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CARGC Briefs Volume I: ISIS Media

Description

The essays that comprise CARGC Briefs Volume I: ISIS Media began their lives as presentations at a small, by-invitation workshop, "Emerging Work on Communicative Dimensions of Islamic State," held on May 3-4, 2017 at the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication.

Consistent with CARGC's mission to mentor early-career scholars, the workshop was a non-public event featuring graduate students, some affiliated with the Jihadi Networks of Communication and CultureS (JINCS) research group at CARGC, and others from around the United States and the world, in addition to postdocs and faculty members. Parameters were purposefully broad to encourage independent thought and intellectual exploration: contributors were asked to write short essays focusing on any single aspect of Islamic State that was part of their research.

The result is a group of fascinating essays: using mostly primary sources (textual, visual, or audio-visual), examining several media platforms and modalities, considering multiple levels of theoretical deployment and construction, and shedding light on various aspects of Islamic State communication against the broad back drop of history, ideology and geopolitics, the following include some of the most innovative approaches to Islamic State to date, and promise a wave of fresh voices on one of the most important challenges to global order.

Keywords

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Disciplines

Communication

Authors

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Introduction: Emerging Work on Communicative Dimensions of Islamic State

Much of the research on Islamic State's communication and media operations has emerged from a counter-terrorism framework. Under the impetus of my 2016 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship. "The War Machine in the Age of Global Communication," the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication established a research group, Jihadi Networks of Communication and CultureS (JINCS), consisting of PhD students, Postdoctoral Fellows, and faculty from the Annenberg School for Communication, the University of Pennsylvania, and elsewhere.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, JINCS hosted external speakers, discussions, and meetings that culminated in a small, by-invitation workshop, "Emerging Work on Communicative Dimensions of Islamic State," held on May 3-4, 2017 at CARGC World Headquarters in Philadelphia. The essays that follow all began their lives as presentations at that workshop. Full scholarly versions will be published in a special journal issue co-published by CARGC Press and the International Journal of Communication.

Launched as the Project for Advanced Research in Global Communication (PARGC) in 2013, the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania produces and promotes scholarly research on global communication and public life. As an institute for advanced study dedicated to global media studies, we revisit enduring questions and engage pressing matters in geopolitics and communication. Our vision of "inclusive globalization" recognizes plurality and inequality in global media, politics, and culture. Our translocal approach fuses multidisciplinary regional knowledge with theory and methodology in the humanities and social sciences. This synthesis of deep expertise and interdisciplinary inquiry stimulates critical conversations about entrenched and emerging communicative structures, practices, flows, and struggles. We explore new ways of understanding and explaining the world, including public scholarship, algorithmic culture, the arts, multi-modal scholarship, and digital archives. With a core commitment to the development of early career scholars worldwide, CARGC hosts postdoctoral, doctoral, undergraduate, and faculty fellows who collaborate in research groups, author CARGC Press publications, and organize talks, lectures, symposia, conferences, and summer institutes.

It is within this vision that JINCS ought to be understood as a space that would spark and nurture original scholarly contributions that grasp the communicative activities of Islamic State and other radical groups from a broad multi-disciplinary perspective, encompassing the humanities and social sciences. Of particular importance to me was to eschew the rather simplistic focus on specific *media* platforms or gadgets, and to consider Islamic State's communications as *mediations* that entail political, ideological, religious, military, social and cultural dimensions, that overlap and intertwine, against a broad geopolitical backdrop that transcends the Middle East to include the global commercial media system and its own articulation with electoral politics, security policies, and spectacular images.

This is guided by a broad conceptual framework that I have been developing in my own work that defines Islamic State as a war machine, with military, communicative and governance dimensions. Neither only a state building enterprise nor merely a terrorist group that stages attacks worldwide, which is how many analysts cast a spurious dichotomy between Islamic State and al-Qaeda, a war machine is a mercurial, shape-shifting entity that blends guerilla tactics with conventional military warfare, traditional low- tech and mid-tech propaganda with digital *blitzkrieg*, and a central territorial base combined with a global reach.

In doing so, Islamic State has developed a media doctrine, which I argued enacts a dual spectacle of life and death to induce what I called a "global networked affect" of terror: a sentiment, spread by global networks, that combines fear and anxiety, and enters circuits of circulation in security, anti-immigrant, and multicultural discourses in the West and else-where.[1]

Consistent with CARGC's mission to mentor early-career scholars, this small, by-invitation only, workshop was a non-public event featuring graduate students, some affiliated with JINCS and CARGC at the Annenberg School for Communication at Penn, others from around the United States and the world, in addition to postdocs and faculty members. Parameters were purposefully broad to encourage independent thought and intellectual exploration: contributors were asked to write short essays focusing on any single aspect of Islamic State that was part of their research.

The result is a group of fascinating essays: using mostly primary sources (textual, visual, or audio-visual), examining several media platforms and modalities, considering multiple levels of theoretical deployment and construction, and shedding light on various aspects of Islamic State communication against the broad back drop of history, ideology and geopolitics, the following include some of the most innovative approaches to Islamic State to date, and promise a wave of fresh voices on one of the most important challenges to global order.[2]

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NOTES

1. This has included Kraidy, M. M. (2017) Revisiting Hypermedia Space in the Era of Islamic State, The Communication Review, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10714421.2017.1343601; Kraidy, M. M. (2017) The Projectilic Image: Islamic State's Digital Visual Warfare and Global Networked Affect, Media, Culture & Society (2017, in press); Kraidy, M. M. (2017, February 9). This is Why the Islamic State Shocks the World with its Graphically Violent Imagery, The Monkey Cage, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/09/this-is-why-the-islamic-state-shocks-the-world-with-its-graphically-violent-imagery/?postshare=8391486648976374&tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.28f001bb6c8d; and Kraidy, M. M. (2017). Terror, Territoriality, Temporality: Hypermedia Events in the Age of Islamic State, Television and New Media, online first (March 23, 2017).

2. This set of essays was originally published online in conjunction with global-e (UC Santa Barbara, https://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/global-e-series/isis-media).

Fatal Attraction: The Islamic State's Politics of Sentimentality

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The ability of the Islamic State (IS) to gain virtual and literal ground in terms of recruitment throughout the world is very much linked to its politics of sentimentality. The militant group appears to be creating, through the romanticization of the Caliphate, a type of (virtual and actual) space where a sense of community reigns. By using affect in their appeals, the IS promises its recruits a chance to depart from mundane daily life to participate in something bigger and supposedly better. The spokesman for the Islamic State, Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani ash-Shami, proclaimed when declaring the establishment of the Caliphate that:

> The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect—the time has come for them to rise. The time has come for the ummah of Muhammad (peace be upon him) to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonor, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone, and the dawn of honor has emerged anew. The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared.[1]

This statement demonstrates the IS's aim to appeal to a form of victimhood that conceives itself as having been treated unjustly, as having been marginalized and abused by the West. As such, the IS claims to offer the disenfranchised—who see no way to live in honor in the West—a chance to reinvent themselves as heroes in the IS's dystopic reality. It does so by concocting fantasies of belonging that are presented in the form of relief from what is experienced in the lived real.

In one of the more popular videos titled "There is No Life without Jihad," stirring images appear as the audience follows the story of Muhammad, a young Syrian battling internal melancholy at the state of affairs in his country. The video is measured and sober in both tone and content: no gruesome decapitations are featured; no kidnappings, sex slaves, or bloodshed is visible. On the contrary, the video expertly targets real grievances by its depiction of Muhammad's helplessness in the face of a crumbling world. The viewer follows Muhammad into an IS recruitment office where he meets a community of people who believe in the same cause and are going through the same internal struggle and who are there to offer guidance, support and salvation. As the story unfolds, it seems that the only way out of the darkness for Muhammad (and his likes) is by joining the Caliphate. This is an example of what Laurent Berlant calls the "intimate public," a space and place that is sheltered from "social antagonisms, exploitation, compromised intimacies, and the attrition of life."[2] An "intimate public" exists in a *juxta*-political safe world where various narratives are transformed into one.[3] As such, the intimate public created by the IS circulates general themes of suffering, humanity, and victimhood with which identification is possible regardless of a person's religion or whether they have experienced the exact same kind of suffering as their fellow "comrade." Instead it is individuals' diverse experiences of suffering and victimization that converse with one another in this intimate public.

Screen grab from video 'There is No Life Without Jihad'

An "intimate public" exists in a juxta-*political safe world where various narratives are transformed into one.*

Slavoj Žižek wrote that "the function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape."[4] Indeed, IS recruitment strategies call on people to "choose happiness over misery" by joining the ranks of the Caliphate, so in a way, a different "social reality" becomes itself the escape for the IS recruit. Indeed, the general feel of the "There is no Life without Jihad" video that features young Muhammad is that the Islamic State extends camaraderie and the possibility of heroic activity. Such strategies are commented on by J.M. Berger, who claims that the easier recruits for the Islamic State are individuals who feel insufficient, humiliated, disrespected, full of untapped potential and insatiable ambitions, who are angry at perceived or real injustices and are therefore looking for an entity to blame for their struggles.[5] In this sense, the video supports a potential recruit's grievances and ultimately introduces or reinforces the idea that the source of their angst is outside themselves.

