Visual Techniques
for Counter-Jihadi Narratives

Maria Mahdessian

Berner Fachhochschule

Hochschule der Künste Bern

MA Design Research 2020

Visual Techniques
for Counter-Jihadi Narratives

Maria Mahdessian

Berner Fachhochschule

Hochschule der Künste Bern

MA Design Research 2020

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank my thesis advisors:

Declaration of Honor

I hereby declare that the present work is the result of my personal research and is solely my own work and that I did not use any literature or resources other than those indicated. Verbatim or non-verbatim citations are all marked and their origin is specified in respect of bibliographical procedures.

Declaration about Visuals

Any violent or sensitive visual content has been obscured.

1. Abstract

The visuals of Islamic State's self-representational photographs elicit and modulate to aspire its audience's perception and emotions to join the group. Islamic State's agility and ability to appeal to young adults and to radicalize them urges experts to effectively counter jihadi narratives. This research investigates how the understanding of the affect techniques employed by Islamic State as well as existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns can ameliorate the development of deradicalization and prevention campaigns. To be able to answer this, I divide this research into sub-questions: (1) What visual techniques does the Islamic State use specifically in photographs of self-representation, to communicate with, to affect, and to mobilize young adults? (2) What visual techniques do existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns employ to affect their target audience? The overall objectives of this research is to gain an understanding of the affect techniques employed in (1) Islamic State visuals and (2) existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns. In order to achieve these overall objectives, this research conducts rhetorical design analysis with the aim of creating a repertoire of (1) visual techniques the Islamic State employs as well as (2) effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives to have a positive impact by way of assisting in the development of jihadi radicalization prevention campaigns.

2. Research Plan

2.0 Research Question

How can the understanding of the affect[1] techniques employed by Islamic State as well as existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns ameliorate the development of deradicalization and prevention campaigns?

I further divide this question into two sub-questions:

(1) What visual techniques does Islamic State use specifically in photographs of self-representation, to communicate with, to affect, and to mobilize young adults?

(2) What visual techniques do existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns employ to affect their target audience?

1. In psychology, affect is the observable mental or emotional state produced by a person's interaction with a stimulus; for example: sadness, fear, joy, anger, tension and relaxation, tiredness, anxiety (Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary 2012).

2.1 State of research in the field

"Violent extremism does not happen in a vacuum" and does not happen to individuals with a particular profile: it cuts across all demographics: age, gender, socio-economic status and education level (Nemr 2017). There are two sets of overarching factors that might lead someone down the path of violent extremism: Push Factors and Pull Factors. Push Factors are frustrations such as government repression, government corruption, group marginalization, inequality, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and unemployment, whereas, Pull Factors are grievances on a personal level such as acceptance, sense of identity and belonging, search for adventure, self-worth, and spiritual comfort (Nemr 2017; UNESCO 2016, 12). Violent extremist groups including Islamic State (IS)[2] play on these notions. Jihadi groups in particular reappropriate, reinterpret, and distort elements of Islam in order to serve their own interests (El Difraoui 2013, 32). According to a recent report, 41,490 individuals from 80 different countries became affiliated with IS (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation 2018, 3).

2. For more information about IS, see Annex I.

Literature Review

Resulting from the high significance of radicalization and the spread of jihadi content online, extensive studies have been conducted on hate speech and the process of radicalization online (Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2019). With the rise of the Islamic State, its deftness for communication technology, and the influx of foreign fighters it has mobilized, on the one hand, researchers have extensively analyzed IS's communication and media strategy and operations (Ingram 2014, 2015; Farwell 2014), its online magazines (Dabiq and Rumiyah) and narratives the group adopts (Winter 2015; Ingram 2016; Ghosh & Basnett 2017; Bröckling et al. 2018; Grinnell et al. 2018; Fahmy 2019). On the other hand, researchers have also studied how to create campaigns to prevent radicalization, how to deradicalize, and how to challenge and counter hate speech and extremism online (Tuck & Silverman 2016; Radicalisation Awareness Network 2017), and finally, how to evaluate counter-narrative campaigns and their impact (Reynolds & Tuck 2016; Silverman et al. 2016). However, these publications explore neither the visual techniques that would appeal to IS's target audience to render the campaigns effective nor the visual techniques that would effectively counter jihadi narratives. Input from Design-discipline perspective is highly valuable and could assist in better designing campaigns to counter jihadi narratives. While the IS is certainly not the first jihadi group using visual communication, it nevertheless seems to have the most sophisticated jihadi visuals ever yet. However,

investigating the visual communication of IS, and in general, that of terrorist organizations from a design-discipline perspective is at its early stages (Scheuermann & Beifuss 2017, 29). There is a wide gap between studies conducted from the perspective of other disciplines and that of design.

As a starting point, Brachman et al. (2006) from Combatting Terrorism Center conducted, the first of its kind in-depth research on the visual iconography of the distinct genre of jihadist imagery to understand how these visual motifs work and the ideas they convey. Another study conducted by El Difraoui (2013) exposes the evolution of Al Qaida's jihadi narratives in its audiovisual productions in which martyrdom mythology plays a central role while appropriating Islamic visual language familiar to Muslims around the world to create jihadi visuals. To understand and decipher Al Qaida's narratives and employed symbols, El Difraoui's analysis model refers to three different levels: iconological, iconographical, and the level of hidden meaning or profound meaning (71). More from a graphic design-perspective, Beifuss & Bellini (2013) claim that terrorist groups are no different from other organizations in their use of branding, marketing, and visual communication to promoting their ideas and messages (10). They investigate the understudied subject: "branding employed by terrorist groups" (Beifuss & Bellini 2013, 11), and provide a comprehensive survey of the visual identity—symbolism, colors, and typography of the logo and flag—of contemporary terrorist organizations worldwide along with description of the group's ideology, modus operandi, and a brief timeline of significant events for each group. Another study analyzes around 25 jihadi

e-environments (websites, forums, YouTube-channels and BlogSpot-accounts) (Holtmann 2013, 14) to understand how jihadis use symbols, colors, and icons to influence each other and gain followers (Holtmann 2013, 9). In another study focusing on still images collected from the Internet from a variety of websites between 2005 and 2013 (83), Ostovar (2017) explores the principal patterns and characteristics of contemporary jihadi visual cultures, and argues that jihadi groups and their media organizations and artists draw from a network of visual images, symbols, and themes familiar to jihadist community and supporters to to create compositions that represent and resonate with them (82). Furthermore, he divides his study into three parts: (1) the notion of visual networks through organizational emblems and flags (83), (2) the central visual themes in jihadist artwork used to communicate notions of the mujahid, hero, martyr, and heavenly paradise (83), and finally, (3) he briefly discusses about the growing role of graphic design in Internet forums and its impact on jihadist visual culture (83). Another first of its kind is a case study conducted by Scheuermann & Beifuss (2017), who analyze the visual rhetoric of the editorial design of Dabiq magazine and position it within the overall IS different media by (1) comparing it to the group's media strategy, and (2) using the rhetorical design analysis method. The appearance of the editorial design of Dabiq is further compared with its assumed intended effects to detect counter-intentional design elements with the aim of giving insight into certain elements of IS visual rhetoric to inform future counter-terrorism activities (Scheuermann & Beifuss 2017). Another study, though with

a misleading title "Visual rhetoric of the Islamic State: Persuasion in the field of terror" employs Panofsky's method of iconology for visual - particularly photographic - analysis of the IS (Spiller et al. 2016, 207). The study's findings reveal that the IS uses motifs that manifest power through mechanism of fright, superiority, and brutality (Spiller et al. 2016). The study also claims that the group covers "topics of freedom, healthcare and family" and also adopts Western commercial style in depicting "normal" social life within IS-controlled territories while downplaying its violent acts (Spiller et al. 2016). A recent study examines the visual discourse strategies used by the IS group in Dabiq and Rumiyah magazines and the relationship between the discourse types and the visual resources in these two magazines (Abdelrahim 2019). Given the proliferation of violent extremist—particularly jihadi—content online in recent years, there is an urgent need to develop effective counter-narratives and strategic communication. To achieve this, first, it is crucial to have a thorough understanding of the visual rhetoric violent extremist groups adopt. Second, it is also important to inform individuals working on designs and strategic communication of the visual rhetoric adopted in order to effectively assist in developing designs for counter-narratives and strategic communication in counter-terrorism (Scheuermann & Beifuss 2017), and radicalization prevention activities.

2.2 Current State of Own Research

The current state of this research is part of the ongoing larger project "Counter Terrorism Communication Design: Rhetorical design analysis of extremist propaganda for development and evaluation of deradicalization and prevention campaigns" with the aim of providing "models, techniques and tools"[3]. It is conducted by the research group VIRAL ("Visual Rhetoric Analysis Lab") at the Institute of Design Research at the Bern University of the Arts HKB and headed by Dr. Arne Scheuermann, who is also the main supervisor of the current state of this research. Using various materials ranging from jihadist videos to right-wing extremist memes, this overall project, "investigates connections between extremist violence and radicalization processes on the one hand and the design of means of communication and the affect techniques used on the other"[4]. I conducted exploratory research and analyzed the visual aesthetics and techniques IS uses in the self-representational photographs in the English-version of its online magazine, Rumiyah[5] to understand the persuasion techniques employed to appeal to young adults.

Relevance of the exploratory work to the present project

To effectively counter jihadi narratives, we first need to gain an understanding of jihadi visuals and the techniques used that render them appealing to young men and women in Western countries to join groups such as IS. This understanding of visual techniques and preferences

of young adults in its turn allows to better assist in radicalization prevention activities.

Corpus of the current research

The corpus of the current research consists of 131 self-representational photographs selected from all 13 issues of the English-version of IS's online PDF format magazine Rumiyah, which were published from September 5, 2016 to September 9 2017. The Rumiyah issues were taken from Dr. Arne Scheuermann in January 2018 but are also accessible on the Internet through third party websites.

Method[6]

The visuals of IS's self-representational photographs, which elicit and modulate to aspire its audience's perception and emotions to join the group, manifest IS's agility and ability to appeal to young adults. This brings attention to rhetoric, "the art of making persuasive speech" using emotion "to pursue its aim of intentional effectiveness" (Joost & Scheuermann 2006, 3, 9). In its turn, rhetorical communication is the intentional production of effective impact on the target public; and so to have the desired impact, it is crucial that all factors surrounding the final deliverable are taken into consideration (Joost & Scheuermann 2006, 5). Schneller (2015) defines design rhetoric as "the attempt to explain how and by which formal means designed things influence us" (335).

To understand the persuasion methods that aim to have

3. "Counter Terrorism Communication Design." Hochschule der künste Bern. https://www.hkb.bfh.ch/en/research/research-projects/05f5aa87-3242-45cf-8736-94075014d4b3/.

4. "Counter Terrorism Communication Design." Hochschule der künste Bern. https://www.hkb.bfh.ch/en/research/research-projects/05f5aa87-3242-45cf-8736-94075014d4b3/.

5. For more information about Rumiyah, see Annex III.

6. For the full analysis, see Documentation Blog.

an effect on the target audience, and therefore understand affect techniques used by IS, I conduct Rhetorical Design Analysis, a four-step qualitative analysis method developed at the Bern University of the Arts, that allows the evaluation of design artifacts to understand the intentionality of the design at focus (Scheuermann & Beifuss 2017, 34; Schneller 2015, 339). The results of this analysis method allow me to detect which visual constructions or features are responsible for the effects intended in IS portraits to create certain emotions in the group's target audience.

Next, I discuss the steps of the analysis I conducted:

I. Formal analysis

As a first step, I recorded quantitative data of what is seen in the photographs by assigning keywords alphabetically for each photograph. These keywords consist of elements seen, location, visual effects, and photography techniques. This step allowed the identification of patterns and their frequencies (see more in Documentation Blog).

