

Journal of Terrorism Research



Volume 7, Issue 2, May 2016

ISSN: 2049-7040



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Articles

Resurgent Insurgents: Quantitative Research Into Jihadists Who Get Suspended but Return on Twitter

by Shaun Wright, David Denney, Alasdair Pinkerton, Vincent A.A. Jansen, John Bryden



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Abstract

Jihadists are very active on Twitter but their accounts frequently get suspended. A debate over the effectiveness of suspension has arisen; an important factor is that Jihadists quickly create new accounts, resurging back like the moles in the “whack-a-mole” game. This causes biases for terrorism and intelligence analysts. Whilst widely acknowledged, little research investigates the problem. In this study we identify resurging Jihadist accounts with novel methods, and provide detailed analysis going beyond previous case-studies. We show that suspension is less disruptive to terrorists than previously thought, whilst the bias and disruption caused to terrorism research has been underestimated.

Introduction

Jihadists have taken to social media. Twitter has emerged as their “favourite” site (Weimann, 2014) and an estimated 46,000-90,000 ISIS supporting accounts were active there in Autumn 2014 (Berger and Morgan, 2015). Jihadists use Twitter for a variety of reasons. The first reason is to spread their messages to a wide audience. The second is for recruitment; the third is to indoctrinate further those drawn to them, like a crucible of radicalisation. And finally, (although not comprehensively) they also use Twitter for seemingly mundane conversation amongst friends.

As a consequence of the volume of data, and its open-source nature, analysis of this source of intelligence about terrorist and extremist activity is becoming more common amongst academics, journalists and government practitioners (Chatfield, 2015; Greene, 2015; Magdy, 2015; Mahmood, 2012; Moriarty, 2015; Ryan, 2014; Stern and Berger, 2015). Whilst there is very detailed research on the Twitter structure and strategies of the top-down, officially-controlled tiers of Jihadist terrorist groups (Stern and Berger, 2015), we argue that the field could benefit from more sustained research on the larger, bottom-up community of Jihadist massed ranks.

Another consequence of how numerous and vocal Jihadists are on Twitter, is the political, cultural and media pressure to take down – or suspend – terrorism supporting accounts (Levy, 2014; Moriarty, 2015). In recent years this has led to several changes in Twitter’s suspension policy, and an enormous increase in the number of suspensions. A debate has now arisen in the media and academic literature on the effectiveness of these suspensions (Arthur, 2014; Fisher, 2015; Gladstone, 2015; Stern and Berger, 2015). The assumption is that suspending terrorist supporting accounts reduces the number of terrorists on Twitter. It is assumed that this, in turn, will help counter the objectives for which Jihadists are using social media in the first place:



recruitment, radicalisation, spreading propaganda and threats. On the other side of the debate are concerns over loss of intelligence, freedom of speech, and how realistically achievable the number of suspensions needed to make a dent in the problem is.

Central to this debate is another significant and problematic phenomenon associated with Jihadist social media research: “many of those suspended users simply sat down at their computers the very next day, created new accounts, and started all over again” (Stern and Berger, 2015). This phenomenon is acknowledged in a range of studies (Chatfield, 2015; Magdy, 2015; Berger and Morgan, 2015) and widely referred to as “whack-a-mole” (Arthur, 2014; Berger and Morgan, 2015; Levy, 2014; Stern and Berger, 2015). Those who create these resurging whack-a-mole accounts we call “resurgents” and we provide a more detailed definition later in the paper.

Resurgents do not just cause a whack-a-mole challenge for those performing the suspensions. Their quantity makes identification difficult and so they often go unnoticed. The impact of researchers being unable to identify or control for resurgents is that their datasets will suffer biases; the main bias being replicate error. If the dataset contains duplicate resurgent accounts who get treated as independent data points, this clearly causes errors in any research addressing a range of issues: the number of Jihadist accounts, the level of support for a particular course of action, how unusual a particular behaviour is, and so on.

An example of a problem caused by resurgents is Berger and Morgan’s estimate of the (carefully worded) number of “ISIS-supporting Twitter accounts”. The problem is that we do not know how many unique ISIS supporters are represented by these accounts. In another example, Twitter claimed that it had suspended 10,000 ISIS linked accounts in a single day (Gladstone, 2015). Again, it is unknown how many ISIS supporters this represents. These problems occur because there are no methods to identify resurgent accounts amongst this volume of data, or control for the biases that they cause. One of our aims is to help develop such methods and provide these estimates.

It is clear that resurgents cause problems for suspension and for research, yet academic study of them is lacking. Previous studies have discussed suspension and resurgence as a potential flaw with the generalisability of their findings (Berger and Morgan, 2015; Chatfield, 2015; Magdy, 2015). However, almost no research has been done to characterise and describe suspended or resurgent accounts – partly due to the lack of methods for finding them. The impact of resurgents on the effectiveness debate, therefore, currently rests on Stern and Berger’s (2015) case study of a single resurgent.

Stern and Berger (2015) conducted a case study of the suspension and single resurgence of the official al Shabaab Twitter account in January 2013 and concluded that suspension is disruptive to terrorists but not to research or intelligence gathering. One of their claims is that finding matching resurgent accounts, and analysing them as continuations of the same account is easy. Furthermore, they claimed the “suspension had cost nothing in intelligence value... and the new account continued the stream of press releases”. Whilst this may be true for researchers tracking a particular case study account, especially official media accounts, any researcher analysing the Jihadist massed ranks on Twitter is going to struggle. We suggest that trying to identify all corresponding resurgent accounts in a dataset of 46,000-90,000 accounts is so time-consuming for humans that there *is* likely to be an intelligence cost. Addressing this hypothesis is another one of our aims in this paper.

Stern and Berger also determined the rate at which their resurgent case-study account accrued followers and calculated that it would take months or years to regain all their followers. They then argued that suspension imposes “clear numeric costs” since ISIS supporters must “reconstruct their social networks and reestablish



trust” (Stern and Berger, 2015). While there may be costs for some suspended accounts, this picture is incomplete. We hypothesise that because Jihadist accounts have previously (and repeatedly) built their reputation and the trust of the community, when they return as resurgents, the nature of Twitter means that they can quickly seek out close comrades from their previous network, initiate contact and re-establish their credentials. Therefore we predict that the number of followers of resurgent accounts should grow faster than naturally growing Jihadist accounts who must establish credentials from scratch rather than simply renew them.

We will also consider other factors that could explain any accelerated growth amongst resurgents. One relevant Twitter phenomenon could be “Follow Friday” (Leavitt, 2014), where participating users recommend accounts (on Fridays) to their followers. These tweets are often signposted with the hashtags “#ff” or “#followfriday”, e.g. “#ff #followfriday @randomuser1 @twitteruser123”. We hypothesise that they could be helping to drive growth, and will perform an initial test of how common they are to assess the viability of this.

We think that the phenomenon of accounts resurging from suspension is a significant enough feature of modern terrorism to merit further study and definition. With currently only a single case study, we suggest that the next logical step is to study more resurgents, and this is the main aim of our paper. However, since the world of modern terrorist activity is one of social media and big data, conclusions drawn about case studies cannot be appropriately generalised to the whole population of Jihadists. We therefore, as has been identified as necessary in the study of Twitter Jihadists in general, propose using big data methods (Berger and Morgan, 2015) on a large sample of resurgents.

We define a Twitter resurgent as any user who has created multiple accounts on Twitter under different handles (unique user-names beginning ‘@’). Resurgence does not only occur as the direct result of suspension; some users pre-empt their suspension by changing their handle or operating multiple backup accounts. All resurgent types are included in the definition, however, as they cause the same biases to research datasets. On the other hand we do exclude those who are consciously masquerading as different people (e.g. operating multiple personas or a variety of automatic bots) and we consider the implications of this in the discussion.

In this paper we aim to find sets of accounts belonging to the same resurgents. Once we have done that, we can study and describe them. We will assess how disrupted they are by quantitatively analysing the rate at which they accrue followers compared to non-resurgent accounts, as well as looking at Follow-Friday as a possible driving mechanism. We will also provide an estimate of the proportion of Jihadist accounts which are just duplicates and the proportion which represent unique Jihadists. These findings will give terrorism researchers a better understanding of the true numbers and distribution of Jihadists on social media, as well as an appreciation of how disruptive suspension is for research. We therefore set out the first large scale description of resurgent Jihadists, a significant phenomenon in modern terrorism, challenging, in the process, some of the conclusions about Jihadist social media behaviour drawn by others.

Methods

1. Dataset

The sampling algorithm used was developed to bias sampling toward accounts that tended to have numerous links to other accounts that had already been sampled. The reason for doing this was the principle



of homophily: the tendency of people to associate with others similar to them (McPherson, 2001). This principle has been shown to lead to highly intra-linked communities on Twitter that bias their interactions to other members of the community and share a social identity (Bryden, 2011; 2013; Tamburrini, 2015). Consequently, we reasoned that Jihadists would bias the accounts that they followed towards other Jihadist accounts and set up our sampling algorithm accordingly.

We therefore used weighted snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) to identify Jihadist Twitter accounts. This approach enabled us to grow the sample, whilst weighting sampling towards accounts with numerous links to accounts already identified. A handful of publicly-known, official “media” Jihadist Twitter accounts named by newspapers provided our starting point. We then manually inspected the Twitter followers of these accounts, aided by Twitter’s “Who to follow” algorithm, and from our analysis we identified 34 ‘unofficial-but-supporting’ Jihadist accounts. For practicality, we selected only English speaking accounts. We then used this starting sample to seed the snowball algorithm.

We snowball sampled daily between May and July 2015 (77 days, with power issues preventing sampling on 10 days). On each day we looked at all accounts followed by those already in our sample. We then sampled any account identified as being followed by >10% of the users in our sample, and with <1,000 followers of its own.

We selected the 10% threshold to grow the sample slowly, without accelerating, whilst remaining within a relatively tight community of English speaking Jihadists (the principle of homophily). While our sample was smaller than 100 users we used a fixed threshold (new accounts must be followed by more than 10 accounts in our sample). We switched to the 10% threshold once we had sampled 100 accounts.

The upper limit of 1,000 followers was selected for two reasons. Firstly, to prevent the inclusion of popular journalists and academics who are often both highly interlinked with the networks, and connected outwards to non-Jihadist followers. Such community transcending journalists were liable to divert the sampling away from the Jihadist community. Our cut-off is similar to, although more ruthless than, the precedent set by Berger and Morgan (2015) who used a 50,000 cut-off, finding that accounts more popular than this were unrelated. Secondly, by avoiding the more ‘popular’ accounts, we aimed to direct our dataset away from the official, top-down Jihadist media accounts covered in other research, and towards the largely neglected Jihadist massed ranks.

During sampling, some accounts were protected, suspended or had voluntarily changed their user-name. We moved these to an “inactive sample” where we recorded all the account information, but they no longer contributed to the 10% threshold check. We identified suspended users by the official suspension report with which Twitter had replaced their pages. Protected users had activated privacy settings and only biography, pictures and summary meta-data were available. Non-existent accounts display an official Twitter message that the user cannot be found (despite our evidence that they previously did). Although no information is provided about their non-existence, since Twitter does not report them as suspended we assume that the users changed their handles themselves.

2. Finding resurgent Jihadists

To identify resurgent accounts we used a quantitative approach that helped draw our attention to accounts whose Twitter biographies, names and locations contained at least 30% of the same words. We set out the rationale for why our quantitative approach is needed, over human identification of accounts, in

Supplementary Material 1. We then visually assessed those accounts, identifying and classifying resurgents.

Defining a set of accounts belonging to a resurgent

When comparing accounts, we used open criteria for determining whether they formed a set. However, in practically all cases, an almost identical match between handle, name, biography or location was necessary and sufficient. Biography and handle were the strongest indicators, whilst location, surprisingly, was still informative due to peoples' unique spelling, punctuation, and choice of descriptive terms. A hypothetical, illustrative example of an almost identical match would be the handles “@jihad_bob2” and “@jihad_bob3”.



Figure 1. An illustrative example from our data of two resurgent accounts which we classified as a set. They have almost identical handles and almost identical biographies. Their images were not inspected, but their profile images are an almost identical match too. Screenshots of two user accounts taken from <http://twitter.com>.



Figure 2. An illustrative example from our data of two accounts which we did not classify as duplicates of one another, despite some similarities. Screenshots of two user accounts taken from <http://twitter.com>.



3. Do resurgents accrue followers faster?

We investigated how disrupted resurgent accounts are by calculating their rate of follower accrual versus non-resurgent controls. As we were unable to find other matching resurgents, we treated all those who had not been identified as non-resurgent controls. We calculated growth rate by dividing the number of followers an account had upon sampling by the number of days between creation and sampling. We used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test after ruling out normality (both $p = 0.00$, 2.d.p, Kolmogorov-Smirnov).

Results

We sampled 1,920 English speaking Jihadist accounts from Twitter. By the end of sampling 1,080 had been suspended, 141 accounts were private, 97 no longer existed and 602 were active (figure 3). Only 1,858 of the users had sufficient name, location and biography information for analysis.

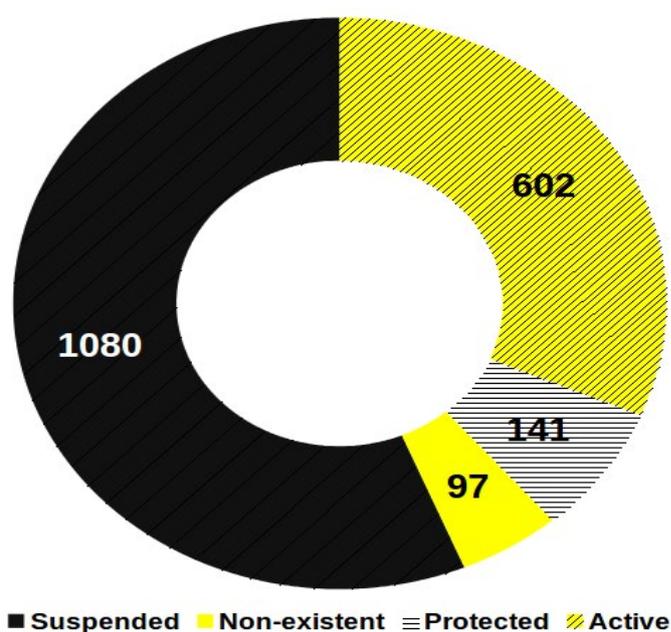


Figure 3. The distribution of our dataset of 1,920 English speaking Jihadist Twitter accounts. By the end of sampling, 1,080 had been suspended by Twitter, 141 had set their accounts to private, 97 no longer existed due to voluntary name change and 602 were still active.

1. Terrorist group affiliations

The majority of accounts do not declare a terrorist organisation affiliation, nor does a simple content analysis allow for unequivocal categorisation. Amongst 300 randomly selected users, 39 (13%) provided an allegiance, of which all gave ISIS, IS, Islamic Caliphate, Baqiya or Khilifa. Amongst the 261 that didn't, 34 (13%) gave one of the four most common locations: "Dar ul Kufr" [Land of the unbelievers] ($n=16$, 6%), "UK" ($n=12$, 5%), "Dunya" [the non-spiritual, temporal world] ($n=3$, 1%), and "Somalia" ($n=3$, 1%); with the sharing of extremist content and pro-Caliphate sentiment also common. Twitter also suspended 56.3% of our sample, evidence that suggests they were engaging in extremist activity. We therefore categorise our sample as Jihadists, whilst assuming, based on location and content, that the majority are ISIS-supporting members of the "Baqiya family" (Amarasingam, 2015).