Additionally, one of *Dabiq* magazine's articles reads that "[the] revival of the Khilāfah gave each individual Muslim a concrete and tangible entity to satisfy his natural desire for belonging to something greater."[6] This type of summons functions through the creation of a sense of community to which Muslims belong, a community that protects itself regardless of whether the individual members of that community have actually met face-to-face. It can be said that a virtual intimate public is concocted and later actualized upon *hijrah* (migration) to the *Khilafa*. This is precisely the appeal of the IS, in that it allows its adherents to negotiate a form of belongingness to a world in which they are not only seen, but recognized and called upon. The Muslim victim as such becomes a symbol for general victimhood, so that no matter what potential recruits' grievances are, they are able to identify with the suffering of the Muslim victim. In turn, this identification is made possible through the intimate public where belongingness is solicited using sentimentality, which binds together the various experiences of its audience into one narrative that is emotionally encompassing and generalizable to each individual case.[7]

The intimate public thrives by creating an emotional connection that produces a sense of relief and an answer to the persistent internal struggles of individual recruits.

ISIS spokesman Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami

The intimate public focuses recruits' personal narratives on "identification with the suffering, endurance, and sacrifice"[8] of Muslim peoples and thereby places more emphasis on the concepts of humanity and suffering than on Islamic tradition. As such, a picture of Muslim humanity emerges from the existential reality derived from a common suffering that is identifiable. This is what the proclamation of the Caliphate aimed at depicting: an identified victimhood that belongs somewhere and whose suffering is not only recognized, but will eventually be alleviated as it reaches "honor" and "victory."

These strategies confirm the observation made by Berlant, who argues that individuals have an "expressed desire to be somebody in a world where the default is being nobody or, worse, being presumptively all wrong."[9] In a sense, the intimate public thrives by creating an emotional connection that produces a sense of relief and an answer to the persistent internal struggles of individual recruits. This emotional connection is actualized by the creation of a "market domain where a set of problems associated with" being righteous and Muslim in this moment in history arises. The term "market" employed by Berlant in her analysis refers to commodities (videos, books, articles etc.) being circulated with the aim of enabling a sort of "emotional generality" regardless of the "diverse historical locations of the readers and the audience, especially of class and race."[10]

Indeed, IS propaganda tools such as recruitment videos and their *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* magazines (among others) are prime examples of disseminated commodities that illicit in some readers a feeling of identification or belonging that they cannot find elsewhere. As such the "generic-but unique"[11] struggle of each becomes identifiable with others in this interwoven intimate public by creating a "sentimental subject" who "is connected to others who share the same sense that the world is out of joint, without necessarily having the same view of the reasons or solutions."[12] Berlant argues that sentimentality centers around the imaginary of "the good life" and that it works together with a view of the world that justifies people's feelings as containing a wisdom about the world that could make it better.[13] So for dispossessed people struggling with the increasing pressure of the present historic moment and its alienating factors, IS proposes a simplistic narrative that makes a life of sacrifice seem sensible.

NOTES

1. "The Return of Khilafah." *Dabiq*, July 5, 2014, 3.

2. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke University Press, 2008), 6.

3. Ibid, 1-13.

4. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso, 2008), 76.

5. Jessica Stern & J.M Berger, "ISIS and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon," *The Atlantic*, March 8, 2015; J.M. Berger, "How we Underestimated ISIL," *Politico*, November 15, 2015.

6. "The Extinction of the Grayzone," *Dabiq*, February 12, 2015, *57*.

7. Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 5.

8. Faisal Devji, "The Terrorist as Humanitarian." *Social Analysis 53*, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 174.

9. Berlant, The Female Complaint, 3.

10. Ibid, 5

11. Ibid, 6

12. Ibid, 21

13. Ibid, 21-22

Where Media Meets Statecraft: Daesh Promotion of Governmental Competence through its Media
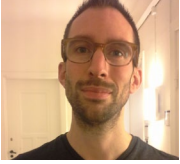
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Daesh media production is complex, multifaceted, and is arguably a representational microcosm of the organization as a whole. Claiming universality as an Islamic State for the entire Muslim Umma, debates about its statehood status continue without clear resolution. In this essay I argue that, rather than a proto-state, a failed state, or a functioning state, Daesh isn't a state at all in the normal sense; it is an *incomplete* state. By analyzing infographics published in issues 10-74 of the Arabic language *al-Naba'* magazine, issued by Daesh between December 19, 2015 and March 30, 2017, we can think more deeply about this incomplete statehood, and how these infographics try to patch it over. The subject at hand is at the crux of studies of jihadi media use and debates about the nature of the state.

Expanding historical scholarship on Daesh has removed any mystery behind the group's origins and shows how the genesis of Daesh contributes to this emphasis on statecraft. Daesh has been shown in numerous scholarly works to have arisen from Zarqawi's faction that broke away from Al-Qaeda, changing names several times in the 2000's before becoming "ISIS" and then "IS" in their own parlance.[1] Zarqawi was intent on seizing and governing territory as well as establishing a caliphate, something Bin Laden and Zawahiri came to view as a mistake that they counseled Zarqawi and others against. After shocking the world with its "success" in 2014, Daeshi's claim to statehood was not only not recognized by other nation-states, but they also refused to call it the "Islamic State." Daesh thus saw its aspirations doubted by other jihadis before even moving to realize them, and saw a complete refusal by the West to acknowledge its statehood after the declaration of the Caliphate.

While Daesh may be relatively new and its publication *al-Naba'* even younger, previous iterations of Daesh had already been making propaganda for years, as had their close organizational cousins Al-Qaeda.[2] The group expanded media efforts from 2011-2014 and founded multiple new outlets that shape what we talk about when we focus on Daesh media in 2017.[3] These include the founding of *al-Naba', Amaq* News Agency, Telegram channels, and the *al-Bayan* radio station. In *al-Naba'*, we see attempts to display the most basic element of statehood: the monopoly over the coercive use of violence. The overwhelming majority of the content in my sample of Daesh media consulted for this research depicts violence or reports the carrying out of violent punishments and attacks. The group's propaganda used to be directed inward at its followers, but it also now seeks to terrorize non-Muslims most broadly. Infographics about statecraft seek to prove wrong those who doubted Daesh, while reinforcing the paternal and nurturing aspects of the state.

States traditionally want to control education and the narratives taught in schools, and Daesh is no exception. An infographic from March 2016 claimed that some 43,000 people took shari'a courses over the previous 6 months in Daesh territories in Syria. (Graphic 1, below) Another measures a full year from mid-2015 through mid-2016 in Iraqi provinces, totaling 2,500 classes and lectures, while curiously not providing documentation of the number of students who attended such classes. (Graphic 2, below) Defectors describe being forced to take these courses. A different facet of education relates to public awareness; Daesh created multiple

public "media points" where citizens could access all of the group's digital productions—in short, to make the propaganda it spread online reach more of the audience on the ground inside of war-ravaged Iraq and Syria. Daesh sought and largely achieved complete control over media and education in their territories.

Graphic 3: "Medical services in Ninawa Province in the year 1437" *al-Naba'* no. 69

Graphic 6: "Statistics for the first half of 1437 for some provinces of the Islamic State" *al-Naba'* no. 31

Infographics about statecraft seek to prove wrong those who doubted Daesh, while reinforcing the paternal and nurturing aspects of the state.

Infographics in *al-Naba'* in early 2017 purported to quantify the number of medical services provided through eight hospitals under Daesh rule in and around Mosul. Daesh claimed to have provided 487,163 consultations, 185,065 natural births, 133,409 sick patients treated, 155,049 ambulance rides, and 103,134 surgeries—numbers that are impossible to corroborate. (Graphic 3) A graphic about medical services in Syrian provinces also emphasized the tens of thousands of free services provided. (Graphic 4, below) These infographics neglect to mention having to issue an ultimatum to doctors to return after many fled Daesh rule. They also fail to mention that Daesh acknowledged that some people must be allowed leave its territory for medical treatment, and that it made an exemptionfor this; otherwise, leaving the territory is equated with apostasy. Such exemptions were not treated lightly, as a car or land had to be offered as collateral in case the sick person didn't return. Infographics about education and health services both attempt to paint a smooth picture of services working for citizens, not a public sector shot through with holes from defections and incapable of meeting everyone's needs. Its aspirations to 'statehood' compel Daesh to emphasize its paternal role in protecting and caring for its citizens, but it cannot show them the full reality, only a stage-managed version.

While much has been made about Daesh exporting oil through illicit networks to fund its activities, the organization cannot survive financially on oil revenues alone. Tax collection figures in *al-Naba'* show revenues from *al-zakat,* an Islamic duty of Muslims to help those in

need. Effective tax collection is understood as a central element of a strong state more broadly.[4] An infographic from mid-2016 shows statistics for *Wilayat Tarablus*, the former Tripoli region in Libya, where Daesh claimed that it had distributed more than $878,000 in charity over a three-month period in early 2016. (Graphic 5, below) Another Daesh infographic claimed that the group has distributed more than $8,000,000 to more than 44,000 families in Syria. (Graphic 6) Yet another graphic dealing with *zakat* emphasized its obligatory status, pushing citizens to see this as an Islamic duty rather than merely a state tax. (Graphic 7, below) Thus Daesh infographics about *zakat* attempt to demonstrate state capacity, readiness to help those in need, and religious bonafides.

