the report would be used to disqualify our work and the university's positive evaluation would be ignored. We suggested postponing publication in order to make time for a discussion with the auditors first, but that possibility was not entertained.

On 11 July, the reflection audit report went online, together with our response. After thanking the auditors, the university called for a critical discussion of the report's recommendations, and ended with the university once more expressing their confidence in us.[15] For the Board of the university, this was the end of the affair.

The next day, the *NRC* (more precisely, the very same journalist who had started the affair) wrote an article about the report under the heading 'Advice to UvA: Improve research anthropologists', focusing on the auditors' assertion that researchers' personal backgrounds can have an impact on research results. That we had worked according to the ethics and integrity regulations was not mentioned in his article.

Annelies: Very early that morning I received an e-mail from our research director with a link to the *NRC* article. His e-mail started with, fair enough: 'I know you told me so.' He also informed me that the published article was

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[15] Text available at Archive.org: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190530050709/http://aissr.uva.nl/content/news/2017/07/research-audit.html> (last accessed 8 March 2020).

an improved version of a far worse text that the journalist had sent him for comments.

We did not hear again from either the Dean or the Rector. As far as they were concerned, the case was closed. The interview with *Elsevier* was published a few weeks later. The journalist responsible had done a great job, dealing with 'our case' in a balanced way. It was very well received, and marked another turning point in the affair.

Martijn: That's not to say that we didn't face further problems. Two examples. When I was called as an expert witness in the trail against Laura H. (coincidentally the same case that was discussed in Kouwenhoven's first article on our research in July 2016) the prosecutor cited the audit report to disqualify my statements. And in the weeks preceding an Islamophobia conference I co-organised in September, online attempts were again made to discredit my work by trying to provoke the university or our funder (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) to respond. When these institutions did not respond (perhaps lessons had been learned by then) the agitation died down, but we did require extra security at the meeting.

Aysha: A few months later, I was with my family in the library, when a local police officer rang my husband up and asked him whether I could tell him more about the identity of our interlocutors. My husband explained that I could not because of the rules about maintaining anonymity. The police officer then tried to persuade him to probe me nonetheless, pointing out that his intention was to help the women concerned. My husband then told him to contact Annelies.

Annelies: No one contacted me.

Although our university had issued our critical response to the audit report online, we did not feel that our lines of argumentation had been heard. With the exception of a few comments made in private, no one in a position of authority ever acknowledged that anything had gone wrong. Hence, in our response to the audit we announced that we would start a small project, 'No escape: an auto-ethnography of the securitisation of academic research'.

Discussion: on 'Talking Back', Remaining Silent and Speaking Out

From the very beginning of the affair, we were forced to take part in a struggle over the framing of our case. By actively talking back, we attempted to

circumvent the ways in which we were addressed. When the media hype centred on the allegations that our junior researcher harboured pro-jihadist sympathies, we responded, first in private to the journalist and then publicly, by redirecting attention to the content of our article, puzzled that it could possibly be read as 'pro-jihadist'. Throughout the affair we have consistently followed this line. We have very much welcomed questions about our methodology and the content, while firmly explaining our reasons for refusing to answer questions that infringed the right to privacy of fellow researchers (Moors 2019a).

We recognise that, in speaking back, we were not fully able to escape the terms by which we were addressed. This became evident when we included a statement in our first response that none of the three authors supported the violent jihad. Such an announcement is not without its problems. Condemning only Islamic State and those who fight for it implicitly means relegating the more than 14,000 torture victims of the Assad regime to a lower position in the ranks of victimhood. Should we not also have condemned the Assad regime? We did not provide such contextualisation because we knew that it could easily have been read as apologetic for Islamic State. Furthermore, we were also taken aback when we realised how the force of security discourse was present not only in our response, but also in that of our university. In her answer to one of the parliamentary questions, the Minister of Education had stated: 'The University of Amsterdam has indicated to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science that it explicitly renounces statements that support the violent jihad, even if these have been made by its employees.' We are not aware of any other case where a university board has made a public statement of that kind.

Nonetheless, our assertion that none of us supported the violent jihad was not only evidence that we had submitted to the discourse of security; it also was an attempt to subvert the terms by which we had been addressed. In our responses, we have always spoken as a collective voice, since all three of us were responsible for the article in *Anthropology Today*. This was diametrically opposed to how the journalist had operated. His main strategy had been to put the blame on the junior researcher, hoping that the seniors would distance themselves from her. In a similar vein, the auditors had tried to differentiate between the junior researcher and the seniors by stating in their

report that they were only concerned about how 'the Muslim background' of the junior researcher might have influenced the analysis. The seniors supposedly had no relevant backgrounds worthy of scrutiny. When we raised this issue, there was a substantial divide in the ways people responded. While other researchers in our field, especially those of Muslim background, immediately recognised the discriminatory nature of the distinction made, neither the auditors nor our university administrators seemed able to understand – or willing to admit – that singling out the Muslim researcher could possibly be considered problematic.[16]

Our early attempts to circumvent the ways in which we were addressed had little effect. We simply were not heard. This was partly because our text was only published on the university website, and therefore only reached a limited public, while the *NRC*'s refusal to publish our letter to the editor denied us access to the domain in which we were being spoken about. At the same time, at the onset of the affair, we also fell into silence because we were simply dumbstruck. We had found it hard to believe that the public would take the journalist's story seriously and we were overwhelmed by the often aggressive reactions.

In hindsight, however, there was also a moment when we should have remained silent but did not do so. That was when we agreed to take part in the reflection audit. We should have realised that this exercise was doomed from the outset, not only because of the lack of checks and balances and the auditors' lack of expertise in our field, but especially because of the nature of the questions posed, which simply followed the accusations of the *NRC*. We should have done no more than issue a formal statement that investigating the political activities of co-authors is not only unethical, but within hierarchical employment relations also possibly illegal, and that registering the official names of our interlocutors would have meant a breach of contract. And we should have left it at that. But instead we participated, believing that the audit was intended to provide an opportunity for a serious discussion of our article's content and our research methods and ethics. Moreover, we

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[16] Didier Fassin (2011: 420) notes a similar divide with respect to the reception of stories of racial discrimination.

feared that remaining silent could easily have been read as unwillingness to defend our research, our department and our discipline.

In short, we allowed ourselves to become part of a public performance in a theatrical setting, perhaps best described as a theatre of the absurd. In our responses, we have consistently stated the negative consequences of publicly investigating the personal backgrounds of researchers. We tried to shift the focus to the research itself, to how we had worked and to the content of the text that we had published. But neither the *NRC* nor the auditors were willing to engage in such a rational discussion about content. It was an affair in which affect ruled and in which anti-Muslim sentiments had become normalised, among many publics, including academia. We were caught in a combination of a generalised repulsion vis-à-vis our interlocutors and a strong sense of distrust vis-à-vis us as researchers, in particular the junior Muslim researcher. And we had not realised that we were up against strong institutional forces. Under pressure from growing competition from other media, especially online formats, the *NRC* was in dire need of clicks and likes. Hence its editorial board favoured a sensationalising article that framed our work as a contribution to 'Cyberjihadism' over the earlier more accurate draft article. At the same time, universities, governed according to the rules of new public management and its celebration of the market, were in competition with each other for students and funding, as a result of which they had become increasingly sensitive to external pressure and the dictates of reputation management.

In retrospect, it is hardly surprising, then, that it was hard to be heard in a setting in which the force of the discourses of security and radicalisation was so strong. Yet, gradually, through our addressing various sub-publics, our perseverance had some effect. It was helpful that a report by the Review Committee on the Intelligence and Security Services (CTIVD) criticised the AIVD and confirmed our analysis.[17] The interview in *Elsevier* was the first the paper had ever conducted with an anthropologist, and it was very successful. When we published an updated version of our *Anthropology Today* article in a Dutch popular-scientific journal, including some of the chats, there was

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[17] De wetenschap, de NRC, en de veiligheidsdiensten, CLOSER, <http://religionresearch. org/closer/2018/05/31/de-wetenschap-de-nrc-en-de-veiligheidsdiensten/> (last accessed 5 November 2019).

no negative response at all (Navest et al. 2018). We have since been invited to speak at conferences and to publish about our case. We also managed to spark a highly productive discussion about ethics in anthropological research and beyond, which led to the publication of guidelines for anthropological research (de Koning et al. 2019).[18] Ultimately, then, we have been able to circumvent the terms by which we were addressed, and have been able to effectively 'turn the tables'. We still work together as a team and continue our WhatsApp group. Yet harm has been done, especially to the junior researcher, and it has become painfully clear to us that we cannot assume that our institutions will support us when needed.

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2

DESIGNING RESEARCH ON RADICALISATION USING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT: DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS AS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Manjana Sold, Hande Abay Gaspar and Julian Junk[1]

Introduction

In recent years, the analysis of data retrieved from social media has become increasingly important for researchers, particularly for those conducting research on radicalisation and extremism. The rise in the use of social media as a data source can be attributed to three main factors. First, more and more people are now online – and that naturally includes jihadists and other extremists; second, a new quality of interaction is observed in social networks – in terms of speed, network density and the use of various audiovisual formats; and third, an extremely large pool of data can be accessed and used to develop and test hypotheses, for instance by means of automatic evaluation systems (Golla et al. 2018: 89–90). It is, therefore, not surprising that research is increasingly being conducted using data obtained via platforms such as Facebook (Błachnio et al. 2013; Caers et al. 2013; Manca and Ranieri 2013; Nadkarni and Hofmann 2012; Wilson et al. 2012), Twitter (Klausen

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2015: 5–6; Dhir et al. 2013; Williams et al. 2013), YouTube (Snelson 2011) and Instagram (Highfield and Leaver 2015).

However, working with social media and audiovisual formats as data sources brings its own challenges. While the existing repertoire of research methods and designs can often help us to analyse textual and audiovisual data from social networks, there are some specific hurdles for empirical research in this data field. These challenges are particularly pertinent when investigating radicalisation processes and their interrelationships with audiovisual content. Communication patterns are becoming increasingly diverse, with combinations of different types of textual and audiovisual data often being used within a single thread or post. Platform shifts are common, seamlessly achieved by linking a communication thread on one platform/app to another conversation on another platform/app – often incorporating different participating profiles, though not necessarily different individuals. A sense of anonymity when engaging via multiple virtual identities and avatars has aggravated these tendencies. Furthermore, communication on social platforms is increasingly moving in encrypted, closed spaces, and this tendency is more pronounced the more radical a group or an individual becomes. The legal situation for researchers working with social media has also changed considerably in recent years. Data protection regulations issued by national bodies have not necessarily become stricter, but have gained more public attention and have become more differentiated. In addition to all of these issues, ethical considerations present a potential minefield – researchers need to balance societal and scientific interests against the individual right to privacy, in a field that is politically sensitive and contested.

This chapter aims to briefly trace these recent developments and to provide guidance to help researchers take account of the various requirements of the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and related ethical considerations when designing empirical research using data from social media platforms. We have identified these considerations in the course of our work investigating Salafist and Salafist jihadist radicalisation in Germany at the nexus between online and offline communication patterns. In addition to other data, we investigated textual as well as audiovisual data obtained from Facebook profiles and Telegram.

In our research, we build on a broad definition of radicalisation. We

understand radicalisation as the increasing fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of a normative order and/or the increasing willingness to fight the institutional structure of this order (Abay Gaspar et al. 2019: 20). Radicalisation in this sense is related not only to violence and actual physical deeds, but also to non-violent forms or phases and to rather rhetorical means. With regard to Salafist jihadism, however, the aspect of violence is critical. But what does *Salafist jihadism* actually mean? *Salafism* in a broader sense can be understood as a modern, fundamentalist and transnational current in Sunni Islam that propagates a literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunna and strict adherence to the example set by the righteous predecessors (Biene et al. 2016: 18). At the moment when Salafist conceptions place the forms of rule and law that were primarily valid in early Islam above the constitutional order, Salafism becomes a political ideology (Farschid 2014: 161). The addition of jihadism to this political Salafism (Salafist jihadism) refers to the willingness to use force to achieve objectives as theologically legitimate and necessary. As outlined in the introduction of the volume, this encompasses a range of actors and practices – many of them are linked to global and social media strategies (Günther and Pfeifer, Introduction to this volume: 4).

On the basis of our research experiences in this field, we give an overview of some key ethical and legal considerations that can serve as a basis for prudently designed empirical research projects. This contribution is forward-looking and solution-oriented. We highlight some ideas in the debate on research using social media that draw attention to challenges and show how they can be viewed as opportunities for the adaptation of research designs.

Diversity of Online Communication Forms

Recent research demonstrates that communication patterns among radicalising individuals and groups are becoming increasingly diverse. This is revealed not only by the wide range of different formats being used within single communication threads, but also by the quantity of different threads with varying degrees of overlaps in terms of participating profiles, topics and material shared.

Plurality of data points

A common pattern is the constant back and forth between different types of textual and (audio-)visual data. The technical functionalities of user interfaces simplify and even incentivise audiovisual uploads and the algorithmic ranking of certain types of material. Furthermore, cultural developments (e.g. the influence of pop culture in certain radical milieus) shape this diversity of material. For researchers analysing social media data, these tendencies have consequences on two levels: firstly, raw data sources are diverse, ranging from text to memes to audio clips to video sequences, all of which may potentially occur within a single communication context; secondly, the incentives, motives and behaviours of those posting the content need to also be reflected upon, as these might differ significantly from those of persons who participate in real-world conversations and/or produce more traditional printed texts.

The variety of forms of expression possible on social media complicate not only the collection of such data, but also its analysis. Firstly, decisions must be made – and made transparent – regarding how different types of textual and audiovisual data will be stored and processed. The deletion of accounts, no matter by whom, can lead to the rapid disappearance of data. Hence, data must be backed up quickly. Furthermore, as already mentioned, researchers are confronted with datasets that contain multiple formats, often within a single communication thread. Although text often predominates, images, memes, audio clips and videos are also included. While shifting from one platform to another may be a deliberate strategy by which users aim to avoid surveillance, the combination of various formats is unlikely to be done for such reasons, yet nonetheless has consequences for researchers. For these reasons, taking a mixed methods approach is proving very fruitful in this field of research. Secondly, combining various methods also demands transparency. It is clearly not enough to simply collect a multitude of data: researchers need to reflect on how to weigh up the reliability of different data sources and consider how best to combine them in order to address the research question (for different techniques for combining methods and weighing data points, see Junk 2011 and Leuffen et al. 2010).

Plurality of platforms, profiles and threads

In addition to the wide range of types of communication data, we have observed platform shifts whereby one communication thread on one platform/app is linked to another communication in another platform/app (Zuckerberg 2019). We have also observed that different participating profiles do not necessarily represent different individuals. Multiple Facebook accounts may be maintained, on the one hand, so that a kind of back-up profile is available should one account be deleted by the platform or security authorities. This means that in the event of a deletion, for example, identical/similar contacts and networks can continue to exist. The use of different platforms increases not only users' access to information, but also their own visibility. The parallel use of different platforms is a strategy that expands one's own field of observation and increases one's own audience. Particularly among users associated with radicalisation towards Salafist jihadism, a constant back and forth between different platforms is common. Individuals and groups who are aware that their content is likely to be scrutinised by security authorities take measures to render their communications more difficult to follow, or even completely inaccessible for unwanted audiences. This may not always be in response to the fear of legal consequences; very personal individual motives can also motivate such precautions. For example, in our own research in the field of Salafism we found that (young) individuals who are moving towards radicalisation often want to withhold their newly developing ideas and attitudes from their former circles of friends or, even more importantly, from their families. Often, users block certain 'friends' on Facebook or 'followers' on Telegram or Instagram, and they may subsequently switch to completely different social media or remain active on the same platform but under a different profile/channel name.

More effective than simply creating a new profile or changing platforms, the transition to using closed spaces also serves to avoid unwanted readers: Facebook in particular offers a number of different options for this, ranging from profiles to private hidden groups.[2] Newman et al. (2019: 37) point out

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[2] As of 7 August 2020. Facebook renamed in 2019 its public, closed and secret group settings to public and private settings. Private groups can be visible or hidden for non-members.

that debates in social media are rarely conducted in public and the tendency to withdraw towards private spaces is increasing and a migration to private messenger applications can be observed. Furthermore, our own empirical findings reveal that 'the more radical the content, the more encrypted and closed the communication' (Abay Gaspar et al. 2018: 36, own translation). There is an observable change in the way social media are used in the course of radicalisation processes. While social media in general and Facebook in particular often mediate the first contact (see also Felden and von Hein 2018), instant messengers such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber, Telegram, Threema and Signal are subsequently used increasingly frequently to maintain and intensify contact as a radicalisation process develops. One of the reasons Facebook makes first contact possible is that it initially offers an anonymous and virtual platform for exchanges among like-minded people. Facebook also plays an important role in spreading low-threshold propaganda (Frankenberger et al. 2018: 7), especially when it comes to attract particular types of young people. Our case studies of different degrees of radicality show that a person's online behaviour changes as they become more radical. While, at the outset of radicalisation processes, individuals often use Facebook's commentary function to express their own opinions, with increasing radicalisation users shift their communications to visible or private hidden groups that are only accessible to a selected group of people. This shift is nonetheless made visible by profiles' explicit references to private groups. Often, for example, Facebook profiles refer to closed Telegram channels (Kimmel et al. 2018: 39).

The development of an individual's way of using social media is also influenced by specific requests from group members. Terrorist organisations such as so-called Islamic State (IS) have called on their supporters and sympathisers to behave well online in order to move 'under the radar'.[3] For example, in the first issue of the so-called *Kybernetiq* magazine, published by IS, sympathisers and supporters were instructed to adopt the real names of unbelievers because they would be less conspicuous than 'any Arab battle names'. In fact, some violent Salafists seem to adhere to this and they go by allegedly clear names when engaging online. Whether these are their actual names

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[3] See *Kybernetiq*, December 2015, Volume 1, p. 5.

or fictitious names, however, is not ascertainable for researchers. Another striking feature to have emerged from our research is the sudden inactivity of some accounts. Many of the accounts that we observed, to which one or more posts were added almost daily, suddenly showed no further activity from one moment to the next. This could be another indication that in the course of their radicalisation those operating the accounts switched to other (social) media or followed the advice of Salafist jihadist groups and continued their communications in encrypted form via other channels.

These observations have consequences for researchers, for whom it becomes all the more difficult to track communication processes that withdraw to private channels. These complications, which constitute our second observation, namely the growing ethical and legal challenges, will be discussed in the following section.

Some Ethical Challenges

While many aspects of researching social media dynamics relate to well-understood challenges of research design and methodology in general, social media also bring specific characteristics and functions that are new territory for social science research. In particular, ethical challenges need to be addressed when designing research in the dynamic environment of social media. This pertains both to using social media as a research tool (e.g. for conducting surveys) (Monier 2018: 211) and to investigating it as a research object, studying the activities and content of individuals and groups. Although the former aspect raises important and partly new ethical questions (for a detailed discussion, see Gelinas et al. 2017), this contribution focuses on the latter, that is, researching social media content and practices.

Digitalisation and mediatisation have made research 'more prone to invading the privacy of individuals who are the subject of research' (Dobrick et al. 2018: 1). It is, therefore, not surprising that ethical and legal issues are increasingly being discussed in the context of digital research on social movements, radicalisation and terrorism. The key questions to be addressed are: what constitutes a challenge, what produces opportunities, and, if certain aspects are truly challenging, to what extent do they differ from the challenges of other research contexts?

The obligation of researchers to present their research interests

transparently, research procedures and the motivations behind their research is nothing new – on the contrary, it is the essence of research in general. One reason why hitherto existing ethical and legal requirements need to be prioritised and re-evaluated when studying radicalisation in online environments is that this is a sensitive research field that – at least in Europe – has become highly politicised and securitised. The situation is further complicated by the rapid development of the research object itself. While the diversity of data forms (text, image, audio and so on) represents a methodological challenge, the withdrawal of users into private communication spaces intensifies many ethical and legal questions (Golla et al. 2018). With the virtual world constantly evolving, new framework conditions are created, and therefore standardised ethical and legal research questions must be viewed in a new light.

Research ethics are discussed and addressed quite differently in different countries (Legewie and Nassauer 2018). Nevertheless, certain core principles transcend national contexts. Ethical issues that are emphasised in social science research across the world include *confidentiality*, *privacy* (that of the research subject and their identity), *transparency* and *trust*, as well as the *safety/security* of the researcher.

As Monier (2018: 211) puts it, '*confidentiality* is crucial in encouraging respondents, particularly when the topic is sensitive'. Especially when research participants cannot be asked for consent (because that would distort results or even make the research impossible), researchers should always manage data collected during and after the completion of the study confidentially. Even if participants have given their consent, data should always be anonymised or at least pseudonymised. There are grey zones, such as in the case of the death of a person, which results in the lapse of their right to their data – as occurred during our research on jihadism. Nevertheless, even in such cases, researchers must ask themselves whether it is really necessary, for example, to disclose a person's full name, or to continue to store data after a research project has been completed. Often, a name would not add any value to the findings, for example, in a description of the radicalisation process of a person who has demonstrably used violence and who perished in the Syrian War.

Confidentiality goes hand in hand with respect for *privacy*. Researchers should question their own moral principles and they should carefully

consider how to handle information gathered from social media (Turculet 2014: 968). Questions that arise include where and how the data is stored, whether the software used is trustworthy and how comprehensive a software vendor's privacy policy is. These issues are relevant to any research project. When working with social media, researchers should also take into account the privacy settings of the profiles and groups from which data is gathered. Whenever possible, consent should be sought from research participants. It is also very important that researchers take their own privacy into consideration. In order to convince a participant that confidentiality will be upheld, for example, researchers may be obliged to reveal their own identity or the identity that was developed for the research project. Revealing one's personal identity to strangers can infringe one's own privacy (Monier 2018: 215). Not only in such situations, researchers should reflect upon their moral motives and respect the privacy of others as they would expect their own to be respected.

Transparency is a related key consideration. Transparency refers both to explaining the research project to research participants and to being transparent about data collection and processing methods when publishing results. Studies conducted in online environments are particularly prone to leaving open questions about the data corpus and the handling of the data generated. Transparency should be upheld regarding the origin of data, the method of data generation, the method of analysis and the processes by which data has been accessed and cases selected. Doing so is not merely good social-scientific practice but enables readers to understand and interpret the results for themselves. A high degree of transparency – despite strict anonymity – of the data used should therefore always be a primary goal.

In social media research, the aspect of *trust* is particularly crucial because it is difficult to verify individual identities in online environments. Researchers not only need to bear in mind that the profiles they are observing may be 'fake'; they should also strive to act in a trustworthy manner and try to avoid conducting their research via fake profiles, whenever possible.

With regard to the *safety/security* of the researcher, an issue that is often taken too light-heartedly in the context of studies in potentially criminal contexts, preparation and communication are key: before embarking upon research, arrangements should be made so that it is clear who should be

notified if threats are received, and who should be informed of details such as the location and timing of interviews.

As already mentioned, the ethical challenges that arise when conducting research in the virtual world have already been widely discussed (Dobrick et al. 2018; Legewie and Nassauer 2018; Kern et al. 2016). These ethical questions go hand in hand with legal questions. When considering how best to handle data obtained without the permission/awareness of research subjects, especially data from closed/encrypted platforms, it becomes clear that ethical issues are inseparable from legal issues. Is it even possible to conduct research without research subjects' permission, and if it is, under what conditions? Which data protection challenges arise as a consequence? And, finally, how does this limit and/or open new possibilities for research? Each platform (and its terms of use) and each privacy setting gives rise to a different legal context. In addition, most social scientists do not have the necessary legal expertise. In the next section, therefore, we will present the legal challenges and outline the possibilities for and limitations of research in social media from a data-protection perspective (for the multi-dimensionality of the legal frameworks in researching these transnational phenomena of jihadi audiovisualities, see also Carvalho, Chapter 3). Laws are legally binding whereas ethics offer guiding principles, yet both address quite similar challenges and provide 'sets of rules that try to achieve an adequate balance between research and privacy interests' (Lauber-Rönsberg 2018: 41). And there are, of course, overlaps: as we elaborate on below, to consider whether the research purpose is legitimate is both an important requirement in complying with legal frameworks and a key ethical consideration. Since we are not legal experts ourselves, we conducted our research in collaboration with law scholars who advised us on legal matters.[4] This exchange was key in enabling us to design our research in a field of uncharted waters in which data regulation was continually changing and its implications for researchers had yet to be thoroughly discussed by law scholars.

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[4] Special thanks to our colleagues Sebastian Golla, Henning Hofmann and Matthias Bäcker (see also Golla et al. 2018).

Designing Research Opportunities within the Constraints of European Data Protection Regulation

As European Data Protection Supervisor Giovanni Buttarelli (2019: 3) states, '[e]thical thinking and deliberation come before, during, and after the law. Ethics are the foundations of our legal systems and ensure that they are updated when necessary'. The processing of personal data obtained online and offline for research purposes is an essential prerequisite for scientific progress in many research programmes. The virtual world in general and social media in particular are becoming increasingly important data sources.

In social networks, people often reveal a great deal about themselves. They may provide personal information such as their ethnic origin, political opinions, religious and ideological convictions, sex habits, sexual orientation, health and affiliations, for example, trade union membership. Some of this personal information may be of interest to researchers conducting studies in various fields. In the European Union, the legal protection applicable to such personal information is set out in the first paragraph of article nine of the GDPR. The requirements for conducting research using personal data obtained online have changed in recent years. The GDPR provides a legal framework for the handling of such personal data. This not only imposes constraints upon but also creates opportunities for scientific research – and for anyone designing research using such data.

A key distinction must be made between (1) research involving data from subjects who have consented to the use of their data and (2) research involving data that is collected and analysed without the consent of data subjects. The processing of personal data is generally prohibited under the GDPR unless it is expressly permitted by law (see the leeway and considerations for researchers, which we will elaborate on below) or the data subject has consented to the processing. If consent is given, the data may be processed in the manner specified or stipulated in the consent agreement. However, for our project it was virtually impossible to obtain consent to conduct research on Salafist jihadism in social media. Hence, we focus in this contribution on the legal and ethical options for working without consent.

Scientific research interests may stand in contradiction to the ethical principle that processing a person's data should only be done with the consent

of that person. In some situations, seeking to obtain the consent of data subjects may jeopardise the research. If data subjects have been informed that their data will be processed – even if many suspect that this may happen at any time – the data obtained is likely to be different from if it were processed without the awareness or consent of the data subject. Knowing that their data will be analysed often leads people to modify their behaviour. For example, if individuals knew that they (or their threads, posts and comments on and transmitted via social media) were being observed, they would be likely to act differently, communicate through other channels, stop expressing their opinions (virtually) or adapt them.

In the following, we will elaborate on the legal aspects of working with sensitive data obtained from social media. Ultimately, researchers need to comprehensively weigh the right to personal privacy against the societal relevance and the research interest. Legal requirements to pass the proportionality test are the following considerations: legitimate purpose (is the purpose that requires the measure legitimate?); necessity (are there no other or less intrusive means available to achieve the purpose?); appropriateness (does the measure achieve (or encourage) the purpose?); and adequacy (what are the advantages of the measure in relation to its disadvantages?). We will elaborate on these elements in the following. On the basis of these considerations, researchers need to develop a data protection plan that should be discussed with and approved by a data protection officer at one's own institution before the empirical work starts.

The principle of proportionality

In order to justify processing data for research purposes without the consent of data subjects, it is necessary to show why this serves the research purposes and why the research interest (significantly) outweighs the data subjects' rights to the protection of their data. This weighing up constitutes the principle of proportionality. Researchers must demonstrate an appropriate correlation between the intended purpose and the measure taken to achieve it. The proposed data processing must serve the pursuit of a legitimate (research) purpose and be suitable, necessary and appropriate in order to achieve the research objective. In brief, the collection of data without the consent of the data subjects must fulfil a legitimate purpose. Scientific research in general is

a legitimate purpose (see also Golla et al. 2018: 90). Nevertheless, the processing of personal data for a research project without the consent of the data subjects should only be considered if the research purpose cannot be achieved by other means. The observation of people on Facebook, for example, may be deemed necessary in order to learn more about how social media use influences radicalisation processes and how differently radicalised people behave in social media.

A measure such as using data obtained via social media is deemed suitable if it enables the research project's aims to be achieved, or if it at least contributes to the achievement of those aims (suitability). In addition, it is assumed that the measure pursues a purpose and is not arbitrary. Conducting research with data obtained from social media, for example, can be justified in order to learn more about the behaviour of radicalised people in social networks.

If the collection of personal data is deemed needed, researchers must seek to analyse no more data than is necessary and to minimise the extent to which the privacy of the person concerned is intruded upon. Analysing data collected online may be required in order to follow extensive lines of communication including entries in the form of text, picture or video messages and chats (so-called threads). Tracing an individual user's posts and their behaviour on social media can offer researchers insights that would not be obtainable via conventional field research methods or biographical self-testimonies. A further reason for observing individual actors and their online activity is that social networks store entire communication processes, which makes it possible to follow developments in online debates over extended periods, or, for example, to keep track of an individual's potential radicalisation. This is possible because profile pages display the date, time and the user names of authors of posts, which are presented in chronological order. Furthermore, profile pages indicate the content that occurs repeatedly, enabling researchers to assess its significance. In the real world, past communications can only be traced if they have been recorded. Processes of knowledge production and knowledge acquisition of individuals or within groups can also be traced by analysing Facebook content. For example, the timeline makes it easy to track which friends joined when, which likes and posts were made when and how the type of content posted may have evolved – for example, following

political events. This can be very important when studying radicalisation processes and the influence of political events on these.

The principle of adequateness and appropriateness

The processing of data obtained online from social media without consent must also be *adequate* and *appropriate*. In order to examine the appropriateness of the intervention, the legal justification for carrying out the intervention (often based on the perceived societal benefit of the research) must be weighed against the obligation to protect the individual whose privacy is violated by the intervention. For our work, this meant deciding whether the processing of personal data from individual profiles or groups on social media was an appropriate measure for the purpose of scientific research. From a legal perspective, the right to conduct scientific research must be weighed against the interests of those affected. The strictness of ethical guidelines or data protection regulations varies in accordance with the privacy settings of the individual profiles/groups studied. In the following, different settings for groups will be discussed.

Personal data shared within public groups is data that a research subject has made public – unless it is information about third parties. For researchers to view such posts, it is not necessary for them to establish a 'friendly relationship' with a research participant. Open Facebook groups represent public communication spaces; they are not private, and anyone can view their pages even without being on Facebook. Data obtained from public groups is therefore the least problematic type of data to analyse in terms of legal and ethical obligations. Conducting research in private visible or private hidden groups is far more complex.

The first question to consider in relation to working with data obtained from private groups is whether this serves purposes that cannot be achieved by using data from publicly accessible groups. As mentioned above, individuals in the advanced stages of a radicalisation process often retreat from public forums to communicate in (visible or hidden) private groups. In order to investigate radicalisation processes, therefore, observing closed or private groups can be essential.

Visible private groups will appear with their names in the results list of a public search. However, visible private groups differ from public ones in

two ways: only current members can see the list of members in the group and the content of posts, comments and shares. Hence, a visible private group can be understood as a 'semi-public communication space'. In order to gain access to a visible private group, it is not usually necessary to know other group members personally, to be their 'friends' or to know their real-world identities.

Our research team's experience to date has been that access to visible private groups, even when requested by a blank profile that does not include statements of political opinions or other specific characteristics, is frequently granted (very) quickly. Group members can add any friend to a group, whether the group is public or private. However, a group administrator might have to approve the request before the person can join.

Nevertheless, administrators and members of visible private groups realise that 'informers' could also be among the group's members. We assume that awareness of this potential lack of privacy of communication makes extremist users tend to adopt false identities when using semi-public communication spaces in order to avoid disclosure of their actual identities. Visible private groups are, therefore, not private but political or religious communication spaces, in which personal information is only revealed in a limited and controlled manner. Although entering a 'semi-public communication space' represents a greater intrusion upon privacy from a legal perspective than that incurred when observing public groups, private groups are nonetheless viewed as communication spaces within which participants cannot assume that they are secure within a restricted, confidential circle of known users.

In general, it has become clear that online data, even that shared among Salafist communities, can never be shielded from the observation of security authorities or other unwanted readers. Warnings about the importance of online security are repeatedly issued within Salafist circles. As mentioned above, it is impossible to know who actually stands behind a profile. Hence, users are obliged to assume that their posts and comments may also be read by (unwanted) others.

In addition to public and visible private groups, Facebook also offers hidden private groups. Hidden private groups are the most private of the three available types. Membership is managed and granted by the group's administrator. Most significantly, no features of hidden private groups

are publicly visible. Only current and former members can find the group and can see its name and description. Current members can also see posts and content shared by group members. Thus, members of hidden private groups consider themselves to be in a more secure communication space than those of public or visible private groups.

One important feature of hidden private groups that actually strengthens the ethical justification for doing research within them is that administrators can exclude users at any time. If they do not want to have 'strangers' in their group, they have the option of only inviting profiles belonging to people they know personally from the real world.

A further ethical justification for research is that some groups may require completion of an entrance test. If researchers respond to such questionnaires truthfully, expressing their genuine opinions, and are nonetheless accepted into a group, they can feel more justified in being present and observant in that group than if they had only been granted access on the basis of answers and the expression of opinions that did not reflect their own views but were submitted in the expectation that such responses would gain the approval of the group's members or administrators.

The ethical and legal issues concerning the analysis of data collected from profiles are similar. Anyone who has a Facebook profile can choose privacy settings that determine who can see their contents. If settings are chosen that make content publicly viewable, a researcher's analysis of such data is seen to constitute less of an invasion of the data subject's privacy than if the data was only shared among 'friends' or an even smaller user-defined subset of selected persons.

Data economy

Researchers working with data obtained online must also observe the requirement for data economy. The collection of personal data must always be linked to a specific research project and/or pursue a specific research objective. Only data that is absolutely essential to achieving the research project may be collected. Limiting the amount of data collected (data economy requirement) and the degree of its processing to the minimum necessary for the purpose, defining a (limited) storage period and regulating who has access to the data are the key principles of data economy.

Anonymisation and pseudonymisation

The anonymisation and/or pseudonymisation of data are also crucial ethical requirements when working with sensitive personal data. If the purposes pursued can be achieved with anonymised or pseudonymised data, then data should be anonymised or pseudonymised. Anonymisation refers to the removal of personal or identifying information from research data. Data should be modified as soon as possible so that it can no longer be traced to a particular person. There may be situations when complete anonymisation would impede research, however. For example, when analysing communication processes, it is often necessary to identify different users' communications over extended periods. In such situations, pseudonymisation (e.g. 'User 1', 'User 2') should be carried out. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that absolute anonymity can never be guaranteed with social media data (Kern et al. 2016; Crawford et al. 2013; Crawford and Finn 2014). Therefore, data must be gathered and maintained at all times with great diligence and with appropriate precautionary measures to restrict who has access to it.

These considerations extend well beyond the actual empirical data analysis. Research findings are usually published in order to make them accessible to a wider public – usually in written or oral form. This brings additional considerations regarding anonymisation and pseudonymisation. At the publication stage it may be necessary to take more comprehensive precautions than those taken for data storage and processing. In our own research, we often faced the challenge of how to present our findings in ways that avoided unnecessary stigmatisation and criminalisation of individuals and groups, while still offering meaningful presentations that did not become confusing as a result of measures taken to prevent any possible identification of individuals or groups.

Passive observation

Another aspect of conducting research with data collected in social networks that raises ethical and scientific issues is the role (active versus passive) taken by researchers during the data collection process (the positionality of researchers matters greatly in any case; for a detailed discussion, see de Koning et al.,

Chapter 1). If researchers assume a completely passive/observational role in the data collection process at all times, they will not influence the communication processes observed, which is a crucial requirement for research with data collected in social networks. Other users are then not encouraged by the researchers to make statements or to express themselves on certain topics. Neither the flow nor the dynamics of communication within a profile/group are influenced by the researchers, let alone manipulated. By contrast, if researchers themselves generate content – openly or covertly – they interfere with and may direct communication in particular ways. Researchers who actively participate in online communication risk distorting the data they collect, which would be unethical and dishonest if they were not transparent about their data collection methods. For both ethical and scientific reasons, researchers should strive to remain passive whenever possible when collecting data. If they do – anonymously or via a pseudonym – make comments, they should not incite other users to make statements. If, for example, our objective is to observe the online activity of radical users, our aim should be to observe what kind of content is posted by differently radicalised people, not to influence radicalisation processes by commenting on their posts or encouraging them to make statements.

Usually, for their own safety, researchers do not use their real names when collecting data in social media without having asked for permission to do so from other users. Instead, blank or so-called 'fake' profiles are used. In the latter case, researchers construct an identity that they present to other users of the social network as if it were their own. This is a form of deception that should only be undertaken if absolutely necessary. When assessing the degree to which a research design takes appropriate ethical measures for working with data in social media, the roles adopted by researchers should be scrutinised in terms of how their online activity (if they take an active role) may influence the data collected. Researchers should aim not to affect the course of the events they observe and should be as honest as possible in their self-presentations, while taking precautions to ensure their own security.

Final Remarks

Since (moving) images touch people emotionally and increase their receptibility to further (propagandistic) material, they are of great importance

for understanding and researching radicalisation processes. Many research questions, however, cannot be answered by simply analysing what is visible or audible in such audiovisual data. To identify the significance of audiovisual content it may often be necessary to relate it to streams of communication, other interactions involving the same profiles, or further contextualising data obtained from interviews, media reports, background discussions and the like.

In this contribution we have provided some insights from our own research on (jihadi) Salafists in Germany. We outlined how we designed our research in order to be able to work with sensitive data from social networks without compromising on ethical standards or breaching legal requirements. This is particularly challenging, if there is no explicit consent of the research participants. Privacy concerns are not only prioritised when we are planning how to process and store the data collected during the empirical research process, but also when it comes to the publication of findings. Ethical and legal requirements are deeply intertwined, not least because ethical considerations underlie legal measures to safeguard personal privacy. While researchers have to make their own moral judgements as they balance issues of confidentiality, transparency, trust and their own security against the social value of research, they are also legally required to comply with the relevant data protection regulations.

The guidelines we offered in this contribution were based upon European data regulations and the experiences we gained conducting research in the German context. In the past, we had encountered colleagues who either simply avoided researching such contentious phenomena or embarked upon research projects without taking data protection issues into account. There needs to be a middle ground. This contribution has offered insights, not only into the challenges and limitations researchers face but also into the opportunities they have in working with data gathered online to investigate socially and politically relevant phenomena, and we hope that it will encourage further research in such fields.

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3

ETHICS IN GENDER ONLINE RESEARCH: A FACEBOOK CASE STUDY

Claudia Carvalho

Introduction

Terrorism continues to evolve in its many layers of definitions, actors, typologies and motivations. It does so at a fast pace. However, there are still unanswered questions and a significant literature gap in specific areas such as online gender radicalisation, research ethics, or the utilisation of Facebook as a radical violent environment. This study presents the ethical challenges I came across while identifying the jihadist roles of Spanish-speaking women active on Facebook. I will dwell on pragmatic ethical aspects, offline field experiences and the methodological design driven by my research, hoping that the discussion will contribute to the further development of ethics applied to online research.

Data were systematically collected between 2012 and 2017. They deliver a unique insight into the underdeveloped topic of women as jihadist agents. Hence, and following the dynamic lines of grounded theory methods, a 'steady movement between concept and data' (Lawrence and Tar 2013: 30) was performed, in both fields, offline and online, in order to code, compare, clarify and control the results.

First, we need to discuss the fact that the women who are part of this

study regard jihad as having a violent nature and a compulsory status. It is an emic perspective, reflecting how these women make sense of jihad. However, this perspective does not correspond with the Islamic theological one. In this research, jihad and violence are not considered interchangeable concepts. Nevertheless, it is important emphasise the fact that these women perceive 'jihad' and 'violence' as synonyms.

As we will see in the following sections, they established their own digital method of luring, grooming and recruiting new elements for jihadist networks. This communicative practice is performed on Facebook, a social media echo chamber intensifying the jihadi belief and its religious legitimacy among this network.

A second introductory note has to be made regarding the public nature of the collected data. With public data, there is no need to employ consent forms; still, as with any other data set, the fulfilment of ethical obligations is required, namely anonymity, transparency and privacy, as I will develop further in this chapter.

With the exception of interviews, the data collected for the purpose of this study is open source. More concretely, all data were manually harvested from Facebook and manually treated without the help of any type of data software. I opted to collect the data from public contents and profiles, which led to an unexpected abundance of audiovisual data available in this format. Keeping their profiles and contents open (instead of private) is an intentional action by Jihadi-Salafi (*al-salafīya al-jihādīya*) individuals aimed at reaching a broader audience. This offers a unique opportunity to explore the concept of *jihadi audiovisuality*, as a way of observing, collecting and studying the online data produced and consumed by Jihadi-Salafis.

Focusing sharply on this specific notion, we can say that Jihadi-Salafis are those who pursue Salafism, an Islamic current of thought built upon the core centre theme of returning to the pious behaviour of the Companions of the Prophet, or 'a philosophy that believes in progress through regression' (Maher 2016: 7). Salafism is a generic denomination that conceals a wide subset of ideological categories that differ in terms of strategy, propaganda (quietists or purists), political elections (politicos) and endogenous jihad (jihadis), but that subscribes to jihad as a permissible Islamic principle (Wagemakers 2012a: 9). In the strict vision of Jihadi-Salafis, 'Jihad should

not just be waged against invading or aggressive non-Muslim enemies but should also be used in a revolutionary way against the "apostates'" rulers in their own midst' (Wagemakers 2012a: 9).

In terms of chronological and situational context, my research began in what we may consider the pre-caliphate period (2012), a time when jihadist women were openly engaged with online jihadist contents and were willing to discuss their ideology. In the summer of 2014, the caliphate was established and declared active, which led to intensive online production of ISIS contents and a surge of female jihadist profiles on Facebook.

Nonetheless, with the growth of ISIS activity and the consequent terrorist attacks in Europe, online police surveillance increased, and issues of liability and risk associated with research on jihadism were at the centre of the academic debate. Spanish-speaking jihadist women in the wake of this trend became more alert to the harm their jihadist activities could bring upon themselves, causing them to change their online participation. Indeed, some modified their public profiles into private ones, others dissimulated regarding their online jihadist profile, and others publicly exposed other jihadist profiles on Facebook. The situation instigated a lack of trust among jihadist women, forcing them to migrate to closed online communication platforms, such as WhatsApp or Telegram.

From the November attacks in Paris in 2015 onwards, and owing to these reasons of liability, risk and harm, my research was limited to 'invisible online observation'. The new and adapted ethical model categorised any direct engagement with jihadist individuals as unacceptable, and any type of online participation related to jihadist contents as well. Although it limited my online ethnographic research, this situation ended up opening up new methodological approaches, particularly social network analysis as a methodological alternative.

By the end of my research time, the caliphate had entered its downward spiral with the loss of physical territories and foot militia. Yet, despite this significant defeat, ISIS activities continued online. Undoubtedly, the most expressive part of the caliphate derives from its 'online territories of terror' (Prucha 2011), its virtual form of existence (Winter 2015) and the perpetuation of its violent propaganda 'between the sword and the pen' (Torres Soriano 2012: 782).

Accordingly, jihadism gained an unlimited territory with continuous production and a global audience, both acting as pull factors to recruit more individuals. These individuals have a 'loose affiliation as media mujahideen' (Fisher 2015) and the distinction between 'supporter and membership is blurred' (Winter 2017: 9). Nevertheless, they are considered and rewarded as fully-fledged physical jihadist fighters (Winter 2017: 12–14).

In the fight against this scenario, 2017 was pivotal for online social media companies in terms of their introducing a 'differential disruption' in ISIS online propaganda (Conway et al. 2017: 20). Categorically, several companies co-ordinated their strategies via the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism consortium to monitor, identify and ban violent content on their online platforms. The case in point of this research, Facebook, installed added and detailed measures in June 2017 to outline its counter-violent extremism fight (Conway 2017: 15). These measures have a distinct impact on the selection of online methods and on the selection of ethical protocols associated with online research on jihadism.

The chapter will be structured as follows. Having introduced the above section on the situational context of my research, I will plunge into the gendered dimension of my case study. Subsequently, I will present my methodological strategy to make use of Facebook as a field of online research. After that, I will explore the legal framework bonding the different parts of my study, moving then to understand how jihadist women create their digital profiles and then, bridging their digital ability, to understand how they perform their jihadist task of digital grooming. Finally, I will share my offline investigation in Catalonia, and how positionality was key to accessing Salafist environments.

Online Gender Jihadism

Facebook, in the context of the Spanish-speaking jihadist women, is the central stage for the violent and wrongful appropriation of the notion of jihad. Only if we figure out how processes of radicalisation and recruitment occur online can IRBs and security forces fully oversee the road ahead.

In this regard, I will adopt the definition of Jenkins (2007: 2–3), who distinguishes recruitment from radicalisation: 'Radicalization comprises internalizing a set of beliefs, a militant mindset that embraces violent jihad

as the paramount test of one's conviction. It is the mental prerequisite to recruitment.' Applying this concept of radicalisation to online gender jihadism study delivers the approximate definition: radicalisation involves recognising Salafi-jihadism (set of beliefs), disseminating its principles in a constant manner (militant mindset), engaging with violent behaviours, belonging to jihadist networks, and directly contributing to its terrorist goals.

In a gendered perspective, studies guided by Pearson and Winterbotham (2017: 67) and Calvo (2017: 6–7) indicate that, in comparison with male jihadists, women's preferred space in which to engage with radicalisation is the online space. In this regard, the results in Spain are clear. Among the 148 jihadist individuals arrested between 2013 and 2016 (Calvo 2017: 3), 55.6 per cent of the women were radicalised online, whereas only 30.8 per cent of the men (ibid. 7) were exposed to online violent radicalisation. So, we have clear figures on the actual relationship between online activity and engagement with online violent extremism, but the data is confined to arrested individuals.

Hence the relevance of this case study, as it concentrates on jihadist women freely acting on Facebook, in the role of disseminators, brokers or recruiters to the jihadist movement. Facebook, with its opportunities for direct communication and exchanges, concurred with the normalisation of violent behaviour and the development of trusted, tight-knit relationships between online producers and consumers. Daily, embedded and embodied exposure to jihadist audiovisualities framed by religious justifications were central elements used by jihadist female leaders to arouse their audience. Furthermore, they also arouse researchers' interest in exploring the field of jihadi audiovisuality. Nevertheless, privileged and direct access to the phenomenon of online gender jihadism is limited to male researchers, owing to the prevailing rules of online gender engagement. In my particular case, as a female researcher I was allowed to be part of their audience. Besides gender, my knowledge of the local narratives and the ability to relate to them also facilitated the construct of trust and respect during my first encounters.

Following this line of thought, and deepening my argument on online gender jihadism, the conclusion is that most academic work focuses on the general perspective of positioning jihadist women in terrorist activities. But there are fewer studies bringing researcher positionality to the centre of the

academic discussion, and even fewer studies focusing on what kind of impact the researcher's gender has on the study goals and analysis. By bringing all the areas together, this research paves the way to further innovation in social sciences in general, and in ethics applied to gender studies in particular.

Online Method Strategy

In order to better grasp the online roles of Spanish-speaking female jihadists on Facebook, I have combined techniques emanating from digital ethnography with elements of grounded theory and digital grounded theory, explicitly participant observation, content analysis, field notes, coding and digital archiving. This multi-methodological approach corresponds to what Lorenzo Vidino and other authors conducting similar research suggest: 'there is no grand theory of radicalization that can explain all processes. [. . .] the soundest approach in trying to understand radicalization is a multidisciplinary one' (Vidino et al. 2017: 77).

The lack of a grand theory of radicalisation and the difficulties of a consensual definition of radicalisation have implications for theoretical and practical ethical research design. Hence, to pursue an online study on jihadism in particular or on any other manifestation of online violent extremism in general, it is important to select methods and correspondent ethical codes that can quickly and fairly be adjusted to changes both in events and in rules of engagement.

For that matter, I have pursued the grounded theory principle that 'all is data' (Glaser 2001: 145), which involves immersing oneself in the data, knowing that 'what is going on in the research scene is the data' (Glaser 2001: 145). To this I would add immersing oneself online to 'read and watch on the screen [. . .] all the time, even on the go' (Varis 2016: 63). These mobile and digital practices require being in the field in a disciplined, frequent and 'sensorily embodied' (Postill 2012: 6) manner in order to capture the factor of immediacy inherent in jihadism.

The selected design of my methodological process (Figure 3.1) is now presented in a step-by-step characterisation covering the period from collecting data to the final moment of archiving it. The first step implies that the researcher enters the field (step 1) without pre-defined ideas or assumptions. The second step (step 2) is the most challenging: this is to find Facebook
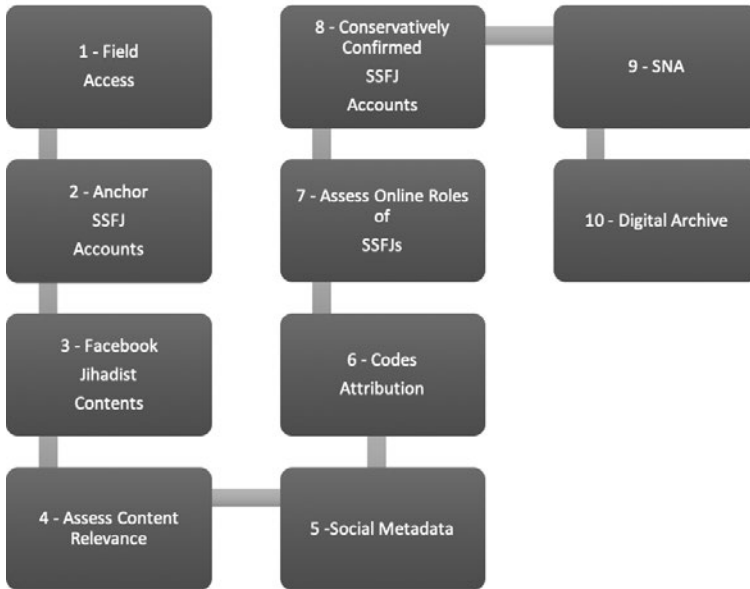
Figure 3.1   Methodological Process; Spanish-speaking Facebook Jihadists (SSFJ) and Social Network Analysis (SNA) (© Claudia Carvalho).

accounts that fit the criteria affiliated with jihadism that will allow the process of snowball sampling.

In the following step (step 3), the researcher's default attitude will be to assume that 'all is data' (Glaser 2001: 145), because, from the visual aspects to the preferred forms of texts, all contents, all profiles and all online accounts comprise meaningful social and behavioural patterns. The result will be a large data set, which needs to be filtered and assessed (step 4) according to its relevance to the research scope. Another strategy for collecting data on Facebook is to trace and collect social metadata, tags, likes, sharing, and lists of friends (step 5). The patterns emerging from the collected data deliver critical codes (step 6) with which to analyse online female jihadist roles (step 7) and to confirm the validity of these women's Facebook accounts as jihadist online profiles in a conservative way (step 8). Once these processes of engaging with violent extremism are determined and the profiles are validated, it is time to structure their jihadist network (step 9). The last step (step 10) is to conserve and keep data that will not be useful in the research context and that may be relevant to future studies.