II. Effect analysis & investigation of specific design means in correlation with specific intent

Visual culture is the visual manifestation of social practices in which visual images' effects are embedded (Rose 2001, 14). This means that visual effects are context-sensitive (Schneller 2015, 340); as Schneller (2015) notes, "the socio-cultural and historical context affects people's perception and interpretation of such elements as colors, textures, and

motifs" (340). To understand affect techniques employed by IS in its portraits it is crucial to have an understanding, first, of the narratives it employs, and second of the visual techniques - including motifs and colors[7] as visual elements - employed in each narrative to render them effective. Therefore, as a second step, I identified and categorized the portraits into narrative themes and sub-thematics, then, I analyzed their visual techniques. Consequently, this section is divided into two parts:

(A) Thematic analysis and (B) Technical analysis

A. Thematic Analysis

IS's self-representational photographs focus on two themes: (1) Heroization of Fighters and (2) Allegorization of Women.

Theme 1
Heroization of Fighters

The portraits of IS fighters are suggestive of heroic depiction. The first key narrative of IS's self-representational photographs focuses on heroization of fighters. A jihadi fighter elicits notions of heroism, bravery, virtue, strength, religious devotion, and divine reward (Ostovar 2017, 93). These notions are regularly depicted throughout IS portraits. I further break down this narrative into the following five sub-thematics: (1) Confrontation with the Enemy, (2) Religious Legitimacy & Islamic Identity, (3) Martyrdom, (4) Collective Belonging, and (5) The Future of the Caliphate.

7. To comprehend the Islamic motifs as visual elements including colors used in the portraits, I resort to two existing studies, "The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda" conducted by Brachman et al. from Combating Terrorism Center (2006), and "The Symbols of Online Jihad: How Jihadis Foster Central Myths in E-Environments to Guide Online-Groups" conducted by Philipp Holtmann (2013).

These sub-thematics most often overlap. For the purposes of this proposal, I only briefly discuss three sub-thematics[8].

Sub-thematic 1
Confrontation with the Enemy

Many IS fighters' portraits depict physical jihad[9] through visuals of confrontation with the enemy (Figs. 1 & 2). These portraits intend to (1) impress potential recruits and (2) to induce fear in enemies.
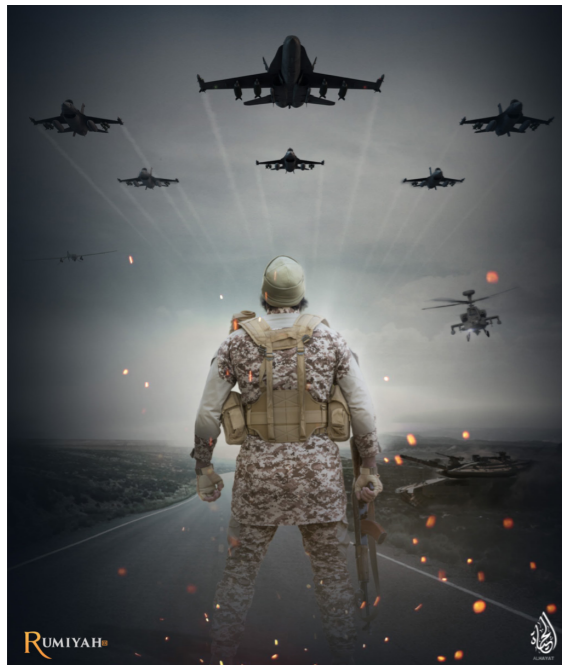
8. For more details on all the sub-thematics, see Documentation Blog

9. For more details on jihad, see Documentation Blog.

Figure 1
Rumiyah no. 7, p. 38

Figure 2
Rumiyah no. 5, p. 16

Sub-thematic 2
Religious Legitimacy & Islamic Identity

IS argues that its "caliphate" is the only legitimate Islamic state, system of governance (Hassan 2017, 1), and restorer of true Islam. IS furthermore fuels powerful political and religious psychological dynamics and exacerbates the perception of crisis in its audiences (IS sympathizers) by creating the perception of 'out-group' (anyone who is not aligned with IS i.e. enemies) and 'in-group' (anyone who is aligned with IS i.e. IS sympathizers) identities (Ingram 2014, 6). To religiously differentiate itself from the 'out-group', IS justifies itself and its actions by the imperative to be fighting for the divine cause of Allah (God), Islam, and the Ummah (Muslim community). To religiously legitimize its status to do so and assert itself, IS depicts its fighters with a focus on piety and virtuous acts (Figs. 3 & 4) and gestures (Figs. 5 & 6) and appropriates Islamic art and notions of Islam's past (Figs. 7 & 8).
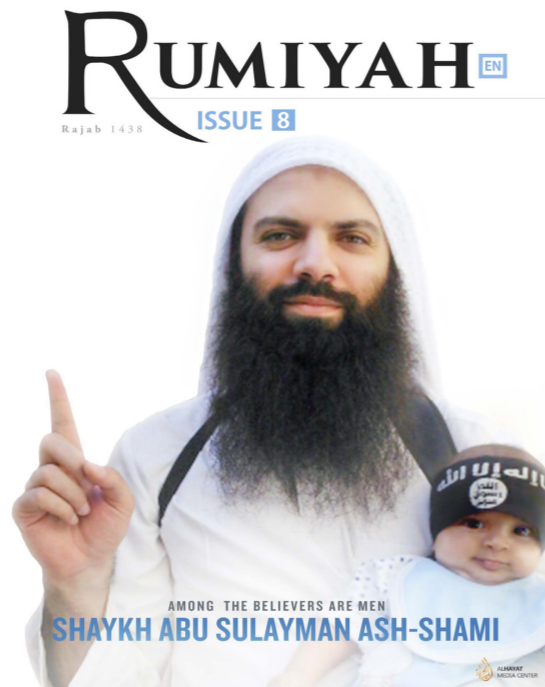
Figure 3

Rumiyah no. 3, p. 32

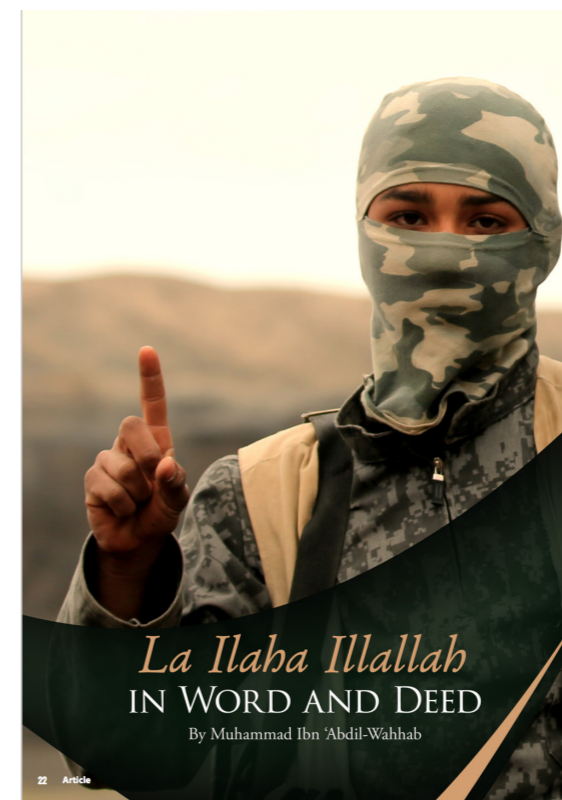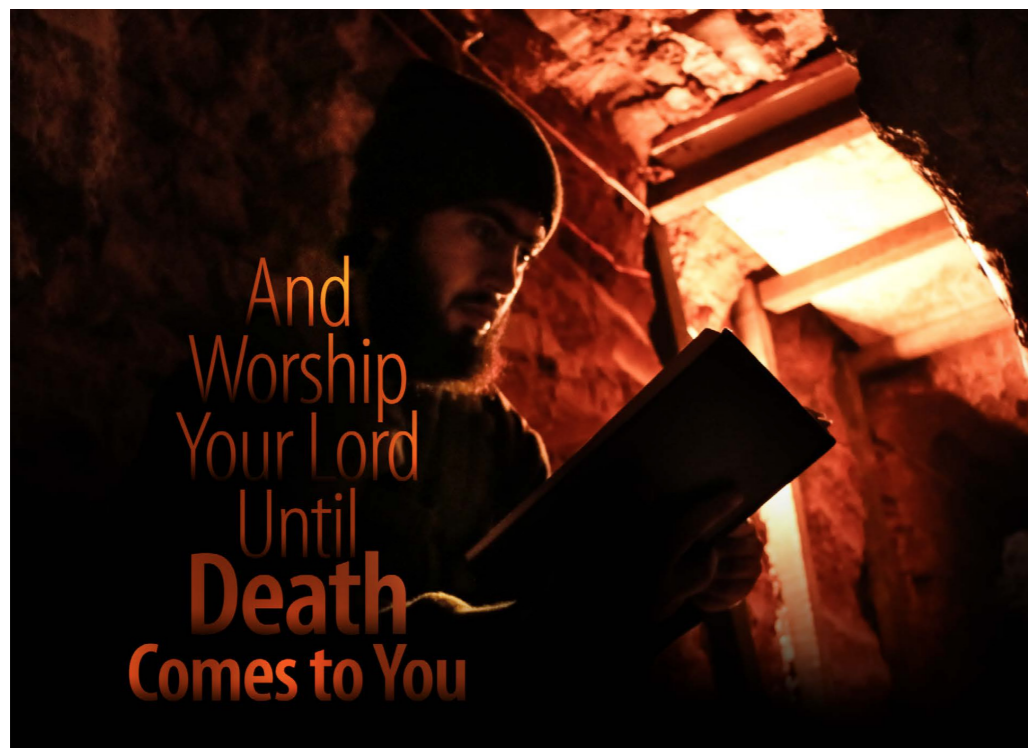**Figure 5**

Rumiyah no. 8, cover

Figure 4

Rumiyah no. 8, p. 4

Figure 6

Rumiyah no. 7, p. 22

Figure 7

Rumiyah no. 3, p. 13

Figure 8

Rumiyah no. 12, p. 18

Sub-thematic 3

Martyrdom

IS views a mujahid as an elite of Allah's creation (see Rumiyah no. 1 2016, 3). His greatest accomplishment is to become a martyr and a hero for the Ummah. In his vision of Islam, "there is no greater spiritual act than martyrdom for one's faith" (Brachman et al. 2006, 86). A martyr is also believed to get elevated above other believers in the eyes of Allah (Cook 2017, 152).