Religious governance in territories controlled by Daesh falls under *al-Hisba*, the religious police, and various infographics in *al-Naba'* attempted to quantify its effectiveness. Daesh shari'a courts in Syria processed just under sixty-nine thousand cases in the space of six months. (Graphic 1) A graphic focusing on a one-month span in Syria showed that the majority of the Syrian cases were in Al-Raqqa. (Graphic 8) For this period between March and April of 2016, we get the most detailed breakdown: 31% of these cases are described as related to buying or selling during prayer times, 13% related to drugs or smoking, many to "various infractions" like wearing makeup or failing to veil the way Daesh decreed. Daesh claimed to have seized more than one million pills during a six-month period in Syrian provinces, as well as several hundred thousand cartons of cigarettes. (Graphic 1) Remarkably, Daesh quietly tolerated cigarette smuggling and later seized the profits from the smugglers themselves, as another source of revenue in hard times—the theme of controlling vice was quietly superseded by hard financial need. Still, the latent theme of infographics relating to religious vice, even if hypocritical, is that stability through rule of law is one of the most tangible benefits Daesh can offer after years of chaos.

Graphic 8: "Statistics of Diwan al-Hisba in Sham provinces, month of Jamadi al-akhra of 1437" *al-Naba'* no. 24

The incomplete reality of Daesh media comes through in archival documents and in testimonies of defectors and others who have fled Daesh rule.[5] Contrary to the image of competence that the organization seeks to display, Daesh has struggled with institutional brain drain as its violent system of rule drives away prospective talent. Extreme measures of "repentance" were implemented in which anyone who worked for the Syrian or Iraqi Ba'ath governments was required to repent for their sin before being allowed to work for Daesh. This insistence on repentance seems to have exacerbated the brain drain problem, as I have argued elsewhere.

Therefore, as this analysis has tried to show, even if statistics in the infographics are correct, they leave out key problems that change the picture regarding the capacities of these services and institutions. While extreme violence projects one facet of state power, the incompleteness of the Daesh 'state' renders it unable to fulfill other basic functions, which also include stable currency production or passport generation. In both of these respects Daesh remains dependent on other states, primarily Syria and Iraq. Daesh cannot manage a modern economy if it cannot print an internationally recognized currency through a central bank. Since the infographics under discussion here were published, Daesh has also lost significant territory, falling further from full statehood and struggling to hold onto what little remains. Daesh media attempt to elide this weakness with displays of strength, dominance, and competence, but the 'Islamic State' will remain an incomplete state at best even if it regains territory.

Graphic 1: "Statistics of Diwan al-Hisba in Sham provinces for the first half of 1437" *al-Naba'* no. 30

Graphic 2: "Statistics of Diwan al-Hisba in Iraqi provinces for full year from June 2015-June 2016" *al-Naba'* no. 37

Graphic 4: "Medical Services in Sham Province for the year 1437 hijri" *al-Naba'* no. 70

Graphic 5: "Statistics for the second quarter of 1437 Wilayat Tarablus" *al-Naba'* no. 32

Graphic 7: "Zakat is Obligatory" *al-Naba'* no. 46

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3. No Author "Medical services in Ninawa Province in the year 1437", *al-Naba'* no. 69, p. 2

4. No Author "Medical Services in Sham Province for the year 1437 hijri", *al-Naba'* no. 70, p. 2

5. No Author "Statistics for the second quarter of 1437 Wilayat Tarablus", *al-Naba'* no. 32, p. 9

6. No Author "Statistics for the first half of 1437 for some provinces of the Islamic State", *al-Naba'* no. 31, p. 2

7. No Author "Zakat is Obligatory", *al-Naba'* no. 46, p.15

8. No Author "Statistics of Diwan al-Hisba in Sham provinces for the month of Jamadi al-akhra of 1437", *al-Naba'* no. 24, p. 16

Daesh's Image-Weaponry in the Battle for Mosul

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On July 10, 2017, the Iraqi PM announced the liberation of the Daesh stronghold of Mosul after about nine months of fighting. The battle, however, was not limited to military action since Daesh was also waging war on the social media battlefield by visualizing the group's resilience to its online followers, supporters, and fanboys. Daesh was in a quite similar position in 2007-2009 as the surge of U.S. troops in Iraq along with Sunni tribal resistance rolled back the group's physical presence, yet it managed to maintain an online presence and boost its statehood claims by declaring two ministry cabinets. Over the years, the group has successfully built a relatively robust propaganda infrastructure capable of disseminating content and promoting "Media Jihad" as equivalent to fighting in battle. The Mosul Operation posed a unique opportunity to gauge the extent to which Daesh could sustain a virtual warfare campaign under immense military pressure.

Studies analyzing Daesh's propaganda over the past three years show that still photographic imagery plays an integral role in Daesh's propaganda mix.[1] Daesh disseminates its imagery in provincial photo reports and multi-lingual publications. Studies examining Daesh's visual propaganda mainly focus on the group's English-language magazine, *Dabiq*. Some researchers have compared *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah* and al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine,[2] while others have traced the origin of *Dabiq* imagery, analyzed the about-to-die visual trope,[3] and categorized images by visual frames and/or purpose.[4] The existing literature lacks analyses of Daesh's imagery at the provincial level and the pictorial conventions it incorporates, including subjective-camera shots, camera angles, direct eye contact, and viewer distance. In this essay, I present preliminary findings of a content and visual framing analysis of images disseminated by Ninawa Province from the beginning of the operation on October 17, 2016 to the end of January 2017, when east Mosul was liberated.

## DAESH'S IMAGE-WEAPONRY

Daesh's Ninawa Province disseminated a total of 1204 images, increasing from an average of 10 per day in late October to 14 per day in November and December, before dropping to seven per day in January. This imagery can be sorted into two main categories of military and non-military, which together are comprised of eight visual frames: combat, preparation, eulogy, law enforcement, social services, economy, natural landscape/cityscape, and media distribution. Military images account for about three-fourths of the total, while non-military images account for the remainder. In the sections below, I briefly describe the most common visual frames along with key the pictorial conventions that Daesh photographers utilized.

MILITARY

Combat and war spoils were the two most recurring visual frames. The former depicted Daesh militants setting out on suicide missions or in battle shooting, sniping, and firing rockets at Iraqi or Peshmerga forces. The latter also included photos of militants confiscating enemy weapons and belongings after battle. Combat and war spoils imagery significantly dropped from
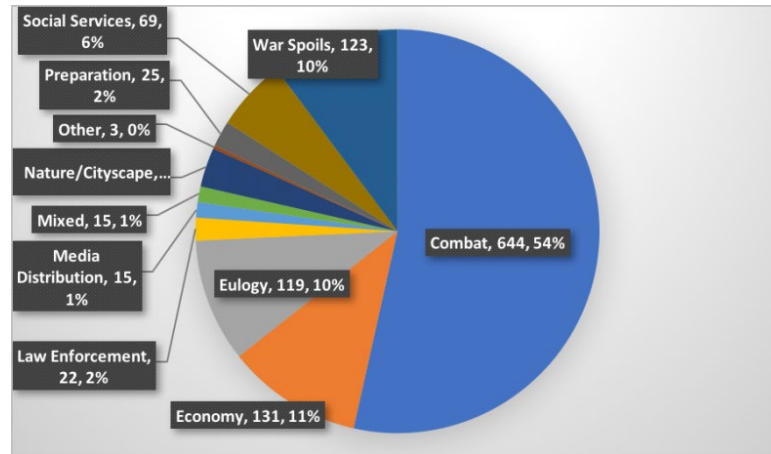
Daesh media imagery by type

November and December to January as the group was losing its grip on east Mosul. Over 70% of low-angle shots in the overall collection appeared in combat images, looking up to Daesh militants in battle—a visual technique known to convey the symbolic power of the photo subject(s).[5] By contrast, over one-third of all high-angle shots appeared in war spoils images, looking down on confiscated belongings to indicate the enemy's loss and inferiority. Moreover, over half of all subjective shots appeared in these two frames, ranging from point-of-view to over-the-shoulder shots, hence embedding the viewer in the militant's position as he fights with, snipes at, and walks over the bodies of Iraqi soldiers. These subjective perspectives are also employed to document the confiscation of the defeated soldiers' belongings. Subjective shots are commonly used in first-person shooter games to promote viewer identification, prompt arousal responses, and foster presence in the scene. By plagiarizing from eminent popular culture images, Daesh targets youth by presenting its messaging in familiar, attractive visual tropes that stimulate embodiment and suggest perceptual alignment through a safe and virtual experience of action on the battlefield.

Eulogy images depicted Daesh "martyrs" before setting on suicide operations and they were often followed by long shots of explosions signalling the outcome. As the total liberation of east Mosul was in sight, eulogy images nearly doubled from November and December to January unlike the decreasing combat and war spoils images. Almost 90% of all instances of direct eye contact appeared in eulogy images, a visual technique often used to establish imaginary connection between photo subjects and the viewer by communicating what the former demands from the latter.[6] This demand can be deciphered by examining the surrounding context, ranging from facial expressions, posture, and distance to other symbols. Eulogy images in Mosul typically position the militant at an intimate/personal distance (94%) with a confident smile (88%) to bolster the connection. The images show happy, confident, and determined young men—often pointing to the heavens signalling both monotheism and reward—who are engaging directly with the group's supporters in demand of admiration, respect, and wishful identification. Taken together, Mosul eulogy images served as carriers of a trans-historical

martyrdom narrative that transforms an on-ground defeat into a symbolic victory, guided by "a sovereign imaginary that demands death over disobedience." By disseminating more eulogy images when facing direct blows, not only did Daesh reframe the battle, but it also attempted to boost its moral superiority among its followers online.