2. Finding resurgent Jihadists

Using the quantitative approach outlined in the methods, we estimated the number of unique Jihadist users by identifying resurgents: users in the dataset who had multiple, matching replicate accounts.

From 1,858 user accounts with information to analyse, only 1,484 (79.9%) were unique Jihadists. The remainder, over one in five accounts, were duplicates: resurgent accounts. 192 (12.9%) of the unique users were resurgents who owned, on average, 2.95 accounts (a set of mean size 2.95) within the three month period (table 1).

The other statistic commonly reported is the number of Jihadist accounts that have been taken down or suspended. This also overestimates the number of unique Jihadists. Performing the same analysis with the suspended users with information to analyse (n=1,066), we found only 757 (71.0%) unique Jihadists. 114 (10.7%) of these unique users were resurgents, owning a mean of 3.71 suspended resurgent accounts in three months (table 1).

| | Number of accounts analysed | Number of unique Jihadists | Number of duplicate accounts | Number of unique users who were resurgents | Mean number of accounts belonging to each resurgent |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|---|
| Entire sample | 1,858 | 1,484 (79.9%) | 374 (20.1%) | 192 (12.9%) | 2.95 |
| Suspended users | 1,066 | 757 (71.0%) | 309 (29.0%) | 114 (10.7%) | 3.71 |

Table 1. Identification and quantification of resurgents in the dataset: users who had multiple, matching replicate accounts.

3. Resurgents accrue followers faster

We found that the growth rate of resurgent accounts (n=566, median 43.8) is significantly greater ($p < 0.0001$ [exact p-value $< 2.38 \times 10^{-40}$], 1-tailed Mann-Whitney U) than that of naturally growing, non-resurgent accounts (n=1,292, median 8.37) (figure 4).

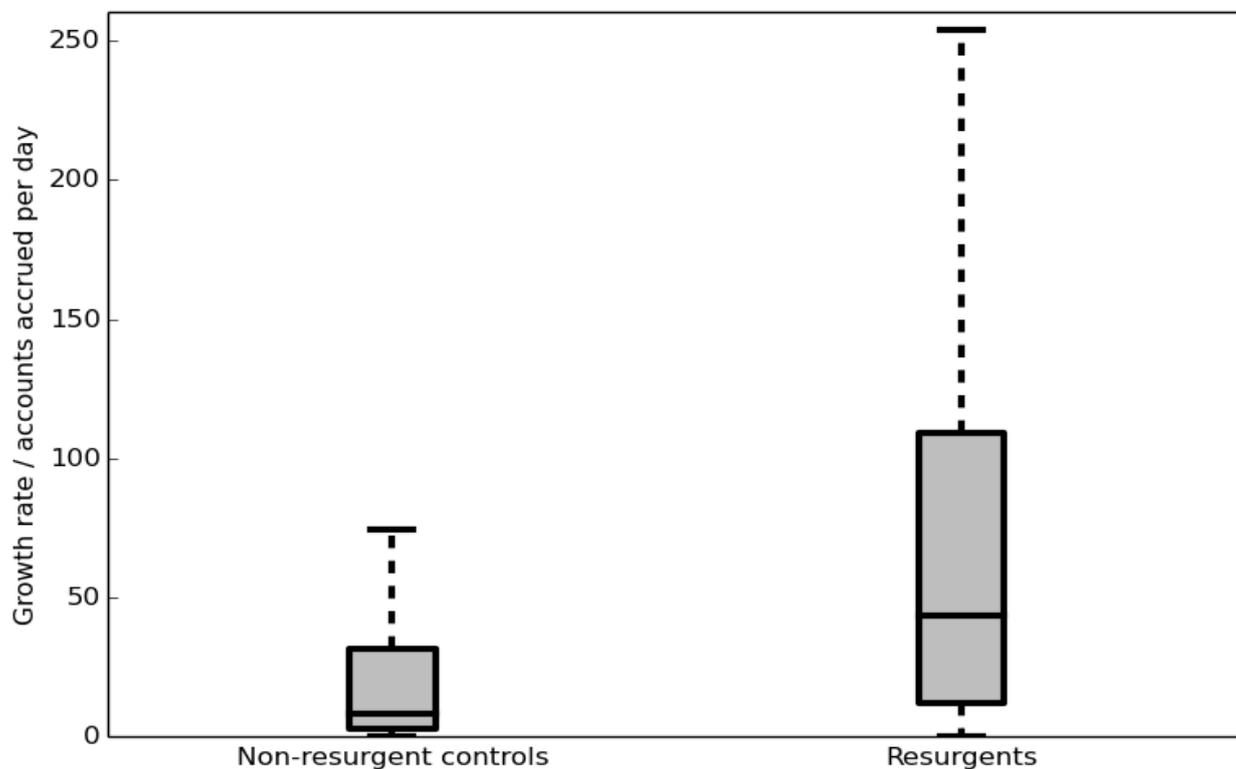


Figure 4. The growth rates (followers accrued per day) of resurgent accounts ($n=566$) versus naturally growing Jihadist accounts ($n=1,292$). The plot shows the growth rate of resurgent accounts is significantly higher than that of non-resurgent accounts.

4. Jihadist Follow-Friday

Having shown that resurgent accounts grow faster than those of non-resurgents, we searched for explanatory factors. We observed a similar phenomenon to “Follow-Friday” within the Jihadist Twitter community and assessed their viability as a growth driving mechanism by testing how common these tweets were.

Downloading the entire daily tweet output of our sample generated a corpus of approximately 155,000 tweets. We randomly-selected 2,500 tweets from this corpus; 46 (1.84%) fitted the Jihadist Follow-Friday structure.

Although we dub them “Jihadist Follow-Friday” tweets, zero (0.0%) contained Friday hashtags. Furthermore, none (0.0%) of the 46 examples promoted more than one user per tweet, with 17 (37.0%) repeating the name several times per tweet, e.g. “Follow: @jihadistaccount123 @jihadistaccount123 @jihadistaccount123”, and the remaining 29 (63.0%) naming them only once, e.g. “FOLLOW & SUPPORT @jihadistaccount123”. Three tweets (6.52%) also stated that the user had returned from suspension.

As an indicator of whether Jihadist Follow-Friday tweets are significant enough to contribute to re-growth, this result estimates that there are 2,852 tweets (1.84%) promoting other Jihadist accounts in our dataset of 155,000 tweets.

Discussion

Suspension and resurgence are significant phenomena in modern, online terrorism. As resurgents are difficult to find in large numbers, research into them is scarce, relying on Stern and Berger’s (2015) case study alone. Furthermore, terrorism research treats the duplicate resurgents as independent data points,



biasing social media research into the numbers, opinions and behaviour of Jihadists. We found resurgents, estimating that within our sample only 79.9% of Jihadist Twitter accounts belong to unique Jihadists, with a lower 71.0% of unique Jihadists amongst suspended accounts. This gives researchers a better picture of the patterns displayed by resurgents, as well as a scale of the significant biases for research and estimates and the continuous disruption to intelligence gathering.

With the identification of resurgents comes the ability to analyse them beyond individual case studies. Previous work has concluded that there are “clear numeric costs” to resurgents who suffer slow regrowth as a cost of suspension (Stern and Berger, 2015), contrary to this single al-Shabaab account however, we have shown that in our sample resurgents grow significantly faster (median 43.8 accounts accrued per day) than non-resurgent Jihadists (median 8.37). Whilst it remains possible that this might not be sustained long enough to get back all of their old followers, especially the curious Westerners, there is no obvious disruption to Twitter when considered as a crucible of radicalisation. Whether or not Jihadist Follow-Friday tweets help to drive this accelerated growth also merits further study, as they seem prominent (1.84% of tweets) given the number of alternative discussion topics.

Our findings could help analysts to put reported numbers and statistics in a more appropriate context. Berger and Morgan estimated the number of ISIS supporting Twitter accounts at 46,000-90,000. However, we have shown that an improved estimate should drop below 36,800-72,000 (79.9%) unique users. Another commonly reported, headline-catching statistic is the number of ISIS accounts suspended; Twitter reported suspending 10,000 accounts. However, our results suggest that this should be corrected to represent only 7,100 (71.0%) unique ISIS supporters. We suggest that while the rate of suspensions remains stable, our specific results of 79.9% (overall) and 71.0% (amongst suspended) may have some usefulness, but that even when suspensions escalate, the principle behind our finding remains crucial. All of these results highlight the dangers in working with a Jihadist dataset without correcting it for resurgents.

One of the implications of this improved picture of resurgents is the contribution to the suspension effectiveness debate. A great deal of political and public pressure exists to suspend terrorists and their supporters from social media sites. Although intelligence concerns often take “a distant third” place to business and cultural concerns, some argue that the intelligence costs are limited (Stern and Berger, 2015). Whilst our results do not address the cultural or ethical arguments, they do suggest that suspensions are less disruptive to terrorists than previously argued; furthermore, suspensions cause significant biases to data and its analysis. Rather than leading us, however, to advocate against suspension – there are convincing ethical and intelligence quality improving arguments (Stern and Berger, 2015) – we propose using methods to control for it.

We consider our dataset of accounts, and their suspension rates, to be generalisable to the unofficial, English-speaking, Jihadist community on Twitter. We categorised our sample as pro-ISIS members of the “Baqiya family” (the friendly network of online ISIS supporters) (Amarasingam, 2015), although terrorist group affiliation is almost impossible to assess without additional sources of data. It is, however, in line with the political dominance of ISIS during summer 2015, the nature of the “Baqiya family” (Amarasingam, 2015), and Berger and Morgan’s (2015) estimate of 46,000-90,000 ISIS-supporting accounts during a similar length time. Although it is possible that generalisability is limited by snowball sampling’s bias towards the seed list, after sampling 1,920 accounts from a seed list of 34, any initial bias should have been diluted. We therefore associate our results only with the general “Jihadist” community, limiting the ability of our study to make statements about differences between specific terrorist groups. Inspection of the data does, however, indicate



success in our aim of using a minimum popularity to exclude bots.

A potential critique of our sampling method (continually looking for new accounts) is that it could be biased towards resurgents. We defend the appropriateness of our sampling, however, as it will still snowball into a wider community, reaching out to newly discovered accounts that need not be new to Twitter. We would also point out that although snowball sampling cannot reach disjoint groups, such a hypothetical, unconnected terrorist group is by definition unrepresentative of the ISIS-dominated Twitter environment. We do, however, suggest that the best course of action is for researchers themselves to analyse their dataset for resurgents. Finally, our definition of resurgents also excludes those masquerading as bots or multiple personas. These are phenomenon potentially causing additional replicate biases to terrorism research and therefore merit further research.

Although there appear to be some statistical issues with generalising our findings directly to Berger and Morgan's work, there are several possible counter-explanations. Scaling by 79.9% predicts that over 20% of their users have resurged back, but they only reported ~7.5% being suspended in the first place. There are however, three reasons why this need not contradict our findings, nor stop us applying our result to their data. Firstly, they acknowledge that the suspension rate has dramatically escalated since, and in our data it was 56.3%. Secondly, name-changing and backup accounts are also sources of resurgents and are presumably not covered under their reported suspension statistics. Finally, it appears that their sample was not continuously re-checked for suspensions. Thus their suspension rate may actually be higher than reported. In the specific case of our Twitter example, where all the accounts were active during a single day, our findings may also not be applicable. However, whenever accounts are reported suspended over a period greater than several weeks, our findings may be highly informative. Again, these challenges only emphasise the importance of researchers attempting to find resurgents in their data for themselves.

Our study included several types of resurgents, including backup accounts and those created after suspension. The difference between a backup and post-suspension account is not a binary classification but a spectrum, depending on whether the main account has been suspended, the age of the backup before and since becoming the main account, and the ratio between these. Recording data to investigate these is therefore beyond the scope of this article, but merits a future study. Crucially however, a lower rate for backups would lower the rate for combined resurgents, and this thus indicates the robustness of our significantly elevated result.

Limitations

A limitation of our "Jihadist" study is that we cannot make statements about the differences between specific terrorist groups. These findings could also benefit from more work with a broader sampling procedure, as there are limits on generalising our sample to the unofficial, English-speaking, Jihadist, Twitter community (snowball sampling methods both limit the ability to reach disjoint groups, and exhibit bias towards their seed lists). Additionally, our estimates are conservative upper bounds as we could have missed some resurgents due to the challenge of finding resurgents amongst big data. Our estimates are also upper bounds as our definition excluded those masquerading as bots or multiple personas, and our study amalgamated several types of resurgents, including backup accounts and those created after suspension. Although there are likely to be differences between backup and post-suspension resurgent accounts (we hypothesise that their longer lifespan and insignificance to followers would give backup resurgents a lower growth rate), testing this is non-trivial. There may also be limitations with generalising our findings directly to all other numerical



estimates, as sampling methods differ from study to study.

Conclusion

This paper marks a step change in methodological approaches towards the study of resurgent Jihadists. The new methods give us novel insights into the proportion of fast-growing, duplicate accounts (20-30%), which in turn suggest some crucial new approaches in terrorism studies: adjusting numerical estimates, recognising dataset biases, and seeking methods to identify and control for the significant number of resurgents. Our quantitative method in particular, which we hope to calibrate further in future work, appeared very useful for quickly finding resurgents, and this presents a clear example of the wider importance and power of using quantitative analysis to investigate a range of terrorism behaviours.

Author contributions

All authors were involved in the conception of the work. SW collected the data, performed the analyses, wrote the first draft and led the writing of the manuscript. DD, AP, VAAJ and JB edited and critiqued the manuscript. The authors would also like to express their gratitude to Peter Adey for helpful discussions and feedback on the manuscript, and to the reviewers for their constructive comments. Date submitted: 19 October 2015; Accept Submission: 07 March 2016.

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Supplementary Material

Why a quantitative approach?

Manually inspecting the complete dataset of 1,920 users for replicates would be very time consuming. Berger's sample of 46,000+ would make the task close to impossible. The feasibility of this task is partly limited by its reliance on human memory capacity. Whilst working memory capacity is a mere 7 ± 2 items (Miller, 1956), we suggest that a more appropriate indicator is recognition memory – the ability to recognise whether or not something matching the account had been encountered earlier in the dataset. Standing (1973) empirically derived equations showing that recognition memory follows a power law with the number of items presented. We can therefore calculate that if humans inspected our 1,920 accounts as printed words, Standing's work predicts the number capable of being held in memory is:

$$10^{((0.92 * \log(1,920 \text{ items})) - 0.01)} = 1,025$$

Since for many accounts we also have a screenshot of their Twitter profile, Standing's equation for pictorially presented data predicts:

$$10^{((0.93 * \log(1,920 \text{ items})) + 0.08)} = 1,360$$

The upper limit of human memory whilst attempting a match search with our medium sized dataset is therefore ~53-71% of previously encountered accounts. Since each account is actually represented by around 10 words, not one, this oversimplification generates an extremely conservative upper limit. Re-calculating for Berger's conservative estimate of 46,000 ISIS accounts, only ~41-56% can be held in recognition memory; another overestimation. Standing's results may also not generalise this far beyond the 10,000 items used in his work.

To aid the quick finding of resurgent accounts, we therefore used a quantitative approach to draw our attention to several accounts at a time. Hypothetically, the simplest approach might have been selecting two random accounts to evaluate simultaneously. This would have been ineffective. A quantitative approach should work on an assumption or hypothesis about the data. We assumed that finding matches would be aided by selecting accounts whose biographies, names and locations contained >30% of the same words. This meant that only accounts with these attributes had sufficient information to analyse.



