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To Die in Rage

Violence, masculinity and aesthetics in the narrative of ISIS

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Abstract

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Summary:

The aim of this thesis is to map general themes which the Islamic State of Sham (ISIS) presents in its media, both textual and visual, in order to pin down the group's constitutionalizing narrative. The study focuses on the magazine *Dabiq* and the short film *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* produced by the ISIS media center Alhayat Media. A discussion of the possibilities to prevent further expansion of the ISIS ideology is also conducted.

The thesis is based on postmodern theory, gender studies and sociology of emotion, and the study is conducted with the narrative approach to conflict resolution as its primary method.

The analysis shows that ISIS is incorporating disparate modern discourses into its narrative, most prominent the islamophobic discourse and the discourse of modern masculinity. ISIS keeps its internal logic going through a balanced emotional regime which allows the group to remain and expand. The study demonstrates how two competing narratives, ISIS and the West's, can use the same discourses in order to create a strong narrative which individuals can exit or enter into.

Keywords: ISIS, *Dabiq*, narrative, discourse, islamophobia, neo-tribes, masculinity, aesthetics, play, violence, emotional regimes.

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1. Introduction

{O you who have believed, do not take as intimates those other than yourselves, for they will not spare you [any] ruin. They wish you would have hardship. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater. We have certainly made clear to you the signs, if you will use reason. Here you are loving them but they are not loving you, while you believe in the Scripture – all of it. And when they meet you, they say, ”We believe.” But when they are alone, they bite their fingertips at you in rage. Say, “Die in your rage. Indeed, Allah is Knowing of that within the breasts”} [Āl ‘Imrān: 118-119]. (*Dabiq* issue 5, page 65).

In 2003 the USA invaded Iraq to “plant seeds of democracy”, according to George W. Bush (Chicago Tribune 13-Apr-2013). Three years after the US drew back a somewhat new power appeared in Iraq, seemingly out of nowhere. Out of the seeds of democracy a new order grew. Convinced, unapologetic, effective and violent the Islamic State of Sham (ISIS) took over large parts of Iraq and shocked the international community by recruiting and inspiring people from all over the world. They spread information, photos, and videos via social media and communicating its message in a highly modern manner, proving that the era of the Al-Qaida VHS tapes was long gone.

The passage quoted above derives from the ISIS news magazine *Dabiq*. It is also part of the Quran, Sura Āl ‘Imrān. It is used by ISIS to justify the targeting of Muslims who disagree with their ideology, claiming that Muslims who did not openly approve of the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris have gone from “hypocrisy to apostasy”, and should therefore be killed. The never ending dilemma of “true Islam” is once again brought to the fore (was it ever brought to the back?) by the rise of ISIS and is not only seen in the rhetoric of ISIS itself, but in the Western media as well. Bill Maher, host of the HBO talk show *Real Time*, for example, equated the “Muslim world” with ISIS stating that: “But if vast numbers of Muslims across the world believe, and they do, that humans deserve to die for merely holding a different idea or drawing a cartoon [...], not only does the Muslim world have something in common with ISIS; it has too much in common with ISIS” (*Real Time*, 26-Sep-2014).

It is an interesting fact, that Western media and ISIS depicts Muslims in a similar manner. Islam is, according to ISIS, “a religion of the sword” (*Dabiq* issue 7, page 20) and the question “Does Islam promote violence?” was asked on CNN recently (realpolitics.com). From a sociological point of view, religion have no agency in itself. It is a result of human activities, and is constituted by it. Perhaps ISIS, then, is a result

of activities that have been conducted during the centuries, and have been spread by globalization. In Sweden, a country with a population of 9 million, about 130 individuals have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and other Islamist movements. Gothenburg city is alleged to be the city in Sweden from which most Swedish ISIS sympathizers hail. This is often explained through theories of segregation and economic gaps (Göteborgs-Posten 9-Mar-2015). This might seem logic, since Gothenburg is one of the most segregated cities in Sweden (Metro 13-Nov-2013), but is it the only reason for these individuals to join ISIS? While focus seems to be placed primarily on the next of kin of Jihadists, support-lines for worried parents and a national center for “deprogramming” have been proposed (Göteborgs-Posten 9-Mar-2015), the number of people traveling to the Islamic State continues to be consistent, according to *Säkerhetspolisen* (Göteborgs-Posten 9-Mar-2015).¹

The successful recruitment in Sweden and the Western world could indeed be described as a result of the lost, or never found, welfare state. This explanation does, however, conform to the general attitude towards Muslims in the Western world, of Muslims as a heterogeneous group of misfits. Is the rise of ISIS proof of the clash of the civilizations, or is it perhaps a clash of narratives? There are reason to ask new questions to a new and acute problem, in order to broaden our understanding of very complex social processes. This is an attempt to do so.

2. Purpose and research question

ISIS, the global Islamist movement which lies behind the creation of the Islamic State, communicates its message through modern social media, online news magazines and short films. The purpose of this thesis is to map the general themes found in the narrative that ISIS presents in these media. How is the group constitutionalized through text and picture, and in what way does their narrative relate to the Western discourse of Islam? The thesis also discusses what possibilities there are to prevent further expansion of the ISIS ideology, and what the best strategy to do so would be, if prevention would be considered desirable.

¹ *Säkerhetspolisen* is the Swedish security police.

3. Background

3.1. The Islamic State²

The Islamic State (ISIS) sprung out of the political vacuum that emerged from the partial breakdown of Syria and Iraq. USA's invasion of Iraq in 2003 eventually led to the political power being given to the Shia Muslim majority, when Nouri al-Maliki was elected premier minister in 2010. Although it was stated in the constitution (written by the occupying powers), that the political power should be divided between the three largest ethnic groups in Iraq, Shia, Sunni and Kurds, Maliki created a state apparatus dominated by Shia Muslims and supported by Iran. The economic support that was promised to the Sunni Muslim minority was neglected and led to riots, which was beaten down by the Iraqi military forces. In effect many Sunni tribes and militias turned on the Bagdad regime, and joined forces with ISIS for pragmatic reasons. In 2014 al-Maliki was forced to resign, and was replaced by Haidar al-Abdi.

Due to the countrywide revolt which began in 2011 as part of what the West named "the Arabic spring", Syria is today considered to be a "failed state", i.e. a state that lacks basic societal functions such as law, order and infrastructure. Bashar al-Assad has been able to remain in "power" due to the homogeneity of the regime and lack of unity among the rebels. At the same time, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and partially Turkey have been supporting disparate Sunni militias in order to prevent the rise of a "Shia Crescent", i.e. an allegiance between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

This tricky political and religious landscape of allegiances and tactics have provided fertile ground for ISIS, which derives from *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*, a group that was founded around 2000 and has its roots in the Afghani wars of 1980s and 1990s. The *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* and its leader, Abu Musad al-Zarqawi, aimed towards bringing down the Jordanian monarchy, but after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 their goal shifted to fight the occupying powers. The *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* used a tactics of terror with suicide attacks, sabotage, kidnappings and executions which were documented and distributed.

In 2004 *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* joined *Al-Qaida*, at the time led by Usama bin Laden, and changed name to *al-Qaida of Waziristan*. Zarqawi was killed in 2006, however, and the new leadership (fronted by Abu Ayyub al-Masari) reformed the

² Unless otherwise stated, this section is based on: Jönsson, Per. 2014. "Profetens Hämd" – Islamiska Staten – Hot mot världsfreden?" *Världspolitikens Dagsfrågor*. 2014/9.

organization and hence created ISI—*The Islamic State of Iraq*. Although most of the ISI leadership was killed in an US-funded tribe-based offensive against ISI in 2007–2008 (referred to as *al-Shawa*), ISI prevailed and in 2010 the present leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Bagdadhi, took over leadership and the new era of ISIS begun.

During the beginning of the Syrian revolts, ISI sent a troop to the area in order to establish a subsidiary organization: *Jabhat al-Nusra*. The group became one of the most successful in the Syrian civil war. *Jabhat al-Nusra* came to identify more with *al-Qaida* then with ISI and eventually stopped taking orders from al-Bagdadhi. This led to ISI changing name to ISIS—*The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria*—to mark the legitimacy of ISIS war in Syria. The leadership of *al-Nusra* disapproved, and the groups declared war on each other. al-Bagdadhi declared ISIS independent from *al-Qaida* at the beginning of 2014, and the group is since independent.

ISIS has approximately 20,000 soldiers (2014) of various nationalities. People from different Jihad movements in the region have joined, but their members also hail from Western countries. In July 2014 the number of foreign fighters was estimated 12,000 only in Syria. Experienced and well-trained foreign military commanders are found in the ranks of ISIS and the distinguishing factor is ISIS speed: they succeed in covering big areas in short amounts of time. This is partly due to the modern military equipment they have acquired of from the Iraqi army.

The goal of ISIS is to keep the Kalifah which they declared on the 29th of June 2014 (1st Ramadan 1435) a functioning state and to eventually expand it, until it encompasses the whole world (*Dabiq* issue 1, page 7. *Dabiq* issue 5, page 3). ISIS is pleading to all Muslims to perform *hijrah* to the Islamic State. The original *hijrah* was conducted by the prophet Muhammed when he left Mecca for Medina. The word primarily connotes the breaking of ties of kinship (Montgomery 2015), it also implies the physical movement from one place to another. ISIS stresses the importance of *hijrah*, since there is an ideological and real need to populate the state. ISIS especially need people with higher education degrees (*Dabiq* issue 1, page 11). Expansion of ISIS is also conducted through disparate groups and tribes pleading allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the state (*Dabiq* issue 5, page 24). For example, Nigerian organization *Boko Haram* pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015 (BBC).

The Islamic State have installed a cabinet, with ministers of different trades such as finance, education and law. The state also have a relatively solid economy, making profit from conquered oil fields, power plants, smuggling and similar activities.

3.2. ISIS and the West

The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify—by Allah’s permission—until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq (*Dabiq*, issue 1, page 5).