Daesh eulogy image

NON-MILITARY

Non-military visual frames depicted the economy, social services, and urban and natural landscapes. Economy images presented Mosul as a prosperous city with vibrant markets, while social services highlighted service provision, such as electricity restoration, street cleaning, and education. These landscapes depicted the beauty and serenity of Mosul and the normalcy in its neighborhoods. Throughout the four-month period, one of these three visual frames appeared at least once daily. Mostly shot from a social/public distance, non-military images showed different types of scenes that were reportedly present in Mosul at the time. Taken together, scenes of prosperity, competence, and beauty aimed to give a sense of normalcy despite the ongoing battles.

The law enforcement visual frame portrayed the maintenance of order through *hudud* (punishments dictated by shari'a law) implementation and *hisba* (moral policing) activities. As the battle dragged on, law enforcement images doubled from December to January. The rise in law enforcement images suggests a sense of authority and control over the city as well as a commitment to implement shari'a law under any circumstances. Over 13% of all subjective shots appear in law enforcement images, embedding the viewer in the position of *hisba* agents reading the verdicts, punishing sinners, and destroying cigarettes and alcohol.

Images of beauty and normalcy purporting to be Mosul & environs

WHAT'S NEXT?

The battle over east Mosul showed that military pressure did not eliminate Daesh's propaganda during the first four months. Whereas military pressure hindered the production and dissemination of some visual frames, such as combat and war spoils, the dissemination of other frames, such as eulogy and law enforcement, ramped up amid intensified pressure. Daesh utilized eulogy as a narrative of ultimate victory, bringing destruction to the enemy, and happiness to the "martyr" in this life and the hereafter. By doing so, Daesh abandoned

Hisba agent destroying a bottle of alcohol

any visualization of victimhood in favor of portraits of young and old men, willingly choosing to die, to exemplify the concepts of sacrifice, devotion, and courage to the group's followers. With more eulogy and law enforcement images, the group attempted to remodel its visual sphere during battle by appropriating two of the most powerful interpretive constructs in Islamic discourse, martyrdom and shari'a implementation, in order to create a picture of an epic battle between good and evil.

The social media battle will remain after Daesh loses its territories, and hence necessitates the development of nuanced and effective strategic communication campaigns in response. Although Daesh's propaganda cannot be eliminated, its visual sphere can surely be disrupted and the underlying constructs rendering the group's narrative powerful can be dismantled. Framing analysis allows us to understand the localized ingredients of Daesh's visual sphere in which pictorial conventions constitute a powerful device to engage the viewer. By comparison, using Daesh's own propaganda material and/or placing a talking head in front of the camera—whether a religious scholar or a grieving mother—puts counter-messaging campaigns at a disadvantage[7] compared to the engaging visual narratives Daesh utilizes. To best counter Daesh's narrative, a more compelling and convincing story has to be created, one that can get the target audience involved in an overarching metanarrative and engaged with the depicted characters, while encapsulating a clear call for alternative action rather than inaction. In the context of the Mosul battle alone, for example, hundreds of Daesh members not only bought into the group's narrative, but also decided to take their own lives by reportedly conducting over 480 suicide operations. Until strategic communication campaigns can embody a powerful metanarrative to compete with Daesh's visual sway over the eyeballs of those who consider joining the group and/or engaging in violent action in their home countries, such efforts will be less likely to succeed.

The Mosul Operation posed a unique opportunity to gauge the extent to which Daesh could sustain a virtual warfare campaign under immense military pressure.

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3 Winkler, Damanhoury, Dicker, and Lemieux's (2016) "The Medium is Terrorism: Transformation of the About to Die Trope in Dabiq."

4 Damanhoury's (2016) "The Daesh State: The Myth Turns into a Reality;" and Fahmy's (2016) "What ISIS wants you to see."

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Hijacking Heads & Hashtags

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"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, the CyberCaliphate under the auspices of ISIS continues in its CyberJihad. While the US and its satellites kill our brothers in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan we broke into your networks and personal devices and know everything about you."

- Threat from the ISIS group via hijacked CENTCOM (US military Central Command) Twitter account. Issued in 2015 as President Obama spoke to the FCC about stepping up cybersecurity efforts.

In the past few decades we have become increasingly familiar with the concept of cyberwarfare. More recently, however, we have also witnessed the rise of a new type of mediation, which could be understood as the mediated personalization of conflict. Popularized in the past few years, and largely in connection to the strategic digital efforts surrounding the group ISIS, this is a form of social media communication that bypasses traditional media and official bodies to target, instead, individual users at high speed and en masse.

Hashtag hijacking, the focus of this essay, is one such tactic from ISIS' strategic communication; it produces a spectacular clashing of texts, worlds, and audiences, and results in a disorientation and virtual encroachment of space. In turn, it gives unprecedented proximity to the phones, hands, eyes, and ears of ordinary people around the world who would not necessarily have had direct and immediate exposure to messages from such groups before. While some work does exist examining the weaponization of social media (Nissen, 2015), a more thorough reading of specific tactics would expand our understanding not only of the ISIS war machine (Kraidy, 2017) but also of the role of new media technologies and practices in today's global conflicts. This essay first explores the idea of hijacking and then delves into examples of its practice.

THE IDEA OF HIJACKING

Hijacking is not a new practice. Etymologically, the word *hijack* itself evokes a complex tale of global appropriation, embroiled in misunderstandings and mistranslation. By some accounts, hijack is a combination of the words "hi – jack" and is thought to have emerged as a euphemism during the American prohibition era as either a code word for prohibited alcohol use or, for US highway jackrolling, a compound word, for stealing cars (Clark, Y. in *The Guardian*, n.d.). By other accounts, the word emerged during the French revolution as a description of the frequent practice of robbing the rich "échaquer", and was misunderstood and mispronounced by the English to morph into 'hijack' (Cryer, 2012). Échaquer as a word itself disappeared from use around this time and is said to have been replaced by the word détourner (Bowen, P. in *The Guardian*, n.d.), a term for 'diversion', later appropriated by the Situationists. Finally, "haiduk" is a popular Eastern European word for an outlaw, a freedom fighter in the Balkans or somewhat of a thief, which has since immigrated into the English vocabulary as 'hijack' (Burke, M. in *The Guardian*, n.d.).

In short, 'hijack' has a number of suggested origins but quite fittingly, no known root. Nonetheless the curious point about translating the word hijack into the digital space today is that a hashtag or a textual meaning is not a tangible good that may be hijacked like a car. What gets hijacked by the ISIS group in these cases is not simply a hashtag but rather, public *attention*, a *communicative space*, and a *particular meaning* and *social convention*. Hashtag hijacking thus becomes a convenient portmanteau that is really about subverting attention and implicit communicative rules and spaces, as established by specific social groups.

Broadly speaking, textual hijacking can be understood as a tactic played out by a less powerful actor in order to use, manipulate, and divert the space and resources created by a more powerful one (de Certeau, 1984). In our context, the less powerful actor is ISIS, using social media as a mass channel and a way of circumventing traditional Western media and military organizations. Hijackers seize opportune moments and spaces to push messages and agendas to maximum effect. In essence, hijacking is a form of counterpower and can be situated amongst an older and wider array of practices of détournement and culture jamming (Debord, 1967; Dery, 1993).

THE PRACTICE OF HIJACKING

Beginning in 2014, ISIS started targeting social media platforms and users by hijacking a variety of hashtags. Of course, this practice is only one among a much broader spectrum of the ISIS media spectacle, part of which is created and sustained by Twitter and the Western media themselves. As Twitter came under increasing pressure to react to the content on its platform, it systematically began to shut down ISIS Twitter accounts in late 2016 and there was a rapid decline in hashtag hijacking in the ensuing months. Nonetheless, the practice of hashtag hijacking remains—it just seems to have moved on to other platforms such as Telegram. Furthermore, the practice of digitally hijacking texts continues to be an insightful act of détournement, which is telling for the mediation of war today.

Textual hijacking takes place through a diversion of social media platforms, topics, users and conventions. In some cases it is done by association, whereas in others it takes place through digital embodiment or through mass force. The latter is typically part of an algorithmic effort which employs the help of fake accounts and bots (more on this is mentioned later). Below are some examples of each of the main hijacking tactics on Twitter: event crashing and persona poaching.

EVENT CRASHING

Event crashing exploits an existing, popular event hashtag, such as ISIS' use of #WorldCup (See Image 1). The operational logic is that using popular event hashtags opens up new opportunities and audiences for ISIS' messaging. In these cases, ISIS seizes upon diverse and popular social networks and gains attention through the shock and clash value of message juxtaposition.

Image 1. This image has been edited to hide a decapitated head that accompanied by the text "This is our ball... it is made of skin." The account and post have since been deleted.