There are, of course, pitfalls in employing a multimodal approach: for example, the dispersal of techniques, the effort to exercise all methods perfectly and equally, and the necessity to prove the validity of new methodological designs. The unfamiliar environments where this research takes form urge a cautious application of ethical procedures that will have more efficiency if applied case by case. What is more, new methodological designs are the fruit of the researcher's own identity, including the capacity to seize the scientific opportunities, the courage to select different paths, and the creativity to generate new ways of collecting data in the least expected fields. This means that, in the absence of pre-defined ethical procedures, the researcher will have to respect more than morality, values or privacy, and will have to anticipate and consider how the disclosure of sensitive data may harm all of the subjects directly or indirectly involved with the research.

In conclusion, the motivations, the causes and the processes surrounding jihadism as a current violent phenomenon are neither entirely disclosed nor fully understood. For this reason, an empirically-based analysis is an appropriate, sensitive and comprehensive approach. Parallel with it should stand equally appropriate ethical pillars that are able to embrace legal frameworks, Institutional Review Board decisions and terms of service, all coherently in a general ethical protocol. In the following sections, I will address these elements in relation to my own case study.

Terms of Service

I will deal first with my own field of online research, Facebook. Facebook was the digital environment chosen for this investigation because of the incipient state of available studies and the correspondent literature gap focusing exclusively on it. To this day, and because of that, the great majority of academic studies tend to be anchored in Telegram and/or Twitter. In terms of the literature produced about digital jihadism, in, for example, 2017, we can see that most of it is dedicated to Twitter as the online field.

An important aspect of, and a limitation inherent in, research conducted on Facebook is the fluctuation of the number of online active members. Owing to the sensitive and violent character of the contents produced, shared or commented on by Spanish-speaking jihadist women, two scenarios are possible on Facebook. First, their accounts are subjected to temporary

and/or permanent disruptions, and, second, the female users anticipating the first scenario open simultaneous accounts. The second scenario, of multiple accounts managed by one single user, is in general possible to be verified because the user explicitly identifies herself and announces the opening of new accounts in order to keep the same 'friends' and/or 'followers'. These scenarios have been more recurrent since the application of the initiative by the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism referred to above. The variation in numbers of users represented in the research mirrors the evolution of Facebook as a social media platform, the constraints of surveillance and censorship, and a higher level of online control of the production and dissemination of violent contents.

I will now look at the legal frameworks restricting the research, and at the university ethical protocols on sensitive research topics. While conducting online research on Facebook, I always presented myself, my university affiliation and the objectives of my research to the jihadist women active on Facebook. Transparency and positioning were interconnected categories when I introduced myself in the first phase of my research. However, in order to respect the privacy of those being observed, we sacrifice our own privacy as researchers. In a more concrete way, through sharing my university weblink I have given an indication of my location. In the particular case of my study, a certain degree of risk and liability is implied that may affect colleagues who share the same space. I never questioned the ethical procedure nor saw the danger in it until the Paris attacks of 2015. I started to question it when some of the women with whom I had been in contact within the initial phase of my online research became connected with individuals involved in the terrorist attacks then unfolding in Europe in 2015 and 2016.

Jihadism aspires to execute violent actions. However, dealing with its operatives from the other side of the screen creates, at times, the illusion that these violent actions are contained beyond the digital divide. Nevertheless, personal safety and direct contact with these individuals 'retains an element of danger' (Schuurman and Eijkman 2013: 3) that has to be taken into consideration. In 2015, after I had met the Ethics Committee, then recently founded, of Tilburg University, several steps were taken to synchronise my work with the deliberations of the Code of Ethics. On the one hand, my previous work was unofficially reviewed, discussed and generally approved

in the following informal discussions. Although the Ethics Committee had decided not to concede any ethics clearance to research conducted before its constitution, this was still an important validation of my work.

The lack of direct interaction with these individuals constitutes a methodological limitation. To overcome it, more time-consuming triangulation techniques are necessary to produce a conservative confirmation of data. As Geertz (1968: 151) so aptly put it, 'This pressure springs from the inherent moral asymmetry of the fieldwork situation'. My conclusion was that the collection and subsequent analysis of the public posts while handled anonymously were too valuable to be ignored in a scientific approach. Hence social media enabled the research, with the unique opportunity to acquire critical primary data furthering terrorism studies but also, in the present case, furthering religious studies.

Another important impact resulting from doing online research is the mandatory contemplation of all the distinct legal frameworks that interfere with the research. In my case, I needed to contemplate the terms of service of Facebook (online place of research) and two different legal models, the Spanish (subjects of research) and the Dutch (offline place of research). The three legal dimensions equally played a complex role in my own ethical considerations as a researcher. Thus, while conducting digital ethnography in Spanish-speaking online and offline spaces, I needed to be aware of the Spanish law on what constitutes an act of jihadism in the online sphere. The Spanish law, Ley Orgánica 2/2015 (30 March 2015), defines this as 'the act of accessing in a usual manner a website that has contents directed to promote recruitment to a terrorist organization'. On the other side of the screen, I was conducting research from a laptop with an IP address located in The Netherlands. The Dutch law on online criminal activities relates to computer criminality in III, a, Articles 137c–137e of the Dutch Criminal Code, which enunciates the following: 'The Netherlands' comprehensive action program to combat jihadism contains the following measures [. . .] c) Producers and distributors of online jihadist propaganda and the digital platforms that they abuse, are identified.' At times, the complexity of the jihadist phenomenon, allied with this multi-dimensional legal framework, was too much of a limitation, rather than a benefit. As specified previously, owing to jihadist attacks and consequent questions of liability, safety and security, my research avenues

were limited to 'invisible observation'. Invisible observation applied to criminal subjects resembles police work in several respects. Though the process in the academic world and in the police has similar stages, the difference lies in the end results. While scholars aim at scientific output, police authorities define and arrest suspects. Translated to research practices, this may sound simple. However, the statement implies ethical dilemmas on both sides that demand urgent attention, namely if there are common goals to achieve, such as profiling jihadist individuals.

Digital Jihadist Profiles

In order to define ethical guidelines that can be applied to online research on sensitive subjects, we have to possess a deep understanding of the meaning attributed to specific digital spaces by online users. It is important to understand the processes that make Facebook a 'sacred space' and the online mechanisms that lead to online jihadist recruitment. Several aspects frame the general setting that lead to jihadist recruitment, among them 'social environment and widespread grievances' (Newman 2006: 750) as seen in the section above, together with close-knit social networks, proximity to Salafi-jihadist ideology, online acquaintance, and regular contact with violent religious propositions (Alonso and Rey 2006: 179, 195).

In the section 'Football and Foreign Fighters' of this chapter, I will share a detailed account of my offline fieldwork in Catalonia to sustain the above argument about how social inequality and correspondent grievances promote Facebook as the ideal sanctuary in which women may engage with jihadist elements. In this section, I will advance some important categories that help to make sense of the holistic context surrounding Spanish-speaking jihadist women in the region of Catalonia. Actually, a more specific observation of the Muslim population in Catalonia reveals several categories that may enclose the capacity to explain, at least partially, the causality between offline lack of social integration and online sisterhood. Those categories are, for example, lack of equal social, educational and work opportunities, general discrimination (more intense for Muslim women who wear traditional religious clothing), cultural differences, language barriers and, above all, the absence of official spaces in which to pray. In some cases, these mosques' remote locations in industrial areas have created the phenomenon of 'garage

Islam', that is, the reliance on unofficial, inadequate places in which to gather Muslim believers to Friday's services. These 'garages', because of their closed-in structure, guarantee the privacy of individuals whose views on Islam are far from mainstream or moderate. Further, they lack space to incorporate the mandatory gender division by offering a separate space for women. In these cases, women are forced to perform their communal prayers in the seclusion of their homes and need to renounce debating, questioning, or gaining religious knowledge via a public sphere. Owing to its digital affordances, Facebook becomes the preferred space for these women to pursue their religious learning processes and to perform online rituals.

However, the embedded and embodied online experience that jihadist users experience on Facebook took place, in the first instance, in the offline world. For this reason, the situational context involving the everyday life of Muslim women in Catalonia played a distinctive role in my analysis of the process of transforming Facebook into a sacred space, and of how jihadist profiles take form online.

First of all, the women have to overcome cultural and religious obstacles that sanction spaces where inter-gender relationships are possible. Second, they must be able to afford the costs of smart-technology devices and an internet connection. Third, they must obtain enough computer, media and digital literacy to navigate through the different online systems.

Being frequently online results in offline social isolation, a condition that 'is critical for normalizing behaviors' (Torok 2013: 6), namely behaviours that involve acceptance and justification of extreme violence. Stern and Berger (2015) understand this behavioural path as similar to 'creat[ing] a new human being' which perceives violence as a normalised behaviour.

Thus, I was aware of the effort the women had gone through to gain an active online jihadist profile when approaching them. I was also acutely aware of their intentions, their agency, and their digital ability to manage Facebook as a communication platform through which to pursue their terrorist goals.

While conducting digital ethnography, and selecting profiles that could be considered jihadi, I was confronted with the perennial question about the informants' authenticity. '[D]eception and detection' are even found in the natural sciences (Barnes 1994: 57), and they are for sure part of the social sciences (1994: 59). Of course, there is an element of 'fiction' (Geertz 1968:

154) in all performances, offline and online. But 'it is this fiction-fiction, not falsehood, that lies at the heart of successful anthropological field research'. Moreover, I was interested in learning about the meaning of the Spanish-speaking jihadist women's online performance on Facebook, the authenticity of their online production. Authenticity is here understood in its emic sense, that is, how do the women perceive their online jihadist performance and the meaning they attribute to it?

Once the observed individuals matched the criteria for being considered jihadists (actively posting and interacting, in a coherent, cohesive and consistent manner, with violent jihadist contents), their list of 'friends' was (where possible) analysed in depth. This is a time-consuming task, especially when carried out manually. Simultaneously, this task had to be completed within a short time considering that these types of accounts tend to be blocked/deleted also within a short period of time. The selected profiles were sampled to see whether they matched the criteria, and if so they would be added to the network (the snowball sampling method).

The number of informants varied according to the situational context at the time of the research. After the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015, the number of open profiles, or of people willing to share their jihadist views, was much smaller than in the previous period. From then on, the only possible way to conduct my research was by monitoring public profile accounts on Facebook without disclosing my identity. At this point the dilemma was obvious, and left me stranded between the option of transparency as a researcher and the option of being 'at risk' and 'a risk'.

In addition, there is the question of 'pervasive data', that is, data that is being collected without the knowledge of the participants. I would like to give this a twist and draw on Buchanan (2012) to address the point that, at times, researchers of sensitive data are in the position of being manipulated. In other words, pervasive data concerns information about behaviour occurring in a context where an individual can reasonably expect observation and recordings. This would mean that the individual can assume that information provided for specific purposes will be made public. The Spanish-speaking jihadist women keeping their profiles public constantly produced violent content, aspiring to see these spread as widely as possible, and had no moral scruples in seeing their jihadist profiles as part of academic research.

How can this scientific dissemination trap be solved? The overlap between online, research and dissemination venues blurs the lines of conduct further. Facing this perverse realisation, together with the methodological limitations of being confined to invisible observation, I thought it reasonable to try to get a glimpse of the Spanish-speaking jihadist network. On the one hand, this involved a smaller focus on contents and a wider focus on social meta-data. On the other, it meant including male Facebook users who were part of this network and who also kept a public profile. Social network analysis does not take shape without carrying its own dimension of ethical reflection, such as regarding the possible loss of data that was not collected on time, and may cause incomplete or incorrect data readings and arguments about privacy, and violate anonymity when revealing roles, hierarchies, and the positioning of elements within the network.

Out of the sum of profiles, a conservative universe of 360 active profiles was considered as the most suitable sample group according with the research scope. By *conservative*, I mean profiles sharing, producing and consuming jihadist ideology in a consistent, consequent and frequent manner, whose social meta-data clearly indicated their jihadist affiliation.

Alongside the ideological motivation, the data illustrates how kinship and social ties are further vital sources promoting jihadist networks. Indeed, family members and close friends create their own social structures upon belonging and emotional bonding. In the case of females, they forge their own online sisterhood. In the next section, it will be observed how grooming fosters recruiting into these female jihadist networks.

Digital Grooming

Grooming is a common strategy employed by jihadist recruiters, not only upon possible jihadist recruits, but also directed at researchers and analysts. Jihadist women gain their audience through the construction of online legitimacy, religious authority and their knowledge of Salafi-jihadist principles. Their initial network nodes are individuals from their close range of connections, family and friends. With the help of trust mechanisms, they move forward to more distant ties, such as researchers. In general, the grooming strategy is initiated with the call to Islam (*da'wa*) considered a duty for all Muslims and taken to a higher level of mandatory actions by Salafi-jihadist scholars (Carvalho 2014).

I have witnessed this grooming strategy first-hand in both my online and offline contacts. I have always defined myself as a born and raised Catholic who was conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a PhD degree, not seeking a conversion. On frequent occasions, both online and offline, I would be asked to consider conversion to Islam. It was interesting that the online invitations to conversion used the ritualisation of the *shahada*, the Muslim profession of faith: write it down or video-tape it, post it on my Facebook wall and have people commenting or liking it was the necessary process to make the ritual valid. While I was trying to know more about the jihadist recruiters' online activities, they were also trying to persuade me to convert: that is, to 'move beyond "the da'wa trap"' (Gauvain 2018: 207) was an 'ethically ambiguous situation' for me (Geertz 1968: 151).

To clarify my point, I will share the concrete details of how a female jihadist recruiter made me the target of her digital grooming strategy. First, she guided the conversation to enquiring about my right intentions (*nīya*) towards Islam. My answer was 'to gain more knowledge', 'to further my education', which she considered a predisposition to accept the true religion, Islam. Therefore, she recommended important basic readings, of the Quran and hadiths. The second step was to question me about what I had learned so far from those readings, redirect the learning process to the 'right, pure path of the Salafs', and ask me about my personal life. The third step was to answer my questions on jihad (open questions about the theological Islamic definition of the term) by sending me PDF documents along with relevant literature (*Join the Caravan* being the most frequent, back in 2012). This is a clear indication of the fact that jihad and jihadism were intertwined in this woman's mind-frame, and that they were equally part of the Islamic religious literature. The fourth step was to integrate closed discussion groups via Facebook messaging, Skype or WhatsApp. The condition for entering these debate groups was to be a Muslim or to become one directly (everyone needed to write the *shahada*, in their first intervention). I declined to do so, which meant the end of her attempt to lure me into her network, but it also meant the end of my attempt to develop my study. This mind-frame is what Gauvain (2018: 203) defined as 'oppositionality', that is, in the case of these recruiters, to refuse and stay far from individuals who do not accept their Salafi positioning.

According to Wellman and Gulia (1997: 10), online communities have 'strong ties' that promote 'frequent, companionable and voluntary' contact among participants in the same manner as offline communities. Against this background, I decided to complement my online study with offline ethnographic incursions.

Football and Foreign Fighters

Therefore, in May 2014, I did fieldwork in Catalonia, visiting mosques and Islamic centres and interviewing Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. The aim of the research was to go beyond the Salafist presence in Catalonia and to reach a wider perspective on what it means to be a Muslim in Spanish society, hence obtaining a more defined picture of the real 'root causes' of extremism (Bjørgo 2005; Forest 2005; Newman 2006; Pedahzur 2006; Richardson 2006; Pick et al. 2009; Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Asal et al. 2011; Schmid 2013; Aziz 2016).

The online female community did not match the one I was observing offline, at least not in terms of their shared views on violence and the meaning of jihad. Keeney (2011: 544) describes a similar experience during his own ethnographic fieldwork in Ceuta. On the same line of argument as Keeney (2011), my research took a month, which Keeney (2011) describes as unique for terrorism studies, but as sufficient if the study's scope is narrow and the core site of research is online. I can add that the contacts developed during this period were continued afterwards and followed up online, delivering more data and granting more research results. Indeed, the online communications follow-up resulted in another critical contact, a young Moroccan man living in Catalonia and working at a local Islamic institution, who agreed to have lengthy conversations on Skype. The detailed information he gave about the recruitment of young women in Morocco helped me to understand much of the online narrative and the formation mechanisms beyond the jihadist networks connecting Morocco and Spain.

Once I was in the region, gaining access to the local imams as a non-Muslim woman was possible by using convenience sampling methods. My football network was the key to opening the doors of the mosques in Catalonia: 'Player X from Morocco that plays in Barcelona now has been an acquaintance since he was 10 years old.' This sentence, repeated at the

entrance of almost all mosques, was the 'log-in' password. Football is a shared cultural phenomenon familiar to Moroccan and Spanish jihadists because the ritualistic sacrifice (towards a common good and goal), ritualistic violence (pain, injuries, blood), discipline (control), delimitations (time and space) and group bonding are all part of both football and the jihadist environment.

Although Salafism in its strict interpretation condemns any activities related to football, the truth is that football is a recurrent topic of online content among self-professed Salafists, reaching from playing to supporting teams or watching games. Independently of the religious restrictions, football and foreign fighters are an overlapping cultural phenomenon that has a constant impact on the foreign fighters. This impact is visible in their Facebook accounts, from the images of professional football players or clubs used as profile pictures (the preferences are for Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United), reaching to the organisation of football matches among themselves in the caliphate and to discussion of the latest results and performances of their local home teams, or to larger-than-life debate as to who is the best player in the world.

Remarkably, access to Salafi preachers, small mosques or the entrance to the mosque of Reus (visited by M. Atta, leader of the 9/11 attacks) was possible, owing to the emotional attachment Moroccan communities have to football. However, there were occasions when doubts arose concerning the ethical correctness of this approach. Being in direct contact with the football world, I knew that this emotional attachment would facilitate my access to individuals and Salafi environments, which otherwise would be out of reach for a female, non-Muslim researcher. Nonetheless, I was equally aware of the preachers' own desire to gain inside access to the football environment, and even more acutely aware of the naivety of 'downplaying the impact of al-wala' wa'l-bara' and other forms of Salafi oppositionality' (Gauvain 2018: 208). However, there were occasions of physical threat, and occasions when the imam would sit in a different room and answer my questions there because of strict Salafi gender engagement rules, and, most particularly, refusal to talk to me because I was wearing a black abbāya ('If you are not a Muslim, it is a falsity to wear it').

Actually, the individuals who reside in Spain and wish to encounter offline sources of jihadist narrative are obliged to follow other routes to find

a space of radicalisation or to attend the 'garage mosque sermons' that are not surveilled. The police-controlled Spanish mosques, imams and *khutbas* (sermons) issue politically correct and co-ordinated statements that openly condemn jihadist discourses and activities. Although it is a fact that there are a higher number of Salafi-jihadist proponents in the Catalan region (Moreras and Tarres 2014: 161) than in the rest of the Spanish territory, offline jihadist mobilisation still follows the route of Morocco, owing to the rigorous monitoring of official mosques, sermons and imams in Spain already referred to. Neumann and Rogers (2007) already came to the same conclusion in their report on European mosques and hubs of radicalisation. However, this security strategy promotes the appearance of the previously mentioned phenomenon of 'garage mosques' or 'garage Islam'.

In conclusion, two different layers of positionality can be observed. On the one hand, online, I was a non-Muslim, female researcher contacting female participants affiliated to jihadism, whereas offline, I was a non-Muslim female researcher interviewing male Salafist imams. On the other hand, as a non-Muslim female researcher in the online realm, I felt the impact and the corresponding limitations of my positionality. Surprisingly, offline, the same positionality and my refusal to consider conversion produced few limitations and I kept the connection with key figures in the Spanish Islamic community.

Concluding Remarks

Spanish-speaking jihadist women were confident about the success of their roles in propagating jihadist audiovisual material among their friends and followers on Facebook, and, hence, recruiting other women to the jihadist cause. For this purpose, Facebook was the ideal digital space, allowing plenty of media contents, correspondent threads and social meta-data to give more relevance to their jihadist aim. As a researcher, I found it useful to observe these Facebook-generated contents, in order to infer vital aspects of social online dynamics and social online exchanges between individuals involved in jihadist networks. This gave me a unique opportunity to register their own specific digital method of alluring, grooming and recruiting new elements to jihadist networks.

Although the reality is now better documented, we are still far from having an efficient and adequate ethics protocol to conduct online research

on sensitive matters such as online jihadism. In other words, this study has exposed the interest of furthering the possibilities offered by digital contexts, namely Facebook, to gather primary data on individuals directly engaged with jihadism. Similarly, the study has broadened the perception of the work ahead to elaborate comprehensive ethic procedures to assist researchers devoted to online violent extremism.

Although the study reflects a particular sample with defined characteristics, it has the potential to explain similar processes of violent extremism and to replicate its ethical considerations in similar research areas. The jihadist social networks share similar relationship patterns and construction dynamics, categories that validate the importance of comparing and replicating coherent ethical plans. Furthermore, these common categories represent a possible advance towards ethical research models, that is, to determine how they can be evolved in a more pro-active way. Moreover, the input brought up by empirical data such as that presented in this study contributes to a comprehensive, deepened analysis of the ethical implications of studying jihadist social networks.

During the entire time of my research I have never lost sight of the fact that online jihadism plays a significant role in the lives of people everywhere in the world, and brings harm in between the blurred lines of the online or offline world. This chapter has explored specific ethical dilemmas associated with online research on highly sensitive and pressuring subjects, as well as having addressed my own position as a researcher.

My ethical decisions reflect the several overlapping contexts that have surrounded my research. I have exposed them here to discussion so that they can serve as stepping-stones with which build up new theoretical avenues or to reinforce the validity of existing theories. Moreover, these ethical decisions are important for the purposes of shedding light on similar case studies observing common patterns and mechanisms that may be useful in generating overarching ethical theories and practices. Finally, the chapter has shown, the uniformity of audio, textual and visual jihadi contents on Facebook, and the ability to frame these into themes that have a distinct value for Spanish-speaking jihadist women, is a key recruitment tool.

Hence, more analysis is necessary to explain the online radicalisation processes while they are still in motion. More work is necessary to harvest

data that position the individual's stages of engagement with violent online contents. This also means that we have to develop ethical propositions that can be helpful specifically to deepening data on online gender jihadism.

It would be interesting, therefore, to test and measure whether the multiple (albeit indirect) interrelations that evolve around people's entanglements with jihadi media resist and subsist after the online links are broken. That is to say, it would be interesting to explore whether the impact of mediated jihadi thinking and action persists in its interlocutors after digital platforms disrupt their activity. In order to answer this question, we need to further conceptualise and develop jihadi audiovisuality as a field of research.

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PART B

VISUALISING JIHADI IDEOLOGY AND ACTION

4

APPROPRIATION IN ISLAMIC STATE PROPAGANDA: A THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF TYPES AND DIMENSIONS

Bernd Zywietz and Yorck Beese

Introduction

The 'Islamic State's' (or IS's[1]) publicity and media work have attracted worldwide attention and shaped public debates about online propaganda. One specific aspect of this outreach is the different practices of appropriation. IS supposedly used 'Hollywood' techniques to overwhelm viewers, adapted various social media services (Awan 2017; Farwell 2014) and appropriated 'the crusades' (Roche 2017) or even al-Qaeda's ideology (Khatib 2015: 14).

This brief overview already illustrates how the term *appropriation* (Latin *appropriare*, 'to make one's own') bears an enormously ambiguous range of meanings while offering a valuable perspective in two ways. First, discerning acts and elements of IS propaganda as appropriative can be understood as

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[1] Adopting the Islamic State's self-designation 'the Islamic State' is contested for good reason. Yet alternatives such as 'Daesh' come with their own terminological challenges. Bearing in mind the adoption of other militant or even terrorist groups' self-designations ('Red Army Faction', 'Irish Republican Army') in academic literature, we will use 'Islamic State' or the abbreviation 'IS'. We will not use the shorthand 'ISIS', since it stands for the Islamic State's predecessor, 'The Islamic State of Iraq and Shām', which ceased existence in 2014.

making strategic ascriptions to delegitimise the 'Caliphate's' representational claims, but also as making projections in reaction to its cultural 'strangeness'. Second, the perspective on appropriation introduces an insightful analytical approach to IS's media work and texts as propaganda. By *propaganda* we mean a kind of persuasive ideological communication (Jowett and O'Donnell 2012). For us, the term is value-free; it is not *per se* tied to sinister motives or unethical methods of influence. It sets the focus, however, on rhetorical functionality. Distinguishing and mapping different dimensions of appropriation in the area of strategic communication (as we do in section 4) might not only provide a systematic framework for analysing IS's and other actors' propaganda, for co-ordinating current and future research, and for correlating respective results. It also could advance our understanding of cultural symbolic practices in the field of media socio-technology and media format phenomena.

Before we proceed to a general critical view of Islamic State as an ideologically and epistemologically threatening 'appropriator' (section 2) and the questionable labelling of IS propaganda as 'Hollywood'-like (section 3), we introduce three broad types of *appropriation* in order to clarify the term, which allows us to discern different dimensions of IS appropriative strategies (section 4). These categories and their naming are preliminary and are meant as a suggestion, which holds for our outline of IS's adaptive dimensions as well. They result from our ongoing investigation of IS propaganda as part of the research project *Jihadism on the Internet*.[2]

Types of *Appropriation*

The term *appropriation* is applied to different objects of study and various degrees of generalisation between the individual (micro) and the broader cultural or social (macro) level. It is used across heterogeneous disciplines like paedagogy, social work, media studies, science and technology studies, human–computer interaction, cultural studies and social anthropology. Appropriation requires an individual or collective actor and a material or

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[2] The research group *Jihadism on the Internet: Images and Videos, Their Appropriation and Dissemination* is hosted by the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz. The group is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

mental object turned into something significantly new or different, essentially or in relation to its original meaning or domain of use. This transfer or transformation may concern legal ownership (such as the appropriation of goods or land; Fairhead et al. 2012),[3] but also, more abstractly, basic cognitive processes of human orientation and learning such as 'active analysis of the environment, especially objective and symbolic culture' (Hüllemann et al. 2019).

Against this backdrop, we distinguish three types of appropriation central to the humanities and to cultural studies. *Interpretive appropriation* includes the aforementioned processes of hermeneutic understanding (Ricœur 1983: 179), mental interpretation, sense-making or world exploration, generating relations 'between what new knowledge is imparted on someone and what is already sedimented in the experience of the appropriating subject' (Michel 2007: 62). One possible sub-type, especially in the context of cultural studies, is the assignment and acting out of cultural-symbolic interpretations (Schweiger 2007: 319), for example counter-hegemonic or oppositional readings of films or TV shows. Although this kind of appropriation primarily relates to the 'internal' or implicit human activity, it may manifest itself in acts such as discussing those interpretations with peers (Ayaß 2012).

The second type, *practical technological appropriation*, relates to means of action and their techno-cultural and techno-social exploitation, but also their practical exploration (meaning the sovereign capacity of utilising). In this area, some resistant practices can be identified as well, for example if users invent or develop manners of use contrary to the intentions and guidelines of device manufacturers and application developers. Theories and studies on the diffusion and adoption of media and other technologies are closely connected to this type of appropriation (Tchounikine 2017). Here, a strong interpretive-cognitive component comes into play, too, especially regarding usability or user experience.

As a third type of appropriation we identify *expressive appropriation*, better-known and highly contested as *cultural (mis-)appropriation*, although this term is sometimes defined more broadly (and expanded into the field of

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[3] This material, legalistic and physical form of appropriation will not be further addressed in this chapter.

our first two domains) by authors such as Huck and Bauernschmidt (2012). While *interpretative* appropriation primarily relates to the generation of meaning and *practical* appropriation to skills and tools, *expressive* appropriation – as defined by us – relates to the acquisition and, most of all, the application of pre-existing cultural and artistic forms, formats, patterns or motifs. This type and practical appropriation intersect because the use of 'artistic' or expressive tools (e.g. the body as medium of dance) cannot be clearly separated from its individual form or style. Nonetheless, this distinction seems useful even despite its semantic entanglement since the technical-instrumental aspect differs from creative practice through the adaption of, for example, literary subject matters and motifs (Sanders 2006) or the choice of formal devices.

Expressive as cultural appropriation is the most controversial kind of appropriation, as it is morally charged to a high degree in the postcolonial discourse, or in terms of cultural, social and political identity (Brunk and Young 2009). Debates revolve around the public display and, by extension, the 'culture-industrial' commodification of certain hairstyles, (body) decoration, textile patterns, clothing and other cultural-artistic styles and motifs originating in marginalised groups or peoples. By contrast, similar practices are deemed less offensive and objectionable, even positive in the sense of cultural resistance, participation and creativity if enacted by subjects located in a rather inferior position within patriarchal, postcolonial, culture-capitalist or otherwise centralised power structures.

Since we are primarily concerned with the pragmatic differentiation of adapted or utilised objects or practices, we prefer the less evaluative phrase *expressive appropriation*, meaning, in a value-free manner, the adoption and application of media-textual structures and conventions, formal aesthetic elements of design or motifs, and specific sign repertories in media representations.

Still, many problems remain. Besides the question of cultural essentialism and fixed cultural identity and authority inherent in the term (mis-) appropriation as a derogatory label, there is the problem of terminological distinction and demarcation. This applies especially to the ordinary 'use', 'borrowing', 'application' and 'implementation'. After all, instances of appropriation are 'not just symbolic achievements or cognitive activities; they are concrete actions' (Hahn 2012: 17). To what extent, then, is the term

appropriation of any use if virtually every action, whether mental or physical, entails an element of adopting something as one's own?

Regarding such pitfalls, appropriation in general should not be considered a definite category of practice, but taken as an analytical perspective on cultural and social-procedural action (*appropriating*) and its outcomes. Besides the determination of source and target objects (appropriation *of/into*), it seems necessary to assess a minimum of transformation effort (appropriation *via*). Criteria for measuring this effort could be derived or deduced on a case-by-case basis from the relation between the object status before and after appropriation. Points of reference are conventional and generic modes and situations of use with respect to socio-semiotic meaning (Derboven et al. 2016; van Leeuwen 2005), inferable from 'typical' or 'traditional' pragmatic contexts.[4]

Subsequently, the type and extent of formal and material change or the modes of use are less important than the meaning connected to appropriation for the respective publics deemed relevant (appropriation *for*). The advantage of such a recursive understanding is that appropriation is nothing fixed, but construed in relation to a (e.g. cultural, disciplinary or ideological) *locus*. This place or position from which the term *appropriation* is deployed might be an individual standpoint or a metacommunicative position (observing the attribution of appropriation) and must be factored into the analysis.

Since our systematic overview of the manifold media-propagandistic appropriations by IS already has to be cursory owing to the breadth of the subject, we can offer only a limited reflection of this kind. Nevertheless, before turning towards distinct categories and fields of propagandistic adoption, adaptation and imitation, we begin with a general view of the classification of IS as an 'illegitimate' appropriator, with the attribution of illegitimacy being the principal constituent in 'detecting' or construing appropriation.

Discursive Delegitimisation and Projection: IS as Appropriating *Other*

According to the terminological scope outlined above, a plethora of IS appropriations can be identified beyond the group's looting of private and public

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[4] On this basis, appropriation can be described as the interplay of various interdependent processes or practices (see section 'Dimensions and Modes of IS Propaganda Appropriation').

property, public goods and resources (especially oil) as well as cultural arte-
facts in occupied territories. However, the discursive classification or percep-
tion might be dominated by the rendering of IS as illegitimate appropriator
on a symbolic and communicative level and, as a consequence, as 'epistemi-
cally defective' (Ross 2002): as dishonest, illogical, misleading or erroneous.

IS claims validity, and it is in this way that its narratives (Heck 2017)
are contested and countered just like the claims and narratives of other jihad-
ist actors. The Islamic State, according to this view, 'wrongfully' or 'falsely'
adopts religious concepts and signs or interprets them in 'extremist' ways. As
many civil actors, scholars, clerics and politicians like US president Barack
Obama have stated, it does not represent Islam at all, or at least represents
it in a distorted fashion (Dyer 2019; Wassenstein 2017). Further examples
of dysfunctional appropriation concern symbols like the black banner, the
concepts of caliphate (Al-Rasheed et al. 2013), *jihad* (Khdir 2018) and *takfir*
('excommunication'; Badar et al. 2017), the history of the medieval crusades
(Roche 2017) and, generally, the selective, decontextualising, instrumentalis-
ing and anti-clerical interpretation of the Quran to justify its actions and
establish its world-view as authoritative (Jacoby 2019; Frissen et al. 2018).

This debate about the attributed status of IS's members as non- or devi-
ant Muslims, in which the ideological power to define what 'true' Islam is (or
should be), is negotiated, is as relevant as 'orientalist' (Said 1979) prejudices
and stereotyping (Bassil 2019) and still awaits its critical investigation. It is,
however, already apparent in the argument structures and the values mobi-
lised in order to delegitimise IS that conflate questions of ethics and religious
interpretation with a strategic counter-communicative calculus and security
policy agendas (that undermine the political and religious appeal for poten-
tial IS followers).

Here the differentiation between interpretive and expressive appropria-
tion proves to be useful, even if only heuristically. In the context of dis-
cursive or ideological warfare, it is important to distinguish between the
(ascribed) strategic or rhetorical deployment of symbols (the black banner,
the prophet's seal, ritualised corporal punishments) and the public perfor-
mance of symbolic (cultural, religious) actions out of conviction and in good
faith. The latter appears less malicious, more internal and 'sincere', as it may
imply a naive misunderstanding of the Quran and Sunnah, for example a too

literal reading of them.[5] Therefore, it is not surprising if the argumentative and linguistic framework of inadmissible cultural appropriation is used to denounce such practises as deliberate and instrumental enactments that mask reprehensible motives (such as greed for power, sadism, enrichment or sexual lust), but also political and social grievances.[6]

Since the focus of this chapter is on IS's practical and strategic media work, we will not pursue this issue further. However, the outlined framing will remain crucial in attending to IS's appropriative activities, whether the 'Western' image of Islamic State is an expression of racist-ideological orientalism or whether Islamic State presents itself as 'anti-modernist', purposely fuelling stereotypical images (like sword-wielding executioners in its capital punishment videos) or cherishes and repurposes nostalgic (counter-)imaginations.[7] The perception of IS as fascinating as much as – regarding its 'savagery' – horrifying *other* not only influences, or even distorts, the view on actual or supposed appropriations by or in the 'Caliphate'. It also makes IS and its media work lucrative subjects for academics and journalists alike. This is especially true since, owing to the lack of valid information or the abundance of bizarre details, IS offers an easy target on which to project rather abstract cultural criticism or a source for sensationalism.[8] Observations about how, for example, 'Hollywood-like' IS videos in this sense rather illustrate the ambiguity of and fascination with Islamic State probably reveal more about the speakers, their position and the cultural and ideological environment than they do about the discussed object. We address this example of a more general appropriation framing in the next section.

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[5] Of course, in circles hostile towards Islam and religion in general it might be regarded as another 'true' radical version of belief.

[6] For examples of and reflections on this topic see Guidere (2015), Cottee (2017) and Gunning and Jackson (2011).

[7] Rogers (2018: 120) considers the 'so-called "Islamic State"' as 'the War on Terror's corporate competitor for hegemonic control of conflict-capitalism's global market. The group positions itself for American consumers as ultimate threat to our very civilizational soul, rendered legible in a localised brand identity that responds to audience expectation: Evil™.'

[8] See Kraidy's application of the term *spectacle* to IS's 'projectilic' or 'operative images' (Kraidy 2017) or Botz-Bornstein's (2017) comparison of IS aesthetics with Italian Futurism. With respect to journalism, we would like to call to mind the media buzz IS generated, especially in 2014 and 2015. Sensations were, for example, the five-part VICE news series *The Islamic State* (August 2018) by journalist Medyan Dairieh.

The Islamic State's 'Hollywood'

Some metaphorical uses of the Los Angeles district's famous name refer to actual film production sites (e.g. Mumbai's 'Bollywood', Nigeria's 'Nollywood'). In other contexts, 'Hollywood' stands for escapist, glamorous cinematic entertainment and technological finesse. Images of the 9/11 attacks, on the other hand, have been associated with 'pictures like in Hollywood' to express feelings of unreality and being overwhelmed (Rickli 2009).[9]

Journalists, especially, have described IS videos using the word 'Hollywood' (Blender 2017: 59). However, only a few ways of applying this label seem sensible. We will address just two.

The first refers to the insertion of snippets from Hollywood movies into IS videos, for example from Ridley Scott's period film *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) (Fernandez 2015) or Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings – The Return of the King* (2003) (Ma 2018). In both cases, scenes of war and mass combat were chosen for illustrative and affective purposes, to display historic confrontations between Muslim armies and their adversaries. By alluding to historic battles and paralleling them with current military confrontations, the jihadists express their proclaimed legitimacy, lend their own operations the aura of mythological prophecy and try to find support for their constituency. It is not so much the specific films and their specific meaning that are crucial but the audiovisual motifs, for instance scenes of 'medieval' and 'archaic' wars that are fought in head-to-head combat with sword, bow and arrow. The fact that *Lord of the Rings* depicts a fantasy world with non-human creatures is readily ignored. *Kingdom of Heaven*, on the other hand, fictionally re-enacts historical clashes between crusaders and Muslims. Read as a commentary on the international war on terror at the time of its release (Sarris 2005), it seems to be an interesting, yet presumably uncalculated choice as an image source. Contrary to most Hollywood movies shaping negative stereotypical images of the Arab world (Shaheen 2015; Semmerling 2006), *Kingdom of Heaven*'s Muslim characters, and especially Sultan Saladin, are depicted as far more civilised and tolerant than the European Christians. Still, it is remarkable that

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[9] An example concerning the Hollywood metaphor in relation to the Islamic State's images of destruction is offered by Munk (2018).

Islamic State repurposes Hollywood's historic and fictional visions for use in a similar manner, albeit an illustrative fashion, stressing the visual appeal of the imagery while reversing the interpretation of identities.[10]

The second way in which IS propaganda resembles Hollywood media is by quality and style. This notion of appropriation is less distinct and manifest, since it either concerns forms of imitation or a certain formal production and design effort or the affective experience associated with this (which may be understood by analogy with the aforementioned 'hollywoodesque feeling of 9/11 imagery').

For example, Dauber and Robinson (2015) note: '[IS] videos mimic what could be called a "Hollywood visual style". And this is being done so systematically and carefully that, while its [*sic*] entirely possible that it's accidental, we find that very unlikely.' They point out that the description as 'being like "Hollywood action films"' (ibid.) is not to be taken literally because, among other reasons, IS videos are not really big-budget productions. Instead, 'Hollywood' stands for an internationally pace-setting commercial standard and strong efforts concerning, among other things, the clarity and colour intensity of images, professional lighting or visual effects. This is a necessary relativisation because IS makes use not only of Hollywood films but also of TV footage or computer games, while Hollywood, in turn, is influenced in style and content by, for example, Asian cinema or documentary films. Furthermore, the 'Hollywood' label only applies when the history of New Hollywood Cinema and other historic developments or products of the 'dream factory' are ignored.

The same holds true for IS videos, of which only a small segment display the infamously high level of quality. Classifying Islamic State as a clever and effective yet unauthentic appropriator stealing from Hollywood only matches hyperbolic and simplifying public discourses on the subject. In fact, IS media offices 'only' seem to follow established aesthetic standards as these are not only part of IS propagandists' media socialisation but are also pursued by producers worldwide – from Egyptian TV stations to Brazilian telenovelas.

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[10] The fact that IS uses excerpts from fictional films in quasi-documentary contexts for purposes of illustration is, however, less remarkable. This 'makeshift' procedure is common in documentary television and film.

The fact that the notion of such a 'Hollywood' quality is implicitly or explicitly attributed to IS – or even secretly admired as subversive – can be explained in three different ways. First, it results from IS's extraordinary status as an extremist and terrorist organisation. Second, it stems from the high degree of success in artisanal imitation or adaption (especially if compared to other jihadist groups and the attention it generates internationally). Third, and finally, it is based on the popularised self-representation of Islamic State as uncannily anachronistic. The modern audiovisual professionality seems to contradict IS's orientation towards the way of life of the founding generations of Islam.

Dimensions and Modes of IS Propaganda Appropriation

We now proceed to take a closer look at several domains of IS media appropriation in terms of *practical technological* and *expressive appropriation*. Beyond this, appropriation entails, as mentioned above, one or more *'re'-processes*, as we like to call these actions or steps of transformation and conversion:

>   *recasting* or *redesigning*; *remediating* (as formal, technical or material change)
>   *resituating*, *re-enacting* or *recontextualizing* (using in or transferring into a different context, e.g. historical or generic)
>   *refunctioning* or *repurposing* (introducing a new way of or a novel purpose for use; transfer into a different functional state)

This list is of course not exhaustive and we cannot go into more detail here. It is, however, important to note that these and other basic appropriative 'operations' underlie or model, on an abstract level, *resemiotization* (Iedema 2003) and *resemanticization* (Joyeux-Prunel 2017), which again include or provoke higher-order processes like *reinterpretation* and *re-evaluation*. Such a pragmatic-functional reconstruction allows us to be more precise and systematic in investigating appropriation as meaning-making, for example by differentiating whether a formal element is deployed in a new way or whether a functional element is given a novel *gestalt*.

We identify five interdependent core *dimensions of practice*: *media materials* (media texts), *formal aesthetic and structural elements* as well as *styles*

(design conventions, patterns, genres), *technological tools* (hardware and software) and *technical formats*. These are explored in the next four sections. A further dimension not addressed in this chapter concerns *social and technical infrastructures*.[11] By this we do not only mean the internet, the dark net or the social web, but also local structures within IS territory: media kiosks, TV satellite dishes or social networks of personal relations and word-of-mouth communication among relatives, neighbours and acquaintances.

Across these categories, two further, likewise interlinked *functional* or *objective dimensions* can be discriminated: (1) the ideational-ideological conveyance of world-view and overarching historical and political goals and objects; and (2) the self-marketing as an individual brand that competes with other (jihadist) actors (Simons 2018; Rogers 2018). We will not discuss these functional dimensions separately or explicitly. Nevertheless, they are relevant in exploring and interpreting adaptive actions, processes and their results.

'Found Footage': The Utilisation of Existing Media Texts

Like political activists, IS makes use of pre-existing media materials of any modality to repurpose them and incorporate them into videos, photographic reports and magazines. Most of these media materials are taken from press kits, stock photo archives or other journalistic recordings available on the internet. They are used like any other news item, for example in the *Dabiq* magazine, in order to illustrate reports, but also to supply evidence, as well as to cite, reply or contribute to certain discourses. An example of this is an excerpt from a TV speech by the then US president Barack Obama or operative footage of air-strikes in the execution video of James Foley.[12] The execution of the American journalist and the accompanying speech by the hooded executioner 'Jihadi John' were organised dramaturgically as a reaction (or dialogical answer) to the images which often serve as proof of the enemy's aggression or, in some cases, of its double standards.

Besides such a reflexive thematisation of visual materials and statements (the title of the *Dabiq* column, 'In the Words of the Enemy', sums it up well), there is no explicit re-interpretation. However, while the basic journalistic or

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[11] For notes on this subject see Zywietz (2020).

[12] *A Message to America* (al-Furqan Media Foundation, 19 August 2014).

otherwise original functions do not change, a re-evaluation takes place via the new contextual embedding. Prime examples of this are the triumphant display of terror attack images – a reframing and re-evaluation as positive and glorious events. Appropriation, in other words, is linked to the pragmatic role or functional communicative mode of the media artefact. In *No Respite*,[13] images such as photo portraits of US presidents are refunctioned as associative elements of an ornamental and aesthetic visual stream of consciousness without any indication of their representational origins or formal external discursive status. And while the former is indicated as 'citation', thus drawing legitimacy from the source's reputation, the latter are stylistically fitted into the visuality of the Islamic State media world.

Formal Aesthetic and Structural Dimensions: Designs, Styles and Genres

Political activists commonly attempt to establish and maintain their own 'corporate' or 'brand identity' by employing symbols, image worlds, colour combinations, logotypes and other visual and auditive elements (such as hymns) (Beifuss et al. 2013). They serve as implicit or explicit statements about aims and the status as political and historical actor(s). In the case of IS, utilising symbols like the black banner or the prophet's seal as a central brand logo is accompanied by public 'enactments' like carrying the banner or hoisting up the flag over the city. This historicising appropriation is embedded in further performative practises that oscillate between presentative staging for the camera, empathetic nostalgic re-enactment, political demonstration and public religious rituality (e.g. riding on horses, following scripture with respect to clothing style or beard, and so on; see Salzmann 2016).[14]

Media logos and designs of the 'Caliphate', its central and regional media offices and their single 'product brands' (like the *Inside the Khilafah* video series and the *Dabiq* magazine) function similarly. Like the traditional symbols of Neo-Salafism, they are structural culture-text elements, derived from, referring to and thus drawing on a certain pre-given area of cultural

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[13] *No Respite* (al-Hayat Media Center, 24 November 2015).

[14] This resonates with 'heroic' motifs in *anāshīd* lyrics. Regarding words as derived from poetry and its musical (vocal) composition and performance, these hymns are a substantial jihadi cultural genre, yet with its own history of traditions, adaptations and mixtures well before and beyond Islamist contexts (Weinrich, Chapter 10).

expression and legitimacy. Here the specific style and its associative meaning are relevant, too. Points of reference are modern media outlets and products, television stations, news programmes and print magazines, their designs and aesthetic qualities – and how they are strategically organised.[15] Along with their adaptation of traditional and regional culture genres like *anāshīd*, IS and its media outlets imitate, cite or emulate also general styles, formats and codes common to global media culture. This includes elements of video games, which, in turn, draw on 'cold' techno-military operational images (Eder 2017). The video *Kill Them Wherever You Find Them*,[16] for example, combines a collage of news footage generated during the Paris attacks (13 and 14 November 2015), surveillance camera with animated aerial shots and visual effect filters simulating superimposed grids, computer-generated reticles and other artificial optical markers. It references the augmented reality visuality of head-up displays or guided missile control images common in video games, particularly mission briefing sequences in games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009). Such instances of computer game aestheticisation, along with a television commercial or music video stylisation, pursue a strategy to affect and attract. On the other hand, many of IS's formal or structural elements derived from TV and web journalism are rhetorical in shaping the corporative *rhetor's* consistent and 'valuable' image for the audience (Ulrich 2012: 222–4), thus enhancing its credibility and soundness.

There is, however, more to these dimensions of expressive appropriation than simply reasons of imitation and effectiveness, as the case of the British journalist and IS hostage John Cantlie illustrates. For the caliphate's propaganda, Cantlie performs as a reporter[17] or, in the *Lend Me Your Ears* series,[18] as a commentator, seated at a wooden desk in front of a black cloth. In his role as pundit, Cantlie wears a bright orange jump suit alluding to the images

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[15] It is relevant that, for example, the different *wilāyat* videos not only opened with a 'professional' visually attractive, animated identifier (a slow metallic materiality of the logo against a black background) but that they all showed this very same unified design: an integrated brand (family).

[16] Released by al-Hayat Media Center, 24 January 2016.

[17] E.g. *Inside Mosul* (al-Hayat Media Center, 2015).

[18] *Lend Me Your Ears – Messages from The British Detainee John Cantlie*, a seven-part series of videos released in 2014.

of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay – a cynical parody of TV expert statements and, at the same time, an appropriation of clothing norms for the purpose of re-enactment and subversion.[19] Cantlie even had his own column in the *Dabiq* magazine where other typical magazine elements and genres could be found like a table of contents, a foreword and 'ads' for the latest IS video productions, but also for hostages advertised as a 'limited time offer' for an unspecified ransom.[20] These and other paratextual genre appropriations like film teasers and trailers announcing the more elaborate IS video productions[21] show the traits of a somewhat ironising, perhaps even playful mimicry. However, their appropriative status is dynamic and oscillates between closeness and distance, appreciation of form, and contempt for the ideological origins and style of the templates used. Those paratexts and genre texts revere the referenced material and, at the same time, refuse it because of its cultural and ideological origins.

Alternatively, these formats, styles and genres can be considered as appropriated formal means of expression and structural elements with which to articulate IS's own ideational contents. From this perspective, appropriation is less mocking and appreciative, but a functional communicative *merging* of presentational means and visual jihad culture: images of paradise-like places – or, in some historic jihadi videos, even paradise itself – and the heroic pathos of *mujāhidīn* (Ostovar 2017; Holtman 2013). Those visual patterns and motifs, codes and metaphors are, however, not the 'real' or main essence of the message. They become fully meaningful and rhetorically effective only in dialectical contrast with the design vehicles or packaging. Such a view is compatible with the concept of *recontextualisation* as introduced by Chouliaraki and Kissas (2017: 28–9) in the context of IS's explicit death/body imagery: a way of competing meaning-making, a form of intervening by engaging, mirroring back and exposing. Either way, any kind of reference and quality ('high-end', semi-professional or 'amateurish') in IS's media work

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[19] Other authors (e.g. Gruber 2020) have noted the appropriation of orange prison clothing by IS as well.

[20] *Dabiq*, 11, 64–5.

[21] Some of the main productions this applies to are *Flames of War* (al-Hayat Media Center 2014), *Flames of War II* (29 November 2017) and *The Rise of the Khilafah and the Return of the Gold Dinar* (al-Hayat Media Center 2015).

is to be considered not only a sign of (in-)ability and (failed) aspiration, but also a potential marker of a kind of procedural authenticity, distinction and signification.

Technical Tools

Genres or communicative formats, whether viewed as established formulaic solutions for recurring communicative tasks or as continued and rigidified creative contracts or proposals, are substantially dependent on techniques and technology, their development and, of course, practical utilisation. Point-of-view shots of fighting IS *mujāhidīn* were made possible only by action cameras like those developed by GoPro, Inc. IS soldiers attach cameras to their heads or to their rifles, preferably in videos of the combat genre, in order to produce an immersive ego perspective of battlefield action. Unlike bodycam footage of soldiers or police officers, which primarily serves to gather further intel, evaluate a mission or become legal evidence, IS uses these images mainly to cultivate a spectacular high-definition experience, document the exploits of its *mujāhidīn* and, maybe unconsciously, reproduce the vista popular in first-person shooter gaming.[22]

Other means of visual design like the animation of title lettering (most notably in the form of kinetic typology), infographics or FX filters, for example glitched data effects, evidence an appropriation of pre-existing design templates and the use of corresponding hardware and software. The history of Islamic State's and other jihadist groups' media technology is part of the ongoing adaptive history of terrorist and activist media, which, in turn, is a history of media democratisation and decentralisation, especially with regard to electronic and digital means of production and distribution. Video cameras became smaller, more affordable and easier to use. Editing is no longer tied to high-end professional work stations, but, instead, is turned into or available via media software (Manovich 2013) for home computers, notebooks and mobile phones. Just like artists or home users do for their respective purposes, extremists use those means for their propaganda.

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[22] The Islamic State video *Determination of the Brave 2* (Wilāyat al-Anbar 2015) not only features GoPro cameras footage, but even reflects on it by demonstratively comparing, i.e. cross-cutting, third- and first-person perspectives.

Besides this mainstream technology, the Islamic State uses equipment more typical for (semi-)professional media actors, such as clip-on microphones (e.g. on the clothing of victims in capital punishment videos) and advanced lighting kits. Major IS productions in particular are shot with at least two cameras, allowing for scenes to be resolved from different angles. Film-making conventions like these were adopted rather quickly by Islamic State, beginning in 2014, and indicate another non-central dimension of appropriation: the capturing of media equipment or its acquisition through illegal or at least unofficial channels that are closely connected to shadow economies and underground financial transactions. Across several groups on Telegram, calls for donations to acquire equipment were made; one website on the dark net even explicitly asked for money to be donated for cameras in the $400–800 range (the said model of camera, the Nikon Coolpix p900, would later be seen in Islamic State videos).[23] A similar grey market has evolved for internet access via European satellite networks or the distributors of devices and service access (Kwasniewski 2015). In order to maintain its grip on TV and internet reception, Islamic State banned satellite dishes in its regions, celebrating their destruction in propaganda videos (Naylor and Salim 2016). According to an IS statement, the materials from the destroyed antennas were re-used as part of explosive devices (Dearden 2015).

