Promoting terror to a digital other:

The terro-media system of Islamic State

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Project aims

To conceptualise the digital media system and institutions used by Islamic State for the promotion of its ideas using institutional-level study (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Bannerman and Haggard, 2015).

To explore the duality of Islamic State's digital media system - messages, visusalities and distribution – as an appeal to the digital other.

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 preventative strand of law enforcement against communicative crimes, such as consuming web content, seen as part of a digital terro-media system.

Digital visuality of post-classical terrorism

- Initial spatial grandeur of acts of terror and resulting visuality was replaced - in the case of AQII,AQAP and IS - with smaller scale spatial enactment and increased rhetorical component

- Smaller form performative digital visuality of violence – more intimate spectacles of terror breaching media reporting boundaries/norms - for global distribution through social media

The digital other

Condition for digital otherness arose from real world factors:

- **Social.** Racism and religiosity of identity, e.g. in the UK - from "Paki" to Muslim (Warsi, 2017), from curry to securitisation, from benign spirituality to centres of hate preaching

- **Political.** Strident racialisation in politics, e.g UKIP

- **Legal.** Terrorism Act 2000 and 2006 created communicative crimes of "possessing " or "collecting" information "of a kind" that could provide assistance to someone (else) to commit a terrorist act

- **Quasi-legal:** Sanctions without challenge under CT apparatus, including Extremism Analysis Unit, Prevent Delivery Unit for "non-violent extremism" views contrary to "British values".
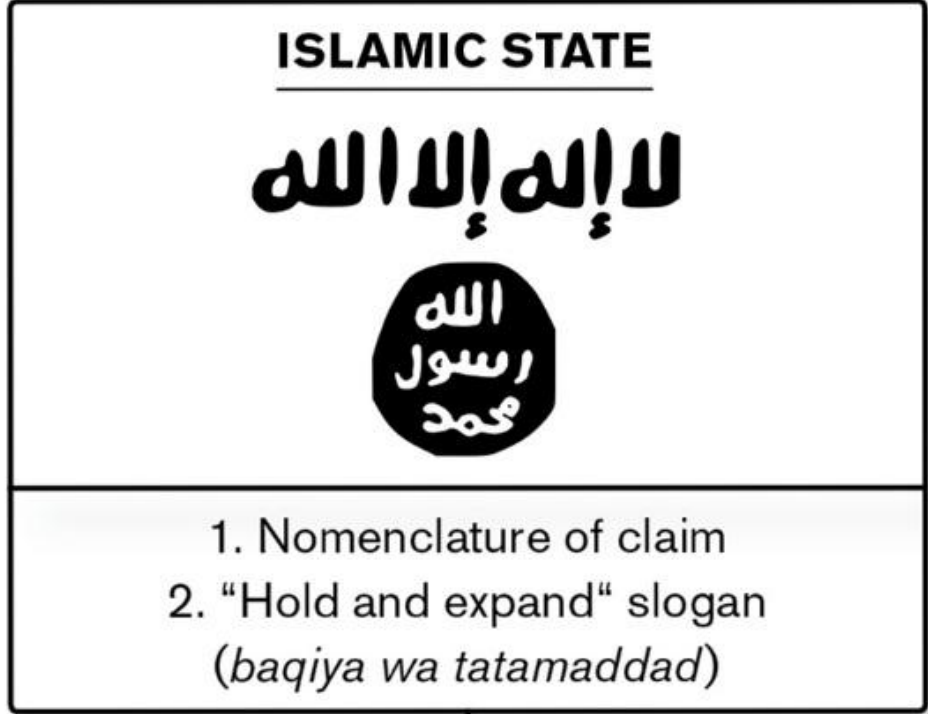
The digital other

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

- The distribution or sell-side of the digital other is presented as incomprehensible except to insiders such as IS who are "masters of the digital universe" (Atwan, 2015:15).