It is worth noting that the scale on which event crashing takes place varies. While #WorldCup is a rather global topic, much more localized hashtags have also been used to target, for instance, smaller communities around relatively unknown soccer teams.

The selection of targeted hashtags itself became a spectacular event when the method was crowdsourced among ISIS supporters online and circulated by the mass media. A man under the name Abdulrahman al-Hamid asked his 4,000 plus followers on Twitter to help him find the highest trending topics in the UK; "We need those who can supply us with the most active hashtags in the UK. And also the accounts of the most famous celebrities. I believe that the hashtag of Scotland's separation from Britain should be the first." (translated from Arabic from the now suspended handle @Abu_Laila – in Malik, Laville, Cresci & Gani, 2014).

PERSONA POACHING

ISIS has not only created new accounts but they have also literally embodied old ones, by hacking and hijacking passwords and thus, digitally seeping into the persona of another's body. In turn, persona poaching includes diverting accounts or hashtags of people and organizations in the public spotlight such as #JustinBieber, Keith Richard (Rolling Stones), Tame Impala (Australian psychedelic band), and the US Central Command's (USCC) Twitter accounts. (The latter three include hijacking accounts, whereas the former, Justin Bieber, includes only hashtag re-appropriation.)

The Tame Impala and Keith Richards digital efforts had some real impact as a number of airplanes had to be diverted because of ISIS-related Twitter threats.

Image 2. #JustinBieber, and Image 3. Keith Richards -- account hacks

In an interesting twist on persona poaching, a number of highly publicized counter-ISIS hashtags have emerged, like the ones below (See Images 4 and 5). Of course, as the saying goes, on the Internet nobody knows if you're a dog, so issues of (re)presentation, authenticity, and validity haunt all digital practice and research (Kraidy, 2012), particularly when accounts and users are suspended, anonymized and frequently resurrected. ISIS' online presence is largely a spectacle precisely for that reason—it is a reflection and a refraction of reality without necessarily being attached to a direct referent.

The practice of digitally hijacking texts continues to be an insightful act of détournement, which is telling for the mediation of war today.

Images 4 employs a professionally framed screenshot, hashtag, and a play on words—but this account, like many others, has since been suspended. Image 5 is an example of a reversal to persona poaching practices, whereby somebody has posted under the counter hashtag #AMessagefromUStoISIS. The person posting under the Lord Stirling account is anonymous and so further adds to the fog around the ISIS media spectacle.

Images 4 and 5.

It is worth noting that algorithmic buttressing in the form of fake accounts and bots is rife in the ISIS effort for maximum visibility. In fact, according to the 2015 ISIS Twitter Census (Berger & Morgan, 2015), around 20% of all ISIS Tweets come from bots or apps. These bots and apps help to rapidly disseminate ISIS Tweets and generate traffic, retweets, and higher algorithmic visibility on the Twitter platform itself. This implies that much of ISIS' social media presence is algorithmically bolstered and thus, hashtag hijacking, event crashing, and persona poaching may also be understood as a product of technology and automation as much as of individual actors or organizations.

SUMMARY

Hijacking serves to appropriate, re-appropriate and perhaps, mis-appropriate existing new media texts, communities and conventions. It causes a spectacular, mediated clashing of worlds, ideas and audiences; one that takes place at speed, en masse, and through increasingly personalized means. While the valence and media interest in ISIS' hashtag hijacking has died down since 2016, studying this tactic provides an example of one communicative turn in modern warfare—a mediated spectacle that has the potential to storm into personal screens, communities, and spaces, thereby exercising a spectacular psychological power that often outshines reality. Still, studying these tactics opens some difficult ontological questions about conducting research online: how do we verify actors and acts, and to what extent can we reconcile this 'reality' with the digital, unverified, and mediated mirage that a majority of people experience?

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Terrorism and World Risk Society: Resilience, Resentment, and Spectacle

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People living in Western societies are, for the most part, safer and healthier than at any point in human history. Despite this, the control and prevention of potential dangers is a central preoccupation of societal institutions. Which threats in particular are given the most attention by governments and media are often out of proportion to their actual likelihood of harm. Since 9/11, Islamic terrorism has been characterized as the predominant security threat to the United States and Europe. The resulting "war on terror" drove changes in domestic and foreign policy and captured much media and public attention. That terrorism has been understood as the predominant social threat is not surprising given its immediate and visceral consequences. But a broader view of the social dynamics of risk can shed light on why terrorism and the reactions to it developed in the way they did.

Terrorism is a category of danger that threatens society but it is also produced by society itself. As theorized by Ulrich Beck in his notion of the 'risk society', there is a shift in individual and public perceptions of the primary dangers we face from things like natural disasters or acts of god, which are outside of human control, to ones produced by human action.[1] Along with terrorism, other examples include climate change, financial panic, and nuclear war. With the rise of such risks, the key concern of states has shifted from the provision and distribution of 'goods'—income, housing, health care—to the avoidance of 'bads' like pollution, crime, terrorism.

This preoccupation with risk comes not because of the actual dangers we confront. Rather, risks cause a problem for the legitimacy of governments and institutions, as modern nation-states based their legitimacy on their ability to control and protect their citizens from dangers. Now those dangers not only arise from society itself, but exceed the capabilities of social institutions to deal with them. One could therefore argue that terrorism represents a more immediate threat to state power and authority than something like climate change, and thus requires a stronger response.

Government responses to risk are deployed strategically to strengthen state power. The representation of risks is inseparable from their material consequences, so how risks are defined and perceived is central to risk politics. In the case of terrorism, while the threat of terrorist attacks weakens trust in institutions, it can also strengthen states that have the most power to discursively define the terrorist threat. This discursive power has been used by Western governments to legitimize global military intervention and implement repressive domestic policies.[2] In the post-9/11 years, the intense focus on avoiding a terrorist attack, and the ways this risk was constructed in official communications and media coverage, helped create a discursive environment in which far-reaching anti-terror laws could be enacted with limited opposition.[3]

Governmental actions and policies generated in response to the risk of terrorism are in some cases associated with forms of neoliberal governmentality in which responsibility for dealing with risk is shifted from state institutions to individuals. The discourse around terrorism not only

harnesses the fears of the public, it also "invites us to be involved in managing the terrorist risk as a logical step towards ensuring our own safe keeping."[4] Discourses encouraging citizens to play an active role in ensuring their security through self-monitoring and self-discipline are not unique to this historical moment. But the ways in which this is implemented is consistent with broader societal trends towards individualization and responsibilization under neoliberalism. In such formations, individuals rather than the state are primarily responsible for dealing with risks of all kinds and can be held accountable if they do not play their part.

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge -- March 2, 2002

More recently this has involved a discursive shift towards the concept of 'resilience.' This was embraced by the Obama administration, which in its counter-terrorism planning emphasized responding to and recovering from attacks as quickly as possible. A resilience approach accepts a certain degree of risk as inevitable, while boosting the capacity of individuals to respond in appropriate manner, for example through more first aid training for citizens or "[making] preparedness a civic virtue by instructing civilians to refrain from requesting professional assistance unless absolutely necessary."[5] Critics argue that resilience demands from citizens "permanent adaptability to extremes of turbulence."[6] Such shifts in discourse are of course politically contingent, with the Trump administration abandoning resilience in its counterterrorism rhetoric and focusing on eliminating the threat entirely.

The power to define risks does not rest solely with governments, however, and is in fact a key point of contestation. The global media landscape is contested and complex, used by both hegemonic powers and disruptive actors to advance their goals. Terrorist acts have long been intimately connected to media, with the attention gained through the creation of spectacular violent images part of the rationale for the attacks. Media are not simply how information about terrorism gets disseminated, but are an integral part of the events and how they are constituted.[7] This means that media themselves become a source of risk, with terrorists deliberately exploiting the media in order to cause reactions and overreactions on the part of the public and authorities.[8] It is not only through reactions to terrorist attacks themselves that media become risky, but the ways they are used for the recruitment and organizing by terrorist groups.

In the case of ISIS, the use of (Western, corporate) social media to organize and spread its message, as well as the usual terrorist logic of co-opting media practices to spread fear, are central to the successes that ISIS has achieved. While news media circulated images of the group's acts of brutality, popular figures on social media emphasized the freedom and glory of life in the caliphate to attract foreign recruits to Syria. The openness and decentralization of ISIS propaganda, and its ease of access on common social media platforms, further encouraged followers to commit acts of terror in their home countries, multiplying and creating risks everywhere. ISIS documents promoted "Media Jihad" as central to its strategy, and other articles in this series have explored ISIS' use of hashtag hijacking on Twitter and its visual propaganda techniques.

Mohammed Emwazi ("Jihad John"), ca Nov. 16, 2014.
Source: Islamic State/al-Furqān Media Foundation

The role of media systems in actively producing the risk of terrorism point to the complex and reflexive nature of socially-produced risks in a globalized society. Responses to risks create new risks. While the discourses of terrorism that today circulate in the media can serve to reinforce the power of the state, these same processes can also amplify the risk of terrorism by fostering the conditions which spawn it. In a globalizing world, unintended consequences will inevitably arise from these new interconnections, which can negatively impact particular societies or groups. The failures of complex global political processes and institutions—many of which emerged in response to various risks—also resonate at an individual level. The paradigm of resilience positions such systemic failures as a fact of life, and means that individuals are vulnerable to the failures of governance while also being responsible for most of their costs. Failures of justice, recognition, and status, along with the denial of these failures, breed resentment and create the conditions conducive to the emergence of terrorism.[9] The individualization of politics and the resentment engendered extends to political violence, with self-radicalization becoming increasingly prevalent in terrorist attacks.