ISIS war is a struggle against other religions and nations in the region, but it is too a struggle against the West. The war against the Western nations is fought with the history of Eastern/Western relations in the background, from the crusades to the modern “war on terror”. The Western nations and its citizens is in the rhetoric of ISIS called “the crusaders”, linking history to the present day in a straight line.

The historic “crusades” refers to the eight military invasions of Muslim territory sanctioned by the Catholic Church between the years 1095 and 1271. The aim of these invasions was to free the “holy land”,³ but also to create unity within Christendom. It was more a question of creating unity through naming a common enemy, than a mission to preserve unity (Gardell 2011:46–47). The crusades were, however, not very successful, but their importance for the notional world of the West and the Muslim world has not diminished. George W. Bush did, for example, frequently describe “the war on terror” as a “crusade”, stating for example that “They [the Canadians] stand with us in this incredibly important crusade to defend freedom, this campaign to do what is right for our children and our grandchildren” (quoted in Lyons 2014:9). Epics about wars between Christians and Muslims have been composed since the middle ages throughout the nineteenth century (Gardell 2011:50–51).

The orientalism of the nineteenth century is also a factor in the West/East relations that need to be taken into account. It was much an effect of colonialism, and colonialism in turn was much the effect of the development of advanced military technology in the west (Gardell 2011:63). The dichotomy between the producers of knowledge and the objects of knowledge was to a large extent established during the colonial era, and new disciplines of knowledge such as orientalism, anthropology, history of religion and geography of culture was developed. Gardell points out that the “orient” is constructed as an exotic fantasy in the West through movies, art, exhibitions and scientific studies,

³ There were also crusades that did not aim for the “holy land”, but was fought to conquer or destroy the heathens in Germany, Poland, the Baltic, Sweden and Finland, France and many other places (Gardell 2011:46).

but it is not only a fantasy. The constructed “orient” is also a place where generations of “westerners” have made huge investments in politics, careers, wealth etc. which makes any critique of these investments’ legitimacy fraught with controversy (2011:65).

The legitimacy of West invading the “orient” was (and still is) explained as the white man’s ontological authority to civilize the world. The white man was thus constructed as the master of earth (or endpoint of evolution), appointed by God or evolution (Gardell 2011:63). In his now classical study of orientalism, Edward Said has shown how the West and the “orient” was/is depicted in infinite dichotomies. In Göran Larsson’s reading of Said, the “orient” is, for example, depicted as irrational, childish and different, while the West is described as rational, virtuous and “normal”. This imagined division of behavior due to cultural belonging, is still a factor in late modern society, and is frequently used in political rhetoric (Larsson 2006:13).

One example of how this discourse of difference have prevailed in modern society, not only in shady parts of the internet, is the widely accepted theory of *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) by Samuel P. Huntington. According to Gardell, Huntington argues that conflicts after the Cold War have returned to the more archetypical conflict between competing civilizations. Individuals, according to Gardell’s reading of *The Clash of the Civilizations*, are a product of these different civilizations and have essential characteristics that are solid, and cannot be altered during the course of life. This means that a Muslim born in the West, is a Muslim, and can never become a “westerner”, due to their inherent disposition. Pluralistic societies are, thus, impossible since they will disintegrate due to internal contradictions (Gardell 2011:80).

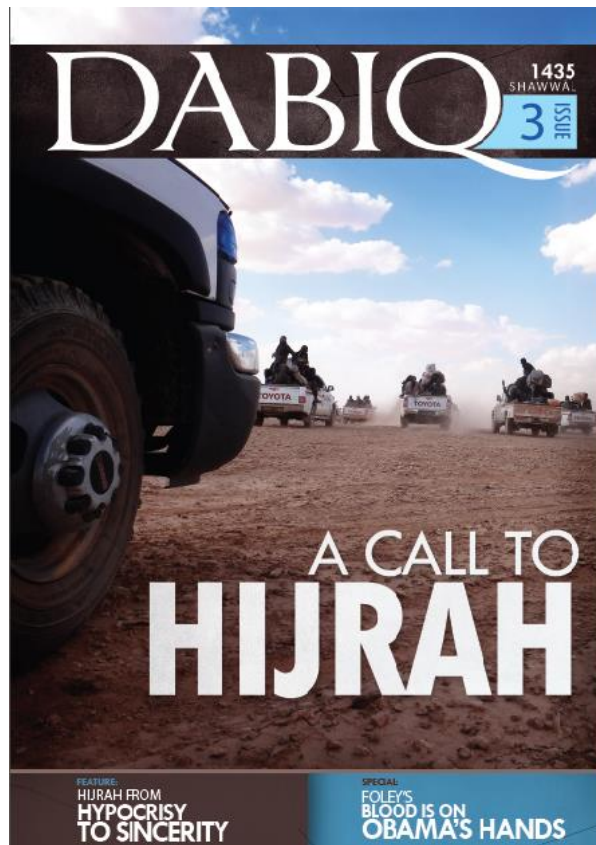
History, is, then not a dead thing of the past, but is a vital part of the present. This needs to be taken into account when considering the disposition of any group, ISIS especially, and how it reacts to the surrounding world.

4. Material

4.1. Dabiq

Dabiq is the news magazine of the Islamic State, produced by its media center: Alhayat Media Center. The first issue was released on July 5, 2014 (Gambhir 2014:1). This far eight issues have been released: *The Return of the Kalifah*, *The Flood*, *A Call to Hirjah*, *The Failed Crusade*, *Remaining and Expanding*, *Al-Qaeda of Waziristan*, *From*

Hypocrisy to Apostasy and Shari'ah alone will rule Africa. Issue eight was released too late to be part of this analysis. The length of the magazine varies between 49 and 81 pages and contain reports, articles, “words of wisdom”, news, interviews, specials, features and “in the words of the enemy”. The magazine also contains a large number of pictures. The content of these pictures are, however, not very varied. There are pictures of male intimacy, dead bodies, epic pictures (i.e. pictures that clearly have been edited with computer software to look in a specific way), weapons, explosions, portraits and documentary pictures (i.e. pictures of suggested everyday activity in the Islamic State). *Dabiq* has a professional layout, and uses the same kind of design as most of the big western news magazines such as *Time* or *Der Spiegel*.



Picture 1: *Dabiq* issue 3 front page

4.2. Although the Disbelievers Dislike It

Although the Disbelievers Dislike It is a 15.53 minute long film produced by Alhayat Media Center. The film begins with an ISIS flag being stomped down on a world map, starting in Iraq followed by the different continents being lit up one by one, symbolizing the ISIS Kalifah taking over the world. After that the history of ISIS is told, beginning with USA's invasion of Iraq in 2003. The new unity of different Islamic fractions under one leader is stressed. The history of ISIS is described with the keywords: progress, advance, unity and victory. Several clips of people dancing is shown, the narrator explains how Bagdad has fallen into sin and mayhem starts, with clips of executions, destruction and corpses. This part of the film can only be described as extremely aggressive. After the sequence of mayhem, an airstrike being carried out by the Syrian army is shown, and the devastation and corpses in the ruins afterwards.

Next is a very aesthetic execution of Syrian pilots. The pilots are dressed in blue prison uniforms, crouching while led by the mujahedin. Passing a box every mujahedin grabs a hunting knife. Putting the pilots in a straight line next to each other, the mujahedin known in the West as “Jihadi John”, whose real name is Mohammed Emwazi, exclaims: “To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we are slaughtering the soldiers of Bashar and tomorrow we will be slaughtering your soldiers. And with Allah’s permission, we will break this final and last Crusade, and the Islamic State will soon, like your puppet David Cameron said, will begin to slaughter your people on your streets.” Then the mujahedin push the pilots down to the ground, starting to cut their heads off. When Jihad John has almost cut off the head of the pilot he is killing, he looks straight into the camera for a couple of seconds, before continuing. The film is cut in a very aggressive manner, with a lot of quick cuts increasing the feeling of it being an orgy of blood and meat. An audio clip is played: “Know that we have armies in Iraq and an army in Sham of hungry lions whose drink is blood and play is carnage.” The mujahedin is depicted standing behind the dead corpses with the heads put on top of its’ backs.

The film ends with Emwazi standing with the head of Peter Edward Kassing between his feet. Emwazi is giving a short speech of how the USA has not left Iraq. The movie ends.

5. Method

This thesis is inspired by the narrative approach to conflict resolution. Narrative mediation was developed by John Winslade and Gerald Monk in the early 2000s. The fundamental supposition in this technique is that individuals live their lives through stories, in which they enter themselves and are entered by others (Monk and Winslade 2000:52). The aim of narrative conflict resolution is thus to “open up space in a tightly woven story” to make possible other ways of interpreting one’s life and the actions of others (Monk and Winslade 2000:5).

These stories through which individuals live their lives is considered to be an effect of culture and discourse. Discourses and effects of culture creates totalizing descriptions, i.e. descriptions that “sum up complex situations in one description that purports to give a total picture of the situation or of a person in it” (Monk and Winslade 2000:5). This might lead to conflict, since individuals rarely share the same concept of the world and live through different narratives. One of the tasks of the narrative

approach to conflict is, then, to destabilize the totalizing descriptions in order to undermine rigid and negative motivations which the conflicting parties ascribe to each other (Monk and Winslade 2000:5).⁴ This is, among other things, done through externalizing conversations, in which the experienced problem is constructed as a problem through the deconstruction of dominant story lines. When deconstructed, new shared meanings can be developed between the conflicting parties (Monk and Winslade 2000:5). The narrative approach to conflict originates from the postmodern line of thought, and is inspired by the work of Jerome Bruner (1915–) and Michel Foucault (1926–1984) among others.