The visual depiction of martyrs (Figs. 9 & 10) ––acts as (1) a source of inspiration for jihad, and (2) an allurement to want to attain martyrdom emphasizing its religious nature to potential recruits (Brachman et al. 2006, 86).
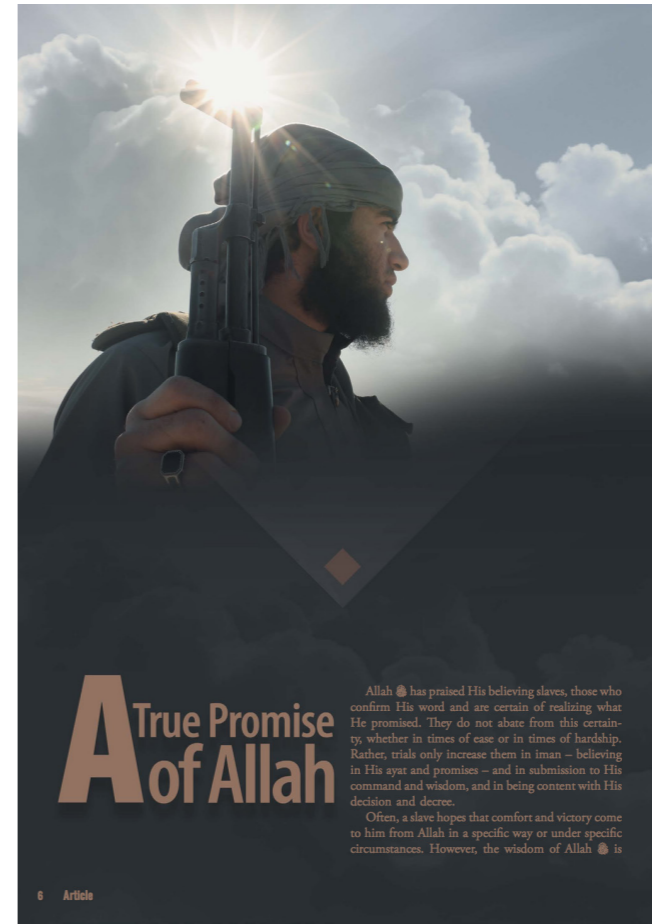

Figure 9
Rumiyah no. 8, p. 6

Figure 10
Rumiyah no. 12, p. 4

Theme 2

Allegorization of Women

The second theme could be characterized as 'Allegorization of Women'. I explore the representation of women and observe a lack of female identity in the visuals addressing them in Rumiyah, and instead, these visuals are of nature, the Qur'an, praying carpet (Fig. 11), money and jewelry that should be donated for jihad, house objects (Fig. 12), or arabesque (Fig. 13). These elements reinforce the message of each article by associating them with the expected behavior of women to construct the ideal Muslim women in the caliphate suggesting their purification and their dependence on their male guardians. The visuals complement the ideological constructs and beliefs of the group towards women, and so not representing women reinforces their subordination manifested in the symbolic representation. Therefore, these elements and the photographs themselves become an allegorical representation of women.

Figure 11
Rumiyah no. 3, p. 40

Figure 12
Rumiyah no. 9, p. 18

Figure 13
Rumiyah no. 7, p. 30

B. Technical Analysis

The technical analysis section studies the visual techniques IS employs in each of the themes and sub-thematics and how each of them has been represented. The features under analysis included motifs and colors, position and gesture of the fighter including his gaze, portrait style, camera angle, visual construction and composition techniques, typography, and layout.

Theme 1
Heroization of Fighters

This key narrative and its five sub-thematics were qualitatively assessed both in isolation, and in respect to each other. After conducting an analysis of the visual techniques to understand how IS plays with the emotions of their audiences, one can observe an apparent fluidity among the visual constructions and techniques of the sub-thematics under the umbrella theme of Heroization of Fighters, and this fluidity creates visual interconnection among these different sub-thematics. Having said this, as the sub-thematics overlap, the visual techniques and constructions are by no means exclusive to one sub-thematic. And many portraits combine more than one visual construction.

Below, I briefly discuss some of the visual constructions and techniques of the three sub-thematics.

Sub-thematic 1
Confrontation with the Enemy

The portraits that fall under this sub-thematic employ visual constructions often with observable similarities with cover art of shooter video games and posters of Hollywood movies despite their cultural differences furthermore, glamorizing and gamifying warfare (Winter 2015, 27). Some of the visuals are not fixed to one visual construction and are concurrently employing more than one visual construction especially those that are a digital collage of different portraits such as Figure 14.

Figure 14
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 9

The following subsections are a brief discussion of two visual constructions that create an overall impression that constitute this sub-thematic.

Fighter as shadowy/silhouetted—all black

A visual construction commonly seen throughout Hollywood war and Science Fiction movies (Fig. 16), and shooter video games visuals (Fig. 17), depicting the fighter as shadowy/silhouetted (Figs. 2, 15, 18, & 19)—all black, is achieved through different means in different IS portraits. Some are manipulated to literally depict the fighter as fully black through the image adjustment of exposure (Figs. 2 & 15), others have added layer with opacity (Fig. 18), sometimes this is achieved simply by wearing all black outfit with Balaclava on their heads, and/or adding shadows all around the portrait (Fig. 19). This depiction of the fighter is not just for visual effect but the fighter could be considered as a rhetorical visual figure acting as a tool of persuasion by which the masked, faceless IS fighter evokes an intimidating sight, which projects strength, mystery, violence and anonymity. This rhetorical depiction further suggests operating in secrecy and working from the shadows to attack the enemy. In its turn, this anonymity allows exchangeability of the protagonist so that the viewer can put himself in this anonymous fighter's place.

Figure 15
Rumiyah no. 11, p. 4

Figure 17
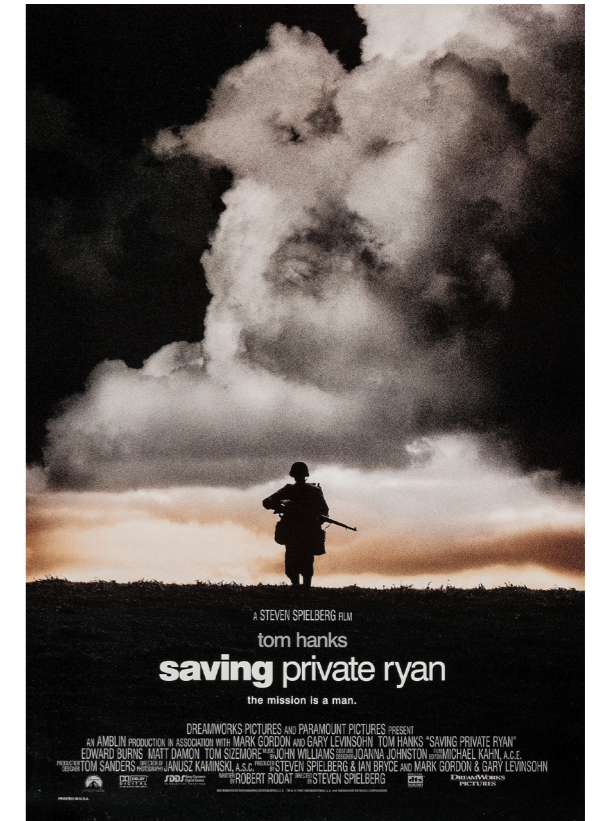Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare
Designer: Joe Cecot (2016)

Figure 16
Saving Private Ryan
Directed by Steven Spielberg (1998)
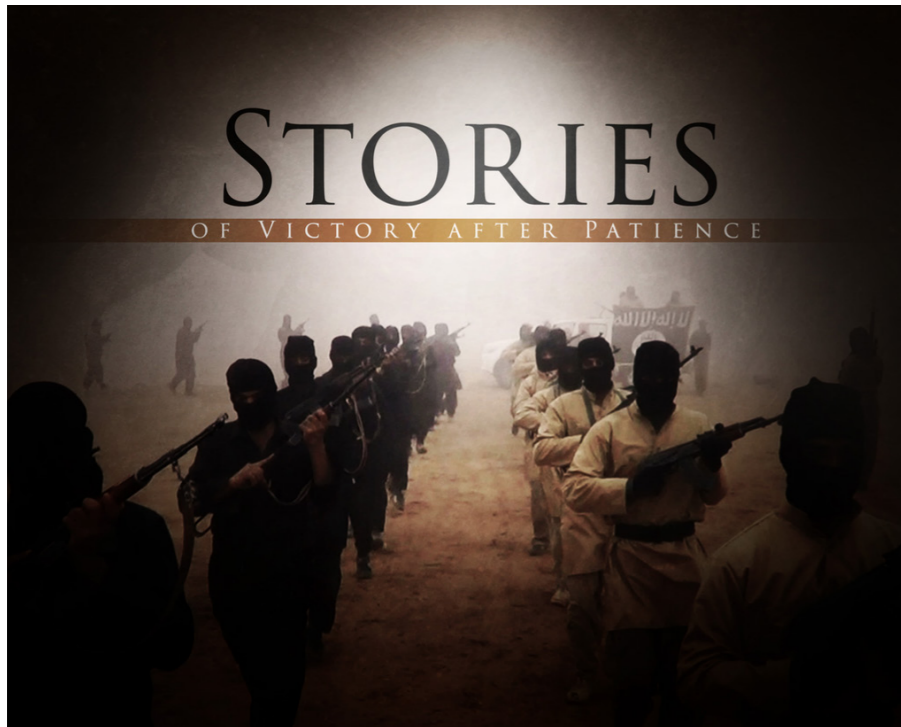
Poster design:
BLT Communications, LLC (1998)

Figure 18
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 22

Figure 19
Rumiyah no. 4, p. 28

Shooting position

In many portraits, IS fighters have shooting positions. These portraits act as evidence suggesting "proof of action" of putting one's life in danger for the divine cause of fighting for Allah, for "Islam", and for the Ummah-showing bravery of the IS fighters in action even though none of these portraits prove that an enemy is actually on the receiving end of the bullets being fired. In this visual construction, there are two different visual aesthetics: ones that have apparent post production looks to them with strong light effects (Fig. 20), and others that look raw—giving them a war photojournalistic look (Fig. 21). While the former look higher in quality, the latter look more realistic and serve their purpose as evidence coming straight from the battle zone without passing through editing phase to give the "perfect" look to the portrait.

Figure 20
Rumiyah no. 10, p. 36

Figure 21
Rumiyah no. 6, p. 29

These portraits aspire a sense of adventure with IS. More speculatively, it may also suggest that these portraits also express the idiom "boys with their toys" that evokes the idea that adult men sometimes excessively cherish and use machines, automobiles, and other gadgets. Nevertheless, the reflection of this idiom is toned down by the portrayal of religious legitimacy discussed later.

Sub-thematic 2
Religious Legitimacy & Islamic Identity

IS justifies itself and its actions by the imperative to establish sharia and Islamic Caliphate by way of physical jihad against opponents. And so the depiction of confrontation with the enemy is inseparable from religious legitimacy. To religiously legitimize its status to do so and assert itself, IS depicts its fighters with a focus on piety and virtuous acts through the employment of different visual constructions—such as worshipping, preaching, reading the Qur'an or a theological book—to visually display that IS fighters are pious worshippers, who are legitimate to defend the Ummah, thus giving legitimacy to IS as an organization to impose sharia and punish those who do not adhere by it. And second, to be good examples for the readers, followers, and potential recruits to worship Allah in the way IS expects - also appealing to those who wish to become better Muslims. These portraits aim to create a balance in the eyes of the reader giving high importance to devotional acts, and remind the reader that IS is not only about violence and war but has a reason and a purpose to the violence it commits. This builds further on legitimizing the fighters and IS as an organization legitimate to establish the Islamic caliphate. If Rumiyah had solely focused on visuals of confrontation with the enemy, the reader might forget its religious legitimacy.

In many cases, in many portraits of this sub-thematic, there is a strong light projection on the fighter's face creating contrast between the fighter and his surroundings, which

is portrayed black—total darkness (Figs. 3 & 4). In jihadi imagery, the sun, sunlight, and thus light is generally used to evoke association with the divine, legitimizing themselves spiritually as well as religiously, and it also evokes association with the afterlife (Brachman et al. 2006, 10-11).

With a digital collage of Arabic Calligraphy & arabesque

Many portraits of IS fighters are a digital collage with added Arabic calligraphy and arabesque[10] (Figs. 7, 22, & 23). These visual elements are not fixed under the sub-thematic of religious legitimacy; they are also seen in the other sub-thematics. To interpret the usage of calligraphy and arabesque in the context of IS, it is important to have a certain understanding of the relationship between calligraphy, arabesque, and Muslim identity in Islam.