Rather than isolated acts of disruption, terrorism is enmeshed within the fabric of global risk society. An appreciation of the complexities and feedback loops inherent in global risk processes is central to understanding the emergence of and responses to terrorism.

NOTES

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A Lone Wolf in the Hypertext:
Radicalization Online

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Contemporary discourse seeking to explain "Islamic" terrorism is, in the English-speaking world, plagued by a profusion of mutually incompatible heuristics, just-so stories, and naturalized prejudices disguised as common wisdom. Perhaps most fundamentally, this discourse errs in its assumption—intrinsic in the very semantic structure of such terms as "Islamic extremism" and "jihadism"—that violent extremism, and the initiatory process of radicalization, originate in the historical and contemporary practices of Islam. Yet the figure of the lone wolf profoundly undermines this assumption.

Case studies of lone wolf terrorists—particularly those who follow a pattern of self-radicalization—reveal that violent extremism grows not from the specific cultural or historical practices of Islam, but from a general affect of sadism, thrill-seeking, and personality disorder. The lone wolf's pathologies are only *Islamically-inflected*, often through an accretion of mediated encounters linking representations of violence, Islam, and the lone wolf himself.[1] This points us to the conclusion that in the case of these violent extremists, pathology usually—perhaps always—precedes theology/ideology.

The peculiar confluences of theology and ideology that accompany violent extremism such as this are no more technologically determined than they are inherent to the practice of Islam.[2] Nevertheless, the theo-ideology of violent extremists regularly bears the ineluctable stamp of those communicative technologies around which it has been constructed. This constitutes a second category of inflection, which must be taken into account. The extremism of highly literate individuals will bear the hallmarks of print media and its particular biases. The theo-ideology of violent extremists saturated in television and radio/audio reflects characteristics of post-literate orality.[3] And those whose primary mode of interface is the internet and world wide web will bear features of the idiosyncratic, ad hoc logic of these technologies' database-derived and hypertextual traits.

Pulse nightclub shooter Omar Mateen offers a good example of the latter, digital dynamic in action. The FBI has expressed strong confidence that Mateen was radicalized at least partly (which is to say, perhaps totally) online.[4] And indeed, as we attempt to trace the contours of Mateen's theo-ideology, we quickly come to recognize the clashing perspectives of a digitally-mediated worldview; a babel of conflicting identities and ideals, at once facile and incoherent, obscuring a toxic affect bearing no resemblance to the conscience of the devout traditionalist, but instead to the criminal narcissist and the rampage killer.

No coherent ideology underlaid Mateen's mass murder attack. Mateen would by turns claim membership in Hezbollah, express solidarity with al-Nusra and al-Qaeda, and pledge allegiance to the Islamic State. He was at once outraged by the application of American force overseas and infatuated with the power of law enforcement and the American carceral state.[5] The violent antagonism between these positions is not surprising in light of Mateen's online

radicalization process. That Mateen's peculiar theo-ideological inflection should prove so dissonant and on its face self-contradictory is the outcome and index of the media environment in which it coalesced—that is, the internet and worldwide web.

Omar Mateen

The biases of the internet and worldwide web are the biases of the database and the hypertext, respectively. A vast reservoir of encoded information sits at the core of the 'net, which is decoded and made meaningful by the user at the level of the interface. Without this "reading up," data remains inert, lacking in significance beyond the fact of its own being.[6] This reservoir of encoded information lacks an organizing "grand narrative" in the mode of, say, the data contained in the texts and practices of a specific denomination and branch of Islam. Indeed, the database's assumption and reliance upon the user to decode and give meaning to its vast trove of raw information is fundamentally undermining to the very notion of grand narratives. As Mateen "read up" the contents of the internet's vast data reservoir, he did not decode its information through a grand narrative of Wahhabism, Khomeinism, or some mainline practice of American Islam (reports indicate he was somewhat dislocated from his own religious community) but rather through his own affective tendencies toward fantasies of violence and power.

Moreover, the essential interface with which Mateen would have "read up" the internet would have been that of the commercial web browser. The world wide web and its network of hyperlinked pages produces an abridged expression of a hypertextual ideal, in which all significant data are linked, directly, with one another.[7] On the web, this ideal omniterminousness is left unrealized, and any data point is made *potentially* relatable to any other at the whim of the web designer and/or user. As such, any point may constitute a rupture or beginning, a link or a dead end, producing a field wherein all points are potentially conterminous, and no path among these points is permanently privileged over others.

That Mateen's peculiar theo-ideological inflection should prove so dissonant and on its face self-contradictory is the outcome and index of the media environment in which it coalesced— that is, the internet and worldwide web.

In a network of meaning wherein any data point is potentially juxtaposed to any other, all equivalence becomes false. We may reasonably speculate that the hypertextual path of radicalization is often experienced as a straying, arbitrary zigzag, where the rules of linear thought and logical conclusion are suspended, taking the lone wolf through illogical and even contradictory ideological watersheds. A capricious, dis-integrated multiplicity of personae emerge, figureheads fronting impossible chains of identity and belief whose links and pieces will never fit together.[8]

Whatever theo-ideological convictions Mateen produced through this accretion of discordant, de-narrativized data points, they were but the "darker, emptier, and simpler"[9] shadows of his pathologically disordered feelings and impulses. Mateen bore many of the traits typical of serial and rampage killers: a history of physically abusive behavior, experience as both victim and perpetrator of bullying, social anorexia, a fascination with police authority, violent ideation, and more.[10] His radicalization was not the adoption of increasingly perverse, nor (to take a reactionary position) "pure" forms of Islamic theo-ideology, which ultimately compelled him to kill. If we must even use the word "radicalization" we must recognize that it only serves to describe the process of accretion and is not a motivator in itself. Perhaps this process of accretion does contribute somewhat to a killer's deteriorating affect (the role of fantasy and escalation in spree and serial murder is well-documented) but the particularities of Islam *per se* seem to bear no significance on this dynamic. Radicalization, especially as concerns its specific ideo-theological inflections, is an ornament, not a motive.

Similarly, media are not the drivers of extremist theo-ideologies, but do often and profoundly impact the shape and structure of those worldviews. If we are ever to understand the phenomenon of violent extremism, we must develop a discourse that recognizes the vagaries and paradoxes inherent to its contemporary manifestations. Such a discourse must take into account the effects that mediating technologies make on the ideo-theological inflections that surround the acts of the lone wolf. Such a recognition, especially as it pertains to new media such as the internet and worldwide web, troubles the very taxonomy of the so-called Islamic terrorist, revealing the inconsistency and even incoherence of the "Islamic" theo-ideological inflection with which he attempts to justify his acts of violence.

We may reasonably speculate that the hypertextual path of radicalization is often experienced as a straying, arbitrary zigzag, where the rules of linear thought and logical conclusion are suspended, taking the lone wolf through illogical and even contradictory ideological watersheds.

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that this claim does not posit a techno-determinative role for media with regard to violent extremism. Rather, by demonstrating the homology of specific communication technologies and violent, extremist theo-ideologies, this project intends to challenge the prevailing discourse of radicalization, which treats theo-ideology as itself determinative of and anterior to violent extremism.

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Obsessive Regulation and 'Biological Minimum' in ISIS Biopolitics

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The dramatic rise and expansion of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, Syria, parts of Africa and South Asia, has generated much discussion about the group's atrocities and geopolitical impact, as well as debates about how to respond to it—not just militarily, but in the domains of ideology and propaganda as well. Yet there has been little effort to understand IS as a power. What do IS's practices, beliefs, and propaganda tell us about it as a form of power? And equally important, how has IS conceived of itself as a power? This article is an attempt to shed light on IS's exercise of power, looking specifically at its view and treatment of women. For although IS has experienced reversals of fortune on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, its track record has much to tell us about its particularly radical strand of Salafi jihadi ideology and practices as a power. This is a power that seeks a maximum regulation of the lives of Muslim women, down to the minute details, and exercises extreme brutality by subjecting captured non-Muslim women to an exceptional state of violence and abuse where they are reduced to their bare biological minimum.

To begin with, it is important to note that IS is at once a juxtaposition of the modern and the medieval, combining modern techniques and technologies of rule with medieval discourses and practices of power. Sifting through the pages of *Dabiq*, an online magazine that IS produced between July 2014 and July 2016 in such languages as English and French and targeted mostly at audiences outside IS territories, the picture that emerges of IS's treatment and view of women—with respect to their behavior, role, and status in private and public spheres—bears the hallmarks of a biopolitical power. A biopolitical power is a broad designation that for the purposes of this essay combines elements of both Michel Foucault's and Giorgio Agamben's definitions and interpretations of the concept involving practices of biopower, disciplinary power, and sovereign power.