Narrative analysis is, however, conducted over a broad spectrum of disciplines (Barbatsis 2005:345), conflict resolution being only one of them. The narrative approach is also useful when analyzing visual communication, such as photos, video and pictures. As Gretchen Barbatsis points out in her article on narrative theory in visual communication, the idea of visual intelligence as a mode of holistic logic is reoccurring in different theories of visual media, and this whole is according to her the same as what scholars of literature would call a narrative (Barbatsis 2005:334). A picture is presented from a specific point of view of a physical or an ideological place, the narrative quality of this place comes to be in the particular way in which the material of the story is organized (Barbatsis 2005:339-340), i.e. it is the spatial organization of a picture which creates a visual narrative and communicates it. The narrating presence comes from the audience's sense that it is being told something, this sense derives from what can be called a pictorial syntax. (Barbatsis 2005:340-341). Through looking at the patterns of visual composition, reoccurring themes might be found and, hence, a generic structure. Through the repetitious conventions of genre a sense of reportiveness and realness can be created, and reinforce a narrative (Barbatsis 2005:344).

⁴ I argue that the most important feature of conflict is that it is a type of human interaction. This means that conflict is constituted and sustained by behaviors of parties involved and their reactions to one another, particularly verbal and non-verbal communication (Folger et al. 2013:4). "Rigid and negative motivations", then, does not imply moral value of the actions conducted by parties, but indicates the willingness of the parties to view the situation from a different perspective in order to avoid escalation of conflict. To view things from a different perspective, however, does not automatically mean that the parties need to change its basic standpoint (Monk and Winslade 2000). Consensus is not a goal in itself. I argue that it is counterproductive to label actions of conflicting parties in terms of moral, since conflict in its different forms is a human reaction to subjective experience of having one's needs threatened. There are no "good" or "bad" ways of handling conflict, there are just ways of handling conflict which can be more or less constructive for reaching one's goal, whatever they may be. If a conflict intervention were to be staged in any conflict, a discussion would need to take place of what mandate anyone has to intervene, and of what basic assumptions that push the intervention. That discussion is, however, outside the scope of this thesis.

The visual part of narrative is interesting since: “images are perceptually processed in the same way as direct experience, the visual part is immediately expressive of meaning in a way that the words are not. Images show their meaning, words do not” (Barbatsis 2005:337). Since the story of ISIS is presented as much through images as through words, I believe that it is necessary to consider their visual communication as much as their textual or verbal.

6. Theory: A postmodern understanding of human activity

My understanding of the phenomenon of ISIS is primarily influenced by the postmodern line of thought. The postmodern philosophy emphasizes the necessary non-conformity of human action. While modernity has considered the human being to be rational and able to arrive at absolute conclusions, the postmodern line of thought have rejected these ideas (Furseth and Repstad 2005:102, 106). Human action, according to postmodernists, is the result of various complex processes, both extrinsic and intrinsic in relation to the individual. One of these constitutionalizing processes is the concept of discourse. Discourses are created through communicative acts in between human beings. Discourse is both the process and product of communication (the actual talking or other non-verbal interactions). Discourses provide individuals with knowledge of how to approach the world, and, in sum, provide meaning to life (Monk and Winslade 2000:42). Individuals can be influenced by many discourses at the same time; which discourses they are influenced by, however, depends on social context and culture.

This idea is also connected to the theory of the multiply positioned self, i.e., as mentioned above, the notion that individuals are products of multiple identifications and subject positions. The self is considered to be a product of myths, traditions, beliefs, assumptions and values of a particular culture which the individual can choose to identify or disidentify with. This means that identity, in postmodern thought, is not fixed but changes during life and is adjusted from one social context to another (Monk and Winslade 2000:45). Connected to this ideation is the concept of power as operating through discourse, i.e. it does not rest within individuals as an essential trait of character or social position. Discourses offers individuals positions of greater or lesser entitlement (Monk and Winslade 2000:50), but since discourses are not fixed or solid, the power relations change with the discourse. This means that individuals always have opportunities to resist operations of power within their lives, since power is not static but dynamic. In a postmodern approach to ethics there is a need to abandon the typically

modern way of going about its moral problems (i.e. coercive normative regulation in political practice and a philosophical search for absolute universalities) without denying the primary structure of human togetherness (Bauman 1993:3–4, 10). There is an intrinsic ambivalence to human moral actions, which cannot be defined in terms of “good” or “bad”. It is the way of human choice that needs to be evaluated and identified, not the essential “goodness” of these actions (Bauman 1993:4–5). Western society have during history divided individuals into different “types” of people, for example, rich, poor, men, women, natives, immigrants etc. These divisions have, among other things, had the effect that there are choices that are not open for everyone to make, due to the way individuals are interpellated and positioned in society. To deem actions “good” or “bad”, then, is complicated and is perhaps beyond the human capacity, due to the complexity of morality and society. A better way to go about moral problems, then, would be to critically analyze what caused the choice to be made, in order to create dialogue and develop shared meanings. Which, then, ultimately could exude shared moral values. The difficulty of these processes can, however, not be underestimated.

It is important to acknowledge that there is no one theory that can adequately describe the complexities of a group like ISIS. I have chosen several different theories in order to analyze ISIS since it is constitutionalized by many disparate discourses. In order to capture themes fundamental to the group it has been necessary to mix and combine different perspectives to get more solid knowledge of the group’s narrative. None of the chosen theories is, however, fully explanatory in itself. The combination of theories is crucial.

6. 1. Neo-tribalism

Michel Maffesoli separates what he calls the mechanical structure of modern social life from the complex and organic structure of the postmodern sociality. Modernity is characterized by political-economic organizations which creates contractual groups constitutionalized by individuals who have certain functions in the system.

Postmodernity on the other hand, is characterized by masses that crystalize into affectual tribes constitutionalized by persons carrying certain roles. The masses, Maffesoli points out, must not be confused with the proletariat or other classes and are not subjects of historical movements (Maffesoli 1996:6). In my opinion, this statement is problematic, since individuals always is part of and entered into a historical context

which will affect their lives. There are, however, easier for individuals today to exit and enter into historical contexts/stories at will, and these contexts might not be connected to the individual's personal history, but can, perhaps, be a flight from or to another context in which another role can be obtained. However, there are, of course, still restrictions; the fact that the social dynamics are not predominantly mechanical today, does not mean that mechanical social structures have faded in all (Maffesoli 1996:3).

Maffesoli advocates a “holistic” approach to social life, by which he means respect for “[the] constant reversibility uniting the (social and natural) whole with the various elements (milieux and persons) of which it is constituted” (Maffesoli 1996:2). This approach is necessary to be able to catch a glimpse of the ambience of postmodern social life, which is in itself a paradox in the sense that it promotes growing massification, but at the same time nurtures development of micro-groups—or what Maffesoli calls “tribes” (Maffesoli 1996:6). Drawing from apophatic theology Maffesoli states that we only can know God indirectly, by which he means that we must not fool ourselves into thinking that we are able to seize and explain the object of study (the tribes or society). Humbleness towards the fact that truth is a relative offshoot of a situation is an absolute necessity (Maffesoli 1996:5–6).

6.2. Emotions

Following Sara Ahmed, I will consider all actions to be reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others (Ahmed 2014:4). Reactions, in turn, are shaped by emotions. In the orientation away or towards others, the body is shaped, and these orientations are effects of the emotions ascribed to the individual by the self and others. Instead of asking what emotions are, this theory asks what emotions do (Ahmed 2014:4). This means that emotions are not considered to reside within objects, but are effects of how the object is read. Objects, therefore, generate emotion which accumulates over time and creates an “affective value” (Ahmed 2014:6, 11). In this way it is possible to speak of the creation of emotion, and how feelings become fetishes, i.e. “qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation” (Ahmed 2014:11). This “history of production” ends *and* begins in discourse, in my understanding of the term.

Emotion is, then, not only an individual concern, but a structural concern as well. Emotion can thus never be only a personal, inner state but is as much a social

construction (Riis and Woodhead 2010:6). There is a two-sidedness to emotion, in the sense that agents can resist, change or reproduce emotional norms, albeit the conditions is not of their own choosing (Riis and Woodhead 2010:6). Religion, accordingly, have a rich history of producing emotion, much through the use of symbols, and the agents of religion resists, changes and reproduces the emotional norms within the emotional regime—which can lead to dynamic change or stagnation of religious behavior. This view of religion indicates that it is not possible to describe religion as hegemonic disciplines without influence from its devotees: “Individuals shape and modify symbols in a way that gives purchase over their own lives and personal dramas, while at the same time relating them to wider webs of symbolic and social significance” (Riis and Woodhead 2010:8).

In their book *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (2010) Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead propose a model for the understanding of how different kinds of religious groups are able to remain and expand in late modern society, due to what they call emotional regimes. Emotional regimes are bound up to wider social orderings, and transcends the individual “shaping what they can feel, how they feel it, the way they can express their feelings, and hence the forms of social relationships and courses of action that are open to them” (Riis and Woodhead 2010:10). Emotional regimes are generated between self, objects and society, and have specific emotional “notes” that its members are expected to know and understand: there is a time for grief and a time for joy and how these feelings are to be expressed is dependent of social context and society.

Emotional regimes are created through emotional dialectics between community, agent and symbol. This process is illustrated in figure 1 below. Although sociology normally have a preferred dialectic between individual and society, the dialectic between the individual and symbols are considered equally important in this model (Riis and Woodhead 2010:96). The power of certain objects and aesthetics cannot be underestimated when it comes to create a shared sentiment among people and to mobilize emotion.

6. 3. Gender and masculinity

Connected to the notion of emotion as something that is created through interaction with others, is the opinion of gender as an effect of performativity. The social stability of gender rests upon the actions by which gender is enacted through behavior, symbols and

actions (Rosenberg 2006:11). I view gender, in accordance with Judith Butler's line of thought, as something which is *done* in a never ending social and cultural process. Performativity is not, in this sense, only an effect of speech-acts but also of physical actions (Rosenberg 2006:11). This means that the idea of masculinity is as much a cultural phenomenon as anything, which can be enacted through normative behavior or changed through resistance to these norms. However, there is no general masculine entity which occur in all societies (Connell 1995:43), but in fact most studies of masculinity have been conducted with the "hegemonic" masculinity at aim (see for instance Connell 1995:76 ff., Ericson 2011, Gindt 2008). The hegemonic masculinity will not be considered in this thesis, due to the narrative approach in method. My approach to masculinity is to focus on the semantics of the modern discourse of masculinity, and how these are enacted by individuals as a means to *do* gender in a specific cultural setting.