A Psychoanalytic Perspective on an Interview with an Irish Republican Prisoner

by Barry Geoghegan



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Abstract

Taking an interview with an Irish Republican Prisoner imprisoned at the Curragh Internment Camp for the duration of the Second World War, the principle objective of this analysis is to demonstrate that psychoanalysis as a depth psychology, can transcend political/ideological considerations in respect of the justice or otherwise of a cause, or moral opprobrium over the tactics employed. Arguing that the context of every conflict is historically unique and using the notions of national identity and the intergenerational transmission of guilt, the analysis demonstrates that the psychic position of the individual terrorist is not necessarily pathological.

The tendency amongst clinical psychoanalysts according to K.R. Eissler, is ‘to look at a patient engaging in revolutionary activities or believing in revolutionary persuasion as acting out’ (Eissler, 2002, p132).

In the personality pathology theory of terrorism, the violent or aggressive ‘symptomology’ of the individual is extrapolated to this wider cohort, with the principle protagonist Jerrold Post having it that, for ‘the paranoid individual seeking a “legitimate” channel for his aggression, the terrorist group provides an ideal venue. Because terrorists bring their personalities with them when they enter the group, the same personality distortions that led to their conflict and isolation in society will express themselves in the group’ (Post, 1986, p 223).

This terrorist paranoia is considered by Post to be ‘primitive form of narcissistic pathology’, with narcissistic entitlement inevitably leading to frustration and retaliatory rage (Post, 2015, p 10). The initial narcissistic injury is seen as deriving from early faulty or traumatogenic object relating, in particular from cold or unempathetic care givers, and in respect of terrorism as Shmuel Erlich points out, it is the ‘currently widely held psychoanalytic stance’ (Erlich, 2003, p 148). Through Heinz Kohut’s formulation of a mirroring ‘narcissistic transference’, Post posits a conceptualisation of the terrorist as being in a needy charismatic leader-follower relationship (Post, 2015, 74). The development of the charismatic leader’s pathological ‘grandiose self’ is as Post describes Otto Kernberg’s notion, that of extreme grandiosity ‘associated with primitive and defective superego formation’, potentially leading to the dangerous personality disorder of ‘malignant narcissism’ (Post, 1993, p 114). Gathering their followers from a ‘disadvantaged or traumatized social group’, the rejected and traumatised the leadership of the terrorist group according to Kernberg, often present with the ‘syndrome of malignant narcissism’ (Kernberg, 2003, p 958).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a culturally oriented and hopefully more nuanced psychohistorical alternative to the simple extrapolation of a putative individual narcissistic clinical pathology, in explaining the rationale of the insurgent or terrorist group. The paper proposes that instead of the acting out an individual narcissistic injury through the terrorist group, the individuals in that group may actually be rational actors seeking to assuage the narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a culture. These individuals are not necessarily



individually narcissistically injured, traumatised and marginalised, but those who actually have a greatly heightened sense of belongingness and take it upon themselves to carry the burden of the narcissistically injured culture as a function of their own identities, actively seeking to lance the festering national wound. In this endeavour and in particular the phenomenological aspects, I have been greatly assisted by John Hunt who at 95 is the last of the old guard Republicans interned in the Curragh internment camp for the duration of the Second World War.

Background

In early 1939, the IRA (Irish Republican Army) had launched a bombing campaign on mainland Britain, with Irish President Éamon De Valera's government regarding these IRA attacks against Britain as posing a threat to the Irish state itself. Recently uncovered archive material demonstrates that De Valera's belief was, that 'if his country was seen as a threat, London might decide to invade' (Thomson, BBC, 2011). Knowing according to Mike Thomson, that the 'hard rump of Republicans would never countenance being allied to the "old enemy" Britain, and that such an alliance could push Ireland into another bloody civil war', De Valera was anxious to maintain Irish neutrality in the forthcoming war (ibid).

Republicanism was as Jill Uris and Leon Uris put it, 'deep-seated and an alter ego for the masses', and as such there was difficulty in securing convictions against IRA members (Uris and Uris, 1977, p 155). So that under 'Emergency Powers Act of 1939 and the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act of 1940' enacted by De Valera, civil liberties were suspended and internments without charge were introduced (Maguire, 2004, p 1). The men detained were held in what Uris and Uris describe as the notorious Curragh internment camp, where the 'horrors of imprisonment became legendary', with the IRA keeping up 'hunger strikes, riots, and daring escapes' (Uris and Uris, 1977, p 156). John, as documented in Uinseann MacEoin's book *The IRA in the twilight years: 1923-1948* (1997), [was for six years incarcerated in the Curragh](#).

National Trauma, Identity and Joining the Cause.

John describes the process by which a historical sense of grievance became imbued in his nationalist ideology in a societal environment where news and information was passed on by word of mouth;

John: 'So, people like me that came from a rural village in Ireland and, knew of the history that was being told in the small village. At the fireside, that is where I learned my history ...

But you always have something about the famine. It was a living thing. Now, I believe this, that, that was genocide. They wanted to spoil the Irish race. The Irish race had to be done away with'

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Through this osmotic bucolic process, John develops his historical sensibility as part of his identity. History and particularly the trauma of the Irish Famine which took place between 1845 and 1852, is still for John a 'living thing' (Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014). This represents what Vamik Volkan terms the 'transgenerational transmission' of trauma, a process involving 'the depositing of an already formed self or object image into the developing self representation of a child under the premise that there it can be kept safe and the resolution of the conflict with which it is associated can be postponed until a future time. The "deposited image" then becomes like a psychological gene that influences the child's identity' (Volkan, 1998, pp 3-4). Such identity for Erik Erikson is primarily a social construct representing 'a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of



essential character with others (Erikson, 1960, p 38).

In a form of mourning process, the trauma representing a real or imagined disappointment in an original object attachment shatters the object relationship, and the result as Freud has it, is 'not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different ... an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification ... The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up' (Freud, 1917, XIV, p 249).

The trauma to the nation in effect becomes a narcissistic aspect of the collective ego, and it is clung to as a badge of honour reflecting a sense of national identification. Thus the object introjected that is to say the Irish sense of loss, is transmuted onto the individual ego in a narcissistic identification. As John was 'bred to believe, that there should not be a foreign flag in any part of that island', the presence of one is akin to an epigenetically transmitted narcissistic wound which must be dealt with as manifesting a cultural stain on the national and no individual psyche (Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014). John's core identity is then narcissistically bound to his mourned object, he becomes effectively a representation of Ireland indeed his very being is Ireland.

Describing this formative psychic 'breeding' process of 'introjection, identification, and identity formation', Erikson has it that the 'mechanism of *introjection* (the primitive "incorporation" of another's image) depends for its integration on the satisfactory mutuality between the mothering adult(s) and the mothered child. Only the experience of such initial mutuality provides a safe pole of self-feeling from which the child can reach out for the other pole: his first love "objects." The fate of childhood *identifications*, in turn, depends on the Child's satisfactory interaction with trustworthy representatives of a meaningful hierarchy of roles as provided by the generations living together in some form of family' (Erikson, 1968, p 159).

Commenting on Freud's own soul searching in relation to his Jewish identity, Erikson remarks that 'identity points to an individual's link with the unique values, fostered by a unique history of his people. Yet, it also relates to the cornerstone of this individual's unique development ... It is this identity of something in the individual's core, with an essential aspect of a group's inner coherence, which is under consideration here: for the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means most to others—those others, to be sure, who have come to mean most to him' (Erikson, 1960, p 38).

Volkan posits that a 'chosen trauma' 'refers to the mental representation of an event that has caused a large group to face drastic losses, feel helpless and victimized by another group, and share a humiliating injury ... I believe that it reflects a group's unconscious "choice" to add a past generation's mental representation of an event to its own identity ... A chosen trauma is linked to the past generation's inability to mourn losses after experiencing a shared traumatic event, and indicates the group's failure to reverse narcissistic injury and humiliation inflicted by another large group, usually a neighbor' (Volkan, 1998, p 4, emphasis in the original). If the succeeding generation is unable to successfully 'mourn the loss or reverse the humiliation, it will in turn deposit this mental representation in the next generation' (ibid). The chosen trauma becomes then, woven into the fabric of ethnic group's identity.

Basing his analysis on Freud's notion of adult mourning in his *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud, 1917, XIV), and extrapolating from a clinical to a psychohistorical perspective, the traumatised society for Volkan, behaves like 'an individual who suffers from perennial mourning' (Volkan, 2007, p 5). In Freud's theory 'mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has



taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition' (Freud, 1917, XIV, p 243)

There is then something pathological in this melancholic aspect Irish society in failing to successfully resolve the mourning process deriving from the trauma of the Great Famine. The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are for Freud a 'profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment' (Freud, 1917, XIV, p 244). This process need not though result in merely sullen depression but on the contrary according to Freud, such melancholic's 'make the greatest nuisance of themselves, and always seem as though they felt slighted and had been treated with great injustice. All this is possible only because the reactions expressed in their behaviour still proceed from a mental constellation of revolt, which has then, by a certain process, passed over into the crushed state of melancholia' (ibid, p 248).

Psychoanalytic enquiry has demonstrated according to Volkan, that this transgenerational transmission of trauma induced melancholia, is more than, just 'a child mimicking the behavior of parents, or developing his or her own ideas based upon the stories told by the older generation. It is the end result of mostly unconscious psychological processes that influence the child's identity and unconsciously give the child certain tasks' (Volkan, 1998, p 4). Similarly, the collective group experience is more than the sum total of the 'many individuals of that groups sharing similar symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, utilizing similar defense mechanisms, or exhibiting symptoms of similar psychological problems. Such traumatic events affect all those under the ethnic or national tent, and all are subjected to societal processes, many of them unconscious, in response' (Volkan, 1998, p 4). Taking on their own specific characteristics, the transgenerational transmissions of trauma are then collective phenomena, which reflect societal processes or indeed political ideologies.

Particular individuals though, John clearly being a case in point, feel the weight of this national seemingly epigenetically transmitted melancholia bearing down on them more acutely than on others, with a psychic need to take upon themselves the reparations needed to grieve, and thus resolve the mourning process. The loss and mourning for an ambivalently loved object gives rise in Melanie Klein's schema, for a concern to put matters right which she terms 'reparation' (Klein, 1987). The reparative process involves not only restoring the obsessively mourned object, but in shoring up the psyche of the individual himself, and for Klein 'it is not only an object about whom guilt is experienced but also parts of the self which the subject is driven to repair or restore' (Klein, 1987, p 187).

If the sense of guilt is though overly strong according Klein, 'this identification may lead to an entirely self sacrificing attitude which is very much to the child's disadvantage. It is well known that a child who has been brought up by a mother who showers love on him and expects nothing in return often becomes a selfish person' (Klein, 2002, p 318). The reparative self-sacrifice is then repaid by the object as represented by the Irish State, by furthering its own 'selfish' geopolitical concerns. This resulted in the imprisonment of John and his IRA colleagues who reflected a projective mirror of the object's guilt and humiliation, as the government was comprised entirely of former IRA members.



John: 'rebelled against the authority because the authority ...

To keep the order, the law and order, that that state or foreign government wanted ... And they're Irishmen. And as long as they keep backing that foreign power, I'll keep fighting them'.

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Unlike for Volkan who sees resurrected trauma as being deployed as an agitating tool by malignantly narcissistic leaders, the Irish Famine for John was an always already living thing, a function of his ego identity. From his personal perspective, John eschews the notion of this trauma as an incitement to dehumanise a hated 'Other'. John has it rather that, 'they're human beings the same as I am', and that he has 'no quarrel with the English people', only an English Government that he believes has oppressed his ancestors and was in league in the immediate pre-war period as the newly released documents actually confirm, with the Irish Government (Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014; Thomson, 2011).

Relating to the Wider Context of Terrorism

Terrorists according to Post, draw their membership '*from marginal, isolated, and inadequate individuals from troubled families, so that for many, belonging to the terrorist group is the first time they have truly belonged to any group*' (Post, 1986, p 211, emphasis in the original). John though was born into a reasonably prosperous professional and merchant family well integrated and respected in his locality. John's identity is the wider but actually for him the more visceral sense of being Irish;

John: 'That's, that's my core and my identity' ... It's, it is a love ...

It's a real thing to me ... I live it every day

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Very confident and assured in this personal and national identity, John does not seek to shore it up by group affiliation indeed that the group must reflect his identity and national ideology;

John: 'If there is an organization let them be called the IRA, let them be called anything they like. If they're for the good of my country. If they, if their ideas are the same as mine, I am with them. I am with them'

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Rather than the crudely ethnic enmity projected out as described by Volkan, who has it that the terrorist's 'targets of his violence are symbolized as unwanted and dangerous elements that originated from his internal world', John's enemy is the ambivalent institutional manifestation of his own introjected object, Ireland and indeed the Irish (Volkan, 1998, p 162; Robins and Post, 1997). The conflict he is engaged in could be seen in fact, as an attempt at repairing this internal ambivalence of the transgenerationally transmitted humiliation and guilt which is at the same time the source of his core identity and self worth. Whilst an extremely devout Catholic, John is at pains to point out that he bore no sectarian animosity, having it that 'my best friend was a Protestant and he was executed' (Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

The notion deployed by Volkan of a dichotomous borderline conceptualisation of splitting and projective ethnic enmity is not only inherently reductive, but actually subverts by subsuming the ideological complexity of these conflicts (Volkan 1998). Similarly Post's notion of the terrorist group's borderline splitting off the all bad and hated aspects of its collective group self, and projecting them onto the enemy, does not reverse engineer to reflect a similar individual developmental process or outcomes (Robins and Post, 1997). Belying



the essential borderline symptomatic pattern of unstable and intense relationships which Post associates with the traumatic psychic injury and the splitting and projective identification that delineates his terrorist cohort, John was happily married to the same woman for some seventy years, and he rejects any association with the borderline traits of impulsivity, addiction and associated criminality, but does not deny its existence in his movement (Post 2007).

John: 'I don't, I'm not a dope addict and I'm not a drunk. I am an ordinary, honest, living person. Who would like, to cause no problem to any individual ...

But then you always have the opportunist who will come in and create that problem which will create a far, a bad impression on the rest of Ireland. I'm not saying, every man in jail for the republic is that. But you have characters that, that sell dope'.

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014)

In so far as he 'followed' leaders, they represented a tool for John to address the ambivalences of his ego identity. John emphatically eschews the notion that he had been inspired by his leaders or followed them because of their charisma;

John: 'I didn't follow anybody.

They were a part of the same history and the same culture I was they shared my philosophy'.

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

John was not then one of what Post describes as 'alienated, frustrated individuals' drawn in by the charismatic leader (Post, 2005, p 8). He was pulled into a conflict as a means of making reparations with his introjected object, his 'father' (Ireland);

John: 'I never thought the world against me ...

No not one was not against me. The people who took my father were against me ... And I would want to die until I got that father back'

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Effectively a prisoner of conscience, John's experience does not reflect Post's notion of the lock and key fit between the mirror-hungry personality of the charismatic leader and the ideal-hungry personality of the follower (Post, 2004). There was though a traumatising catalyst for his career as a rebel, however it happened not to John but a cousin of his;

John: 'Three miles from me there was, four men arrested, sitting on a bridge, and the black and tans [a specially recruited British force, notorious for its ill discipline] come in, they arrested the four men.