ISIS billboard with verse from the Qur'an urging women to wear hijab. Raqqa, Syria, 2014. Reuters

As a biopower, IS is an entity that displays an insatiable desire to control and regulate every aspect of women's outward existence—from their bodies to behaviors and roles at home and beyond—thereby harnessing women's reproductive capabilities and ultimately confining them to a power relationship in which they are perpetually subjugated to the males around them. In this regard IS can be seen in light of a Foucauldian definition of biopolitical power, one that seeks to take "control of both the body and life" or, indeed, to take "control of life in general—with the body as one pole and the population as the other."[1]

As a Salafi jihadi entity committed to a strict and ultraconservative interpretation of Islam, IS imposes numerous limitations on women, ordering them to fully cover up, "lower their gaze and guard their private parts,"[2] and accept polygamy.[3] It furthermore promotes procreation and child raising—providing future warriors for the cause—as key objectives of women's lives. Much of IS's preoccupation with women and their bodies emanates from a deep preoccupation with sexuality, an area that Foucault describes as a "crucial target" of any power aiming to manage life.[4] IS narrowly focuses on the reproductive function of sexuality, obsessively erasing any associations with feminine pleasure. Its obsession with sex is evident in *Dabiq*, where Western women are admonished for debauchery and Muslim women are directed to adopt "chastity" and "honor," insulating them from sexual temptation. But for those who dare to defy the rules of proper sexual conduct, IS exhibits its disciplinary side through grisly images of women stoned to death for "adultery"—corporeal reminders of the cost of ignoring the rules.

IS AS A SOVEREIGN POWER

IS's treatment of captured women reveals a different side of its biopolitics. Whereas in the case of Muslim women IS demonstrates a strong if by comparison seemingly trivial obsession with controlling individual and collective behaviors of the faithful, in the case of captive women it positions itself as a sovereign power with authority over life and death, determining the very form of life (or lack of it thereof) that captured women experience. In August 2014, IS raided the Sinjar area in northern Iraq, home to the followers of the ancient Mesopotamian Yazidi faith. What ensued has been described by the United Nations as an "ongoing genocide,"[5] as IS is estimated to have massacred hundreds of Yazidis, mostly men, and captured thousands of Yazidi women and girls who have been subjected to sexual slavery.

Yazidi escapee from ISIS captivity. Source: Reuters

Despite the universal outrage about these atrocities, IS proudly took responsibility for its actions against "pagan" Yazidis. The October 2014 edition of *Dabiq* contained the following statement: "After capture, in accordance with Shariah law, the Yazidi women and children were then

divided amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations."[6] *Dabiq* also boasted that the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women was a realization of "many divine wisdoms and religious benefits, regardless of whether people are aware of this."[7]

Treated as spoils of war by IS, the women were pressured to convert to Islam, subjected to forced marriage, torture, and sexual violence. In dealing with Yazidi women, IS effectively suspended the laws it applied to other women in its territory, thus condemning the Yazidis to what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben described as a "state of exception."[8] By so doing, Yazidis women were effectively reduced to "bare life," the most basic and unprotected form of life. The concept of bare life was articulated in Agamben's work on Nazi camps in Europe. The camp, in Agamben's words, is "the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation."[9] As such, a camp need not denote only something physical, but could refer to a metaphorical space where a brutal state of exception is enforced. What actually constitutes sovereign power—i.e. biopower in the extreme—in these spaces is not the physical annihilation of life as such, but rather a reconstitution of life reduced to its biological minimum.[10]

Yazidis women were effectively reduced to "bare life," the most basic and unprotected form of life.

Through its deployment of modern technologies of rule coupled with an ethos that is medieval and traditional, IS reveals itself as an ultimate expression of a biopolitical power, obsessed with regulating, disciplining, and determining the forms of life that women are entitled to have under its reign. As a key multilingual publication of IS meant to appeal to sympathizers and potential recruits, *Dabiq* provides interesting clues about IS ideology and practices, how it operates as a biopolitical power. What emerges is an image of IS as a power in charge, regulating the lives of those within its territories. Whereas with Muslim women IS is chiefly concerned with organizing their lives in private and public domains and issuing recommendations on chastity, reproduction, and appeasement of male family members, in its treatment of captured Yazidi women emerges the image of an absolute sovereign power that subjects these women to a violent state of exception and extreme abuse, thus reducing their lives to a bare minimum.

NOTES

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Mongol Hordes, the Khmer Rouge, and the Islamic State: Non-Modern Conceptions of Space and Time

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Most scholarship and journalism about the Islamic State fail to grasp the true meanings of the group's unorthodox relationship to space and time. The group's orientation to territory and temporality is different from normative Western models both tactically and ideologically. That is, the Islamic State, when operating at its ideal capacity, traverses time and space. It is both any-where and every-when.

This means that the way we approach the group might benefit from a kind of reorientation. The Islamic State is not just a nation-state-building enterprise and it is not a guerilla terror group. Instead, it is sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both. It is more diffuse, nimble, and protean—by nature and design—than conventional modern nation-states. Our models need to account for these differences.

One way to re-think and re-conceive the Islamic State is to use models that are either outside of or at least in opposition to Western frames. This essay does that by pairing the Islamic State with two conceptual forerunners: the Mongol Hordes of the Thirteenth Century and the revolutionary Khmer Rouge regime that seized power in Cambodia in 1975. The Mongols are relevant because the group operated in a non-Westphalian context where national boundaries meant little. The same is true of the Islamic State. Additionally, their modular approach to statecraft was not unlike the contemporary decentralized organization of the Islamic State, where national borders are blurred and troubled by strategic and technological innovation. The Khmer Rouge is a more contemporary case, pertinent due to "Year Zero," a politically motivated reset of the national calendar and rejection of Western history. Both the Khmers and the Islamic State reorient themselves and their subjects to an altered sense of temporality that is strategically anti-modern and anti-Western. Their work against normative time is symbolic of a disorientation process in the service of their apocalyptic aims.

FLEXIBLE BORDERS AND FUNGIBLE CITIZENS: THE CASE OF THE MONGOLS

The most significant period of Mongol power in Asia began in 1206 with the ascendancy of Chinggis Khan, who united a set of disparate, warring factions and formed the Golden Horde that conquered much of the continent during the time of Chinggis and his subsequent progeny. The Mongols were a mobile war-making apparatus; they never sought to build the stable cities of their Greco-Roman forebears. Instead their strategies and objectives were always being refashioned according to what was needed for success in battle, so that, for example, hunting for food doubled as military training.

This modular approach extended into statecraft—there was little that was discernibly "Mongol" within the group's larger structure. While the group was known for their brutality in wartime, in many cases, they allowed conquered groups to maintain many of their customs, traditions, and organizational structures, as long as they could be re-made to serve their new masters. The group's language, government structure, and religious practice were all either drawn from their

recently conquered subjects or constructed whole-cloth to serve the war effort. Even the term "Mongol" itself may be most productively understood as a modern depiction of a social order in which citizenship was fluid, not designated by the kind of nation-state frame we use today.

The Islamic State employs a similarly malleable strategy. The "Islamic State's decision-making is opportunistic, adaptive, and dependent upon its leaderships' [sic] shifting propensity to implement its ideology," one analyst, Craig Noyes, writes, suggesting that the group, which purports to embrace the doctrinally rigid Jihadi-Salafist sect, is actually more adaptable than it tries to appear. "[I]t is only when Islamic State has adequate governing strength, or a decision cannot provide short-term organizational benefit, or IS's ideological legitimacy and grand strategy are at stake that it pivots to overtly ideological decision-making."[1] The Islamic State has collaborated with non-Islamist groups for tactical maneuvers and propaganda purposes, all in the service of war-making.

The Islamic State… is more diffuse, nimble, and protean—by nature and design—than conventional modern nation-states. Our models need to account for these differences.

Mongolian calligraphy - Wikimedia Commons, A. Orkhon

Moreover, the Islamic State and the Mongols both used technological innovation rather than lines on a map to expand their territory in multiple places at the same time. The Yam, a set of roadways developed in 1234 by Chinggis's youngest son, Tolui, gave the empire its shape—anywhere the Yam went was a station of the empire. The Internet might be called the Islamic State's Yam—a space of flows where the aims and subjective reality of Islamic statehood is realized not at its interstices but at its networked nodes. Each computer connected to Twitter and spamming hashtags, sharing beheading videos, or pledging allegiance to the caliphate might be called territory of the Islamic State, which holds the potential to expand far beyond what is understood by contemporary conceptions of nation and nation-state.

YEAR ZERO AND THE REJECTION OF MODERN TIME

The Islamic State also attacks and disrupts mainstream notions of time and the temporal. So, too, did the Khmer Rouge, a rebel Cambodian cabal led by the despot Pol Pot, who seized control of the capital city of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975 and declared "Year Zero," a reset of time, history, and the outside world. The Khmer Rouge platform was built on an oversimplification of history that laid blame for the nation's struggles at the feet of its Western colonizers; by re-setting the clock, the revolutionaries contended that they could throw off the organizing system of their foreign oppressors. All holidays more than seventeen years old were forgotten; all schools were closed; most intellectuals were killed. The goal was to reconstruct each individual, atomized citizen from the ground up, convincing them that they inhabited a time before colonial oppression, when the great Twelfth-Century city of Angkor Wat—the nation's apogee—was more than a ruinous reminder of a glorious past.

Khmer Rouge leaders sit in a train car in 1975; Pol Pot is on the far left.