However, such aspects of the availability and distribution of equipment already lead into the subject area of propaganda infrastructures addressed elsewhere (Zywietz 2020). Therefore, we wish to close with some remarks on media-technological formats – a subject recently discovered by media and culture studies.[24]

Technical Formats

By *format* we do not mean the generic structure of media texts like the licensable concept of a television show ('TV format', Chalaby 2015), but

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[23] However, it has so far been impossible to clarify to what degree such donations using Bitcoin or PayPal are 'legitimate' or whether they are scams or even traps set by security services.

[24] A seminal work has been presented by Jonathan Sterne (2012), who suggested and outlined a *format theory*.

the basic physical norms or technical standards of information encoding, its syntax and its semantics: paper-page size and printing norms, cassette tapes and DVD standards, file formats and codecs for data compression, transmission, storage, playback or editing like MP4, MP3, HTML, DOC, JPEG, GIF or PDF. Formats are not epistemically neutral, if only because the ideas of conformity and exchange are essential to the very concept of formatting (McGill 2018: 671). They influence the media-textual work, its performance spectrum, its results and its perception. 'The format is what specifies the protocols by which a medium will operate' (Sterne 2012: 8); it 'denotes a whole range of decisions that affect the look, feel, experience and workings of a medium' (ibid. 7).

Unsurprisingly, IS delivers its media in the established formats that the technology apparatus and online platforms demand or facilitate, because it wants to be 'understood' by a target audience and its devices. However, within those regulations, and together with religious keywords, established wordings and references, the spoken and written Arabic of IS publications marks a distinct cultural identity – or technicality – and serves the processes of inclusion, exclusion, conformity or standardisation. Besides jihadi iconography (Brachmann and Kennedy-Boudali 2006), graphical patterns (ornamentation, calligraphy) and auditive structures (recitations, vocalises in *anāshīd*; Pieslak 2017; Weinrich, Chapter 10), they are forms of self-enactment or adaptations of formal guidelines in media design, too, even if not directly regulated by *technical* standardisation. Yet they might be considered 'soft' formats, a kind of counter-coding, and important in this context, as they are not immediately intelligible for human 'outsiders' and, in addition, not for non-human agents like algorithms or upload filters.[25] However, even when personal apps for android phones and browsers were developed to facilitate the dissemination of propaganda and possibly even allow for encrypted messaging (Dillow 2016), as far as technical media formats are concerned IS and other political and cultural actors remain 'silent' or can only articulate themselves in technological 'languages' supplied by standard-setting bodies and

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[25] The Arabic script – as writing system, Unicode and ISO standards, and digital fonts – exemplifies how tight and complex technical and cultural formats interrelate in this context.

their working groups,[26] Far East and US tech companies which won so-called 'standard battles' or 'format wars' (van de Kaa and Vries 2015).

Conclusion

In order to outline the heterogeneous field of Islamic State's appropriation, we described three basic types of appropriation which again can be applied to several dimensions of IS propaganda texts and practices. Together with analytical terms like 'style' or 'formats', 'appropriation' proves an instructive concept with which to generate insights into what IS is *doing* with its media, but is also useful, if critically deployed, in working out of how the idea of appropriation is in itself functional in culturally and ideologically *othering* IS and denouncing its position in a global (anti-)'jihadist' discourse. Although we could only briefly or implicitly touch on this issue, it is remarkable how IS does not use interpretative, technical or expressive contents, styles, symbols and devices of communication and (re-)presentation essentially different from those used by other political, religious or militant activists. Computer game visuality, GoPro points-of-view, Adobe Premiere templates or codes of TV journalism are remarkable or even unusual for us. The reason is not that they are new, but that they are transferred from one 'appropriate' (and at the same time *inappropriate*) domain of use (and locus of encountering) to another 'inappropriate' (and appropriated) one. Therefore, as a meta-communicative concept, appropriation is an ascribed practice and – most of all – an analytical perspective of great value in (en-)countering Islamic State and its 'Caliphate' by reflecting our own ideological and cultural stance.

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[26] E.g. the Moving Picture Expert Group (MPEG) or the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

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5

VISUAL PERFORMATIVITY OF VIOLENCE: POWER AND RETALIATORY HUMILIATION IN ISLAMIC STATE (IS) BEHEADING VIDEOS BETWEEN 2014 AND 2017[1]

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The significance of visual propaganda and imagery in war and conflict, currently carried by terrorist organisations on popular social media platforms, has never been debated so much as it has been since Islamic State (IS) started gaining global attention for its sophisticated Jihadi-Salafi media campaigns in 2014. Although IS visual propaganda contains a wide tapestry of narratives, the images and videos of gruesome beheadings have for years been the centre of attention for scholars,[2] and for supporters of IS ideological doctrines as well.[3] This graphic violence involves deliberate choices in terms of image composition, lighting, camera angles, and overall editing techniques deployed to produce the maximum effect in terms of viewing experience and ideological interpretation among its targeted audiences. These videos produced and disseminated by IS, especially since the declaration of its caliphate in June 2014, are not only evidence of tactical choices and strategic products and tools in warfare: they are also communicative artefacts.

[1] First presented at *Jihadi Audiovisualities*, 4–5 October 2018, University of Mainz.
[2] For more on the visualisation of torture in IS media campaigns, see Molin-Friis (2015) and Euben (2017).
[3] For more extensive discussions of the role of online supporters for the dissemination of propaganda, see Krona (2020).

This chapter aims to dissect a particular mediation of performative violence: the visualisation, through moving images, of beheadings as multilayered and multimodal media artefacts, produced with the dual objective of inciting fear among adversaries and, in addition, strengthening the in-group identity of the organisation for its supporters. How videos of IS beheadings of foreigners, alleged apostates or spies are designed is crucial for our understanding of the role of visual propaganda in IS contemporary warfare. It also contributes to a larger discussion of the significance of graphic representations of power and retaliatory humiliation in radicalisation processes. This chapter is based on the qualitative visual analysis of beheading videos produced and disseminated by IS's official media wings between 2014 and 2017, with a particular focus on image composition and sequencing, contextualised through a theoretical discussion about how power and retaliatory humiliation are constructed through the visual performativity of violence.[4]

Militant Jihadist Beheadings and IS

Despite the fact that IS had emerged, developed and extended its territorial reach in both Iraq and Syria long before the appointed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stepped up for his first address to the *ummah* in the Grand Mosque of Mosul in June 2014, it was mainly during the weeks following that speech that wider international attention to the proto-state project that is Islamic State was generated. A significant reason for this global outreach was the al-Hayat video entitled *A Message to America*,[5] in which the US photojournalist James Foley was beheaded by the UK citizen Mohammed Emwazi.[6] However, the use of decapitation videos broadcast on contemporary media platforms is by no means the invention of IS. Leaving aside this established execution method as a tool for intimidating adversaries used by, for instance, Mexican drug cartels (see Koch 2018), the significance of beheading videos within the twenty-first-century militant jihadist milieu can only be described as essential in its modus operandi (see, inter alia, Jones 2005).

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[4] Screenshots have been selected taking into account ethical restraints and considerations, though they may seem provocative and graphic in nature.

[5] Produced and released by IS's main media wing for international audiences, *al-Hayat Media Foundation*, in August 2014.

[6] Emwazi became known as 'Jihadi John' in major Western media outlets.

But before entering the role of strategic and propagandistic mediations of IS beheadings, one must consider a contextual framework to understand the contemporary use of beheadings in IS warfare, namely the historical precedent and sectarian dimensions behind the divide between Shia and Sunni within Islamic scripture and history. Even though there are several dimensions involved in this split, a historical important factor is the beheading of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad. He was killed in the battle of Karbala in 680 after having confronted Caliph Yazid ibn Muawiya (appointed by his own father in the first Sunni Arab dynasty). Husayn ibn Ali, as a Shia imam, was considered the spiritual leader of Muslims and Yazid ibn Muawiya had only temporal power, a fact he was aware of. After Husayn ibn Ali had claimed his position to preserve the pure and true foundations and values of Islam, an army of men sent by Yazid ibn Muawiya caught and beheaded Husayn ibn Ali and his group of seventy-two followers, which ended with their heads being put on spears[7] and presented to the Caliph in Damascus (Campbell 2006: 585).

This and several other historical events and developments within Islamic scripture are often used by Salafi-jihadist organisations like IS as a means of justifying the use of beheadings as a method of execution (see Furnish 2005). There are several reasons, aside from the symbolic ones, for IS performing this violent act instrumentally and doing so in front of cameras for the world to see. From a military strategic point of view, IS militants have employed this method as a catalyst for deterrence in anticipation that enemies and adversaries would surrender in order to avoid further victimisation. In several videos, there are also demands for or mentions of halting air-strikes, even though it is more relevant to consider that this is not a desired or achievable end-goal. It is, rather, a means of provoking reactions from the international coalition fighting IS since late 2014. In either case, the beheading videos are not merely propaganda but, in addition, evidence of IS's saliency and its reliance on 'its messaging value and recognition of Internet media's wide reach' (Zech and Kelly 2015: 85).

From the perspective of media and communication studies, the very practice of mediating beheadings becomes even more interesting around the

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[7] In several IS videos of beheadings, the victims' heads are also placed on spearheads.

millennium shift when the practice was starting to be broadcast and/or disseminated online – thereby changing the nature of hybrid warfare and the digital circulation of videos among supporters of, for instance, AQI[8] or other contemporary militant jihadist organisations. Since then, a number of internationally recognised beheadings have been videotaped and gained attraction around the world. When the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl was beheaded in 2002 and the video of his death was found on media platforms to be viewed around the world, it helped spark a modern-day resurgence of this Salafi-jihadist ritual rooted in Islamic scripture, even though Chechen rebels, for instance, had also rather substantially evoked this method of execution in the battlefield already in the late 1990s (see Furnish 2005).

In IS videos, the victims and opponents are portrayed as criminals deserving to be punished, and, according to IS, the sought-for audience for these videos is meant to observe fair executions rather than illegitimate murders. Unlike during the French Revolution, when France promoted the guillotine to standardise capital punishment in a manner symbolic for modernity and equality, IS utilises an extra-judicial and more religiously crude interpretation and implementation of beheadings as execution method, for instance by using knives and hence showing determination and force of manual and prolonged decapitation (Zech and Kelly 2015: 87). This and several other symbolic actions are explicitly exhibited in the visual representation of IS beheadings analysed later in this chapter.

Methodology

The videos selected for analysis have all been collected through covert observation[9] on Telegram. From a methodological point of view, the advantages of using covert observation monitoring IS Telegram channels are: the immediacy in attaining raw data, authenticity, because IS carefully chooses the channels on which it releases official propaganda, and archival purposes regarding Telegram's architectural design allowing the easy and fast downloading of material for

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[8] An infamous example of a jihadist beheading video from 2004 of a Western citizen shows AQI (Al-Qaeda in Iraq) leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, wearing a headscarf and standing in the middle of four other disguised militants, with the US-company-contracted Nick Berg kneeling in front of them, beheading Berg after reading a statement about his 'crimes'.

[9] See Given (2008) for a comprehensive discussion of covert observations.

analysis.[10] Furthermore, from an ethical perspective, it is vital to recognise the challenges of representing graphic empirical material along with the necessary considerations around integrity and respect for victims. The choices made in this chapter regarding how to represent and discuss videos containing beheadings have all been made in the strong conviction that in order to pursue a significant argument and enhance the understanding of a potential appeal for IS supporters in these videos, some visual representations are important in terms of their being highlighted. But in this process, an awareness and careful consideration have been secured so as to show respect for the victims.

The videos selected for analysis have been extracted in accordance with a purposeful sample strategy – choosing videos, from the years 2014 to 2017,[11] with attributes that can best provide answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: *What characterises the visual imagery and construction of power and humiliation in the selected IS beheading videos between 2014 and 2017, and which, if any, changes can be traced over time?*

RQ2: *How can IS beheading videos be understood as visual representations of both instrumental and expressive forms of performative violence?*

The selection of videos has subsequently been made with the purpose of including videos, first, which derive from each year in the time frame and, second, which contain a variety of qualitative attributes. In this case, these attributes are visual techniques and strategies for mediating the performative violence and constructing positions of power and humiliation. With the aim of discussing the plethora of visual strategies concerning editing, after-effects, camera angles, image composition and symbolism as well as environments, a total of thirteen videos were selected for qualitative visual analysis. Another distinction was the focus on the scenes and sequences revolving around the executions themselves. With the overall narratives in the video of which they were a part, this excludes much of the political and religious narratives

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[10] Telegram has levels of encryption and offers possibilities for remaining relatively anonymous when monitoring channels.

[11] Additional searches have been made on databases such as jihadology.net in order to verify titles and translations.

surrounding the beheadings. Instead, the spotlight is directed on the violence itself and the visual choices made during these acts.

The visual analysis performed in this chapter relies on Gillian Rose's argument that visual artefacts and communication can be analysed through the joint understanding of three so-called 'sites': (1) site of production, (2) site of the image and (3) site of audiencing (Rose 2001: 14–16). Depending on the research questions and focus of the inquiry, one could choose to perform a combined analysis of the three sites or an in-depth close reading of visual material highlighting certain aspects of production, image *or* audiencing. For this chapter, a special interest is primarily devoted to the site of the image, which, according to Rose and under the conceptual framework of 'compositional interpretation' (ibid. 52), entails analytical dimensions of image composition, lighting, and editing techniques. Even though this framework was intended for analysing still images, it is applicable also to moving images, not least when adding the concept of multi-modality and understanding it as a form of 'frame sequencing (how visual frames are edited in cohesive sequences)'.[12] This allows for an analytical reading of the empirical material combining in-depth visual analysis of screenshots/still images and their function in a sequence in relation to other frames.[13] We can gain further knowledge of the symbolic and expressive function of IS videos as communicative acts and aesthetic practices by analysing not only what the videos say (or show) through the means of visual imagery, but also how they work – in this case, as visual representations of performative violence through the construction of power, and as humiliation.[14]

Theoretical Framework

Without a doubt, brutal IS videos have been a significant part of its propaganda strategy and branding efforts, not least for Western audiences (see

[12] Chouliaraki, Lilie And Angelos Kissas (2018), 'The Communication of Horrorism: a Typology of ISIS Online Death Videos', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35: 1, p. 28, which in turn utilises an approach borrowed from Jewitt, Carey (ed.) (2019), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Research*, London: Routledge.

[13] Rose (2001) presents this as inspired by Monaco, James (2000), *How to Read a Film*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[14] Ethical considerations are essential, above all for showing respect for the victims. Therefore, I have selected images with as much ethical restraint as possible.

Zelin 2014). One way of arguing for aims involved in producing and disseminating these videos is touched upon by Simone Molin-Friis (2015: 729), who states that the acts are carried out 'not for the sake of murder in itself, but with the purpose of being reproduced and watched by an audience far larger than the one directly experiencing it'. Considering the layers included in the videos of beheadings throughout IS media campaign since the declaration of the caliphate in 2014, a striking impression is the level of ideological, symbolic and visual dimensions and, in particular, the contrasts between them. Relationships between them are extensions of the core instrumental part of the violence and encourage perspectives and meaning-making beyond the brutal act itself. Therefore, this chapter focuses on these intersections within the visual construction of violence, performativity, power and humiliation.

As a first level of distinction, IS videos of beheadings are considered aesthetic practices within the social realm of 'horrorism', rather than a means of conducting 'terrorism'. By considering horrorism as connected to the mediated witnessing of violence for a distant audience, whereas terrorism involves proximity, more physical experience and the witnessing of violent acts, it is possible to contextualise IS videos as horror 'in the realm of the eye' and not as lived experience of panic and fear (Caverero 2009). Within this mediated representation of violence, it is necessary to analyse how it visually performs violent death and, in addition, how the audience is invited to relate to and understand it (see Chouliaraki and Kissas 2018; Zelizer 2010).

Performativity of Violence and Retaliatory Humiliation

For the purpose of understanding the role, attributes and significance of visual performativity of violence in IS beheading videos, Jeffrey Juris provides a useful definition of performative violence as 'a form of meaningful interaction through which actors construct social reality based on available cultural templates' (Juris 2005: 415). Here, violent acts are considered to have more than practical-instrumental dimensions, namely also symbolic-expressive characteristics (see Riches 1986). With regard to the application of the concept of the visual performativity of violence in this chapter, the implementation of the definition above would then be leaning more towards the symbolic-expressive aspect of violent acts: a representational context for

the symbolic interaction of violence in which the performative violent act in itself is re-mediated and re-contextualised through visual means.

In line with acknowledging the symbolic-expressive function, Tripp (2018: 168) argues that in political struggles violence exhibits an exercise of power in which acts bring about a social reality. In this view, the violence can both protect an established order and create a new configuration of power. Violence then becomes a projection of statehood, and performances, in addition, convey a message to those threatening to overthrow the new order.

The concept of humiliation, and, above all, the mediated enactment and construction of humiliation, stand in direct, mutual and necessary opposition to the position of power in which IS executioners find themselves. In line with Roxanne L. Euben's (2017: 1010) definition, humiliation is 'the imposition of impotence on Islam and Muslims by those with greater and undeserved power, while retaliatory humiliation both performs and produces an inversion of this relation'. If the concept of retaliation in relation to humiliation is incorporated, one must consider the theoretical context in which retaliation is expressed and justified. Bertram Turner argues that retaliation occurs discursively under four main framework conditions: *scientification*, *securitization*, *religiosification* and *juridification* (see Turner and Schlee 2017: 5). With regard to IS videos in this chapter, the framework of religiosification holds the highest merit. As Turner and Schlee go on to maintain, 'Religion may stipulate forbearance towards those who have wronged someone or, on the contrary, emphasise the exercise of retaliation as a religious duty, thereby fostering an intertwining of the religious and the secular in various domains. Tenets of faith may thus appear inextricably linked with notions of retaliation and reflect religious ideas about justice, repentance and remorse, punishment and salvation.' Moreover, the way IS claims legality through divinity by referring to scripture and divine law as justification for both method and punishment further supports the notion of seeking to embed retaliation in religious discourses in order to strengthen the impact of its messages to supporters and adversaries as well. Exercised humiliation does not come out of a vacuum, but from a religious and ideological context of justified retaliation.

The aspect of how retaliatory humiliation generates an inversion of power structures encompasses two main levels. First, the applied visual imagery in IS videos converts the physical punishment of the victims into a symbolic

punishment of the nation or the community they belong to. As in the case of James Foley, retaliatory humiliation is symbolically imposed on the American nation,[15] and it simultaneously exhibits a form of dominance of IS over the USA. Furthermore, this is where sovereignty comes into play, as the sovereign power[16] connected to the formation and implementation of nation states includes the right to judge and punish, and thereby exercises power over life and death. By legitimising this right, not least through its proto-state and its political project attempting to back up claims of Western understandings of sovereignty, IS additionally reverses the relationship between the 'state' and outlaws, or terrorists for that matter.

Through rhetorical constructions, the USA is positioned as the murderer, aggressor and terrorist state, and therefore, IS argues, it deserves punishment in a way similar to the humiliation of Islam and Muslims around the world (see Euben 2017: 1012). Conclusively, the concept of power should be understood as associated not only with sovereignty here, but also with dominance in different forms. In some of the early videos chosen as empirical material in this chapter, dominance over the victims is practised and performed in the videos by an IS executioner in the sense of visual composition, often standing tall over a kneeling prisoner. Besides, from a Foucauldian perspective, IS presents regular use of strapping the body of the victim preventing the freedom to move, usually with tied hands behind the back or by keeping victims in cages before executed. This can be contextualised as a transformation, as Michel Foucault explains in his work *Discipline and Punish*, from the aim of execution as punishment being to inflict pain on the body itself, into a focus on the disciplining character of contemporary punishment, leaving the body in an intermediary fashion and changing focus from the body itself to the actual act of depriving the prisoner of free movement as the main characteristics of public and non-public state executions (Foucault 1977).

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[15] In the video of James Foley's execution (A MESSAGE TO AMERICA, released August 2014), the ascription of guilt is conducted orally and visually and argued by both Foley reading from a prepared script blaming the US administration and their foreign policy, and hence the American nation, and by his executioner through a separate monologue aimed directly at an international audience.

[16] 'Sovereign power' is here equal to definitions proposed by theorists such as Michel Foucault and Thomas Hobbes.

By invoking the excessive use of retaliatory humiliation, IS symbolically and ideologically challenges a status quo and provides a competitive system of meaning, a framework enhanced not least through the videos of beheadings (see Ingram 2015). The characteristics of these beheading videos have been identified and analysed in several academic contributions in recent years (see Impara 2018; Euben 2017; Friis 2015; Koch 2018; Chouliaraki and Kissas 2018). By focusing on the symbolic power of the violence performed and communicated, this analysis aims to provide insights into the way these videos of performative violence are constructed, and, furthermore, into the visual presentation of power and humiliation and how these constructions work. The purpose of the analysis is also to track potential changes over time to highlight the variety of visual techniques and their relation to the audience.

Analysis

One of the Quranic verses justifying beheadings most commonly used by IS is Surah Mohammad 47:4: 'So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them [. . .]'.[17] In the context of war and of defending Islam from outside interference and attack, which is the core foundation of doctrines conveying the ideological and religious framework of IS, beheadings are interpreted as a justified means. Reminding ourselves about the definition of retaliatory humiliation presented earlier in the theoretical framework of this chapter, the significance and application of Islamic scripture and actions, or interpretations in contrast to the IS Salafi-jihadist reading, is essential in any attempt to critically approach the IS retributive violence performed in these videos. For instance, the use of knives as weapons and tools for beheadings contains a layer of relevant ideological points. From perspectives of Islamic scripture, the knife, as a more convenient, intimate and individually-connected weapon than the sword, can be considered an extension of the hand. The connection to and similarity with the sword is obvious, which in turn constitutes 'a

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[17] The full Surah (47:4) continues with 'then secure their bonds, and either [confer] favor afterwards or ransom [them] until the war lays down its burdens. That [is the command]. And if Allah had willed, He could have taken vengeance upon them [Himself], but [He ordered armed struggle] to test some of you by means of others. And those who are killed in the cause of Allah – never will He waste their deeds.'

pre-modern weapon which is considered noble and is associated with early Islamic heroes and their jihads' (Campbell 2006: 604).

Fiction, Documentary – or Real Horrorism

One of the most significant and frequently used strategies in IS beheading videos is the deliberate blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality. The concept of authenticity is relevant, as it 'rests on the visual's privileged epistemic status: it verifies and it brings the audience closer to the event' (Hansen 2011: 56). When authenticity is drawn upon it has a certain connection to the audience, as the genre of documentary film or observations is an invisible contract of anticipation between the filmmaker and the audience (see Nichols 1981). But IS videos of violence have a complex, or uneasy, relationship with reality and documentation only. The use of fiction in terms of staging scenes, after-effects and creative editing holds similar uncertainties for the audience.

A commonly used reference is the notion of IS as constantly using techniques and visual imagery deriving from, or mimicking, Hollywood movies and familiar Western modes of cultural expression. However, although this might be true in many cases depending on how analytically we approach them, there is a vastly more elaborate and rich use of techniques applied for other purposes of making violence exciting and appealing for its supporters, including the direction of scenes. As Gruber (2019: 139) notices, the 'deadly scenes are carefully staged – the scenography and body movements practiced multiple times – before an actual killing takes place'. I argue that an emphasis of fictionalisation, here determined through the elaborate use of editing techniques and after-effects, has not only increased with time, but, in addition, has been designed to appeal to supporters rather than being utilised as a means of inciting fear with these videos. A comparison between two initial videos in the selected time-frame, *A Message to America* and *A Second Message to America*, released in fall 2014, with *Wa-in ʿuddtum ʿudanā* #2 released in October 2015 shows how editing strategies aiming to blur boundaries between reality and fiction also have different levels of performativity. The first two videos depict the execution of James Foley and Steven Sotloff, while the third was released one year later. The prisoners' interaction and participation change. In the first videos, Foley and Sotloff are forced to speak and read

from a prepared script; hence, a portrayal of them as persons, individuals, is created, and they represent their nation symbolically. In the third and later video, the prisoners are visually represented first of all as a group rather than as individuals, consistently through acting in terms of being forced to walk in line and being held by their executioners, who lead them to a designated spot. The camera makes cinematic movements in order to capture the environment and relationship between executioners and prisoners.

There are different types of performances in play in the full empirical material. Dimensions such as participant movement and body language, poses and interaction between executioner and prisoner are all constructed through the interplay with decisions on how to enhance the symbolic and emotional effect with visual means (see Pfeifer et al., Chapter 7). The videos of Foley and Sotloff were aimed at a specific audience and had a clear political statement, while the third and later video in Arabic was designed for a different audience and could therefore have a more elaborate narrative. In this particular video (Figure 5.1, right), the actual beheading is later filmed with three camera angles, one from the side and two cameras from the front, filming from the ground with low-angle and both medium and close-up shots, switching between slow motion and normal speed, with some repetition of the decapitation sequences. In comparison to the 2014 videos mentioned above, the beheadings are now explicit and visible, accelerating the gore effect and impression of fiction. There is also an interesting de-humanisation of the prisoners in this video, as few individual faces are shown in close-up or even medium-shot. Instead, all prisoners are presented in one frame, as a collective

Figure 5.1   (Left) Screenshot from *A Message to America*, Al-Hayat Media Center 2014, showing James Foley's execution. (Right) Screenshot from *Wa-in ʿuddtum ʿudanā #2*, Wilāyat Nīnawā, September 2015, showing five IS prisoners being led to their execution.

Figure 5.2   Screenshots from *A Message Signed with Blood – To the Nation of the Cross*, al-Hayat Media, February 2015.

rather than as individuals, thereby strengthening the symbolic representation and decreasing the personal unique qualities of each individual.

In another infamous video, *A Message Signed with Blood – To the Nation of the Cross* released in February 2015, several aspects concerning both performativity and the use of fictionalising techniques in the editing process are similar. As the screenshots represented in Figure 5.2 show, there is a symmetrical visual imagery, carefully considered in terms of the line-up of executioners and prisoners, body positions of the black-covered men standing, clothing, and so forth. The symmetrical imagery also resonates with the performative violence to the right and the co-ordinated effort of pushing prisoners to the ground, one by one, and filming them from the side, which makes the action appear as a wave-movement.

In combination, this imagery generates strength, command and motion. When it comes to the beheadings later on, there is frequent cross-cutting between slow motion close-ups of beheadings and fast forward images, creating a visual performativity of violence characterised by a mix of sophisticated film techniques with theatrical performance, placing the audience in an uncertain position regarding expectations, performance and genre-mixing.

The productions mentioned should also be seen as contrasting with other types of visual style in beheading videos being produced and disseminated by IS, which are characterised by more shaky and hand-held camerawork and a more documentary style of capturing events. For instance, in *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs #1*, released in June 2015 (Figure 5.3), a hand-held camera in front of the victim is used, resulting in low-resolution

Figure 5.3   Screenshot from *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs*, Wilāyat Khurasān, June 2015.

images with medium-shot of the kneeling prisoner, whose hands are tied behind his back. A single camera is employed only following the movement without edited cuts. The executioner stands on top, forcing the victim to lie down on the ground before lifting his head and moving the knife towards the neck.

Instantly, the images fade to black, which questions the authenticity and leaves the intrusive documentation of the violence just before its climax. The next visible image shows the decapitated head placed on top of the body. Bridging between frames of documentary film aesthetics and an elaborate fictional style with special effects is a technique repeatedly used in IS beheading videos from 2014 and 2015 – a time when the IS global media campaign in general and the production and design of beheading videos in particular was in a phase of transition as the brand of IS received increased international attention. Hence one would also assume increased expectations among supporters concerning the elaboration and development of visual propaganda strategies. The overall visual imagery of the videos is characterised by flexibility and an adaptive mode concerning the fictionalisation of true violence, yet with the reservation of never fully convincing the audience of its fictional character but leaving room for truth-claiming elements. Similar imagery is

Figure 5.4   Screenshots from *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs #3*, Wilāyat Khurasān, October 2015.

used in a later video in the same series, *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs #3*, released in October 2015, with a mix of staged execution and a prisoner being paraded along a country road, only to meet his death after being forced to the ground.

Performative Violence and Constructing Power and Humiliation

Videos are manifestations of power as dominance over others. Exercising power is realised (a) through the instrumental aspect of the violence, where IS executioners practise power over body and life, and (b) over the audience in the videos, in terms both of addressing us directly or indirectly and of the visual means by which this addressing is constructed. In contrast to how positions of power are constructed in the videos, the binary opposition of humiliation is included in the interpretative frames. Figure 5.5 is an illustrative example of a visual representation capturing both power and humiliation. The rite of placing the decapitated head back on top of the dead body is a recurrent theme of IS videos and also has long-standing historical and theological connotations (Campbell 2006).

In the video *ʿĀqibat al-mundharīn*, released in July 2017, a scene of multiple beheadings ends with a close-up shot on an executioner's foot placed on top of the head of one of the prisoners, leaving an everlasting symbolic and physical impression of superiority. As the head also is a symbol of reason and thought, this impression becomes even more accentuated.

Aspects of retaliatory humiliation and, at the same time, an exercise of power and dominance can also be visually expressed through other means. In the video *Jazāʾ al-khāʾinīn #2,* released in May 2017 (Figure 5.6, left),
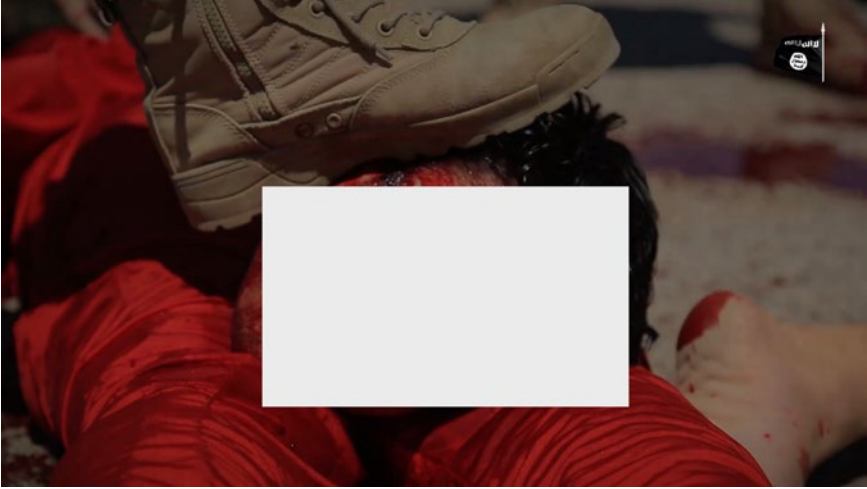
Figure 5.5   Screenshot from ending scene of ʿĀqibat al-mundharīn, Wilāyat al-Furāt, July 2017 (note: image edited by author for ethical reasons).

the prisoners selected for execution by beheading are visually represented through a collage of superimposed images and multi-screens, as in a video game, when they are forced to admit their alleged crimes.

The use either of prisoners' interrogations with confessions, more or less forced, or of forced readings of scripts (like the examples of James Foley and Steven Sotloff) has remained over the years. This aspect, the fact that prisoners are forced to speak the words of their murderers during their last breath, captures an essence of the duality in the mediated construction of and between power and humiliation. It is not only an exhibition of dominance over another person, but also a confessional dimension attempting 'to control the narrative and legitimise the murders in the eyes of viewers' (Zech and Kelly 2015: 87).

It appears essential for IS to portray the prisoners through recurring elements emphasising the retaliatory humiliation, for instance as shown in Figure 5.6 (left), where the consequences of the alleged crimes of which the prisoner standing is accused are being presented underneath him on the screen. In Figure 5.6 (right), another prisoner awaits his death and the person behind the camera first zooms in on the prisoner's face and then slowly leads the audience's attention to the knife held by his executioner. The anticipatory
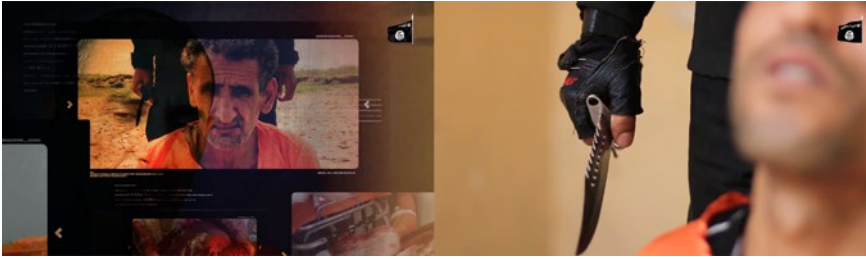
Figure 5.6   Screenshots from *Jazāʾ al-khāʾinīn #2*, Wilāyat Karkūk, May 2017.

character of composition and editing prolongs suspense for the audience, and yet another concept comes into play: fear. The faces of the prisoners fulfil an important narrative function as fear itself is also related to threat here. In Figure 5.6 (right), the defined threat is usually placed behind the prisoner, as is the case with several other similar videos like the one cited in Figure 5.7.

Threat is being constructed on two levels: one for the prisoner and one for the audience. These are usually contradictory, in the sense that the audience is not being kept in the dark regarding what will unfold, but the prisoner is almost exclusively so. The performativity of the violence represented in IS beheading videos requires some restraints concerning the purposeful

Figure 5.7   Screenshot from *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs #2*, Wilāyat Khurasān, July 2015.

incitement of fear in the prisoners themselves. They are to remain as calm as possible in front of the camera in order to fit the storyline of retaliation, which includes confessing their alleged crimes and, besides, quietly accepting their punishment – aspects used to further legitimise the executions and to provide IS with forms of power drawing on its sovereignty. This dimension of visually-controlled fear reaches a theatrical climax in the video *Qiṣṣat al-naḥr*, released in June 2016, in which the five prisoners are placed according to a clear pattern (Figure 5.8, right) where one of them is forced to watch the other four being executed first. Hence, this is a double form of punishment. However, his reactions towards what he witnesses are, although they are edited out, again controlling the fear in the representation of humiliation and power, and then finally he is beheaded as well.

Direct attacks against the enemy do not necessarily induce fear, and instead we can observe this staging through the lens of propaganda's and horrorism's role, concluding that 'beyond actually attacking your adversary, the best way to frighten him is to commit an atrocity that he observes' (Vinci 2005: 370). This relationship or interaction between the executioner and the prisoner highlights, on the one hand, a gruesome form of instrumental violence and, on the other hand, a strong visual and expressive act of performative violence seeking to enhance the dichotomy between divine power and retaliatory humiliation.

In Figure 5.8 (left) from the same video, yet another highlighting of this relationship is evident, as the five executioners look straight into the camera in front of them, when the narrator in the middle suddenly turns to address the kneeling prisoners and, with the help of another camera placed behind them, at the same time directly addresses the audience. This composition and performance places the audience in the prisoners' position. When the

Figure 5.8 Screenshots from *Qiṣṣat al-naḥr*, Wilāyat al-Furāt, June 2016.

audience is directly addressed, this breaks the illusion of theatrical staging and brings the audience closer to the event, thereby also increasing the effect of power over life and death to power over mediation and the audience as well. The same holds for a scene from the video *Naṣr min Allāh wa-fatḥ qarīb #4*, released in March 2016, when the actual beheading is filmed from underneath and the executioner looks directly into the camera, which creates a bridge between the audience, the executioner and his actions.

Finally, I want to reconnect to Foucault and his notion of the transformation of capital punishment's focus from causing extensive pain to the body itself into the symbolic power of depriving the prisoner of free movement. Without these two aspects being mutually exclusive, we can observe that IS beheading videos almost all contain strapped prisoners, and this relates not only to the aspect of power and punishment, but also to the aforementioned control of fear and undesired reactions from the individuals facing execution. One video in which this is overtly emphasised and visually represented, both instrumentally and expressively, is *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs #4*, released in November 2017. With a painting-like image composition, the method of execution involves more than a beheading as it is preceded by the prisoner being strapped around his wrists and arms and stretched as in a

Figure 5.9   Screenshot from *Naṣr min Allāh wa-fatḥ qarīb #4*, Wilāyat al-Khayr, March 2016 (note: image edited by author for ethical reasons).

Figure 5.10   Screenshot from *Shifāʾ al-nufūs bi-dhabḥ al-jāsūs #4*, Wilāyat Khurasān, November 2017.

crucifixion position. Two men with swords stand behind him and start the torturous process with a simultaneous movement of cutting each arm with a forceful stroke.

The combination of strapping and the upcoming force of removing the prisoner's arms conveys a double manifestation of depriving individual agency, both literally and symbolically.

Although this graphic document of the atrocities performed and implemented by IS would easily remain an iconic image in public consciousness, it is important to nuance the symbology and visual imagery. As this analysis has revealed, one of the main purposes of the performative violence is to construct and accentuate the forms of power held by executioners and the retaliatory humiliation suffered by the victims. These constructions and the visual imagery of violent acts enable IS to portray itself as a powerful legitimate organisation with a preserved (and divine) right to implement punishment that is, in the cases analysed, carried out through beheadings. Victims are framed accordingly as representatives of nations, 'apostates' or 'spies', hence as criminals who, with forced confessions, are represented as deserving the humiliating positions they find themselves in.

In sum, much of IS's efforts to construct and design videos of beheadings

comes down to putting the audience in a specific relation to the victim. Moreover, to some extent, a common denominator across the empirical material presented in this chapter is the effort to reduce our sympathy for the victims, as if they deserved the punishment and humiliation performed. As Judith Butler writes about the precarity of life and our perception of other people and their lives: 'specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense' (Butler 2009: 1).

Conclusion

Drawing on theories of performativity, power and retaliatory humiliation, the analysis illustrates that there is no evident or causal chain of events leading to the conclusion of a stable line of innovative development and elaboration of visual strategies. Rather, it is clear that techniques and visual constructions are used depending on contemporary events and targeted audiences. Aside from the aim of using the beheading videos of westerners in 2014 to convey a political message and provoke responses, the videos of beheadings over the following three years have shifted substantially in visual imagery. The videos from 2015 and early 2016 exhibit an experimental and elaborate use of visual techniques, coinciding with transitional phases for IS in general certainly affecting production possibilities, for instance the increase of hostile air-strikes and dismantling of territorial land. Yet another way of interpreting the variety of techniques in terms of constructing power and humiliation in the interaction between executioners and victims is paved by the apparent efforts to appeal more to the regional population and sympathisers, rather than developing a trajectory of linear productions concerning visualisation of beheadings. The symbolic expressive mode of the performative violence visually constructed emerges as more carefully considered than the instrumental aspect of the acts. Nevertheless, it is possible that, at least, these are never separated from each other. The construction and legitimisation of sovereign power over life and death are magnified by the use of strategic relations between executioner and victim in terms of performance and interaction, by visual imagery enhancing effects of larger-than-life characters, and, above all, by exercising power over the

mediation itself and its audience through various techniques in body language, addressing and editing. The position of humiliation for the prisoner is constructed as a necessary opposition to the position of power, visually represented through the symbolic and instrumental act of removing the individual's choice of free movement, of the consistent forceful performance of them being pushed to the ground to meet their death, of their duty to be active participants in re-enactments, and of the use of forced confessions to their alleged crimes as well.

Framing these mediations as horrorism above terrorism allows a deeper understanding of the communicative and aesthetic aspects of the beheadings, something that is far more applicable in any attempt to design counter-narratives to IS's competitive system of meaning. Therefore, meaning-making process taking place in the relationship between the sequences themselves, and their audience is considered absolutely essential in understanding the significance of performative violence in IS branding. For instance, when the videos turn from sophistication in terms of staging, editing techniques and image composition in general to a grainier image quality, hand-held camera-work and improvised performances, this signifies a change in the relation with audiences. The camera techniques commonly used in contemporary visual culture production have connotations familiar to, not least, a Western audience and consumers of visual popular culture. By deploying similar techniques and style in the representation and performances, but narrating content drawing upon ancient scripture placed in a modern context, IS manages to stand out from previous terrorist organisations applying media strategies for branding purposes. The videos analysed in this chapter hence work and function in several capacities, because they are designed simultaneously to incite fear, encourage supporters, relate to Islamic and political history, and magnify and alter definitions of justice, power and humiliation, to name only a few. They move between political, ideological, religious and cultural discourses on society. Regardless of who interprets the content in general, and visual constructions of power and humiliation surrounding IS beheadings in particular, the conclusion is that their multimodal character and carefully considered visual imagery have contributed to strengthening the global brand of IS, as this imagery has become among the most iconic and recognised in the jihadosphere of propaganda. This is worth considering

when, at present, IS still produces and spreads these types of videos, working to further establish its own definition of good and evil and, above all, to maintain its position as a leading force in the mediated visual propaganda of performative violence.

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6

FROM THE DARKNESS INTO THE LIGHT: NARRATIVES OF CONVERSION IN JIHADI VIDEOS[*]

Christoph Günther

Introduction

Instructing people as to who they are, how they are related to others, and how they should act in certain situations is a central function of Jihadi-Salafi media activities. Jihadi-Salafi actors assess and classify individual and collective action as well as social and political processes and events along clear-cut, often binary lines. They have, just as any other social collective, a keen interest in establishing and substantiating collective identities that help them to create senses of belonging and construct boundaries with 'the Other'. At the same time, such collective identities offer an epistemic and ontological framework, helping people to set their individual biography in relation to one or more social collective.

In this chapter, I will examine a specific format used by Jihadi-Salafi groups to make such an offer. I trace the (re-)creation of two autobiographical

narratives of religious conversion as they are presented in two videos authored and issued by the Jihadi-Salafi groups *al-Muhajirūn* and the Islamic State (*al-dawlat al-islāmīya*) between 2016 and 2017. Testimonies of the missionary activities (*daʿwa*) of Jihadi-Salafi actors, these videos render the stories of their protagonists remarkable and meaningful examples of religious conversion to Islam. The authors do not only present individual narratives, that is autobiographical recollections of a series of events and personal experiences of two young men, but also interweave them with allusions to Islamic history and the ideological framework of the Jihadi-Salafi current. They create needs among (potential) followers, show them what conversion to 'pristine' Islam according to the Jihadi-Salafi interpretation is, help people to convert, and demonstrate the consequences of such an individual transformation. As such, the recollections articulated in these videos are instrumental in religious appeals of Jihadi-Salafis to (potential) followers, help to construct faith-based social identities, and offer a religious justification for thinking and action.

The epistemological interest of this chapter is to reconstruct the appropriation of key concepts from Islamic intellectual history and the teleological strategies employed in the audiovisual processing of these personal narrations. I will show the ways in which the videos' authors use audiovisual means to construct and enhance the authenticity and plausibility of these individuals' personal stories and their spiritual experiences. I assume that they are well aware of the inherent logic of conversion processes in general, as well as the ensuing narratives that often (but not always) evolve around experiences of crisis and the functionalisation of the 'new' belief system in order to stigmatise one's past vis-à-vis a glorified present and future. On the basis of this premise, I argue that the videos' authors offer specific configurations of roles and social identities that draw on shared systems of knowledge about patterns of narratives of conversion to Islam in general. They also connect these offers with the self-conceptualisation of Jihadi-Salafi actors so as to provide an intellectual framework for a broad range of (potential) followers.

To scrutinise how such knowledge figures in the composition of these videos, I structure my endeavour along four thematic lines. First, I examine the conceptualisation of religious conversion to Islam as a consequence of a natural inclination of mankind. Second, I draw attention to the crisis-induced nature of religious conversion, be it an existential crisis of the protagonist or a

moral crisis of his social framework. Third, I show how the videos and the protagonists' narratives address the tension between individual agency and divine predetermination. Fourth, I look at the ways in which the videos' authors seek to establish social and symbolic boundaries through conversion to Islam.

Data and Methodology

The leaderships of major Jihadi-Salafi groups and movements have always used their media apparatus to appeal to (potential) followers and call them to join. Although it is imperative for them to incite commitment in order to 'recruit' others to their ranks, it proved difficult to provide an intellectual framework with which as many people as possible could identify and which could also be suitable for non-Muslims. Despite the fact that former 'outsiders' confessing their belief in Islam are part of many textual and audiovisual publications belonging to the Jihadi-Salafi current, accounts that offer a detailed biographical perspective on the individual are rare across all media formats. In creating such accounts, Jihadi-Salafis arguably took inspiration from a number of Sunni Muslim *daʿwa* groups whose media regularly give prominence to individual stories around conversions to Islam.

I have selected two examples from this this scarce category of Jihadi-Salafi videos[1] which had been issued by al-Muhājirūn[2] and the Islamic State (*al-dawlat al-islāmīya*). The first is a nine-minute video published by Islamic State's al-Furāt province media centre[3] on 2 September 2016 under the title of *Min al-ẓulamāt ilā-l-nūr* (*Aus der Finsternis ins Licht*). Second, I have selected *Fiṭra – The West behind the Mask* (*fiṭra – al-gharb min khalaf al-qināʿ*), a 35-minute video released by al-Muhājirūn in June 2017. Both videos are

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[1] Among the videos compiled by our research group, I have found four in which the process of individual transformation to 'genuine' Muslimness is a major element of the story. Two of them, however, centre primarily on other aspects of the individual's biography, which is why I have not considered them for examination here.

[2] Al-Muhājirūn was a Jihadi-Salafi group that mainly operated in the Syrian civil war between 2015 and 2017, and is not to be confused with groups with the same name, one of which has been active in the UK. The group produced audiovisual material in several languages, including videos of *Jaysh al-Fatḥ* in Syria (see Joscelyn 2015).

[3] The Islamic State established several local and regional branches of its media apparatus. Among them, the maktab al-iʿlāmī li-wilāyat al-Furāt had been active between February 2015 and April 2018.
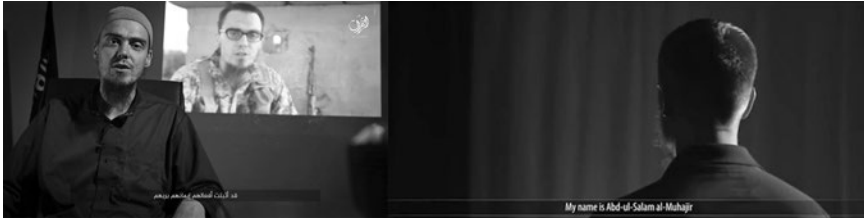
Figure 6.1   Video stills from *Fitrah – The West behind the Mask* (2017) (left) and *Min al-Ẓulamāt ilā-l-Nūr* (2016) (right).

notable examples of Jihadi-Salafi video production in several respects. First, an autobiographical perspective on religious conversion is of primary importance to the authors, who put the protagonists in an interview situation with more than one camera on set. Their narrations are juxtaposed with moving images (at times in picture-in-picture scenery: Figure 6.1), which undergird, reinforce or simply illustrate the verbal narrative. Second, and related to the former, they feature a German male who converted to Islam and joined one of the groups some time prior to the publication of the videos. However, only 'Christian', the protagonist of *Min al-Ẓulamāt*, speaks German with Arabic subtitles, while *Fitrah*'s central character 'Andreas Müller' (alias ʿAbd al-Salām al-Muhājir) chooses Arabic with English subtitles. Nevertheless, both videos were widely disseminated on various (German-language) social media channels and were even received in mainstream media as examples for the persuasive power of Jihadi-Salafi videos (see, inter alia, Reuter 2017).

Both videos present the post-hoc recollections of these young men about their experiences of life, being and spirituality as an autobiographical narrative in which their conversion to Islam and the ensuing consequences play a central role. This is not least because 'the narrative itself [is] the constitutive process of how converts are "made"' (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 8). Primarily, however, both videos are embedded in a communication strategy that functionalises these narratives in order to further the Jihadi-Salafi cause. This means that the people appearing as first-person orators are chiefly personages whose narratives are subject to and shaped by the values, norms, beliefs and practices advocated by al-Muhājirūn and the Islamic State. Being the videos' authors, these groups skilfully create an audiovisuality of 'pristine' religious conversion so as to refashion the biographies of the protagonists in

conformity with their ideological meta-narrative and specific regimes of truth to show others how they could fit into the same story. Thus, we have to be aware that the affective potential of the narratives unfolding in these videos is built upon a strong blend of 'real' persons and the partly fictionalised personages of 'Christian' and 'Andreas' who appear as protagonists. This synthesis is first and foremost commissioned by the authors who script and realise the cinematographic processing. For this reason, the narratives presented here are an artefact of Jihadi-Salafi ideology that figures in the ways in which the protagonists apprehend and describe their experience of a radical change in the significance of their lives.

To address this inextricable audiovisual interdigitation of 'the pious construction of self' (van Nieuwkerk 2014: 680) and the group narrative, I use a hermeneutic approach to reconstruct the appropriation of key concepts from Islamic intellectual history as well as the teleological strategies employed in the audiovisual processing of these personal narrations. Because these are all used by the videos' authors to offer specific collective identities and link them to the life-world of (potential) followers in 'Western' countries, I also set them in relation to research on religious conversions to Islam, particularly in Europe and the USA. This allows me to link the narrative structures of my case studies to patterns of the inherent logic of conversion narratives in specific socio-cultural contexts.

'The Natural Constitution': Conceptualising Conversion to Islam from a Jihadi-Salafi Perspective

> But in the end, I realised that only Islam with the miracle of the unaltered and uncorrupted Quran is God's true religion.

This statement by Christian, the protagonist of *Min al-Ẓulamāt*, points to one of the key frames of the videos examined in this chapter. An individual's pursuit of 'the truth' and a genuine system of meaning is completed by turning to the One God and his ordinances as given in the Quran. His call for a purified Islam not only echoes the central tenets of the Jihadi-Salafi agenda, but also addresses sentiments shared by some young Muslims – second-generation and converts – in Western Europe (van Nieuwkerk 2016: 344). In the same vein, the voice-over in *Fitrah* presents the film as a bibliographical showcase in

accordance with Quranic verse 17:81: {And say, 'Truth has come, and false-hood has departed. Indeed, is falsehood ever bound to depart.' } The motif of truthfulness figures strongly in the autobiographical narratives in the videos. Moreover, it helps the authors to inextricably link this symbolic system of a purified Islam with the protagonists' configuration of their individual change as a radical, incisive and meaningful break with their past that bears severe consequences for their lives. As with many processes of religious conversion, their change is charged by an individual pursuit of truth that affects concepts of the self and one's biography. It also entails universalistic claims that set the individual in relation to symbolic systems of meaning and several wider discourses. Arguably, the videos' authors are well-aware of both the inherent logic of narratives of religious conversion and corresponding systems of knowledge.

The authors use these patterns to structure both the visual narration accordingly, and the language used by the protagonists to describe the transformation they have experienced. Neither 'Christian' nor 'Andreas' refer to these changes using the term 'conversion'. Instead, they say they have 'become Muslim', or that God had 'guided me to the true religion'. Their terminology demonstrates a field of tension between individual activeness and divine predetermination, which I will further elaborate on below. But at first it is noticeable that, on a semantic level, the protagonists connect to terminologies that we find in long-term empirical studies of conversions to Islam in different parts of the globe, where people use similar concepts to articulate and affirm belonging to a social collective in the process of their religious conversion, highlight group boundaries and symbolise their distance from other social groups (see inter alia van Nieuwkerk 2014: 668–9; Scharrer 2014: 129–30).