They put them, they took them to the other side of the ditch, and off of the road and they shot three of them and one man got away ... They killed them and brutally murdered them ... And the, one of these people was a cousin of mine'

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

John's was not then a personally traumatic event of narcissistic wounding as described by Volkan analysis. John claims to have had a very happy childhood and loving relationship with his parents so he does not appear to have been narcissistically wounded as per Post's early traumatogenic object relating formulation (Volkan, 1998; Post 1986). John's reaction to the incident would though seem to relate to a desire for revenge,



as reflecting the darker side of a sense of injustice, recognised according to David Silke, to be 'for most terrorists a key motivation for joining a terrorist organisation' (Silke, 2003, p 39).

This desire for revenge is again not necessarily pathological *per se*, because as Cota-McKinley *et al's* research shows, that in Western culture revenge 'fulfils a wide variety of goals, including righting perceived injustice, restoring the self-worth of the vengeful individual, and deterring future injustice' (Cota-McKinley *et al*, 2001, p 344). Revenge is also tied according to Cota-McKinley *et al*, to the self worth of the individual, so that frequently it is individuals with little power who 'seek revenge against powerful adversaries even though the action has overwhelming costs' (*ibid*). Indeed terrorism is effectively the tactic of the weak deployed against the strong.

Addressing Post's central tenet that the '*cause is not the cause ... individuals become terrorists in order to join terrorist groups and commit acts of terrorism*', John's story categorically rejects (Post, 1998, p 35, emphasis in the original);

John: 'The real man is not doing it for self interests.

He's doing it for a cause that he thinks is just.

What is a cause? A cause is a problem.

A foreign power in my country'

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Whatever other particular and personal psychic impulsions John may have had, the decision to dedicate his life and to an ideal and the consequent disruption of his life was a momentous one;

John: 'My social life was interrupted by a foreign power ...

And as long as there's a foreign flag in Ireland, I will fight until the day I die to get rid of that ...

I wouldn't, you wouldn't call it happiness ... That I took this stand in life ... But I, I took it as a natural event ... Of course, I am, very proud of it ...

When a man lays down his life for his principles, there must be something in it'

(Personal Communication, John Hunt, 2014).

Conclusion

For Jerrold Post and the personality pathology theory of terrorism '*political terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and that their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalize acts they are psychologically compelled to commit*' (Post, 1998, p 25, emphasis in the original).

Normatively locating grievance and its outcome within the psyche of the 'Other', has the effect of enlisting psychoanalytic conceptualisations in support of one particular side in a politico/ideological conflict. As Raymond Corrado argues, political terrorists are then seen as engaging 'in gratuitous violence, which reveals psychopathological rather than socio-political' causes (Corrado, 1981, p 295). The policy consequences are that if terrorists are pathological, 'their political demands can be ignored and the strategic focus will be overwhelmingly a military response. If terrorists are political idealists, then it raises the possibility that complex political and social issues must be addressed by governmental policy' (Corrado, 1981, p 293).

Although the personality pathology model is the dominant psychoanalytic paradigm in explaining political violence, there is though no reason in particularly Freudian depth psychology, why either social upheaval or



individual participation in it, should be regarded as normatively pathological. The culture wide melancholia induced by the Great Famine was reflected in a universal nationalist aspiration, so that individuals acting upon that sentiment could not in Freud's terms be regarded as individually pathological because 'for an individual neurosis we take as our starting-point the contrast that distinguishes the patient from his environment, which is assumed to "normal". For a group all of whose members are affected by one and the same disorder no such background could exist' (Freud, 1930, XXI, 144).

Similarly, such revolutionary activity may be viewed as psychohistorical evolution as with, in Freud's terms, 'victors and vanquished who turn into masters and slaves. The justice of the community then becomes an expression of the unequal degrees of power...the oppressed members of the group make constant efforts to obtain more power...from unequal justice to justice for all...a solution by violence, ending in the establishment of a fresh rule of law' (Freud and Einstein, 1933, XXII, p 206). Hegemonic normative forces induce psychic crises, with authoritarian regimes Nancy Caro Hollander argues, splitting the world 'into good and evil—Western Civilization vs. "subversion;" the projection of everything bad onto a hated object (the "subversive") with the consequent need to control it for fear of being controlled by it' (Caro Hollander, 2006, p 4). Revolutionary violence could then as Caro Hollander claims, derive from the resultant trauma, deprivation and frustration, with 'groups seeking a radical change in the social order, often based on attitudes of love, concern, and responsibility for others' (ibid, p 3).

The principle objective of this paper has been to demonstrate that psychoanalysis as a depth psychology, can transcend political/ideological considerations in respect of the justice or otherwise of a cause, or any overlapping moral opprobrium over the tactics employed (i.e. terrorism). The aim has been to provide a psychoanalytic analysis relating to notions of identity individual and national as they affect the individual's psyche and the individual's psychic responses to national trauma and conflict.

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Terrorists, Geopolitics and Kenya's Proposed Border Wall with Somalia

by **Brendon John Cannon**



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Abstract

Addressing border security appears to be a plausible approach for states that suffer from terrorism. Kenya's border wall is to keep terrorists out of Kenya. Utilizing a comparative approach, this paper explores the efficacy of border walls, particularly Kenya's wall with Somalia. Findings show that walls rarely accomplish stated goals and have unintended consequences. In Kenya's case, it may reignite border disputes and separate communities. The success of Kenya's border wall is low given the high levels of corruption and the fact that walls have been demonstrated to only be as good as the people who guard them.

Keywords: *terrorism; border wall; Kenya; Somalia; Al-Shabaab; international relations; boundary disputes; corruption; international terrorism*

Part I: Introduction

Heinous acts call for desperate countermeasures. The killing in cold blood on April 2, 2015 of 147 students at Garissa University in Kenya, by a handful of terrorists affiliated with the al-Shabaab terrorist group, has led Kenyan authorities to resort to building a wall along its border with Somalia in an effort to stem future attacks. The decision to construct a security wall occurred against a backdrop of the public rage and anguish felt in Kenya following the attack and compounded by repeated al-Shabaab attacks in the country since 2008. Kenyan authorities' fixation with ostensibly penning in al-Shabaab terrorists and keeping them out of Kenya dominated discourse about the suitability of a border wall. Al-Shabaab's leaders and most of its terrorist training camps are based in Somalia. The terrorists who conducted the attacks at Garissa University came from Somalia and ostensibly acted under the direction of al-Shabaab leadership.

When Kenya announced it was building a wall, questions were immediately raised regarding the effectiveness of such an expensive venture. However, the debate about constructing the border barrier did not consider or entertain key questions including the likely geopolitical repercussions such as migration in the region, separating communities and clans that have co-existed and depended on each other for hundreds of years and long-simmering border disputes with Kenya's neighbours, some of which have periodically fed Somali irredentism. This paper utilizes international security theories and a comparative political science approach in analysing the efficacy of Kenya's proposed border wall with Somalia as a strategy for containing al-Shabaab and preventing future terrorist attacks in the country. Existing evidence suggests that the proposed wall, if completed, will exacerbate an already volatile situation by reigniting border disputes not only between Somalia and Kenya; but could also provide precedent for other states in the region to raise claims over borders that were drawn by colonial powers. The proposed border also will artificially separate communities and clans who live on either side of the border and negatively affect existing and legitimate social, cultural, economic and political cross-border exchanges. Lastly, this paper argues that the chances of success of the



Kenya/Somalia border wall (keeping out terrorists) are miniscule, given the high levels of corruption in Kenya and the fact that walls have been demonstrated throughout history to only be as good as the people who control them.

This paper discusses practical implications and offers prescriptions based on the research and comparative methods used. It highlights lessons learned from other countries such as Israel, Bulgaria and India that have attempted to build border walls to improve security. This paper will add significantly to the discipline of political science on account of its original contributions to theories of international security and comparative politics. It will also add considerably to the discipline of international relations (IR) and political economy by asking crucial questions and defining possible geopolitical and socio-economic effects of the proposed Kenya/Somalia border wall. These could have unintended, long-term and possibly detrimental outcomes, including the exacerbation of border disputes, irredentist movements and the cessation of legitimate cross-border trade and movements. Subsequent to introducing the topic, Part II provides a synopsis of al-Shabaab's terrorist attacks in Kenya and shows how the attack at Garissa University provided the impetus for Kenya to continue building a proposed security wall in an effort to prevent al-Shabaab terrorists from infiltrating its territory and killing its citizens. Part II also examines why border walls are becoming popular for countries seeking to attain and maintain internal security. Part III assesses the effectiveness of a border wall with Somalia as a response to international terrorism in Kenya. It also draws lessons from countries such as Israel, Mexico, the United States (U.S.), and other historical evidence to demonstrate that a border wall will have little, if any, impact on Kenya's security. Part IV concludes the paper.

Part II: Desperate Acts call for Desperate Measures

According to the American political scientist Robert Pape (2003), the most promising way to reduce terrorism in a given country – particularly suicide terrorism – is to reduce the terrorists' confidence in their ability to carry out attacks against a target society. Pape concludes that states which confront persistent terrorist attacks like Kenya should invest significant resources in border defences and other means of security rather than relying on military offensives or concessions to terrorist groups. It is unclear whether Kenyan officials were aware of, or influenced by, Pape's research when they sanctioned the building of a border wall with Somalia, but their underlying assumption that such wall would prevent terrorists from reaching Kenya from Somalia is basically similar. It should, however, be noted that the porous Kenya/Somalia border has always been problematic especially for Nairobi. Since the independence of both countries, movements in Somalia have waxed and waned to incorporate portions of northern Kenya (along with eastern Ethiopia and Djibouti) into a greater Somalia. This culminated in the Shifta War (1963-67). The outcome was messy and brutal, with large numbers of civilians killed, but resulted in the status-quo of Kenya's post-independence borders remaining intact (Branch, 2014). Though Somalia's civil war that began in 1991 and the resulting lack of a central government removed "official" approval for such irredentism, a new set of problems presented themselves. These included the influx of millions of Somali refugees into north eastern Kenya as well as border smuggling that includes the illegal movement of people, animals and other goods (Kumssa & Jones, 2014).

A. Background on Kenya's Border Wall

After the horrific attacks at Garissa University in April 2015, some in Kenya's government apparently took Pape's advice to heart and announced that Kenya would continue with the construction of an anti-terror



security wall that would separate Kenya from Somalia and help prevent attacks from al-Shabaab. Terrorist attacks planned in Somalia, often involving Kenyan nationals who were trained in Somalia, have been an ongoing problem in Kenya and one that has only intensified in recent years.

The attack on Garissa University was shocking in its length and brutality. For a full 15 hours, a handful of terrorists held over 700 people hostage, freeing those they identified as Muslim and slaughtering anyone else identified as Christian. 148 people were killed in the attack and another 79 wounded. Four of the terrorists were eventually shot by Kenya security forces and a fifth reportedly detonated his explosive belt, killing himself (Odula, Muhumuza & Senosi, 2015).

The attacks at Garissa University occurred against a backdrop of a spate of al-Shabaab terrorist attacks that have targeted Kenya since 2008—when al-Shabaab launched its first attack in the country (Pate, et al., 2015). Al-Shabaab, with ties to various terrorist groups including al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State (IS), is based in Somalia, though its members and recruits come from multiple continents and countries, to include Kenya (Shinn, 2011; Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2015). Kenya has experienced more than 200 attacks at the hands of al-Shabaab terrorists in places ranging from the big cities of Nairobi and Mombasa to the small hamlet of Mpeketoni and a rock quarry outside the town of Mandera (Pate, et al., 2015).

The attack on Garissa University was noteworthy for another reason: the lacklustre response of Kenyan security forces and the government. In this, it was similar to the confusion and mayhem that accompanied the attacks on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September 2013 (Onuoha, 2013). Kenyan media reports suggest it took the country's elite paramilitary unit seven hours to deploy to Garissa from their base in Nairobi. By the time they arrived, the majority of the students held hostage by the terrorists had already been murdered (Cummings, 2015). The Kenyan response was characterized by an almost utter lack of security force preparedness, capacity, independence of movement and mission, and professionalism. When reports surfaced a few days after the massacre that a police chief used a plane to fly his family back to Nairobi from holiday on Kenya's coast rather than transport Kenyan commandos to Garissa, Kenyans were outraged (Mutiga, 2015). Coupled with the slow response time of Kenyan authorities and their apparent inability to save defenceless citizens yet again, the government of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta scrambled to effectively blunt criticism and affect a proper and coordinated response. First, the Kenyan Defense Force (KDF) bombed al-Shabaab camps in Somalia, including Camp Shaykh Ismail, Camp Gondodwe, Camp Bardheere and what was described as a major camp in Gedo Region where some 800 militants were based (McGregor, 2015). The government's focus then shifted to the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya's North Eastern Province. The refugee camp, the largest in Africa with between 350,000 to 500,000 Somali residents, was set up in 1991, and its population composed largely of women and children has grown exponentially over the years. The Garissa attack led to further claims from some Kenyan politicians and security personnel that the facility is a terrorist training camp and place of refuge. Indeed, following the Garissa attack, Kenya's Deputy President, William Ruto, demanded that the United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, close Dadaab and remove the refugees from Kenyan soil (Sieff, 2015). Following an international outcry, the government softened its stance and, to date, the refugees remain housed in Dadaab.

The government also publicized plans and touted its firm commitment to build a border wall along Kenya's border with Somalia. First reported in February 2015, Kenya's government tried to further blunt criticism of its response to the attack in Garissa by announcing that the wall, already reportedly under construction prior to the attacks, would keep al-Shabaab terrorists from entering Kenya from Somalia and boost security (Kazungu, 2015). The wall's construction was, in effect, something tangible that would prove Kenya's



government and security forces were capable of protecting Kenya's citizenry, a capability that has been severely called into question given al-Shabaab's seeming impunity and ability to strike Kenya from Mombasa to Lamu to Garissa to Nairobi.

When built, Kenya's proposed border wall with Somalia may extend over 700 km from border point one in Mandera County at the country's north eastern tip to Kiunga in Lamu on the Indian Ocean. The proposed border wall has been described as a series of fences, ditches, and observation posts rather than a true wall (Laing, 2015). Kenyan officials say the security wall will provide a long-term security solution to securing the border, adding that once the wall's construction is completed, it can only be crossed by entering through the appropriate border points. The wall will cost an estimated US\$2 million, approximately 200 million Kenyan shillings (Ksh) per kilometre (Kimonye, 2015). This means the proposed 700 km wall will cost US\$ 1.38 billion, or approximately Ksh 140 billion, with an unidentified sum for maintenance accruing on a daily, monthly and yearly basis for as long as the wall exists. This is the same basic cost as Israel's "separation barrier," a wall that separates Israel from the Palestinian West Bank. Its construction was an estimated US\$2 million per kilometre, with an additional cost for maintenance at US\$260 million per year (Cave, 2013). Reports about the length and cost of Kenya's border wall are conflicting, however. In May 2015, Kenya's Interior Secretary, Joseph Nkaissery stated that the wall would not be built along the entire 700 km border with Somalia and Kenya. Rather a security barrier would be constructed on a small portion of land around Mandera town to help control and screen people crossing into Kenya (Mutai, 2015).