The Islamic State's relationship to time is similarly political and complex. It, too, employs a set of rhetorical techniques that effectively reorganize time by constructing an ideology from various *hadith* (records) of the Prophet Muhammad from diverse sources, regions, and time periods.[2] "Modern" is a pejorative term within the group, Gregorian (Miladi) dating is rejected in favor of the Islamic lunar calendar, and the Islamic State seeks to operate every-*when*—existing outside of the linear telos of the "modern" west and putting various contexts to use in the service of its work.

This study is not intended to be overly ambitious. Neither of the cases examined here could ever stand as a strict one-to-one comparison. Instead, what these conceptual antecedents allow us to do is to reorient our thinking about the Islamic State. Perhaps scholars and policymakers have spilled so much ink debating what the Islamic State "is" because "what" it "is" is complicated by its flexibility in time and space. This happens in large part because too much of our understanding, strategy, rhetoric, and policy-making is limited by a Western orientation to a non-Western conception. As Edward Said reminds us, "[D]iscussions of the Orient or of the Arabs and Islam are fundamentally premised upon a fiction."[3] The fiction, his work would illustrate, was an Orientalizing one, where the Orient was conceived within Western/ Occidental epistemological frames as pre-modern, backward, and unsophisticated. From that inaccurate and presumptively superior position, normative cultural understandings have taken hold in many Western contexts. The Islamic State in fact has its own context, and the time- and space-shifting of the group are products of its alterity as much as they are strategies that advance the group's intentions.

The Islamic State seeks to operate every-when— existing outside of the linear telos of the "modern" west...

If the Islamic State can "exist" anywhere one of its adherents is Tweeting, then we need a new conception of what a state is that takes into account its networked and dispersed "citizenry." If the Islamic State can "exist" at any time, then a more robust historiographical analysis of its references might prepare us for what might come next.

Drawing upon alternative epistemology is a way to emphasize the exteriority of the subject. Changing the orientation of our research upsets facile assumptions about the group, reframing the study outside of an Occident/Orient dichotomy. These cases help us to tap different wells in order to generate knowledge from alternative contexts and connective themes. Rather than getting bogged down in any of the ongoing debates around the Islamic State, this essay suggests attempts to generate new paradigms for understanding it, drawing from these intersections to create new pathways for understanding across time and space.

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The author would like to dedicate this work to the memory of David Giovacchini.

NOTES

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The Islamic State's Passport Paradox

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Shortly after ISIS declared itself "Islamic State" in 2014, images of purported passports circulated online. In August, 2014, Swedish terrorism analyst Magnus Ranstrop tweeted a photo of four passports strewn across a table (Figure 1). He found the image on an IS supporters' website. They bore the group's flag under the word "PASSPORT." There were reasons to doubt the group sanctioned these, starting with the cheap, shiny laminated covers. The use of English and in particular an English transliteration of the Arabic word for Caliphate appeared odd. "Islamic State of Al Khilafah" is not an official name; it is redundant phrasing, basically saying Islamic State of the Islamic State. Most likely, these were a fan's mock-ups made to express exuberance at the announcement of the Caliphate.

Figure 1

That same summer, a different image of a passport with a dark green bound leather cover also made the rounds on social media. Its ornate, emblazoned logo and full Arabic script made it appear legitimate (Figure 2). One report claimed that IS had issued it to 11,000 citizens who lived near the Iraq-Syria border. According to *Al Arabiya*, the group was using a captured Iraqi government "Identification and Passport Center" in Mosul to create the documents as an effort to boost morale and solidify its rule.

As a militant movement aspiring to statehood—one that was capturing and holding on to territory, and implementing a legal regime—IS would be expected to furnish its own passport. After all, it engaged in the formal administration of travel consistent with modern statehood practices, issuing safe-conduct passes and exit permits for exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, IS built bureaucratic structures to manage the populations it conquered. A passport would supplement these official efforts to regulate the movement and identities of individuals within and passing through its territories. Also, it would symbolically supplant the previous documents of foreign fighters who burnt their passports to show their full commitment to IS and reject their old citizenship. However, IS never systematically issued these or any passports to its entire population. Neither the group's captured records nor media reports have made any mention of IS passports since 2014.

Besides being a juridical and functional artifact of sovereignty, a passport is a material canvas for power to demonstrate its legitimacy. This gives it an analyzable communicative pertinence. In the first instance, the decision to issue a passport is a declaration of having borders that demarcate national territory and is a geopolitical statement of inclusion among the larger community of nations. It matters for burgeoning international relations since a country's official travel papers derive currency from other countries' formal recognition of the authority vested in them. Perhaps, since IS saw its borders as fluid and did not recognize other states, it had no such purpose for national documents.

Figure 2. Purported real Islamic State passport.

Second, a state's representation of itself is displayed on the passport's cover and in its first pages via nomenclature, layout, and iconography. It inscribes a vision of its own identity and sources of legitimacy. This gives official documents an attractive symbolic power; governments-in-exile (Tibetan Green Book), para-state authorities (Palestinian Authority) or deeply unpopular regimes (North Korea) issue passports despite their having little utility for mobility in the world. It is probable that this is an under-whelming motive for IS, which may see a passport as a facsimile of nationalistic states.

Although IS had the impetus to release passports and the capacity to produce them, there may have been a deeper reason for not exercising that option: A passport foregrounds latent tensions in the group's claims to sovereignty. Specifically, the first and most essential justification IS gave for its existence is a divine one, appealing to the "prophetic method" of declaring a Caliphate. While the religious sources, from the holy texts to the practices and sayings of the Prophet and his contemporaneous followers, offer a blueprint for a just Islamic authority, they give no direct guidance on the question of passports. A cosmic *raison d'etat* admittedly suggests their futility, but the group would have to construct a policy. Many within it would surely oppose the promotion of outward travel on theological grounds. In *fatwa no. 48* (2014), the Al-Buhuth

wa al-Eftaa' Committee forbade leaving because it was "without gain for anyone who wants to travel to the land of disbelief." According to such a view, passports serve no purpose because everything beyond its borders is antithetical to Islam.

In practice, however, IS granted many exceptions. It promulgated a policy, for example, that "those living in Islamic State territory must obtain a permit from the Diwan al-Hisba in whatever *wilaya* (province) they live in if they wish to travel outside Islamic State territory for a limited period of time." This would be a temporary substitute for an IS passport since travelers would use their old passports for the time being. If IS matured into a settled state, and citizens' previous passports were invalidated, it would have to have a national passport to continue such permissions. Although having no clear theological backing, such a policy is consistent with the second rationale and source of inspiration for the state: a historical justification rooted in prior Islamic states. In its formation, IS claimed to resurrect the line of rightly governing Caliphs. While they deemed most historic Muslim rulers corrupt, even the Caliphs whom IS claimed to succeed gave out travel documents akin to passports; they facilitated the movement of travelers and others engaged in economic activity, diplomacy, and proselytizing. Some of the papyrus passports from early Caliphates—including the early Abbasids—have been preserved.

Since IS never concretized its territorial rule, and likely will lose it entirely by 2018, it is saved from having to decide about issuing a modern passport. The programmatic issuance of an official passport would have invited IS to clarify a coherent discourse around its sovereignty, reconciling itself as a divine, sanctified, religiously correct authority that is also historically rooted in an interrupted line of Caliphs. Islamic State's officials may have come to see a national travel document as essential to the practical imperative of managing a state. This might alienate the religious purists within IS's ranks, but it would find grounding in the desires of its fighters, residents and fans who celebrated mock-ups of a passport as a symbol of the state's manifestation. As such, a passport, that small material artifact, could have forced the group's first necessary compromise with the practices of sovereignty that still define sustainable, territorial political organization in the contemporary era.

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Cynthia Miller-Idriss, American University

April 4ᵗʰ
Not Quite Not White: Losing and Finding Race in America
Sharmila Sen, Harvard University Press

CARGC Colloquia

September 6ᵗʰ
"Struggles for Visibility: Surveillance Representations and Self-Representations of Terrorists in the News Media"
Mette Mortensen, University of Copenhagen & CARGC Faculty Fellow

October 18ᵗʰ
"The Cultural Logics of Digital Governance: Russia's Great Power Identity and Internet Sovereignty Narrative"
Stanislav Budnitsky, CARGC Postdoctoral Fellow

November 29ᵗʰ
"Digesting Precarity: Digital Motherhood, Food Safety, and Health Panic in Vietnam"
Giang Nguyen-Thu, CARGC Postdoctoral Fellow

December 3ʳᵈ
"Making Sense of Millennial Childhood Trauma in Iraq through Nostalgic Media: A Study of Databases of Spacetoon Cartoons and Social Media Posts in Arabic"
Zubaida Qaissi, CARGC Undergraduate Fellow

January 31ˢᵗ
"Digital Chronotopes: The Promises and Politics of the Digital under Authoritarianism in Egypt"
Yakein Abdelmagid, CARGC Postdoctoral Fellow

February 14ᵗʰ
"Youth, Hashtags, and the Digital Circulation of Protests of Guinea"
Clovis Bergère, CARGC Postdoctoral Fellow

March 14ᵗʰ
"Innovation on Standby: Political Pitfalls, Economic Uncertainty, and Scientific Frustrations in Brazilian Computer Innovation"
Beatrice Choi, Northwestern University & Predoctoral Fellow, University of Pennsylvania