- It is extreme and massive, deploying "vast numbers of digital fighters" (Cohen, 2015: 53) to sustain the terro-media system on the dark web.
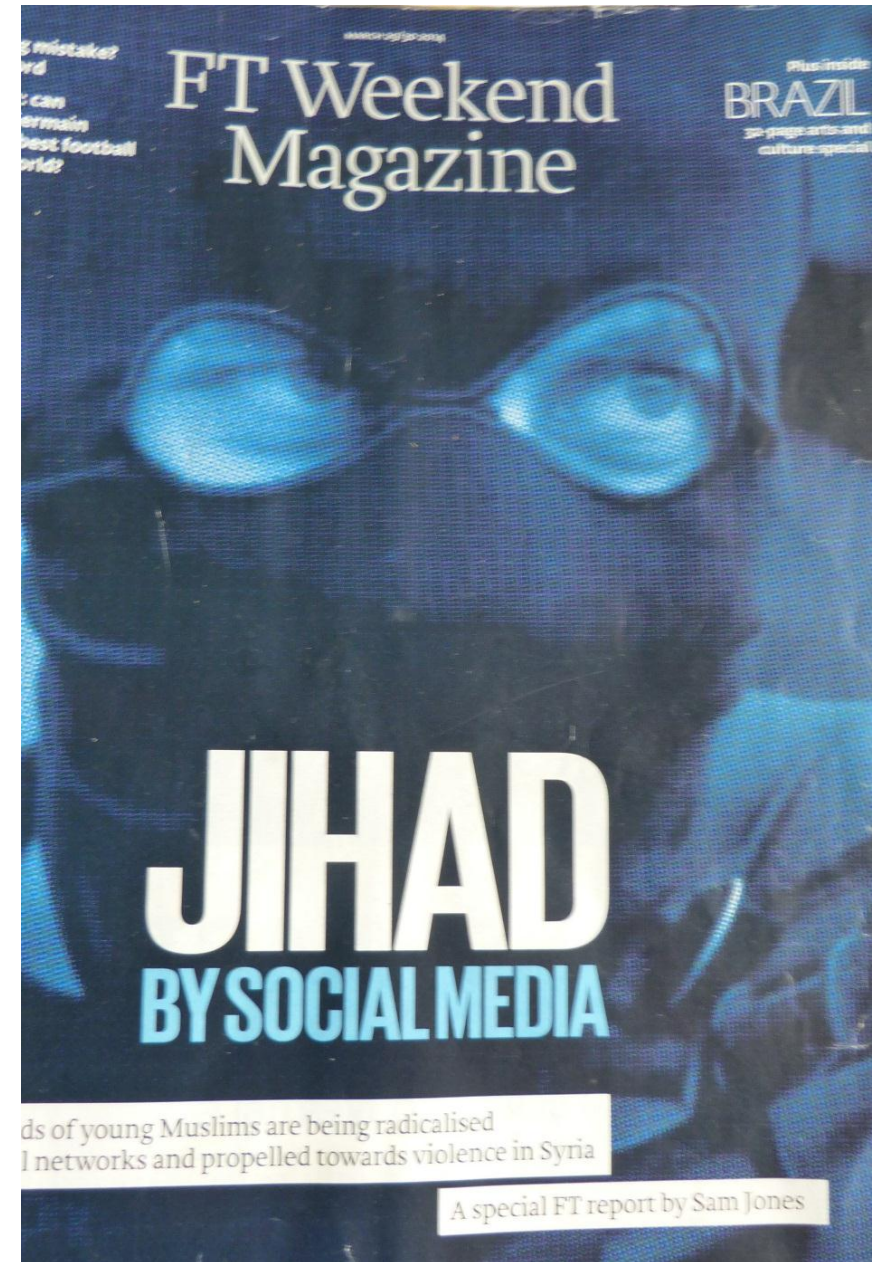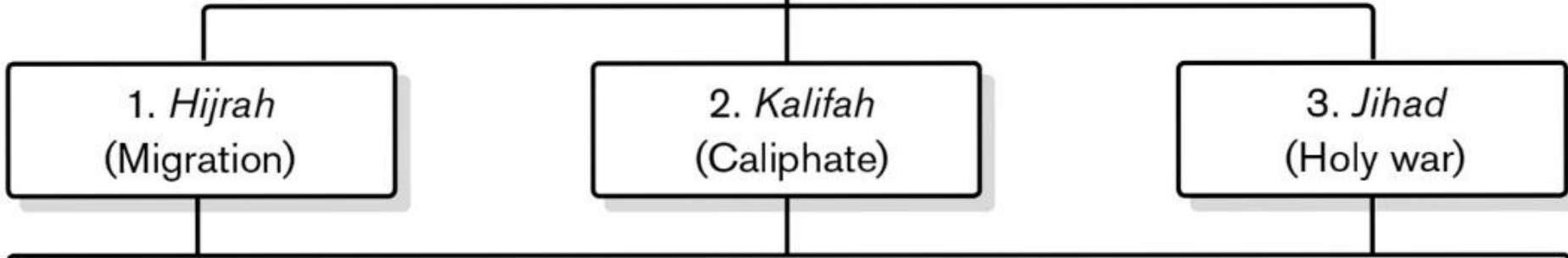
"A huge proportion of them use social media."
(Jones, 2014).

