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MA Design Research

The Visual Culture of the Islamic State

too functional

option 1: The Affect Technique Used by the Islamic State in Portrait Photographs
for the Purposes of Mobilisation of Young Men

option 2: The Islamic State's Appropriation of Photographs from Popular Visual
Aesthetics and Historical Imagery for the Purposes of Self-Representation

too long

Creating visuals is one of the defining characteristics of humans from the very beginning of the human culture (Morriss-Kay 2009) depicting history, religion, cultural experiences, collective memory, rituals, and traditions. To do this, people use motifs as symbolism representing their culture to furthermore give meaning to these visuals in order for specific people to relate. According to Charles A. Hill, "Representational photographs are used to in influence people's attitudes, opinions, and beliefs - and sometimes actions of those who view them" (Hill 2004, p.25). But how exactly to photographs persuade? While the Islamic State (IS) is certainly not the first jihadi group using visual imagery, it nevertheless has the most sophisticated jihadi imagery ever yet. Having said this brings attention to rhetoric, which has been viewed "as the art of making persuasive speech" with the use of emotion "in order 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 (Joost & Scheuermann 2006, 5). To add, in order to have the desired impact on the audience at focus, it is crucial that all factors surrounding the final deliverable are taken into consideration (Joost & Scheuermann 2006, 5). This means that each element in the visual delivered to the target audience has been intentionally thought of by the designer in order to affect the viewer. This research investigates the affect techniques employed by the Islamic State (IS) in its portrait photographs that are published in the English-version of their online magazine, Rumiyah, in order to communicate with its audience, particularly to mobilize young men. In psychology, affect is the observable mental or emotional state produced by a person's interaction with a stimulus (Add source and give example). In its turn, affect technique means the intentionality of elements used by the Islamic State's media team while aiming to communicate a certain message for persuasion or reinforcement of a certain emotion in the target audience (Joost & Scheuermann 2006, 9 & 10). According to an article published in the Islamic State's fifth issue of Rumiyah magazine, the fights of the mujahidin and their enemies revolve around two important axes: the military axis and "the axis of confronting the Satanic media that has distorted the identity of the Ummah" (Rumiyah issue 5 2017, 23), a fundamental concept in Islam that expresses the essential unity of Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds to form a Muslim community (http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2427). This article also states that "accordingly, it is only appropriate that the mujahidin – those whom Allah has accommodated with the ability to break the force of their enemies militarily – also contend on another front: the media front" (Rumiyah issue 5 2017, 23). To add, this article shows the high value placed on the media front by summarizing its most important goals in the following points: to defend the Muslim honour and faith, to raise the morale of the Ummah's men, and particularly that of the mujahidin, and to expose the lies in the faith and morals of the enemies in order to show