10. forms of decoration based on rhythmic linear patterns such as interlacing foliage as decoration

Figure 22
Rumiyah no. 2, p. 26

Figure 23
Rumiyah no. 6, p. 33

In early history, Arabs were nomadic people and so relied on oral tradition to record information and communicate including the transmission of the Qur'an among Muslims (Lee-Niinioja 2018, 18; Bannister 2014, 2). Since the Qur'an can only be transmitted in Arabic even amongst non-Arabic speakers (El Difraoui 2013, 74), from its origin, Islamic culture has largely been based on Arabic language, becoming the lingua franca of all Muslim peoples. And so, Arabic calligraphy is the most representative symbol of Arab and Muslim culture (El Difraoui 2013, 73-74). The art of writing became the most superior in all of Islamic arts due to the centrality of the Qur'an written in Arabic and its status as the divine revelation in the Islamic faith (Lee-Niinioja 2018, 54; El Difraoui 2013, 74). And so, Arabic calligraphy attained sacramental character (Lee-Niinioja 2018, 47). Today, Arabic calligraphy is regarded as one of the greatest achievements of the Islamic civilization (Lee-Niinioja 2018, 5). Shared by all Muslims, it communicates a strong Islamic traditions and identity. As this magazine is directed towards Western audience, I cannot but question another purpose to its usage other than playing with the identity notion related to Arabic writing and calligraphy. Arabic calligraphy and arabesque became characteristics of Islamic art (Lee-Niinioja 2018, 17) and having an understanding of their importance in Islamic art, tradition, and identity gives a clear comprehension of their usage in the IS portraits. Their usage intends to touch the emotions of IS's audience by playing on the religious and identity factors and their legitimacy[11]. This evokes feelings of Islamic identity in its audiences. Although the great paradox according to El

11. They play on the notion of religious (Islamic) legitimacy even when employed in the other sub-thematics.

Difraoui (2013) is that the most radical group [i.e. Al Qaida—but also applies to IS] claiming itself to practice real Islam, a religion based on writing and not on representation of particularly any living creature; this exemplifies how jihadists' imagery although appropriates visual symbolism from Islamic culture it nevertheless capitalizes on it and manipulates it as well only to break with the traditions of Islamic history (15-16).

Sub-thematic 3
Martyrdom

To entice individuals to respond to the concept of martyrdom by way of joining IS, the group depicts its fighters, who became martyr or looking forward to becoming one, in three dominant visual constructions:

Smiling

Photographs in this visual construction focus on the fighter's facial expression of happiness (Figs. 24 & 25). These portraits humanize the IS fighters portraying them not only as individuals beyond war but also as individuals, who are happy with the path of jihad they have chosen knowing that they will eventually become martyrs for their appropriated vision of Islam.

Figure 24
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 17

Figure 25
Rumiyah no. 7, p. 36

Dead

By portraying the dead fighter extremely close and showing off his bruises (Figs. 26 & 27), the headshot portraits aim to create intimacy between the viewer and the fighter and demand empathy by the viewer towards the depicted fighter and the cause he became a martyr for. Once the feeling of empathy is achieved, I suggest that then the feeling of guilt for not joining the cause is also stirred.

Figure 26
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 3

Figure 27
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 14

Looking away into the distance

Another visual construction in this sub-thematic, I identify as the fighter looking away into the distance (Figs. 28 & 29). If we look throughout history, one of the most iconic photographs with this construction is Guerrillero Heroico picture of Che Guevara (Fig. 30), which is often accompanied by the famous quote "Hasta la Victoria Siempre"[12] that reinforces the meaning of the gaze past the camera suggesting looking into the future. Moreover, shooting the subject from a low camera angle, which is often the case, glorifies the subject as if looking up to the person in admiration (Jackson as cited in Galloway 2006). This visual construction could also be seen in portraits of Communist leaders, to some of USSR's and Nazi propaganda posters (Figs. 31, 32, 33 respectively).

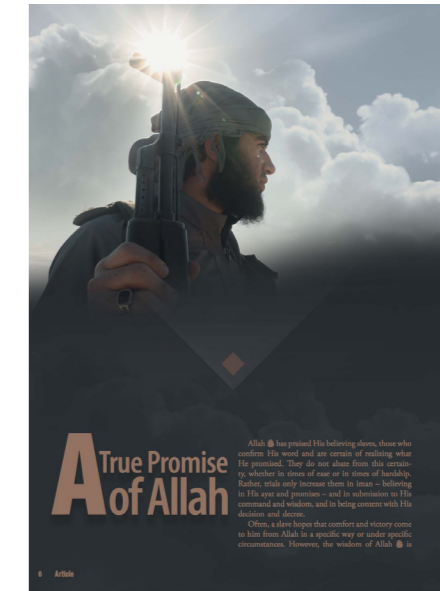12. "Towards Victory, Always"

Figure 28
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 2

Figure 29
Rumiyah no. 8, p. 6

Figure 30
Guerrillero Heroico
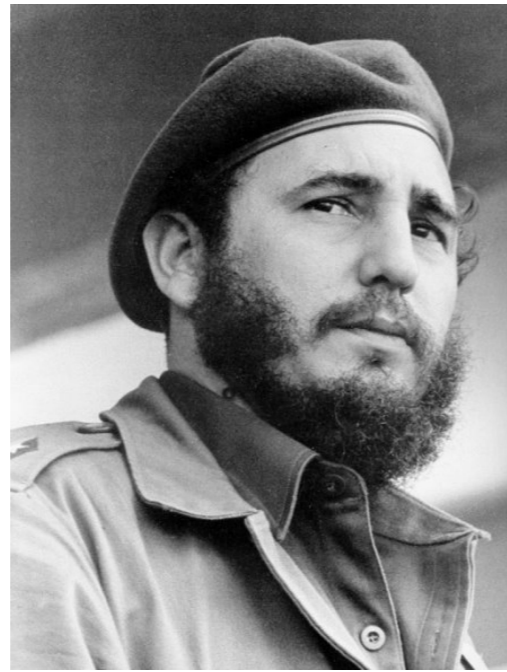Ernesto "Che" Guevara
Alberto Korda (1960)

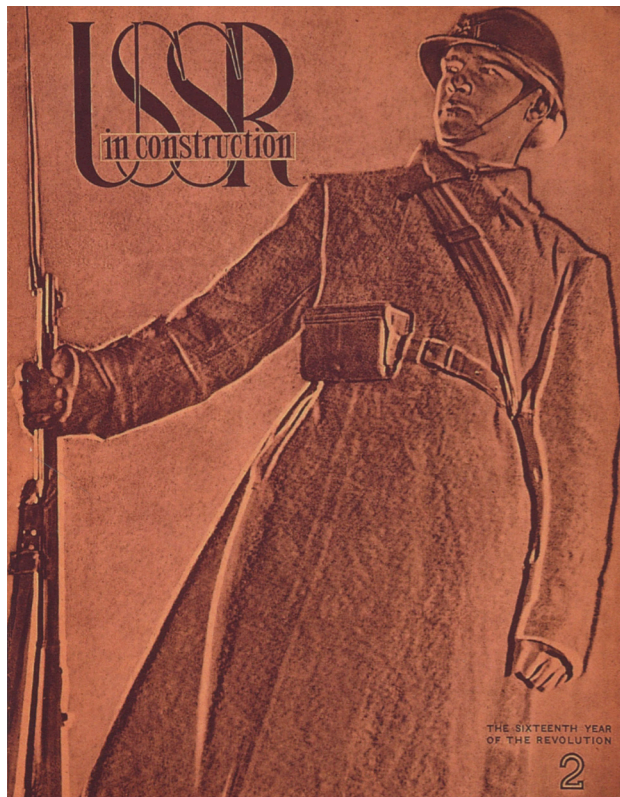**Figure 31**
Fidel Castro
Liborio Noval (1953)

Figure 32
The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army
El Lissitsky (1933)

Figure 33
Waffen SS

These visual constructions that focus on martyrdom also incorporate the sunlight glowing on the fighter or have added light/glow effect on him, or the portrait is overexposed—as if giving it light effect (Fig. 34). A dead fighter is sometimes depicted with the additional visual effect of clouds beneath him giving the illusion that he is floating on them (Fig. 10).

Figure 34
Rumiyah no. 2, p. 8

General to all sub-thematics

Colors

Colors play an important role in jihadi aesthetics (Holtmann 2013, 34), nevertheless, there is no uniformity in the choices of colors in IS fighters' portraits. In general, some portraits use earthy color tones (tonalities of browns and tans as well as orange, red, green, yellow, and blue), and some others use vivid colors without differentiation amongst the sub-thematics.

Visual composition techniques, typefaces & their colors

The IS visuals regularly employ visual composition techniques such as digital collage, Golden Ratio, and Rule of Thirds (see infographics Figs. 35 to 37). The employment of these techniques further asserts that IS puts expert effort in producing appealing visuals delivered to its audiences and that the designers and photographers of Al Hayat Media Center[13] have knowledge and expertise in visual composition principles. But there is no consistency in the usage of typefaces through out Rumiyah. For example, some articles under the same title—such as "Among the Believers Are Men", which focuses on the life story of different dead fighter in every issue (Figs. 38 to 41)—would use a serif typeface in one issue, and a sans serif in another issue. Furthermore, neither is there typeface patterns that could be traced within sub-thematics. Nevertheless, the text of the titles are consistent with the color palette of each article's main portrait.