B. Kenya Not Alone: Borders, Barriers and Walls Elsewhere

Kenya is not alone in attempting to use a border wall as a mechanism for preventing future terrorist attacks. Jones (2012) notes that approximately twenty-five border walls have been built, or been fortified around the world since 2000. Israel, India and the U.S. alone have together built more than 3,500 miles of walls and fences. Although the 1990s saw almost as much border fencing as the previous four decades of the Cold War combined (Hassner & Wittenberg, 2009), border walls were by and large seen as relics of the Cold War, something that globalization would conquer. However, Jones (2011) argues that the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. on 9/11 were transformational in that they flipped the logic of the Self versus Other developed during the Cold War. In other words, after 9/11 the Other who stayed on its respective side of the border morphed into the Other who attacked the Self from within the confines of its national "home" (Jones, 2011). In essence, the attacks on 9/11 shifted the paradigm of viewing walls from the, "... exclusionary and anachronistic imagery of the Berlin Wall to that of a modern and essential way to secure the future of civilisation and freedom" (Jones, 2011, p. 214). This major change informed the decade-long spate of border wall construction that has characterized the world from Bulgaria to India to Kenya as part of the so-called War on Terror. The irony of this surge in wall building, if there is one, is that, "... in our increasingly globalised world, we are witnessing a relapse of border demarcation and of closing up of national spaces" (Szary, 2012, p. 3).

C. The Rationale for Border Walls

Much of the recent literature on borders and walls has focused on understanding them through an analytical look at changes to the security paradigm (Brunet-Jailly, 2007; Salter & Zureik, 2005; Walters, 2006; Anderson, 2000). There are three reasons states may have for constructing a border wall. The first may be the ostensible protection of cultural practices within the state from possible outside influences, usually those of immigrants,



offered by border wall construction. This was witnessed in Europe in mid-2015 as Hungary and other European Union (EU) countries erected barrier walls along their borders in an effort to keep out thousands of refugees fleeing chaos in Syria, Iraq, Somalia and elsewhere. Second, states may erect border walls in an attempt to establish sovereignty over ungoverned or unruly lands – an effort known as broadcasting power from the centre of a given state (usually the capital city) to the peripheral borders of that same state (Herbst, 2000, p. 11). In the Kenyan context, as in much of Africa, the state has often faced difficulties or has few incentives to broadcast power to its peripheries, particularly in the arid and sparsely-populated regions bordering Somalia. By building a border wall, Kenya's government in Nairobi may be attempting to effectively and consistently broadcast power to this peripheral region for the first time since independence in 1963. Third, and more relevant to the present analysis, states may erect borders in an effort to protect the safety and thereby the wealth of the state and its population. Kenya currently is seeking to stop al-Shabaab attacks that kill its citizens. It is also attempting to promote a secure environment for its multi-million-dollar tourism industry. In the wake of recent attacks, countries such as the U.K. and U.S. have consistently issued advisories warning their citizens to avoid all but essential travel to Kenya (Obwocha, 2014). This has had an extreme and detrimental effect on Kenya's tourism industry (Morris, 2015). Given the thousands of Kenya's who rely on the tourism industry for their livelihoods, al-Shabaab's repeated attacks have had a chilling and direct effect.

This paper focuses on the third rationale on why states build walls: that is, to keep undesirable elements such as migrants or terrorists out of their territory. This is the reason Israel has built its so-called "separation barrier" with Palestine: to keep Palestinian terrorists from infiltrating and conducting attacks inside Israel. Kenya similarly has argued that a border wall separating Kenya from Somalia would prevent al-Shabaab trained and directed operatives from entering and conducting attacks in Kenya (Kushkush, 2015). But walls also broadcast to world, and more importantly to contiguous states, the line of sovereign authority and territory of the wall-building state, as noted in the second reason for building walls. While borders may appear to the casual observer to be natural and timeless, the truth is that even the oldest territorial borders in Europe are only a few hundred years old. In another scenario, the current US-Mexico border was literally drawn in 1854, but US sovereignty was only established by decades of movement into what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California by Anglo-Americans (Nevins, 2010, p. 27).

Part III: Assessing The Effectiveness of Kenya's Border Wall

A. What Walls Do and Do Not Do

Walls definitely keep people out. They have all sorts of psychological consequences, as well. Whether the walls are effective at keeping everybody on a particular side of the fence – to include terrorists—is debatable. The following examples are instructive. First, walls are built ostensibly to keep people on one side or the other. The Great Wall of China was built to keep "barbarians" away from the Middle Kingdom. The Berlin Wall was built to keep East Germans away from the West. But walls are also largely symbolic constructs. They have a psychological component and they present an unnatural barrier to commerce and communication. However, they are not insurmountable. If a country builds a 20-foot wall, a person only needs a 21-foot ladder to climb over it, or they can tunnel under it, or simply bribe border guards to get to the other side. Second, building walls is terribly expensive and they are even more expensive to maintain. The U.S. government estimates that each mile of fencing on the Mexican border will cost US\$20 million over the fence's 20-year life span. As noted, the proposed border with Kenya may cost as much as US\$2 million, per kilometre. For



many countries, including Kenya, this sum is unsustainable given a paucity of currency reserves and poor tax collection practices (Njoroge, 2015). Therefore, the efficacy of the border wall is called into question as money runs out and politicians and their priorities change. Third, borders with fences are still crossed on a daily basis, often by thousands of people. These legitimate border crossings involve farmers crossing with their livestock from Bangladesh to India or Palestinian day-labourers traveling to work in Israel, for example. Besides inflicting huge costs in the form of time and money, these legitimate and necessary border crossings also represent a weak spot in border wall defences. Terrorists can utilize these border crossings just as easily as migrant labourers or farmers. Terrorists often utilize legitimate methods to enter the countries housing their targets of attack. Most famously, all of the al-Qa'ida 9/11 hijackers entered the U.S. with valid visas through airports. Fourth, walls take a psychological toll. The so-called "wall disease" diagnosed by Berlin psychologist Dietfried Müller-Hegemann (1973) manifests itself in people living next to a separation border or wall in the form of heightened levels of depression, alcoholism and domestic abuse. Marcello Di Cintio (2013), documented cases of death from grief by Tohono O'odham tribe of Native Americans when the U.S. border fence was built and separated them from their ceremonial sites. Di Cintio (2013) also documented the development of Self versus Other mentality in the minds of Bangladeshi farmers who were cut off from their neighbours by a hastily erected, Indian-built border fence. According to Di Cintio, Bangladeshi farmers began exhibiting dislike and distrust vis-à-vis their former neighbours within a few weeks and months after the barbed-wire fence was erected. Thus, the size of the fence does not matter when it comes to psychological effects, some of them profound. Lastly, border fences rarely run the entire length of any given border. The Berlin Wall was the exception rather than the rule. The U.S. fence only covers one third of its long, porous border with Mexico. India's walls only cover 80 per cent of its borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. As noted, some Kenyan government officials have announced that the proposed Kenya/Somalia border wall will cover the entire 700 kilometre border. Others have announced it will only stretch across a small area close to the town of Mandera in order to screen individuals entering Kenya from Somalia.

What do walls offer? At a localised level, a wall does offer more security than no wall. However, walls do not address the root causes of insecurity nor do they foster understanding or a desire for rapprochement. Rather, walls may act as a catalyst for conflict, at most, and a stalemate in the status quo, at least. It is worth remembering that terrorist attacks have risen globally despite over a decade of wall-building (Tomlinson, 2015). This is because terrorist groups are largely products of their environment (Krueger & Maleckova, 2003). But they also have the ability to adapt ideologically and tactically. This is particularly the case with al-Shabaab (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). Yet that has not acted as a deterrent to states that choose to build walls. Indeed, it appears that there is something of a copy-cat effect when it comes to building walls to keep out undesirables, particularly terrorists. Tunisia's government, copying Kenya's, announced it would build a wall along its border with Libya after a terrorist attack that resulted in the deaths of 38 tourists (Mwiti, 2015). For terrorists, walls are surmountable because they can utilize available resources and contacts to surmount them. Drug cartels operate along the same lines as terrorist groups and quickly adapt to barriers erected to prevent the flow of drugs. By using fake documents, disguises, sympathetic contacts and networks or bribery, terrorists and drug runners are able surmount significant impediments to carrying out their respective missions (Zill, 2001). Indeed, the Islamic State (IS)-affiliated and funded terrorists who attacked Paris in November 2015 utilized various means and methods to travel to Syria and return to France. These included using legitimate and false passports to enter Europe in the company of legitimate refugees fleeing the very chaos fomented by IS and other groups (Walker & Bisserbe, 2015).



B. Is Kenya's Proposed Border Wall Worth the Cost and Effort?

It is worth noting that in Africa borders are not only relatively new, but were arbitrarily drawn by outside colonial powers, separating linguistic groups, tribes, clans and families (Baud & Van Schendel, 1997). Though there have been arguments about the relative size of African states (Collier, 2006), there is little doubt that reifying currently porous borders with walls – as is the case with Kenya and Somalia – may exacerbate tensions that have simmered just below the surface since independence (Kromm, 1967; Mahmoud, 2008). Indeed, recent disputes over Kenya's and Somalia's maritime border led Somalia's government to take Kenya to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. The case is ongoing and there are concerns in Somalia that Kenya may attempt to draw the border in their favour through the construction of the border wall separating the two countries (Olick, 2015).

Borders seldom keep out "unwanted" people: As discussed previously, walls such as the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall, the US-Mexico border fence and Israel's separation barrier do not stop all terrorists or others who are willing to take various measures and have the resources to do so.

- i. Israel's case is instructive. Most estimates conclude that the 800 km separation barrier has been effective in stopping terrorist attacks. They cite figures showing that in the three years before the barrier was built, suicide bombers killed 293 Israelis; in the three years after it went up, that number dropped to 64 (Allison, 2015). However, a recent flare-up in violence and the killing of Israelis also demonstrates walls cannot keep all terrorists out (Booker, 2015).
- ii. Completed in 2014, the three-metre high border wall separating Bulgaria and the European Union (EU) from Turkey is an extension of the border wall built between Greece and Turkey and completed in 2012. Bulgaria built the wall in response to refugees moving north from Greece and crossing into Bulgaria, and by extension the EU, after Greece erected its wall (Mortimer, 2015). The fence that separates the EU from Turkey has now resulted in migrants taking a much riskier sea crossing from the Turkish mainland to various Greek islands dotting the Aegean Sea (Arango, 2015). The lesson here is that when walls go up alternative routes and methods are found and used by refugees, drug cartels and terrorist groups.
- iii. The US-Mexico border, which is separated along certain portions by a massively expensive wall, armed agents and the latest technological equipment has also been effective in stopping some would-be crossers (Carter & Poast, 2015). However, drops in border crossings from south to north seem to have less to do with the wall than the economic downturn and recession that plagued the U.S. beginning in 2007. Again, those who want to cross still attempt to do so – and many make it (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015).

Walls negatively impact existing, legitimate exchanges: Often described as unparalleled engineering feats, these walls may not keep out unwanted and undesirable people such as terrorists, but they do effectively separate populations. The wall in Kenya will definitely separate the people of two countries who often share cultural, linguistic, familial and religious ties. Citizens from both the countries have intermarried, and the wall will affect family, clan and pastoral ties due to immigration complications. These complications include the need for travel documents, which many locals do not possess. Yet the real question remains, will the proposed wall accomplish what Kenya's government says it will do? Will it actually stop al-Shabaab terrorists?

Walls as a deterrent: Walls have been shown to be a deterrent to crossing from point A to point B, particularly for resource-poor refugees, pastoralists, labourers and families. They are less successful in



stopping terrorists and drug runners (Brown, 2010). Both groups have access to resources, networks on both sides of the wall and adapt their tactics in pursuit of strategies. States that choose to build walls must take these factors into consideration along with the significant expenses associated with the construction and maintenance of border walls and fences. Yet states such as Israel may realize that walls will not be 100 per cent effective, but build them anyway. The wall acts as a deterrent and does arguably lessen penetration of Israel by would-be terrorist attackers. Kenya's case may be a bit more complicated. Will Kenya's wall act as a deterrent to al-Shabaab attackers entering Kenya? Arguably yes, it will. But it depends on what kind of wall is built, its length and the people who man it.

Walls present Alternatives: Should Kenya's wall be built, al-Shabaab may simply develop alternative routes (sea or air) or utilize legitimate means to cross into Kenya. It should be noted that many of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Kenya have been Kenyan citizens, making it easier for them to cross legally into the country (Botha, 2014). Regardless of the technology and engineering used in the construction of border walls, walls are only as good as the people who guard them. Yet Kenya has a well-documented problem of corruption. Some have argued that corrupt contracts that were delivered at inflated costs, were of substandard quality, or were never delivered at all are largely to blame for al-Shabaab's continuing ability to attack Kenya (Githongo, 2015; Meservey, 2015). Illustrating this point, in 2014, two militants bribed Kenyan border guards to escort them to the port city of Mombasa. The two were later captured in the city driving a vehicle stuffed with automatic weapons, ammunition, and over 130 pounds of explosives (Ombati, 2015).

Corruption defeats walls: It appears that corruption in Kenya will affect the very efficacy of the wall itself. Walls do not stop all terrorists, but Kenya's wall cannot stop terrorists if the guards let them through. Though simplistic from a historical perspective and likely over-dramatic, the fact remains that it took just one corrupt and traitorous general to open a gate in the Great Wall of China. By opening that gate, a small ethnic group invaded China, destroyed the empire of the majority Han Chinese, and ruled the country as the Qing Dynasty for the next 250 years (Stary & Wakeman, 1990).

While nothing as drastic as an al-Shabaab invasion of Kenya will occur, the bottom line is that Kenya's wall will be full of holes unless issues of corruption are dealt with. Kenya's corruption reportedly permeates multiple agencies and ministries (Hope, 2014). This includes the military and police forces and has led to sensational, but credible reports that accuse the KDF, for example, of cooperating with al-Shabaab in the charcoal trade in southern Somalia (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). Given the sheer levels of corruption reported in Kenya, the country should arguably spend any money allocated towards the building of a wall on other measures such as fighting graft and corruption through prosecutions and reforms. The money could also be spent towards alleviating the many grievances of Kenya's citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, Somali and non-Somali alike (Lind, Mutahi & Oosterom, 2015).

Partnering with Somalia to promote mutual sustainable security solutions: Terrorism is a common problem on both sides of the Kenya/Somalia border. Indeed, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud immediately condemned the terrorist attacks in Garissa, offered his condolences and stated that Kenya and Somalia must cooperate to defeat terrorism in the region (AFP, 2015).

Kenya's response to President Mohamud's statements, if there was any, remains unreported. Perhaps Kenya's government feels that the current Somali Federal Government, derisively referred to as the "Mayors of Mogadishu," have very little to offer when it comes to prosecuting efforts to root out terrorists in the region. The two governments also harbour mutual suspicions regarding the other's intents vis-à-vis maritime and land borders. At stake are the two countries' legal claims to sell rights for exploration of oil and gas and



collect revenue from any discovery. This includes the maritime border dispute, referenced above, currently pending at the ICJ in The Hague. Somalia believes that the maritime border should extend in a southeast direction, in an area equidistant between the two states, while Kenya believes the line delineating water under its control should extend directly east of the land border (Mutambo, 2015). In turn, Kenya has exacerbated border tensions by pushing ahead with plans to build the border fence (Hirmoge, 2015).

Yet the fact remains that al-Shabaab poses a threat to both countries and both regimes. It can be argued that it makes more sense for Kenya to work with Somalia on this issue and others, to include border issues, in a constructive and concerted way. This may actually have the effect of bringing the two countries together rather than building a likely ineffective border wall while reifying already strong notions proliferating in both countries of “Us” versus “Them.”

Border demarcation could ignite latent border disputes: Kenya’s attempts at border demarcation through the construction of a border wall with Somalia could provide a precedent for other African countries and possibly ignite latent border disputes.