"He spent alot of time in his room playing computer games."
(Clifford, 2015).

ISLAMIC STATE

لا إله إلا الله

الله رسول محمد

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

Strategy, Operations and Identity

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

Core IS Ideology

Recruitment Narratives

Money & comfort	Power & kinship	Adventure & ultraviolence	Sexual opportunity
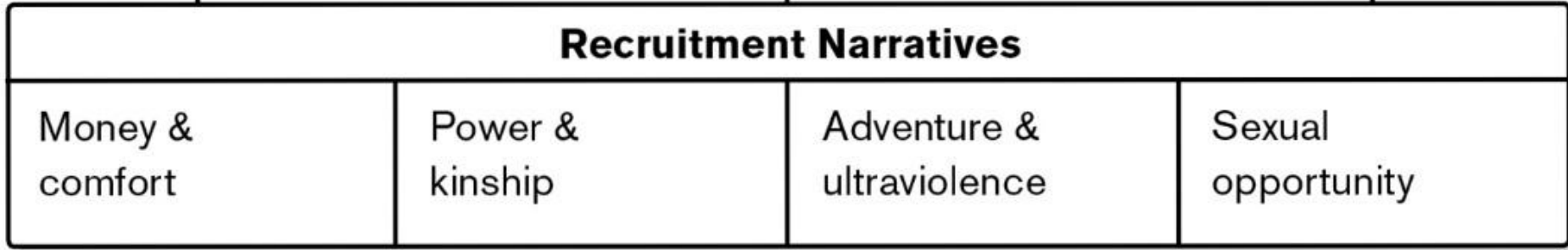
Recruitment Message Origination

Verbal Channel:

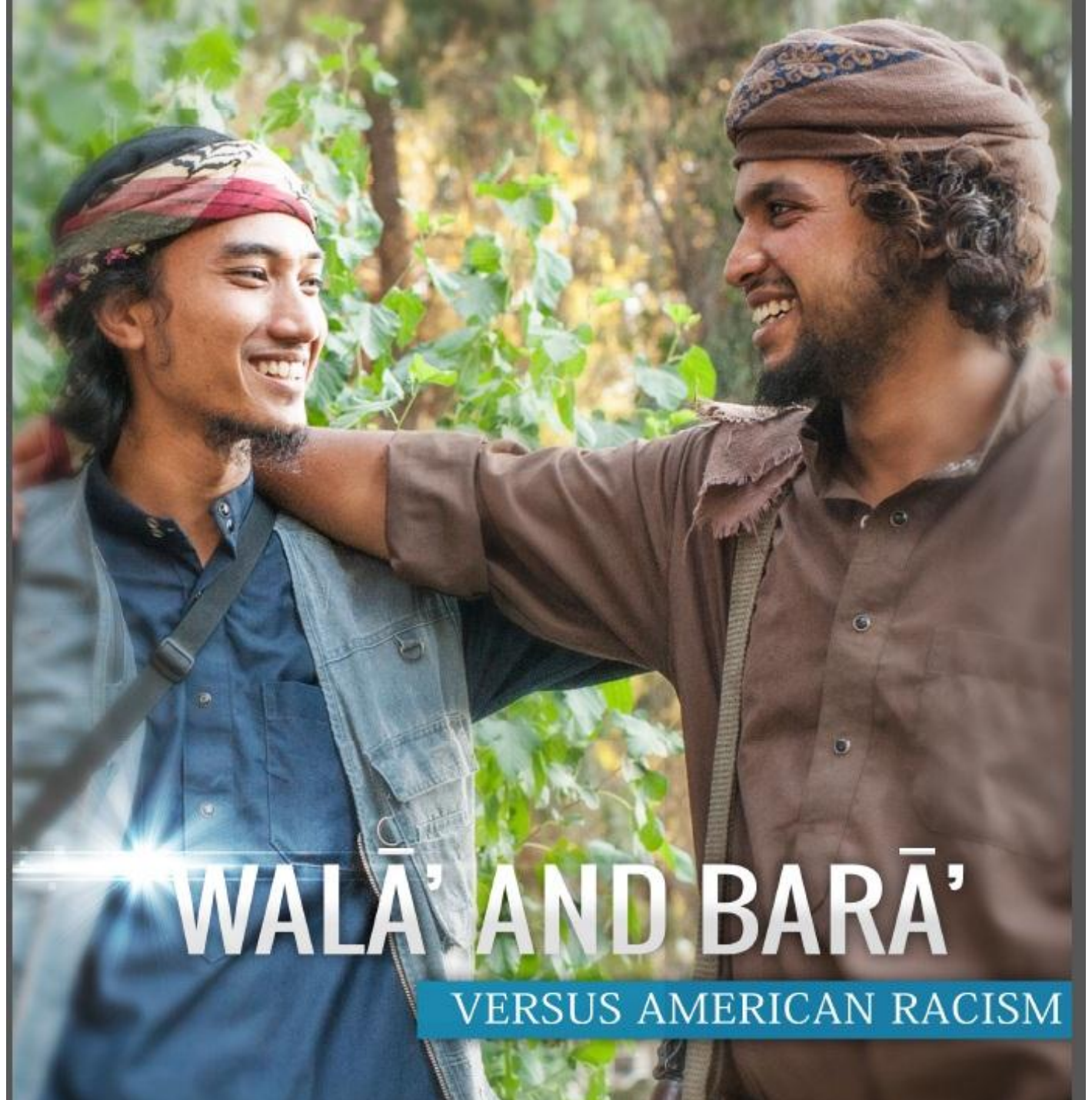Rhetoric of inclusion and kinship versus experience of exclusion
(as others in West)