6. 4. Islamophobia

Jonathan Lyons writes in the introduction to his book *Islam through Western Eyes* (2012) that the "western" discourse of Islam can be summarized as follows:

Islam is a religion of violence and is spread by the sword; its tenets are upheld by coercion and force; Islam's prophet, its teachings and even God are false; Muslims are irrational and backward, "medieval", and fearful of modernity; Islam is by nature fanatical; Muslims are sexually perverse, either lascivious polygamists or repressive misogynists or both; they are antidemocratic and despise Western notions of civic freedoms; and, finally, they are caught up in a jealous rage at the Western world's failure to value them or their beliefs (Lyons 2012:3).

Lyon's summary neatly describes the prejudiced negative and stereotypical attitudes towards Muslims commonly termed "islamophobia". These attitudes can rely on notions of the inherent destructiveness of the religion or culture, but is often as much an effect of ideas of biology and economy, i.e. that the Muslim individuals are naturally inferior, "primitive" and cannot maintain "western" moral standards (Larsson 2006:10–11). This ideation of Islam has been formed through history.

Most exposés of the history of islamophobia begins with the crusades and ends in the ongoing "war on terror" (see for example Gardell 2011:45 ff.). The background of these wars lie in the islamophobic discourse that have prevailed throughout history, despite resistance within and without Western society. The negative depictions of Muslims (both visual and verbal) did not emerge from a lack of knowledge but came to

be due to struggles for power and wealth. The negative stereotypes of Muslims have, according to Mattias Gardell, never stood unchallenged, but the interest in the negative stereotypes have always generated greater public interest than positive or even neutral depictions (Gardell 2011:47).

Muslim and “Islam” are frequently described in western media through the filter of the above described, thousand year old, discourse. The demand for “experts” who “explain” Muslim behavior through popular ideations of Islam, is growing in the post 9/11 landscape, and solidifies the islamophobic discourse. As part of the grand narrative of “Western Civilization”, Muslim are still described as irrational and hating the West for no apparent reason (Lyons 2012:117). For example, the Muslim reaction to the Muhammed cartoons published by Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which also were reprinted by other big newspapers in the name of free speech, was described as “primitive” and viewed as proof of the popular notion that Muslim are against freedom, affective and non-rational (Lyons 2012:12–13). Accordingly, the attacks carried out by members of ISIS on the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was explained in the same manner. It was framed as ISIS hating “free speech”, and was described as basically unprovoked, since *Charlie Hebdo* did not only publish anti-islamic cartoons but supposedly made fun of “everyone” (see for example *Aftonbladet* 09-Jan-2015). People who after the attacks expressed disapproval of the artwork in *Charlie Hebdo* were framed as “misunderstanding” the intentions of the magazine. Not showing the artwork would be to take Europe back to the era before the Enlightenment (see for example Natalie Nougayrède in *The Guardian* 22-Jan-2015). The reason for publishing the cartoons was also described as an effect of the French (harmless) love for good comics, and since satire is *tradition*, it could, therefore, not be an expression of “real” islamophobia (*Aftonbladet* 09-Jan-2015).

The islamophobic discourse is hence constitutionalizing the way the world is viewed by Westerners *and* Muslims, effecting how reality is constructed by disparate individuals and society in general.

7. Disposition

With the help of the theoretical perspectives described above I will conduct an analysis in five steps: it begins with a discussion on the neo-tribal qualities of ISIS and how these are formed through the usage of social media and the depictions of apocalyptic violence as a means to mobilize emotion. The analysis then turns to the aesthetic aspect of the ISIS narrative, and how it is influenced by popular culture, especially video and

computer games. The gender aspects of ISIS will then be considered, how the masculinity ISIS promotes correlates with the modern Western discourse, followed by a discussion of ISIS's use of violence and how violence in the narrative of ISIS is depicted primarily as play and a way of life. Finally, ISIS internal logic will be considered and a model for the understanding of the group's expansion and survival will be presented. The analysis is followed by final remarks in which a proposal for how ISIS internal logic may be dissolved will be presented.

8. Analysis: The play of carnage

8.1. The global tribe

It might be tempting to think of ISIS as some kind of nationalistic movement, however, when examining their narrative it is clear that it is not the case. On the contrary, ISIS is repeatedly disidentifying themselves from nationalism, stating, for example, that:

The biggest of these distinguishing factors [that prevented the rise of a Khilafah] were nationalism that tainted many of the banners and parties in Afghanistan, in addition to serious innovations that destroyed the creed and healthy body of the Muslim jama'ah required for reviving the Khilafah. (*Dabiq* issue 1, page 35)

Nationalism, then, is not how ISIS themselves frame their war. They are strikingly unimpressed by the West's preoccupation with "races" and nations, and explains that: "It [the Islamic State] is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers" (*Dabiq* issue 1, page 7). ISIS war is a war against nationalism, not for it. The nation is a symbol which ISIS wish to deconstruct in favor for another kind of nation, namely the Muslim *Ummah* (see below), in which all individuals are welcome, not only those of the right "race".

However, ISIS is only inclusive in so far that the individual embraces the "right" form of Islam, as defined by the Imam of the Islamic State. These individuals are described as being in the possession of, what I call, a "genetic memory", which drives them towards joining and working for the Islamic State. This "genetic memory" is connected to a perceived linear history of all Muslims created by God. The individual is therefore not driven by immanent emotions which derive from different experiences lived by the individual, but from transcendent emotions belonging to God. This is why ISIS is not interested in creating a western-style nation since their war is fought on the premise of the history of God, which according to them, will lead to the creation of a worldwide Khilafah with all righteous Muslims co-existing under the same banner, followed by the apocalypse (see for example *Dabiq* issue 4, pages 32–44). ISIS has collected this idea of eschatology from a *hadith* told by Abu Hurayrah, which in short tells that the romans will arrive at the city of Dabiq and there the final battle will be staged, with the effect that the righteous Muslims will be distinguished (*Dabiq* issue 1, page 4–5). This is also the reason for the magazine's name.

However, this line of thought is also connected to the in the Quran expressed concept of *Ummah* and *Kalifah*. The concept of *Ummah* is the essential unity and

theoretical equality of all Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical settings (“Ummah” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*). This, then, is the theological reason for ISIS disinterest in the Western conception of “races” and nations. The concept of *Ummah* in turn is connected to the concept of *Kalifah*, which have many meanings. One of them, and in this case the most important, is, however, that the individual is a *Kalifah* to God, which means that: “[The Muslim] must strive to adhere to and advance God's will by establishing a society that reflects human dignity and justice” (“Kalifah” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*). The strong emphasis on dignity and justice is ever present in the rhetoric of ISIS, claiming that the annulment of the physical *Kalifah*, i.e the historical Islamic state, has led to the Muslims being subjugated to the “western”/Christian nations (see for example *Dabiq* issue 3, page 29).

Sara Ahmed has, in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), shown how demarcations between what is considered by the individual to be “me” or “not me” can be created through a discourse of hate. According to Ahmed, individuals perceive hate as being placed inside them by another because of that person’s actions (person X is engaging in this activity which makes me hate person X). If the emotion of hate is perceived in this way, hate can define a group, creating the group’s subjective impression of ‘apartness’ when comparing itself to other groups (Ahmed 2014:51). According to the Islamic State, the righteous Muslim is driven by “the heart” rather than the brain, for example as stated in *Dabiq* issue 5: “They [the mujahedin] do not complicate their knowledge by philosophizing their religion and thus abstaining from obligations through complex analysis. Rather their knowledge flows from their hearts [...]” (page 27). Individual feelings of alienation, disappointment, hopelessness and rage (see for example *Dabiq* issue 3, page 27), is not immanent, they are transcendent, a product of divine rage and intervention, given to the individual by God “himself”. The hate towards the West is thus legitimized by claiming that it has nothing to do with the individual but is an intrinsic characteristic of the righteous Muslim. Hate in this case is perceived as put inside the Muslim by God, and this is what creates ISIS imagined apartness from other Muslims.

ISIS can, therefore, be described as what Zygmunt Bauman and Michel Maffesoli named a neo-tribe. Neo-tribes are, according to Bauman, crowds with allegiances wrapped around the crowd’s lowest common denominator, which must be a relatively simple topic (Bauman 1993:142). In the case of ISIS, the lowest common denominator seems to be the apocalypse and a disgust towards western societies, chiefly the USA,

which is ever present in their rhetoric when defining themselves and their mission on earth. This mission is to stage an apocalyptic battle between the righteous Muslims and “the crusaders” (i.e. the western nations), ending the world as we know it (see for example *Dabiq* issue 1, pages 34–40). Indifferent towards possible cultural differences ISIS recruits and inspires people from all over the world.

According to Bauman, this formation around the lowest denominator makes it possible for the neo-tribe to “boost into action the otherwise disparate and differently ‘positioned’ or ‘embedded’ selves” (Bauman 1993:142). As mentioned above, ISIS openly dislikes the concept of “races” and are indifferent to prospective cultural differences in their rhetoric. Instead, they plead to the individual’s emotion. It is important to note, however, that the direct usage of emotion in ISIS rhetoric is rare, especially the usage of what normally is considered “bad emotions” such as hate. The rhetoric ISIS uses can be described as a rhetoric of love. The love for the religion is what drives the individual to perform a violent Jihad. This verse from the Quran (5:54) is frequently used in *Dabiq* to explain or justify the use of violence: “He will love and who will love Him [who are] humble toward the believers, mighty against the disbelievers; they strive in the cause of Allah and do not fear the blame of a critic” (*Dabiq* issue 7, page 21). It is, however, not unusual that groups that would be considered “hate-groups” by the majority (Islamic terror-organizations are frequently described as “hating” freedom etc. in western media) is defining themselves as “love-groups”. Sara Ahmed has shown how love works in bonding people in relation to an ideal and how individuals become invested in an ideal through identification with a collective (Ahmed:2014:124), or a neo-tribe in Bauman’s terminology.