- i. Kenya/South Sudan Border Disputes: The Ilemi Triangle, situated at the junction of Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia, is disputed land. The territory is currently claimed by both South Sudan and Kenya, though Kenya has *de facto* control of the area. As with other border disputes, this dates back to colonial times and was previously a bone of contention between Sudan and Kenya prior to the independence of South Sudan in 2011, when the Sudanese claim to the Ilemi Triangle was transferred to the new national government in Juba (O’Collins, 2004). South Sudan Ambassador to Kenya, Guangdong Makok, dismissed rumours in 2012 that South Sudan had written to the African Union and the UN over the Ilemi Triangle dispute (Olick, 2012). South Sudan has also accused Kenya of illegal construction of unidentified structures inside South Sudanese territory close to the Nadapal/Lokichogio border crossing (Nakimangole, 2015).
- ii. Ethiopia/Kenya Border Dispute: Though there are arguably no border disputes between Kenya and Ethiopia, citizens of the two countries have fought and killed each other over access to water for decades. Ethiopia’s decision to build a dam on the Omo River to harness hydroelectric power means less water will flow into Lake Turkana (Powers, 2011). The Turkana of Kenya and the Dassanech, Nyangatom and Mursi of Ethiopia are tribes that depend on the Omo River and Lake Turkana to survive. Though Ethiopia and Kenya recently signed agreements to end conflict in the region and cooperate in regards to water resources and the development of the region, the area remains a potential zone of conflict (Chebet & Bett, 2015).
- iii. Uganda/Kenya Border Dispute: Misingo Island in Lake Victoria is claimed by both Kenya and Uganda. Uganda deployed troops to the island in 2004 and complaints of harassment by the island’s 1,000 Kenyan residents have led to recurrent clashes and arrests (Shaka, 2013). Kenya and Uganda have met numerous times to defuse the situation and resolve the dispute to little avail (Onyango, 2013).
- iv. Oil and Gas and Border Disputes in East Africa: The fairly recent discovery of oil and gas in East Africa also may exacerbate territorial disputes. Border disagreements of some sort currently exist between Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania (including Zanzibar) and Uganda and these will likely intensify over control of oil and gas resources (The East African, 2012).



Part IV: Conclusion

Pape (2003) is very likely correct that the most promising way to reduce terrorism in a given country is to reduce the terrorists' confidence in their ability to carry out attacks against a target society. And there is no doubt that Kenya is a country that continues to suffer from terrorist attacks by an enemy that is largely trained in and operates from a neighbouring country. As such, addressing border security and revamping national security apparatuses along with building a border wall would appear to be in Kenya's best interests. This supposition should also hold true for other countries such as Israel, which are the targets of sustained terrorist attacks. However, as demonstrated in a variety of cases, border walls only reduce terrorist attacks – they do not eliminate them. They also result in shifts in the behaviour and methods of those attempting to cross them, be they refugees, drug cartels or terrorist groups. In Kenya's particular case, the border wall should not be built for multiple reasons. These include the astronomical expenses involved and the likelihood the wall will cause more problems than it will solve. The wall also has the potential to exacerbate an already volatile situation by reigniting border disputes not only between Somalia and Kenya but between other states in the region. Furthermore, the proposed wall will artificially separate communities and clans living on both sides of the Kenya/Somalia border. The final and most important argument against building a border wall is that its chances of success are minimal. It will not keep out all or even most of the al-Shabaab terrorists who wish to attack Kenya. This is because of the high levels of corruption that reportedly permeate Kenya's security establishment and the fact that walls have been demonstrated throughout history to only be as good as the people who guard them.

About the author

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“We’re Going to Nicaragua”: The United States, Nicaragua, and Counterterrorism in Central America during the 1980s

by Philip Travis



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Abstract

During the first two years of Ronald Reagan’s second term the United States developed an offensive strategy for dealing with conflict in the developing world. States like Nicaragua were the prime target of this policy. Scholars refer to this as the Reagan offensive: the first time that the United States eschewed the norms of containment and sought to “roll-back” the gains of communism. However, the Reagan offensive was also significantly driven by a response to the emergent threat of international terrorism. U.S. policy with Nicaragua demonstrates the importance of terrorism in the development of a more aggressive United States.

In 1989, ten years after the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, Orion Pictures produced a film titled “Speedzone.” This motion picture was the third in a trilogy of comedies made about the illegal cross-country motor race, “The Cannon Ball Run.” The movie featured a collection of significant American personalities that included John Candy, Brooke Shields, Carl Lewis, and the Smothers Brothers. In one of the later scenes, the Smothers Brothers, playing themselves, bought plane tickets in an attempt to cheat in the race by flying, rather than driving, from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. The flight attendant on the plane was the darling of the 1980s, Brooke Shields. Shields joked about the lowly quality of her airline. Then, suddenly, a dark skinned man jumped up, drew two guns and shouted “this is a hijack, we’re going to Nicaragua!” Shields and the pilots struggled with the Nicaraguan terrorist and Brooke knocked the villain out with a food service tray. The reason this is interesting is because no Nicaraguan conducted a major airline hijack during the 1980s. Nor were there any other types of international terrorist acts that the Sandinistas directly perpetrated. So, why does this popular image of a Nicaraguan international terrorist exist? The answer to this question rests at the heart of this article.[1]

Between 1983 and 1985 a succession of international terrorist acts caused a change in U.S. Cold War policy. One of the most urgent moments came in June 1985. That month gunmen shot and killed six U.S. citizens in San Salvador, El Salvador. Among the dead were 4 off-duty Marines. Days before, militants hijacked TWA 847 in one of the most visible and controversial hijackings of the period. The hijackers sought a prisoner exchange with Israel and took the plane to Beirut, Lebanon, where for days the militants made demands through western media outlets. The events were a capstone to an escalation of terrorist incidents throughout the world.[2] The front page of the *New York Times* on June 21 covered three different terrorist incidents, the El Salvador killings, the TWA hijacking, and a deadly bombing at the airport in Frankfurt, Germany.[3] The events provided a catalyst for the development of a United States counterterrorism offensive against state sponsors of terrorism.

The period from 1984 to 1986 was one of significant change for U.S. policy with Central America and also the wider world. The transformation carried two thrusts often referred to by scholars as the Reagan doctrine and the Reagan offensive. The Reagan doctrine declared that the United States intended to actively pursue



democratic change in the world. For Sandinista-led Nicaragua, a government already facing U.S. military pressure and that the Reagan administration insisted was the anti-thesis of democracy, this amounted to an open assertion that the United States' goal was regime change. The Sandinista government was a primary target of the Reagan doctrine. The Reagan offensive facilitated this policy primarily through the use of proxy armies trained by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other U.S. advisors. For the Reagan administration, irregular armies like the Nicaraguan Contras held the front lines in a war to make Central America 'safe for democracy.'

From the late 1980s until the early 2000s several excellent scholars documented U.S.-Nicaragua relations during the Reagan administration. Scholars interpreted this history from economic, ideological, and political perspectives. William LeoGrande, Cynthia Arnson, Greg Grandin, Robert Kagan and Walter LaFeber provided some of the most significant scholarship of this period. LaFeber, the ground-breaking revisionist scholar, argued that the anti-U.S. revolutions in Central America resulted from a long history of economic imperialism. In his still relevant 1980s publication, LaFeber argued that these conflicts represented "inevitable revolutions" brought about by a century of U.S. economic exploitation. Kagan provided the most in-depth interpretation of the conflict between the United States and Nicaragua. His monograph, *A Twilight Struggle*, was a roughly 900 page meta-narrative that missed no detail about this period in U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. However, Kagan's point of view as a Reagan insider resulted in an overly defensive narrative. LeoGrande, Arnson, and Grandin, however, criticized the Reagan administration's guerrilla war. Most recently, Greg Grandin emphasized the importance of neo-conservative ideology as the justification for a U.S.-led terror war in Central America. Grandin insisted that the goal of neoconservatives to remake the world in the capitalist-democratic model drove the Reagan offensive in Central America.[4]

As impressive as the scholarship is, most of the best works are 10 to 20 years old. The release of formerly classified documents over the past 10 years allows for a reappraisal that demonstrates the importance of terrorism to the development of the Reagan offensive in Nicaragua. For the most part, scholars ignore the counterterrorism component of this story. Several historians, political scientists, and journalists have considered the Reagan administration's late-Cold War handling of the issue of terrorism, but these scholars tend to focus on the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Typically, Central America is overlooked as a brief side note or is written off as not relevant to the counterterrorism discussion.[5] Even David C. Wills, author of an impressive work on the Reagan administration's counterterrorism policy, pays little attention to the relevance of counterterrorism to the United States' proxy war in Central America.[6] This article is drawn from a forthcoming book that attempts to reorient this narrative.

Terrorism as a problem predates the 1980s, but the Reagan administration's approach differed from earlier ones because it used counterterrorism as a justification for making war on sovereign nations like Nicaragua. In the confusing and tumultuous 21st century the terms 'terrorism' and 'war on terrorism' are often tossed around by the media and the political leadership in the United States, but few Americans really understand that these commonplace terms signify a landmark transformation in how the United States uses and justifies its use of force in the world. The basic definition of terrorism involves a range of violent actions perpetrated on non-combatants with the goal of achieving some kind of political objective. Acts of terrorism are carried out by non-state agents, terrorist organizations, and are often facilitated directly by state sponsors of terrorism. Likewise, a war on terror occurs anytime a government, in this case the United States, uses counterterrorism as a primary justification for taking aggressive actions to combat a terrorist threat from or within another nation. These seem like fairly simple concepts, however, let us look a little deeper.



The standard definition of terrorism is primarily concerned with only the act of targeting innocents. From this standpoint, any side in a conflict regardless of affiliation or ideology might be guilty of conducting acts of terrorism. In the 1980s, many Americans understood this and accurately highlighted both rightist and leftist forms of terrorism in the bloody Central American wars that raged in places like El Salvador, Guatemala, and across the borders of Nicaragua. However, the Reagan administration, ultimately, decided to define the threat of terrorism as uniquely leftist and used it as a vehicle for the pursuit of its policy objectives within the Cold War.

During 1983, administration officials observed an unprecedented escalation of terrorist violence in Latin America. Of the 170 attacks against U.S. citizens and property that year, Latin America led all regions with nearly 80 incidents. Likewise, by 1985 Latin America made up 15.2 percent of all international terrorism in the globe, this was the third highest percentage following the Middle East and Western Europe. More importantly, just short of 50 percent of all international terrorist attacks on U.S. citizens and property occurred in Latin America. The period was plagued by a terrorism crisis.[7] The situation in the mid-1980s was so dire that former Deputy Director for Counterterrorism Parker Borg recalled, “There seemed to be hijackings or terrorist incidents almost continuously.”[8]

Following the surge in terrorism the State Department began a process of redefining terrorism. Through this process it enlarged the catalogue of actions considered terrorist in nature, and limited the scope of legitimate insurgency. According to the State Department, a legitimate insurgency involved a group in which, “Its members wear a uniform [and] operates in the open.” Further, “Its (insurgency) methods are military [and] its targets are military, both tactical and strategic, and its legitimate operations are governed by the international rules of armed conflict.” Lastly, for the United States to recognize a revolutionary or guerrilla movement as a legitimate insurgency rather than a terrorist threat, “Its primary interests [must] relate to one country.”[9] Effectively, no insurgency at any time previous or since fell into the administration’s new definition. As an almost universal rule of insurgency combatants did not wear uniforms, operated as guerrillas, acted across national borders, possessed transnational links, and engaged in a wide array of violence. The United States moved to effectively consider any insurgency against its allies or interests as terrorist in nature, and thereby illegitimate.

As a result of this change the United States defined the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), which led a revolution against the United States supported government in El Salvador, as a terrorist army with a membership numbering 7,500. The FMLN was a revolutionary insurgency, but this redefining placed it among the largest terrorist groups in the world. The Reagan administration catalogued and discussed the FMLN at length in *Terrorist Group Profiles*, a publication, for which, Vice President George H. W. Bush provided an eloquent introduction. Of course, Nicaragua and Cuba the administration deemed as the primary state sponsors of the FMLN.[10] The Reagan administration expanded the definition of terrorism to justify aggressive actions against insurgent groups and nations at odds with the United States by rebranding these groups as terrorist and illegitimate.

The Reagan administration’s struggle with Sandinista-led Nicaragua went back to 1981. Its attempt to destabilize the Nicaraguan government by supporting clandestine guerrilla operations, however, was contentious and the administration met substantial resistance from Congress. Over time, however, the terrorism crisis of the mid-1980s allowed for a re-definition of the Nicaraguan conflict as not only a fight against communism, but also as a struggle in a new global war on terrorism. A critical component to the development of the Reagan administration’s counterterrorism strategy involved the reconstruction of



the meaning of terrorism in such a way that the language applied to not only criminal agents, but also to a wide array of revolutionary and political actors that opposed the United States. Over time, the Reagan administration included those initially considered outside the bounds of international terrorism as part of a broad and radical terrorist threat. These included communist-Marxist governments and insurgencies, leftist political activists, and drug traffickers. This effort to broaden the scope of terrorist groups and states continued into Reagan's second term as the administration sought to use such allegations as a motive for increased military pressure on Nicaragua.

Following the shocking events in El Salvador and Lebanon in June 1985, the Reagan administration announced publically that it was getting tough on terrorism. Speaking before the American Bar Association (ABA) on July 8, Reagan affirmed that the Executive Branch planned significant policy changes following the terrorist incidents. Reagan labeled five states as part of "a confederation of terror states" and a "new version of murder inc." that had attacked the United States and its allies with "outright acts of war." He listed Nicaragua, Cuba, Libya, Iran, and North Korea as the heart of world terrorism. In his own version of "the axis of evil" these states, he argued, were "outlaw states." The President acknowledged that the Cold War had changed, and that radical leftist regimes sought to use terrorism against the United States' allies and interests. Reagan announced his order to form a task force to evaluate and redevelop U.S. counterterrorism policy.[11]

On September 18, the heads of all pertinent agencies and departments met for the first time and provided direct insight to the task force on the course of U.S. terrorism policy. Vice President Bush opened the meeting and made key points about how the task force should define terrorism and what this meant to U.S. policy. In his opening remarks, he insisted, "Once the President approves the recommendations of this task force this congressional support affords a real opportunity to package legislation under anti-terrorism that will stand a good chance of passage." Bush implied that this new threat introduced a tool that could allow for the authorization from Congress of a more aggressive foreign policy in the name of counterterrorism.[12]

According to the members present, the international character of the terror crisis and its role in a global anti-American offensive made it unique. The acts involved state supported transnational criminal agents. These individuals targeted citizens, soldiers, and world leaders through a network of loosely connected state sponsors. The leadership at the meeting perceived the threat primarily as a broad leftist offensive against the United States and, for this reason, Secretary of State George Shultz joined Bush in pressing for a definition of terrorism that facilitated the goals of the Reagan doctrine in places like Nicaragua. First, he insisted, "The international aspect of terrorism is the essence of the matter...the terrorist connections are international." Next, Shultz supported broadening the dimensions of what the United States regarded as international terrorism by incorporating the illegal drug trade into the catalogue of international terrorism. The allegation of Sandinista involvement in drug trafficking, so-called "narco-terrorism," enhanced the administration's call for military escalation. Shultz argued, "There is a definite connection with illicit drugs as a source of financing activities." A key component to the inclusion of Nicaragua in this war on terrorism related to the manner in which the United States defined the threat. The decision by the task force to define the problem broadly provided a justification for escalation against the Sandinistas.[13]

During the meeting some seemed to question whether actions against or within sovereign states might violate norms of international law. This issue pertained to applications of force against sovereign states not technically at war with the United States.[14] In response to this, Shultz implied that international law should not impede the United States' attempt to fight terrorism. He insisted, "We often torture ourselves with these moral dilemmas of justice when we forget the victims and the consequences of the incident." [15] The



Secretary apparently believed that the United States needed to respond aggressively and if necessary without the impediment of “moral dilemmas of justice.”[16] It was clear from this meeting that unilateral military action, aid to transnational guerrilla forces, and other preventative and pre-emptive measures were on the table as potentially acceptable options for dealing with ‘outlaw states’.