The protagonists' nomenclature furthermore connects to an ontological dimension of religious conversion that figures in the way in which many people, particularly in Western Europe, conceptualise their transformation as well as the language they use to speak about it. Hermansen (2014: 633) proposes that 'many English-speaking converts to Islam prefer the term "revert", since Islamic theology features the idea that all souls have recognised God in pre-eternity in an episode known as the Primordial Covenant'.[4] This idea

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[4] This refers to Quran 7:172–3: {And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying

might be related to the way in which some converts conceive of their conversion, that is as a process of gradual realisation expressing that 'they already feel Muslim but did not know that their ideas were Islamic' (van Nieuwkerk 2014: 669).

Other perspectives support this notion but prioritise a different epistemological angle. In her study of online and offline conversion narratives, van Nieuwkerk (2014: 669; 2006b: 109) found that people extrapolate from an individual-centric notion to a generic perspective, where the idea 'I was Muslim but just wasn't aware of it' slides into the ideology of 'all people are born Muslim', that is, in a 'state of Islam'. This aspect cannot be underestimated in light of an Islamic missiology in particular that sets the stage for a common Muslim appeal positing that 'in choosing to follow Islam one is not "converting", but rather "reverting" to the world-view and state of being that is innate in every person' (Poston 1992: 135). People, particularly in Europe and the USA, are not simply invited to any other religion on the 'market', but rather 'to the oldest religion, indeed to their "own" religion, the religion of living in total surrender to their Creator, in accordance with the guidance brought by *all* His Messengers' (Murad 1986: 18).

Conceiving of individual transformation under religious premises as a return to humankind's natural state links the conversion process presented in both videos to the idea of *fiṭra*. This concept, which signifies the innate nature of mankind created by God as Muslims, is a key code in the framework of the protagonists' self-representation. Consequently, it is in the film *Fitrah* that we find the concept most explicitly linked to the biographical story of its protagonist, 'Andreas Müller'. His personal development towards Islam is identified as a step towards the authentic state to which man is destined. Again, the videos' authors connect the protagonist's change to the narratives of many converts to Islam, who do not understand their conversion as a transformation to something new, but as a return to a natural, God-given and pristine disposition (see inter alia Scharrer 2014: 129–30). The Quranic idea that

to them], 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we have testified.' [This] – lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware.' | Or [lest] you say, 'It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?'.} See also Al-Qadi (2003).

God had, in order for humans to recognise Him by themselves, created all people with a natural inclination towards a primordial form of monotheism (*ḥanīfiya*) that is equivalent to Islam is related to this (van Ess 1975: 103–7).[5] The notion that Islam and *fiṭra* are identical has further been reinforced by the principal *ḥadīth* on *fiṭra*, implying that Islam is the universal religion of every newborn child (Hoover 2016: 104).[6]

It hardly comes as a surprise that the epistemology supporting the identification of *fiṭra* and Islam also figured in the theology of the Ḥanbalī reformer Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328), who is held in high regard among Jihadi-Salafi theorists and who developed an understanding of *fiṭra* as a 'positive and instinctual disposition towards Islam [which] is widespread in modern activist circles' (Hoover 2016: 106). Adding to this notion, some modern Sunni reformers sought to render 'pristine' Islam – devoid of all customs and blameworthy innovations – discernible to the people, making them able to discover and follow the 'right' path. In this regard, Abū 'l-ʿAlāʾ al-Mawdūdī, for instance, emphasised the importance of 'a moral vanguard, so important to reviving Islam and raising its head against foreign and un-Islamic tutelage', whereas Sayyid Quṭb gave priority to the idea that 'the true human nature, had to be reacquired through an austere path and a complete method (*manhaj*) including belief, conduct, and morals of the righteous predecessors, not to be deviated from' (Malik 2018: 231). The concept of *fiṭra* has since been used by Muslim scholars of various backgrounds 'to mount an apologetic for Islam as the most suitable and naturally fitting religious system for humankind' (Hoover 2016).

Equally, Jihadi-Salafi scholars have appropriated the concept, which becomes particularly apparent in the way the idea defines the ontological framework for the autobiographical narrative presented in *Fitrah*. The

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[5] Quran 30:30: {So set your face toward the religion, being upright, the natural constitution (*fiṭra*) of God, according to which He constituted (*fatara*) humanity. No change should there be in the creation of God. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.}

[6] 'Every newborn is born with the natural constitution (*fiṭra*). Then, his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian. This is like an animal that bears another that is perfect of limb. Do you sense any mutilation in it?' (Muslim, *Kitāb al-qadar*, 4803). On the hadith, its variations and interpretations, see Hoover (2016).
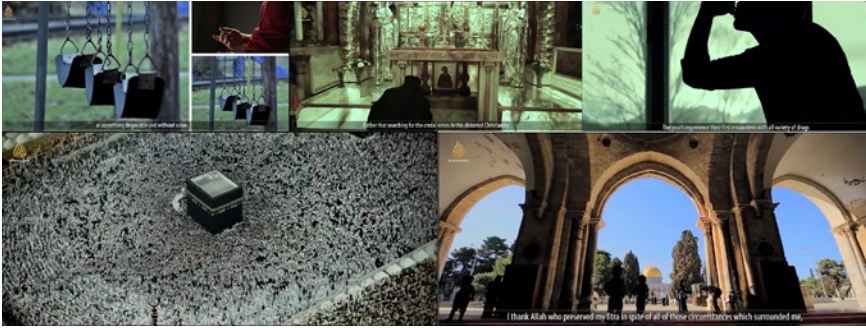
Figure 6.2   Video stills from *Fitrah – The West behind the Mask* (2017).

authors develop the protagonist's story as an example of how an individual recognises and enacts his *fiṭra*. He does not only discover his natural inclination to 'genuine' Islam, but also sets his self in relation to the binary opposition between the good forces of monotheism and its evil antagonists. In the introduction, they parallel his biography with that of Moses,[7] stating that the protagonist 'was born in the house of Pharaoh and lived among them for many years. However, God fortified his *fiṭra*' so that he was able to debunk the deceiving nature of Western societies and report about it. Hence, the authors suggest temporal continuity and present Andreas as a role model for the enactment of the primordial covenant, and, besides, also render his story an authoritative account of the 'true' nature of Western societies. This scheme ultimately sets the tone for the boundaries in which the protagonist's story is arranged and presented.

This Manichean scheme is over-articulated in both videos. As the protagonist debunks 'the West' by listing the many ways in which people in Western societies voluntarily or involuntarily distance themselves from their natural disposition, we see grey and greenish pictures desaturated from the colour red (Figure 6.2). These images do not only contrast the brightly shining impression of sites of European cities presented in the beginning to demonstrate

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[7] Adducing the biblical prophet, they emphasise that he had liberated the Israelites from captivity in Egypt and the deceiving magic of Pharaoh by 'the light of Islam [that] came in Moses' right hand' (*jāʾa nūr al-Islām bi-yamīn Mūsā*). With this, the authors refer to Quran 20:11–23, which reports on the signs of prophecy with which God has equipped Moses, among them a stick in his right hand.

'the mask' of Western societies. They are also set in opposition to the bright and colourful pictures of Muslim communities, places of Muslim religious practices and Muslim majority societies in the moment when the protagonist thanks God for 'preserving my fiṭra'.

Beyond the visual juxtaposition of Western societies and the Muslim community, visualisations and the protagonist's narrative alike introduce the moral and ethical constitution of these social collectives as a framework for the interpretation of the protagonist's personal development. They demonstrate a severe moral degeneration in European societies, which, as an epistemological background, helps the viewer to understand the external factors that render the protagonist's orientation towards Islam inevitable. The authors offer the audience a blueprint for interpreting the protagonist's individual transformation and for understanding who he is and how he is related to Western societies and the larger Muslim community. In doing so, they effectively offer a blueprint that potentially helps viewers to put themselves in the place of the protagonist and relate to his 'awakening'.

Conversion to Islam as a Crisis-induced Process

The protagonist's realisation of living in a faulty environment does not only promise positive prospects for his future. It also entails the recognition of states of crisis affecting the larger society, certain social collectives and the individual. In fact, such states of crisis play an important role in both videos. Moreover, critical moments and the recognition of states of crisis constitute important watersheds that shape the protagonists' transformation and help them adopting a different social identity. As will be detailed below, they also help the authors to portray the transformation as a 'rebirth', which not only reinforces expressions of dissociation from former patterns of identification. Incorporating such an idea, in their self-representation also enables them to gain feelings of strength, firmness, conviction, consciousness and ontological security throughout their very process of conversion and joining a specific community.

Research focusing on psychosocial dynamics in conversion processes shows no clear picture of whether the correlation between an experience of crisis or conflict and conversion to specific religious groups is empirically relevant (cf. Murken and Namini 2004: 147–53; Pargament et al. 2005;

Gooren 2007). Reviewing previous research on conversions in general, Pollack (2009: 309) concludes that, although states of crisis and deprivation affect conversion processes, it is unclear to what extent these factors have an influence. Based on her research on conversions to Islam in Germany and the USA, Wohlrab-Sahr (1999, 2006) argues that individual processes of religious transformation are often recollected as coping strategies for problems of affiliation, distinction, recognition and discrediting. By contrast, Köse (1994) critically assesses crises theories and the role the experience of a moral crisis plays with regard to the pre-conversion life histories of converts to Islam in Great Britain. He strongly argues against an understanding of conversion as a coping strategy for specific realms of problems, be they religious crises of adolescence, failed socialisation, sexuality and gender relations, social mobility, or problems related to nationality and ethnicity.

As outlined above, we find that, in the audiovisual narratives scrutinised in this chapter, experiences of crisis are part of the protagonist's reasoning about their conversion or reversion to Islam. Most explicitly, *Min al-Ẓulamāt* presents its protagonist's decision to accept Islam as being shaped by both a prolonged experience of moral uncertainty and an urgent existential threat. He introduces his religious background as having grown up with religious education in Christianity. He states that, although 'I learned much about this religion and its history [. . .] [I was confronted with] many absurd things that I could not comprehend'. To underline the insinuated incomprehensibility of the Christian dogma and practice and present it as incompatible with the needs of an ordinary person, the video shows a male person flipping through a medieval Latin manuscript. The authors thus link his individual ontological crisis to the perceived failure of Christian theology, institutions and practices in providing a framework for his 'thoughts about God and the afterlife', which speaks to widely known effects of de-traditionalisation and liberalisation in Western societies. The video presents these sequences (Figure 6.3) in greyish, dimmed images that give the impression of a confused and depressed state of mind, a subject helplessly admitting 'I had lost myself and saw no alternative. I did not know what to believe.'

The authors then insert a text slide framing the following sequence as a tribulation wrought on the protagonist by God. Using Quranic vocabulary that indicates the protagonist's weak-minded nature in relation to the divine,

Figure 6.3   Video stills from *Min al-Ẓulamāt ilā-l-Nūr* (2016).

the text has it that God tries (*ibtilāhu*) Christian with a disease, so that 'this disease and the tribulation be a reason for his guidance'.[8] The protagonist describes how, in this existentially threatening situation, he begged his Creator: 'Save me! And if there is true religion, guide me rightly and I will serve you as best I can.' Christian's narrative manifests the logic of his conversion experience, connecting it to established patterns of autobiographical narrations wherein individual transformation is identified as a coping strategy. The biographical development over a longer period of time is characterised as a state of limbo and the moment of acute existential insecurity presents itself as catharsis, providing the impulse for reorientation. However, the protagonist connects this reorientation to specific expectations so as to (re-)gain certainty and clarity vis-à-vis the previous state of ontological and existential insecurity, hence to find a religious system that offers truth and meaning. As will be detailed below, the video creates a tension between divine forces of predetermination and the agency of the protagonist, who places his destiny in the hands of God, but, at the same time, presents himself as an active individual who determines his further path.

In *Fitrah*, Andreas recollects that during his adolescence he had developed an inner sense of imbalance of the society he lived in, which rendered his personal state uneasy in terms of his social environment. He recalls that 'at first it was simply feelings [. . .] that soon turned into realisation and conviction'. Although it does not figure explicitly in his narration, the conceptualisation of a recognition process as involving an inner voice and inward perception is

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[8] *Ibtilāḥ* references Quran 89:15–16, hence some people's weak-minded understanding of (and trust in) God's power addressed in this early Meccan sura. Congruent with the presentation in the video, in an interview with *Deutsche Welle* Christian's mother accounted for the emergency surgery, and that her son had afterwards been diagnosed with Crohn's disease (Felden 2018).

Figure 6.4   Video stills from *Fitrah – The West behind the Mask* (2017).

closely linked to the concept of a natural predisposition of humanity towards monotheism that is *fiṭra*. He denounces the moral and ethical degeneration of Western societies, which he attributes to the remoteness of people from God, that is, from their natural predisposition to monotheism. On a visual rather than on the textual level, the authors identify institutionalised Christianity and the European Enlightenment in particular as a root cause of this development (Figure 6.4). *Fitrah* thus wittingly posits the Enlightenment discourse – often advanced to highlight alleged cultural clashes between European and predominantly Muslim societies – as one of the main sources of people's remoteness from God. The proposition of the video's authors is that the ideas advanced by prominent figures in the German tradition of *Aufklärung* such as Lessing and Kant only purportedly contributed to liberating people from the compulsion of ecclesiastical offers of meaning. Rather, their ideas had paved the way for the work of new idols and increased a lack of orientation on part of the people.

Contrary to other converts who consciously inscribe their interpretation of Islam in the discourse of enlightenment and modernity (Özyürek 2015), the film portrays this very discourse as a symptom of those evil forces that further people's separation from the One God. Being per se antipodal to a 'genuine' Muslim identity, the ideas of modernity and enlightenment are tangible in many spheres of society, and hence affect people's lives in a negative way. In particular, the realms of media and education, the misuse of alcohol and drugs and consumerism are interpreted as instruments of Satan to 'turn people into his slaves instead of slaves of Allah'. Debunking the West is therefore not only a paradigmatic way to investigate the failures of Western societies, but rather helps recognising the forces of evil against which the protagonist stands as one of few who enact 'pristine' monotheism.

The film thus creates a biographical narrative that contrasts the sheltered, well-educated protagonist with the moral degeneration of his environment. These authors thus not only render the story appealing and potentially compatible with all who perceive these or similar problems in Western societies. They also establish a background for rendering the protagonist's experience, decision and firmness an extraordinary example, because his biography would hardly have given him any reason to change his life so drastically, thus putting him in opposition to mainstream society.

Although allusions to the protagonists' strength and firmness dominate their narratives, we also find glimpses of yet another, post-conversion crisis. In addition to coping with individual states of crisis through conversion, the process as such, and in particular the habitual changes it entails, which are clearly articulated vis-à-vis one's social environment, also involve potentially crisis-like moments. Karin van Nieuwkerk (2014: 672–3) emphasises this in her study of female converts where she finds that conversion to Islam as such might trigger feelings of crisis among such a person 'not knowing how to give this new conviction a practical place in her life: in her work, in her family, and in her choice of clothing'. Wohlrab-Sahr (2006: 74) adds that, in contradistinction to assumptions made by the human-capital approach, conversion to Islam in Europe and the USA in particular 'produces enormous conflicts and costs. The life that they have been living, the social relationships that have been relevant, the places that they have been going, cannot be referred to easily after conversion.' Both videos point to such potential moments of crisis. Most notably, the protagonists distinctly highlight their post-conversional vulnerability in relation to their social environment, that treats them with suspicion or is generally perceived as discriminating against Muslims.[9] Connecting to generalisable patterns experienced by religious converts, the authors then reframe these parts of the narration. They link it with their meta-narrative that portrays Muslims as victims of 'Western' sociopolitics to emphasise the protagonists' inner stability in light of such stressors, as well as to highlight the even greater need among Muslim communities to close ranks against their adversaries and put their trust in God.

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[9] In *Fitrah*, around twelve minutes (i.e. one third of the whole video) are used to document systematic discrimination against Muslims in European societies.

Agency and Predetermination

The conversion processes portrayed in these videos are characterised by an individual's search for a change in the significance of his life. These individuals and their views of the self, others and their environment at large form the centre of their journey. Both videos relate the protagonists' thoughts and actions to specific collective identities that include a strong reference to numinous powers. However, in doing so, they create a tension between predetermination and individual agency. This is particularly discernible in the ways in which they portray the protagonists' biography as being determined by transcendent forces that may 'make' them Muslims, and in the way they frame their change as a spiritual journey.

Most explicitly, *Fitrah* presents its protagonist as the subject of divine guidance and predetermination. At several points in the video, Andreas affirms that he thanks God who has 'preserved my *fiṭra* [. . .] and guided me to the true religion and favoured me greatly over much of his creation'. His trajectory towards embracing Islam is not rendered as a deliberate, rational choice but rather as a consequence of the work of transcendental forces. The environment he experiences as chaotic and traumatic is neither portrayed as 'the subtle handiwork of a benevolent God' (Buckser and Glazier 2003: xii) nor as the work of human agents. Rather, it is 'Satan [who] has deviated these societies away from Allah'. Since God had allowed the protagonist to realise the faults of his own society, there is no option available other than to begin 'living for what I was created for'. Consequently, he reconstructs his conversion as the experience of a cathartic moment verbalised with such terms as guidance, being chosen, being born anew, liberty, and awaking from a nightmare. As discussed above, the verbal articulation of this experience is impressively underlined with images and sounds. The portrayal of the fault-lines of Western societies through highly desaturated, greyish and greenish pictures is contrasted with pictures of Muslims and places of Muslim religious practices presented in bright, rich and highly saturated colours. In addition, a prayer call creates an aural atmosphere that strongly contrasts with the scenes before.

Particularly remarkable is the way visualisations are used to fill in for experiences that cannot be expressed verbally. Both *Fitrah* and *Min al-Ẓulamāt* use exactly the same imagery, which was probably taken from stock footage. It
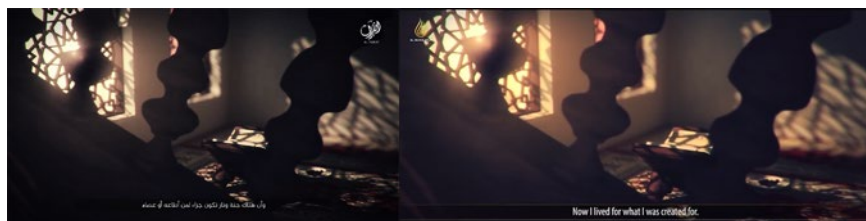
Figure 6.5   Video stills from *Fitrah – The West behind the Mask* (2017) and *Min al-Ẓulamāt ilā-l-Nūr* (2016).

conveys the obviously unspeakable multi-sensual experience of being touched and spiritually connecting to the divine (Figure 6.5).

The visual metaphor is abundantly clear. The viewer beholds a warm room, with, lying at its centre on a reading desk, an open book, probably the Quran, which is illuminated by sun rays. Looking through the slots of the banister, the viewer's gaze is distant and very closely involved in this intimate scenery at the same time. Concurrently, the light refracted by the grids of the *mashrabīya* window, illuminating the book and symbolically enlightening the reader, points to the presence of the unrepresentable God and elucidates the protagonists' guidance from the darkness into light.

In *Fitrah* in particular, the terminology used and the way in which the conversion process is visualised demonstrate a high degree of predetermination and divine guidance of the protagonist, who marks Western modernity and individualisation as hideous consequences of people's separation from God. The narrative in *Fitrah* thus rejects, albeit implicitly, the idea that the protagonist as an individual agent is the centre of his biography – a notion that is key to the discourse of modernisation and individualisation, and hence significant for processes of conversion (Hofmann 1997). Karin van Nieuwkerk (2006a: 3) further argues that '[t]he changed place of religion and the process of individualization transformed religion and religious goods into matters of individual choice. Actors choose among several religious options the worldview that suits them best.'

As Allievi (1998) and Wohlrab-Sahr (2006) have shown, the ideas of individuals who pick and choose rationally among religious systems of meaning on the religious market also apply to conversions to Islam in Europe and the USA to a certain extent, where religious behaviour more often than
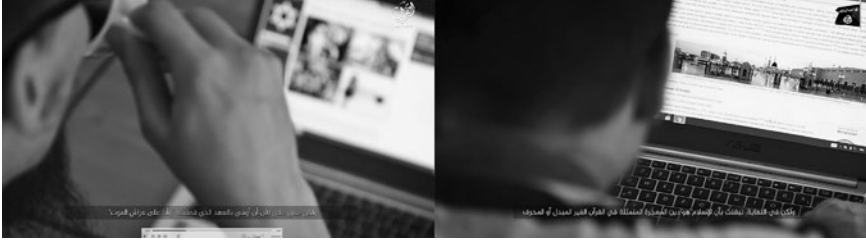
Figure 6.6   Video stills from *Min al-Ẓulamāt ilā-l-Nūr* (2016).

not is 'influenced by individual choice rather than by tradition and social constraint' (Wohlrab-Sahr 2006: 72). This idea significantly lingers in the protagonist's narrative in *Min al-Ẓulamāt*. The video frames his decision to embrace Islam as not driven primarily by supernatural forces or beliefs regarded as 'irrational' in the discourse of modernity. Rather, the authors of the video strongly accentuate the idea of the protagonist's individual agency, rendering his conversion freely chosen and 'rational', yet authentic, and stressing the autonomy of the person to whom Islam's message is meaningful. Here, Christian asserts agency by going against the grain of his social background and culture in selecting something new and strange.

Although his decision to embrace Islam is shaped by an intervention of the divine during life-threatening surgery, the video's authors do not allow the viewers to grasp the protagonist's spiritual journey. After he has promised God to search for the truth we see him searching the internet, looking for information about the creeds of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Figure 6.6) before he acknowledges that the decisive criterion for the truthfulness of religious messages is the extent to which they are devoid of customs and human interest.

Following this logic, he highlights the pristine and unchanged character of the Quranic text and recognises Islam as 'God's true religion'. He is portrayed as choosing Islam as if it were one commodity among others on the market of religious goods. This market is – of course – a priori limited to 'those who claim being monotheist like Judaism and Christianity',[10] and like Islam, whose religious traditions and dogmas the individual agent rationally

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[10] The Arabic subtitles (02:34) give the spoken text as *al-baḥth bayna al-diyānāt ka-l-yahūd wa-l-naṣrānīya*, which does not reflect the insinuation articulated in the German voiceover.

comprehends and selects accordingly. Embracing Islam here is not 'a recognition of the heart (the seat of the "intellect" [ʿaql] in Quranic terminology)' (Dutton 1999: 163), but rather becomes a matter of choice, though presented as the 'natural way'. The protagonist's decision for Islam thus seems inevitable, because it is the logical consequence of both the way predetermined by God and his self-determined search.

In both videos, the factor of self-determination becomes even more important, because the influence of religious authorities and the receiving religious community before and during the conversion process are hardly noticeable as a social and ideational framework for the protagonists' personal and spiritual development. The authors of *Min al-Ẓulamāt* and *Fitrah* use visual means to make clear that the protagonists do not first seek the advice of local religious authorities and do not even consult peers. Rather, they are portrayed as seekers who have pursued an individualist's path under the guidance of God. This undoubtedly represents a moment of empowerment and elevation of the self of converts over both traditional Muslims and non-Muslims alike – a recurrent theme in studies of conversions to Islam in Europe (Özyürek 2015). At the same time, this approach, which emphasises the individual and its agency in actively choosing his/her path through life, is symptomatic of the ways in which Salafi and jihadi teachings further far-reaching transformations of structures of religious authority that have 'fragmented' Sunni Islam on a global level for more than thirty years (Robinson 2009; Eickelman and Piscatori 2004). Bypassing traditional religious hierarchies and institutes of learning, the protagonists' conversion biographies become role models for the renunciation of long-established schemes of interpretation of the Quran and Sunna. Furthermore, the autobiographical narratives showcase another dimension of the Jihadi-Salafi 'liberation theology', because they offer a 'way out' of a society that is, on the one hand, morally degenerate and hostile to Muslims. On the other hand, many Sunni Muslim scholars have come to terms with this and advocate an integration of Muslim life in Western societies.

Establishing Boundaries and Symbolising Distance

The videos make it abundantly clear that the protagonists' lives in Germany had been characterised, among other things, by problems of belonging. These

were caused by the perceived irreconcilability of their natural inclination to a specific set of norms, values and beliefs based, on the one hand, on the Jihadi-Salafi interpretation of Islam and, on the other hand, on a social environment that is morally corrupt and distant from God. This set of norms, values and beliefs helps to structure the post-hoc recollections and to image the Muslim *umma* in general and specific Jihadi groups in particular as communities meeting the protagonists' needs for belonging, safety and ontological security. They yearn for a social and religious affiliation that is both a matter of individual choice and an expression of divine guidance. They enter into the Muslim *umma* as a community that transcends geopolitical, ethnic, racial and class boundaries and into the framework of Jihadi-Salafi ideas that offers belonging to a vanguard of believers in 'pristine' Islam. What is more, this set of principles also helps to establish 'a contrasting principle and ideology enabling the person to leave the conflicting symbolic frame [so that] the problem of precarious belonging is turned against the system that makes belonging problematic' (Wohlrab-Sahr 2006: 87).

The videos depict how the protagonists find and form new social identities, which provide shortcuts to potentially complex systems of beliefs, normative appeals and orientations, and help them to gain a different understanding of who they are, how they are related to others, and how they should behave in certain situations. This dimension of the conversion process is developed on two distinguishable yet interrelated levels. First, a transformation in their own conception of the self and their relation to their social environment is effectively narrowed down to a mental process on part of the protagonists, who contemplate, search, choose and decide on their own.

The change of roles, which is mainly mentally processed, however, requires a second level of identity formation. It means external recognition or misrecognition through the reactions and responses of the receiving community and society at large towards the protagonists. In this regard, the authors of the videos put a premium on conceptualising conversion as a transformation of the protagonists' relationship with their socio-political environment. Conversion is accompanied by specific religious beliefs, that is, the belief in one God, the recognition of his power, and the acknowledgement of his antagonists. Once these specific religious beliefs have become part of the protagonists' self-concept, they form the framework in relation to which they

mainly assess social and political facts and events. By way of their narrations, the protagonists do not only fit a certain framework; they also carefully interweave social and political facts and events into their conversion narratives, thus potentially enhancing the plausibility and authenticity of their experiences, the radical change to their selves, and the ideological meta-narrative of the videos' producers. Moral, ethical and socio-political elements form the narrative and ontological structure against which the appropriateness of the protagonists' decision for Islam is presented.

Moreover, in the light of this prioritisation, it is conspicuous that neither the implications of the social act that is conversion nor the ways in which the protagonists enact these transformations prominently figure in the visual narration. The videos recognise the protagonists' embeddedness in social relationships, but focus mainly on an individual transition rather than conceiving conversion as a complex social phenomenon with various implications and consequences for an individual, the concerned religious communities and the larger society. Also, despite indexical images showing ablution and prayer and mentioning the protagonists' changed names,[11] the videos hardly reflect the ways in which (or the practices with which) these people created, embodied and transmitted their new identity while they were still in Germany.

The videos clearly highlight, however, the ways in which the protagonists establish spatial boundaries as a compelling consequence of the change of social identities and the switch from one social collective to another. For them, becoming Muslim is incommensurate with living in their home countries. Contrary to the findings of research on European converts to Islam,[12] it is not an option for them to stay and enhance their status of being a good citizen by becoming Muslim. They reach far beyond pure ideas and habitual elements and identify the establishment of boundaries with an escape from the hostile environment.

[11] The change of name is a practice that serves the anonymisation of followers of jihadi groups. More importantly, this practice dates back to the time of the prophet Muhammad, who would change people's names if they overtly signified unacceptable pre-Islamic beliefs or practices. Thus it is a meaningful element to reflect a religious conversion to the outside world.

[12] On the discourse on conversion to Islam as a way of establishing feelings of being a good citizen of European societies, see Özyürek (2015) and van Nieuwkerk (2006c, 2016).

Their departure, declared *hijra*, becomes the ultimate consequence of their conversion to Islam and symbolises their distancing from their former environment. The audiovisual arrangement of this issue provides manifold allusions to the prophet Muhammad's role model, as it references the first *hijra* in Islamic history with connotations of emotional and spatial separation and the subsequent endurance of psycho-social hardships. By making such a fateful decision, it is implied, the protagonists will neither follow the 'simple' path of *alternation* (Travisano 1986) nor pursue a *conversion career* (Richardson 1980) in the sense that they might switch back and forth between different religious and non-religious systems of interpretation of meaning.[13] In fact, they are very clear about the consequences of the drastic change in their life under religious premises.

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[13] This model is equivalent to what Gooren (2007) has proposed as cycles of religious behaviour, i.e. pre-affiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession and disaffiliation.

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PART C

APPROPRIATING AND CONTESTING JIHADI AUDIOVISUALITY

7

ARTIVISM, POLITICS AND ISLAM – AN EMPIRICAL-THEORETICAL APPROACH TO ARTISTIC STRATEGIES AND AESTHETIC COUNTER-NARRATIVES THAT DEFY COLLECTIVE STIGMATISATION

Monika Salzbrunn

Introduction: Performances as Aesthetic Practices in a Political Context of Stigmatisation

In a world characterised by the globalised circulation of references, choreographies and images, various social, political and religious actors are increasingly appropriating specific aesthetics and means of expression to create visual and audio products that are intended for widespread circulation via social networks.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and ever increasingly since the 9/11 attacks in New York, new antagonisms have emerged that are contributing to changes in the ways Muslims are perceived in certain countries, particularly France and the USA. The experience of collective stigmatisation and the conflation of Islam with terrorism have fuelled the development of aesthetic counternarratives and artistic forms of self-representation; in particular, performances by means of which those performing distance themselves from jihadi ideologies. In the present chapter, we explore the interrelations between art and activism, activism in art and the use of art in activism in the current context in which Muslims are experiencing growing stigmatisation. To what extent have the arts been political to date, and how does political activism make use of art (poetry,

performance, painting, photography, music, video, and so on)? Starting from the Situationists' movement and following Rancière's 'Distribution of the Sensible', I will reflect on links between the aesthetic and the political. After a conceptual overview of artivism and political engagement as a research field and a consideration of its methodological challenges, I will provide concrete examples of artistic strategies that demonstrate how Muslims engage with various media in order to counter collective stigmatisation and (mis-)representation. I will share insights from three ongoing research projects, 'Undocumented Mobility (Tunisia-Switzerland) and Digital-Cultural Resources after the 'Arab Spring'', '(In)visible Islam in the City – Material and Immaterial Expressions of Muslim Practices in Urban Spaces' (both funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation) and the project 'ARTIVISM. Art and Activism. Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities' funded by the European Research Council (ERC). Each case shows how Muslims (predominantly from North Africa and from Senegal) have been developing artivistic strategies based on music in order to counter collective stigmatisation and the conflation of Islam with terrorism.

Artivism: Concepts and Methods

Artivism[1] is a neologism combining the words art and activism. It refers to both the social and political engagement of militant artists (Lemoine and Ouardi 2010) and to the use of art by citizens as a way of expressing political positions (Salzbrunn 2014, 2015; 2019b; Malzacher 2014: 14; Mouffe 2014). The term gained notoriety through its use by Latin-American activists and artists working in California: the group Mujeres de Maiz, founded in 1997 in East Los Angeles, has included 'women of colour artivists' in their recent oral history project.[2] Referring to the Chicana artist Judy Baca,

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[1] The ERC ARTIVISM project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (ARTIVISM – grant agreement No. 681880), Available at <www.erc-artivism.ch> (last accessed 17 October 2019). I would like to thank my assistants Serjara Aleman and Lisa Zanetti for their help in translating parts of the text from French to English, and Lorena Ehrbar for technical assistance.

[2] Available at <https://www.mujeresdemaiz.com/20th-anniversary> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

founder of the SPARC laboratory in 1996 in Los Angeles, Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre use the term 'digital artivism', observing that the combination of 'activism' and digital 'artistic' production' is 'symptomatic of a Chicana/o twenty-first-century digital arts movement' (Sandoval and Latorre 2008: 81). The increasing interest in mural art has led to a professionalisation of mural artists who started as political activists and now travel globally and participate in mural art festivals or tours organised by the local governments of cities like Porto[3] or Cologne,[4] which have been marketing mural art as a tourist attraction.

On a conceptual level, researchers studying *artivism* have questioned the distinction often drawn between art considered as work and art for art's sake, as discussed, for example, by Jacques Rancière in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*:

> Producing unites the act of manufacturing with the act of bringing to light, the act of defining a new relationship between *making* and *seeing*. Art anticipates work because it carries out its principle: the transformation of sensible matter into the community's self-presentation. (Rancière 2004: 44)

It goes without saying that the simple fact of sharing a common religion does not automatically lead to any kind of homogeneity or community. Nevertheless, sharing a common political goal or being subject to similar prejudices or stereotypes can lead to a shared position or situatedness, which may result in a sense of belonging to a larger group (see also Ali et al., Chapter 9).

Artivistic expression can take innumerable forms: from mural art, graffiti, comic strips, music, flash mobs, or theatre, to the invention of new forms of expression (Concept Store #3 2010). Recent forms of artivism that use performance art find their roots in other experimental artistic movements developed in the 1960s, notably Agosto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Situationism (Debord 1967) and Fluxus. Just as the Situationist International (1958–69)

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[3] See the current research project dedicated to street art in Porto. Available at <https://www.streetartcei.com/> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

[4] Available at <http://cityleaks-festival.de/> and at <https://blog.koelntourismus.de/en/arts-culture-en/the-best-quarters-and-spots-for-discovering-street-art-in-cologne/> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

movement tried to create situations (1967) with which to destabilise the audience (Lemoine and Ouardi 2010), and the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1996) used theatre as a form of therapy, contemporary artivism aims to awaken the public from its 'supposed inertia', inciting people to position themselves in relation to social issues (Lemoine and Ouardi 2010; on the transformation in and of urban spaces see Schmitz 2015 and Salzbrunn 2011). The artist, curator (at ZKM Karlsruhe) and university professor Peter Weibel (2013), referring to the global aCtIVISm exhibition, wrote: 'Audience participation in art as a consequence of the performative turn has probably created the historical prerequisites for the new civic participation in democracy.'[5] Furthermore, he considers artivism to be 'the first new art form of the twenty-first century' (ibid.). In the empirical examples that follow, I focus on the way activists and/or engaged citizens have used art – mainly music and performance – for political purposes, rather than examining how contemporary artists perpetuate the long tradition of socially and politically engaged art. Focusing on specific performances allows us to better follow the involvement of the performative audience, and to observe the direct effects of artivist action. Just as certain actors define themselves as artivists, some performances are defined as artivistic by their authors. In other cases, these terms are not used as emic categories but are imposed as etic categories (in the anthropological sense of the term) by researchers. In this chapter, I focus on the way activists have used artistic means, including performance, to express narratives that counter the stigmatisation of Muslims.

Finally, current activist movements make wide use of the latest information and broadcasting technologies, both during the process of creation and in circulating their works, images and testimonies (Salzbrunn et al. 2015). More radically, hacktivists intervene by diverting links and transforming websites. The Internet has facilitated the development of new ways of medialisation, for example, the transformation of images or messages from one medium to another, or the creation of new forms of expression, namely digital assemblages, by which I mean the combination of still and moving images with music. What have been referred to as 'new' media, which are no longer a

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[5] Available at <https://zkm.de/en/blog/2013/12/peter-weibel-global-activism> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

novelty, and their style figures have been widely used by various actors. Since the beginning of their activities, members of Islamic State (IS) have used social networks to promote their ideologies as well as to exhibit their treatment of prisoners, most notoriously disseminating aesthetically elaborate audiovisual documentations of executions. As other contributions in the present volume show, the use of memes (Dawkins 1976) and *détournement* is central to IS's creation and circulation of audiovisual narratives. Certain images evoke analogies between the conditions of detention in Guantanamo and the treatment of kidnapped journalists in IS-controlled territories – images that have become widely circulating Internet memes (including those used against IS: see Pfeifer, Fuhrmann and Wevers, Chapter 8). Conversely, Muslims who have wanted to distinguish themselves from IS have used public performance in order to stage different ways of being Muslim and/or of practising Islam, as I will show below.

Finally, anthropologists who work on artivism are exploring not only new methods of investigation, but also new ways of communicating their results, in particular with the aim of decentring the status of text (Schneider and Wright 2006) by shooting documentary films, creating comic strips, holding discussions with artivists via blogs,[6] or interacting through performances such as *Rawson's Boat*, led by the Nigerian Jelili Akiku in May 2018 at the Museum of Acquitaine in Bordeaux.

One aspect commonly raised in relation to the analysis of performances is the performativity of such acts and their transformative potential. In their constructive dialogue, Judith Butler and Ana Athanasiou propose that the performative is a specific power of the precarious (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 121). They identify the 'promise of performing disruptively – that is, the open-ended possibility of performing within, beyond, and against retroactive recitation, and expropriating limitations and injuries prescribed by it. This understood, performative politics, in its conjunction with the politics of precarity, remains open and unprefigurable, persistently and interminably susceptible to the precarious forces of eventness' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 131).

In an age in which individuality is often erased, especially in media

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[6] Available at <www.erc-artivism.ch> (last accessed 19 October 2019).

representations of refugees, the portrayal of Muslims or any other (post-) migration phenomenon as a collective, apparently homogeneous group reflects a process related to a certain form of biopolitics. At such times it is all the more imperative that research should, as Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) suggests, capture the singularity (which is always plural) 'of those politically reduced to insignificant human matter' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 133). Following Athanasiou and Butler (2013: 140–1), who conceptualise *eventness* as the 'performative exercise of social antagonism within norms that act on us in ways that exceed our full awareness and control; a social antagonism that produces disruptive and subversive effects in the normalised matrices of intelligibility', I will now analyse the (co-production) of representations through aesthetic audiovisual counter-narratives intended to oppose stigmatisation (see also Dick and Fuhrmann, Chapter 12). Do the frames of dispossession 'become a performative occasion for various contingencies of individual or concerted actions' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 143) – rewriting history, repainting representations through performances? Can actors, as Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, create a desired world by performing bodies? The empirical studies presented below show, at least to a certain degree, processes of boundary-making undertaken by certain individuals and/or groups who do not want to be assimilated into a supposedly homogeneous category of persons with 'Arab' roots who are conflated with terrorists by wider populations. In this context, 'Arab' is an emic category used by Muslims of West African origin. Analysing their performances, we observe '"aesthetics" at the core of politics' in the sense highlighted by Rancière (2004: 13): 'Aesthetic practices are "ways of doing and making" that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationship they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility' (ibid.). The three empirical examples show different ways of transforming perceptions of Muslims' being and doing, instigated by aesthetic practices performed by Muslims within public, semi-public and/or virtual spaces: musical performances, religious gatherings and the aesthetic staging of (diverse, including Muslim) bodies in a fashion show. By performing their commonality (as *Harraga*) or their sense of belonging to a Sufi brotherhood (Murids) or a place of residence (district of Maddalena), the actors concerned express themselves by means of artistic practices. Through the analysis of these artivist actions, I will also show

how Muslims take measures to avoid religious ascriptions in order to not be perceived first and foremost as Muslims, or, as Muslims, not to be conflated with terrorists. Indeed, since 9/11, as a reaction to stigmatisation processes, Muslims have been increasingly doing boundary work in order to distinguish themselves from terrorists. Following Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168):

> Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. Examining them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. [. . .] Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities.

Music and Images about Harraga

My first example demonstrates how music and musical performances about *Harraga* are presented in (semi-)public and virtual spaces. During my project 'Departures. Undocumented Mobility (Tunisia-Switzerland) and Digital-Cultural Resources after the Arab Spring', we[7] undertook a long-term ethnographic study in Tunisia, Italy and Switzerland, working with undocumented migrants (*Harraga*[8]) and focusing in particular on their representations of Europe. The on-site ethnography was conducted parallel with a netnography – an analysis of sounds, images and texts circulating via social networks, in particular on Facebook. The transnational imaginary that shines through the videos and self-created digital assemblages of photos, original images and

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[7] Project No. 146041 funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation (SNF), led by Prof. Dr Monika Salzbrunn and conducted with senior researcher Dr Farida Souiah and PhD student Simon Mastrangelo between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2017. See Souiah et al. (2018) on representations in Tunisian and Algerian cultural productions about undocumented migration.

[8] *Harraga* is of Arabic origin and literally means 'to burn'. It can also mean 'to free-ride', 'to jump a queue' or to 'run a light' (Souiah et al. 2018: 155). In the context discussed here, it refers to young men who wish to travel to Europe by boat and burn their papers in order to avoid deportation to their countries of origin.

music, as well as staged self-representations such as selfies or videos from the journey to Europe by boat, reveals the central preoccupations and interests of young men who want to migrate to Europe. These comprise the following:

1. As a destination, Italy appears very frequently, evoked by national flags, logos of its leading soccer clubs, or Italian women.
2. As symbols of success, cars are very often displayed, sometimes with women (e.g. images similar to car advertisements).
3. Young men are frequently shown with symbols of physical strength, of their power (of seduction) and of risk behaviour (alcohol, sometimes weapons), thereby positioning themselves in relation to certain social and/or religious norms.
4. Apart from images of desirable European-looking women, the only female figures featured tend to be mothers weeping and suffering from the absence or death of a loved son.

The inner conflict of desiring freedom of movement yet feeling loyalty towards a suffering mother is clearly expressed. Interestingly, the extreme risks of the journey and the disillusionment experienced in everyday life in Europe are also emphasised (see Salzbrunn et al. 2015, 2018). Religious practices or values are less prominent in such material, with the exception of prayers for a safe journey, for the mother left behind and for the (future) safety of the family that will be supported by the migrant if he is successful. These findings have been presented more extensively in other publications, so here I will present just a short lyric excerpt from Cheb Rached's 'Ya Roma', which has been performed in various different ways on Facebook as well as on TV shows, and associated with images of *Harraga* (a large corpus of lyrics[9] has been analysed in Salzbrunn et al. (2015)):

> Excerpt, Cheb Rached, 'Ya Roma'/Oh Rome, Mezoued
>
> A winter's night, we went to the sea
> Without a word of goodbye, without a travel bag

[9] Farida Souiah translated the lyrics from Arabic to French and Lisa Zanetti from French to English. I express my gratitude to both of them.

We indulged in the waves, we were not afraid of the danger
If we have to die, we would rather die valiantly.
O waves of the sea, calm down
Let the boat pass through
We arrived safely
We arrived in Italy
The little mom is happy. She is appeased.

O Rome, I am coming
O waves of the sea, do not rise [. . .]
Do not let the boat go backwards
Your prayer, O mom, when you pray
I would rather die than come back
O lights of Rome, appear

O Rome, we are coming.
O waves of the sea, be gentle
In the middle of the depths, protect us

As mentioned above, the lyrics express a deep desire to travel to Rome – the protagonist would rather die than return home. Nevertheless, his first thoughts are dedicated to his mother and her protective prayers. When Nabil Louhichi sung Cheb Rached's song 'Ya Roma' on a Tunisian TV show in 2012, he had attached several portraits of *Harraga* to his clothes. During this broadcast performance, he publicly expressed the suffering of all the families who had lost their sons. Indirectly, he also criticised the difficult living conditions that motivate young men to take such risks to leave their home country. Although neither Louhichi nor Rached are *Harraga* themselves, the contents of their performances are similar to *Harraga*'s cultural productions themselves.

In sum, in the fifty-four Mezoued lyrics examined, religion featured as a form of moral support for the migrant's journey and for the family left behind, in particular the mother, the most venerated person. The *Harraga*'s artivist practices range from circulating stagings and representations of their own multiple belongings via social networks, transgressing social and religious codes and defying expectations to the creation of digital assemblages and the public performance of songs. While Tunisia is known to have a

certain number of IS activists, in our ethnographic and netnographic findings we did not come across cultural productions that justify this evolution.

Drawing Boundaries to Reject External Jihad in Transnational Murid Events and in Local Muslim Festivals

The second example deals with semi-public performances of religious belonging (to a Sufi brotherhood) expressed through musical performances, prayer and discourses. As part of the project '(In)visible Islam in the city: material and immaterial expressions of Muslim practices within urban spaces in Switzerland',[10] we researched various ways in which a specific form of belonging to Islam is performed. At a time in which terrorist attacks were on the rise, Sufi brotherhoods, common in Senegal and popular among Senegalese abroad, represented an interesting case for studying boundary-making processes. Since the referendum in which the majority voted to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland in 2009, Muslims have been subjected to a particularly negative populist image campaign. Moreover, regional referendums against face-veiling in 2013 (Ticino) and 2018 (St Gallen) have stoked anti-Muslim sentiment in general, although the majority of Muslim residents in those regions are of Balkan origin, and do not even wear the veil. The following example shows how Muslims from sub-Saharan African countries have responded to these growing anti-Muslim discourses in Switzerland by defining boundaries between themselves and 'Arab' Muslims (as an emic category) through discourses and performances.

The Murid Brotherhood in Switzerland and its Kourel Kat (Singing Circle): A 'Bird Who Flies'

From the very beginning of the development of the Murid brotherhood, the companions of the founder, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853–1927), met regularly to form a circle to recite and to share the poems he had written. Cheikh Amadou Bamba's ideas were disseminated through religious songs. To this day, young practitioners form circles called *kourels kat* in order to

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[10] The project No. 143203, '(In)visible Islam in the city: material and immaterial expressions of Muslim practices within urban spaces in Switzerland', was led by Prof. Dr Monika Salzbrunn and conducted with senior researcher Dr Talia Bachir-Loopuyt and PhD student Barbara Dellwo between 1 April 2013 and 30 September 2017.

sing the founder's praises, with each such circle developing its own sonority. Usually, the practitioners come from the same *daara* (praying circle in a rural environment, from the Arabic word *dār*: home, farmhouse), or *dahira* (praying circle in an urban environment and/or in a diaspora, from the Arabic word *dā'ira*: circle, field, area, zone) or are made up of members who share the same marabout (spiritual authority). According to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's last son, the General Khalife Serigne Saliou Mbacké (1915–2007), 'The kourel is like a bird who flies, the providers are its wings and those who listen are its feathers'.[11] Hence, the listening audience is integral to the performativity of this musical prayer ritual.

A Message of Peace Shared in a Tense Political Context: The Khassida Jazbul Performed in front of the University of Geneva

During the visit to Geneva of Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké, a grandson of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, on a Saturday evening in 2015, a reception was held in an auditorium in a central building of the University of Geneva. Before the opening, a *kourel* took place in the square in front of the building; young men formed a rotating circle and sang. The *kourel* continued to sing for half an hour as the audience of followers arrived. When the doors opened, a hundred people entered the atrium of the building, still surrounded by the sound of the *khassaïdes*. About ten people hurriedly started to film the scene from the sides of the atrium. When the members of the *kourel* entered the auditorium, they placed carpets on the floor, to the right of the podium, and continued singing. All night long, many people came and went, talking to each other, sharing news or congratulating each other on their resplendent outfits. Many Murids filmed or took pictures of the scene, including a reporter from the Murid TV channel Bichri-TV. These images continue to circulate via social networks, Whatsapp, Youtube channels and/or as digital assemblages that are screened during other visits of Murid spiritual leaders. On the evening Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké was in Geneva, videos from his previous visit to New York and images from Murid gatherings all

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[11] A sentence repeated many times in oral Sufi culture, and often cited, e.g. in Anonyme, 'Le Koureul', *Hizbut Tarquiyyah Darou Khoudoss* [online], HTDKH, 2008, Available at <http://www.hizboudaroukhoudoss.org/?Le-Koureul> (last accessed 15 December 2016).

over the world were screened in order to reinforce a feeling of transnational community.

In the following section, I provide an analysis of some sections of verse from the *khassida* Jazbul Qulūb ilā ʿAlāmil Ghuyūb'– known as [*Jazbu*] (The Attraction of the Hearts towards God[12]). This *khassida* includes 185 verses, of which more than a third (56) refer to peace. The following verse does so in relation to the prophet Muhammad and emphasises the peace granted to his followers and his companions:

> 8- O LORD! Grant Peace and Honors to the Prophet who, as soon as he arrived, was promoted to the Pole of the Universe, as well as to his Favorable Family and his Companions.

Other verses praise the prophet's beauty and describe his character. In the following verses, a moral imperative is implied in the request for peace to be granted to those who demonstrate exemplary behaviour, to the prophet and his companions, and to all Muslim women and men:

> 15- O LORD! Grant Peace to the Doorway of Righteousness, to the Prophet whose ascendancy is broad and who has filled us with gifts, this brave Lion among the enemies who has dissipated the danger, the Doorway leading to Eminence and Honorability [. . .]

> 22- O YOU in whom my hope lies! Grant, on my part, Peace to the Draped Messenger, to His Companions endowed with Perfection as well as to the entire Muslim community [. . .]

Despite the explicit mention of enemies and danger, in the speeches that followed the *kourel* performance it was the peaceful nature of the fight against the enemy that was emphasised. In the speeches – as in other stories – parallels were drawn between significant events in the prophet's life and milestones in

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12 I refer here to the translation in French published on a Murid website: Mouride Blogger, *Khassidablog* [online], 22 November 2013. Available at <http://khassidarek.blogspot.ch/2013/11/jazbul-qulub-ila-alamil-ghuyub-jazbu.html> (last accessed 11 May 2017). I thank my assistant student N'Deye Maty Kane for having collected many sources after the fieldwork we did together in Geneva, and for translating the speech of H. E. Bassirou Sene, the ambassador of Senegal, cited in the text, from Wolof to French. Thanks also to Lisa Zanetti for the translation of this section of this chapter from French to English.

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's biography, in particular his peaceful fight against the enemy (the French colonisers) when the latter sent him into exile.

During the evening, the theme of violence was taken up by the lecturer Mouhamet Galaye Ndiaye, director of the European Islamic Institute in Brussels, as well as by the guest of honour, H. E. Bassirou Sene, Ambassador of Senegal in Geneva. In his speech, the ambassador observed that the current situation was marked by terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam, and took the opportunity to distance himself and the audience from such actions, by stressing the peaceful history of Muridism. Speaking directly to the guest of honour, Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké, grandson of the founder of the Murid brotherhood, he said:

> Dear Serigne Mbacké, know that we, here in Geneva, you have seen how we are, you have seen which pastor leads us, the Murids, the Tidjanes and many others gather and go together, we ask you to pray that this will continue in this way, that we will continue to listen to your speeches and instructions. The so-called jihadists, who go to the mosques to kill people, to take women in their homes and rape them, to take ignorant young people to give them guns and tell them to kill their closest acquaintances first, yes, because among jihadists, they are told to kill their family first, this is the test to become a real jihadist. Whoever does this is not a Murid. What Serigne Galaye said is true, and powerful. We believe that, as long as we stay behind you and Serigne Touba, as long as we learn the khassaïdes, the Koran, we know that jihadists will never come from the Muridism, Allah kuli al.[13] I think that we will never find a jihadist among the Murids.[14]

This speech echoes the sentiments of the lyrics sung by the *kourel* to the extent that both call for peace. The narrative of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's peaceful resistance of the colonisers is well-known among Murids, so the audience would easily recognise the allusion. On some occasions, the history of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's life is explicitly remembered and cited to call upon followers to be inspired by it and reject the outer armed jihad.[15]

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[13] May God forbid.

[14] H. E. Bassirou Sene, Ambassador of Senegal to Switzerland, University of Geneva, 30 May 2015.