The neo-tribal mode of existence is diffuse and has local, episodic displays of conduct “emulating the pattern which has become the vestigial crowd’s trade-mark” (Bauman 1993:142). In the case of ISIS, I would argue that their specific trade-mark is the use of what can be described as apocalyptic violence and a very specific aesthetics. It is apocalyptic since it has a function in the group’s narrative and is not, as one might first think, thoughtless and unnecessary, or even a display of power, but is instead a way of unifying the ranks and making the story of ISIS more recognizable to its members (see below). The violent creation of the Khilafah can thus be described as an episodic display of this group’s trade-mark, however, how long this episode is going to be, no one knows. There are nevertheless other episodic displays of conduct, for example the

ISIS attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, where persons identifying themselves as members of ISIS carried out violent attacks on Western society.⁵

ISIS has made themselves known to the world mostly through their presence in internet-based social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. It is through these channels they spread their propaganda and infamous videos. ISIS also profiles itself through the independent news-media. There are instances in *Dabiq* when they “complain” about lack of attention in western media (*Dabiq* issue 7, page 32). They seem to need “the West” to define them, in order for ISIS to accept or reject this definition and create a narrative based on the definition. It is understandable that ISIS work in this way, since they are interested in recruiting individuals from the western countries, whose main source for information is, one would presume, the western media. Bauman notes that the media is necessary for sustaining crowds (neo-tribes) of large sizes, but since the attention span of the public is short and news quickly get old, the existence of these crowds have a short life expectation; the topic of the group’s emotion will soon be replaced by another topic, and hence the crowd will “disappear”. If the topic of the group disappears from the media’s radar, the group will dissolve (Bauman 1993:142). However, it is clear that Bauman has not taken into account the vast growth of free social media. Today, what news the public should and will consume is not a choice of the editor, but of the consumer. Hence, I would argue that the life-span of a neo-tribe has increased in the last five years, since the possibilities to communicate, choose and share information over vast distances has improved dramatically. Today it does not matter whether the members of the tribe are located on different continents, they will have access to the same information which will not necessarily be dated despite lack of attention in traditional media. These groups today have the possibility to create and spread their own information, which they do. ISIS is a living thriving proof of this. Mappings of ISIS activity on social media show that 73 % of ISIS supporters have less than 500 followers on Twitter, and 4 % had more than 5000 followers. These figures might seem low, however, the authors of the report points out that these numbers are high in comparison with the average user (Berger and Morgan 2015:30).

⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that ISIS officially ordered these attacks, but ISIS nevertheless has an outspoken strategy to let members plan and conduct attacks on their own without direct orders from the management. It is thus significant that the attackers identified as members of ISIS. See for example *Dabiq* issue 6, pages 3–5.

Based on the line of argument above ISIS can be considered to be a neo-tribal group. This form of being together is constituted by a lowest common denominator, which in the case of ISIS is the disgust towards Western societies and the apocalypse. The feelings of the group is moved and boosted through the notion of a “genetic memory” and transcendent emotions. ISIS is unifying its ranks through the usage of free social media, through which the group communicates its message, creating a global tribe.

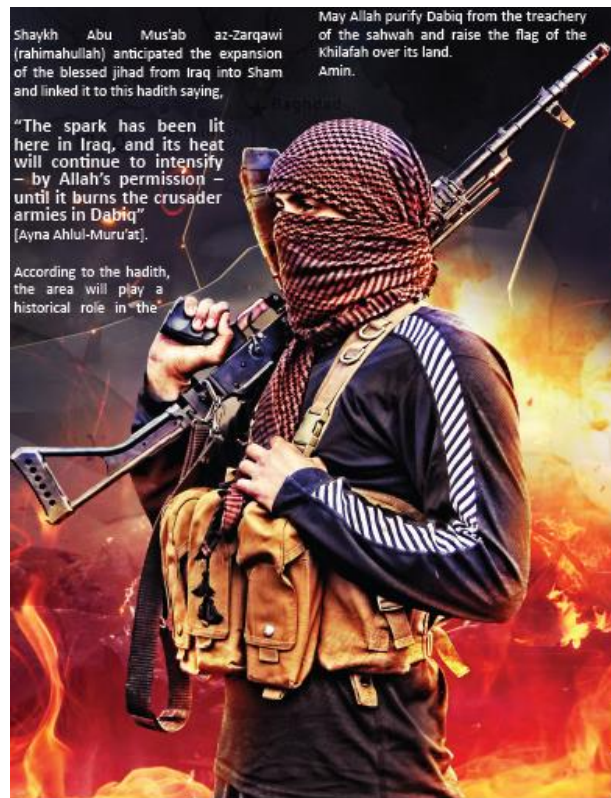
8.2. The Jihad-look: making fiction reality

In his view of neo-tribalism, Michel Maffesoli is arguing that the aesthetics of the group creates a shared sentiment, from which they derive feelings and common faculty (Maffesoli 1996:13, 74). In my reading of Maffesoli, this means that what the eye registers, i.e. the aesthetics of an object or a person, forms the feelings and actions of an individual as much as verbal interpellation. Visual communication in-between groups and individuals, hence, have the capacity to create faculties in society and within disparate groups. ISIS has a very specific aesthetic style, drawing from computer games and epic stories. Featured in *Dabiq* issue one is, for example, a screenshot from *The Return of the King* (2003) illustrating an article on the last apocalyptic battle which, according to ISIS, will take place soon (page 40).

There are a what one could described as a “jihad-look” resembling the terrorist characters in the computer game *Counter Strike* that seems to be embraced by most of the members of ISIS. The game was first released in 1999 by Valve Software and has since had several follow-ups. The latest follow-up was *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* released in 2012 (Valve official website). The game is a team-based first person shooter that is played online, with teams consisting of terrorists and counter-terrorists. The goal of the game is for the terrorists to either plant a bomb, take hostages, or engage in similar activities, and for the counter-terrorists to prevent the terrorists from doing this. The round does not end until all the players from one of the teams are dead. *Counter Strike* is very popular and is one of the biggest e-sport games, with 980 000 viewers in the 2015 years final (ESL 2015).

One of the pictures drawing its aesthetics from this game illustrates the foreword in *Dabiq* issue one (page 5). It is a picture of a young man in profile. He is wearing a black and red *shemagh* wrapped around his head, covering everything except his eyes. Wearing a black track suit sweater and a light brown tactical vest while effortlessly leaning a Kalashnikov against his shoulder, he is depicted against a background of bright flames and ruins (picture 1).

This is what I would describe as the “jihad-look”. All men described as part of the mujahedin (i.e. the soldiers of the Islamic State fighting Jihad) depicted in *Dabiq* are wearing this kind of outfit in some form. Following Maffesoli, I would argue that this specific aesthetic is, among other things, what gives ISIS the power of attraction on a global scale. This is an aesthetic which is recognized and appreciated by millions of people all over the world, partly due to the success of various computer games, *Counter Strike* being only one of them (*Call of Duty*, *Battlefield*, *Assassins Creed*). Maffesoli is arguing that aesthetics has the power of creating effective social affinities and sympathies experienced by individuals in relation to others (Maffesoli 1991:12–13), this follows the logic of identification as presented by Sara Ahmed, i.e. identification leads subjects to pull towards each other creating an ego ideal and an ideal object (Ahmed 2014:126–127). Since all objects are recognizable through their appearance (its aesthetics) I suggest that an individual tries to enact an ego ideal not only by the attainment of special characteristics, but also by the adoption of a certain look, or aesthetics. According to Maffesoli, the personal history of an individual is nowadays a myth in which the individual is an active participant (Maffesoli 1996:10). Which myth the individual chooses to live, however, must be an individual choice, but the choice is probably influenced by what narratives are open for the individual to enter, due to “race”, class,



Picture 2: *Dabiq* issue 1, page 5

sexual orientation or ethnicity. ISIS has, through its choice of aesthetics and rhetoric, created an open and inclusive narrative possible for most young men to enter.

I would argue, however, that the aesthetic and the concept form which it derives, is not recognizable for all ISIS members. I assume that there are two groups (or more) within ISIS, the “internet group” and the “non-internet group”. People from the local area from which ISIS emerged have probably not the same knowledge of the aesthetics and narrative that ISIS implicitly refers to, due to years of war, mayhem and lack of modern entertainment, such as movies, computer games or internet. People from the West joining ISIS, one would have to assume, have the knowledge of how to interpret the images ISIS are depicting, due to the popular culture pervading late modern Western society. It is not impossible that these two groups have different reasons for joining ISIS. The “non-internet group” might be conforming due to basic human needs, such as food, shelter and a functioning community, while the “internet group” might be joining due to issues of identity and thrill seeking. Although hard to prove in this study, it is nevertheless a possibility one must take into account while viewing ISIS narrative.

ISIS visual communication can be viewed as following the conventions of how a certain group of people (“terrorists” or “anarchists”) should look like in the specific genre of action computer games. This creates a shared sentiment of the group, and makes the story of ISIS attractive on a global scale. The look that the Jihadists adopts is also a way of enacting an ego ideal, and allows the individual to enter into and play the part of an epic story, making fiction reality.