13. The central media organization of the IS. For more information about Al Hayat Media Center, see Annex II.
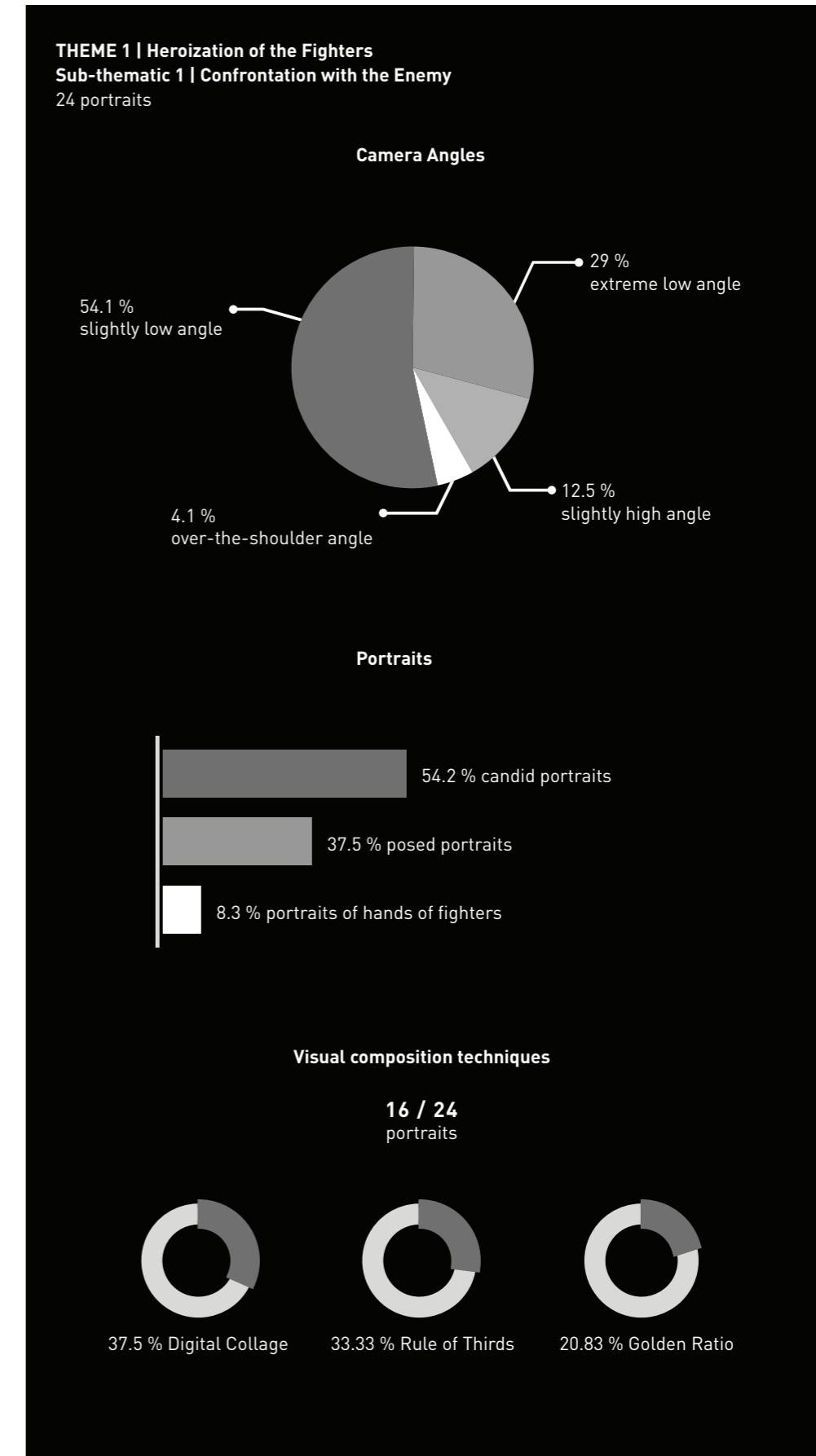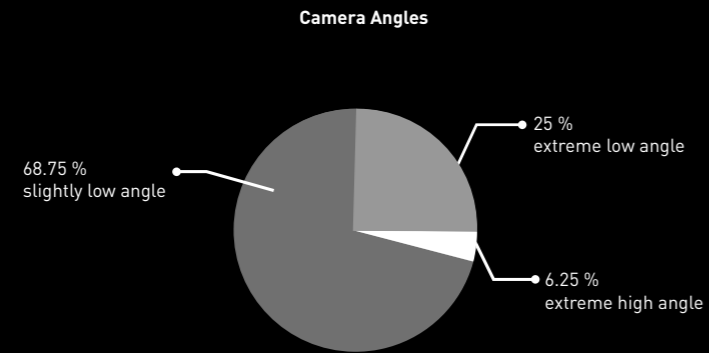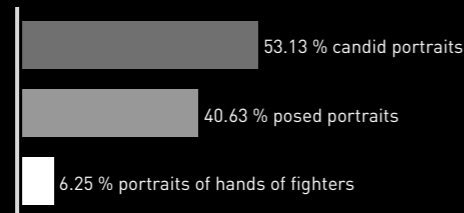

THEME 1 | Heroization of the Fighters
Sub-thematic 1 | Confrontation with the Enemy
24 portraits

Figure 35

Camera Angles

29 % extreme low angle
54.1 % slightly low angle
12.5 % slightly high angle
4.1 % over-the-shoulder angle

Portraits

54.2 % candid portraits
37.5 % posed portraits
8.3 % portraits of hands of fighters

Visual composition techniques

16 / 24 portraits

37.5 % Digital Collage   33.33 % Rule of Thirds   20.83 % Golden Ratio

Camera Angles

25 %
extreme low angle

68.75 %
slightly low angle

6.25 %
extreme high angle

By shooting the fighter at a low camera angle IS reinforces the notions of not only bravery and strength of its fighters but also their religious legitimacy and superiority to also, in its turn, entice its audience to get inspired by them and want to become one of them by way of idolizing the fighters within the notion of piety.

Portraits

53.13 % candid portraits

40.63 % posed portraits

6.25 % portraits of hands of fighters

Visual composition techniques

19 / 32
portraits

18.75 % Digital Collage

34.38 % Rule of Thirds

18.75 % Golden Ratio

3 % Symmetry

Figure 36

Figure 37

Camera Angles

11. 11 %
eye-level angle

80.56 %
slightly low angle

8.33 %
extreme low angle

Portraits

55.56 % posed portraits

16.67 % candid portraits

Visual composition techniques

18 / 36
portraits

25 % Digital Collage
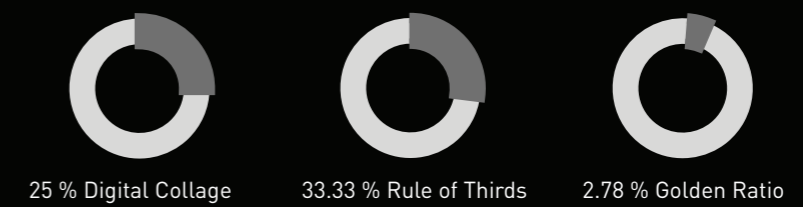
33.33 % Rule of Thirds

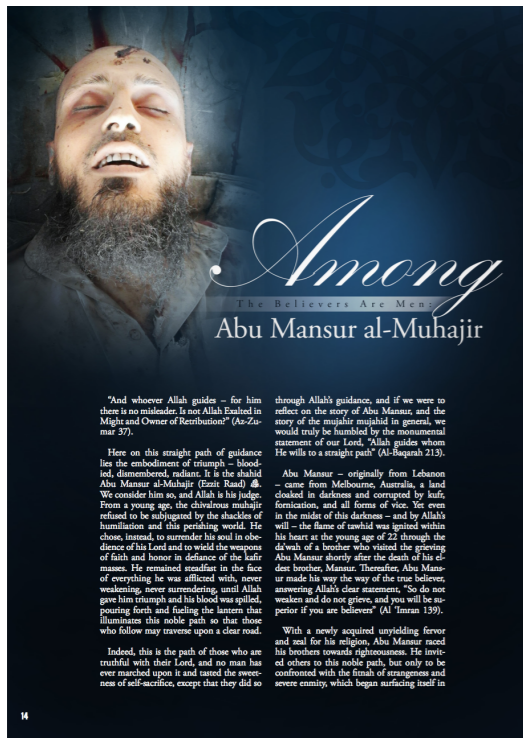2.78 % Golden Ratio

46

47

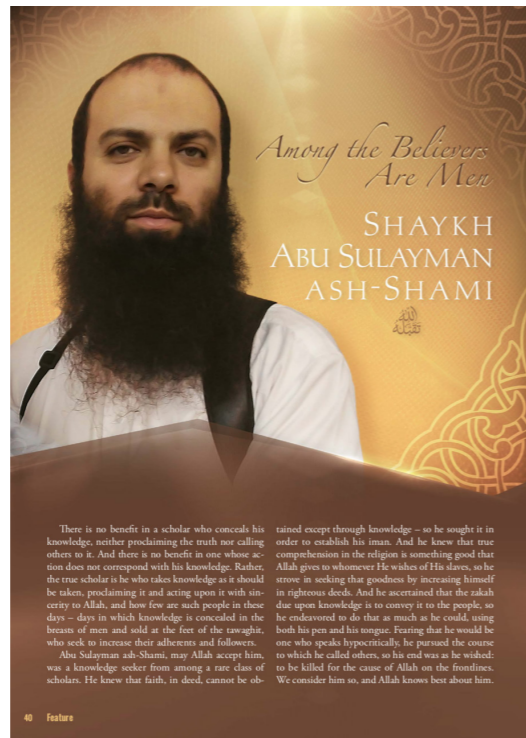**Figure 38**
Rumiyah no. 1, p. 14

Figure 39
Rumiyah no. 8, p. 40
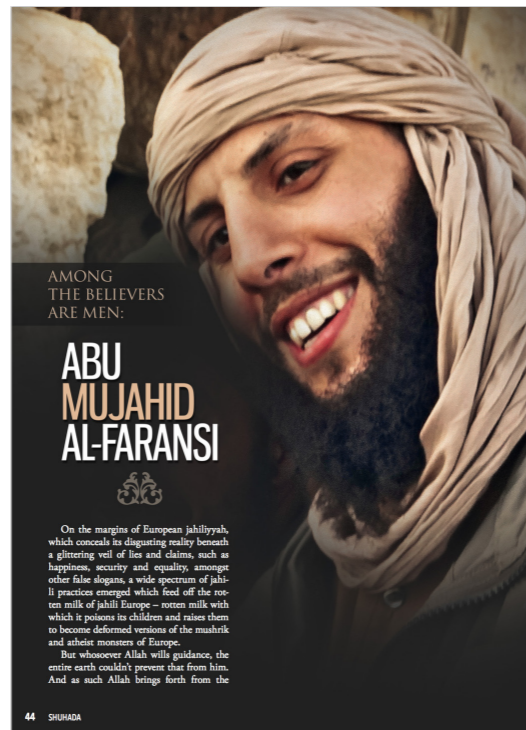

Figure 40
Rumiyah no. 3, p. 14

Figure 41
Rumiyah no. 11, p. 44

Digital collage

There is a sporadic use of digital collage with or without Arabic calligraphy and arabesque. And this usage is not restricted to one sub-thematic nor to one visual construction. The Arabic calligraphy and the arabesque illustrations also use earthy color tones (tonalities of browns and tans as well as orange, red, green, yellow, and blue), and some others use vivid colors—keeping consistency and coherence with the overall page and the elements it incorporates.

Camera angle

The majority of the portraits in Heroization of Fighters theme employ low camera angle, which as mentioned earlier, has the power to make the subject look powerful or threatening (Baranowski & Hecht 2017, 2)—although they are not always extremely low angles but are more subtle and slightly low[14].

14. For camera angles employed in each theme and sub-thematic, see Documentation Blog

Continuity & fluidity of sub-thematics

As mentioned in the introduction of the technical analysis section, it is important to note that not only there is a continuity among the sub-thematics but they are also tightly interlinked, and so the visual constructions are not fixed to one sub-thematics; they are interchangeable and fluid as IS portraits fall into more than one sub-thematic, and share different visual constructions from different

sub-thematics, especially if the visual is a digital collage and consists of more than one portrait; for example, Figure 14. Below I describe thoroughly this visual to demonstrate the different sub-thematics and visual constructions it includes.
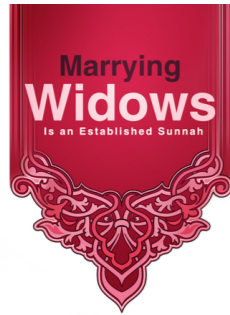
Figure 14 is a digital collage visual titled "THE WILL TO FIGHT". As a whole, this digital collage, which seems to consist of a general narrative, features 5 different images creating a banner similar to that of a Hollywood movie. On the top-left of the digital collage, there is the title of the video written in upper case letters, and in white and gray gradient colors: the words "THE WILL" and "FIGHT" are separated with the preposition "TO" and a red line - this separation gives further emphasis to the separated words. Behind the title, there is the depiction of a shadowy fighter on a truck with his machine gun (sub-thematic 1: Confrontation with the enemy; visual construction: Depiction of the fighter as shadowy/silhouetted—all black). This might have been an added effect to make the title more visible. Below it, there is the portrait of an imam. The Iranian flag behind him, as well as, the superimposed word Iran in Arabic suggest that he is an Iranian imam thus Shiite Muslim. The designer has placed a target on his head reinforcing the enmity between Iran, Shiism, and the Islamic State. Next to this depiction, the designer has place an illustration of a plane, which seems to refer as written to a B-1B lancer, a heavy bomber used by the United States Air Force —another enemy of IS. If we look next to the plane illustration, we can see another fighter—shot with a neutral camera angle pointing his

machine gun towards the Iranian imam (sub-thematic 1: Confrontation with the enemy; visual construction: Shooting position). Almost in the middle of the composition, the designer has placed a frowning, confident looking fighter holding his gun, and who is photographed at an extreme— low camera—angle giving the illusion of grandeur; a low-angle shot has the power to make the subject look powerful or threatening (sub-thematic 1: Confrontation with the enemy; visual construction: Straight posture with legs spread). The right side of this fighter's figure is contoured in orange as if conveying the emission of light from him. Furthermore, on the left and right sides he is separated from the rest of the photos with dashed orange and yellow lines , as if emphasizing on this fighter thus furthermore reinforcing his central position in the composition and reinforcing his impressiveness. On the right side of the visual, the designer has placed the sepia colored portrait of another fighter - shot with eye-level camera angle - with his gun - this time with a full smile. The background of this photograph is the landscape of what might be from the province of Anbar, and a smoke from possibly a fighting or an explosion scene (sub-thematic 3: Martyrdom; visual construction: Smiling). The fighter's smile is contradictory to the attitude of the fighter in the center. Nevertheless, this smile is of high importance because it suggests that the IS fighters are happy to willingly fight and wage jihad in the name of Allah for the Islamic caliphate.