[15] E.g. Cheikh Anta Mbacke Babou recalls Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's concept of 'Jihad for

In recent years, warnings have been issued against ways of thinking that come from the Arabian Peninsula. The Murids insist that they are peaceful Muslims, unlike other branches that propagate violence in the name of Islam. In the same way, in his responding speech, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's grandson emphasised the distinction between Muridism and the Islamic teaching that is imparted in Arabic countries (e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia), and explicitly advised listeners not to send their children to such countries, where they would be encouraged to stray from the right path, that is, a moderate one:

> If I return on the learning process, in fact, at one point we started to notice that as soon as the children have a bachelor's degree, they would leave. By the time they came back, they brought us problems, they changed the way they dressed, they grew their beards, they wore so-called 'Islamic' clothes, and made strong progress on subjects they didn't master.[16] We know very well that the bachelor's degree has a lot of positives effects on children, but, when you get to leave the country, some people will try to bring you on paths that are not yours, and you will end up saying to yourself that everything you believed in before was wrong.
>
> Professor Galaye has already said that this was not really plausible in Senegal.[17] It is for this reason that when we created the University of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, at the beginning they wanted to call it Al-Azhar but I didn't agree, because Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is more important, for us, than Al-Azhar. Everything was reformed. For example, every child who lives there must speak French and English. [. . .] Serigne Touba, if he made it through all this, it is thanks to of his beliefs and because he met good people. He has been Tidjane, Khadr and he went to Mauritania, he took everything that was good but he didn't look any further.[18]

In the speech above, Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké recalled the broad cultural education of his grandfather Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, who had been taught

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the soul' mentioned in Cheikh Anta Babou (2007), *Fighting the Greater Jihad. Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913*, Athens: Ohio University Press.

[16] He refers to young Murid graduates known to have changed the way they dress and their ideas about Islam after continuing their studies in so-called 'Arabic-Muslim' countries.

[17] Reference to armed jihadism, terrorism.

[18] Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké, University of Geneva, 30 May 2015.

by intellectuals from two brotherhoods, the Tijâniyya and the Quadiriyya, without ever needing to go to the Arabian Peninsula. Emphasising the need to distance oneself from the kind of instruction imparted in Arabic countries, specifically the University Al-Azhar in Cairo, Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké mentioned that the Murid University in Senegal was named after Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba rather than Al-Azhar. Nevertheless, two references come together in the name of the Al-Azhar Touba Institute, which has educational campuses and Murid associations in Senegal and worldwide: the reference to the Egyptian University of Al-Azhar and to the Senegalese city of Touba. The Institute is mainly funded by remittances sent by Murid migrants. Touba is the capital city of Muridism, funded in 1988 by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, and became the second-largest city in Senegal thanks to important remittances sent by Murids from all over the world.

Murid women are not generally very visible during the most important moments of religious events, yet they do take important roles in organising religious and/or political meetings. Several women with positions of responsibility in associations have a strong convening power. In Switzerland, many international Murid organisations are led by women. Their strong financial standing and their societal status are clearly expressed by their smart fashionable clothes, precious jewellery and expensive handbags. This festive, opulent way of performing gendered and religious belonging is also part of a boundary-making process whereby they distinguish themselves from other Muslim groups, which they view as excessively conservative and out of 'Senegalese tradition', which is considered as being more liberal.[19]

The collective effort to make Sufi Islam audible and visible is part of a performative strategy that should be analysed with reference to intersectionality. This concept, initially developed in order to facilitate analysis of the intersection of gender, race (in the sense in which the term is used in North American literature) and class can be extended to include religion, nationality or geopolitical location (e.g. boundary-making vis-à-vis another group defined on the basis of continent of origin, even if expressed in terms of language or race) (see Crenshaw 1991: 1,241–99). Following Crenshaw, I

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[19] Observation of verbal and non-verbal reactions, made during another Murid assembly, when converts wearing the hijab had arrived.

believe that to understand the boundary-making that took place at the event in Geneva, it is necessary to take into account the articulation of race, class and gender in the given historical and social situation – particularly since the majority of Murids in Switzerland are highly qualified immigrants who possess greater social, cultural and relational capital than the country's average resident. Religion and gender, as well as other categories of multiple belonging, are performed individually and collectively in a boundary-making context in which such performance often expresses reactions to experiences of exclusion from certain public and/or mediatised spaces. Thus, Murids in the Lake Geneva area perform (semi-)publicly their belonging to the Swiss public sphere, while distinguishing themselves from other Muslim groups by condemning them as violent and deviant, and most importantly, incompatible with the peaceful form of Islam propagated by the Murid brotherhood since its inception. As I have written elsewhere (Salzbrunn 2019a), we observe here an 'ethnicisation of religion' insofar as sub-Saharan Africans are distancing themselves from 'Arabs' (in the emic sense) and from extremely conservative Muslims by asserting the uniqueness of the way they practise their religion, claiming that the Sufi practice developed by a 'black' African is more peaceful than the school of Islam practised and taught in training centres on the Arabian Peninsula. Although Sufism has historically been characterised by rather discreet and private ritual practices, the anti-Islam political context has encouraged Murids in Switzerland to perform their belonging publicly, emphasising their specific poetical, mystical and musical heritage. To this end, religious activists create soft power through artistic practices (music, poetry, recitation, performance) – a strategy that has led them to participate in exhibitions in Lausanne and Geneva and to give a performance in the MEG (Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève). Following the dictates of situational analysis, any observations should always be considered in their specific context. Speeches made on other occasions, such as in the wake of the attacks against the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists, have focused on reminding listeners that Senegalese Muslims belong to *umma*, for example. While the attacks were condemned by most speakers, including the Senegalese President Macky Sall, cartoons have also received much criticism in Senegal in the name of Islam.

Whereas many Senegalese residents in Switzerland enjoy a good social

standing, the same is not true in Genoa, in Italy, as the following example shows.

Fashion Show in the Maddalena District of Genoa, Italy: Defying Stigmatisation

The third example deals with a public performance: a fashion show, organised by residents, tailors and vintage-shop owners in order to counter prejudiced ideas about their locality. When I arrived in Genoa in the autumn of 2017 to conduct a long-term study on art and activism, I was struck by very negative headlines in the local press, which portrayed the Senegalese population as a 'mafia' that was flooding the streets of the old town with crack.

Having worked for twenty years on the political and religious networks of Senegalese and their translocal social networks in Senegal, Europe and the USA, I found the negative media coverage in Genoa, associating Senegalese with mafia and drugs, a surprise. It contrasted starkly with the positive media representations enjoyed by Senegalese in New York (Salzbrunn 2004) or the images they themselves cultivate publicly in Geneva (Salzbrunn 2016). From the beginning of my stay there, I was compelled to reconsider my understanding of the local, regional and national logics of Senegalese people's self-representations. Given that I had chosen the city of Genoa because of its vibrant and large artivist actions as one of the fields to be covered as part of my project ERC ARTIVISM,[20] discovering the variability of representations in circulation relating to the Maddalena – one of Genoa's most demographically diverse districts – thus created a bridge between two projects, with the performative, artivistic representation of self and others as a common issue.

As we will see later, religion, or, more precisely, Islam, hardly seemed to be an issue during the preparation and organisation of the fashion show organised in the Via Maddalena. The only time religious practices were mentioned was in setting the date for the show, in order to avoid the event coinciding with Ramadan, as had once mistakenly happened in the past.

The district of La Maddalena, near Genova's port, is characterised by

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[20] 'ARTIVISM. Art and activism. Creativity and performance as subversive forms of political expression in super-diverse cities'. Available at <www.erc-artivism.ch> (last accessed 19 October 2019).

the diversity of its population. Linked to historical immigration that centred around transport nodes, like many port localities, the Maddalena saw workers from formal industries and the informal economy arrive at the port from both overseas and inland. Today, La Maddalena, part of Genova's *centro storico* – the largest old town in Europe, as the tourist office proudly informs visitors – also has the highest percentage of residents with an academic degree. This indicates that the area is already showing signs of gentrification processes, of which artists and intellectuals are ambivalent precursors.

As already mentioned, Maddalena's media image is tainted by local press reports that hold the 'Senegalese Mafia' responsible for flooding the district with drugs. At the entrance to one of the streets leading to the old town, there are still traces of a message from the Second World War that warns soldiers about sexual diseases (transmitted by prostitutes) and against violence. Some contemporary tourist guides also advise readers that it can be risky to walk the streets, some of which are almost too narrow for more than two people to pass. Nonetheless, more and more groups of cruise ship tourists now pass through the historical centre because Via Garibaldi, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site with its many museums and palaces from the Renaissance period, is just a stone's throw from Via Maddalena. The basements of the buildings in Via Maddalena house numerous artisan workshops, including many tailors and fashion designers of West African (mainly from Senegal, but also from Ivory Coast) and Ligurian origin. In the same street and those nearby there are also many vintage stores, which are run either by charitable organisations or by individuals and address a range of clientele in terms of purchasing power. In 2017, dressmakers and shop managers came up with the idea of coming together to organise a fashion show on Via Maddalena. One of the motivations was the desire to counter perceived associations of the neighbourhood with crime and danger, and to value and celebrate the diversity of its residents, in terms of their origins, status, social class, and so on. I followed the preparations for the second show in autumn 2017, together with members of the ERC ARTIVISM team (Raphaela von Weichs and Pascal Bernhardt), with whom we filmed the activities.

From the outset, the fashion show seemed to me to be a form of political performance, a staging of self and otherness, a way of staging diversity and commonality – the sharing of a common neighbourhood. The shots filmed of

the preparation work revealed 'what [was] at stake' (Lallier 2018) in the performance exercise, particularly at the moment when bodies and new clothing came together.

As we filmed the preparations, we asked the (non-professional) models how it felt to wear the clothes. A young man of North African descent, who had experienced some setbacks in his teens, commented that when he donned a silk suit from the 1960s it made him 'feel important'. The whole experience of rejection, of being looked down upon as he had been at times during his youth, seemed to be forgotten the moment he stepped into a suit representing a different status. Another participant in the event, a former political refugee from Morocco known locally as the 'white wolf' for his generosity, also radiated joy and pride, announcing to camera that he loved the neighbourhood 'more than anything'. Later, Cheikh, the Senegalese boss of a sewing workshop, proudly traced the migratory route of his family of dressmakers: from Senegal via Ivory Coast to Italy. For him, the event was above all an opportunity to show his creations to a wider public. We filmed Cheikh in his studio, while he worked diligently on a suit:

> It's a job I grew up with. It's now 28 years of work. I started in our country, Senegal, and I did it in many African countries before coming here. We did it in Mali, we even had a sewing workshop there. We did it in Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, we did a lot of countries. In Africa, everyone sees that it is a job of Senegalese.

Since one of the aims of the fashion show's organisers was to value the skills and work of tailoring, the common profession emerged as a rallying point that seemed more important than the origins or religious affiliation of the people involved. Nevertheless, religious practices did become relevant when, as in the spring of 2019, the event took place during Ramadan. The common desire to publicly showcase the fashion creations ultimately prevailed over criticism of the scheduling. In addition, a critical attitude towards the globalised fashion industry and in favour of championing local creations and second-hand circuits brought the protagonists together.

Just as individual shots triggered statements about how the body and mind dwell in clothing, the shooting of the event itself reinforced the staging of oneself. Dances, acrobatics, exotic make-up with white lines on the

cheeks, all kinds of gestures such as those expressing joy or greetings were performed in a theatrical fashion by everyone living in the neighbourhood who was transformed into a model for a day. The representation of the self, of one's attachment to the neighbourhood, to the locality, appeared to be paramount – far more important than the performance of one's origins. To live and to perform the joy and pride of being the protagonist of the day in the Maddalena district was an opportunity to assert one's place in this place, a particularly important experience for people affected by the growing racism in Italy, especially (first- and second-generation) refugees. The activists, engaged in representing their neighbourhood and fighting against racism, used performance art – a fashion show with masquerade, dance and music performances – to counter the stereotypes disseminated by local media in relation to the whole district as well as to specific groups ('Senegalese', 'refugees', 'immigrants'), by appropriating public and media space.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three different creative strategies of boundary-making established by Muslims with different origins who reside in different places. I was able to offer a nuanced analysis of the situated politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006) because I did not pre-define any supposedly homogeneous group as the subject of my research, nor did absolutist conceptions of religion or migration narrow the field of my interest. Instead, I explored the interrelations between art and activism, focusing in particular on the use of art in activism in the context of the growing stigmatisation of Muslims by certain media.

Frequently, the process of creating academic representations about migration and religion begins with the definition of research subject/questions, approach and methods. This procedure is problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, there is the risk that researchers' preconceptions will shape the subject they want to investigate. Secondly, in the process of translating the project to make it easier for participants to understand, a hegemonic form of othering – by which migrants are reified as a distinct, supposedly homogeneous group – informs how migration is represented in the course of interaction with the subjects, if migration or a specific form of religion is emphasised as the key issue. Thirdly, when the results are disseminated, if migration or religion are

over-emphasised as cause and/or effect, the self-fulfilling prophecy of reification is completed with the reception process.

In the *Harraga* example, music, video performances and digital assemblages circulated via social networks represent the values, desires, and transgressions of social norms of those who create them. The staging of risky behaviour (alcohol, physical force and so on) does not stand in contradiction to prayers for a safe journey to Europe. Producing or referring to musical productions in which *Harraga* feature as adventurous and courageous protagonists is a way of countering preconceptions and gaining recognition through the arts. Whereas moral and/or religious values like respecting one's parents, in particular the mother, are implicitly or explicitly part of the *Harraga*'s references, engaging in an outer jihad was not a relevant theme for the population we worked with during our ethnographic research.

The two subsequent empirical examples focused on specific events within urban spaces. Attending events allows us to observe what is important for a particular population residing in a specific place. Whether organised as a disruptive form of performance within public space or an event that refers to issues already supposedly overcome – such occasions have the potential to incite the creation or foster the maintenance of groups around a common political goal. Experiencing racism in a local, regional and national context of growing xenophobia in Genoa has, for instance, led to local resistance movements in which the religion or origin of the participants are not central to their politics of belonging (Yural-Davis et al. 2006). The protagonists' representation of local life through the fashion show has contributed to changing the way knowledge production is situated, challenging the hegemony of printed media and establishing counter-images within public space, disseminated via social media and films. Following Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018), this way of pushing further the actor-centred approach might contribute to fostering the 'end of the cognitive empire', making way for alternative epistemologies. Hence, the rather hegemonic nature of the concept of 'participation' (by whom to what, from which perspective?) can be constructively overcome by researching the performative (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) impact of a disruptive and/or unpredictable event (Amiotte-Suchet and Salzbrunn 2019) in public space.

From a methodological point of view, our work with the camera also

highlighted how bodily postures were transformed by wearing particular clothes for the fashion show in Genoa. The recovery of dignity that took place when the clothing and the models became one was clearly visible in our footage. Here, in the words of Rancière (2004), politics (of recognition) are obviously aesthetic.

In the case of the Murids' festive event in the Lake of Geneva region of Switzerland, Murids' own self-representations have already been circulating in social networks and media for some time. The event, particularly the moment of Cheikh Amadou Bamba's grandson's arrival, was documented by a dozen cameras operated by Murid professional filmmakers as well as amateurs. Just as images from his previous visits all over the world were screened during the event, the images from Geneva will be projected at future events worldwide, demonstrating that Muridism is a global phenomenon. Emphasising that the Sufi Islam practised by Murids is peaceful and condemns armed outer jihad and disseminating that (audiovisual) image is a key objective for Murids, especially since 9/11, as we have shown in different ethnographic studies (Salzbrunn 2004, 2016).

In a context of stigmatisation and exclusion by certain media, especially since the strong increase in the popular and political influence of the far right in Italy since 2018, as well as, to a certain extent, in France, the desire to counter preconceptions by celebrating the value of 'urban diversity' (Reuschke, Salzbrunn and Schönhärl 2013) is stronger than ever. Talking about professional trajectories, as the Senegalese tailor does in a locality that others portray as a drug dealers' milieu, is a way of counter-performing othering images of oneself not only individually but also collectively. Both the Senegalese tailors in Genoa and the Murids in Geneva are keenly aware of the importance of publicly staging alternative expressions of belonging. These artivistic performances and their mediatisations are part of a media battle within which we, as researchers, also participate. Hence, to answer the question raised in the introduction to the present chapter, actors have used the 'frames of dispossession' as a 'performative occasion' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 143) to rewrite history and to create their own image, visible within public space.

Finally, creating disruptive artistic performances like fashion shows in a stigmatised urban space or religious musical recitations in a very secular

urban environment are ways of using art as a political tool. These forms of artivism are spectacular and disruptive in their local contexts and beyond, producing counter-narratives and countering stereotypes related to ethnic, national or religious belonging.

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8

RE-ENACTING VIOLENCE: CONTESTING PUBLIC SPHERES WITH APPROPRIATIONS OF IS EXECUTION VIDEOS

Simone Pfeifer, Larissa-Diana Fuhrmann and Patricia Wevers

Introduction

Two women dressed in black hoodies, with their faces hidden behind black veils, stand behind a kneeling woman with a veiled face, who wears an orange jumper. The hand-held camera and clumsy frontal framing offer glimpses of a living room with long curtains, sofas, cushions and a flat-screen TV. The two standing women rhythmically shake long knifes in their hands to the intradiegetic remixed version of the well-known Islamic State (IS)[1] nasheed *Ṣalīl al-ṣawārim*. As the song comes to the call 'Allahu Akbar' and the remix's trap rhythms come to the fore, one woman pretends to cut off the kneeling woman's head, then all three start to dance with their hands. At the end, the two women dressed in black dance closer to the camera and point their knives directly into the lens. As the music fades out, only the women's giggling laughter can be heard.[2]

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[1] Other terms, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), refer to earlier self-designations and their translation from Arabic.

[2] We thank all members of the research project Jihadism on the Internet, especially Christoph Günther, for their insightful comments on the videos as well as on this chapter, and Pip Hare for her sensible language editing.

In the course of 2015, a large number of Arabic-speaking YouTubers responded to and reproduced staged beheading memes[3] like the one described above. These popular amateur videos are set in intimate living rooms. The soundtrack of these videos is generally a version of the popular IS nasheed *Salīl al-ṣawārim* (The Clanging of the Swords) (see Fuhrmann and Dick, Chapter 12). As the scene and the nasheed progress, anticipation of a violent culmination intensifies – then viewers' expectations are confounded. The soundtrack marks a turning point in the narrative. Instead of an actual beheading scene, after gestures of cutting off the head with the knife, the standing and kneeling performers suddenly start to move their bodies, dancing humorously and suggestively to the 'song'. The phenomenon, originally mainly produced by Egyptian YouTubers, went viral on YouTube and was imitated in many Arabic-speaking countries and received media attention across the globe.[4]

The colour-coding of the black and orange costumes,[5] the choreography and the gestures clearly reference IS-authored decapitation videos, for example, the ones of the journalists supposedly murdered on camera by Mohammed Emwazi,[6] which became infamous in the course of 2014 and 2015. Yet by choosing domestic indoor settings, amateur hand-held camerawork and covering the victims' heads, the makers of these YouTube videos do not strive to replicate IS's professionally-produced staged beheadings with their multiple camera angles and close-up shots. Furthermore, the female performers and their giggling stand in stark contrast to IS productions that rarely depict women as actors with agency. The clear reference to the mediated

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[3] We follow Limor Shifman's (2014: 41) definition of internet memes 'as (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users'.

[4] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFR1AUA_RPo> (last accessed 16 September 2019); see also Jones 2015; Saul 2015; Arabisches Internetphänomen veralbert Hymne der IS-Miliz (2015).

[5] Clothing their victims in orange jumpsuits became one of the most powerful symbols of IS's attempt to reverse relationships of power. On aspects of rhetorical resistance in this practice, see Richey and Edwards (2019).

[6] Mohammed Emwazi, known as the faceless executioner Jihadi John, appeared in several IS videos (Mekhennet 2017: 261–2; see also Chandrasejaran and Prephan 2019 on the 'iconic character').

IS beheadings evoked by the IS nasheed *Ṣalīl al-ṣawārim* is subverted by the use of the exegesis forbidden remixed version that includes trap music elements.

These YouTube videos have been interpreted as part of anti-IS humour and digital cultural resistance (Al-Rawi 2016), as a movement to counter IS's spreading of fear by disseminating via Internet ever more graphically violent and horrifying portrayals of beheadings. While this observation seems to hold on a general level, in our contribution we want to explore the techniques that are at work in these forms of engagements that we term re-enactments of violence. With re-enactments of violence, we describe the embodied (video-) performance of executions that relate to decapitation videos mainly produced and distributed online by IS media outlets. Beyond recognising the re-enactments as humorous and/or defiant attempts to counter IS's iconic and (operative) images, we want to go further, to explore how they transform and redirect forms of violence within and between very different digital and political realms.

In this contribution, we begin by defining how we conceptualise resistance and re-enactment, and how this relates to discussions on (digital) public spheres. Secondly, we examine the iconic features of IS beheadings, and the creative techniques and practices that different actors use in their re-enactments and reinterpretations of that violence. We point to similarities used in different re-enactments while showing how re-enactments of violence may differ according to the contexts in which they are set. Thirdly, we relate our examples to discussions on cultural resistance, power and hierarchy, and argue that re-enacting images of violence can not only be used as a memetic form of cultural resistance to counter IS iconography, but can also be used to transform those 'projectilic' (Kraidy 2017) or 'operative' images (Klonk and Eder 2018) into different forms of resistance and hatred.[7] We therefore recognise that re-enactments and their mediations can become actors with an existence in their own right (Mitchell 2011: xix).

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[7] We distinguish re-enactments of violence from 'mere' imitations of the violent acts on the basis that imitations do not relate aesthetically to iconic forms or practices. Hence, we do not see the decapitation of two Scandinavian tourists in Morocco by IS supporters in December 2018 as a re-enactment of violence.

The Constitution of Re-enactments of Violence, Resistance and (Digital) Public Spheres

While we acknowledge that beheadings in IS videos might themselves be re-enactments, appropriated and performed for the camera (see Zywietz and Beese, Chapter 4), we point to the iconic status of these videos, which is testified to by the diverse ways in which the iconic images are taken up by different (digital) contexts and publics. We apply W. J. T. Mitchell's (2011: xix) method of 'Iconology' and bring it together with ethnographically-informed investigations of audiovisual encounters in social media. Mitchell (2011: xix) points out:

> Images, from an 'iconological' standpoint, are both verbal and visual entities, both metaphors and graphic symbols. They are, at one and the same time, concepts, objects, pictures, and symbolic forms. Some of them become operative forces in sociopolitical reality, attaining what is commonly known as 'iconic' status – widely recognizable, and provocative of powerful emotions.

He thus brings together the interpretative inquiry into the meanings of images in their historical contexts and their power to influence human behaviour with the 'agency' of images – 'how they live and move, how they evolve and mutate, what sorts of needs, desires and demands they embody' (2011: xix). This is very close to our ethnographically-informed approach whereby we follow images and their entanglements in different digital environments, taking account of how they are socio-culturally situated. Following Pollock's (2012) assertion that images become iconic when they come to represent the entire complexity of an event in its exceptional singularity, we examine how such an iconic status may be defied by (re-)appropriation and reinterpretation.

In our analysis of the videos, we draw on the term 'cultural resistance' following Duncombe (2002: 5), who describes it as the use of culture consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist or change a dominant structure. Here, the dominant structure provided by the IS decapitation videos is defied in the re-enactments.[8] Our goal is to offer a deeper understanding of 'the

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[8] IS videos themselves could be seen as a form of cultural resistance against Western dominance or certain internal Islamic debates, yet such considerations go beyond the scope of this chapter.

people's' capacity to resist narratives circulated by IS by re-appropriating its audiovisual material as a resistive practice. Through our examples, we reveal how cultural resistance 'works to foster or retard radical political activity' (Duncombe 2002: 5) and how it may be interpreted as anything from rebellious deviance or emancipatory struggle, according to a viewer's ideological perspective. This raises the questions of which contexts publicly acknowledge and understand such acts of cultural resistance as worthy of 'serious' attention and of what the common creative techniques of re-mediations of iconic IS beheadings are. We therefore also examine what happens to re-enactments of violence in the digital public sphere where re-enactments by actors in Arabic-speaking countries as well as in different European contexts intersect.

In recent years, the concept of re-enactment has not only been widely used in artistic performance practices but has also been discussed in historical sciences, history of art, anthropology and cultural and media studies. When it was initially used in historiography, the term primarily referred to the performance of past events in order to generate new forms of knowledge or to develop methods for re-living and re-thinking the lives of past actors (Agnew 2004). In our contribution, we follow Dreschke et al. (2016a, b), who consider re-enactments from a media-practice-based perspective. Dreschke et al. (2016a, 10–11) define re-enactments as media practices that are situated in time (historical), space (geographical-topological) and within a (re)mediated conveyor of traces (*Spurenträger*). They are creative (media) appropriations that produce new material-aesthetic forms. In this sense, re-enactments are performative practices that always relate to another time and another space, and, most importantly, reference other forms of mediations like films and videos. In our examples, they are not necessarily about the actual re-living of a certain event, but they are nonetheless always a re-interpretation of a point of reference. In contrast to enactment, a *re*-enactment always relates to the mediation of an event (with a specific time and space), a film or icon; while the physical practices comprise one medium within a chain of remediations.

In this contribution, we focus on the mediated forms (embodied, audio-visualised or digitised) and examine how the temporal and spatial dimensions of re-enactments are interconnected and mediated in particular ways as socio-culturally-specific public activities. It is especially this group-related activity that becomes relevant when looking at re-enactments as part of public spheres,

especially digital public spheres, which Martin Zillinger (2017) has referred to as graduated publics. By focusing on 'making things public', the concept of graduated publics challenges the binary opposition of public versus private realms and the concept of a unified public or counter-public sphere.

When writing about re-enactments of IS decapitation videos, we acknowledge what Friis (2018), with reference to staged executions, has called the 'public display of violence' (see also Krona, Chapter 5). She argues that it is not the arbitrary 'brutality' of IS executions, but the public visibility of the acts that are facilitated through the professional use of media technology, the transgression of sensibilities and as part of an alternative political order. In this sense, it is not only the killing of foreigners that successfully attracted global attention (Koch 2018: 25) but what Azoulay (2012) identifies as the three defining characteristics of the execution portrait: the transgression that is seen in the image, the manner in which the image is made public and the horror an image generates. Applying Azoulays' (2008) theoretical considerations of the 'photographic situation' and the 'civil contract of photography' to the decapitation videos that we are concerned with, it becomes clear that the imbalance of power that is inscribed in the roles of perpetrator, victim and audience is crucial. The '*individual victim* is forced to actively participate in the performance' (Friis 2018: 249, italics in the original), but the imbalance of power and the violence are inscribed not only upon the body of the victim but also upon the body of the spectator.

Defying Violent Visuals: Two Ends of a Spectrum?

The Levant Front's counter-Islamic State video (henceforth *Levant Front*)[9] was uploaded in 2015 to a YouTube channel with content focusing on Middle Eastern, British and US American politics and has attained nearly a million

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[9] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OEvK9nO94Y> (last accessed 16 September 2019). The 'Levant Front' (*al-jabha al-shāmīya*) is an umbrella for several rebel groups in Northern Syria, founded in late 2014. They have been coined a major 'anti-ISIS opposition group' and have received support from the US government (Cafarella and Casagrande 2016: 6). They are known for conducting arrests and executions in their province, and their status is highly controversial. Hence, their production and release of the video described sparked a great deal of critical debate in social media.

Figure 8.1   Still from *The Levant Front's Counter-Islamic State Video* (2015). © Levant Front (note: persons anonymised by authors for ethical reasons).

views to date. On the YouTube channel, a short contextualising paragraph summarises the video in English:

> On December 7, 2015, al-Jabhat al-Shamiya (The Levant Front), a Syrian rebel group in Aleppo, released a video that imitated the Islamic State's produce up to the moment that it seemed they were going to execute the Islamic State prisoners, at which point the Front brought in a cleric to instruct on justice.

Five minutes into the professionally filmed and edited video ten captives in orange jumpsuits are standing in a row with naked feet, their heads bowed down. Behind them, ten heavily armed men in camouflage suits and bala-clavas are shown with multi-camera angles and close-up shots. The shackled men in the front are pushed to the ground, kneeling in the dirt when pistols are being pointed at their heads. The iconic choreography and landscape are reminiscent of IS audiovisual productions, for example, the video released by Al-Furqan Media Foundation *Although the Disbelievers Don't Like It* (2014), which features 'Jihadi John' among a group of executioners preparing for acts of violence. Hence, the description in English not only serves to prepare viewers for the content, but also potentially to prevent the video from being deleted immediately by the website's administration.

The turning point stated in the description occurs at minute 5:26 into the video and comprises three elements that interrupt the expected course of events. The first element is the fading in of a text proclaiming 'Muslims are not criminals' in English and Arabic. This is the first time that English-speaking viewers are directly addressed. Up until that moment, non-Arabic speakers might have been misled by the resemblance of the video to IS propaganda material, especially if they were unaware of the political stance of its producer. The subsequent textual content addresses Arabic-speaking Muslims, providing contextual and linguistic elaboration to make a religious and political statement regarding Islamic State's executions. The second element is the unmasking of the men behind the captives. This destroys the anonymity of the executioners that is obligatory in IS executions. They walk away and leave their captives behind. The significance of executioners' anonymity also becomes clear in journalist Souad Mekhennet's (2017) writings on the 'unmasking' of Jihadi John's identity. The third element is the sudden appearance of the imam who gives a speech addressing the captives and the camera, denouncing past IS executions on the basis of religious arguments. As the imam starts to make a speech condemning IS executions, photos of them are blended in; the captives look at each other with bewilderment but relief.

Non-Arabic-speaking viewers would notice this element but would not understand the reasoning put forward by the religious authority, since no translation is provided of the imam's speech.[10] What adds to the potential confusion and discomfort of viewers, regardless of their language competencies, is that it remains unclear whether the captives knew that they were participating in a re-enactment rather than an actual execution. From an ethical perspective, this raises the question of whether the imam's condemnation of IS violence is not counterbalanced by the trauma and torture experienced by the captives in the same video, if they did not know what was about to happen to them.

The video is an act of cultural resistance that draws upon the visual

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[10] It is beyond the scope of this contribution to elaborate on changing forms of Muslim religious authority in relation to militant digital environments (see Bunt 2018; Eickelman and Anderson 2003).

memory of the viewer, works as an educational piece for an 'exclusive in-group', and leaves less informed viewers with more questions than answers. While the use of iconic, easily recognisable elements, such as the captives' orange jumpsuits and the executioners' military outfits and balaclavas, makes the re-enactment video's reference point clearly identifiable, care is also taken to reproduce more subtle details. The cinematography, camera angles, visual effects and branding of the opening titles are clearly part of the re-enactment. In terms of the soundtrack, not only the nasheed but also other audio effects directly reference IS propaganda videos.

Unlike the aforementioned example, *ISIS Bloopers*[11] is a humorous re-enactment of the infamous execution of the American journalist James Foley. The video was uploaded in February 2015 on a YouTube channel called בערך, which mainly features comedy content from Israel. The video consists of the imagined 'outtakes' from an execution video, and features a camera-man, an executioner and a captive, who interact with each other in English. The visuals, which evoke the imagery of iconic IS executions, produce a sense of dissonance in combination with the jokes made by the protagonists. The video is directed at an English-speaking audience familiar with visual parody and with allusions to different frames of reference. From the very first frame, it is obvious that this is a comedy video and not IS propaganda. It opens with a clapperboard and a voice saying in exaggeratedly broken English 'Kill all the infidels, take *wahad*'.[12] The executioner re-enacts the start of a speech from the James Foley video but fails to remember his lines. Unlike the aforementioned video by the *Levant Front*, this video shows a lively interaction between captive and executioner, ascribing agency to the captive, which in itself already testifies to the video's defiant stance. Despite kneeling in a subordinate position, he acts as an intellectually superior subject, correcting the executioner's English while laughing with/at the latter's mispronunciation. He even tries to take advantage of the executioner's momentary distraction to flee the scene, but he is recaptured. The captive expresses concern for the executioner when he cuts himself with the knife and advises him to hold his hand up to reduce

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[11] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz3oWmDUW1Q> (last accessed 16 September 2019).

[12] One, in Arabic.

the bleeding. In the next scene, the captive is already dead, and his body can be seen lying on the ground. When the executioner, cameraman and sound recordist realise that they had forgotten to press the record button, the sound-man replaces the captive to become the next execution victim for the camera to record. This narrative twist emphasises the interchangeability of IS victims, making it clear that their identities are subordinate to the primary objective of filming a performance that can be shared widely to incite fear. And herein lies the potential for a humorous re-enactment to become a force of resistance against IS, as Al-Rawi (2016) has observed. By drawing on a variety of frames of reference, producers of such videos destabilise the aesthetic styles and structures that characterise IS's execution videos in order to subvert their monolithic narrative.

The above-mentioned examples show two ends of a broad spectrum of videos that re-enact IS executions. The re-enactments evoke the iconography of IS execution videos by replicating camera angles, audio and visual effects, postures and clothing. While both videos share the same goal, to defy the narrative of the IS, the *Levant Front*'s serious commentary addresses a very specific Arabic-speaking group, whom it seeks to convince by means of authoritative religious-political argument, whereas the comedy *ISIS Bloopers* uses humour to ridicule IS, appealing to a wider English-speaking audience. Acting in or watching either video is nonetheless a visceral embodied experience. Affecting the viewer and evoking emotions and bodily reactions is the key strategy by which the videos' producers aim to reach wide audiences and thereby undermine the potency of the 'source' material. Both videos achieve this objective, but they do so in contrasting ways.

Circulating through (Digital) Public Spheres: From Videos to the Streets to (Social) Media and Back Again

Many researchers who study IS decapitation videos have pointed out the importance of the visibility and the public display of violence (Friis 2018; Krona, Chapter 5), not only for an immediate audience but also for one reached by global digital distribution via social media platforms (Winter 2015) or journalistic outlets (e.g. Zelizer 2016). In our consideration of re-enactments of violence produced by different activists in Europe, the

public display of violence and the interrelations between different offline and digital public spheres also come to the fore. The activist collective '12th Memo Rise' came to prominence with the re-enactment of an IS execution in the pedestrian zone of the German city of Essen in October 2014. Hassan, one of the founding members of '12th Memo Rise', recounts the group's first theatrical staging, as he called it, in a longer interview with the authors:

> We stood at the Limbecker Square. The silent scene started. Actually, we only wanted to perform there, two of us kneeling, one standing with a knife, one with a pistol, just standing there and nothing more. After five minutes the police came and told us: 'you have to explain immediately because we've had more than 200 callers.' I think the number is exaggerated, but he said a high number of callers had told the police: 'there is an attack happening in Essen'. People had already gathered, a huge crowd, [police] calling 'who is responsible for this chaos?' So I stepped forward and showed my ID. (Hassan, 12 June 2019)

Hassan's description highlights the confusion that the group's performance created among those who saw it. Because the activists did not provide any explanation or contextualisation, the embodied re-enactment of the IS beheadings was seen as a 'real' terrorist threat by many of the people who came across the scene in Essen. Only when requested to do so by police did members of the collective improvise speeches and write contextualising explanations on the concrete with chalk to explain their actions. As in the videos discussed before, it was the iconic orange prison suits, the perpetrators veiled in black with guns and knives, and the kneeling and standing poses that clearly referenced IS executions. Furthermore, the appropriation of the black flag made the allusion to IS execution videos unmissable. The emblematic symbol on the black-and-white banner referenced the IS flag, while the additional text 'Ausgebildet in Bonn Braunschw. Wuppertal' (educated in Bonn, Braunschweig, Wuppertal) referred to Jihadi actors' connections with major German cities, highlighting Germany's transnational entanglements with the war in Syria and Iraq.

Mediated executions by different IS media outlets were the main point of reference for the collective '12th Memo Rise':

Figure 8.2   Stills from *IS Hinrichtung in Essen / Deutschland* (2014). © 12thMemoRise.

At that time, YouTube and Facebook weren't blocked. You only had to do a search in Arabic on YouTube, and you'd find something. So we watched a few videos. That wasn't easy, some videos were just too extreme. We watched out for the cinematic techniques, why this kind of music at this moment, why Hollywood-style scenes, why this kind of drama. There were so many details, scenes, close-ups, the weapons. And the emotions of the victims. It was all in there [in the video] and we tried to write it down and said we want to do something similar but with a different message. There's that saying: fight the enemy with their own weapons, then we said let's do that. [. . .] I still have the videos in my head because I personally found them really hardcore. One time, we watched three Arabic videos. My

friend Ali, he has a smart TV and he could play them on the TV from his
iPhone. So we watched them on the TV. One of the videos was the one
with the Jordanian pilot who was burnt alive.[13] That was really a high-end
video, it could have been a Hollywood production, the way it was filmed
and portrayed. Then we watched one video that showed a whole group of
people drowning in a cage[14] and one was the beheading of an Iraqi man, not
a migrant. I still have the scene from that video in my head. But the thing
is, we were watching something totally different, not just the cinematic ele-
ments, we studied what they were wearing, how is this guy standing, what
is he doing, how does he move. That was what we were interested in for our
scene. (Hassan, 12 June 2019)

It was not only the costumes, other props, posture and gestures that they
were careful to emulate in their re-enactment. As in the videos discussed in
the previous section, the camera shots, editing techniques and narrative con-
struction through montage of IS productions were taken into account when
planning the re-enactment in the pedestrian area and producing the video of
the performance.[15]

The re-enactment was undertaken with the clear objective of 'counter-
ing the message' of IS videos by using the enemy's own 'weapons'. That also
meant using the same aesthetic styles as those of IS videos, which apparently
made the re-enactment barely distinguishable from the 'original' for the audi-
ence in Essen. In other words, before the resistant 'countering' could take
place, the nearly perfect imitation had to successfully evoke the original.
The countering was then achieved by relating the imagery to new narrative
frames, and by providing commentary in the public space and within the
video, which included text inserts and quotations from media reports.

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[13] The video *shifāʾ al-ṣudūr* (Healing of the believers' chest) with the Jordanian pilot Moaz
al-Kasasbeh was distributed online by the IS media outlet al Furqan media on 3 February
2015, months after the release of *IS Hinrichtung in Essen*.

[14] Presumably, this was a similar video to the infamous *wa-in ʿuddtum ʿudanā* (If you return
[to sin], we shall return [to punishment], Quran 17:8) distributed by IS's Nineveh Province
Media Office on 23 June 2015, in which alleged 'spies' are drowned in a swimming pool.

[15] *IS Hinrichtung in Essen / Deutschland*. 12th Memo Rise (published 3 December 2014).
Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxDq96g1tUg> (last accessed 16
September 2019).
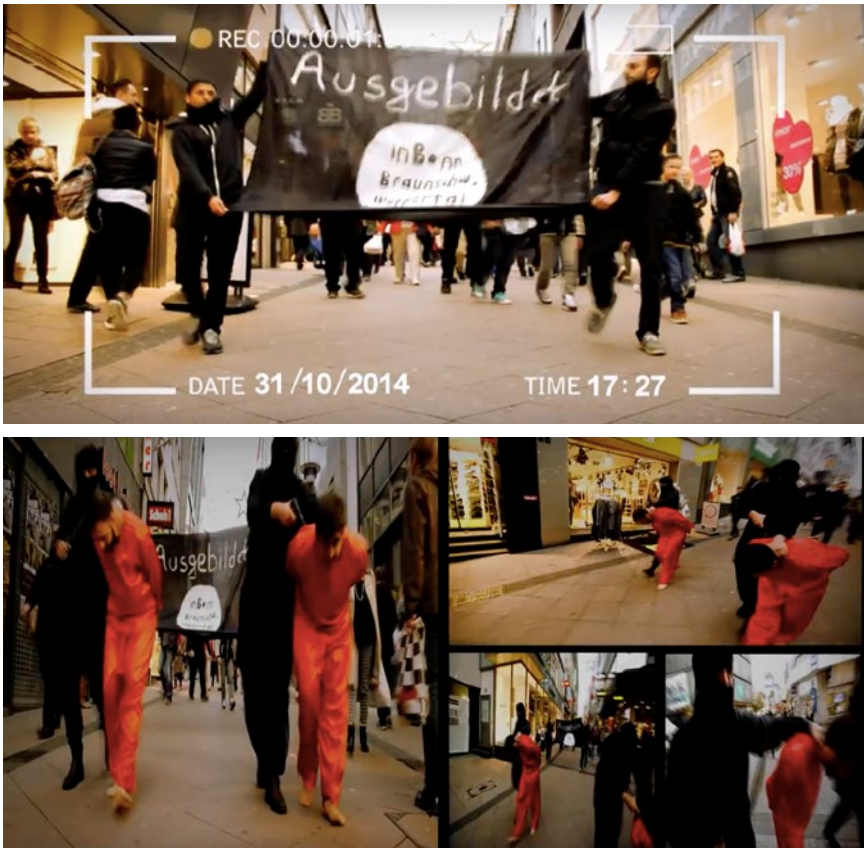
Figure 8.3   Stills from *IS Hinrichtung in Essen / Deutschland* (2014). © 12thMemoRise.

Additionally, some of the filmic elements self-reflexively drew view-ers' attention to the fact that they were watching a recording (figure 8.3). While the recording information imprinted on the video image indicates a certain time and date, its primary function is to mark the scene as a video recording and to disrupt the immersive narrative. The split screen with four images showing the same scene from different angles serves a similar reflexive aim, not only highlighting the simultaneity of the actions taking place but also using aesthetic techniques to draw attention to the act of montage and framing, while referencing similar reflexivity found in some IS videos. Expanding on Dreschke et al.'s (2016a) notion of re-enactment as creative (media) appropriation, the video that was produced as a new

material-aesthetic form became a re-enactment to mediate between different contexts.

Hassan's statement also points to the emotionally and affectively intensive experience of viewing the extreme violence of the IS execution videos, for him personally and for the group as a whole. Furthermore, and this also relates to our findings above, his comments remind us that the accessibility of such videos is not only governed by platform politics and restrictions but also effected by language proficiency and other barriers that have to be considered in our discussions about digital public spheres.

Even though the staging in the street was done in order to produce the video, the physical and affective performance had a cathartic effect for those who participated:

> In the end we celebrated our achievement, as if we had liberated territories. But that wasn't acting, it was a real sense of relief. We had done it because of the rage we had been feeling, about always having to justify or, I don't know, I'm associated with these people, I think differently, but somehow I'm associated, because of religion, origins, language, appearance, all identical, even though my mindset is different; you have this certain kind of rage, having to justify to yourself. To outsiders you react, sometimes you overreact, if someone asks what you think of it; because I criticise myself for that, I even hate myself, but when we did it, it was such a liberation. In the video you see that we hugged each other, we celebrated and that was enough for us. We had done it and we had done something, our conscience was calmed, we only wanted to go home. We weren't thinking about the video, what would become of it and what impact it would have. (Hassan, 12 June 2019)

Hassan's narrative refers to what other authors have termed knowledge through experience (Agnew 2004: 331). He initially likens his sense of joy and relief to supposedly militaristic feelings of freeing territories from IS, before going on to describe the frustration and pressure he feels in everyday life in Germany, where he is constantly obliged to position himself in relation to what is going on in Syria and Iraq and feels the need to distance himself from it. Even though these 're-lived' feelings are a personal experience and knowledge, in the context of the execution re-enactment the reactions of the

audience on the street are an integral part of the performers' affective experience: without witnesses, the exhilarating cathartic and motivational effect of the activism would not have been so profound. Additionally, Hassan draws a clear distinction between the meaning of the performance constructed by those who saw it live, and the video and messages that his group disseminates more widely via social media.

'12th Memo Rise' released the video on its YouTube channel in December 2014 with the title *ISIS Attack in Essen/Germany*, shortly before the attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher grocery store in Paris on 7–8 January 2015. The title *ISIS Attack in Essen/Germany* was intended to attract attention, including from audiences that Hassan termed 'radical' or 'Salafists'. With the promotion and sharing of the video on the Facebook profile page of Essen-born German rapper Sinan-G, in January 2015, the video came to be seen and commented on by more than 1,500 people within a matter of hours, and was also mentioned in various German TV, radio and press statements. Given Sinan-G's many followers on Facebook and his status as an 'influencer', his promotion extended the video's reach far beyond the group's own following on Facebook and YouTube. As a result of the media attention, filmmaker Till Schauder accompanied the group for a year, producing the documentary *Glaubenskrieger* (Warriors of Faith) that was broadcast several times on different German TV channels from 2017 onwards.

The video's diverse audiences reacted to it in very different ways. While Hassan describes feeling rather uplifted and motivated by the immediate reactions of audiences on the streets and online, wider dissemination led to more complicated reactions from the different kinds of nonetheless overlapping publics. Two developments are notable here: initial critical voices and threats came from different online contexts, including the group's own Muslim community, disapproving of the statements that they as young people were making about Islam, not only by criticising leading figures of the Salafi movement in Germany but also by contesting conservative religious authorities.[16] Secondly, and even more pertinent for our argument here regarding

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[16] Some of their statements also fuelled conflicts between Shiite and Sunni communities in Germany, but this goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

digital public spheres, a consequence of the online criticism expressed by some Muslim communities was the expression, on social media, of positive responses to the video by supporters of far-right movements that were flourishing at the time, including Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) in Germany and the 'Identitarian Movement' in Austria.

Inspired by the re-enactments of the activist collective '12th Memo Rise', the Viennese branch of the 'Identitarian Movement' re-enacted the Essen re-enaction on one of Vienna's main shopping streets on 21 December 2015. The same day, the YouTube channel 'Esterreicherr', administered by an anonymous person who regularly published videos of police and firefighter operations, such as (violent) demonstrations and football games, uploaded a video of the event.[17] For the video's entire 2:48 minutes, the copyright stamp and written watermark of the YouTube channel 'Esterreicherr' are displayed in the lower-right corner.

After fading in from black, the video opens with footage recorded by a walking camera-person who passes among pedestrians and police to reveal the scene of the re-enactment. A loud voice screams 'Lass los!' (Let go!), then the English-language nasheed *For the Sake of Allah* starts to play. The shaky hand-held camera moves in and out of the scene as people try to physically disrupt the re-enactment but are held back by supporters of the performers. Three males wearing military outfits and olive balaclavas stand next to a person dressed in a black burka holding a black banner bearing the Muslim creed in white Arabic letters. In front of this ensemble of four, a woman and a man are kneeling, dressed in everyday clothes with their faces clearly visible, holding 'Refugees Welcome' signs. The camera zooms in on one of the camouflaged men, who is holding a knife, pretending to cut the throat of the kneeling man before throwing him to the ground. He gives his knife to the person standing next to him, who performs the same movements with the women kneeling in front of him. For most of the video, these two people lie on the ground, still holding the 'Refugees Welcome' signs so that they can be clearly seen. After

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[17] *IS-Enthauptung mitten in Wien | Mariahilfer Straße 21.12.2015.* Esterreicherr. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwRV2bYGa5E> (last accessed 16 September 2019).

a cross fade at minute 1:28, the nasheed stops playing and the well-known leader of the 'Identitarian Movement' in Austria, Martin Sellner, explains his views on immigration to Austria. He indirectly takes the re-enactment of the IS execution as a starting point, going on to blame refugees for the 'Islamisation' of Austria and to identify his own movement as the solution to all of Austria's problems. Without ever directly referring to IS, Martin Sellner's choice of wording clearly associates the execution re-enactment with 'terrorism' and the 'Islamisation of Europe'.

As in the examples discussed previously, the careful staging of distinctive postures and gestures, accessories like the knife and, in part, the perpetrators' camouflaged outfits and the flag clearly mimic IS execution videos. Furthermore, as in the living room re-enactments described in our introduction, using the English nasheed as a soundtrack references IS videos, despite differing in terms of the use of intra-diegetic 'original' sound in the street performance. The victims holding the 'Refugees Welcome' signs are equated with the protesters who try to prevent the re-enactment from taking place and who are shouting. However, unlike in the case of the victims in the *ISIS Bloopers* video, no agency is attributed to their role. The different narratives of refugees, activists who welcome refugees and politicians who call for the defence of 'Fortress Europe' are set in complex relationships with one another by their staging within the re-enactment in the pedestrian zone of Vienna and the distribution of its mediated form via social media, mainly on Facebook and YouTube.

These re-enactments of executions by '12th Memo Rise' and the 'Identitarian Movement' share similarities in the ways in which they perform and speak to different publics offline and online, even though the video of the Vienna example was later distributed by different actors and its narratives and messages interpreted in divergent ways. It is precisely the flexible scaling of publicness that, as Martin Zillinger (2017: 43) has pointed out in relation to Moroccan trance rituals, enables the re-enactments to unfold their agency and transcend their original ambits, becoming imbricated with new (and not necessarily intended) meanings in the process.

In both cases, re-enactments of IS execution videos were staged in public spaces in Europe in order to draw attention to the transnational links between the wars in Syria and Iraq and the countries in which the

re-enactments were performed. The re-enactment by '12th Memo Rise' pointed to German involvement in the violence in Syria and Iraq, for example, by naming German cities where IS fighters had been born and educated, and warning that hatred could take hold in Germany. The re-enactment by the 'Identitarian Movement', by contrast, located the source of violence outside Austria, in order to argue that it must be prevented from entering the country. But at the same time, the 'Refugees Welcome' signs and Martin Sellner's speech served to direct staged violence and hatred towards 'leftist liberal activists' and refugees supposedly attempting to come to Austria.

Significantly, as Hassan mentioned in one of our conversations, the 'Identitarian Movement' had observed his group's activities and the Vienna re-enaction was clearly inspired by the Essen performance, aspects of which it imitated, such as the location. The 'Identitarian Movement' later even approached '12th Memo Rise' and suggested collaboration for a joint event. Hassan's group declined the invitation, but the interaction points to the entanglements of the different publics. The two re-enactments and videos discussed were staged at different locations on different occasions and were made public in distinct digital contexts with different, even contrary dynamics and discourses, yet these apparently separate online and offline spheres transcended their original fields to converge, not only as a source of inspiration. Re-enactment thus mediates between different actors in offline and online spheres and lends itself to very different forms of cultural resistance. A re-enactment develops further, becoming an independent reference in itself. The re-enactment travels through watching IS videos, to staging a re-enactment of them in a pedestrian zone in Germany, to distributing the re-enactment among a particular social media audience with the aim of countering a particular image of Islam in Germany. The reference then travels further, inspiring a re-enactment by the 'Identitarian Movement' that is distributed online to express very different narratives relating to immigration and Islamisation. The re-enactment as a mediating device is clearly more complex than something that simply circulates – the interlinkages of the different images, narratives and discourses it brings forth become entangled in a 'messy web' (Postill and Pink 2012).

Conclusion: Contesting and Redefining Violence

In this contribution, we have introduced the reader to re-enactments of violence that reference IS execution videos. Drawing upon selected examples, ranging from ones that work with comedy to others that are presented as serious (religious-)political re-enactments, we have shown how the videos' producers use this media form to resist and defy the narrative and undermine the iconic status of IS imagery, despite having different motivations for doing so. The diverse contexts we have discussed were made comparable by showing how re-enactments mediate content from one context to another and how they are imbued with new meanings from specific (cultural) settings in the process. The shifts in the ways in which the videos are interpreted are made possible by actors' re-contextualisation of the recognisable and iconic elements that they appropriate. Firstly, we identified as a practice common to all the re-enactments the precise replication of details from IS execution videos, such as the clothing worn by captives and perpetrators, the protagonists' demeanour, gestures and movements, the choreography of the bodies within the setting as a whole, and the use of direct speech to address the audience. Secondly, we showed how cinematographic and video techniques such as the use of special effects, close-ups and multiple camera angles, certain editing styles and audio techniques such as the incorporation of a nasheed make re-enactments appear all the more similar to IS propaganda and therefore intensify the ambiguity in order to confuse viewers and make them unsure whether they are watching something 'original' or not. This ambiguity is key to the embodied and affective impact of the re-enactment. Thirdly, we argued that the re-enactments cannot be discussed without considering the different kinds of publics (online and offline) that are addressed, intentionally or otherwise, which become an integral part of the performance of the re-enactment.