8.3. Among the believers are men

A complex picture of masculinity emerges from the ISIS narrative, but what stands out the most is the notion of the male as a being driven by emotion (see above). In his book *Das unmoralische Geschlecht* (2008) has Christoph Kucklick shown how the male in the modern era has not only been constructed as a transcendent, rational being, but also as downright immoral and dangerous. According to Kucklick, the good news about men in modern discourse is that they “are” strong, energetic, brave and creative, and possessing unknown powers of nature. He points out that this is also a common depiction of the “savage”. Through the emergence of modern society, the “savage” traits of the male was considered useful for civil society, *but* the true nature of the male was, and still is, seen erratic and able to break loose at any time. To be able to fulfill himself,

the destructive powers of the male must be released every once in a while, thus the inevitability of violence in different forms. To sum up: “Er ist ein Gott mit einem Vorschlaghammer, kreativ und grob zugleich” (Kucklick 2008:117–118).

ISIS has incorporated this idea of the male as being driven by basic instincts into their narrative. It is important to note that the grand narrative of ISIS is not about women, it is about men. Women are mentioned in issues regarding sex and partnership, but it is not a story of the peaceful nuclear family. It is a story of men causing mayhem due to feelings (see above) and, I would add, *instincts*, given to him by God.

As mentioned above there is a notion of transcendent feelings throughout the ISIS rhetoric. However, there is also this very immanent aspect of acting in the world, which is better described as “instincts” of the male Muslim. There is, for example, an article in *Dabiq* which argues the necessity of “concubines” (i.e. enslaving female non-Muslims or “hypocrites”):

In addition, many Muslim families who have hired maids to work at their homes, face the fitnah of prohibited khalwah [seclusion] and resultant zinā occurring between the man and the maid, whereas if she were his concubine, this relationship would be legal. This again is from the consequences of abandoning jihād and chasing after the dunyā, wallāhul-musta’ān. (*Dabiq* issue 4, page 17)

What is said in this quote is basically that “concubines” are necessary since their existence prevents men from committing sin. The dichotomy jihad and dunya (the temporal world) is, as I understand it, perceived as being the same as unmarried versus married life, i.e. a life wherein the male sex-drive can have free scope or a life with limitations. Jihad is here a full concept, in which only the love for the religion and the death of oneself and others seem to fit. In *Dabiq* issue seven is an article named: “Among the believers are men” (page 46). It is about a young man: “So driven was Abū Qudāmah to fight for the cause of Allah and to seek the greatest of rewards [martyrdom], that he left the UK two months before his baby daughter was born.” Manliness is thus, not about family and relations with the other sex, but about satisfaction of one’s religious desires (enslavement of women as being one of the features of jihad) and glory (death). Kucklick has shown that in the modern discourse of manliness there is an emphasis on self-control; however, in the ISIS narrative, this is not necessary. All the modern characteristics of “destructive” manliness is allowed to roam free.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the picture of masculinity in the ISIS narrative is quite complex. There is not only emphasis on what would normally be considered bad masculinity, but also on a loving caring masculinity in relation to other men. There are many pictures of “male intimacy” (see for example picture 3), and the featured stories about extinguished individuals are always set in a context of brotherhood. These stories are always about two friends or more, that in the



Picture 3: *Dabiq* issue 3, page 42

context of jihad set out on a great adventure, and under the protection of God succeeds in their mission, and sometimes, achieves martyrdom (death). These stories are accompanied with portraits of males looking happy, self-confident and proud. The emphasis on the collective is ever present, and is also a big (perhaps the biggest) part of the ISIS ideology: the whole world is to be united, the apocalypse will merely be the beginning of a worldwide *ummah*. The theme of tribes “pleading allegiance to the Islamic State” is recurring, and there is a large number of pictures of groups of men, supposedly belonging to different tribes, standing in circles putting their hands on top of each other in the middle in a symbolic gesture of unity.

The concept of brotherhood, however, is central in the Quran, for example in the Surat Al-Hujurat, where the spiritual brotherhood of the faithful is described as central for the religion. In Islamic philosophy the words “brother” and “brotherhood” are central terms, and the concept has historically been a way of unifying competing tribes in the early days of Islam (Starkman 2013:599). When viewing the ISIS rhetoric it is clear that this theological and philosophical concept is indeed important for legitimizing the unification of different tribes, as well as the killing of tribes that will not conform the ISIS ideology (see for example *Dabiq* issue 1, page 12–15, and *Dabiq* issue 3, pages 43 and 44).

The narrative of ISIS is, then, one of and for men. The descriptions of the male Muslim conforms to the modern Western discourse of masculinity and is integral to the

ISIS concept of Jihad. The male is driven by basic instincts, but also the love for the religion and his fellow brothers, which makes him a righteous killing machine by the command of God.

8.4. The meaty orgy and the winning of the game

The destructive instincts of the male is useful when it comes to the act of violence, which, as mentioned above, is a trade-mark of ISIS. A real man is a man that can kill in a spectacular way (beheading, burning, shooting etc.) without batting an eyelid. A real man is “harsh” against the enemy and “soft” or “humble” with “believers” (see for example *Dabiq* issue 7, pages 70–71). The emotional satisfaction that these men is described as getting from the act of violence is paired with an implicit notion that they have the physical capability of a ninja. They are trained in stamina, martial arts and tactic according to *Dabiq*, while dressed in a manner very similar to what we normally associate with pop culture ninjas (*Dabiq* issue 6, pages 26–27). In the film *Although the disbelievers dislike it* produced by the ISIS media center; Alhayat Media, is the men cutting off the heads from Syrian pilots described in an audio-clip as: “hungry lions whose drink is blood and play is carnage” (11.08 minutes). This description of the mujahedin as “lions” is connected to the history of Islam (see below), but it is also a way of emphasizing the notion of the instinctual quality of the killings these men commit. A lion does not kill out of spite, it kills because it *needs* to and instinctually cannot resist it.

Normally, violence is considered a display of power and a way of sustaining dominance. Raewyn Connell has argued that violence is a part of the gender politics between men, and should be viewed in terms of transactions between them. She claims that marginalized masculinities assert themselves through the use of violence towards other men and towards women. The violence conducted by men in society is a “crisis tendency”, triggered by the liberation of women and is a way of reclaiming position in the social hierarchy (Connell 1995:83–84). It is indeed tempting to view violence in this way, since it conforms with the definitions of man as a rational being created by the Enlightenment, and what could be more rational than the will to power? In the case of ISIS, however, I disagree with Connell. The violence that ISIS is constructing its narrative around is not a depiction of power in an instrumental sense, although power indeed is needed for the creation of a worldwide *Khilafah*. It is part of a skillfully

designed fiction, drawing (as mentioned above) on computer games and other displays of pop culture. “History may promote a moral attitude, but space will favor an aesthetics and exude an ethics” (Maffesoli 1996:15). If we consider the fictional world to be a space in its own right, this world will be able to exude ethics of its own which will impress on individuals and collectives. It is hard to deny that violence throughout history has been conducted in terms of entertainment and play (although we are prone to deny this). This is also how violence is depicted in the ISIS propaganda.

According to Johan Huizinga play is first and foremost a free choice. To enter into the play-zone is to exit “ordinary” life. Play has rules which are peremptory. Play transcends life itself (Huizinga 2004:18–20). He opposes the idea that play is not serious or that it should be foolish, stating that:

The more we try to mark off the form we call “play” from other forms apparently related to it, the more the absolute independence of the play-concept stands out. And the segregation of play from the domain of the great categorical antithesis does not stop there. Play lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil. Although it is a non-material activity it has no moral function. The valuations of vice and virtue do not apply here (Huizinga 2014:6).

The fact that the activities that the members of ISIS engage in is seen as deeply immoral and problematic by large parts of the world is, therefore, not a reason not to view the act of violence as play.

In the ISIS narrative there are the mujahedin and “the crusaders” playing the game of the right to define the world. The mujahedin is struggling with God on their side, “the crusaders” with the Devil on theirs. Play, according to Huizinga, can be a holy action. Referring to Platon he claims that the human being can play games of holiness and beauty, and that the holy acts and rituals share rules with the play, insofar that it requires for the participant to exit “ordinary” life, that it has specific rules and that it transcends life itself (Huizinga 2004:30). The fact that the war that ISIS presents in its propaganda is said to be based on religious belief nevertheless makes it a game. The playground can be thought of as the apocalypse, which should be limited in time and space according to ISIS (see for example *Dabiq* issue 1, page 4–5). ISIS is enacting the apocalypse, “the crusaders” are trying to prevent them from doing this. It is a kind of cat and mouse game, also found in the narrative of the computer game *Counter Strike* as described above. This is what Huizinga calls the agonistic element of play, and it occurs when the

parties regard themselves as antagonists, contending over something which they feel they have a right to. “Right”, according to him, can be translated into “might” in the sense of the parties wanting to manifest superiority (Huizinga 2014:90–91). According to Huizinga the play is a struggle for something or a representation of something (Huizinga 2004:24). The violence conducted by ISIS is both a struggle for world dominance and a representation of the apocalypse.

Play is moreover concerned with disguise or masquerade. The one in disguise is “playing” another being. He “becomes” another (Huizinga 2004:24). As I described above, ISIS is promoting a very specific aesthetic style. In putting on certain gear, the person becomes a mujahedin, and becoming a mujahedin enables him to commit violent acts that may have been forbidden before. This is also part of playing the part of a certain masculinity, if sex is considered to be an imitation without original, following Judith Butler’s line of thought (Butler 1990).

Huizinga considers war to be a form of play. The agonistic nature of war as it is described in history is, according to him, an effect of literature. He claims that when considering the play aspects of war one must take this into account, but that it at the same time it would be incorrect to believe that literary descriptions of war would only serve as a cover up for cruelty and misery. International law has evolved from narratives of war as righteous and a play of honor; hence these narratives have refined the “purity” of mankind (Huizinga 2004:116). However, Huizinga points out that the blood-stained violence can only partly be considered as play, but beautiful fantasies about heroism is created by the collective conducting the violence in order to make it an acceptable part of the play (Huizinga 2004:125). In the film *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* the violent and blood-stained acts conducted are described as follows:

It was not befitting for the grandsons of Abu Bakr and 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) to take the stance of a subservient and humiliated person. So they sharpened every blade to make the rafidah taste all sorts of killing and torment. They uprooted the fortresses, pounded the strongholds of shirk, and cleansed the land of the filth of the rafidah. They liberated the prisons, which had been filled with free women, and they remained an impenetrable barrier and strong fort for Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah, for they no longer had anyone to strengthen and support them after Allah ta'ala other than the Islamic State.