Theme 2

Allegorization of Women

We cannot see any Arabic writing calligraphy in the visuals addressing women; instead we can see incorporation of arabesque in some layouts of visuals. When there is a use of a photograph of an object, then the layout does not incorporate any arabesque. The use of arabesque accompanies only solid color backgrounds (Figs. 13 & 42). Moreover, more than half of the visuals of objects are overexposed—as if giving them light effect.

Figure 42
Rumiyah no. 4, p. 32

Colors

Similarly to the first theme, we can see the usage of the colors yellow, green, orange, red, blue, grey and brown. Nevertheless, the color pink is added to the color palette in the visuals representing women. Pink, like many other colors, has socio-cultural connotations to it—today, particularly in Western cultures, in which the color pink is associated "with femininity and its stereotypical features, such as softness and delicacy, with childhood and innocence" (Koller 2008, 396). There is a holistic approach in the relation established between visual elements, colors, and language in the articles addressing women in Rumiyah in a way that the visuals reinforce the language used in the text, and its turn, "given the cultural association of pink with femininity, the function of the pink titles or the arabesque of the articles denote that those articles are addressing women i.e. feminine (Koller 2008, 410), which also reinforces the language used (Koller 2008, 410). And so as Koller states, "[i]n artefacts and visual texts, pink is seen as gendering textual referents and as attracting female readers' attention, often in tandem with verbal components" (Koller 2008, 418). Marketing and consumer culture have certainly helped disseminate the pink color concept across Western cultures (Koller 2008, 404) as well as Eastern cultures; I remember while living in Lebanon or when I would visit Syria, in terms of the stereotypic representation of pink it was not different than in Western cultures. On the other hand, pink can also be associated with lust and sexuality (Koller 2008, 396); it is in contradiction to the connotation discussed

above but this can be explained by the different shades of pink, their brightness, saturation, and other colors pink is accompanied with that highlight different connotations—"an increase in brightness and saturation promotes sexual connotations," whereas, the combination of white and pink triggers association with innocence (Koller 2008, 404-405). And so, going back to the IS visuals representing women, the pink used is bright and highly saturated, thus contradict to message and intention of the Rumiyah articles.

Conclusion

In the current state of this research I have identified two themes within Islamic State's self-representational photographs: (1) Heroization of Fighters and (2) Allegorization of Women. The first theme plays on notions of IS fighters' bravery, strength, heroism, collective belonging, and religious devotion. This theme can be distinguished into five sub-thematics: (1) Confrontation with the Enemy, (2) Religious legitimacy and Islamic Identity, (3) Martyrdom, (4) Collective Belonging, (5) The Future of the Caliphate. All these sub-thematics can be characterized as Pull Factors—grievances on a personal level such as acceptance, sense of identity and belonging, search for adventure, self-worth, and spiritual comfort (Nemr 2017; UNESCO 2016, 12). These sub-thematics were qualitatively assessed both in isolation, and in respect to each other, revealing an apparent fluidity among the visual constructions and techniques across the sub-thematics. Whereas the visuals representing women completely exclude any depiction of the female gender, and instead the visuals addressing

them are elements that reinforce the expected behavior of women to construct ideal pious and devout Muslim women, who are subordinates to the jihadi fighter. The visual constructions and techniques employed by the Islamic State to the portraits of its fighters elicit and modulate to aspire its audience's perception and emotions to join the group. I can thus far conclude that this elicitation and modulation of perception and emotions is achieved through the visual manipulation of (1) preconceived ideas of heroes, (2) Hollywood and shooter video game styles, while combining with manipulation of (3) elements of Islam, (4) Islamic traditions and identity, to give itself religious legitimacy.

Now that I have an understanding of the visual rhetorics violent extremist groups such as IS adopt, I will analyze the visual rhetorics existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns adopt to understand what visual techniques these existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns employ to affect their target audience. As there is a lack of research from a design-discipline perspective—particularly of the visual techniques that would effectively counter jihadi narratives—I view this as an important step to effectively assist in developing designs for counter-narratives and radicalization prevention activities.

2.3 Objectives, Corpus & Method

Objectives

To assist in the development of jihadi radicalization prevention campaigns, along with understanding the visual techniques IS uses to influence its audience's emotions, this research analyzes the visual techniques used in existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns to gain knowledge of successes and failures of these campaigns. This research aims to publish a repertoire of (1) visual techniques the IS employs as well as (2) effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives.

Corpus

This research analyzes existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns that aim to prevent radicalization on the Internet through the development and dissemination of alternative narratives. As I have advanced knowledge of English, Arabic, and French, I will focus on online campaigns in these three languages. Another criterion would be campaigns that have young adults as their target audiences. The number of existing campaigns in these three languages targeting young adults is yet to be determined through online research. So far, I have found 15 campaigns in the database of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)[15]: two in Arabic, twelve in English, and one in both English and French.

15. http://www. counternarratives. org/html/case-studies

Method

"Images work by producing effects every time they are looked at" (Rose 2001, 12). To understand the persuasion methods that aim to have an effect on the target audience of existing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns, and therefore understand the affect techniques used by these campaigns, I will conduct rhetorical design analysis, which proceeds through the following steps: (1) Formal analysis that is the description of the formal and factual description of the elements seen in the design object such as content, format, composition and photography techniques used without any speculations, and information about its context (Schneller 2015, 339), (2) Effect analysis and investigation of the specific design means in correlation with specific intent, (3) Identification of counter-intentional elements, (4) Design rebriefing or informing future design.

As the intention of counter-jihadi narrative campaigns is to prevent radicalization, to deradicalize, and to challenge and counter jihadi hate speech online. I expect these campaigns to consists of rhetorical communication, which is the intentional production of effective impact on the target audience (Joost & Scheuermann 2006, 5). And so, the results of this analysis method will allow me to detect certain visual techniques that are responsible for certain emotions triggered in audiences of counter-jihadi narrative campaigns. It is important to investigate if these campaigns achieve their aims of intentional effectiveness— thus analyzing their successes and failures. Next, in order to assist in designing effective counter-jihadi narrative

campaigns targeting audiences who would also be potentially Islamic State's target audience, it would be crucial to compare affect techniques employed in counter-jihadi narrative campaigns to the affect techniques used in the visuals of the Islamic State. These steps, would guide the way to generating a repertoire of effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives.

2.4 Work Packages & Timeline

The research will be carried out over a period of 48 months, and is made up of **5 work packages (WP)**.

WP1 Literature Review

This work package allows to have an in-depth understanding of existing efforts in prevention of violent extremism and counter-jihadi narratives campaigns from the perspectives of different disciplines. It also allows to get an understanding of how to monitor and evaluate counter-jihadi narrative campaigns to measure their impact—successes and failures.

WP2 Data Collection & Analysis

(a) Selection of corpus of existing online counter-jihadi narrative campaigns

In this work package, through online research, I will determine the number of existing online Arabic, English, and French counter-jihadi narrative campaigns that target young adults—in addition to the 15 campaigns I have already compiled from the ISD database.

(b) Rhetorical Design Analysis of the selected corpus of counter-jihadi narrative campaigns through the following steps:

(1) Formal analysis

In this step, I will compile the factual description of the elements seen in the design object such as content, format, composition and photography techniques used without any speculations.

(2) Prior to the next step of the analysis method, I will detect themes addressed in each counter-jihadi narrative campaign.

(3) Effect analysis and investigation of the specific design means in correlation with specific intent

Next, I will conduct a technical analysis through which I will investigate the design of each theme and the visual techniques it employs. For example, if a counter-jihadi narrative campaign has 'identity' as one of its themes, I will investigate the particular design of that theme and the visual techniques the design of the 'identity' theme employs to create the particular feelings of belonging and identifying with a particular group.

(4) Identification of counter-intentional elements

In this step, I will identify if there are elements that backfire the prevention of radicalization, and countering the hate speech of jihadi groups. The purpose of this step is to investigate if the counter-intentional elements play a role in the success or failure of a particular counter-jihadi narrative campaign. To be able to identify the successes

and failures of campaigns, I will either find existing evaluations of campaigns or evaluate them myself using the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's 'The Counter-Narrative Monitoring And Evaluation Handbook' (Reynolds & Tuck 2016) and 'The Impact of Counter-Narratives' (Silverman et al. 2016)—even though these two publications do not explore the visual techniques that would render counter-jihadi narrative campaigns effective.

(5) Design rebriefing or informing future design

In this step, I will produce the repertoire of effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives.

WP3 Comparison of affect techniques

To assist in developing effective counter-jihadi narrative campaigns targeting audience who would also be potentially Islamic State's target audience, it would be crucial to compare and identify if there are any commonalities between the affect techniques employed in the Islamic State's self-representational photographs and counter-jihadi narrative campaigns. For example, in many portraits the Islamic State incorporates visual techniques such as digital collage of Arabic Calligraphy and arabesque to evoke feelings of Islamic identity in its target audiences; if a counter-jihadi narrative campaign has identity as one of its themes, and if it also evokes Islamic identity, in this work package, I will first compare the visual techniques employed in both the jihadi narrative and the counter-

jihadi one. Then, I will compare the feelings of Islamic identity these visual techniques evoke.

WP4 Publication

(a) Publication in a scientific journal

Journal options: Journal for Deradicalization, International Communication Gazette, and Visual Communication Quarterly. The reason for these options is discussed in the "Output" section of this proposal.

(b) Online dissemination of the repertoire of effective visual techniques for counter-jihadi narratives

The aim of the online dissemination of the repertoire is not only to reach specialist audience such as academics, researchers, experts in counter-jihadi narratives, designers, and organization personnels producing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns, but to also be accessible to the interested public—I believe that such knowledge should be accessible to everyone. The data will be disseminated on websites of: (1) universities I will reach out to such as Bern University of the Arts and University of Bern (2) conferences I will present in, and (3) non-governmental organizations that I detect to be interested.

WP5 Conferences & workshops

Throughout the four years period, I will participate once a year in a conference and organize a workshop. The

conference of choice would focus on extremism and counter narratives to present the state of the research and findings acquired up-to-the moment of the particular conference. Attending and participating in conferences in different countries—not just in Switzerland and Europe but also in North America and the Middle East—would increase the propagation of this research and it would also increase the chance to get feedback from experts and meet academics and researchers working in the field of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). And so, I will attend and participate in conferences held in different countries such as the annual Countering Violent Extremism Research Conference held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, which provides a platform for CVE researchers to share ongoing research within CVE and participate in discussions on effective solutions to

counter extremism. Another platform that would be interesting to be part of is the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), which is an EU Commissioned network of practitioners—not only police authorities but also teachers, social workers, civil society representatives, healthcare professionals, etc.—from around Europe who work with already radicalized people and those who are vulnerable to radicalization[16]. As to the workshop—also aimed to be held in different countries—along with also presenting the research and its findings, the aim is to create a dialogue and have an exchange with designers and organization personnels, who focus on producing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns, about their expertise, and if its possible to test the repertoire of the effective visual techniques in the counter-jihadi narratives campaigns they are working on.

