The promotion of terror through otherness?

A conceptualisation of the digital terro-media system of Islamic State:

Gareth Thompson
g.a.thompson@arts.ac.uk
The communicative dimension of terrorism

• Communication of terrorism: Alleged symbiotic interdependence of media and terrorism (Rada, 1985; Clutterbuck, 1981; Schmidt and Graaf, 1982 and which is contested (Wieviorka, 1988)

• Terrorism as communication: A process that is communicative and rhetorical. (Heath, 2008: Matusitz, 2013)

• Communication as terrorism: Reflected in law enforcement against communicative crimes. A digital terro-media system?
A digital other

• From 2014, a media mythology/orthodoxy emerges of an extreme digital other, a black box of social media communications that takes young people from the streets of West Yorkshire and East London to Syria.

• “A huge proportion of them use social media.” (Jones, 2014).

• This extreme digital other is presented as incomprehensible and IS are “masters of the digital universe” (Atwan, 2015:15) and deploy “vast numbers of digital fighters” (Cohen, 2015: 53).
Research Questions

• RQ 1: What rhetoric and messages are used in the communications of Islamic State?

• RQ 2: What media systems is used by Islamic State?
Methodology

1. Historical institutionalism approach (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Sandhu, 2015; Bentele and Wiesenburg, 2016) approach to define the case/institution, agents of support, ideas/messages, mechanisms of communication and outcomes.

2. Contemporary historical examination of documents and communications artefacts against social context.
ISLAMIC STATE

Strategy, Operations and Identity

IS Ideology

Recruitment, Message Origination

1. Nomenclature of claim
2. “Hold and expand“ slogan (baqiya wa tatamaddad)

1. Hijrah (Migration)
2. Kalifah (Caliphate)
3. Jihad (Holy war)

Recruitment Narratives

Money & comfort
Power & kinship
Adventure & ultraviolence
Sexual opportunity
Verbal Channel:
Rhetoric of inclusion versus experience of exclusion (as others in West)
Media & Distribution System
Islamic State Institute of Public Information – Abu Mohammed al-Adnani

**Verbal Content**
- Dabiq magazine
- Radio
- Dawn of Glad Tidings radio app.
- Ajnad Media Foundation nasheeds or anthems

**Visual Content**
- Al-Hayat Media Center videos
- Al-Furqan Media Center videos
- Al’ltsam Media videos

**Audiences**
- Disengaged
- Sympathetic
- Committed

**Scan & listen**
- Empathise & engage

**Engage**
- Customised to individual interests

**Action**
- Migrate to caliphate to wage holy war

Recruitment
Messages
Packaging and Distribution

Recruitment
Communications and Process

Online automation, algorithms and personal engagement with potential recruits
Visual Channel:

1. Rhetoric of empowerment, statehood, dignity - and revenge for exclusion and humiliation - via digital artefacts of fear.

2. Encouraging to sympathetic audience and terrifying to the disengaged.
ISLAMIC STATE

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3. Jihad (Holy war)

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Recruitment Communications and Process
- Online automation, algorithms and personal engagement with potential recruits

Strategy, Operations and Identity
- Core IS Ideology
- Recruitment Message Origination

Recruitment Message Packaging and Distribution
Conclusion and Implications

• The duality of IS communications differentially targets uncommitted/disengaged and sympathetic audiences in ways that generate fear, alienation and suspicion in uncommitted and inclusion, power and sense of success in sympathetic and committed audiences.

• IS rhetoric annexes aspects of otherness imposed on Muslims in the West

• The aim appears to be to exploit otherness for strategic gain by achieving irreconcilable separateness between the uncommitted audience and the audience that is sympathetic and committed to IS.
AUDIENCES

Uncommitted audience
- Western society and
- Middle East states

Sympathetic audience
- Hardline / extreme Muslims
- in West and Middle East

Action Channel

Propaganda of the Deed against Near and Far Enemy
Ultraviolence for Local Terror and Global Reaction against:

1. Far Enemy in Middle East
   - e.g. Beheading of American journalists
   - and aid workers in Syria
2. Far Enemy in Arab Countries
   - e.g. Tunisia beach attack of 15 June 2015
   - and bombing of Russian airliner flying from Egypt on 31 October 2015
3. Far Enemy in Western Countries
   - e.g. 13 November 2015 attacks on Paris,
   - 22 March 2016 attacks on Brussels.
4. Near Enemy in the Kalifah
   - e.g. Executions of Syrians named as alleged British spies by Jihadi Sid in January 2016