Over the course of the next year George Shultz and George H. W. Bush led the way in explaining the new aggressive, unilateral, and pre-emptive approach that the United States adopted in 1985-1986. In May 1986, *American Legion* published an interview with the Vice President titled, “A Warning to Terrorists: We Will Protect Our Citizens.” In the interview Bush insisted that Nicaragua was, contrary to popular opinion, a serious terrorist threat. Bush insisted, “While we usually associate terrorism with the Middle East, a very serious problem exists much closer to our borders. More terrorist acts were directed at U.S. citizens in Latin America last year than any other region. Both Nicaragua and Cuba have been implicated in this activity. Our support for the Contra cause against the Sandinistas is, in part, to ensure that we are not going to have a terrorist beachhead right in our own hemisphere.” George H. W. Bush led the way in advocating an aggressive pre-emptive counterterrorist campaign against Sandinista-led Nicaragua. In Central America, the United States justified its support of the Contras as part of the fight against state sponsors of terrorism.[17]

The proposal of the task force was due by December 20, 1985, and formally outlined the Reagan administration’s counterterrorism policy. George H. W. Bush insisted that once signed the document represented “the gospel” for the future of U.S. counterterrorism policy.[18] Despite these bold assertions controversy reigned within the task force. Ambassador at Large for Counterterrorism, Robert Oakley, sent a critical letter to Executive Director of the task force retired Admiral James Holloway. Oakley was the head of the Office of Counterterrorism, located in the State Department. During 1985, Oakley gave numerous speeches on the emergent issue of international terrorism.[19] He understood the seriousness of the international terrorism problem. However, he disputed the role of military force as the primary method of combatting terror. By contrast, Oakley believed in a multilateral diplomatic approach that the United States could undertake without panicking the public, and which discriminated strictly between insurgencies and terrorists. He acknowledged the potential role of the military in counterterrorism strategy, but his own understanding, as a diplomat, was that the role of the military was for use as a last resort. While Oakley praised the overall process and the move to get serious on the issue of terrorism, his three-page letter to the task force was a stinging critique of the final report.[20]

On December 10, the Deputy Director for Counterterrorism, Parker Borg, also assailed the proposal. Borg was a diplomat well known for his service in Southeast Asia during the end of the Vietnam War and to African nations Zaire and Mali. Like Oakley, Borg preferred to approach the terrorism problem with non-military means.[21] In 2002, he explained that both he and Oakley disagreed with the majority opinion in the task force on several key points. Specifically, the two disagreed with a broad definition of terrorism. Parker Borg insisted there was a difference between terrorism and the actions brought on by revolutionary warfare. For this reason, he recalled that the Office of Counterterrorism “declined...to consider the various groups in Central America, the Sandinistas or El Salvador groups...as being terrorists per-se.”[22] The Office of Counterterrorism resisted the State Department’s efforts to lump revolutionary factions in as part of the terrorism problem. Borg and Oakley offered a more specific and nuanced definition. This outlook, however, ran counter to the attempts of the task force, and most significantly of Shultz and Bush, to use terrorism as a way of carrying out the Reagan doctrine in Central America.

Despite the criticism from Robert Oakley and Parker Borg, the task force’s final report went ahead as



scheduled. Statements made by Bush, Shultz, and Reagan suggested that the majority in the National Security Council, the State Department, and the task force believed that the United States should escalate military operations against states like Nicaragua. On December 20, 1985, the task force's recommendations went to President Reagan. One month later, Reagan signed "National Security Decision Directive Number 207: The National Program for Combatting Terrorism" (NSDD 207) and made the report of the task force official policy. The administration implemented the new policy in the following months.[23]

In addition to economic sanctions, the framework that the task force developed centered on several military options. These included support for insurgents, unilateral military strikes, clandestine operations of sabotage and assassination, and military and naval maneuvers designed to threaten, provoke, and/or act as a cloak for other military operations.[24] The administration re-affirmed a "no-concessions policy." [25] This meant that the United States refused to negotiate with terrorists and state sponsors, and that the alleged illegitimacy of states like Nicaragua meant that the United States refused to conduct fair negotiations. Instead, the administration promoted a military oriented policy that guaranteed an escalation of the conflict as a means to a U.S.-centric peace and democratization. The directive insisted, "The U.S. government considers the practice of terrorism...a threat to our national security...and is prepared to act in concert with other nations or unilaterally when necessary to prevent or respond to terrorist acts." [26] Further, the document pledged, "States that practice terrorism or actively support it, will not be allowed to do so without consequence." [27] To deal with this threat it asserted, "The entire range of diplomatic, economic, legal, military, paramilitary, covert action and informational assets at our disposal must be brought to bear against terrorism." [28] In order to deter and defeat state sponsors the Reagan administration asserted a hardline that included restrictive economic measures, and an entire range of military options.

At the beginning of March 1986, the administration took steps to implement the offensive war on terrorism called for by the task force. On March 5, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Whitehead sent a message to the British at the U.S.-UK Bilateral Meeting on Terrorism that confirmed that the United States was adopting an offensive strategy. The confidential statement emphasized a shift in U.S. policy on the issue of terrorism and the Cold War. He asserted that the "USG [U.S. government] has concluded that the past approach has not yielded adequate results,[and we] must move to [a] more active, offensive policy." The statement continued, "Numbers and casualties of international terrorism demonstrate who is winning despite our intensified, defensive, containment approach." The administration made the decision, and this message was a notification to the United States' closest ally of the change.[29]

Nicaragua was at the center of the administration's new policy. On March 6, Vice President George H. W. Bush and Admiral James Holloway acknowledged in a public statement that the new counterterrorism approach targeted Nicaragua. On March 6, Bush and Holloway held a press conference and announced the release of the public version of the report of the task force.[30] Of all the countries and regions that the task force considered at risk or involved with international terrorism, the two emphasized Nicaragua. Speaking alongside Vice President Bush, Admiral Holloway insisted that, "More terrorist acts were directed at U.S. citizens in Latin America last year than in any other region. Both Nicaragua and Cuba have been implicated in terrorist activity in Latin America." [31] No other states were mentioned in this press conference, which announced the administration's new counterterrorism policy. The White House directed its war on terrorism against Nicaragua. Of all the possible targets for the new offensive, Nicaragua was primary.

In 1986, the administration applied the new framework of intervention offered by the task force in an escalated effort to place increased military pressure on the government of Nicaragua. This involved



threatening U.S.-Honduran military maneuvers on Nicaragua's border coupled with increased clandestine support for the Contras. The result was a major escalation. The Sandinista army launched a responsive invasion into border areas of Honduras, and the Reagan administration publicized the event and used it to build support in the United States Congress for the Contras. By the end of the summer Congress approved, for the first time, lethal support to the Nicaraguan Contras and effectively authorized the Reagan administration's policy of regime change in Nicaragua. Of course, the revelations surrounding the Iran-Contra affair, which emerged in the fall of 1986, derailed this effort shortly after it began.[32]

The Nicaraguan policy was not an anomaly, but rather a product of the Reagan administration's global war on terrorism. At the same time that the United States targeted Nicaragua it also targeted another nation deemed a sponsor of terrorism, and an ally of the Sandinistas. The country was Libya. Simultaneous to the Honduran operations the United States applied a similar approach against Libya beginning with provocative naval maneuvers that incited a direct engagement and was used to build support in Congress and with the public for the administration's more aggressive posture. In a memo to Reagan, National Security Advisor John Poindexter praised the actions as, "Unilateral military action [that] decreased terrorism at the source by putting state sponsors on notice." [33] Together the actions against Nicaragua and Libya represented a broad reaching war on terrorism conducted by the Reagan administration.

Long before George W. Bush's invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Reagan administration constructed its own counterterror offensive. In the middle of the 1980s, the Reagan administration reacted to violence in the Middle East and Latin America. In its response, it redesigned U.S. counterterrorism strategy by broadly defining the terrorism threat and using it to justify the use of military pressure against Nicaragua and other radical powers. In 1986, the administration targeted both Nicaragua and Libya. In Central America, the approach hinged on taking steps to isolate and escalate hostilities with Nicaragua in pursuit of the forceful alteration of the government of Nicaragua. Terrorism provided a tool for justifying a policy of pre-emptive regime change.

In its own war on terrorism the Reagan administration defined and applied the allegation of terrorism one-sidedly. It associated the term almost universally with leftism and toward its enemies. Simultaneous to waging a war on terrorism the Reagan administration supported groups that clearly perpetrated acts of terror. In Central America, the United States supported and supplied a transnational guerrilla army, the Contras. The administration defined these fighters as "freedom fighters" and even insisted that its leaders resembled the founders of the United States. However, journalists, activist, and the International Court of Justice demonstrated that these guerrillas acted in violation of international law and of the sovereign rights of Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. The Contras killed civilians and according to an investigative committee headed by Senator John Kerry were intertwined in drug trafficking to the United States.[34] In short, the Contras fit the administration's own loose definition as terrorists. The Reagan administration, however, consistently ignored acts of terrorism perpetrated by its allies. Instead, it hid an aggressive Cold War realism and policy of regime change in the cloak of human rights and counterterrorism. Terrorism for the United States had more to do with which side of the geo-political spectrum a state or group was affiliated. Terrorism was a way of justifying aggression against Cold War enemies.

Not only did the United States support proxy armies that conducted acts of terrorism, the Reagan administration also facilitated state terrorism in the civil wars in both Guatemala and El Salvador. In *Empires Workshop* and *The Last Colonial Massacre* historian Greg Grandin demonstrated that the United States used the Central American conflicts to implement a policy of state terrorism that involved targeting civilians



with sabotage, assassination, and forcible relocation as a way of combatting insurgencies that threatened the influence and control of the United States in its most intimate imperial domain, Central America. Its support of such policies undermined democratic movements, enfranchised the elite in Central America, and caused the destruction of the lives of thousands of people. While the United States attacked its enemies and justified a policy of regime change with allegations of state sponsorship of terrorism, it actively supported militants and governments that utilized violence against civilians as a fundamental component of its Central American policy.[35]

In order to defend its policy of regime change in Nicaragua the Reagan administration peppered the American public with incessant allegations that the government of Nicaragua was a state sponsor of international terrorism. It was from this public defense that the Nicaraguan terrorist in the film *Speedzone* originated. Nicaragua was not openly complicit in major acts of terrorism during the 1980s, but the Reagan administration's continual assertion that its involvement in the war in El Salvador was tantamount to international terrorism reshaped the public image of Nicaragua. The Reagan administration's portrayal of the Sandinista terrorist came to life in the film *Speedzone* as well as other, more serious films, like the blockbuster smash hit *Red Dawn*.

Terrorism presented a real problem in the 1980s, but the United States provided a one sided portrayal of the problem as a way of justifying an aggressive policy of pre-emptive regime change. This policy lay at the heart of the Reagan offensive. Still today, the United States appears to rely on a one sided interpretation of the terrorism problem. The United States openly supports allies that conduct brutal public executions or launch military incursions that target opponents with little concern for the lives of innocents. Most recently, the United States armed militants dedicated to the overthrow of the sovereign and internationally recognized government of Syria. Apart from the goal of regime change these militants, in some cases, joined groups like the Islamic State, a problem that policy makers recognized as potential blowback from its support of Syrian militants. Perhaps more than at any time prior, the United States utilizes the allegation of terrorism as a justification for aggressive applications of power, but it consistently fails to acknowledge either its or its allies complicity in acts that observers may rightfully claim as terrorist in nature.

About the author

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Apprehending the Bio-cognitive Substrates of Social-Identity Formation in Islamic-Extremist Masternarratives

by Doyle Ray Quiggle



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Abstract

A new generation of counter-terrorism scholars have begun to correct the theory-induced blindness of their predecessors. These scholars seek to arm CT experts with predictive social-identity models that are serviceable to enclave-level efforts to counter Islamic radicalisation in Europe. Dina Al Raffie, for example, builds upon Fathali Moghaddam's "staircase to terrorism" model to reveal the social-identity dynamics in non-violent forms of Islamic discourse that specifically foster extremist conditions within European Muslim enclaves. Raffie has demonstrated that, "it is the perceptions of individuals, and what shapes them, that provide the foundations for violent radicalisation." Raffie insists that "radicalisation can be understood as a process of first fostering an increase in religious awareness and then manipulating this awareness for political ends." Religious awareness within Muslim enclaves begins at the "ground floor" of the local Islamic community. Raffie challenges CT scholars to augment her investigations of the ground-floor cultural mechanisms that prime their Muslim populations for recruitment by the likes of Dr. Baghdad. Mindful of Raffie's focus on perceptual influencers and cognitive framers that function as extremist primers, I will lay out an analytical model for investigating how European Islamic masternarratives activate, structure, and motivate a distinctly Muslim social identity and condition communal members for extremist recruitment. Where Raffie has been examining the cultural "ground floor" in which extremist priming takes place, I will be examining its basement, the bio-cognitive substrates of identity-formation in Islamic masternarratives.

Introduction

How do Muslims, European Muslims in particular, become radicalized and motivated to commit terrorist acts? As the refugee crisis in Europe intensified, that question, posed with increasing impatience by the general public, urgently demanded honestly achieved answers that are intelligently useful to counter-terrorism practitioners and their counter-radicalisation operations.[1] However, counter-terrorism scholars who specifically investigate processes of *social-identity formation* in Islamic extremists have been generally less than illuminating in their efforts to provide answers to that question that will enable CT experts to develop strategies for apprehending and disrupting processes of radicalisation.

Lacking a standard model for social-identity formation in Islamic extremists, CT scholars who examine social-identity formation in violent extremist Islam typically revert to a general theory of social-identity formation by which to construct a coherent *extremist narrative* out of the subject's life. Working under the spell of her favorite theory, the analyst selects from the subject's psycho-biographical evidence whatever the SIF theory tells her are the key formative themes and sub-themes of an individual's career as an Islamic terrorist. Too often, the analytical product ends up proving the theory with narrative-confirming evidence



instead of using the theory to intelligibly order the full range of disparate types of psycho-biographical, including bio-cognitive and cognitive-sociological, evidence.[2] These studies assume that, by painstakingly reassembling the thousand-and-one shards of the psyche of a terrorist, *ex post* terror attack, they can reveal the invisible hand of the Dr. Baghdad who constructed the monster. This forensic style of identity reassembly has not been entirely useless to CT practitioners, but it does not show us how to keep the monster from being built in the first place. Nor does it reveal the locations of the Dr.'s infernal laboratories.

Even methodologically self-conscious SIF VIE studies that attempt to provide a holistic deconstructive analysis of the broad ideological surround in which the European Islamic terrorist was raised, educated, and radicalized are hobbled by what Daniel Kahneman defines as *theory-induced blindness*:

Once you have accepted a theory and used it as a tool in your thinking, it is extraordinarily difficult to notice its flaws. If you come upon an observation that does not seem to fit the model, you assume that there must be a perfectly good explanation that you are somehow missing. You give the theory the benefit of the doubt, trusting the community of experts who have accepted it.[3]

One of Kahneman's most disturbing insights into human cognition is that even the trained scholarly mind tends to drink its own *Kool-Aid*. Our near-complete failure to implement successful counter-radicalization operations in Islamic enclaves in Europe suggests that the CT community has been hitting the punch bowl. We need an SIF-VIE model of practicable value to enclave-level CT experts.