WALĀ' AND BARĀ'
VERSUS AMERICAN RACISM

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 I'tsam Media videos

Recruitment Messages Packaging and Distribution

Audiences

Disengaged	Sympathetic	Committed

Scan & listen

Empathise & engage

Engage

Customised to individual interests

Action

Migrate to caliphate to wage holy war

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.

3. Digital spectacles of division and separateness

Differential ways of seeing

THE DANGER
Of Abandoning Dārul-Islām

The repeated events of Syrians and Libyans dying on the shores of Turkey, Libya, and Italy, or even on the highways of Austria, is one that should awaken the heart into reflecting upon the issue of hijrah.

{Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." The angels will say, "Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination. Except for the oppressed among men, women and children who cannot devise a plan nor are they directed to a way – For those it is expected that Allah will pardon them, and Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving} [An-Nisā: 97-99].
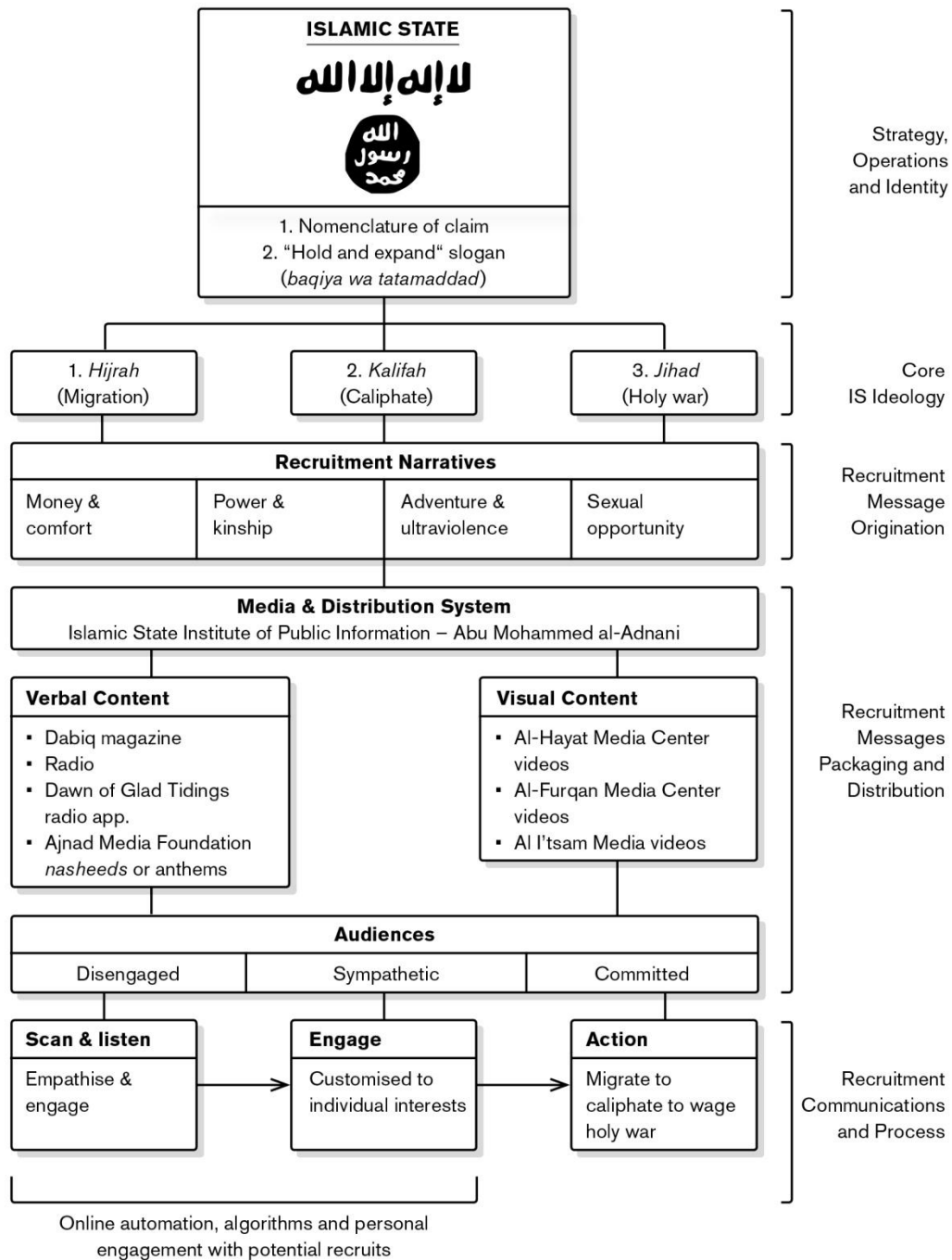
Rasūlullāh 🌸 said, "Allah 🕋 does not accept any deed from a mushrik after he accepts Islam until he departs from the mushrikīn and goes to the Muslims" [Reported by an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah on the authority of Mu'āwiyah Ibn Haydah].[1]