(Although the Disbelievers Dislike it, Alhayat Media Center 2014, 5:30)

The killings and the chaos created are set in a fantastic myth of heroes, rising up to the challenge, doing what is necessary, liberating women and standing up for what is

right and good in this world. Zygmunt Bauman, commenting on Huizinga's theory, says that "Play is not about survival (if anything, it is what makes survival worth dreaming about and pursuing)" (Bauman 1993:170). There are little doubt that the notion of martyrdom (death) is indeed very present in the narrative of ISIS; it is considered to be the greatest honor, and pursuing it is the meaning of life. The way in which it is pursued is through war. The winning of this game is, then, to die and the survival of the individual is secondary. In this case, I would like to alter Bauman's statement: play is indeed not about survival, and survival might not always even be the thing worth dreaming about. What play really is about is *life*. If anything, play is what makes life worth dreaming about and pursuing. Life and death always exists in a dichotomy, however, the one cannot exist without the other, and which part moves the individual to act is probably impossible to know. The will to live or the will to die? If life is considered to be chasing after death, what does then "survival" mean?

It is, however, hard to talk about these individuals way of "surviving" without taking the concept of martyrdom into account, which makes the picture even more complex. Much of ISIS rhetoric circles around martyrdom, i.e. when the individual is granted death by God for defending the religion. The notion of martyrdom in Islamic theology is complex and differs between the different Islamic traditions. Martyrdom should, according to Sunni tradition, not be about the individuals happiness in afterlife, but is ideal an effect of defending the Muslim community or overcoming one's desires. Although, the early leaders of Sunni Islam discouraged the deliberate pursuit of martyrdom, since it is considered equal to suicide, it has in the modern era begot a new understanding among some Muslims, namely one connected to war and the active killing ("Martyrdom" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*).

The martyrs in ISIS narrative functions as role models with mythological dimensions. There are frequent references throughout *Dabiq* to "The Lion of Allah".⁶ Using scientific sources, it is not at once clear who this individual is, but there seems to be a thriving online culture concerned with the myth of one individual, Ḥamza b. ʿAbd

⁶ There is a competing narrative, in which Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph according to Sunni Muslims and the first Imam according to Shii Muslims, is called The Lion of Allah. Whatever of these two Islamic narratives ISIS is referring to when calling their mujahedin "lions" is not certain, but an informed guess would be that they are indeed referring to Muhammed's uncle; since the story circulating online of this person conforms most to ISIS overall narrative, both written and visual. The fact that ISIS is Sunni makes it more probable that it is not Ali which is referred to, since he is an example to Shii Muslims, who ISIS have declared "hypocrites" and therefore are to be killed (see for example *Dabiq* issue 3, page 38).

al-Muṭṭalib, who was the uncle of the prophet Muhammed. He was after his death honored "chief of the martyrs". He reverted to Islam, although he had before been an opponent to the religion and according to legend:

...distinguishing himself in single combat with many polytheists, but in the following year he was slain fighting heroically at Uḥud by the Abyssinian slave Wahshī who thereby gained his manumission. After he fell, his body was barbarously mutilated by Hind bint 'Utba who chewed his liver (Meredith-Owens 2015)

Death and the meaty orgy is skillfully woven into the ISIS narrative as something glorious and desirable (see for example *Dabiq* issue 7). This is possible since there is an actual tradition of the idea of the glorious death, not only in Islam, but as what can only be described as a human archetype to be found in most cultures. Winning the game, then, could be death and the prize to be won is glory and fame on earth, despite one's departure from it, and rewards in the afterlife.

8.5. Remaining and expanding—the dialectics of emotion

They see that the Khilāfah has not only returned, but is remaining and expanding, bringing Muslims of all colors under one banner and one leader to rid their lands of the tawāghīt and raise their swords in unity against the Jews and crusaders (*Dabiq* issue 5, page 13).

Although ISIS could be considered to be a neo-tribal group, which according to Bauman should be defined by certain topics circulating in traditional media and thus disappear when the topics have lost attraction, ISIS remains and is expanding in their own right. They have not lost in attraction. It could be argued that this is due to the traditional media's never ending interest in the group and its publications, or that ISIS has a very effective media machine of their own. That, however, does not explain how the group keeps its internal logic going. This could be explained by examining the dialectics of the group's emotion.

ISIS, have, as mentioned above, a solid set of symbols gathered from diverse parts of culture, history and religion. These symbols obtain worth through the process of objectification and subjectification between the symbol and the individual on one hand, and through consecration and insignation between the symbol and community on the other. Objectification is the process through which certain emotions are put "inside" the

object by the individual, these emotions are “bouncing back” at the individual through the act of subjectification, i.e. the process in which the symbol is generating emotion and makes certain acts and interpretations possible. The individual do not need to fully understand the sacred narrative surrounding the object or symbol, or be able to explain it in terms of logic. As long as the object provokes the appropriate emotions, its sanctity is confirmed by the emotional reaction (Riis and Woodhead 2010:98, 100).

Symbols are consecrated by groups or communities. The symbols are through this process legitimized by the group’s elite or by the group itself, and will eventually accrue power of its own (Riis and Woodhead 2010:102). For example, in the case of ISIS, the symbol of Jihad is legitimized both by the religious elite of the group, but is also embraced by “laymen” all over the world, somehow feeling “the call” of Jihad. The symbol in itself is speaking to the individuals, and no further explanation is needed for them to sympathize with what the symbol is perceived to stand for in the group’s internal logic. Working in the other direction, i.e. from the symbol towards the group, is the process of insigation. According to Riis and Woodhead, this is the process by which “a community is moved and inspired by a religious symbol” (Riis and Woodhead 2010:103). The authors notes, however, that symbols are also refashioned and proposed by insigation, and that the process can be considered a sort of “wellspring for cultural creation”. The logic of choosing objects and symbols is first and foremost a matter of whether members of the group will be able to insignify it or not (Riis and Woodhead 2010:103, 105). Now, as noted above, ISIS is not just a product of religious symbols, but of symbols form the modern western discourse of masculinity and popular culture. These symbols are not chosen randomly, but their place in the presented narrative of ISIS is logical, since they already boosted the emotion of disparate young males in the western world.

Drawing from the cognitive theory of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, Riis and Woodhead argues that the emotional relationship between the individual and the group are created through processes of externalization and internalization (Berger and Luckmann 1998, Riis och Woodhead 2010:109). Externalization is, according to Berger and Luckmann an anthropological necessity, since it is impossible for human beings to exist in a closed sphere, inactive, dwelling in their own thoughts. There is an intrinsic instability to the human organism, which forces her to find a stable environment for her actions (Berger and Luckmann 1998:68–69). The stable environment is the being together with other human beings, in society, communities or groups. Feelings felt by

the individual are deeply personal, but not necessarily private. Feelings are noticeable, and have effect on other human beings, hence individual feelings impact on groups (Riis and Woodhead 2010:109), i.e. the individual externalizes their feelings to the groups, and is at the same time influenced by the group by the process of internalization.

Internalization, thus, is the ways in which the shared emotional sentiment influences the individual's private emotions. Through internalization, the social world is created and experienced as something meaningful. It starts with the individual "taking over" already existing worlds, making them their own thorough creative modeling, and eventually bilateral identification is shared among individuals—creating groups (Berger and Luckmann 1998:154).

The processes described above constitute a balanced religious emotional regime:

In such a regime an agent's emotions are shaped by internalizing norms enacted by a community, and by subjectifying emotions related to sacred symbols. The agent may objectify religious emotion by creating or appropriating symbols that are emotionally meaningful to him or her. Feelings relating to such symbols are shared with others in the process of insigation, and insigation is disciplined by consecration. The collective expression of emotions reinforces the emotional standards of the religious community, which agents internalize (Riis and Woodhead 2010:118).

These processes works in dialectic feedback, making it possible for the regime to reinforce or adjust the emotional flow to keep the regime balanced. When balanced (i.e. when the different processes occur equally as much) the emotional life becomes focused. The approved emotions are brought to the fore and unwanted emotions are suppressed in relation to the ideal (Riis and Woodhead 2010:101). If unbalanced, the emotions become more extreme, either in the sense of intense outbursts or of their absence. According to Riis and Woodhead, it is possible for the regime to tilt in six different directions when unbalanced, namely in the direction of mortification, expressivism, symbolic inspiration, iconoclasm, kitsch or fetishism (Riis and Woodhead 2010:145). These different unbalances will, however, not be described in detail here.⁷

⁷ For a detailed discussion of different types of unbalanced emotional regimes, see Riis and Woodhead 2010: 123ff.