16. https://ec.europa.
eu/home-affairs/
what-we-do/networks/
radicalisation_
awareness_network_en

2025
04
03
2024
Q1
04
03
2023
Q1
04
03
2022
Q1
04
03
2021
Q1
04
03
2020
Q1

MAD Examination

PhD / Funding Applications

WP1 Literature Review
(1) on violent extremism prevention
(2) on counter-jihadi narratives

WP2 Data Collection & Analysis
(a) Selection of corpus of existing online counter-jihadi narrative campaigns—
(b) Rhetorical Design Analysis of the selected corpus

WP3 Comparison of affect techniques
of IS self-representational photographs and selected counter-jihadi narrative campaigns

WP4 Publication
(a) Publication in a scientific journal
(b) Online dissemination of the repertoire of effective visual techniques for counter-jihadi narratives

WP5 Conferences and workshops

Buffer period

2.5 Output

This research will have two outputs that will be realized in "WP4 Publication".

The first output of this research will be a publication in a scientific journal such as Journal for Deradicalization, International Communication Gazette, and Visual Communication Quarterly. The choice for these options as possible target journals is due to previous studies focusing on the communication strategies of the Islamic State published in these journals.

The second output of this research will be the online dissemination of a repertoire of visual techniques the IS employs and effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives. The data will be disseminated on websites of: (1) universities such as: Bern University of the Arts and University of Bern (2) conferences, and (3) non-governmental organizations.

2.6 Limitation

This research has multiple limitations. First, although visual effects are context-sensitive, the method itself neglects the dependence of visual effects on subjective factors such as taste, interests, and values, on actual disposition, needs, and previous knowledge, and experiences; all these subjective factors cause indeterminacy of effects (Schneller 2015, 340). Second, due to the language limitation, the research corpus consists only of counter-jihadi narrative campaigns produced in English, French, and Arabic. This neglects counter-jihadi narratives produced in other different languages, and therefore, creates a gap in the understanding of counter-jihadi narrative campaigns in languages other than these three. To eliminate this gap, in the future, this research could collaborate with researchers who speak other languages to analyze counter-jihadi narratives produced in languages other than Arabic, French, and English; this would further allow to understand if there are differences manifested among different languages and different cultures across the globe. The third limitation is the absence of engagement with the target audience—radicalized individuals or individuals prone to radicalization—and instead the repertoire will be theoretically constructed until employed by a counter-jihadi narrative campaign.

2.7 Risk

While producing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns does carry multiple potential risks that need to be taken into consideration—such as local legal and cultural contexts in which the target audience interact with particular counter-narrative campaigns (Reynolds & Tuck 2016, 25)—gaining an understanding of affect techniques employed by Islamic State and existing online counter-jihadi narrative campaigns to produce a repertoire of visual techniques to assist in the development of prevention campaigns does not carry such potential risks. However, while the preliminary stages of this research carried psychological risks due to violent visual content produced by IS, the current research proposal research does not carry such risks since the selected corpus to be analyzed will be of existing online counter-jihadi narrative campaigns. The "WP3 Comparison of affect techniques" will include the IS corpus analyzed in the current research. Nevertheless, I can say that I have built resilience to the material after looking at them for two years and a half. Another risk WP3 carries is the fact that I will have Islamic State material on my computer when I travel around for conferences. This risk could be reduced by registering my name and my research with the Federal Office of Police of Switzerland (as Dr. Arne Scheuermann registered my name for the preliminary stages of this research), which is responsible for the coordination between cantonal police corps and between Swiss and foreign police forces.

2.8 Budget

This budget has been prepared with the objective of being financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

I plan to devote 100% of my time to the proposed doctoral research over a period of four years.

The desired salary is based on the extract from Annex 12 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations of the SNSF document found on the SNSF website[17].

The total desired amount applied for is CHF 206,400.

17. http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/snsf-general-implementation-regulations-for-the-funding-regulations-e.pdf

Resources	Cost (per year)	Total (over 4 years)
Doctoral student (Maria Mahdessian)'s salary	CHF 50,000	CHF 200,000
Material resources for 1 conference and 1 workshop per year	CHF 1,600	CHF 6,400
Accommodations	CHF 600.-	CHF 2,400
Travels	CHF 600.-	CHF 2,400
Printing	CHF 200.-	CHF 800.-
Consumable materials (papers, pens...)	CHF 100.-	CHF 400.-
Snacks and drinks for workshops	CHF 100.-	CHF 400.-
		CHF 206,400

2.9 Relevance & Social Impact of the Project

Given the proliferation of jihadi content online, there is an urgent need to develop effective counter-narratives. Investigating the visual communication of jihadi organizations such as the Islamic State from a design-discipline perspective is at its early stages (Scheuermann & Beifuss 2017, 29), and as there is a wide gap between studies conducted from the perspective of other disciplines and that of design, to achieve this, first, it is crucial to have a thorough understanding of the visual rhetoric jihadi groups such as the IS adopt. Second, it is also important to inform graphic designers of the visual rhetoric adopted to effectively assist in developing designs to counter extremist narratives (Scheuermann & Beifuss 2017) in radicalization prevention activities. To inform graphic designers and assist in developing designs to counter extremist narratives, I wish (1) to publish this research— a repertoire of visual techniques the IS employs and effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives—in a scientific journal, (2) to present it in one conference a year focusing on countering violent extremism narratives, and finally, (3) to give one workshop a year over a period of four years to designers and organization personnels focused on producing counter-jihadi narrative campaigns. After the online dissemination of a repertoire of effective visual techniques that could be employed in activities countering jihadi narratives, this research aims to turn into a long term project and becoming a non-profit and becoming a

non-profit and non-governmental practice-oriented research agency continuing on conducting research to stay up-to-date and up-to-speed with communication strategies jihadi groups adopt while applying the research into practice through a free online platform that aims to prevent jihadi radicalization among young adults.

2.10 Ethical Consideration

The analysis of the Islamic State visuals of self-representation comprises multiple ethical considerations. First, the choice of workplace to view and analyze these portraits is crucial due to the fact that many visuals consist of violent and sensitive content. Therefore, it is important not to expose other individuals to such visuals unless they are consulted. This means that whenever I, as a researcher, work with IS visual materials— WP3 Comparison of affect techniques—have to be vigilant of my working environment and who is surrounding me. This leads me to the issue of desensitization toward the violent and sensitive content of the IS. The repeated exposure to IS visuals diminished my emotional responsiveness to the group's violent and sensitive content. This adds the danger of forgetting that others viewing these visuals are not desensitized. Therefore, it is ethically best practice to obscure or pixelate these violent and sensitive content of IS visuals when publishing or presenting the research. As to the production of a repertoire of the visual techniques the IS employs and the effective visual techniques that could be employed in counter-jihadi narratives, it is of high importance to consider that the latter depends highly on the cultural context of the community in which the particular counter-jihadi narrative is put forward; and those experts using the repertoire as a guideline need to be aware of this consideration.

2.11 Importance of workplace

As the current state of this research is part of the ongoing larger project "Counter Terrorism Communication Design" conducted by the research group VIRAL in the Institute of Design Research at the Bern University of the Arts HKB and headed by Dr. Arne Scheuermann, who is also the main supervisor of this current state of this research and one of the researchers who developed Rhetorical Design Analysis as a method, having Dr. Scheuermann as a supervisor for the proposed research would be an excellent fit. Moreover, it seems reasonable to choose the Institute of Design Research at the Bern University of the Arts HKB as the workplace.

2.12 Bibliography

Abdelrahim, Y. A. A. (2019). Visual Analysis of ISIS Discourse Strategies and Types in Dabiq and Rumiyah Online Magazines. Visual Communication Quarterly 26 (2), 63–78. Retrieved November 1, 2019, from https://doi.org/10.1080/1555139 3.2019.1586546.

Australian Journal of International Affairs, 69(6), 729–752. http://dx.doi.org/10.108%3071847.2014.990810. Retrieved June 18, 2018.

Bannister, A.G. (2014). Retelling the Tale: A Computerized Oral-Formulaic Analysis of the Qur'an. San Diego: Presented at the 2014 International Qur'an Studies Association Meeting. Retrieved December 1, 2019, from https://www.academia. edu/9490706/Retelling_the_Tale_A_Computerised_Oral-Formulaic_Analysis_of_the_Qur_an.

Baranowski, A. M., & Hecht, H. (2017). Effect of Camera Angle on Perception of Trust and Attractiveness. Empirical Studies of the Arts 0(0) 1–11. DOI: 10.1177/0276237417710762. Retrieved December 14, 2019, from https://www.researchgate. net/publication/317237444_Effect_of_Camera_Angle_on_ Perception_of_Trust_and_Attractiveness.

Beifuss, A., and Bellini, F. T. (2013). Branding Terror: the Logotypes and Iconography of Insurgent Groups and Terrorist Organizations. New York: Merrell.

Brachman, J. Boudali, L. K., and Ostovar, A. (2006). The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda. New York: Combating Terrorism Center. Retrieved March 30 2018, from https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-imagery-project/.

Bröckling, M., Fritsch, C., Haider, M., and Yalman, T. (2018). Radicalizing Narratives of the "So-Called" Islamic State. Journal for Deradicalization, 17, 240–293. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc62/fda0178beb19ec036b05f1afba520f0693a2.pdf?_ga=2.99818142.1693257581.1576533719-673315000.1576533719.

El Difraoui, A. (2013). Al-Qaida par limage: la prophétie du martyre. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Fahmy, S. S. (2019). The Age of Terrorism Media: The Visual Narratives of the Islamic State Groups Dabiq Magazine. International Communication Gazette, 1–29. Retrieved October 1, 2019 , from https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519843412.

Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary (2012), s.v. "affect." The Free Dictionary (2012). Retrieved October 3, 2018, from https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/affect.

Farwell, J. P. (2014). The Media Strategy of ISIS. Survival, 56(6), 49–55. https://doi.org/10.108‰396338.2014.98543 6. Retrieved October 7, 2017.

Ghosh, T., and Basnett, P. (2017). Analysis of Rumiyah Magazine. IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) 22, 16–22. Retrieved May 21, 2018, from http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol. 22 Issue7/Version-12/C2207121622.pdf.

Grinnell, D., Macdonald, S., Mair, D., and Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2018). Who Disseminates Rumiyah? Examining the Relative Influence of Sympathiser and Non-Sympathiser Twitter Users. The Hague: 2nd European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) Advisory Group conference. Retrieved October 13, 2018, from https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/who-disseminates-rumiyah-examining-relative-influence-of-sympathiser-and-non-sympathiser-twitter-users.

Hassan, A. (2017). De-legitimising Al-Baghdadi's 'Caliphate'. Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, 9(11), 1-6. Retrieved December 5, 2019, from www.jstor.org/stable/26351565.

Holtmann, P. (2013). The Symbols of Online Jihad - How Jihadis Foster Central Myths in E-Environments to Guide Online-Groups. In Rüdiger Lohlker (Ed.), Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations, 2, 9–63. Göttingen: V&R unipress. Doi: 10.14220/9783737000680. Retrieved October 26, 2019, from http://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=1005261;keyword=Jihadism:Online%20Discourses%20and%20Representation.

International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. (2018). From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State. Department of War Studies, King's College London. London: ICSR. Retrieved March 15, 2019, from https://icsr.info/2018/07/23/from-daesh-to-diaspora-tracing-the-women-and-minors-of-islamic-state/.