Although the obligation of hijrah is clear, a mistake is regularly committed by claimants of Islam, and that is in choosing their destination for "hijrah." They always choose the lands of the Christians for their destination. But after the establishment of the prophetic state, hijrah was to al-Madīnah not al-Habashah. And during the Umawī and 'Abbāsī rule, hijrah was to the lands of the khilāfah not Rome and Constantinople. And with the revival of Islam's

implemented somewhere, it is not Dārul-Islām" [Ahkām Ahl adh-Dhimmah]. This is evident, as the Sahābah did not consider the lands overcome by the false prophets or the resistance against zakāh to be anything but dārul-harb. The fuqahā' after them did not consider the lands ruled by the Tatar or 'Ubaydī rulers to be Dārul-Islām, for although these rulers claimed Islam and ruled by some of its laws, they committed apostasy by abandoning some of its laws or teachings. Accordingly, moving to the lands of Āl Salūl or the Sahwāt is not hijrah, as the rulers of these lands – in addition to them allying with the crusaders and apostates against Islam – abandon and resist many of the laws of the Sharī'ah. There is no wālā' and barā' there except on a nationalist basis.

Sadly, some Syrians and Libyans are willing to risk the lives and souls of those whom they are responsible to raise upon the Sharī'ah – their children – sacrificing many of them during the dangerous trip to the lands of the war-waging crusaders ruled by laws of atheism and indecency. Although most of these families leave from dārul-kufr – Sahwah, PKK, or regime territory – to the crusaders' lands, the possibility of families leaving the Khilāfah for America or Europe in pursuit of the Dunyā is a matter that should bring focus to the ruling of abandoning Dārul-Islām for dārul-kufr.

Therefore, it should be known that voluntarily leaving Dārul-Islām for dārul-kufr is a dangerous major sin, as it is a passage towards kufr and a gate towards one's children

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Conclusion and Implications

- The duality of IS media system differentially targets uncommitted/disengaged and sympathetic audiences.

- The aim is to 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 (racism, legal constraints and securitisation) and exploits the zone of the digital other for strategic gain in its emphasise on irreconcilable separateness between the uncommitted audience and the audience that is sympathetic and committed to IS.

Conclusion and Implications

- IS digital rhetoric encourages internalisation of self-image of the stigma of otherness in young Muslims (in terms used by Wolfgang Lipp in *Sociololgy 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."