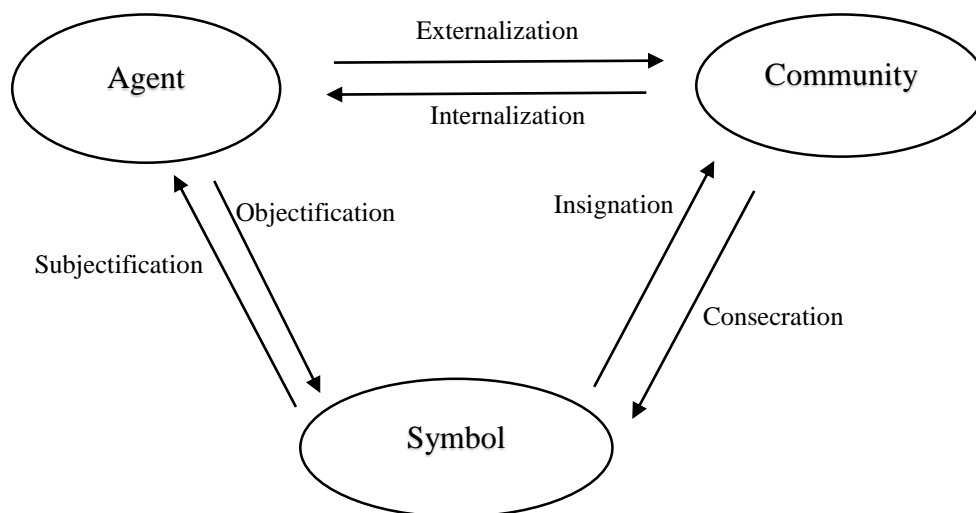


Figure 1: The dialectics of emotion (Riis and Woodhead 2010:118)

It is important to note that the emotions accumulated in the regime do not necessarily have to be “positive”, in a normative sense, for the individual or group. In the case of ISIS, “the crusaders” is a symbol that accumulates as much emotion as the symbol “jihad”. These emotions have different qualities, but are equally active in the emotional economics of the group. When discussing emotion as a constitutionalizing effect, it is important to remember that there are no such thing as “good” or “bad” emotions. “Bad” emotion can be as effective, or even more so, as “good” emotion when it comes to solidify a group. Also, the fact that an emotional regime might be balanced does not imply that the regime is sound or moral from a normative point of view (Riis and Woodhead 2010:124), it only means that the regime is able to empower its different parts in a way which is beneficial for the regime’s survival.

I argue that ISIS indeed has a balanced emotional regime. Connected through history and reality to a wider social order, which in generalizing terms can be called the West, ISIS has adopted a certain set of symbols that do not only have legitimacy inside the regime, but also in a wider social context. Society in general, and ISIS in particular have consecrated and insigated the symbols connected to a specific type of masculinity, i.e. the non-visual symbols of “male” behavior and emotion found in the rhetoric of ISIS and in the modern discourse of masculinity. While society in general, to some extent due to the rise of feminism and queer-theory, have begun to question this discourse, ISIS has insigated it, and made it a symbol for the group to gather around and identify with. As described above, the male is considered violent and powerful in modern discourse, and this coincides with the ISIS notion of Islam as a religion for and

of warriors and martyrs (see for example *Dabiq* issue 7). History itself, could be described as a symbol which ISIS has insigated, though consecrated only in a very specific form. As should be evident from the line of argument above, ISIS does not insigante and consecrate the critical study of history, but the epic, semi-fictional stories filled with beautiful fantasies of heroism and glory. These stories are reinforced with visual symbols taken from popular culture, chiefly from the world of computer and video games.

This unusual fusion between religion and popular culture can indeed be described as a “wellspring of culture”, and is a good example of how religion in late modern society can evolve and develop in unexpected directions. These images from popular culture possess their referents within themselves, and the aesthetics are undeniably referring to actions of violence, real (the “jihad-look”) or fictional (observed in popular culture). The symbols chosen by the community are able to maintain emotional associations and memories beyond actual experiences, and are media for initiating new members into the regime (Riis and Woodhead 2010:104). It is probable that if the symbols are well known and appreciated by a lager crowd, the attraction of the community will increase.

Since the history of ISIS seems to be perceived by individuals to be the creation of God, their objectivization of history is an effect of the subjectivizing process. As described above, the emotions of the individual are not described as belonging to the individual but to (the symbol of) God, which makes the individual feel and act in a certain way. The balance in dialectics becomes possible through the symbolic narrative which ISIS creates and is internalized by the individual, while the individual is externalizing their emotion (the quality of these emotions is beyond the scope of this thesis), which is picked up by the community, offering a world for the individual to “take over”.

The balance of the emotional regime is most visible when it comes to the symbol of martyrdom and the acts of violence and death. If unbalanced, death would be avoided, since there would be a lack of emotional focus, or over-pursued, due to lack of discipline in relation to the group’s ideals (see above concerning martyrdom). Individuals imbedded inside the emotional regime of ISIS seem to be “indifferent” to the prospect of dying. When a member of ISIS is killed, the symbol (death) is created. The community and the individual reacts to this through balanced processes described above. This means that any attempt to uproot ISIS through the use of violence only will

balance their regime even more, making the members even more interactive since death is only reinforcing the dialectical processes. The apocalypse, according to ISIS, “must happen and certainly will” (*Dabiq* issue 4, page 32). The West and the “hypocrites” killing ISIS members is only proof of the apocalypse happening.

In sum, the components of the emotional regime of ISIS described above correlates to the islamophobic discourse found in Western society. Islam is in that discourse described as masculine and violent, consisting of emotional irrational individuals loving death and violence. It is connected to an exotic fantasy of the orient and the objectification of history. ISIS has, then, merely adopted islamophobia and made it its trade mark showing the world that they are everything they are said to be: masculine, violent, emotional and exotic. The survival of islamophobia is, in part, what allows ISIS to remain and expand.

9. Final remarks: To die in rage or not to?

I think a great deal of what goes on in society could be described that way—it may well be fatal, but it's not serious. (Bohm 2004:42).

I have shown above that ISIS is as much a product of general modern discourses as a product of “Islam”. ISIS forms a balanced emotional regime, through the complex use of symbols, deriving from modern society, popular culture and religion. It is an effect of disparate oppressing discourses, most prominently sexism and islamophobia, but also the widely accepted and normalized use of violence as entertainment.

ISIS is connected to islamophobia through the fact that the two narratives are almost identical. They only differ in the positive or negative connotations that the narratives are given. In the “western” discourse of Islam, for example, the Muslim is described as irrational (i.e. emotional) and violent, Islam is a religion for and of men, oppressing women. All Muslim are “fundamentalists”, hating the West and its democracy. In the narrative of ISIS the Muslim is described as violent, driven by transcendent emotion (irrational, in a secular Western way of thought). Islam is indeed a religion of and for men, who have the right to oppress certain kinds of women (i.e. “non-Muslims”). Muslims are indeed fundamentalists, living their lives based on the Quran and the Sunnah of the prophet, and, yes, Muslims do hate the West and want it destroyed in favor for a worldwide Khilafah. The grand narrative of ISIS is partly a reflection of the Western discourse of Islam. The connotations are, however, reversed. In the Western discourse the Muslim characteristics are constructed as downright negative and immoral; in the narrative of ISIS, the characteristics are constructed as positive, great and essential for “Islamic” life and conduct.

There are, however, other discourses that have influence over ISIS and its narrative too. For example, as have been noted in the analysis, is disparate theological readings and notions of Islam also an active part of ISIS narrative, however, this thesis have focused on the Western discourses which can be found in the story which ISIS presents in its media. The usage of theological notions as part of narrative building is a possible topic for further research on the group.

If the premise that we enter into stories and are entered into stories by others and that these stories are lived by individuals is accepted, it should be clear that there is a need for serious dialogue of how these stories are constructed and why, without ending

up in a discussion of “right” and “wrong”, “good” or “bad”. “It is the actions one needs to *choose*, actions one has *chosen* from among others that could be chosen but were not, that need to be assessed, measured and evaluated” (Bauman 1993:4, emphasis in original). Such an evaluation would probably show that there are choices that are not open to everyone. Such limits do not necessarily depend on class or economics, but can be effects of interpellation and performativity. The possibility that the West interpellates Muslims to perform a certain kind of “Islam” needs to be assessed. To view sympathies with any group as an enactment of identity and not only as an effect of economic deprivation, might be a way forward from the Western societies shock upon realizing that “well-mannered” young men and women choose to join ISIS instead of participating in the Western democracies, without turning to the disproven theory of “brainwashing” (see for example Hood et al. 2009:270 ff., Cowan and Bromley 2007:217–218).

However, the conversation that would need to take place will take time and be somewhat traumatic for everyone involved. It will be necessary to have this conversation, nevertheless, since society is turning towards organic structure and leaving the mechanical structure of modernity, due to globalization, emigration and immigration. Without forcing individuals to be “with us or against us”, we need to have a serious conversation about ISIS, if there is a need to and if society should prevent individuals from joining the group. Since individuals are not only entered into stories by discourses, but makes active choices of which stories they prefer to enter, it is necessary to ask the question whether society should or even have mandate to prevent or forbid individuals from joining any group, since prevention would mean a restriction of free choice. That discussion is, however, outside the scope of this thesis, but if the conclusion is reached that individuals indeed should be prevented from joining the group, Western society needs to offer a better alternative. In order to do that, it is necessary to realize that the discourses through which society is constructed have to be seriously evaluated because they are fatal, as have been seen in Paris and Copenhagen, not to mention Syria.

A serious discussion of the discourses, not only on academic level but in society in general, *might* lead to the destabilization of the ISIS emotional regime. If the emotional regime of ISIS were to be destabilized, the most effective way of doing this would probably be to deconstruct the group’s symbols. In this thesis a certain kind of masculinity and a specific aesthetics which is connected to modern pop-culture and the

usage of violence, have been identified as being important symbols of the group. Having the serious discussion of how and why we have constructed certain “types” of human beings (in this case “men” and Muslims) as mentioned above, and why many of us enjoy violence as entertainment might lead to a deconstruction of parts of the ISIS grand narrative. The deconstruction would, hence, open up for a critical discussion of certain aspects of Western modern society, due to the shared discourses.

There is no “quick fix” to “get rid of” ISIS, if that is what is desirable. Reading Western newspapers, however, there seems to be consensus that it is necessary to do so. I have suggested a way to milder the impact which ISIS have over the general Western narrative, but it presupposes a critical discussion of certain modern discourses, which do not exist in by themselves but are interconnected to endless variations of individuals’ basic assumptions of how life should be lived. Generations have invested money, prestige, identity and emotion into the narrative which constitutionalize ISIS, and the question is if it is possible to in the graspable future deconstruct the, in my opinion, very destructive discourses which constitute the ISIS narrative. It would take time to work through the trauma of deconstruction, and the question is: do we even want to? We might not, but do we really have a choice if we are not to die in rage?

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