As we pointed out in the introduction, the notoriety that IS videos have achieved cannot be explained simply by the horrific nature of the acts of violence that they show; the ways in which the images are produced and circulated must be taken into account. The success of the perpetrators in disseminating a message is dependent on the distribution of the image (Klonk 2017: 1; Friis 2018). The re-enactments we have discussed re-work IS's depiction of

violence in different ways, leaving out the violence (as in the *Levant Front*), undermining it with humour and mockery of the perpetrators (*ISIS Bloopers*), or transferring it to different geographical contexts ('12th Memo Rise') or to different kinds of narratives and victims ('Identitarian Movement'). In each case, the re-enactments serve to defiantly resist IS's implied claim to a monopoly on a specific genre of violent images by reinterpreting the execution videos to convey different political messages.

Our examples have shown how the embodied and performative practices of re-enactment are always inspired by and relate to other mediated forms. Hassan's statement testifies to this when he talks about how his group studied IS execution videos in order to work out the aesthetics for its performance and prepare for staging it. Not only physical performance but even embodied spectatorship is an affective experience; bodies are thus one link in a media chain that also includes objects, audio, video, social media and media infrastructures. Infrastructures enable re-enactments to be made public to different kinds of audiences and (digital) publics and thus to travel across social and political spheres. It is precisely this scaling of publics that allows re-enactments to interconnect seemingly discrete online and offline public spheres and different (cultural) contexts. While the content and styles of the re-enactments themselves already bear traces of these interconnections, by following the relations between the activist collective '12th Memo Rise' in Germany and the 'Identitarian Movement' in Austria, we have shed further light on the process. The re-enactments mediate between different contexts, yet the divergent narratives imposed upon two similar stagings of violence show how that violence and hatred can be redirected and transformed for different purposes. The 'Identitarian Movement' transforms the violence inflicted upon 'infidel' victims in IS executions videos and redirects it towards 'liberal leftists' and refugees.

This brings us to the important role of the captives in these videos and to related ethical discussions. Simone Molin Friis (2018: 249–50) has pointed to the active and participatory role of victims in IS execution videos, noting how the victim 'becomes complicit in the killers' narrative [. . .] [while becoming] silenced through the pain'. This relates to the (re-)enacted agency of the victim that we drew attention to in our examples. By moving their bodies or expressing themselves verbally, victims exert their agency, as when

they start to dance in the introductory scene in the living room, or when the victim in *ISIS Bloopers* not only attempts to escape but also shows himself to be superior to the executioner by correcting his pronunciations. By contrast, the agency of the captives in the *Levant Front* video is questionable. As in the IS videos they are performing under duress within the *Levant Front*'s narrative, and it is not clear for viewers whether they knew in advance that the video was a re-enactment with a narrative twist that they would live to survive.

By discussing the creative techniques used in decapitation re-enactments and the mimetic performances of violence in online and offline engagements and (semi-)public spheres, we have shown the diversity of ways in which people from various backgrounds and professions have employed performance and used audiovisual distribution infrastructures in order to resist and defy the narrative of power disseminated by IS's media outlets and to undermine the iconic status of its imagery.

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9

'YOU'RE AGAINST DAWLA, BUT YOU'RE LISTENING TO THEIR NASHEEDS?' APPROPRIATING JIHADI AUDIOVISUALITIES IN THE ONLINE STREETWORK PROJECT *JAMAL AL-KHATIB – MY PATH!*

Rami Ali, Džemal Šibljaković, Felix Lippe, Ulrich Neuburg and Florian Neuburg

The Issue: Contesting Jihadi (Online) Recruitment

'I want to write a book, in order to prevent other young people from repeating the same mistakes I made.' These were the words of a young man in prison who is mentored by a social worker from our project team. Once part of the jihadi subculture in Vienna, Austria, he had since cut all ties to the group he was once part of and distanced himself from the worldview he had shared. He had turned his back on a scene that had been the starting point for the more than 320 Austrians who travelled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the so-called Islamic State (IS) or other groups in the ongoing conflict (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2019). He had reflected his own fanaticisation process and had reached a point where he wanted to share his experiences with young people like himself, who for various reasons are susceptible targets for the recruitment efforts that had once convinced him. An initial project team, consisting of social workers and experts in Islamic sciences formed around his idea to disseminate his conclusions in order to prevent other young people following a similar path. The question facing our newly-formed project team was how such young people could be reached. Against this background, three main guiding principles were formulated in

the conceptualisation of the project: to use social media as means to communicate our message (1), to deconstruct the us vs them narratives, prevalent both in jihadi propaganda but also in mainstream discourse, in our message (2) and to use videos in which we appropriate audiovisual aesthetics of jihadi propaganda, as vehicle for our message. These principles were informed by the experiences made by the young man within the jihadi scene, the insights our social workers had gained in their day-to-day work, and the expertise of Islamic scholars, who were consulted from the very beginning of the project.[1]

It quite quickly became clear that the best way to reach our target audience, namely adolescents who are at risk of coming into contact with extremist content, as well as adolescents who already sympathise with jihadi groups and their narratives, would be to use social media as means of communication instead of a book. Accordingly, the first guiding principle was formulated: In order to prevent young people being convinced by jihadi recruitment efforts, we decided to employ the same means of communication as that used by extremists. Groups such as the so-called IS make extensive use of social media platforms in order to spread their propaganda, knowing that such media have the capacity to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition and divert behaviour to achieve a response that furthers their desired intent (Jowett and O'Donnel 2012: 7). Long before the so-called IS, Al-Qaeda was already using online forums to spread its ideology and most importantly to recruit sympathisers. Such actors are well aware of the impact of their online propaganda, in fact they consider it to be crucial to the whole movement, as Osama Bin Laden, founder of Al-Qaeda, and his successor Az-Zawahiri, have stressed (as cited in Al-Rawi 2018: 6). The American jihadi Omar Hammami who led the al-Shabab terrorist group once declared: 'The war of narratives has become even more important than the war of navies, napalm and knives' (Cottee 2015). Abu Bakr Naji, author of the book *Idārat at-Tawaḥḥush* (The Administration of Savagery) published in 2004, which aims to provide a solid strategy for establishing the caliphate, stresses the importance of media, describing jihadist struggles as 'media battles' (Najii 2006: 73). He identifies several crucial functions of media. Firstly, media can convince potential recruits to '[offer]

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[1] Parts of this chapter have previously been published in e-beratungsjournal.net – Fachzeitschrift für Online Beratung und computervermittelte Kommunikation 15(1).

positive support and [adopt] a negative attitude toward those who do not join the ranks' (ibid. 55). Secondly, media should call upon people living outside the groups' territories 'to fly to the regions which we manage, particularly the youth after news of our transparency and truthfulness reached them' (ibid. 51). As part of the strategy, jihadis and their sympathisers exploit every media outlet possible, creating a complex network of content that is spread across platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Telegram (Conway 2017: 77–98), employing a wide variety of multimedia including videos, memes, comics, video games, magazines, literature and a cappella-style songs with religious themes called *anāshīd* (plural of *nashīd*) (Piper 2008: 28–38). The decentralised nature of jihadi online content and its interlinked distribution across different platforms are considered key to maximising the number of people reached. However, it is neo-Salafist content that appears to come closest to dominating the search results on topics like Islam as such, or international conflicts involving the oppression of Muslims. Neo-Salafists mostly operate within the limits of the law and try to attract the attention of adolescents by addressing issues relevant to them and tapping into mainstream discourses. Not only in legitimising violence do their narratives overlap to a large extent with those of actors from the jihadi end of the spectrum, however (Said 2015). The experience of some of the young people who later became part of our project team confirms that these jihadi and neo-Salafist online recruitment efforts can be effective. In a conversation with his social worker, the young man who sparked the idea of the project recalled: 'The first time I heard about *Takfir* [the concept jihadi and neo-Salafist actors mainly refer to when distinguishing between "true Muslims" and "non-believers"] was in a propaganda video. When I heard it more often in videos featuring imams, I wanted to know more.' These kinds of remarks inspired our decision to use the same kinds of media to promote a very different message and to distribute our content across several social media platforms, mainly in the form of videos.

A second guiding principle that was formulated at the start of the project was to focus on particular aspects of the political socialisation of the young man, whose biography we wanted to share with our target audience. More precisely, we wanted to concentrate on the jihadi narratives that had been central in his fanaticisation processes. This principle was created in response

to the observation that groups such as the so-called IS produce content rang-ing 'from gruesome images of beheadings and calls of violence against *kafir* (infidels) to Instagram posts depicting jihadists who are cuddling with cats or are gleeful about access to Snickers and Funyuns' (Farag 2017: 848). Presenting such a diverse range of material is a strategy intended to speak to the needs and interests of different target groups, to appeal to anyone, from a young Muslim student to a thirty-year-old who feels alienated by the state or discriminated against. The success of the so-called IS derives to a large extent from its ability to address the grievances of different people at different stages of their lives (Farag 2017: 848). In 2010, Al Qaeda published the first issue of *Inspire* in English, one of many jihadi online magazines that are freely available on the internet (Ghambir 2014). Political myths play an important role in *Inspire*, especially when it constructs in-group and out-group identi-ties (Kirke 2015: 284). One of Al-Qaeda's main narratives is the foretelling of an epic clash between the *Umma* and the evil Western 'Crusader' who is supported by treacherous 'puppet' regimes in the Middle East. The intention behind these kinds of narratives is clear: you either support your oppressed brothers and sisters by joining the fight (in self-defence) against the *Umma* or you become a traitor without morality who passively accepts the systemic persecution of Muslims. So-called IS's *Dabiq* magazine, first published in English in 2014, uses similar 'us versus them' argumentative structures to construct the good 'we' and bad 'they' (Berger 2017).

Othering, identity politics, polarising in- and out-group constructions are thus crucial to jihadi online propaganda and have been seen as key to the fanaticisation processes of adolescents in the West who decided to follow the call to jihad. That is because the 'us versus them' constructed in jihadi online propaganda is especially effective when it resonates with the everyday experiences of the receiver. 'Discrimination and abuse can give rise to anger that could be transformed into rage, hatred and a desire to take revenge' (Karagiannis 2012: 106), and so 'feelings of Islamic repression and massacre affect radicalization' (Githens-Mazer 2008: 550). The adolescents who joined our project later confirmed this interrelation when they talked to the social workers in our team. These observations made it clear that for the *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* project it would not suffice to try to counter the nar-ratives of jihadis by simply spreading opposing content, but that it was also

necessary to fight or at least publicly denounce the roots of Muslim suffering as well as discrimination and racism in all its forms – especially in the wake of rising Islamophobia and right-wing nationalism in Europe. This 'unexpected solidarity' proved crucial in tackling the 'us versus them' narrative of jihadis that aims to convince vulnerable individuals that they are isolated in a hostile society and can count on no one except themselves or their 'Muslim brothers and sisters' (i.e. the construed in-group) in the fight against discrimination (by the out-group).

The third principle that guided our approach in reaching out to the target group was appropriation of the audiovisual aesthetics of the online propaganda of groups such as the so-called IS. Content created in order to offer alternatives to jihadi narratives and to reach out to their target audience needs to be as aesthetically appealing as the propaganda itself, while challenging the simplified world-view that the latter propagates. Appropriation must therefore be undertaken in terms of both content and (audiovisual) form. Propaganda videos produced by the so-called IS, for example, often draw on Western pop culture by incorporating certain stylistic features of Western movies, video games and so on, combined with quintessentially Islamic elements, such as *anāshīd* in the soundtrack. The videos showcase high-quality graphically violent footage, fast cuts between scenes and a generally 'dark' atmosphere. Even just the way the pick-up trucks were presented was enough to spark interest in these videos, according to the adolescents who later became part of the project team themselves. This made it clear that in order to contest these kinds of videos, high production standards would have to be achieved to produce videos with similar kinds of footage, general atmosphere and sounds to those disseminated by extremists, but with a completely different message. It was thus clear from the outset that a professional filmmaker would have to be consulted for the project.

Building on these three principles, *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*[2] has been developed: a project in which the internet is understood as an informal learning environment within which political education can be offered in

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[2] The second season of *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*, which was launched in the course of an online campaign between May and July 2019, was funded by the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and the Erasmus+ Role Model Initiative.

a manner that is geared towards young people's circumstances and experiences. The project is conceptualised as media-mediated youth work, whereby our specific approach to online preventative work combines aspects of both information dissemination (political education online) and online interaction (communication and discussion online).[3] The young man quoted at the beginning of this contribution, who initiated the project, was joined by other young participants including both young people who had dropped out of the jihadi scene and young people who, during the heyday of the so-called IS, had resisted jihadi narratives. In accordance with the project's peer-to-peer approach, the experiences of these young people have come to form the basis for the content of the campaigns. Based upon narrative biography work, videos featuring alternatives to jihadist and neo-Salafist propaganda are produced. The videos are posted on different social media platforms, communicated to the target audience via the fictional character Jamal al-Khatib, and discussed in the course of online streetwork.[4] The adolescent members of the project team are involved in every step, from text production to online streetwork. This participatory approach is central to our work. It guarantees a level of authenticity without which it would not be possible to reach the target group. Most importantly, however, working in the project offers participants the opportunity to reflect upon their own biographies, compare their experiences to those of other adolescents, and share their reflections with their peers and participate in a public discourse that is relevant to them. Reflecting on their political socialisation strengthens their sense of autonomy; combined with being afforded a chance to become self-efficient in a supportive social environment, those who are in the process of distancing themselves from the jihadi scene are supported sustainably (see also al-Mafaalani 2017; Deci and Ryan 1993). The adolescents were joined by professionals including

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[3] Digital youth work can be subdivided into media-related and media-mediated youth work (Mayrhofer and Neuburg 2019: 8). Media-related youth work in turn can be subdivided into media pedagogical work, which aims to teach young people specific skills in the use of digital media, and creative-transformative media work, which seeks to develop competencies that enable young people to actively design digital spaces.

[4] Streetwork is a method in the field of social work, which is designed to establish contact with hard-to-reach target groups in public space. Online streetwork describes the transfer of this approach to the online sphere.

experts from fields such as Islamic studies, political science, sociology, psychology, psychotherapy, social work, educational science, filmmaking, digital content management and more, to create a richly diverse team. This multidisciplinary approach is essential to realising the goals that the project *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* sets out to reach: to deliver alternative narratives to those propagated by extremist groups to adolescents who are vulnerable to, or have already been influenced by, extremist propaganda; to initiate discussions and processes of self-reflection; and ultimately, to increase young adults' resources to cope with conflict, compromise and contradictions, and to foster their tolerance towards ambiguity.

The Project: *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*

Narrative Biography Work

The fundamental core of the project lies in the experiences and thoughts of the participating young adults. Throughout the text production phase, the young men are supported by social workers and experts in Islamic studies and other fields, who first conduct narrative biographical interviews and then moderate group discussions. In order to get to know the stories of these young people, narrative biography work has proved to be a very productive method. Generally speaking, it is a way of dealing with topics separately from the individual. Working with narratives serves to distance the person concerned from the events that they have lived through, helping them to take a more objective view. Thus, the sense of personal involvement is reduced to a certain degree, relieving the narrating person and facilitating a better environment for discussions. The method is empowering for narrators because it puts them, and especially their stories, at the centre of the discussion. Narrative biography work can be used to address different processes in life. In our case, the focus was on the political socialisation, the access to and exit from jihadi groups and, in particular, key moments in participants' pathways within these groups.[5]

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[5] It is crucial to recognise the processual character of fanaticisation and the multiplicity of its causes. Neither a single event nor a single isolated aspect of life can be identified as exclusively responsible. Experiencing discrimination, although in itself very harsh, is much more likely to lead to the adoption of extremist views if it is linked to feelings of powerlessness. If

The first step is to offer narrators a safe space in which to share the narratives that have shaped their beliefs and their personal development. This gathering of experiences is undertaken with the accompaniment of other team members – social workers, experts on Islamic studies, psychologists or psychotherapists. At this stage, the team provide general psychological support to help narrators to discuss difficult circumstances, while also helping them to express themselves and to re-view and reframe certain aspects of the narratives they encountered in the course of their involvement in the jihadi scene. This involves the deconstruction of jihadi narratives and the effort to abstract specific needs that had motivated their interest in extremist narratives and the joining of groups. The next step is to work together to come up with alternative perspectives and different ways of framing certain aspects that were talked about.

As mentioned in the introduction, one factor in fanaticisation processes is the experience of recurrent discrimination and exclusion. Continually being subjected to racism in different contexts, such as in school or in police controls based upon racial profiling, can result in an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and humiliation: feelings that can lead an individual to experience disaffection from society (El-Mafaalani 2017: 91). In the course of narrative biography work, the young adults of the project team reported such incidents all too often in connection with police and teaching staff. They had almost always been singled out for such harassment on the basis of their cultural and religious identity, which led to feelings of frustration and anger towards the perpetrators, relative to whom they were in a socially subordinate position. They had rarely had opportunities to reflect on such incidents afterwards, and even when they had, the outcomes were often frustrating, with the victim all too often being blamed for the racism and actions of people in power. Institutionalised racism in Austria receives a great deal less critical attention from the country's popular media, however, than do narratives claiming Islam is a violent, misogynistic or anti-democratic religion. These narratives contradict the experiences of young people for whom

young people discover ways of expressing their frustration about racist narratives and other negative experiences productively, the likelihood of their being convinced by extremist rhetoric is diminished.

faith is an important part of their identity, and something they perceive as positive – seeing it constantly coming under attack from representatives of the *Dominanzgesellschaft* (dominant society) intensifies a sense of being excluded and isolated by the society they live in. A widespread response to these racist experiences is anger and disappointment, which makes the 'us versus them' narratives of extremist groups make sense. But even this anger can be channelled in ways that benefit not only the persons experiencing it, but society as a whole, by holding it accountable for negative developments within it. Anger is a powerful force that can open up a great window of opportunity if young adults are included in public debates that all too often take place without their being offered a chance to take part. Being left out creates a sense of powerlessness that is a further factor in increasing the propensity to fanaticisation. By embracing young people's strong feelings about society and their position within it, a great many different opportunities and ideas can be created. Jihadi groups recognise this potential and harness it, calling upon young people, who are already motivated to do so, to oppose the injustices they have experienced (Reicher and Lippe 2019: 60). The sense of powerlessness felt by such youth can also be countered by offering them opportunities to create narratives of their own and by involving them in wider discussions, which increases their perceived self-efficacy (Freires 1973). Hence, it is not enough to simply criticise the 'us versus them' narratives spread by extremist groups; those of the so-called *Dominanzgesellschaft* need to be subjected to similar scrutiny. This approach is central to our method, and is most visible in the narrative of the video *Takfir* from the second season of *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*.

The diversity of the team is key to the way our project works. All team members recognise and highly value the multiplicity of skills and expertise contributed by other members. Input from different professional experts is a prerequisite for high-quality, nuanced and differentiated results. The method necessarily involves instigating situations in which young people may experience flashbacks or other psychological stress as they recall highly charged emotional moments from their own lives. These difficult situations demand a highly sensitive approach and support from very considerate, dedicated, experienced and well-qualified personnel. Talking about turbulent experiences can (re-)trigger feelings like fear, isolation or anger. Irrespective of

Table 9.1   Narrative Framework of *Takfir*, Indicating the Deconstruction and Reframing of Extremist Narratives

| *Takfir* | | |
Extremist narrative	Discriminating narrative	Alternative narrative
Dualistic world-view '*Kuffar*' (disbelievers) vs 'Muslims' as a central concept '*Kuffar*' oppose you because of your Muslim identity Divisive theology Undifferentiated judgement of people based upon identity	'*Kuffar*' is a derogatory term used to refer to non-Muslims '*Takfir*' is a (political) method to separate people Undifferentiated judgement of people based upon identity Muslims oppose non-Muslims because of their beliefs	Only God can know whether someone is a believer or not My opinion towards people is based on the way they treat others, not their religion or identity God does not want the division of humankind

the objectives of the process in relation to the project, there must always be time and willingness to respond to the narrators' needs and, if necessary, immediately take a pause to guide the narrator to a position in which they can somewhat distance themselves from their story, in order to prevent re-traumatisation. The social workers in our team are indispensable. They see it as their role to work towards the empowerment and inclusion of excluded groups within society and to fulfil the duty of political education. One key objective to this end is to debunk extremist narratives and to show young people that serious issues and societal problems can be addressed in ways that do not have to be based on violence and discrimination.

Appropriating Jihadi Aesthetics – A Means to an End

In order to adapt the texts created in the course of narrative biography work into videos, the team's filmmaker guides the adolescents to develop a shooting script together. A lot of thought is put into this process in order to guarantee the right look and feel of the videos. This is essential if our videos are to compete with the highly professional material produced by terrorist groups such as the so-called IS. The group uses film language to develop the arguments they want to convey, discovering audiovisual techniques that can add meaning and enable them to deliver their message to the target audience. Since this target audience includes young people who have already come into contact with jihadi propaganda, we have made it our mission to appropriate some of the audiovisual codes and strategies used in such videos. These

Figure 9.1   Point-of-view in IS-produced video (first image) and over-shoulder shot in *Jamal al-Khatib*; both are commonly seen in computer games. Note the different focus: IS – the fight lies ahead; Jamal – confusion in the middle of a fight. © IS Propaganda; © turn.

include the use of exaggerated aesthetics, graphical elements, sound design, *anāshīd*,[6] character building, episodic structure, presentation of religious content in sound and graphics, and varying cinematographic styles from hand-held documentary-style camera to complex effect shots to first-person shooter sequences like those in video games (Figure 9.1).

    We wanted to appropriate such codes in order to attract the attention of the kinds of young people who find jihadi content appealing and are likely to spend hours watching it. To that end, the filmmaker reviewed selected

[6] For a detailed examination of other appropriations of IS *anāshīd* by different actors see Dick and Fuhrmann (Chapter 12).

propaganda material in order to identify the audiovisual devices employed and was advised further in terms of content by academics and social workers. The audiovisual codes presented in the first season were largely religious, and featured elements commonly found in productions by the so-called IS (e.g. quotations from the Quran, *anāshīd*). In the case of the Quran quotations, the young participants proposed certain rules of presentation that we adhered to strictly, such as no accompanying music, intricate graphic borders and an impressive visual design (Figure 9.2). The key shot that we developed for presenting the protagonist Jamal, in which he approaches the camera head on, is the same as that used in many recruitment videos produced by the so-called IS as well as numerous other military recruitment videos (Figure 9.3). We decided that Jamal should walk steadily and consistently maintain a camera height of almost eye level to match that of the viewer. This shot is used recurrently in every episode. The audiovisual atmosphere that accompanies Jamal is created by techniques including fast-paced editing, hard and stylised contrasts and associative sequences that support the voiceover on an emotional level. In the second season, we adapted a few of these approaches and added others that are frequently used in the audiovisual material consumed by young people (e.g. first- and third-person camera angles). We hoped that these techniques would enable us to present young people with alternative ways of dealing with the problems in their lives to those put forward by extremist groups.

Yet the most important aspect of the filmmaker's work was not addressing style, dramatic structure, series branding or audiovisual codes. One of our priorities was to effectively establish the central character and the world he inhabits, to define his goals and his needs. The thematic content of *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*, as well as the stagings, were proposed by those directly affected by the themes addressed. In order to catch the initial attention of the target audience, the videos' aesthetic elements had to be appealing, but if the videos had then failed to address relevant issues, to speak with an authentic voice, with character development and the establishment of a plausible world in which it all plays out, they would have only catered to the eye and probably failed to hold viewers' interest, let alone stimulate conversation. After various texts had been created by the young people, they were developed collaboratively into screenplays. The process involved
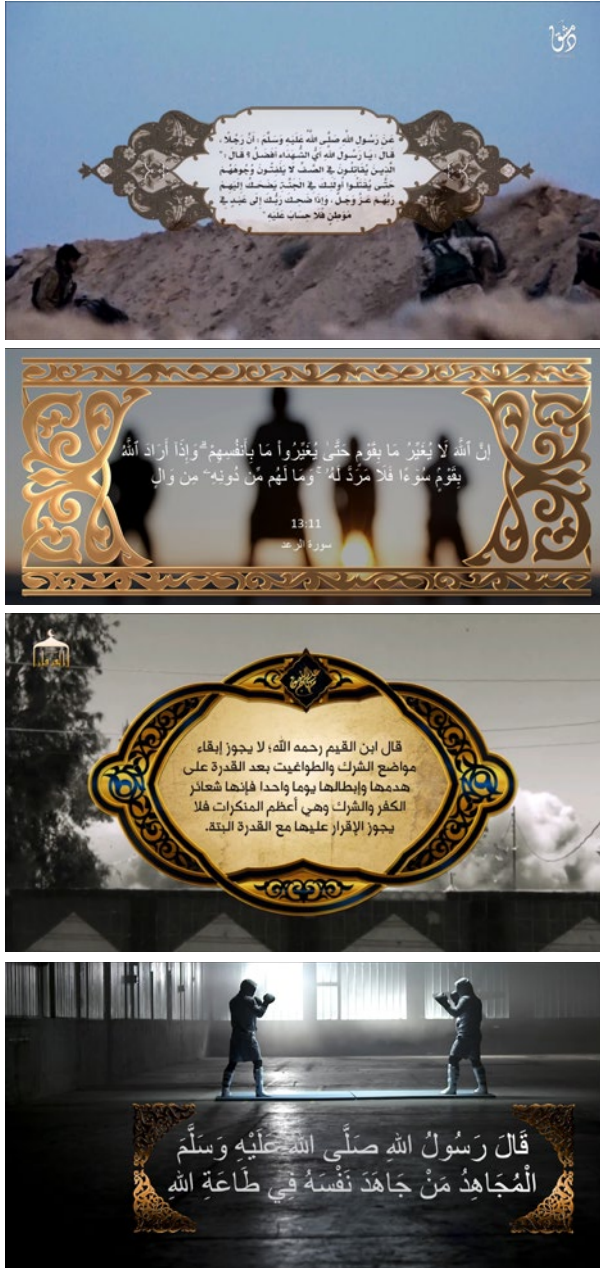
Figure 9.2   Quran quotations included in IS propaganda (images 1 and 3) and Quran quotations featured in *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* videos (images 2 and 4). Images 1 and 3: © IS Propaganda; images 2 and 4 © turn.

Figure 9.3   Protagonists approach the camera in IS propaganda videos (images 1 and 3) and in *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* videos (images 2 and 4). Images 1 and 3: © IS Propaganda; images 2 and 4 © Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

singling out a specific theme for each video, combining different storylines and reducing redundancies. In a series of meetings, the screenplays were reviewed together with the young participants. Then each scene was broken down to identify requirements in terms of location, props and costumes, and content. The young participants discussed what they would consider authentic locations, appropriate attire and further accessories. During the shoot, the participants who were not acting in a particular scene were given a monitor so that they could give feedback on what was being filmed. Their insights, based upon their own viewing habits and preferences, as well as the social workers' knowledge, helped those filming to produce videos which are authentic down to the tiniest detail.

The result of this process is Jamal al-Khatib, who appears visually as a black shadow; a silhouette without a face. There is no way of knowing who he is, but viewers recognise the world he moves through, the way he talks, the problems he faces, the desires he has and what drives him to walk confrontationally towards the camera. Since the project is driven by the thoughts and experiences of young people, issues were addressed from their perspective, which allowed us to reach other young people with a similar background and prevented us from replicating the discourse from the perspective of the *Dominanzgesellschaft*. The production process includes, among other tasks: defining a negotiation level (personal/with society/religious and secular); the creation of a visual world in look and feel, with an identifiable location and social context; building a sustainable episodic structure with recurrent key visuals (live action, graphics and sound); incorporating audiovisual codes familiar to the target audience (e.g. *anāshīd*, certain graphic arrangements, spoken voice, authentic costumes) to establish an emotional landscape; and including dramatic structure and character development underscored by visual features. All these elements, and the choices made in order to achieve them, transform the themes, messages and content into a story.

The everyday experiences of discrimination described by adolescents in the course of narrative biography work are taken up visually in the video *Takfir* from the second season of *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* (Figure 9.4), for example. The 'us versus them' mindset that is established by propaganda produced by so-called IS is cinematically expressed by staging Jamal in sharp focus with a narrow depth-of-field so that his surroundings dissolve into

Figure 9.4   Visual representation of the everyday discrimination experienced by young Muslims in Austria shown as fictional (but plausible) election campaign posters. In English, the slogans would read: 'Closed Border = Safe Home'; 'Islam does not belong to us/There's no place for Islam here'; 'Josef not Yusuf –We speak German here!'. The fictional party slogan means 'My homeland, my values'. © Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

blurriness. His in-group, by contrast, appears homogeneous, bound by a common cause (Figure 9.5).

It is necessary to use cinematic techniques in order to produce videos that tell stories that people will want to watch, to package the content in ways that will engage those receiving it, but the main and most important part of the project is working together with young people. Letting them find their own themes and motives and keeping the process within a framework that enables them to express their thoughts in a way that is participatory and results in a product they can be proud of – dark and hopeful, threatening and compromising, angry and forgiving, always conflicting and never simple – is the essence of *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*.

Online streetwork

The text and script production, as well as the shooting of the videos, is followed by an online campaign, in the course of which the videos are released. However, in contrast to other, alternative-narrative or counter-narrative campaigns, our online campaign does not end with the release of the videos. Our aim is not simply to deliver content that the target audience accepts and adopts. We want the adolescents to whom we reach out to critically challenge the themes and ideas addressed in our material, so that they form their own opinions rather than just unquestioningly taking on ours. To achieve this,

Figure 9.5   The visual rendition of the 'us versus them' narrative. © Bundeszentrale für politsche Bildung.

we strive to initiate discussion and debate in the comment sections under our videos. This is where our online streetwork method comes into play. Just as some social workers take to the streets, and spend time in parks and public places in order to reach their target groups, online streetworkers dive into digital spaces to get in contact with young people. Instead of shopping precincts, social media platforms are visited; instead of hanging around offline meeting points, they are present in groups in messenger services. In contrast to approaches in which youth workers use their own profiles to enter different online groups and forums in order to communicate with their target groups, the project *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* does content-based online streetwork. Like an offline youth club, the *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* campaign platforms, with their own commenting and messenger functions, serve as a primary meeting and communication space for the targeted young

audiences. The outreach aspect of this approach is realised firstly by working in the digital realm, which transcends geographical borders,[7] and secondly by the target-oriented distribution of our contents on the internet, whereby we take measures to get in contact with hard-to-reach dialogue groups by reaching out to their online bubbles and echo chambers.

The *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* videos address young people in general, but in particular, young people who already have an affinity for extremist or fanatical groups and who are highly likely to reject projects sponsored by the state out of principle. For this reason, we refrain from clearly marking the videos as the work of a preventative project when we present them on distribution channels (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). At a second glance, however, the project can be recognised as such, and online streetworkers respond transparently and openly when questions are raised.

During the online phase of the project, our team of online streetworkers seeks to instigate discussion of the videos' content in a one-to-many, many-to-many approach. They also create opportunities for individuals to move into a safer discussion space, that is, to communicate via private message (one to one), which enables direct relationships to be established and personalised counselling to be offered. The goal is to establish a common ground and a respectful trustworthy relationship, which are prerequisites for changing behaviour patterns in the young adults from our target group (Weilnböck and Uhlmann 2018). In our project, interventions are undertaken not only by social workers but also by scholars of Islamic studies, religious educators, sociologists, political scientists, social educators and peers. In peer-to-peer interventions, young project team members take part in some of the online discussions on the various channels. Which particular mode of discursive intervention is chosen, and which member of the team takes on the main responsibility for communicating with a particular individual or group, varies according to the person or group addressed and the kinds of questions or issues discussed.

Our work is project-based and temporary, which means that we are only able to maintain contacts established with young social media users during

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[7] Geography does not become irrelevant, however, as some national legislations limit access to certain digital spaces and the exchange of certain information and opinions via the internet.

the so-called online phase, which runs for a limited period. Therefore, one regrettable characteristic of our work is that we are unable to offer permanent supportive relationships via the net. Nonetheless, a large number of young people have used our channels to contact us expressing their need for advice and support. This shows that it is possible to reach young members of our target audience via content-based online streetwork, and that youth workers can successfully establish online relations that are trusted by the respective young people. We have set up a network of offline and online institutions that enable us, if necessary, to mediate contacts with specialised counselling services.

The Campaign: Can Target Groups be Reached by Appropriating Jihadi Audiovisualities?

Having described the project, its background, methods and implementation, we will now evaluate whether appropriating jihadi audiovisualities in our videos resulted in a successful online campaign and, most importantly, whether we successfully reached the desired target groups.[8] The four videos of the first season received 200,000 views during the online phase. During the campaign for the second season, we reached around 450,000 views. It has to be noted, however, that we encountered certain obstacles: during the first campaign, our Facebook account was blocked for a week, and in both seasons, the option to advertise our videos was restricted on all platforms. This might suggest that we did so well in appropriating jihadi audiovisualities that platform staff felt it prudent to impose restrictions. All in all, we achieved a satisfying number of views and interactions. However, while great awareness indicates a certain degree of success, the principal question for us was whether we could win the sustained attention and critical engagement of our specific target groups.

In order to obtain more in-depth information on that question, we analysed the 'likes' of Facebook accounts that had 'liked' the *Jamal al-Khatib*

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[8] Since this contribution focuses on the appropriation of jihadi audiovisualities in an online campaign, it will assess the degree to which we achieved our aims in terms of reaching the specific online target group. The results of the evaluation of the offline phase were published in April 2020. The report can be downloaded on www.turnprevention.com.

Facebook account.[9] The analysis of a sample of 500 such accounts revealed that about one fifth also had 'Pierre Vogel.de' and 'Ansaar International e.V.' among their 'likes'.[10] These are the Facebook accounts of a German-speaking preacher and an organisation, both of which can be related to the neo-Salafist spectrum.[11] Other popular Facebook accounts were 'Generation Islam' (approximately 15%) and 'Realität Islam' (Islam Reality) (approximately 8%). Together with demographic data about our viewers provided by the social media platforms, these numbers indicated that we had reached at least one part of the online target group, namely adolescents who are at risk of getting into contact with extremist content via search requests concerning topics that are relevant to them because they relate to their circumstances and experiences. That is to say, Facebook accounts such as 'Generation Islam' and 'Realität Islam' are quite successful online initiatives that have been classified as Islamist and are associated with Hizb ut-Tahir, which has been declared illegal by the German government and several others (Schölermann 2018). The group uses the internet intensively for its activism. Part of its online strategy is the organisation of online campaigns such as #NichtohnemeinKopftuch (notwithoutmyheadscarf) in order to bring its narratives to the attention of young Muslims. It takes up issues that are relevant to its target audience, typically incidents of anti-Muslim racism, to initiate discussion. The next stage, however, reveals its true agenda: part of the messages it typically puts forward are 'us versus them' narratives, referred to throughout this contribution, which it harnesses to exacerbate the polarisation of society. Its target group are young Muslims who are interested in questions concerning their faith, for which they seek answers online, and who may be susceptible to manipulation (Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2018).

[9] This relates to the first season of *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!*. We have been undertaking a similar analysis for the second season, the results of which were made available in April 2020 and can be downloaded on www.turnprevention.com

[10] A 'like' does not indicate that the user who 'likes' has been fully convinced by the narratives we present. However, it is an indication that our contents were well-received, or at least that the respective user wished to receive updates relating to our online campaign.

[11] Interestingly, we mainly found that accounts from the neo-Salafist spectrum were 'liked', and not ones that were associated with the jihadi subculture. This is probably because the latter mainly operate on more clandestine social network platforms such as Telegram, while the former tend to prioritise public visibility in order to reach a wider audience.

In order to find out more about the extent to which we had been able to reach our target group, we also conducted an exploratory social network analysis of the 'likes' displayed on the public profiles of the followers of the *Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!* campaign account (de Nooy et al. 2018). The results suggest that we had successfully reached an important part of our online target group – that which was already frequenting online spaces associated with the jihadi or neo-Salafist subculture and thus was familiar with online settings characterised by extremist content. This was indicated by clusters of 'likes' identified by the social network analysis of the sample. One cluster comprised Facebook accounts associated with neo-Salafist circles, such as that of the Salafist preacher mentioned above. More precisely, the analysis revealed that half of the 20 per cent of the *Jamal al-Khatib* followers who had also 'liked' 'Pierre Vogel.de' had also 'liked' the 'Ansaar International e.V.' Facebook page. Also, 'Generation Islam' (31) was among the 25 most popular Facebook pages of the *Jamal al-Khatib* followers who had 'liked' 'Pierre Vogel.de'. When the most popular Facebook pages of *Jamal al-Khatib* followers who had 'liked' the account 'Realität Islam' are examined, this trend becomes even more evident. Of those 40 followers, 27 had also 'liked' 'Ansaar International eV.' and 24 'Pierre Vogel.de', which represent the two most popular Facebook pages of those accounts. Assuming what cannot be taken for granted, that there were actual persons behind these accounts, this finding means that while scrolling through their news feeds, these people would have been regularly confronted with content posted to a large extent by accounts that disseminate Islamist and neo-Salafist material. From the moment that they clicked 'like' on the *Jamal al-Khatib* campaign account, our content, including the alternative narratives produced by the project team, also became part of their Facebook timelines.[12]

Taken together, the three guiding principles that we formulated at the beginning of our project have proved vital to the success of our online alternative narrative campaigns. Harnessing social media in order to communicate

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[12] When drawing conclusions on the basis of the exploratory social network analysis, it must be remembered that a 'like' on Facebook does not necessarily mean that the 'liker' is actually a sympathiser with the respective preacher or organisation. However, at the very least, the accounts mentioned above are ones that people interested in, if not convinced by, jihadi or neo-Salafist narratives could be expected to 'like'.

alternative narratives to those disseminated by extremist groups has not only allowed us to reach our target audience (defined above), but has also enabled us to establish contact and initiate discussions of the issues raised in the videos. The decentralised online setting and the limited time period available for building relationships imposed upon us by the campaign structure make it hard to be certain how many viewers and commentators were inspired to engage in processes of self-reflection as a result of our work. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that many more people than the number who actively responded by commenting or contacting us were reached in some way and followed the discussions without getting directly involved in them. Furthermore, basing the content of our videos on material developed in narrative biography work proved a highly effective strategy. In order for the narrative of our main character to engage adolescents from our target groups, they needed to identify with him; the issues and experiences addressed in the videos had to be similar to the issues and experiences of the viewers. Key to achieving this in the course of our project was our collaboration with young people who had themselves made such experiences: young people who had encountered propaganda material disseminated by so-called IS but resisted it, as well as some who had formerly been active in the jihadi scene. These young participants themselves expressed their strong motivation to take action against extremist online propaganda and to participate in public debates about it, while also expressing their frustration that they rarely found opportunities to do so. Two shitstorms during the second season, that is, co-ordinated efforts to spam our channels with propaganda disguised as harmless arguments, suggest that addressing the narratives the young adults had come across on the jihadi scene and combining them with the right keywords and hashtags was an important factor in reaching the target audience. These shitstorms were the answers of extremist actors to our reframing of certain aspects of their ideology. Our appropriation of audiovisual codes employed in material produced by extremist organisations such as so-called IS was also a significant factor in ensuring that our material caught and sustained the attention of our target audience. Examples of similar campaigns in this field suggest that regardless of how well-researched the content of an alternative narrative or political education online campaign is, or how convincing the arguments it formulates, if the material is not presented in a way that (audiovisually) appeals to the target group, the

campaign is unlikely to be effective. For our videos to engage adolescents who are at risk of being influenced by the narratives of extremists, the right images had to be selected, the right music had to play in the background and the narrator had to speak the right kind of language. Many of the comments posted in response referred to the look and feel conveyed by the videos. One viewer was particularly confused by the combination of extremist audiovisual codes and unexpected narratives. He asked: 'You're against Dawla, but you're listening to their nasheeds?' His question indicates that our strategy achieved what we had set out to do: to instil a sense of ambiguity by combining familiar elements with new ideas, an ambiguity that opens space for self-reflection and the critical reconsideration of concepts and beliefs.

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ANĀSHĪD: SOUNDSCAPES OF RELIGIO-POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

10

'NASHĪD' BETWEEN ISLAMIC CHANTING AND JIHADI HYMNS: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Ines Weinrich

Introduction

Music is one of the most powerful means of stirring up emotions and changing or deepening the mood of listeners. Throughout history, societies have used, but have also feared, the affective power of music, and have developed systems to channel and control it.[1] Jihadi groups are no exception regarding their use of music, be it for recreation, for mobilisation, to strengthen the spirit, to fight fear or to recruit new members.[2] They use the community-building effect of music and, last but not least, they use it as

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[1] This pertains to the definitions of what is music and what it is not, to attitudes towards music's effect and usage, or to the ban of particular instruments or musical techniques. Only a few examples from the Muslim context will be mentioned: on the overlapping of Quran recitation and the Arab secular music system and the demarcation of both domains, see Nelson (2001); on the appropriation of Greek musical philosophy on the effect of music on the human soul and the body, see Blum (2013), Weinrich (2020b) and Wright (2008). For a general introduction to Arab music, evaluating a wide range of treatises on both musical theory and Muslim theology, see Poché et al. (2001). A rich overview of diverse styles, functions and practices of Middle Eastern music is offered by Danielson et al. (2002).

[2] Bailey (2009): 151–2, 157; Lahoud and Pieslak (2018); Said (2016): 140–59; Seidensticker (2006).

a means of distinction, to keep 'right' from 'wrong': they define what people should listen to and what they should not listen to.

It is almost commonplace knowledge that jihadi groups do not term the vocal genres they use as music or song but as *nashīd*. From an ethnomusicologist perspective, the question of what people define as 'music' is part of the research design. On a meta-level, however, all organised vocal and instrumental sound can be analysed as 'music', that is, according to pitch and time organisation. Hence, when I use the terms 'music' and 'singing' throughout this chapter – meaning deliberately created sound – it is part of the metalanguage and does not reflect the attitude of most performers. *Nashīd* (pl. *anāshīd*) is a term that is commonly used today to keep the religious repertory separate from secular music and singing as a profane act without any further spiritual or ethical impetus. On a musico-technical level, however, *nashīd* shares the rhythmic and tonal structures and performance techniques of music, and much of the musical material builds on the Arab musical culture. In this chapter, I will map the field of the different musical domains that use the term *nashīd* and that chiefly form the musical sources of jihadi hymns.

By 'jihadi hymns', I simply mean those hymns that are used by jihadi groups, since there is no other distinct demarcation line where 'jihadi' as an attribute starts. First, not all *munshids* belong to a jihadi organisation; second, not all songs by a *munshid* or all hymns used in jihadi culture address military jihad or its related political aims; and finally, there is no fixed musical scheme for jihadi hymns.

Hitherto, research on jihadi hymns has ascertained a preference for traditional poetic forms, whereas the musical forms are more heterogeneous.[3] Studies have identified forerunners of contemporary singers and have included a historical overview of politically motivated Islamic hymns (Lahoud 2017; Lahoud and Pieslak 2018; Pieslak 2015; Said 2016). What is missing, however, is an evaluation of contemporary *anāshīd*'s musical sources and their collation with other domains of Islamic religious music. Pieslak (2015, 2017) mainly places the hymns within the 'Islam-and-Music' paradigm and

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[3] Seidensticker (2006); Said (2012, 2016); Gråtrud (2016); Creswell and Haykel (2017), on poetry by jihadi leaders that was not set to music. On music, see especially Pieslak (2015, 2017) and Lahoud and Pieslak (2018; a shorter version of their paper appeared as 'Music of the Islamic State', *Survival* 60: 1 (2018), 153–68).

only occasionally hints at musical forms employed in general piety. Lahoud and Pieslak (2018: 16, 18) contrast the IS *anāshīd* with 'traditional Arabic music', which is perceived as a rather static concept. Both categories, 'allowed forms of music' and 'traditional Arab' as a *tertium comparationis*, are too broad for specific sonic markers to be identified. The aim of this chapter is to identify confluences and distinctions of jihadi hymns within the field of song that is labelled with the Arabic term '*nashīd*'. Moreover, it aims to show that music is not only a vehicle for an ideological content wrapped in a poetic form but itself constitutes a message. The sensual perception is not a merely physiological process. How sounds or images are interpreted is shaped by pre-experiences and learned behaviour (Howes 2015). Meaning emerges through an interplay of poetry, religious propositions and well-selected sonic markers.

Terminological Clarifications

The term *nashīd* is today widely used, yet it may denote quite different sonic manifestations. Historically, the root *n-sh-d* was not linked to an exclusively religious repertory. Rather, it denoted any activity of text articulation by a performer vis-à-vis a listener, most commonly poetry. This included a raised voice, clear articulation, and possibly a slower tempo than normal speech.[4] *N-sh-d* most probably described a rendition of poetry that was on a musico-technical level simpler than *ghinā'* (singing) as an art form, which is described quite expansively in Arabic sources for the seventh to tenth century, such as in the 'Great Book of Songs' (*Kitāb al-aghānī al-kabīr*).[5] It was only in the late twentieth century that the verb *anshada* ('to raise the voice', 'to recite', 'to chant') and the noun *nashīd* (hymn) became the marker of an almost exclusively religious repertory. The dualistic distinction reflects the aspiration to create a clear-cut line between 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic', owing to the politics of alterity.

Anwar Al Awlaki, the US-Yemeni preacher of jihad who was killed in Yemen in 2011, refers to this early usage of *n-sh-d* in his call to produce *anāshīd* as an important tool for mobilisation:

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[4] This is how the verb *anshada* is used in chronicles, biographical lexica and anthologies, and how the Arab lexicographers explain it. See also van Gelder (2012): 159–62.
[5] al-Iṣfahānī (1955–7).

Muslims need to be inspired to practice Jihad. In the time of Rasulullah (saaws) he had poets who would use their poetry to inspire the Muslims and demoralise the disbelievers. Today nasheed can play that role. A good nasheed can spread so widely it can reach to an audience that you could not reach through a lecture or a book. (Al Awlaki n.d.: no. 40, n.p.)

Al Awlaki refers to the pre-Islamic Arab warfare custom of chanting verses in the *rajaz* metre that extol the strength of the in-group and ridicule the enemy, a practice that was perpetuated in the Islamic era. The emboldening effect of specific rhythms and melodies was later discussed by Muslims within the appropriation of Greek musical philosophy; for Al Awlaki, however, the key issue is to create a link to the Prophetic practice. Having established this link as a legitimising basis, he moves on to recognise the general affective potential of musical sound which amplifies the merely spoken or silently read word. Hence, he affirms the need to use music as an affective tool within the jihadi movements.

In the following, I will briefly present the musical domains in which *nashīd* (pl. *anāshīd*) is the dominant term. These are, first, the field of traditional religious chanting, or *inshād*; second, the patriotic and political hymns, termed *anāshīd waṭanīya*; third, a body of religious songs subsumed under the English spelling of the term, 'nasheed'; and fourth, the jihadi hymns. Jihadi hymns, I will show, draw musically from the three other domains and use specific sonic strategies which signify their general message.

Mapping the Field: The Musical Domains of n-sh-d

Traditional Inshād (Chanting)

In this domain, *inshād* is the generic term for a repertory that consists of praise poetry for the prophet, supplications, benedictions, rogation and doxology.[6] It is performed by a small ensemble (*firqa*) formed by a lead vocalist (*munshid*) and a chorus of four to eight persons. The ensembles are either all-male or all-female. Mostly, one or two frame drums of different sizes are added. In some regions, such as Egypt or Morocco, melody instruments are

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[6] The following remarks are based on fieldwork on contemporary religious chanting in Syria and Lebanon, conducted in 2007 and 2009–13. On *inshād* culture, see also Maktabī (2000).

added (Frishkopf 2000; ter Laan 2016). *Inshād* comprises solo and group singing and rhythmic songs as well as the metrically free solo performance of poetry (*qaṣīda*).

Inshād happens mainly offline. It takes place as a live event and features a high degree of interaction between performers and listeners. The audience engages in singing along or clapping their hands during selected parts. Often, they perform alternately with the ensemble in the form of refrains or call–response sequences (Abdel-Malek 1995; Frishkopf 2000; Weinrich 2016). During the soloist recitations, the audience participates through verbal and non-verbal responses such as exclamations, shouted comments or sighing. These are articulated between the single musical phrases and may inspire the performer to intensify emotions by repeating the phrase with subtle modifications – a technique of mutual engagement termed *tafāʿul* (Racy 2003; Weinrich 2018).

Performers and participants view *inshād* as a supererogatory act of devotion, and its performance is often linked to other supererogatory acts, such as the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*) or meetings to invoke blessings for the Prophet (*majlis aṣ-ṣalāt ʿalā n-nabī*). Although *inshād* gets broadcast in radio and television and audio files are exchanged, its milieu is chiefly non-commercial. *Munshids* may get payed, but festivities and meetings are sponsored with free access for everybody. Audio and video footage of such events are given away as a gift, sold informally, or uploaded on the internet.

To be clear, the characterisation 'traditional' relates to the performance context and performance practices and not necessarily to the musical material, which can be quite volatile. It builds on an older repertory that is stylistically rooted in Arab art music (*qaṣīda*, *muwashshaḥ*), Quran cantillation, and local folk music and incorporates contemporary stylistic currents. A lead vocalist compiles his or her repertory from what he or she has learned, heard and liked. Besides, the composition of the audience, that is, what styles listeners respond to, affects the selection. *Inshād* is a flexible and fluid system which is rooted in tradition and responds to individual preferences and shifting tastes. The performance practice, however, builds on participation and interaction, independently of the concrete musical material. Although performances often blur socialising, entertainment and religious devotion, one

main function of *inshād* is to praise God and the Prophet, express gratitude, ask for forgiveness and thereby provide for the Hereafter.

Whereas many genres and practices within this type of *inshād* – though not the exact musical sound – can be traced well back in history, the second category of songs termed *anāshīd* is a rather recent phenomenon. These are the patriotic and political hymns, called *anāshīd waṭanīya*.

Patriotic and political hymns (anāshīd waṭanīya)

Political hymns such as national anthems or the hymns of single organisations and parties form the few non-religious hymns that are termed *nashīd*. This type of composition started at the beginning of the twentieth century in the wake of Arab nationalism. Its musical features had, however, been prepared well before that time. In the 1820s, the first military music schools were founded in Egypt to educate musicians for the military bands (El Shawan 1985). Students learned the basic rules of European music theory and a European and adopted Arab repertory. Alongside other European experts, music experts were recruited who worked in schools, as private tutors, in music institutions, and later in the radio stations. The 'modernisation programme' of rulers such as Khedive Ismāʿīl (r.1867–79) promoted European-style concerts, concert venues and performing troupes. With the inauguration of the Cairene Opera House in 1869, staging Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, an annual opera season started. Economic and social changes resulted in a re-organisation of music education: it shifted from guilds to private clubs and institutes, and from there to formal school education. European music pedagogy including staff notation and solmisation was introduced into the Egyptian school curriculum as early as the 1930s. Similar developments followed in other Arab countries.