Ingram, H.J. (2014). Three Traits of the Islamic State's Information Warfare, The RUSI Journal, 159(6), 4-11, DOI: 10.108%3071847.2014.990810. Retrieved June 18, 2018.

Ingram, H. J. (2015). The strategic logic of Islamic State information operations.

Ingram, H. J. (2016). An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine. Australian Journal of Political Science. https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2016.1174188. Retrieved June 18, 2018.

Institute for Strategic Dialogue. (2019). Hate Speech and Radicalisation Online. The OCCI Research Report. Retrieved October 29, 2019, from https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ISD-Hate-Speech-and-Radicalisation-Online-English-Draft-2.pdf.

Jackson, A. quoted in Galloway, G. (2006, June 12). A Very Modern Icon. New Statesman. Retrieved April 28, 2019, from https://www.newstatesman.com/node/164522.

Joost, G., and Scheuermann, A. (2006). Design as Rhetoric—Basic Principles For Design Research," Swiss Design Network (Hg.): Drawing New Territories. Zürich: 3rd Symposium On Design Research. Retrieved October 10, 2018, from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/55ae/2346ebaecf7c6e362834338b0101208e41a4.pdf.

Koller, V. (2008). `Not just a colour: pink as a gender and sexuality marker in visual communication. Visual Communication, 7(4), 395–423. doi: 10.1177/1470357208096209. Retrieved December 11 2019, from https://www.academia.edu/218416/_More_than_just_a_colour_Pink_as_a_gender_and_sexuality_marker_in_visual_communication_.

Lee-Niinioja, H. S. (2018). Islamic Calligraphy and Muslim Identity: a Case study of Kuwait. Novel&Nobel Communications. Retrieved December 1, 2019, from https://www.academia.edu/30356427/Islamic_Calligraphy_and_Muslim_Identity_a_Case_study_of_Kuwait.

Nemr, C. (2017, August 18). Why violent extremist narratives resonate [Video file]. Retrieved November 8, 2019, from https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=_6-KniTPe6Y.

Ostovar, A. (2017). The Visual Culture of Jihad. In T. Hegghammer (Ed.), Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists, 82-107. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2017). RAN Guidelines for Effective Alternative and Counter-Narrative Campaigns (GAMMMA+). RAN Issue Paper. Retrieved November 6, 2019, from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-c-and-n/docs/ran_cn_guidelines_effective_alternative_counter_narrative_campaigns_31_12_2017_en.pdf.

Reynolds, L., and Tuck, H. (2016). The Counter-Narrative Monitoring & Evaluation Handbook. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Retrieved October 30, 2019, from https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CN-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Handbook.pdf.

Rose, G. (2001). Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials. London: Sage Publications.

Silverman, T., Steward, C.J., Amanullah, Z., Birdwell, J. (2016). The Impact of Counter-Narratives: Insights from a year-long cross-platform pilot study of counter-narrative curation, targeting, evaluation and impact. London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Retrieved October 30, 2019, from https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Impact-of-Counter-Narratives_ONLINE_1.pdf.

Scheuermann, A., and Beifuss, A. (Eds.). (2017). The Visual Rhetoric of the Islamic State – an Editorial Design Case Study of the IS Magazine Dabiq, HKB Research Paper No. 16. Bern: Hochschule der Künste Bern HKB.

Schneller, A. (2015). Design Rhetoric: Studying the Effects of Designed Objects. Nature and Culture, 10(3), 333–356. doi: 10.3167/nc.2015.100305. Retrieved October 25, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/26206098.

Spiller, R., Breidenich, C., and Hilgers-Yilmaz, U. (2016). Visual Rhetoric of the Islamic State (IS): Persuasion in the Field of Terror. Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Design History and Design Studies. São Paolo: Blucher Design Proceedings. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from DOI 10.5151/despro-icdhs2016-038.

Tuck, H., and Silverman, T. (2016). The Counter-Narrative Handbook. London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Retrieved March 19, 2018, from http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf.

UNESCO. (2016). A Teacher's guide on the prevention of violent extremism. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved December 13, 2019, from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244676.

Winter, C. (2015). Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'. London: Quilliam. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/documenting-the-virtual-caliphate/.

Image sources

Figure 16 Retrieved on January, 20 2019. http://www.im-pawards.com/1998/saving_private_ryan_ver1.html.

Figure 17 Retrieved on May 31 2019. https://www.gamer-fuzion.com/cod-infinite-warfare-modern-warfare-remas-tered-wallpapers/.

Figure 30 Retrieved on May 30 2019. https://commons.wi-kimedia.org/wiki/Category:Guerrillero_Heroico#/media/File:Heroico1.jpg.

Figure 31 كاسترو يقدم مذكرات. February 15, 2012. Kassioun Newspaper. Retrieved on May 20 2019. http://kassioun.org/more-categories/art-and-culture/item/40817-14474.

Figure 32 King, D. (2016). Red Star Over Russia—A Visu-al History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Death of Stalin. London, UK: Tate Publishing. Page 222.

Figure 33 Retrieved on May 7 2019. https://allthatsinter-esting.com/nazi-propaganda-posters#18.

3. Annex

I. Islamic State (IS) (also known as ISIL[18], ISIS[19], & Daesh[20])

Founded in the 1990s by Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, Islamic State is a militant organization that claims to follow a fundamentalist Salafi-jihadist doctrine of Sunni Islam. Its goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate governed by its interpretation of the Qur'an and sharia, and to exercise Islam as the first three generations of Muslims (Wood 2019, 6). IS emphasizes on: (1) the unity of the Ummah, (2) Tawhid[21], (3) and rejection of religious innovations, while adhering to the strict scriptural interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith to practice its imposed form of Islam (Haykel 2014, 38-39), and those who do not adhere to this imposition are subjected to punishment. According to Tariq Ramadan (2017) sharia has been reduced to a system of rules and practices often perverting its meaning and giving it a negative connotation (156), and has become one of the most misunderstood terms used today often related to "brutal and literalist application of a criminal code" with provisions that include cutting off hands and imposing corporal punishments (145-146). This strict understanding of sharia has resulted in dangerous reductions appropriated by political, religious leaders, and jihadi groups, who diminished it to literalist application and transformed it into a resistance tool against colonialism to oppose Western political regimes, their legal systems, and their values, as a consequence (Ramadan 2017, 155). Today, jihadi groups such as IS claim to apply the sharia by

18. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

19. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

20. Arabic acronym of the group's name

21. The Tawhid is the belief in the oneness of God and is a key component in Islam (Ramadan 2017, 55). It is the first half of the shahada, which is an affirmation of faith, one of the five pillars of Islam, and a component of daily prayers: "There is no god but Allah", and the second half is accepting Muhammad as God's prophet.

abusing, torturing, and executing individuals in horrible ways—totally contradicting the principles of Islam (Ramadan 2017, 155-156). In June 2014, the group claimed itself a worldwide caliphate (BBC News 2015; Roggio 2014). It is believed to operate in 18 countries including Mali, Egypt, Somali, Indonesia, Philippines, and Bangladesh (BBC News 2016).

From the perspective of Islam, "the prohibition of compulsion in religious matters is a fundamental Qur'anic principle: true faith is based on free will and free choice" allowing to freely discuss matters of faith and religion to enable people as free, moral agents to make informed choices about such matters" (Hasan 2013, 7); and therefore, many religious scholars condemn IS with distortion Islam.

II. Al Hayat Media Center

With "a teardrop-shaped" calligraphic Arabic script logo similar to that of Al-Jazeera, Al Hayat Media is the central media organization of IS that produces audios, videos, and PDF magazines in several languages including German, English and French, and specifically targets non-Arabic speakers, and specifically young audiences (Rose 2014). In general, the individuals behind Al Hayat Media Center are unknown; no named editor(s), or contributor(s) of any sort including graphic designer(s), and photographer(s). Nevertheless, in Rumiyah issue 8 (2017), one of the articles discusses about Abu Sulayman Ash-Shami (died in 2017), who"completed his studies in Computer Science at the

University of Massachusetts in Boston, graduating as an engineer and programmer, before resolving to go forth in the cause of Allah with some of his friends" (41). Abu Sulayman joined the media organization with the strive to enhance it "by widening its activities and supporting its cadres of qualified scholars and technicians" (Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 42). He was working on organizing the foreign language team, which was started by Abu Muhammad al-Furqan (died in 2016), the head chief of Al Hayat Media Center (Reuters 2016), to inform Muslims in the east and west about Islamic State and to urge them to perform hijrah to it" (Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 42). Abu Sulayman along with others came up with the idea "to produce a magazine directed towards English speakers", and this is how the idea of the Dabiq magazine came about with Abu Sulayman as its chief editor, who also wrote many articles in it and was involved in directing the team in matters of formatting and design (Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 43).

III. Rumiyah magazine

Rumiyah, published by Al Hayat Media Center (Winter 2015, 13), is a monthly magazine —available in 8 different languages—that informs non-Arabic speaking Muslims about Islamic State, conveys teachings of the group's interpretation of Islam, stories, strategies, news, practical advice, and interviews with important representatives or supporters of IS (Ghosh & Basnett 2017, 3,16; Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 45), and finally it urges Muslims to perform hijrah (Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 42). Hijrah is a reference to

the migration of Muhammad and his Companions from Mecca to Medina in order to escape prosecution in 622 C.E.. The IS claims that hijrah to the Islamic caliphate, a state governed by sharia, is an obligation on all Muslims (Dabiq no. 1 2014, 11; Rumiyah no. 1 2016, 8; Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 42). Rumiyah refers to Qur'anic verses such as the fourth sura (chapter), An-Nisa 100, that states that hijrah is rewarded with forgiveness and Jannah (paradise), as long as the muhajir (an immigrant performing hijrah) truly dedicates himself to Allah and His cause (Rumiyah no. 4 2016, 3). Moreover, Rumiyah's goal is to expand IS's reach by releasing one magazine in several languages, with each language's issue released at the same time (Rumiyah no. 8 2017, 45). It was first published in September 2016 as a successor to Dabiq, which was discontinued in July 2016 (Ghosh & Basnett 2017, 16). Rumiyah is disseminated via online social platforms such as Twitter (Grinnell et al. 2018). Ghosh and Basnett (2017)'s analysis of Rumiyah magazine indicates that Rumiyah focuses on two target audiences: (1) IS sympathizers ('in-group') to recruit and to terrorize the enemies (20) and (2) enemies ('out-group') to instill fear among them (21).

Additional Annex Bibliography

BBC News. (2015). 'What is Islamic State'? Retrieved May 20, 2018, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144.

BBC News. (2016). Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps. Retrieved May 20, 2018, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034.

Hasan, U. (2013). No Compulsion In Religion: Islam and The Freedom of Belief. Religious Reform Series 2. London: Quilliam. ISBN: 978-1-906603-98-4. Retrieved December 7, 2019, from https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/no-compulsion-in-religion-islam-and-the-freedom-of-belief/.

Haykel, B. (2009). On the Nature of Salafi thought and Action. In R. Meijer (Ed.), Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement, 1st ed.:33–57. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ramadan, T. (2017). Islam: the Essentials. London: Pelican Books.

Reuters. (2016, October 10). Islamic State confirms death of propaganda chief: statement. Reuters. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-islamic-state-idUSKCN12A2BU.

Roggio, B. (2014, June 29). ISIS announces formation of Caliphate, rebrands as 'Islamic State.' Long War Journal. Retrieved May 20, 2018, from https://www.longwarjournal. org/archives/2014/06/isis_announces_formation_of_ca.php.

Rose, S. (2014, October 7). The Isis propaganda war: a hi-tech media jihad. Retrieved December 8, 2019, from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/07/isis-media-machine-propaganda-war.

Wood, G. (2019). The way of the strangers: encounters with the Islamic State. New York: Random House.