the *Ummah* "the filthy reality of the kuffar's society and the falseness of what the kuffar have to offer, curbing the kuffar's defiant aggressions towards the Muslims, and casting terror into the kuffar's hearts" (Rumiyah issue 5 2017, 24). In terms of organizational structure of the Islamic State's media body, it consists of three sub-bodies: Exterior Media (managing the official website of the IS, and interior and exterior communication), Media Production (filming team, design team, montage team, and printing team) and Interior Media (publishing and distribution team, media points team, flicks and ads team, and Al-Bayan radio team). Dr. Daniel Milton, the director of research at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, draws upon 13 internal documents obtained by the Department of Defence from Afghanistan that discuss the IS's media organization in details **(CITE)**. According to Dr. Milton the IS media organization cultivates photographs by giving recommendations for example how the framing should be, and how a fighter should be postured **(CITE)**. To add, in an audio interview published in the Combating Terrorism Center website, Dr. Milton quotes a section from one of the documents: "We advise the brothers to avoid innovation because it is mostly the main cause of mistakes" (audio https://ctc.usma.edu/pulling-back-the-curtain-an-inside-look-at-the-islamic-states-media-organization/) (https://ctc.usma.edu/pulling-back-the-curtain-an-inside-look-at-the-islamic-states-media-organization/ https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/08/The-Essential-Duties-of-the-Media-Mujahid.pdf https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/08/Organizational-structure-of-the-media-office.pdf). Going back to my research, to create my corpus, I compiled 111 portrait photographs from the complete (1 to 13) issues of the English-version of the IS's online magazine, *Rumiyah,* which is published by al-Hayat Media Center (Winter 2015, 13). Available in 8 different languages (Basnett & Ghosh 2017, 16 & Rumiyah issue 8 2017, 45), *Rumiyah* is a monthly (Grinnell et al 2018, 3 & Rumiyah issue 8 2017, 45) magazine that conveys teachings of Islam, stories, strategies, news and interviews with fighters of the IS to inform Muslims in the east and west about the Islamic State and to urge them to perform *hijrah* (Rumiyah issue 8 2017, 42), which is a reference to the migration of *Muhammad* and his Companions from *Mecca* to *Medina* in order to escape prosecution in 622 C.E. (https://www.britannica.com/event/Hijrah-Islam). **(CHECK what IS means by Hijrah in RUMIYAH)** To add, in modern times, it symbolizes the willingness of an individual or a group to suffer for Islam through opposition to politics of colonialism, secularism, capitalism, socialism, modernization, and Westernization as a response to a threat to survival (http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e841). The goal of the *Rumiyah* project was to expand the Islamic State's reach by releasing one magazine in several languages, with each language's issue being released at the same time (Rumiyah issue 8 2017, 45). It was first published in September 2016 as a successor to *Dabiq,* which was discontinued in July 2016 (Basnett & Ghosh 2017, 16). The analysis of the Islamic State's portrait photographs employs

[handwritten margin notes:] What's the audience for that magazine? Is "is in tension with 'is conveying my [...] of photographs?*

new paragraph

make shorter sentences here as this is crucial with the exact same images?

[handwritten at bottom:] That would make for a good title: "Conservative Iconographies: The IS ...."

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methodological triangulation. The first research method is the Panofsky method, which is a qualitative analysis through the understanding and interpretation of meaning in visual representation. According to Panofsky, the study of art objects and photographs can be divided into three levels. The first level is pre-iconographic analysis, which is the formal, natural and factual descriptions of what is seen such as the colours, the content, and the format seen without any speculations. Consequently, as the first research step, I applied the pre-iconographic analysis by implementing a quantitative analysis of the portrait photographs of the IS in *Rumiyah* (issues 1 to 13) by recording quantitative data through keywords (ADD SCREENSHOT). To discuss in details, first, I added keywords for each portrait in terms of elements seen and photo composition techniques, and second, I added them in an alphabetical order in an Excel sheet and tagged the photos in Adobe Bridge to facilitate searching for specific keywords and identifying the frequency of each. Subsequently, the second level of the Panofsky method is iconography, which is the decoding of the content by questioning why the narrators (the designer, the photographer, and the editor) of the IS felt entitled to transfer the certain motifs as visual elements. This means that there needs to be an analysis of the meanings of the elements in each photograph taking in consideration the context, history, audiences, and framework of society. Therefore, I reflect on the findings of this analysis through the decoding of the elements in the portraits and the techniques of photography used. (ADD ABOUT THE MOTIFS and FINDINGS) In addition to cultural motifs, some portrait photographs look similar to Hollywood movie posters, and some are inspired by comic books cultivating armed heroes such as a jihadist photograph adapted from a Marvel Universe drawing of The Punisher, which is a popular character and famous for his violent vigilante campaign against organized crimes. In this case, the narrators have resorted to the familiar symbolism of the comic character to reimagine a jihadist as a hero in a menacing and an unmistakable way to be relatable and attractive to young men engaged in popular culture on the Internet (Ostovar 2017, 98).

good!
Now has to follow
an analysis of
the irony that
IS reproduces a
pop culture that fuels
fight...

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