Patriotic hymns, anti-colonial hymns and hymns promoting different types of nationalism were present in early twentieth-century official festivities, demonstrations, paramilitary youth organisations of political parties, and schools. Many of these shared the characteristics of military music such as a straight beat and a marching tempo, frequent upbeats, dotted notes, fanfares, and, often, a melodic line that was suited for multi-part arrangement. Allusion to harmonic schemes – singing/playing in fifths, thirds, or sixths – and the oscillation between the Arab modal system of *maqām* and European

functional harmony can be traced back to this period.[7] Since the late 1930s, the newly-founded radio stations in the Middle East, often owned by the colonial powers, contributed considerably to the dissemination of European music, and henceforth tonality. This never replaced Arab music's tonal system, but was nonetheless continuously present and, in many cases, constituted a model that shaped developments in Arab music, especially those in orchestrated music of the 1950s and 1960s (El Shawan 1985; Poché, Shiloah, and Wright 2001; Weinrich 2006). This brief overview shows that composition techniques based on European tonality are not a recent phenomenon but date back well into the nineteenth century; the issue of the asymmetrical power relations that shaped that appropriation cannot adequately be discussed here.

International nasheed

Nashīd's English spelling, 'nasheed', became an international term, used also by non-Arabic speakers and Arab Muslims writing in English. It denotes religious songs in Arabic and many other languages. It could also be termed 'pop *nasheed*', although most of its protagonists would dislike the term. One successful player in this domain, Sami Yusuf (b. 1980), remarks in an interview: 'They've called it Nasheed [. . .], rock and even Islamic pop, which I absolutely hate' (quoted in Tusing 2010). But, in fact, many productions share the characteristics of a pop song: they are up to five minutes long, and have a clear, often strophic structure and a duple metre. Many songs come with a music video. The songs feature syllabic singing and only occasional melisma. The vocal line forms the centre of the musical texture, and the musical accompaniment ranges from only a background chorus to percussion or drum machine (or both) and more instruments. The electronic sound production, both of vocals and of musical instruments, has become an important trait in this field. We find allusions to European-style harmony, but rarely fully-fledged harmonic chords throughout the complete song. For instance, the dominant in the minor or the parallel key is used instead of the dominant in the major.

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[7] Cf. the samples included in ʿAytānī and Fākhūrī (1995): 184–97 and Qurṭās (1983); for a brief analysis of some hymns that circulated in the 1940s, see Weinrich (2006): 75–80.

Initially denoting a single vocally-performed piece, '*nasheed*' became a generic term, illustrated by statements like 'It's not music, it's *nasheed*' and titles for song compilations online. In this context, '*nasheed*' stands for a 'religiously licit repertory', and performers often also call themselves *munshid*. Nevertheless, a great part of the music production is market-driven and commercial: singers sell their records and tickets and make a living by singing, although they are often engaged in charity projects as well. Catering to the different demands of their audience, many offer different versions of a song: 'with/without music', or, more elegantly put, 'acoustic/instrumental' (Otterbeck and Skjelbo 2019; Weinrich 2020a).

Texts and music videos focus on personal piety, ethics, praise of the prophet Muḥammad, images of contemporary Muslim lifestyle, and Muslim solidarity. The sonic and visual language of videos stresses images of a middle-class lifestyle, which was formerly occupied by pop music videos and is now claimed as Islamic sphere (Barendregt 2012; Weinrich 2020a). Besides, videos use graphic patterns or natural landscapes as backgrounds. Many performers see their songs as a means of developing one's own spirituality, and the field developed its own global market structures (Barendregt 2012; Karahasanoğlu 2016; Morris 2017; Otterbeck and Skjelbo 2019; Weinrich 2020a).

Despite the above-mentioned commonalities, '*nasheed*' is a heterogeneous field with different local foci. It is part of a broader consumer culture of religiously conscious and faith-inspired products, such as in Western Europe (Herding 2013; Morris 2017), South Asia (Barendregt 2012), Lebanon (Deeb and Harb 2013) or Egypt, from where the impetus of the much older concept of 'art with a mission (*al-fann al-hadīf*)' began in the 1990s (van Nieuwkerk 2013). '*Nasheed*' is international in the sense that some actors, especially those performing in English and Arabic, have a global audience, and it is international in the sense that it simultaneously developed different local aesthetics.

Overlapping spheres of politically and religiously motivated anāshīd

Pieslak and Lahoud set the 1960s as the starting-point for songs that address military fight (Pieslak 2015: 23–4; Pieslak 2017: 67; Lahoud and Pieslak 2018: 1–2). It is true that the *fidāʾī*, the Palestinian fighter who started military operations, became the superhero of Palestinian resistance poetry and

popular culture from the early 1960s onwards. One should add, however, that the *fidāʾī* culture of the 1960s was a secular culture. In fact, politically and religiously motivated *anāshīd* emerged in several political contexts and followed different, though partly overlapping, paths, both politically and aesthetically. The following remarks can offer only a glimpse of these different paths.

Alongside political hymns, hymns with Islamic themes were launched by the Egyptian Muslim Brothers in the 1930s (Tammam and Haenni 2004: 93). Secular political hymns formed an important part of the musical production in Nasserist Egypt. The political hymns disseminated by the PLO in the 1960s added to the already existing repertory of resistance songs that were inspired by Palestinian folk genres (McDonald 2013: 78–103). During the 1970s, university students in Egypt and Morocco started to perform and consume religious hymns as a protest attitude towards state politics (Haenni and Tammam 2004; ter Laan 2016: 88). The popularity of such hymns increased rapidly, resulting in the demand for performing ensembles for the so-called 'Islamic weddings', a new form of wedding celebration that emerged around 1990. These developments constitute the roots of what is today known as '*nasheed*' or Islamic pop (Tammam and Haenni 2004). The 1970s were likewise the time when the first jihadi hymns within the Islamic opposition in Syria and Egypt started to be written (Said 2016: 45–63; Pieslak 2015). The 1980s witnessed the further regional diversification of such hymns in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, followed by Palestine (Said 2016: 63–84). Finally, many influential leftist political singers and bands made their debut in the 1970s in several Arab countries. These were musically inspired by folk songs and the international civic protest movements (Weinrich 2006: 412–13; not all songs in the latter category were termed *nashīd*).

The first Palestinian Intifada, starting in 1987, worked as a catalyst for Palestinian productions as well as for Islamic hymns in other countries. The Palestinian repertory was threefold: next to the politically leftist mass hymns, Palestinian artists inside the Occupied Territories further developed the folk-based repertory, and Hamas entered the scene with a religious musical repertory (McDonald 2013: 116–43). In Turkey, genres like jihad song (*cihad ezgi*) and march (*marş*) emerged in the late 1980s, in the beginning often modelled on the leftist marches of a decade earlier (Karahasanoğlu 2016).

In the 1990s, the popularisation of Islamic hymns started, in the sense both of becoming a broad movement and of borrowing musical styles from popular music, from both '*shaʿbī* and *shabābī* (folk and pop)', as Tammam and Haenni (2004: 96) put it. In South Asia, male performing groups modernised, popularised and recorded Islamic chants, such as *nasyed* in Malaysia (Arps 1996; Barendregt 2012), *singir* in Java (Wieringa 2006) or the *qasida modéren* in Indonesia (Arps 1996). Much of this repertory had been performed formerly by women. 'Art with a mission' revived as an alternative entertainment form and a means of propagating Islamic values. With the rise of private TV and radio stations, the aesthetic forms of religion became further mediatised, using music videos, TV shows or podcasts. In short, contemporary *nasheed* and jihadi hymns are strongly mediatised forms of what had started in the 1970s as 'cassette cultures' (Peter Manuel).

Jihadi hymns

Jihadi hymns that have become highly visible and audible on the internet in the twenty-first century include forerunners from the 1970s and 1980s that are re-used by contemporary performers. Many of these performers are from Saudi Arabia, Yemen or Egypt and were born in the 1970s and 1980s (Said 2016: 123–39). The early repertory used musical material from the patriotic and political hymns (*anāshīd waṭanīya*), from traditional *inshād*, folk genres, and then popular styles. Whereas the early repertory was distributed through music cassettes with sporadic live performances, jihadi groups nowadays use specialised media companies, websites, and technically well-equipped – but not overly expensive – studios (Lahoud and Pieslak 2018: 19), and distribution mainly takes place via the internet. In many cases, the visual element is added to the auditive consumption, since hymns are available as stand-alone audio and as video soundtracks.

Lahoud and Pieslak (2018) have shown that a substantial change took place in 2012/2013, when IS, through hymns, prepared for a situation which was achieved in early summer 2014, namely the seizure of a territory that was to become the caliphate. The shift from an abstract idea to concrete territorial manifestation of that idea is addressed in a number of *anāshīd* produced and disseminated by IS's media wings. At the same time, these media wings

refrained from using songs from *munshids* that did not belong to IS. Hymns developed into a site of competition between militarist groups and thus had to contribute to shape an IS-specific identity. In the following, I will present a sample of individual single pieces and demonstrate different musical sources and styles.

Battle Songs and Military Music Features

Songs which describe or call to fighting commonly feature a marching tempo, syllabic singing, duple metre and a strong, palpable beat. Often, the melodic line is marked by upbeat, dotted notes, stylised fanfares and sequences, that is, the restatement of a motif or melodic passage in a higher or lower pitch. Many of these musical characteristics have been established by the earlier *anāshīd waṭanīya*. One prominent example is *Bi-jihādinā* (Through Our Jihad).

Bi-jihādinā exists in numerous versions online. The singer of the analysed recording is Mūsā ibn ʿAlī al-ʿUmayra aka Abū ʿAlī (b. 1978), a well-known figure in the jihadi milieu. The song itself is much older; its text is included in the poetry collection belonging to the music cassettes by the Syrian *munshid* Abū Māzin, published in 1984.[8] Next to rhyme and metre, the poem employs the rhythmic device of syntactic parallelism, which I have also tried to render in my translation:

> (1) Through our jihad we let rocks crumble
> and tear up the oppressor and unbelief.
> (2) Through powerful and great determination
> and a willingness that does not accept any compulsion.
> (3) We mobilise emotions and intellect,
> with our blood, we will colour the dawn.
> (4) We arrive there [at the dawn] with victory, oh my Ummah,
> with our fight, we will change fate.
> (5) Through our jihad, through the blazing torch,
> the night of polytheism and heresy will vanish.

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[8] *Nashīd al-katāʾib* (1986), 3rd edn: 181. On Abū ʿAlī, see Said (2016): 123–5; on the poem/song, see Said (2016): 81, 164, 166–8 and Lahoud and Pieslak (2018): 4. Note that the stanza's melodic line in Abū ʿAlī's version differs slightly from Abū Māzin.

(6) We embark with determination and endurance
and break the oppression of chains and bonds.[9]

In the musical composition, each half-line forms a musical phrase, and the melodic development of a line is chiefly shaped by sequences. This technique gives the song a clear structure and a distinct rhythm which reflects the rhyme and partly also the parallelism. In addition, the poem has been turned into a strophic song, with the first two verses taken as a refrain. The articulation is syllabic; only on the last syllable of each hemistich does the performer execute a short melisma or vocal turn, which almost forms a triad. The melody moves in small steps, with tone repetitions and occasional leaps.

In its musical structure, *Bi-jihādinā* is similar to *Mawṭinī* (My Homeland), a well-known patriotic and non-religious hymn. *Mawṭinī* is based on a poem by the Palestinian poet Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān (d. 1941) and was set to music by the Lebanese Fulayfil Brothers, Aḥmad and Muḥammad Fulayfil, who conducted the first Lebanese national military band founded in 1942.[10] *Mawṭinī* is considered the unofficial Palestinian anthem and is often sung during protests. Since 2004, it has been the national anthem of post-war Iraq:

My homeland,
Glory and beauty, sublimity and splendour are in your hills.
Life and deliverance, bliss and hope are in your air.
Will I see you
Safe and blessed with prosperity, successful and revered?
Will I see you in your grandeur
Reaching to the stars?

As becomes clear from the visual form of the text, the poem is in free verse, like most of the secular nationalist and resistance poetry of the twentieth century.

Both compositions feature duple metre, upbeat, dotted notes, and sequences as a melodic figure. They furthermore exhibit a regular structure, based on four-bar blocks, fill-ins as a 'fanfare' and hints of functional

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[9] Since the last two verses of the poem are not sung, they are not included into the translation. All translations from Arabic are mine.
[10] Ṭūqān (1988): 511–13; Aytānī and Fākhūrī (1995): 184–6.

Figure 10.1 Musical transcription of Bi-jihādinā (© Ines Weinrich 2020).
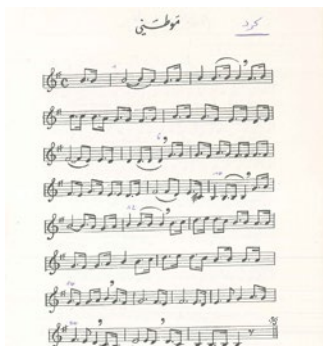
Figure 10.2 Page from a school hymn book edited by Wadād al-Maqdisī Qurṭās, principal of a Beiruti girl's school in the 1940s.

harmony. It might not even be by chance that both pieces are in the same *maqām*, that is *maqām kurd*.[11] In music arranged for a military band or a larger orchestra, there is a preference for *maqāmāt* that do not involve microtonal steps and thus are easier to combine with harmonic chords. Selective harmonisation, while at the same time retaining melodic movements characteristic of *maqām*-related music, is the main marker of oscillation between both tonal systems, *maqām* and European tonality.

Patriotic hymns are commonly performed with the accompaniment of brass and percussion. This version of *Bi-jihādinā* is a purely vocal studio recording. Occasionally, a counter-voice to the main melody, humming, and vocal fill-ins are added.[12] Throughout the song, reverberation is used. The reverberation effect has been immensely popular for a couple of decades. It is also used in live performances of *inshād*, regardless of the size of the room or the size of the audience. I experienced it during fieldwork on various occasions, including performances in a small living room where the performer brought in a huge box with an amplifying system and reverb technique. Michael Frishkopf (2009) ascribes this aesthetic feature to the rising aesthetics of the Saudi style of Quran recitation, where it is often added in the

[11] *Maqām* (pl. *maqāmāt*) designates the modes in Arab and neighbouring music cultures. A *maqām* is defined by a specific succession of intervals, characteristic melodic movements and its relation to other *maqāmāt*.

[12] In traditional Arab music, instrumental fill-ins between two musical phrases take up the last tones of a phrase, often by imitating the rhythmic or melodic structure.

studio. He reads the reverb as a strategy for imitating the soundspheres of the huge mosques in Mecca and Medina: 'Reverberating in their cavernous spaces, the reciter's voice becomes an index of the mosques themselves, sounding sacred space' (Frishkopf 2009: 101). Reverb and delay seem to have transgressed styles and musical domains rapidly. John Baily observed these features in Taliban *tarana* recordings from Afghanistan and describes them as techniques that are very popular in the secular music of the region (Baily 2009: 157). Whether the reverb technique originated in the Saudi-style recitation or not, it is certainly no longer a distinct feature of Saudi-shaped religious ideology, nor of jihadi hymns, since it is common in many *inshād* performances and in *nasheed*.

Similar musical structures and more sound effects are employed in a song which likewise encourages fighting, *Usūdu l-ḥarb* (Lions of War). *Usūdu l-ḥarb* is available in different versions on the internet, too. It is used in several videos produced by jihadi groups, for instance a production by *al-Qāʿida in the Maghrib* in 2011, and is classed as one of the 'Top 5 Jihadi Songs' of 2014, referring to a version by the *munshid* and Afghanistan veteran Abū Usayd.[13] The song has been uploaded onto many websites either as an audio file or as a video, independent of official media productions. Many of the videos show only one photograph or a designed image as a still throughout the song. One video illustrates the poetic text by photographs. Against a green background, the song's text and various pictures are shown: men riding on horses, men with a flag, a fighter with a machine pistol, the corpse of a martyr, a photo of Usama bin Laden:[14]

> (1) In war, we are lions; we are never afraid
> and [we are] falcons, ascended into the sky.
> (2) The backs of our horses were our cradle
> on them, we inherited our pride.
> (3) We are knights, horses are our cradles
> when we are called, we answer the call.

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[13] Mohammad D., 'Top 5 Jihadi Songs of 2014', posted 18 November 2014. <https://syrianewsupdate.wordpress.com/2014/11/18/top-5-jihadi-songs/> (last accessed 24 October 2018). On the poem/song, see Said (2016): 172–86; on Abū Usayd, Said (2016): 128–30.

[14] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WN2vkane0E> (last accessed 24 October 2018).

(4) In the path of God we live and die
a life of glory or a death of sacrifice.
(5) If somebody calls us to
support Islam, we follow the call.

The next verses describe battle scenes, promise the immortal life for martyrs, and address a fighter's mother and sister. The final verse reads:

(15) If he [the son/brother] dies as a martyr, be proud of him
if he returns, it will be with a clear victory (*an-naṣr al-mubīn*).

The poem's rhythm, enacted through rhyme and parallelism, finds its match in the short musical phrases, which cover a half-line each, and the repetitive melodic schema that features narrow steps and pitch repetition. The syllabic singing alternates between a solo voice and a chorus. To enhance the sonic structure, various sounds effects are added, such as the hooves of horses, the roaring of lions, and a hissing sound that could be interpreted as either bullets or arrows. Arrows would go with the poetic imagery, which evokes battle scenes as described in early Arabic poetry. Military sound effects are already reported by Baily (2009: 152) for hymns used in the 1980s. Furthermore, vocal fill-ins, counter-voices, and the singing of the same melodic line in a different register are occasionally added.

Both *Bi-jihādinā* and *Usūdu l-ḥarb* share similar musical features combined with the ethos of early Arabic poetry: the ethos of the knight, the brave and noble fighter, the well-versed rider and warrior. 'We arrive there [at the dawn] with victory, oh my Ummah' evokes the image of an early morning raid (*ghazwa*), which was a typical Bedouin warfare technique and is also used as a poetic simile in the Quran (100: 1–5). Guns and canons are repeatedly juxtaposed with swords and arrows. Horses figure prominently in the poetic, visual and sonic language: they are directly named or metonymically referred to in poetry; they feature in numerous pictures, as well as in the sounds of hooves and neighing.[15] Given the fact that early Arabic poetry constitutes a large part of the school curriculum in many Arab states, there is reason to

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[15] Cf., furthermore, poems and recordings such as *Yā ʿābida l-ḥaramayni, Risālatunā katabnāhā bi-damʿin, Sa-nanzaʿu qalba*, or *Ṣawt azīzi l-midfaʿ*, and visual illustrations of various *anāshīd* compilations.

think that not only sound and image but also the poetry resonates with native Arabic speakers.

With Al Awlaki's reference to poetry chanting as an ancient tradition in mind, the musical features of battle songs and the poetic imagery form a strategy to appeal by evoking the heroic ethos of the early Islamic era, when Islam was still young, strong and uncorrupted. Further illustrated by visual images of horses, swords, and men in long garments riding on horses, the heroic ethos becomes poetically, sonically and visually present.

'Be Steadfast, O My Soul' (*Ṣabran yā nafsī*)

Another group of songs can be subsumed under the term 'contemplative songs'. They feature also a regular beat, but exhibit occasional rhythmic liberties and a slower pace. A soft, often breathy voice is preferred, and a higher vocal register. The melodic idiom is calmer, though elements like vocal fill-ins and selective multi-part singing remain in many studio versions. Such songs do not directly incite to fighting. They serve to release emotional tension and often address visions of paradise and female family members. The hymn *Ṣabran yā nafsī* (Be Steadfast, O My Soul) is a prominent example.

Judging by its numerous different versions, *Ṣabran yā nafsī* turns out to be an exceptionally popular song. It is included in the joint album *Lan nansākum* ('We Will Never Forget You', released in 2008) by Abū Fāris and Ghālib Aḥmad Bāquʿīṭī aka Abū Hājir (b. 1986), where the lyrics are ascribed to Abū Hājir.[16] A simple search on YouTube showed approximately a hundred different videos of this song, ranging from professionally produced ones to home-made mash-up videos.[17] Unfortunately, the singer is not always mentioned by name. It seems, however, that the performances by Abū Fāris and Abū Hājir and by Nāyif Sharhān are the most popular, since their voices feature in most videos. Besides, videos show lay performers, such as armed fighters in the field or a man in a mosque, who sing live. The poem/song is

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[16] <https://archive.org/details/AbuHajaralHadramiAbuFarisLanNansakum/10+-+Sabrn. mp3> (last accessed 23 October 2018). On Abū Fāris, see Said (2016): 127–8, on Abū Hājir, Said (2016): 130–3; on the poem/song, Said (2016): 234–7.

[17] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=sabran+ya+nafsi> (last accessed 23 October 2018).

used by different, also opposing groups, featuring different cities, war situations and armies in text and image.[18]

In the poem, a fighter addresses his soul and reflects on his situation. The intimate dialogue with the soul is a common trope in Arabic poetry. What makes the poem interesting is the description of struggling emotions, or mixed feelings, namely the conflict that arises through the memory of the fighter's mother (verse 5) and his subsequent reassurance that he took the right decision, ending with visions of paradise:

(1) Be steadfast, o my soul, be steadfast, o my soul

be steadfast, oh my soul, God is with us.

(2) Jerusalem calls, Jerusalem calls

Jerusalem calls and cries out: ah!

(3) Be steadfast, because my path, be steadfast, because my path

be steadfast, because my path is [made of] fire.

(4) The Huris call, the Huris call

the Huris call to delight.

(5) I remember, when I said farewell to you [f.] that day

you cried for me out of compassion.

(6) You said: O son, don't break my heart!

The memory and yearning kills me.

(7) And I went, because I realise that in my time

unbelief dominates everywhere.

(8) I took my weapon and lifted my banner

and went to kill the enemies

(9) In Paradise, I sing and trill and chant

and recite verses of the Quran

(10) There, I will meet my wife and children

and embrace my family and brothers

The version from the 2008 album is slow, featuring long notes and solo singing, enhanced by pad sounds. The text repetitions correspond to melodic repetitions; only occasionally does the singer slightly modify the melody. The version

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[18] In recent versions, Jerusalem is often replaced by Damascus.

by Nāyif Sharhān skips one repetition, sacrificing the poetic form for easier listening. His version is further emotionalised through a humming chorus, gunfire that starts as early as verse 2, and heavy explosions illustrating the 'fire' mentioned in verse 3. Additionally, a 'mother's voice' is cut into the song: after verse 6, we hear a woman saying 'allāh yirḍā ʿalayk (may God be pleased with you)', a common phrase in daily parlance, especially between a mother and her child. Verses 5–8, depicting the inner struggle of the fighter, are distinct from the rest of the song through a different textual and melodic structure and a higher voice register. When these verses are repeated by the chorus, the soloist increases the musical texture by adding fill-ins. When the 'inner fight' is over and the lyrical subject convinced about his actions (again), having persuaded himself, the song gradually returns to its musical regularity. Composition and arrangement (tawzīʿ) of this song show strong affiliation with contemporary nasheed.

Though contemplative, elegies seem to form a separate musical category within jihadi hymns. Most of them are solo performances and feature improvisatorial passages without an underlying metrical beat. Elegies seem to be inspired by musical forms that are traditionally performed in the context of funerals, such as rithāʾ, the solo performance of a poem eulogising the deceased, nadb (lament), short verses sung alternatingly between soloist and chorus, or more general forms of lamenting and contemplating that use melismatic singing (nawḥa, mawwāl).

It should be mentioned in this context that jihadi hymns have appropriated not only musical aesthetics but, especially within the field of elegy, the fidāʾī culture of the 1960s, when the figure of the fidāʾī who devotes his life to the cause became almost omnipresent in poetry, song and cinema. Most striking is the parallel between the fidāʾī and jihadi culture in funeral songs that are at the same time wedding songs. The wedding has become both a site of and a topos in Palestinian resistance songs (McDonald 2013: 4, 109–11, 177–88). But whereas the religious martyr is wedded to the houris in Paradise, in the resistance poetry the homeland is turned into the bride and the wedding into revolution.[19] In addition, there is a considerable difference

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[19] On 'the wedding of the martyr' in Palestinian resistance poetry, see Embaló et al. (2001): 14–122; on the 'revolutionary wedding' in song, theatre, and film, see Weinrich (2006): 241–3, 256–65.

in the poetic form: whereas a great part of the jihadi poetry is composed in forms of the early poetic heritage, the nationalist *fidāʾī* poetry is predominantly in free verse (*ash-shiʿr al-ḥurr*), a poetic style that most poets in the jihadi milieu seem to avoid.

Conclusion: Appropriations and Strategies of Authentification

This chapter has introduced the musical domains that are governed by the term *nashīd*: traditional *inshād*, patriotic political hymns (*anāshīd waṭanīya*), international *nasheed*, and jihadi hymns. Musically, jihadi hymns draw from the three other domains. The greatest communality with *inshād* is the missing of musical instruments, which are often employed in *nasheed* and in the patriotic hymns. Otherwise, there are significant differences between both domains. *Inshād* comprises different genres, including the melismatic, metrically free *qaṣīda*, and different themes, such as human insufficiencies, the plea for forgiveness, and God's mercy. Most importantly, in traditional *inshād*, the *munshid* interacts with his listeners in a live performance, whereas jihadi *munshids* often lack live listeners.[20] *Inshād* builds on a participatory culture, where the roles of performer and listener merge. The processes of performance and composition often overlap, especially in the *qaṣīda* style, which is significantly missing in jihadi hymns. Like *nasheed* and most of the political hymns, the jihadi hymn is a pre-composed fixed product. Jihadi hymns are marked – and recently also marketed – by a top-down process; only after the fixed product is offered to the public, individual choices of listening and re-appropriation can start.[21]

Hymns exhibit sonic strategies which are based on listening as a learned practice. The effect thus may vary individually, but there are several strands which are designed to impact listeners on a more general level. I term these strategies to attract people as 'strategies of authentification', that is, presenting the own cause as genuinely 'Islamic'. Many hymns, especially from the later period of jihadi hymns, employ sonic reminiscences to the kernel of religion and its sonic atmosphere. The primacy of the voice is indexical of

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[20] For occasional live performances, see Said (2016): 125, 135–6.
[21] On *anāshīd* as a fixed and controlled product, see Berg, Chapter 11; Dick and Fuhrmann, Chapter 12, analyse appropriations of jihadi hymns.

Quran cantillation and related musical techniques. These comprise also the call to prayer and prayers pf supplication (*duʿāʾ*), which have several musico-technical restrictions in contrast to the singing of poetry. The a cappella singing has an ideological background – music instruments are to be avoided – but at the same time it links songs to the 'most pure' religious musical genres. Certain voice techniques add to the atmosphere of genuineness: performers are knowledgeable in Quran recitation and apply rules of *tajwīd* (orthoepy), such as the technique of *qalqala*, that is, producing an echoing sound if a syllable ends with the letters q, ṭ, b, j, or d of the Arabic alphabet. Executed at the end of a word, it leads to a palpable echo which gives Quran recitation its distinct flavour.

In *Ummatī qad lāḥat fajrun* (My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared),[22] the expression *rabb al-ʿālamīn* resonates numerous prayers (*duʿāʾ*) and of course the Quran, where it features most prominently in the *fātiḥa* (first Surah) which is recited in every prostration sequence of the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) and is therefore familiar also to Muslims whose native tongue is not Arabic. Together with *ṣādiqīn* and other rhyme words, the song text is in its sound reminiscent of *duʿāʾ* and thus gives the content an aura of not only authenticity but rightness, truth, and legitimation. Importantly, this effect is not created by the content alone ('God wants it like this'), but by the sound that is itself a reference to professed sacred sources.

Sound comprises more than the musical composition; rather, the deliberate choice of vocabulary re-sounds religious propositions and the Quran. For instance, references to immortal life and the garden of eternity in *Usūdu l-ḥarb* are evoked through Quranic vocabulary (Q 3:169, 25:15). For listeners familiar with the Quran, the phrase *an-naṣr al-mubīn* (the clear victory) in *Usūdu l-ḥarb* and *Ummatī qad lāḥat fajrun* works as a sonic trigger. *an-Naṣr* features prominently in the Quran (Q 3:126, 8:10), and the almost synonymous *al-fatḥ al-mubīn* (Q 48:1) comes into the mind. Moreover, the adjective *mubīn* semantically feeds into the Quranic link, since it is part of the self-referential *al-kitāb al-mubīn* (the clear book). Hence, *mubīn* stresses the reference to the Quran, without direct citation. Finally, keywords of poetic imagery constitute sonic markers of authenticity that build on learned

[22] On this song, see Lahoud and Pieslak (2018): 12–13.

forms of meaning ascription. The recurrence of early poetic forms and imagery blends well with the re-actualisation of heroism and the greatness of a glorious past.

It might not be by chance that, in the IS repertory analysed by Lahoud and Pieslak (2018), the forms which are based on soloistic, melismatic performance are largely absent. Elegies are built on this form, and might be avoided in favour of an optimistic self-referential repertory. The individualistic impulse of improvised forms is generally decreasing in the repertoire. This includes the subtleties of the voice that show in microtonal nuances (ʿurab), which become eliminated in favour of a strong, compact sound. Finally, folk styles, too, build on individual creativity and exhibit subtle markers such as timbre, tessitura, or wordplay based on ambiguity (homonyms, puns). Moreover, folk styles index local cultures, whereas the ideology aims at merging with a universal Muslim culture. Thus, we can discern a focus on military and group-specific themes that demand sounds of rhythm, beat and chorus-singing to signify power and communality. Markers of ambiguity and individuality are effaced in favour of uniformity.

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11

ANĀSHĪD AT THE CROSSROAD BETWEEN THE ORGANISATIONAL AND THE PRIVATE

Carin Berg

Introduction

Music is a contested issue in many Muslim contexts. Hence, in order to not contradict religious ideas, Islamist organisations like Hamas and Hizbullah use *anāshīd* (*nashīd* in the singular), a form of poetic chants, to mobilise their supporters. This chapter will show how *anāshīd* traverse the borders between the public domain of the organisations into the private lives of their supporters. This chapter aims at showing that the *anāshīd's* capacity to move back and forth between public and private, hence fusing political and religious messages with emotions and organisational events, provides Hamas and Hizbullah with an exceptional tool to convey political agendas.

In order to grasp how the public (organisational) and the private domain interact, *anāshīd* will be analysed through Ray Pratt´s (1994) definition of the purposive and effective dimensions of how music can be used in political contexts and for political use. The purposive dimension implies that music is used in an intentional strategic manner to reach certain political goals and/or effects. The effective dimension, on the other hand, illustrates how music can be used for political purposes by evoking specific connotations, implying that any music can potentially be employed for political aims.

Hamas and Hizbullah apply *anāshīd* as a tool and strategy to fulfil the role that other types of music play in many other organisations. *Anāshīd* are strictly controlled and managed to fit the religious ideology and political aims of the organisations. Music as instrument of political communication in general, including *anāshīd*, has the capability to strengthen the collective, to spread, highlight, and support core ideas as well as to stimulate emotions and trigger feelings, which is useful to maintain and reinforce political values (Pieslak 2015: 18–21; Pratt 1994). In Hamas and Hizbullah, this is especially true when *anāshīd* are used during political events to create specific atmospheres and a common identity, to spread political messages, and to remind people of the struggle and enemies of the organisations. Their lyrics are widely popular, and supporters listen to the same types of *anāshīd* in private. This study will show that *anāshīd* are part of the organisational identification, although the organisations' supporters have their own interpretation and experience of *anāshīd* and their own perception of their role, which stretches beyond the control and reason of Hamas and Hizbullah. The incorporation of *anāshīd* into the private sphere actually optimises their political qualities, but also creates tensions as the distinctions between the private and the organisational are blurred.

In the private context, *anāshīd* are listened to, for example, at home and in the car, which are places where, potentially, any type of music could be played. Nevertheless, *anāshīd* are the preferred, or at least the selected, genre. One reason is that *anāshīd* are one of a few permitted musical genres according to a common interpretation of Islam. Another reason relates to the fact that, on an individual level, *anāshīd* can support the mobilisation of strength during harsh times, remind of and help maintain political and religious values, speak about morals, and entertain, which is not only of concern in regard to organisations (Berg, forthcoming).

Anāshīd will be explored through empirical data gathered during fieldwork in the milieus of Hamas and Hizbullah. The material consists of participant observations, mainly during political events and rehersals, and interviews with officials, musicians, and supporters of the two organisations. The data were collected during nine months of fieldwork between 2012 and 2013 in Lebanon, as well as during additional follow-up interviews/conversations in 2014 and 2015.

Hamas, Hizbullah and *Anāshīd*

Palestinian Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) was founded in 1987 as an outgrowth of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and as a result of the first Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections but was denied victory by Fatah, which did not accept the election results. As a consequence of major clashes and disagreements, the political system of the Palestinian territories was divided. Up until today, Fatah has ruled the West Bank and Hamas the Gaza Strip (Caridi 2012: 306–13). Lebanese Hizbullah (the Party of God) is one of the most powerful forces in the Middle East. It was founded in 1982, initially as an Islamic militia group. Hizbullah was created partly to strengthen the deprived Shia population of the Middle East and partly as a resistance wing against the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. The organisation takes its inspiration from the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian revolution of 1979. Today, Hizbullah is a party in the Lebanese government and is one of the most influential political forces in the country, with a strong military wing (Alagha 2015: 43–78).

Art and culture are part of both Hamas's and Hizbullah's structure and tools, among which *anāshīd*, meaning hymns or poetic chants (Weinrich, this volume), serve as a core element. *Anāshīd* have a long tradition of use in the Middle East. Originally, they lacked instrumental accompaniment, whereas today many *anāshīd* include multiple instruments. *Anāshīd* should not refer to subjects, or be used in contexts, that are incorrect or forbidden according to Islam, which is a matter of interpretation, with large variation (Teer Laan 2016: 79). The *anāshīd* applied and produced in Hamas and Hizbullah often contain political statements intertwined with Islamic messages. The organisations, particularly Hizbullah, also use military marches, French marches, for example, and political and nationalistic songs by composers such as Fairouz, Wadih Safi, Ghassan Saliba and Julia Boutros. These songs are not classified as *anāshīd* since they lack the religious dimension (Samir 2013). When referring to music that is not *anāshīd* but is still used in Hamas and Hizbullah, the chapter will speak about songs or other music. The *anāshīd* that Hizbullah uses and produces are mainly monotonous, with a low pitch, sung by men with powerful

voices (very rarely by women, and if so, in female contexts only). The songs usually include instruments, sometimes few and sometimes many. The common denominator is the Islamic message permeating the *anāshīd* (Teer Laan 2016: 79).

The *anāshīd* and songs analysed in this chapter mainly speak about resistance, nationalism, heroism, morale, unfairness and revenge. Since their foundation, Hamas and Hizbullah have used and produced *anāshīd* and other music; however, over time their function has become more formal, with a stricter management. In Hizbullah, nowadays art has its own branch called Risalat, whereas Hamas handles art in an ad hoc manner through the political bureau in consolidation with religious leaders (Said 2016: 863–76). The fact that *anāshīd* are frequently used in Islamist organisations of today and, at the same time, are strictly regulated makes them particularly interesting and important to study. Not least, this study is important as the cases of Hamas and Hizbullah indicate that the strict management has limitations or is stretched, since the same *anāshīd* also play a role in the private sphere beyond these organisations.

Music in Political Organisations and Beyond

Music is a tool used by political organisations, with supporters, potential recruits and enemies as the main targets. Pratt (1994) argues that music has the ability 'to give shape and voice to emotions that ordinary people have but find difficult to express with coherence and without embarrassment' (Pratt 1994: 4–5). Hence, when music is used by political organisations, the different domains, such as events, serve as ideologically-controlled free zones for expressing political ideas where emotions can be played out and intertwined with the organisation's goals. Pratt further distinguishes between two specific ways of using music politically as the purposive and effective dimension (Pratt 1994: 4–5). These two dimensions illustrate how music can be created explicitly for political purposes, or alternatively, how any music can be made political, and how any situation (even a private one) can be made political through the use of music. Pratt (1994) emphasises that it is often the interaction between the song and the practice that makes the music political. However, this does not mean that the song cannot have a political agenda in itself. Rather, it shows that all songs are potentially free for any form of use

as soon as they are produced, a notion that will be developed further when discussing the effective dimension.

The purposive way of understanding how music functions politically concerns individuals or groups proposing to 'influence the ideas or behaviors of others' (Pratt 1994: 4–5), where music is used as a means. These individuals or groups are political representatives in some sort of position of power. John Street (2012) argues likewise, stating that political communication through music is closely linked to political representation where one has to be able to speak for people or a certain cause (Street 2012). In addition to representation, music is used as an organising force in political contexts such as in organisations. The music employed to organise people in a specific manner for certain political purposes has to be selected and controlled by an authority. To 'organise', in this context, is used along the lines of Arnold Perris's (1985) meaning that it should 'instruct and direct, as well as delimit, composers, performers, and audiences' (Perris 1985: 68). Even if Perris particularly speaks about the function of music for political purposes in totalitarian regimes, his remarks could be applied to any authority controlling music for certain aims, such as Hamas and Hizbullah.

Pratt (1994) reveals that using music in a purposive way has historically proven to be an effective political tool. One reason for this is that if music is produced for and used among a political collective, it is likely that this group will interpret and use the songs in a similar way. If music is used as a medium in a purposive way, specific songs are produced by the individuals or group aiming for certain political goals. The songs often have explicit messages and intentions and it is difficult to read more into them than what is stated in the text, because they do not leave much room for interpretation. According to Pratt (1994: 4), the most obvious kind of 'purposive music' is protest songs. They are usually explicit in their intentions, and therefore easy to apply and use in specific political situations. When the text is direct, its effect on people is more predictable than if the song could be interpreted as having multiple messages.

The effective dimension of how music is used politically refers to exercising an influence that can be intentional but is usually not. It implies that no one can control the use of a song once it is produced. For example, one could 'take a song from the Beatles and perversely twist it in his cultish murder

of several people' (Pratt 1994: 4). Specifically, it is common, in relation to politics, for music not explicitly intended for political purposes to be used by a specific group or organisation. The reason for using music in this way is the same as in the purposive dimension: marking identity and creating boundaries for certain groups. It is the interpretation that differs (Pratt 1994). In certain contexts, such as in organisations, this dimension should be understood in terms of an authority that directs the targeted individuals towards a 'correct' interpretation of the songs in order to fit the agenda. If this is the case, the songs that function effectively are only partly unrestrained. Street (2012) writes about this issue in terms of how music becomes political. He points out that 'the "right" to be political can be granted and taken away by the institutions which produce and regulate [. . .] music' (Street 2012: 55). Hence, there is power and control involved in the effective dimension as well, which is played out by particular authorities possessing the power to approve songs as political as well as censoring and prohibiting them.

With regard to Hamas and Hizbullah, the purposive and effective dimensions will be applied in order to show how *anāshīd* are used. The deliberate application of *anāshīd* in Hamas and Hizbullah corresponds to a large extent with Pratt's (1994) definition of the purposive explanation. The production and usage of *anāshīd* are intentional, with strict control for the sake of impacting people in accordance with the ideas of the organisation. Regarding how *anāshīd* are used in the effective dimension, the empirical results are somewhat different from, or go beyond, Pratt's 1994 definition. Hamas and Hizbullah use songs by external composers for their own purposes. In addition, the empirical material reveals that the effective dimension also concerns a constant negotiation taking place around religion and politics. Hence, it also describes the usage and function of *anāshīd* in the uncontrolled space outside of, but not separate from, the organisations.

Anāshīd in Hamas and Hizbullah

Along the analytical themes of how music is used politically, this section will describe how *anāshīd* are used in the settings of Hamas and Hizbullah and beyond. The text will be divided into empirical findings in the purposive and effective dimensions. Moreover, each of the two sections will be further divided according to empirical sub-themes.

Deliberate Function of Anāshīd

The intentional use of *anāshīd* in Hamas and Hizbullah serves the aim of guiding the organisations' positions and influencing people's ideas, emotions and behaviour. In order to describe how *anāshīd* are used in such a manner, the empirical material is divided into the following themes: general management and control; *anāshīd* as an organising tool during events; and *anāshīd* as political communication. The themes reveal that the management of Hamas and Hizbullah has a clear vision and steers the function of *anāshīd* in order to achieve certain goals. They have to do with appropriate messages being sent and the right mood being stimulated, particularly during collective gatherings.

General Management and Control

Hamas and Hizbullah have a strict view as to what kinds of *anāshīd* should be used and for which purposes. Two bands belong to Hizbullah: the orchestra Shams el Horriye (The Freedom Sun), which is administrated by Hizbullah's arts section the Risalat; and Firqat al-Kashef (The Scout's Band), which belongs to Hizbullah's scouts branch. Being part of the organisation implies that the songs they produce and perform are severely controlled in all instances. Conflicts can occur, one example mentioned being the use of drums: 'In the past, drums were accepted in Hizbullah, but some guys used it in a wrong way, so Hizbullah forbid it. One year ago, they have allowed it again' (Samir 2013). This is an example of an issue that had to be discussed and solved by the committee. Another task of the committee is to approve or reject CDs, which are sold in special shops in the Shia area of Beirut. These shops are only allowed to sell CDs consistent with Islamic norms according to Hizbullah. Consequently, controlling *anāshīd* stretches beyond the bands and performances, but is related to them.

In Hamas, the control of *anāshīd* is not as preventative as in Hizbullah, but is still managed strictly. The administration concerns both Gaza and the diaspora countries.[1] The government in Gaza makes all the formal decisions,

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[1] Since Fatah governs the West Bank, Hamas's management does not concern this area. However, the Hamas supporters residing in the West Bank suffer severe punishment, such as prison, if it is discovered that they listened to *anāshīd* supportive of Hamas.

but since many Hamas leaders reside outside Gaza, particularly in Lebanon, discussions are held in various places. As a result, it is difficult to maintain coherent management and control of *anāshīd*, or any issue, within Gaza and in the diaspora societies simultaneously. The irregular management means, for example, that the *anāshīd* and songs being used during events are not severely controlled beforehand. Hamas's control of music also goes beyond the organisational sphere, but in a different manner than in Hizbullah. In the case, for example, of private events, particularly in Gaza, the Hamas police force regularly interrupts and closes down celebrations and concerts owing to breaches of Islamic norms. This can concern inappropriate music containing blasphemy and settings (e.g. where alcohol is consumed or men and women mix) (Omar 2012).

Although the band Protectors of the Homeland consists of members of the Hamas police academy and rehearses in their venues (*The Telegraph* 2007), Hamas does not have official bands such as Hizbullah does. The bands performing and producing *anāshīd* for Hamas are only affiliated to the organisation, which makes them spill over to the effective dimension. They are mentioned here in relation to the question of how *anāshīd* are managed in Hamas. In Lebanon, for example, there are the bands called al-Amjad, al-Waed, Soukour al-Aqsa and Mjaad. Furthermore, in Jordan, there are the bands called Yarmouk and Rawabi, and singers such as Abdul Fattah Owainat and Ahmad al-Kurdi, who are affiliated to Hamas. These are musicians sympathising with Hamas, who, on request, produce and perform *anāshīd* in the name of the organisation. In this sense, they are controlled and managed by the organisation's authority.

An Organising Tool during Events
Anāshīd are used as a way of organising and directing the focus of events in Hamas and Hizbullah. The main concern is that the right songs are played in order to deliver suitable messages and to stimulate certain moods. Most events in Hizbullah are held in the main hall, called Sayed Shuhada, in Beirut. One informant expressed the view during an interview that

> Hizbullah wants to control each point of the event and the control is related
> to what message Hizbullah wants to send out to the people. The real official

messages will be delivered by our leader Nasrallah, but the songs we play will always support his speech, which is a request from Hizbullah. (Samir 2013)

This statement adds to the previous section on how *anāshīd* are controlled. It is placed here because it shows that *anāshīd* have the capacity to frame and organise the official messages through a medium alternative to Nasrallah's speeches. Another example is the organisation of events by Shia villages in the southern part of Lebanon, with Hizbullah being part of the organisation. In such situations, Hizbullah can control the set-up, similar to those at Sayed Shuhada, and songs based on Nasrallah's speeches are also commonly played at those events.

Even though the events are managed, the observations showed that *anāshīd* reveal emotions. Nevertheless, they constitute a controlled way of expressing one's emotions and triggering people. When *anāshīd* were played during events, people were lively, collectively sang along and screamed out slogans. Supporters were particularly loud before and after Nasrallah spoke live on the screen, illustrating his popularity (Berg, forthcoming). During the events held by both Hamas and Hizbullah, *anāshīd* are particularly used to navigate a collective. For example, during Hizbullah's martyrs' day, slogans were screamed out, banners and flags were waved, and songs were sung in unison with people standing close to each other. Songs about *jihad* and pride were recurring themes, which triggered people to collectively celebrate war, violence and resistance, even if the occasion revolves around people who have been killed. Hamas employs *anāshīd*, particularly as a way of organising a collective during events around the issue of Palestine specifically, not forgetting the right to return, the occupation, the resistance and the suffering. Hamas delivers the concerns of Palestine through *anāshīd* in order to maintain the coherent goals of the organisation, mediated during the events. Songs including phrases like 'We shall not forget', 'The land is ours', and 'Jointly we will resist' are common.

Political Communication
Another core function of *anāshīd* is the deliberate communication of politics, hence influencing thoughts and actions. 'Yes, we send messages through

art' (Muhammed 2013), stresses the manager of the Risalat in Hizbullah, emphasising that they make people feel the message. Adding to the two previous sections, organisational events are platforms for political communication directly controlled by Hamas and Hizbullah. They serve as an arena where the organisations can frame and spread their political ideas. *Anāshīd* communicate the core issues of the organisations, such as resisting Israel, showing bravery against the enemies of Islam and protecting the land. Furthermore, in Hamas's case, there is the goal of creating a Palestinian state and a return to the land, which is also of concern for and hence supported by Hizbullah (Hani 2012). Political communication is intertwined with religious messages. It is essential to bear in mind that *anāshīd* are at all times managed and applied in accordance with Islamic values. One informant emphasised this, during a chat in a café, by saying 'The important things to keep in mind about *anāshīd* are two: To not contradict religion and to not sing about religion in a bad way' (Hussein 2012). Hence, *anāshīd* lead the way to what is appropriate and correct according to the organisations.

Several informants expressed the view that the organisations communicate needs through *anāshīd*, but also what is about to happen: 'I felt that if I understand what they are singing in the *anāshīd* and the songs as a whole, it means that I understand where our country is going and what is happening around me' (Rami 2013). The same informant continued:

> *Anāshīd* are a very important medium for Hizbullah. They are informative and spread information about what the organization thinks. They also show the organization's abilities in terms of resistance. They are about sending a message to the people. (Rami 2013)

This can also be achieved through other media. However, it is significant that *anāshīd* reach a large crowd at the same time, while also touching people's emotions through, for example, reality-based lyrics.

As mentioned earlier, *anāshīd* also affect communication about and with the enemy. During an interview, the manager of the Risalat stated: 'The songs about Israel are the ones mainly used during Hizbullah's political events. In these songs, Hizbullah has a very direct message to Israel' (Muhammed 2013). Both Hamas and Hizbullah employ *anāshīd* as a channel, since they do not communicate with Israel directly, but know that Israelis listen to and

translate their *anāshīd*. Moreover, 'Hizbullah makes songs about their victories in order to underline that we are militarily strong and in order to alert Israel that there will be more wars and victories' (Louai 2013). Hamas uses *anāshīd* in the same way, whereby they inform Israel that they will stay strong and firm against any future attacks, just as in the past. In the same regard, *anāshīd* are also used as a form of warfare in order to humiliate and irritate the enemy. For example, 'the [Hizbullah] soldiers used to play loud *anāshīd* beside the Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon to annoy them and to show that we are strong' (Samir 2013). Hamas frequently draws upon these tactics during war too, but also when Israelis patrol in the Palestinian areas.

Furthermore, *anāshīd* are used before and during missions and battles. 'Some songs are fast and powerful with strong lyrics that will push the soldiers to be tough and give them courage to face the enemy and not retreat. The soldiers listen to *anāshīd* for example at home or just before the operations' (Louai 2013), mainly in order to mobilise strength and bravery. One informant who used to live in the south of Lebanon explained that during the war with Israel *anāshīd* were very important for communication between Hizbullah supporters and their families: 'The *anāshīd* alerted people about when there was a Hizbullah operation. Through the songs, we could understand that something was going on, meaning that locals should stay away' (Louai 2013). People from Hamas made similar statements, concerning when *anāshīd* are used as a political platform that Israel cannot reach or control. 'It is a relieving feeling that we have a tool, which we can use freely. We can say what we want and communicate it to each other' (Hussein 2012). With regard to Hamas, it was also briefly explained that *anāshīd* are a means of communicating with and between prisoners in Israeli prisons.

In terms of communication, *anāshīd* are also used to spreading the word, and to remind people about the political history relating to Muslim society as a whole. With respect to Hamas, they specifically concern the history of the Palestinian land and population, their suffering, and the deprivations of rights. The *anāshīd* about history were depicted as the base or background to the struggle and goals of Hamas and Hizbullah. This is particularly important for the Palestinian population living in the diaspora, in order that they remember the causes, but also in order to assure the people in the Palestinian

territories that they are not forgotten and that people are still fighting for the rights of the entire population. One informant revealed:

> the *anāshīd* by Hamas are a very important element in Lebanon since they are living in a diaspora situation. This means that having different kinds of support, such as *anāshīd*, helps to remember the past and present and the struggle for a return to the homeland. (Khaled 2013)

In the case of Hizbullah, narrating history through *anāshīd* mainly concerns ʿAshuraʾ, commemorating the death of imam Husayn (ibn ʿAli), the grandson of the prophet Muhammad, who is commemorated for ten days each year. ʿAshuraʾ is, so it is argued, the main inspiration for the political struggle of Shia Muslims, which is partly imparted through *anāshīd* (Dabashi 2011: 3–6). Many informants highlighted the importance of specific ʿAshuraʾ *anāshīd*, which give strength and motivate people to perform difficult tasks relating to the organisation in particular, but also to life in general.

The Effective Dimension

Supporters of Hamas and Hizbullah use songs of external composers within the organisations as a means of influence. The effective dimension also relates to the question how the same or similar *anāshīd* and songs used within the organisations are listened to in the private sphere. On the one hand, *anāshīd* and songs are brought and used outside of their original context. On the other hand, since the supporters are deeply rooted in and strictly controlled by the religious and political views of the organisations, the 'original' public context overlaps with the private. In addition, the effective dimension contains the fact that organisational restrictions leave musicians with no choice but to keep on making *anāshīd* if they wish to make a living from music.

Politics through Others

As mentioned previously, Hamas only uses *anāshīd* and songs that are produced by affiliated bands. They consist of musicians sympathising with Hamas who, upon request, work closely with the organisation. Al-Amjad is the most common band to produce songs and CDs for Hamas and to perform during events outside of Gaza, particularly in Lebanon where they reside. Hizbullah adopts songs and *anāshīd* produced by Shams al-Horiye and Firqat al-Kashef

and, in addition, they also use *anāshīd* and songs from externally-affiliated bands sympathising with Hizbullah, such as al-Wilaya and al-Israq. Just like Hamas, Hizbullah hires the affiliated bands for events, and 'when al-Wilaya and al-Israq want to record songs in the name of Hizbullah, it has to be approved by the leadership just as when any band wants to perform during Hizbullah celebrations' (Samir 2013). Members of these bands are also occasionally hired to perform together with the Hizbullah bands.