Operational Targets

1. Far Enemy in Middle East
2. Far Enemy in Arab Countries
3. Far Enemy in Western Countries
4. Near Enemy in the Kalifah

Military and Terrorist Operations

1. Unified command and control
2. Skilled in urban and guerrilla warfare
3. Viable bomb-making and suicide terror teams

Islamic State

Command and control
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi
**Conclusion and Implications**

- IS rhetoric encourages internalisation of self-image of the stigma of otherness in young Muslims (in terms used by Wolfgang Lipp in *Sociology of Deviance, 1977*) and offers redemption via paternal charisma of IS leadership or heroic charisma of action.

“A person can very well build up their identity by actively adopting the very features that are normally viewed as marks of culpable outsiderhood. This self stigmatization is the source of all charisma.”
**ISLAMIC STATE**

1. **Nomenclature of claim**
   - Naming system that is messianic and makes strategic claims
   - “Endure and expand” slogan (baqiy wa tasmaddad)

**Islamic State**

- Claim of Islamic allegiance
- Claim against non-believers (kuffar)
- Claim of statehood
- Claim of a caliphate (kalifah)

**Verbal Channel**

1. Language of conviction, intent and ambition
2. Messages to appeal to Muslims in near and far land and terrorise near and far enemies
3. Links between IS ideology and prophetic claims of Islam
4. Messages of belonging and fictive kinship for recruitment
5. Proposition of ultraviolence and sexual reward

Distribution via:
- Dabiq Magazine
- Islamic State Report
- Al-Bayan radio
- Dawn of Glad Tidings twitter app
- Ajnad Media anthems

**Ideology**

1. **Hijrah**
   - The requirement to migrate from the West for Muslim lands and join the caliphate
2. **Kalifah**
   - Establishment of support and defence of a holy land—or caliphate—refuge for all Muslims
3. **Jihad**
   - The invocation to wage holy war both to establish and defend the caliphate—as well as making preemptive attacks on the land of crusaders or non-believers (darul khalid)

**Media System**

Islamic State Media Infrastructure

1. Communications command and control: Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani
2. Message origination and management: Islamic State Institute of Public Information
3. Co-ordination and distribution via affiliate media centres:
   - Al-Hayat Media Center
   - Al-Furqan Media Center
   - Al-I’tisam Media Foundation
   - Al-Battar Media Foundation

**Visual Channel**

1. Images intended to appeal to Muslims and repel enemies
2. Humiliation of near and far enemies through videos of beheadings
3. Visual signals of revenge for Muslims e.g. orange jump suits for prisoners
4. Competent administration and workings of the proto-state. E.g. videos of Islamic State Health Service
5. Harmony in the caliphate among ummah (the global Muslim community). E.g. videos and photos of different ethnic groups sharing comradeship as fighters
6. Action and ultraviolence
7. Martyrdom as nobility as a Muslim

**Audiences**

- **Uncommitted audience**
  - Western society and Middle East states
- **Sympathetic audience**
  - Hardline / extreme Muslims in West and Middle East
# Evolving Seriality of Islamic Terror

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Personal Style</th>
<th>Propaganda Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hizbullah</td>
<td>Hassan Nasrallah (1992-present)</td>
<td>Political, wide-ranging, charismatic and subtle charm. A cleric but not overtly religious or fiery in style, emphasising Arab dignity. Reasonable style seeking legitimisation of cause.</td>
<td>Segmented for multiple audiences. Interviews with Western media such as The New Yorker, Washington Post plus video interview with Julian Assange for Wikileaks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al-Qaeda in Iraq</td>
<td>Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2004-2006)</td>
<td>Ill-educated, criminal, headstrong and a poor communicator. Highly dogmatic and extreme with experience as terrorist leader in homeland of Jordan.</td>
<td>Relied on violence and visual depictions of beheadings etc. to communicate power and induce fear.</td>
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</tbody>
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Introduction

The would-be bombers of Walthamstow

By Dominic Casciani
BBC News
8 July 2010 | UK

Found Guilty: Ibrahim Savant, Arafat Waheed Khan and Waheed Zaman

Image 2 of 2
A tape found in the prayer room