In addition, Hizbullah also uses *anāshīd* and other songs that are not produced by bands or singers affiliated with the organisation. This indicates a third level of the use of *anāshīd* and songs. If Hizbullah wants to use *anāshīd* or songs with messages which are not clear-cut, or which are to be interpreted in a manner deviating from the organisation's goals, they are discussed and decided upon within the leadership. There have been situations when songs, for example by Fairouz or Julia Boutros, were discussed regarding whether or not to play them during an event. In these cases the lyrics have been questioned in terms of their propriety. In such instances, a few selected persons from Risalat's leadership discuss whether a song can be employed, and, at times, whether a song could be used in a censored version (Hamid 2012).

Thus, in Hamas and Hizbullah many so-called external *anāshīd* and songs are applied in order to fit the organisations' aims. The fact that music and *anāshīd* from the external arena flow into the organisations, being altered in order to suit their political and religious goals, illustrates that, after all, it is difficult to control music. However, through the organisation's adjustments to external songs, Hamas and Hizbullah still try to maintain control, at least of the choice of songs employed within the organisations. The next section will show how the control spills over to the private sphere as well, where it is even more related to personal ideology and lack of choice.

Politics in Motion
The private sphere refers to a platform outside of Hamas's and Hizbullah's organisational domain to which supporters have to relate. *Anāshīd* can either be brought from the organisational domain into the private sphere to extend the political dimension of the organisation, or vice versa, as explained above. *Anāshīd* and other music can be brought from the private platform into the organisations (and adjusted accordingly), hence making them political.

Supporters of Hamas and Hizbullah are strictly controlled and are religiously and politically dedicated. These two aspects serve as the basis for explaining why *anāshīd*, and no other type of music, are also played in the private sphere. Hypothetically, no matter how much Hamas and Hizbullah try to control *anāshīd* and the supporters, people have the ability to listen to whatever kind of music they want in their leisure time. However, the data show that such potential freedom is rarely used or misused, for two main reasons, as indicated previously. Firstly, because of the strong religious devotion and the dedication to the organisations, most people listen to the same or a similar type of *anāshīd* and songs to those used in the organisations, even in their free time. One informant expressed it like this: 'we listen to the same *anāshīd* in our private time, mainly due to religious reasons, because the normal songs which speak about love, or those songs performed by women, are haram, not permitted. But we can also listen to classical music' (Samir 2013). Being part of Hamas and Hizbullah is not a position you walk in and out of: it is an identity that follows you at all times.

Secondly, even if a person chooses to listen to other sorts of music, there is a risk of being discovered, which is embarrassing and might jeopardise that person's organisational position or affiliation. For example, the conductor of the military band in Hizbullah stated: 'If I hear that someone listens to, for example, pop music, I would explain to him that it is disrespectful to play it officially. If he does it again, I would tell him to leave the building. It is everyone's choice but it is not ok to let others, who did not ask for it, hear it involuntarily' (Hamid 2012). Several people argued that choice of music equals personal responsibility. The statement concerns a public situation, but with the consensus that people are expected not to contradict the values of their organisation, even when no one can see them.

In the private sphere, *anāshīd* are listened to, for example, at home, in the car, and at weddings. The wedding scene is somewhat special, because instead of dealing with the type of *anāshīd* heard it concerns supporters' responsibility for resisting inappropriate occasions where *anāshīd* or other songs are played. One example is from Hamas, where supporters refused to attend the wedding of their relative because pop music was played and men and women mixed. This implies that although *anāshīd* were played, the Hamas supporters would most likely have resisted attending anyway owing to the mixed setting.

One of the resisters stated: 'It is not about if someone sees me or not. God sees me all the time, and if I join the party I will go to hell and have boiling metal in my ears' (Omar 2012). This example stresses religious rather than political reasons and draws upon the same religious norms that are applicable on the organisational platforms. Another informant, a musician in Hamas, explained which kinds of songs are permitted at a wedding:

> We sing about love, but we have to sing it in a way that it is mixed with religious words, so people accept it. Forbidden issues are those triggering sexual activities, which we cannot sing about. When we perform, we can sing to men and women at the same time even if they are in the same room, but they have to sit separated and cannot sit mixed. (Hani 2012)

Opinions on this varied, however, with some informants explaining that any type of mixed setting at weddings or other events is unacceptable and inappropriate, specifically if there is other music, or even *anāshīd*.

At home, social media such as TV, radio and the internet are commonly used to listen to *anāshīd*. Since both Hamas and Hizbullah broadcast their own channels, the al-Aqsa and the al-Manar, it is not surprising that their programmes are often watched at home, for example as background in the living-room or the kitchen. The fact that the organisations control the channels implies that the same types of *anāshīd* are heard in the public as in the private spheres. However, one musician in a Hamas band stated: 'When al Qassam [Hamas' military branch] holds festivals and they show it on TV, I hear that it is our songs. Not only on the al-Aqsa, but also other TV-channels like the al-Quds' (Hussein 2012). Supporters of Hizbullah reported the same. This shows that the music employed in the organisations is transferred from this context and used in the private domain by people other than their supporters. Moreover, a common theme addressed in the *anāshīd* broadcast on TV and radio is that of morals, which constitutes a typical subject within the organisations as well. The main justification for playing *anāshīd* about morals consciously within both platforms is that 'they speak about how we should act in society and be good humans and Muslims' (Louai 2013). *Anāshīd* as guides to correct living do not begin or end at the physical borders of the organisations. However, if the *anāshīd* about morals are productions or means

of Hamas or Hizbullah that are brought to the private sphere, the political dimension of Muslim duties such as jihad are likely to be transferred as well.

Another platform where *anāshīd* are listened to in the private sphere is in the car. On two occasions, a Hamas supporter drove me around in his car playing Hamas *anāshīd* loudly with the windows rolled down. It must have been an inappropriate setting, he alone with a woman, but at the same time he was delivering the messages of Hamas, to me and to the surroundings. When a religious leader of Hamas drove me home, loud pop music came out of the speakers as he started the engine. He became very unpleasant and turned it off immediately. It cannot be confirmed whether it was a coincidence, or if it was evidence that the religious and political rules of Hamas had been ignored. One informant also expressed the view that what is relevant is not only what you listen to in the car, but also for what purposes the car is used: 'You can use it to go to nightclubs or use it to visit your relatives or go to the *masjid* [mosque]' (Saber 2013). If you play *anāshīd* in your free time in the car but use the car to go to a nightclub to hear pop music and drink alcohol, the role of *anāshīd* becomes eviscerated.

Some supporters also expressed frustration because of the obligation to listen to *anāshīd* in their private time, which means that they cannot just listen to any music that they like. No matter what the restrictions and control of *anāshīd* and other songs look like in Hamas and Hizbullah, many people are musicians, meaning that they are interested in the peculiarities of music. 'We are not allowed to listen to any other music so what choice do we have? If we are going on a long car trip, we have two choices: to load *anāshīd* or to turn on the al-Noor radio channel, which will also play *anāshīd*' (Samir 2013). This implies an enforced transition of organisational *anāshīd* into the private sphere, where the religious dimension is emphasised, whereas the political significance is somehow reduced. On the other hand, one informant underlined the fact that, even if he did not have many choices, he would still choose to listen to the *anāshīd* used in the organisations because of the high quality of the productions and their clear messages: 'They produce modern, high quality audio that is representative and really powerful in spreading the message' (Saber 2013). Thus, there are those who feel bothered by the underlying or direct enforcement and those who still feel that they possess control over their choice of *anāshīd* and songs, even if they are somehow limited.

Lastly, and specifically regarding Hamas, using the same type of *anāshīd* inside and outside of the organisations fulfils the specific function of creating a homeland, since Palestinians are spread all over the world:

> *Anāshīd* is a very important element, since many live in a diaspora situation. This means that having different kinds of support, such as *anāshīd*, helps to remember the past and present and the struggle for a return to the homeland. There are also many bands, which are not specifically for Hamas, which play just regular *anāshīd* about Palestine and religious matters. (Khaled 2013)

Since the struggle for Palestine is a matter of the heart for any Palestinian at all times, hearing the political Hamas *anāshīd* is in general a priority. The second part of the quotation indicates that *anāshīd* which are important for the Palestinian cause could also be brought into the organisation externally.

Conclusion

Anāshīd in Hamas and Hizbullah are used as a strategic tool in order to ensure, maintain and spread certain religious-political ideals of the organisations. The study revealed that *anāshīd* are strictly managed by the leadership of Hamas and Hizbullah and deployed during events to enhance political messages. According to Pratt (1994) and Street (2012), this is a prerequisite for understanding music as a purposive political tool. However, *anāshīd* are also applied and managed in accordance with religious values and restrictions, which makes the chants politically effective, also in contexts that are not formally controlled by the organisations. Although not created exclusively for political purposes, the *anāshīd* in this case become a political tool owing to their connection to religion and because religion and politics in the organisations are intertwined.

The data showed that the main tactic in adopting *anāshīd* is political communication, and the conscious organisation and direction of events and of supporters. One core way to achieve the goals is to monitor and steer the management of *anāshīd* by selecting bands and songs with clear intentions for specific purposes. However, there is a designated, small division deciding which messages should be delivered and what is required to be in sync with

the organisations' goals and values. Hence, the way Hamas and Hizbullah communicate through *anāshīd* is a controlled way of representing the political causes. The function of *anāshīd* for political purposes is often directly related to an organisational event or a political situation. During the event itself, in addition to organising people, *anāshīd* fulfil the function of framing the causes and creating feelings. However, this function is still controlled by the organisations or its authority, as Pratt (1994) points out. The use of *anāshīd* during events can be understood as a way of indoctrinating people towards correct opinions, thoughts and actions in line with religious-political values.

Another finding is that *anāshīd* and the collective setting of events together have an impact on supporters' behaviour. In this regard, it is fair to say that the management of *anāshīd* in Hamas and Hizbullah is reflected in the political usage, or behaviour, of its people. Restricting the content of the songs according to religious and political values and selecting certain songs for specific occasions has an impact on the behaviour of the persons hearing the songs. You will, for example, never see supporters singing beautifully and dancing to the songs. The atmosphere can be heated and people can be active, but always within confines. Slogans are screamed out only in accordance with the songs and the event. Flags are waved, but they carry the logos of the organisations or other politically and religiously correct slogans. This observation also implies that the *anāshīd* songs played during the events have a mutual effect on people owing to a common interpretation. Pratt (1994) argues that if this is the case, the use of music is politically effective. It is, however, somehow difficult to evaluate whether this efficacy is intentional or coincidental.

However much Hamas and Hizbullah exercise intentional influences through their management of *anāshīd* along religious and political lines, this study illustrates that the role of *anāshīd* spills over into the private sphere of supporters where it has a function along the effective dimension. Pratt (1994) argues that any song can be used for political purposes, which, as a tendency, might be correct. But the practice in and beyond Hamas and Hizbullah is far more complex. This study has been able to demonstrate that the songs used by these organisations are not always their own products, particularly in the case of Hamas. However, by changing and censoring the songs to fit their agendas, or a specific event, these organisations convert them into political tools, utilising the effective dimension in music. As Pratt (1994)

argues, music is employed that is not explicitly intended to be used in political settings. Nevertheless, Hamas and Hizbullah do not necessarily use an original song and interpret it differently, as Pratt (1994) suggests, but rather change it strategically and consciously to fit the religious and political restrictions. This study has further shown that these restrictions create tensions when analysed in the private sphere. The effective dimension should not be understood as decoupled from the purposive one in Hamas and Hizbullah, as the restrictions are not only a tool for the organisations, but also interfere with people's private lives. The tensions that *anāshīd* create are an indication that the borders between the private and the public are erased or questioned. Since the only 'correct' music to listen to is *anāshīd* or other songs that do not contradict Islam, even outside of the political sphere, there is an enforced overlap between the two spheres. This observation strengthens Pratt's (1994) definition of music that is free for interpretation. Still, it also challenges it, since the freedom of people belonging to Hamas and Hizbullah has certain boundaries with regard to what type of music they can listen to, even in their free time. So, the purposive use of *anāshīd* 'spills over' from public events to the private sphere.

The restrictions on freedom, grounded in religion and as a component of political organisations, reaching into the private domain, mean a lack of choice and acceptance. They are based on respecting the directions of the organisations, but also the norms of Islam. This accords with Pratt's (1994) argument that music is intended to frame and mark one's identity. However, in the private sphere, this identity involves more religious than organisational belonging. Furthermore, Pratt (1994) argues that the interpretation, or the imagery, of songs is what defines individuals and groups within the effective dimension. People can accept what they hear, accept parts of what they hear, and reinterpret what they hear in order to match their own agenda and make the song 'their own'. If we embrace such an argument, the private usage and meaning of *anāshīd* are a direct reflection of people's religious affiliation and their organisational belonging. This study implies that, for members of Hamas or Hizbullah, use of and thoughts about *anāshīd* within the organisational sphere constantly overlap with the private and steadily oscillate between the political and the religious. This potential for continual movement between the organisational, the private, the religious and the political makes *anāshīd*

an extremely valuable tool for gaining support and knitting the goals of the organisation together with emotions and existential questions.

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12

CONTESTED CHANTS: THE *NASHĪD ṢALĪL AL-ṢAWĀRIM* AND ITS APPROPRIATIONS

Alexandra Dick and Larissa-Diana Fuhrmann[1]

Making and Taking IS *Anāshīd*: The Example of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*

> A singer [*munshid*[2]] is there to boost the morale of the combatants. When they hear a chant in combat, it lifts their spirits. It gives them confidence and they feel important. (from *Ashbal – Les lionceaux du califat*, directed by Thomas Dandois and François-Xavier Trégan)

This is how Mohammad, who joined the so-called Islamic State (IS)[3] at the age of thirteen, explains the importance of chants in battle. He participated in an IS chanting competition, which he won with an original chant, on the occasion of the visit of a high-ranking IS member from Iraq. Interestingly, Mohammad uses the Arabic term *anāshīd* (singular: *nashīd*) to describe chants in the context of IS during his interview. His use of the term reflects a

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[2] A *munshid* is a *nashīd* (= chant, hymn) singer.

[3] We use the term 'so-called Islamic State' to highlight the fact that its religious legitimacy is self-proclaimed.

broader twentieth-century trend in which jihadi groups and movements have appropriated the genre for their own purposes (Said 2016: 78), even though it broadly includes chants or hymns that are not jihadi[4] (Shiloah 1993: 975). As becomes apparent in the documentary, Mohammad knows several jihadi *anāshīd* by IS, including *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, which he is shown chanting.

Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim, which translates as 'Clashing – or Clanging – of the Swords', is a well-known IS[5] *nashīd*. It first appeared in the fourth and final instalment of the same-titled video series released by the media office al-Furqān Media on 17 May 2014 (Pieslak and Lahoud 2018: 279). By that time, the group was already following a state-building agenda leading to the proclamation of the caliphate slightly over a month later on 29 June 2014. In this context, the title might be understood as a declaration of war against Arab Muslim governments which, in the eyes of IS, posed an obstacle to the idea of a first regional, then global caliphate, where only IS's interpretation of Islam would be lived and practised. Even one year after its release, *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* still ranked among the *anāshīd* most frequently appearing as 'soundtracks' to IS videos (Pieslak and Lahoud 2018: Table 3).

While this *nashīd* was clearly among the most popular in the context of IS, it also appeared outside of the group, circulating on pop-cultural social media platforms such as YouTube and SoundCloud. The distribution through these channels made *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* a popular target of audiovisual appropriation, which led to the creation of various *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* remixes and cover versions that were, in turn, disseminated online. While a detailed theoretical engagement with the concept of appropriation is discussed elsewhere in this volume,[6] we define audiovisual appropriation as the act of creating a new work by taking visual and/or sonic imagery or elements of imagery from one context and re-using or re-arranging them in another context, so that they take on new meanings.[7]

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[4] Our use of the term 'jihadi' is based on Günther and Pfeifer's definition in the Introduction of this volume.

[5] For the sake of simplification, we use the term 'IS' for its predecessor 'Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām' (ISIS/ISIL) as well.

[6] For a theoretical framework of different types of appropriation, see Zywietz and Beese, Chapter 4.

[7] This definition was inspired by Hayley A. Rowe (2011).

In this chapter, we will address a range of audiovisual strategies for appropriating IS *anāshīd*.[8] Sonic and visual appropriations typically appear in combination, wherein one form is dominant in most cases with regard to the complexity of the produced sounds or visuals. In this sense, we understand the audiovisuality of appropriating *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* as a spectrum of sonic and visual appropriation – some appropriations are more sonically derivative while others are more visual, but we analyse them as a continuum of appropriation, not as distinct binaries.

Following Castells' (2007: 242) conception that 'the media are not the holders of power, but they constitute by and large the space where power is decided', we argue that IS *anāshīd* and their appropriations together form part of a broader struggle over media visibility and cultural power. We thereby draw on Al-Rawi's (2016: 52) concept of *Anti-ISIS Humor*, in which he defines audiovisual appropriations mocking *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* as 'active involvements in ridiculing, countering, and discrediting the terrorists' ideology' and thus as 'cultural resistance efforts that aim at countering terrorism'. Our chapter complements Al-Rawi's concept through detailed analyses of the distinct appropriation strategies applied to counter IS.

The Jihadi Use of *Anāshīd*

The origins of *anāshīd* have, indeed, nothing to do with jihadism. Rather, they lie in '*inshād al-shiʿr*, a protracted poetical recitation delivered in a loud voice', a practice that was already widespread in pre-Islamic times (Shiloah 1995: 4–5).[9] The jihadi use of *anāshīd*, on the other hand, is a relatively new phenomenon that emerged towards the end of the twentieth century. Jihadi *anāshīd* are sometimes conceptualised as 'jihad-hymns' in literature on jihadism (see e.g. Prucha 2018), but this reductionist view leaves out their substantial non-jihadi history as well as their religiously and culturally diverse manifestations in the present (Ufuq e.V. 2016a,b).

In her chapter in this volume, Weinrich (Chapter 12) argues that the a

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[8] This chapter has already been published as an abbreviated version in German titled *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim: Ein Nashīd und seine Aneignungen* ('Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim: A Nashīd and its Appropriations'). While the German version only gives an overview of audiovisual appropriation, this chapter addresses various appropriation strategies.

[9] For a more detailed description of the term *nashīd*, see Weinrich, Chapter 12.

cappella nature of jihadi *anāshīd* links 'to the "most pure" religious musical genres'. In the view of jihadi groups such as IS, the genre represents sacred chants as opposed to worldly music, which they disapprove of. To mark this difference, there are generally no instruments used in jihadi *anāshīd*, including those of IS, following Salafi-Wahhabi[10] doctrine that forbids the use of musical instruments and heavily restricts the use of rhythm instruments (Said 2016: 78). In January 2014, IS issued a statement titled *Bayān ʿan Manʿ al-Mūsīqā wa-l-Ghināʾ wa-l-Ṣuwar ʿalā al-Maḥallāt* ('Statement Concerning the Prohibition on Music, Singing, and Photos on Shops'), in which its stance on instruments and singing is formulated: 'Know [. . .] that stringed instruments[11] and song[12] are forbidden in Islam because they detract from mention of God and the Qurʾan, and they are a source of strife and corruption for the heart' (trans. Al-Tamimi 2015).[13] Although this document does not address the conditions under which *anāshīd* are permissible according to IS, it indirectly suggests a link between text-centred Islamic practices and *anāshīd*. The a cappella nature thus also represents a means for jihadi groups to evoke associations of religious practices such as prayers and Quranic recitations (Weinrich, Chapter 12), which place jihadi *anāshīd* in the realm of the sacred.

The IS Nashīd Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim

The sanctifying potency of the *nashīd* genre even unfolds when topics such as jihad and martyrdom appear as lyrics. Although other themes are addressed as well – *Ummatī Qad Lāḥa Fajrun*[14] ('My Umma, Dawn Has Appeared'), for instance, primarily aims to spread the 'glad tidings' of an approaching Islamic State – fighting is prevalent in IS's most popular *anāshīd*. As Pieslak

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[10] *Salafism* describes a religious movement within Sunni Islam that aims to return to the roots of Islam, but at the same time absorbs modern political developments (Biene 2015). *Wahhabism* describes a form of political Salafism that is particularly prevalent in Saudi Arabia.

[11] The word used in Arabic is *maʿāzif* (singular: *miʿzaf*).

[12] 'Singing' and 'song' here are translations of the Arabic word *ghināʾ*, 'which became the generic term for art music' (Shiloah 1995: 5).

[13] There exist, however, several examples of IS videos in which synthesisers are used. Further research thus needs to address the legitimacy of instruments against this backdrop.

[14] Muʾassasat Ajnād li-l-Intāj al-Iʿlāmī (2013).

and Lahoud (2018: Table 4) demonstrate in their analysis of seventeen IS *anāshīd* that appeared most frequently in a sample of fifty-eight IS videos released between May 2015 and March 2016, thirteen out of the seventeen *anāshīd* cover this theme, among them *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*:

> Chorus:
> Clashing of the swords: a nasheed of the defiant.
> The path of fighting is the path of life.
> So amidst an assault, tyranny is destroyed.
> And concealment of the voice results in the beauty of the echo.
>
> Verse 2:
> 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. [repeat line]
> (trans. Al-Tamimi 2014)

As the line 'the path of fighting is the path of life' (*wa-darb al-qitāl ṭarīq al-ḥayāt*) expresses most clearly, fighting has a positive connotation for IS and jihadi groups in general, since death in jihad is perceived as a means of obtaining eternal life in Paradise. Furthermore, jihad comes along with territorial conquests, spreading the only accepted way of living and practising Islam by fighting 'tyranny' (*ṭughāt*). This term is often used for Sunni Arab governments and regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, that, in the eyes of IS, do not practise 'true Islam' and represent an obstacle to IS's notion of an Islamic caliphate. IS, on the other hand, does not rely on human governance, but rather on divine guidance, as the story goes: they 'have refused to bow before any besides God'. To uphold this self-proclaimed religious legitimacy, theological references to the Quran and the hadith[15] generally play an important role in IS *anāshīd*.[16] In the case of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, the use of the term *Ṣawārim* is

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[15] 'In Islam *ḥadīth* is the term applied to specific reports of the prophet Muḥammad's words and deeds as well as those of many of the early Muslims; the word is used both in a collective and in a singular sense' (Speight 2019).

[16] For a deeper analysis of theological references in *anāshīd* used in IS martyrdom videos, see Dick (2019).

remarkable, as it describes a somewhat outdated expression for 'swords' that appears in the hadith. Finally, the lyrics are inclusive ('we') and invite certain listeners ('brother') to take part in the fight of IS.

The theme of fighting is also reflected in the musical composition of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* and IS's most popular *anāshīd* in general. Out of the seventeen IS *anāshīd* analysed by Pieslak and Lahoud (2018: Table 4), 'eleven [. . .] were quickly paced, at 118 BPM [beats per minute] or higher, and this trend was somewhat predictable in that lyrical themes about fighting and combat seem more suitably set at higher tempi'. With a tempo of 130 BPM, this may explain why the *nashīd Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* is used in IS videos like *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, *Part 4*, and *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* for sequences show-ing shootings and killings. By using *anāshīd* with fast tempi for violent scenes, IS follows established media rules. Applying Weindl's (2013: 62) categorisa-tion of different functions of extradiegetic film music, *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* here not only serves as a tool for affectively involving audiences, it also sonically labels an openly violent sub-genre of IS videos. In a way, listening to the *nashīd* already indicates what to visually expect from these videos.

In terms of its thematic focus and musical composition, *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* can generally be regarded as characteristic of IS *anāshīd*: it is a three-minute-long a cappella chant, sung only by men, applying overdubbing, pitch correc-tion, digital reverb and delay. The main – or maybe even the only – *munshid* is known as Abu Yasir. He is one of IS's two most famous *nashīd* singers, the other being Maher Meshʿal (Pieslak and Lahoud 2018: Table 4). The *nashīd* is mainly composed in the Arabic musical scale *maqām al-faraḥfazā* on F, which corresponds with the F natural minor scale of 'Western' music theory.[17] It has a limited dynamic and melodic range and a clear, strophic structure that gives listeners orientation and can help them to memorise the *nashīd*: chorus—chorus—verse 1—chorus—verse 2—chorus—chorus—verse 3—chorus—chorus—chorus—short outro, in which the last line of the *nashīd* and/or its title are repeated. Repetitions are generally common in IS

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[17] The notes of *maqām al-faraḥfazā* on F and the F natural minor scale are F, G, A flat, B flat, C, D flat and E flat. In *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, the note G flat also appears in a short transitional section, bridging the verse to the chorus, and corresponds with a somewhat curious chord shift to the flat II harmony.

anāshīd. There exists an abundance of examples in which the last line of the verse and/or chorus is repeated to mark transitions.

In the case of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, the title is furthermore not only repeated in a subordinated vocal line throughout the verses, but also literally translated into a sound through the metallic clanging of swords that appears twice in the *nashīd*. Gråtrud (2016: 1063) argues that this repetitive structure, 'coupled with [the] engaging rhythm, [. . .] facilitates internalization of the messages'. Similarly, Schinis (2017) calls the use of repetition in *anāshīd* 'a strategy used by IS to facilitate their memorization by its intended audience'. The question remains, however, who constitutes this 'intended audience'. While it is rather unlikely that IS could have strategically used the repetitive structure of *anāshīd* for indoctrination purposes, it is possible that it is meant to reach informed listeners with previous exposure to jihadi contents and Arabic language skills. As focusing exclusively on the lyrics would limit the potential outreach of IS *anāshīd*, their musical composition is equally important, since it provides a semiotic language that can speak to broader audiences.

Cultural Resistance in the Online Sphere

The internet has played an important role not only in the dissemination of IS *anāshīd* and jihadi contents,[18] but also in politics in the Middle East and North Africa in general, where social media became a driving force of the so-called Arab Spring. The internet and other technologies have, indeed, changed our whole communication system, allowing for the democratisation of content production, which has become more accessible, affordable and user-friendly as of the 1970s (Jenkins 2006: 11–13). While the industrial communication system was built around mass media with a one-way, vertical distribution, the foundation of today's 'network society is the global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many both synchronous and asynchronous' (Castells 2007: 246). In particular, the emergence of interactive websites such as Flickr, YouTube and Wikipedia in the 2000s enabled

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[18] IS built an elaborated digital infrastructure that academics and journalists have already described in detail. See e.g. *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (Atwan 2015).

a growing number of users to post texts, audios, photos and videos online, which is summarised under the terms User-Generated Content (UGC) and User-Created Content.[19] Furthermore, platforms where amateurs and professional artists alike can create parallel (art) worlds independent of traditional gatekeepers such as curators, editors and gallerists were established in the form of social media (Chin-Fook and Simmonds 2011: 21–2). With audio and visual editing software just a fingertip away, smartphone users are connected to a global network, enabling them to instantly share their latest creations. With one tweet, millions of people can possibly be reached, potentially overcoming the boundaries of nationality, class, race, gender and political affiliation. IS, too, used these affordances of the internet. As a reaction, various actors such as states, political organisations and private users began to reclaim the online sphere and engaged in countering IS online. The internet provided all these actors, including IS, with an instrument of cultural self-empowerment to contest and negotiate power and counter-power anew (Al-Rawi 2016: 56–7).

Appropriating *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*

The categorisation of cultural power and counter-power or resistance is, of course, relational. While *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* could also be understood to challenge mainstream media messages, its audiovisual appropriations, in turn, counter IS media (ibid.). Taking *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* as a starting point, we understand its appropriations as acts of cultural resistance against IS. We follow Duncombe's (2002: 5) definition of cultural resistance as 'the use of culture consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist or change a dominant structure', meaning that not the intention, but rather the result of breaking with IS doctrine is central when appropriating *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*. Our analysis encompasses sonic, visual and audiovisual appropriation strategies that are part of an audiovisual spectrum. While all of the appropriations analysed here combine sonic and visual elements, one form, either the visual or the sonic, is more elaborate in the respective examples.

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[19] More on the emergence of UGC can be found in *Participative Web: User-generated Content* (OECD 2017).

Sonic Appropriation

The fact that IS, according to its *Statement Concerning the Prohibition on Music, Singing and Photos on Shops*, disapproves of 'stringed instruments' already suggests one strategy of sonic appropriation: by using musical instruments, the produced sound loses its status as a sacred *nashīd* according to IS. The second example presented here follows a similar logic, adding, however, an inversion of the notes to change the mode from minor to major to create a more cheerful version – at least for listeners familiar with 'Western' musical traditions.

Using Instruments: Piano Cover

The strategy of using instruments is, for example, employed in the animation-based piano cover *Salil Sawarim* (*Synthesia piano cover*).[20] It combines the sonic imagery of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, played on a piano, with the visual imagery of a piano keyboard and the visual representation of music through bar-graph scores.

At the bottom, there is the keyboard of a contemporary standard piano with the highest (white) key missing. Each key is labelled with the respective note. Keys to be pressed are additionally highlighted with colours; those played by the left hand are blue, those played by the right hand yellow. Drawing on aesthetics similar to those of the popular video game *Guitar Hero*, the notes vertically fly in as bars, allowing the piano player to prepare for the following notes. These bars then land on the keys that are to be pressed with small visualised 'explosions' (Figure 12.1). The length of the bars and the vertical distances between them reflect the note value, that is the duration of a single note, and the rests, the pauses between notes. These elements together form the rhythm of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*.

By visualising these musical features of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, the piano cover also serves as a tutorial that promotes an IS *nashīd* and teaches others how to play it on the piano. In this regard, the piano cover could represent fan art. A closer look at the YouTube comments posted under this video, however,

[20] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bWI0J7Kxok> (last accessed 2 August 2019).
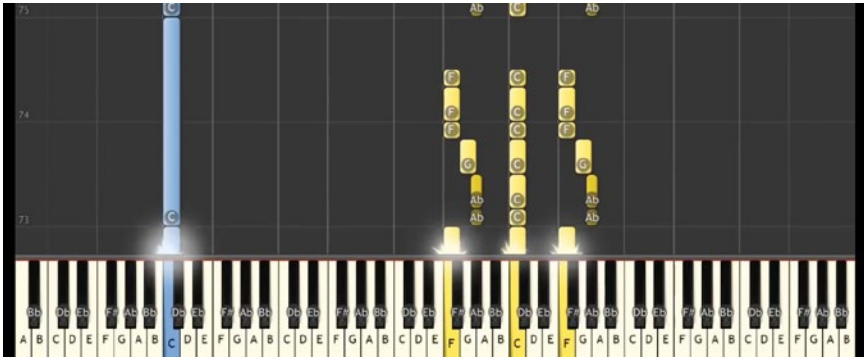
Figure 12.1   Video still from *Salil Sawarim (Synthesia piano cover)*.

suggests the opposite. One comment stands out, as it highlights the relationality of cultural power and cultural resistance: 'I asked if I could play a song in music class. The teacher gave me access to the piano and I started playing this song 😂.' In educational contexts, teachers are generally in more powerful positions than students. This student thus subversively used a jihadi *nashīd* to contest existing hierarchies within a mainstream education system. This does, however, not change the fact that using a piano is against IS doctrine, which the users commenting on the video seem to be aware of: 'Stop it! Pianos are haram! XD', 'My piano is trying to behead me . . . is this normal?', or 'My piano just blew up'.[21]

All of these comments refer to IS's categorisation of instruments as unlawful. The Arabic word used in the above-mentioned statement issued by IS is *maʿāzif* (singular: *miʿzaf*), 'a term denoting today any string or wind instrument or even, more restrictedly, a piano' (Farmer 1991: 189), which is noteworthy in the context of this piano cover. As it is unlikely that the producer or the commenters knew about any of this, their awareness of breaking with IS doctrine by using a piano is all the more remarkable. Cases like that of the Palestinian-Syrian pianist Aeham Ahmad internationally received great attention and spread IS's stance on music. His piano was burnt by an IS member when IS, in 2015, seized control of Yarmouk, a suburb of the Syrian

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[21] We are fully aware of the brutality of IS and distance ourselves from the content of these comments.

capital Damascus. The burning piano became a symbol of living under IS rule (see Abdelaziz 2015). While the piano cover possibly also promotes an IS *nashīd*, it even more engages others to commit an unlawful act in the view of IS, making it – as an effect not necessarily intended – an example of cultural resistance.

Inverting Notes: MIDIFLIP Version

Approximately one year after having uploaded the piano cover *Salil Sawarim (Synthesia piano cover)* onto YouTube, the same producer added another piano version, applying a sonic appropriation strategy known as *MIDIFLIP*. Accordingly, this version is called *Salil Sawarim (Synthesia piano cover) – #MIDIFLIP*.[22] As the visual imagery applied here does not differ from the first version apart from using the full keyboard of a standard piano, we will only address sonic alterations. *MIDIFLIP* describes the idea of inverting music around one fixed note that serves as an anchor, 'so that the low notes become high and the high notes become low'.[23] In the *MIDIFLIP* version of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, this anchor note is A flat. By flipping all other notes, the scale is changed from F natural minor to E major.[24] This transposition comes along with a mode alteration from minor, which 'is associated with sadness for a large segment of Western-enculturated listeners' (Huron 2008: 59),[25] to major, which may evoke different associations. This altered perspective is reflected in the reactions on YouTube: 'This should be used in an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria movie at the end when ISIS gets defeated and the Middle East thrives more than any other region.' This optimism is also expressed in the comment 'my exploded piano has come back to life', which almost seems to be a reaction to the comment 'my piano just blew up' posted under the first version.

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[22] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AX3xmTg-OM> (last accessed 2 August 2019).

[23] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhsAyVcUJ_I> (last accessed 2 August 2019).

[24] For the sake of an easier understanding, we will only use the terminology of 'Western' music theory here.

[25] Huron (2008: 59) highlights, however, that 'not all music in the minor mode has sad connotations. [. . .] Moreover, a composer might choose to use the minor key for purposes other than evoking or portraying a particular emotion.'

AUDIOvisual Appropriation

While both piano versions follow the overall structure of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, our next example re-organises its structure by applying hip-hop sampling techniques and modifies its tempo and pitch to ridicule the vocals and message of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*. It also alters Islamist visual imagery, with sound, however, remaining the main focus of appropriation.

Speeded-up, High-pitched Hardcore Remix
The hardcore techno version *Saleel Al Sawarim – Hardcore Remix (Full Version)*[26] uses *chopping*, initially a hip-hop sampling technique, but which is today used across various genres, to metaphorically 'cut *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* into pieces' and re-arrange its structure. '"Chopping", as its name suggests, refers to altering a sampled phrase by dividing it into smaller segments and reconfiguring them in a different order' (Schloss 2014: 106). In addition to this, a percussive hardcore techno beat is added and another, rather simple strategy of sonic appropriation applied: it speeds up *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* to the very fast tempo of 185 BPM, which is characteristic of the hardcore genre, using a higher pitch. Apart from undermining IS doctrine with 'every beat of the bass [that] is a punch in IS' face', as one commenter puts it, this version thus ridicules the vocals and, in the end, the original message of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* through a faster tempo and higher pitch. While this strategy is unique among the examples analysed here, there exist striking structural commonalities with other sample-based sonic appropriations of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, as the comparison with a dubstep remix titled *Nasheed Saleel Sawarim – (sfraxwell remix)*[27] demonstrates. This comparison suggests that sample-based appropriations of IS *anāshīd* follow a certain scheme: both versions start with a hit, so that the listener familiar with *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* immediately knows that this cannot be the original *nashīd*. Then the first part with the original *nashīd* follows: in the case of the *Hardcore Remix*, however, already speeded up and high-pitched. The transition to the second part is again marked with a hit, which is, apart

26 Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Q0_W_XcYw> (last accessed 2 August 2019).

27 Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-823SjzMST0> (last accessed 2 August 2019).

Figure 12.2   Video still from *Saleel Al Sawarim – Hardcore Remix (Full Version)*.

from shouts, used for transitions. The second part consists of part one and an added beat, here a simple percussive hardcore techno beat. This culminates, in the third part, in the complete absorption of the *nashīd* through the beat. In the case of the *Hardcore Remix*, this beat consists of a constant kick drum, to which a lead synthesiser phrase is added that copies the lead vocals of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*. These parts are then slightly altered and combined, until the remix ends with the words *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, eventually returning to the original structure of the *nashīd*.

Although sonic appropriation is clearly the focus of this remix, it also appropriates, unlike the examples hitherto introduced, Islamist visual imagery (Figure 12.2). The cover picture resembles a 'flag used by various Islamist organisations' (Quilliam Foundation 2014). It has the same colour scheme, that is, black and white, and the same inscriptions, expressing the Islamic creed, the so-called *shahāda*. However, the quantity and the arrangement of the word *shahāda* differs. As it appears eight times, instead of just once, and the word 'hardcore' is added, it becomes rather obvious that this cannot be the 'official' flag of any jihadi or Islamist group. The possible association with Islamism or jihadism is thus immediately distorted through audiovisual elements that seem odd.

Figure 12.3   Video still from *Mahrajān al-Ṣawārim – Zār Rīmiks | El Sawarim – Zar Remix.*

AudioVISUAL Appropriation

Moving further on the audiovisual spectrum, the main focus of our next examples is visual appropriation. Sound is here rather used as background music, which is an important difference from the previous examples.

Gamification

Mahrajān al-Ṣawārim – Zār Rīmiks | El Sawarim – Zar Remix[28] – the first part of the title meaning 'Festival of the Swords' – uses gamification, that is, 'the use of game design elements in non-game contexts' (Deterding et al. 2011: 1), in the form of a fictional game titled *Super ISIS Bros*, referring to a popular Nintendo video game. Right from the beginning, this gamification version refers to the audiovisual aesthetics of video games. It first shows the fictional brand 'CIA Games' including the abbreviation of the Central Intelligence Agency. Subsequently, the title of a fictional game follows that is called *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* (in Arabic) *Super ISIS Bros*, which refers to the Nintendo game *Super Mario Bros* (Figure 12.3).

The visual animation of the words 'press start' and the accompanying

[28] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqgEIVrQSd0> (last accessed 2 August 2019).

sounds further intensify the impression of a video game. The audience plays this game through an implicit player whose hands are shown selecting 'continue', using a controller resembling that of Sony's PlayStation. The viewer is then immersed into the animated, fictional game *Super ISIS Bros* on full screen. The player character is an IS member with a black balaclava, military vest, and a sword in his left hand. He tries to behead as many other characters as possible, all of them resembling Muʿadh al-Kasasba, a pilot of the Royal Jordanian Air Force whose aircraft crashed over IS territory and who was captured and burnt to death in 2016. In this way, *Super ISIS Bros* inverts the aim of the game. While in *Super Mario Bros* the player (character) kills attacking opponents in order to stay alive and finish a level, the IS character in *Super ISIS Bros* aims to kill as many characters as possible. Accordingly, these characters here are no real opponents, but rather victims, who are not attacking the player, not even defending themselves. All they can do is run away, look back at how the IS character approaches and wait to be beheaded, whereas the IS character can increase his size and power through a Super Mushroom, a power-up also appearing in *Super Mario*. This power-up is sonically accompanied by an eight-bit lead synthesiser phrase matching *Super Mario*'s sound design. Throughout the game, the high-pitched original vocals of the *nashīd Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* can be heard, to which an 'orientalising' percussion beat is added. This 'orientalising' impression is intensified through the game's landscape, consisting of sand dunes and cacti. Although the IS character kills all the other characters and thereby presumably 'successfully' finishes this level, the game ends with the words 'Game Over', again sonically illustrated through a lead synthesiser phrase. This predetermined twist at the end possibly includes the implicit message to IS: 'No matter how many people you kill, you will be "Game Over" in the end.' In this regard, the gamification version interestingly mirrors IS's use of gamification. The application *Muʿallim al-Ḥurūf*, for example, is designed to teach children the Arabic alphabet, using a reward system of launching a missile at London, Paris, New York City or Moscow. The outcome, however, is always the same: either one of these cities can be attacked or nothing happens. Although IS-produced games generally follow formalised, ludic rules, in this regard they lack a fundamental ludic element, namely the condition of winning or losing, so that IS is always victorious in the end (Rauscher 2018). However, *Super ISIS Bros* hijacks this

predetermination of IS-produced games by inverting the roles of superiority and inferiority. While in IS-produced games the successful outcome for IS is invariable, there is no possibility of the IS character winning the game in *Super ISIS Bros*. This is particularly interesting in the regional context of this appropriation video. The additional information provided states that the three producers come from Egypt. In this regard, *Mahrajān al-Ṣawārim – Zār Rīmiks | El Sawarim – Zar Remix* represents not only an act of cultural resistance, but also a compensation strategy in the face of a regional threat.

Re-enactment

The motive of decapitation is also central in *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim – 'Maskhara' Tariyaqa ʿalā al-Dawāʿish bi-Jumhūriyyat Dār al-Salām*[29] ('Clashing of the Swords – Mockery of IS Members in the Republic of the Abode of Peace'), which demonstrates how closely IS is associated with this form of execution and reveals another dimension of appropriation: besides sounds or visuals, both videos appropriate 'acts' associated with IS, namely beheadings.[30] Like the previous examples, this version unites sonic and visual appropriation strategies. Nevertheless, using a pre-existing remix of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* as background music, the focus of this amateur video is clearly on visual appropriation. It depicts several persons re-enacting an IS beheading.[31] Four men dressed in black with balaclavas stand behind and hold knives to the throats of four male persons, who are dressed in shades of red and are kneeling in one row (Figure 12.4).

Among the kneeling persons are three children or adolescents, which suggests that the protagonists might be from one family. The colour of the clothes worn by the perpetrators and victims as well as their spatial positioning trigger associations of IS execution videos. The impression of

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[29] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZeT1XVr3R8> (last accessed 2 August 2019). The term *Dār al-Salām* ('abode of peace') used in the title describes, like *Dār al-Islām* ('abode of Islam'), areas under Islamic rule and jurisdiction as opposed to areas that are part of *Dār al-Ḥarb* ('abode of war') (Albrecht 2016). IS and other jihadi groups use this distinction to legitimise military conquests (Funke 2018).

[30] For an analysis of the visual performativity of violence in IS beheading videos, see Krona, Chapter 7.

[31] For an in-depth description of a video using the same meme, see Pfeifer, Fuhrmann and Wevers, Chapter 8.

Figure 12.4 Video still from *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim – ʿMaskhara' Tariyaqa ʿalā al-Dawāʿish bi-Jumhūriyyat Dār al-Salām*.

professionally produced IS videos stands, however, in stark contrast to the intimate living-room setting and the amateur hand-held camera. These factors indicate that this is not a violent video, but rather a parody of IS. Nevertheless, the reference to IS execution videos is maintained for the first fifteen seconds, in which the protagonists stand or kneel next to each other, until the sonic caesura of an *Allāh Akbar* shout ('God is greater') used in the *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* remix puts an end to the situation. The hierarchy between the perpetrators and victims, symbolised through the rigid position-ing, disperses immediately and everybody starts dancing in a way that evokes memories of the *Harlem Shake*.[32] Apart from the use of musical instru-ments, dancing, too, is regarded as *bidʿa* (Wöhler-Khalfallah 2004: 78), an unlawful innovation (Krämer 2005: 265) according to Salafi-Wahhabi doctrine. In this regard, the protagonists oppose IS in a twofold, audiovisual way. Against the backdrop of its regional political context, the video again represents both an act of resistance and a compensation strategy. It was part of a major internet phenomenon that went viral in 2015, especially among Egyptian users, and inspired Arabic-speaking YouTubers to produce their

[32] The *Harlem Shake* was a popular dance meme some years ago (see Lotan 2013).

own parodic re-enactment. While the number of protagonists and the settings vary, most of these versions use the same remix of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, which predetermines the choreography from a re-enacted IS decapitation towards an improvised dancing performance. The fact that this version, too, originated in Egypt allows the conclusion that engagement in countering IS might increase with geographical proximity.

Visual Appropriation

Now that we have finally reached the other end of the audiovisual spectrum, our last example demonstrates how visuals can superimpose new denotations onto the original message, even if the sound of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* is not changed at all.

Misheard Lyrics

The *ISIS Song Saleel Sawarim Presidential Sing Along Parody*[33] demonstrates the seemingly limitless creativity of online users in making visual contents and appropriations. It counters IS without any sonic modifications, solely by adding a visual dimension in the form of lyrics to the *nashīd* to divert the viewer's attention. Such videos are known as *Mondegreens* (Smith 2003) or *Misheard Lyrics* versions, which 'are based on amusing mistranslations of spoken sounds to written words. These are done by transcribing what the words sound like (that is, their phonetics), regardless of their true meaning' (Shifman 2014: 108). Outside the anglophone context they are also known as *Soramimi* in Japanese (Beck 2014), *Mots d'Heures* in francophone (Weissmann 2014) and *Agathe Bauer Songs* in German-speaking contexts. All these phenomena have in common that the verbalised lyrics derive from homophonic translations injecting comical references (Otake 2007). This way, as Figure 12.5 shows, the text sung in Arabic, *wa-darbu-l-qitāli*[34] ('the path of fighting'), becomes 'What, the bull bit Ali?', illustrated with a Pit Bull.

The Arabic lyrics are replaced with humorous and, at times, nonsensical

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[33] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ft071uT3hfM> (taken down by YouTube).

[34] We have slightly modified the transliteration *wa-darb al-qitāl* to express the Arabic phonetics that are central here.
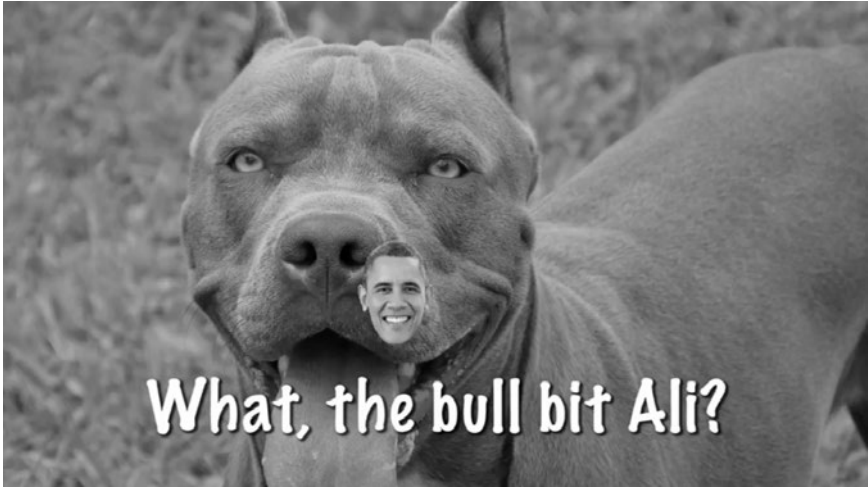
Figure 12.5   Video still from *ISIS Song Saleel Sawarim Presidential Sing Along Parody*.

translations into English that superimpose new denotations onto the original sonic message of the *nashīd*. In the context of IS *anāshīd*, this appropriation strategy is particularly meaningful, since the text here represents a key element, in order to classify *anāshīd* as sacred. As is common in sing-along videos, the lyrics appear at the bottom of the screen. While changes of colour usually indicate the course of a song, here 'jumping heads' of former US presidents and presidential candidates guide one through the *nashīd*. The politicians move past illustrations of various 'misunderstood' words in the form of photos, portraits, logos and cartoons to highlight the alterations in the denotations (Figure 12.5). Among them are 'orientalising' depictions such as a jinn coming out of a bottle, heads of pigs, which some Muslims might regard as a provocation, and a portrait of the philosopher, cultural critic and atheist Friedrich Nietzsche. The partially Dadaesque visual additions entertain, confuse or provoke viewers, depending on their cultural background. Whenever the title *Saleel al-Sawarim*[35] appears, the letter 'l' in *Saleel* is replaced by swords to illustrate the 'Clashing of the Swords'. Having fulfilled their purposes and having led through various verses and choruses,

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[35] This spelling is used in the video.

the heads of the US politicians are impaled on these swords at the end of the *nashīd*.

Breaking IS (*Anāshīd*)?

In this chapter, we have introduced the reader to jihadi *anāshīd* and varying appropriation strategies. An in-depth analysis of the Arabic IS *nashīd Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* has revealed how IS thematically and musically realises the idea of fighting. Jihadi media, including IS *anāshīd*, are disseminated online through social media channels. As we have demonstrated through six examples of audiovisual appropriation, however, they also face massive cultural resistance online. Following Al-Rawi's (2016: 56 –7) concept of *Anti-ISIS Humor*, according to which these appropriations represent instruments with which to contest and renegotiate prevailing structures of power, we discussed appropriations of IS *anāshīd* in the context of cultural resistance. Unlike Al-Rawi, however, we focused on identifying the audiovisual strategies applied, which we conceptualised as a spectrum of sonic and visual appropriation. We have shown how these practices challenge not only IS *anāshīd* but also IS as a whole, with its Salafi-Wahhabi-inspired doctrine and interpretation of Islam.

Our first example was a tutorial-like piano cover that teaches others how to play *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* on the piano and thus sonically undermines IS doctrine through the use of a musical instrument. Then the same cover followed as an inverted version, called *MIDIFLIP*, transposed to another mode that may seem more cheerful than the original for listeners familiar with 'Western' musical traditions. After that, we introduced a speeded-up, high-pitched hardcore version as an AUDIOvisual appropriation which, first, sonically ridicules the vocals and message of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* through a faster tempo and higher pitch and, second, uses the sampling technique of chopping to metaphorically 'cut *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* into pieces' in addition to adding a beat and using Islamist visual imagery as a cover picture.

Moving further on the audiovisual spectrum, we analysed an animated gamification version called *Super ISIS Bros* that refers to the aesthetics of the Nintendo game *Super Mario Bros*, in which the player character, an IS member, aims to behead as many other characters as possible. Another example of audioVISUAL appropriation was a re-enactment of an IS beheading that uses a pre-existing remix of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim* as background music. Following the

structure of the remix, the video clip turns into a dancing performance that adds another dimension of cultural resistance, since IS regards dancing – just like music – as unlawful. Our final example was a humorous *Misheard Lyrics* or *Mondegreen* version with visually presented lyrics that are based on homophonic translations from Arabic into English. In the process, the original jihadi message is superimposed through humorous and, at times, nonsensical denotations that are additionally illustrated in some places. By discussing such a broad range of audiovisual appropriations of *Ṣalīl al-Ṣawārim*, we hope to have contributed to the study of cultural resistance against IS and its religio-political doctrine.

The fact that the producers of two above-analysed appropriations come from Egypt is noteworthy in a regional political context, which suggests that appropriation here serves not only as an act of cultural resistance, but also as a compensation strategy in the face of a geographically close-by threat. Apart from this, it is generally difficult to identify the producers' backgrounds and motivations through online research. The users' anonymity on platforms such as YouTube, and the lack of a direct messaging function, prevent us from reaching out to them.

In our chapter, we were able to deal with such limitations by drawing on Duncombe's (2002: 5) definition of cultural resistance as 'the use of culture consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist or change a dominant structure'. Accordingly, with the example of the piano cover, we highlighted that it is not the intention that is central for our analysis, but rather the effect of cultural resistance. The YouTube comments posted under this version, however, allow the conclusion that (commenting) online users are remarkably aware both of IS doctrine and of breaking with it. Duncombe's definition further raises the issue of the effectiveness of such appropriations, which is hard – or maybe even impossible – to measure: can appropriations actually help to break IS?

There remain many unanswered questions. In the course of our research on YouTube, we also came across one comment, posted under the *Hardcore Remix*, that clearly stood out by even using the correct terminology, although with English spelling: 'lol this nasheed deserves all kinds of covers. hillarious [*sic*].' Such a comment demonstrates that the knowledge of the actors in our research field is generally not to be underestimated. Future research seems likely to focus on the producers' part in order to conceptualise the contested

field of jihadi media and its culturally resistive appropriations that express the interaction between IS and its opponents.

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