Fortunately, a new generation of CT scholars have begun to acknowledge and correct the theory-induced blindness of their predecessors. This new scholarship seeks to arm CT experts with *predictive* identity models that are serviceable to enclave-level efforts to counter Islamic radicalisation in Europe. A refreshingly sober scholar from whose eyes the scales of theory have fallen is Dina Al Raffie. Building upon Fathali Moghaddam's "staircase to terrorism" model to reveal social-identity dynamics in non-violent forms of Islamic discourse that specifically foster extremist conditions within European Muslim enclaves, Raffie demonstrates that, "it is the perceptions of individuals, and what shapes them, that provide the foundations for violent radicalisation." [4] Raffie insists that, "radicalisation can be understood as a process of first fostering an increase in religious awareness and then manipulating this awareness for political ends." [5] Religious awareness within Muslim enclaves begins at the "ground floor" of the local Islamic community. Raffie challenges CT scholars to augment her investigations of the *ground-floor* cultural mechanisms that prime their Muslim populations for recruitment by the likes of Dr. Baghdad. [6]

Mindful of Raffie's focus on *perceptual influencers and cognitive framers that function as extremist primers*, I will lay out an analytical model for investigating how European Islamic masternarratives activate, structure, and motivate a distinctly Muslim social identity and condition communal members for extremist recruitment. Where Raffie examines the cultural "ground floor" in which extremist priming takes place, I'll be examining its basement, the bio-cognitive substrates of identity-formation in Islamic masternarratives. [7]

Defining Masternarrative: Soothing Cognitive Torment

Working from the premise that masternarratives merely *reflect* a community's worldview, the professional analysis of Islamist masternarratives has largely failed to yield insights that are intelligently useful to enclave-level efforts in Europe at counter-narrating the recruitment strategies of Islamic extremists. For example, this is a typical operating definition of *Masternarrative*: "Master narratives are the historically grounded stories that *reflect* a community's identity and experiences, or explain its hopes, aspirations, and concerns.



These narratives help groups understand who they are and where they come from, and how to make sense of unfolding developments around them.”[8] We derive this normative definition from the literary sub-discipline of narratology, which, as M.H. Abrams explains, “deals especially with types of narrators, the identification of structural elements and their diverse modes of combination, recurrent narrative devices, and the analysis of the kinds of discourse by which a narrative gets told, as well as with the *narratee*—that is, the explicit or implied person to whom the narrator addresses the audience.”[9] Even this traditional definition of narrative analysis is too superficial to be intelligently useful to in-the-field strategic communicators.[10] It is also incomplete. It omits the bio-cognitive substrates and psychosocial functions of masternarratives.[11]

While masternarratives most certainly do *reflect* a community’s identity and experiences, they must first activate key bio-cognitive processes in the audiences they contrive to captivate. MNs are more than historical markers. They are biological manipulators. They manipulate and exploit innate bio-cognitive proclivities.[12]

As E.O. Wilson, the pre-eminent founder of socio-biology, has noted, “Permanent ambiguity in the individual human mind is an inevitable result of the mutually offsetting forces of multilevel selection.”[13] The human mind constructs narratives almost moment by moment in order to minimize the dissonance created by our cognitive inheritance of “permanent ambiguity.” We are motivationally hamstrung between two different moral systems, a selfish program that impels us to procreate at all cost. And a self-less program that impels us to identify with and protect the genetic coherence of our primary tribe, Robin Dunbar’s famous 150, at all cost. Neither “moral” system is “rational.”[14]

As Wilson notes,

Multilevel selection (group and individual selection combined) also explains the conflicted nature of motivations. Every normal human person feels the pull of conscience, of heroism against cowardice, of truth against deception, of commitment against withdrawal. It is our fate to be tormented with large and small dilemmas as we daily wind our way through the risky, fractious world that gave us birth. (290)

Our inner, compulsively story-telling homunculus helps us minimize the torments of multilevel selection. Narrative is our primary cognitive operator, a stabilizer of mental experience whose origins lie in our *social* past.

Our narrative compulsion is an evolutionary pre-adaptation that activates and guides the other primary pre-adaptations involved in human *ultra-sociality*, like disgust, cooperation, and procreation. At the individual level, the narrative operator gives coherence to mental experience of imported sensory data that would be, without narrative structure, chaotic and unusable. But the primary adaptive *social* task of our narrative operator is to make us *feel* at home in the world and *feel* bonded to tribal members who share that home. At the social level, masternarratives (known in other eras as “myths”) maintain tribal morale and morality. At the individual level, MNs eliminate the cognitive torments of multilevel selection. Thus, MNs do much more than *reflect* personal and group identity. MNs are radically *formative* of social identity. They form inter-subjective neuro-networks, effectively binding the limbic systems of narrative captives together into an MN community.[15] In their most extreme (extremist) versions, a masternarrative functions as a communal plot, assimilating into itself the total individual identities of its captives, sending them down pre-plotted behavioral vectors.

In order to be successful as MNs (socially adaptive), they must both absorb and dispel the *torments* of multilevel selection. They must be specific enough (in symbolism, themes, plots, and language) to describe *local*



sources of “torment,” but they must be general enough to explain and structure the *collective inter-subjective* experience of *non-genetically related* individuals. It is important to recall that political modernism not only encourages fierce identity competition *among* groups but also identity competition *within* individuals. Biological cognitive torment is exacerbated by the cultural competition and the fierce identity competition that are features of pluralistic democracies. Extremist Islamic masternarratives exploit the cognitive torments of modern identity competition as a psychological resource. I will examine that process in more detail below.

Bio-cognitive analysis of Islamic masternarratives seeks to reveal how IMNs form an individual’s *social identity* within the increasingly understood parameters of human cognitive programs, within the evolutionary constraints of what paleo-anthropologists and socio-biologists call the pre-adaptations of human *ultra-sociality*, in particular, disgust, altruism, and procreation.[16]

As I am re-defining it, MN analysis should seek to explain how an MN gains access to primary biological motivational systems. This process is called limbic hijacking. MN analysis should seek not only to reveal how a specific narrative construct activates a pre-learned cognitive program, such as disgust, but also to demonstrate where (in what context) the narrative links that innate motivational system to a specific set of symbols. This is called symbolic encoding.[17] From that analytical basis, MNA can then begin to reveal how the narrative kicks specific symbols into communal motion, thereby provoking a compelling, even compulsive, *feeling* of communal, group belonging. Masternarratives bring biological motivational systems into alignment with a field of resonate symbols to create a masternarrative community.[18]

Where biocognitive analysis can generate insights into the social-identity formation of Islamic extremists that are of practicable value to counter-radicalization operations is in its understanding of narrative as a neurologically compelling behavioral vector. MNs plot group-oriented behavior—behavior of, by, for the IN-group and typically aimed at or against the OUT-group.[19] European Islamic Masternarratives typically kick Islam-resonate symbols into motion (plots) that keep the European Islamic identity unburdened by the intense moral ambiguities that arise from living in or within a pluralist society. To echo Wilson, European Islamic MNs succeed where they can eliminate the cognitive torments of multilevel selection, which tend to be severely heightened among European Muslims who live *betwixt and between* self-consciously “sacred” and nonchalantly “profane” societies. European IMNs typically achieve “torment relief” among their narrative captives by eliminating competing, non-Islamic (*haram*) identity models from the symbolic enclosure of their version of Islamic mythology.

With the recent discovery that mirror neurons are globally distributed in our brains, we are beginning to understand much more precisely how MNs entice an individual’s neuro-network into synching up with a specific set of symbolic representations that are already actively circulating in other neuro-networks.[20] We already know that MNs exploit “mirror synching” to bind, at the neurological level, an individual to his identity group’s primary emotional core. The more the individual fuses with the group, the less “multilevel selection torment” he or she experiences. The more he contemplates the MN’s specific symbolizations of identity themes (i.e. disgust boundaries) and the more he employs these symbolizations to organize his own psycho-biographical data, the tighter will be his identification with the group. But he purchases group identification and self-esteem at the price of perceptual independence and accuracy.[21] Here we are dealing directly with Raffle’s *perceptual influencers and cognitive framers that function as extremist primers*.

For example, Greg Berns et al’s recent investigations of the neurology of group identification and individual perception indicate that group cohesion is purchased, both evolutionarily and neurologically speaking, at the cost of perceptual accuracy. Bern’s MRI experiments have shown that the limbic system bypasses the



neo-cortex, directly activating networks responsible for visual and auditory perception and processing (the occipital-parietal network). When group survival is threatened, loyalty to the group (altruism) is selected *before* individual perception. We have known since Solomon Ash's experiments that groupthink overrides individual volition. Berns' experiments show us how individual perception is overridden at the neurological level by group pressures to be cohesive, cooperative—altruistic. If the masternarrative community with which you identify pressures you to see 2 plus 2 as 5, you will see 2 plus 2 as 5. In fact, you may not be able to see 2 plus 2 as anything other than 5, because your neo-cortex gets overridden by your limbic system, which has been hijacked, so to speak, by your masternarrative community. Masternarrative analysis calls this process *coercive cohesion*. [22]

In this regard, Islamic MNs will only be successful if they can perform a vital *de-tormenting* psychosocial task for European Muslims whose internal, evolutionarily inherited cognitive ambiguity is intensified by an external environment of competing social identities and group loyalties. European Muslims today typically find themselves caught within a field of competing social identities and group loyalties. [23] Not surprisingly, European Islamic MNs quell identity competition (cognitive ambiguity) by eliminating non-Islamic competitors from the symbolic field. By locating and isolating the specific symbols, themes, and plots of successful masternarratives, biocognitive MN analysis seeks to reveal not only how group cohesion is coerced but also what degree of perceptual independence is lost among narrative captives.

Most masternarratives provide an individual an imagined communal space in which to escape cognitive dissonance, achieve cognitive balance, and maintain cognitive consistency. Thus, bio-cognitive analysis augments the social-psychological model of *symbolic convergence theory*, in which the primary psychosocial task that masternarratives perform for an individual is achieving and maintaining *cognitive balance*. [24]

However, before masternarratives can balance an individual's social identity within a field of competing identities, MN manipulators must *first* activate and captivate at least three universal, primary bio-cognitive programs: disgust, social altruism, procreation. [25] All three are primary motivational systems that, in a sense, contain their own biologically front-loaded plotlines. Disgust impels redemptive narratives of containment, contamination, and cleansing. Altruism impels heroic narratives of tribal defence. Procreation impels romantic narratives of tribal propagation, in the instance of IMNs both biological propagation and ideological propagation (proselytising). Most masternarratives achieve cognitive balance in narrative captives by giving these primary motivational systems mutually supporting and overlapping plotlines.

For example, Islamic "disgust" narratives eliminate internal ambiguity by telling adherents what it is "safe" to eat, to wear, to do (sumptuary laws); internal ambiguity is further diminished by telling adherents which thoughts are safe to think and which identities are safe to develop (creed policing). Once an individual aligns his personal disgust boundaries with his group's disgust symbols, his altruism/cooperation motivational system can be activated to protect the group/tribe from physical and moral contaminants. I will examine *disgust* in European Islamic MNs in more detail below.

In this regard, MNs perform "symbolic action" in the sense that the sociologist of human communication, Kenneth Burke, means, "as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off the evil eye, for purification, for propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions of one sort or another." [26] MNs are, "*equipment for living*, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes." [27] Masternarratives provide symbolic motivations for acting in the real world.



However, biocognitive analysis extends Burke's insights, to reveal the ways in which narratives plot action in-the-real-world with symbols. Bio-cognitive analysis is highly sensitive to the active presence of identity-forming, group-generating masternarrative wherever it encounters rhetoric, narratives, storylines, images, songs (any means of *symbolic expression*, including suicide bombings and ritualized beheadings) that articulate and mobilize the primal themes of disgust, altruism, and procreation.[28] This analytical model correlates these primary narrative themes, upon Fritz Heider's "cognitive balance theory," with group attitude, group identification, and self-esteem. Analytical emphasis is placed upon isolating the specific symbolic identifications in which disgust, altruism, or procreation are linked to self-esteem, group identification, or group attitude. MNs symbolically narrate these motivational systems to create the cognitive triad of cognitive balance, self-esteem, group identification, or group attitudes.

All variants of European Islamic MNs recursively circulate themes of disgust, altruism, and, to a lesser extent, procreation. Identifying the symbolic vehicles of these themes and then correlating these themes within the points of Heider's social-identity triangle is a primary analytical task of MN analysts. When analysing Islamic MNs, therefore, it is critically important to look for correlations between the bio-cognitive triad and the social-identity triad. MNs activate the former to construct the latter. As we will see, Islamic MNs typically mobilize disgust to create self-esteem.[29]

To sum up, when analysing masternarratives at the "basement" level, we are dealing with six points of two triads, a bio-motivational triad and a cognitive-balance triad. This might be represented in a *power point* presentation with two overlapping triangles. Disgust, altruism, procreation are one triangle. Self-esteem, group attitude, group identification are the other triangle. In an active rhetorical setting, the communal "ground floor" where perceptual shaping takes place, the two triads overlap. Masternarrative field research can effectively delimit its scope by measuring for symbolic correlations among these six points.[30]

As I am defining it, bio-cognitive analysis of MNs will yield practical payoff for counter-radicalization efforts only if it can enable swifter detection of openings for analytical intervention and "narrative disruption." [31] In order to know where to aim narrative disruptors, CT experts benefit from knowing whether an Islamic MN has linked individual self-esteem primarily or secondarily to disgust detection or to altruistic protection, whether the MN has linked group identification primarily or secondarily to altruistic protection or disgust detection, whether the MN has linked group attitude primarily or secondarily to ideological procreation or to biological procreation, and so forth. By revealing how a community-forming narrative has mobilized the bio-cognitive triad of its *narratee captives*, MNA can equip CT experts with a swift grasp of precisely how self-esteem or group identification has been symbolically constructed within a specific enclave. That knowledge provides immediate apprehension of the specific type of masternarrative community with which the CT expert is dealing: fundamentalist, extremist, or terrorist. That knowledge may also provide a more accurate assessment of an individual's level of commitment to his terrorist group, a swifter and more accurate indicator of the degree of his or her narrative captivation.

To be truly useful to CR efforts, bio-cognitive MN analysis must enable precision in the apprehension of the neuro-cognitive sources, psycho-cultural resources, and thematic techniques that narrative masters of both normative and extremist Islam exploit to construct masternarrative communities. That knowledge is key to counter-narrating the extremist social identity. But it is not enough.

For example, can bio-cognitive analysis of MNs really help a strategic communicator attempting to implement a counter radicalization program in, say, Molenbeek, Brussels adjust for the fact that his target audience has been primed by their *normative* Islamic masternarrative to perceive him and his state-funded



de-radicalization program as *haram*? Does MN analysis really provide new weapons for the CT professional dealing with at-risk Muslim youths in Europe's Islamic ghettos, young Muslims who are primed to automatically perceive him as dangerously, toxically contaminant to their Islamic identities?

Symbolically Motivating Disgust: Hallal versus Haram

Enclave-level, normative Islamic MNs typically seek to eliminate the cognitive torments of multilevel selection by activating the *disgust-detection*, pre-adaptation programs of narrative captives. Global jihad's many strategic narrators, especially ISIL narrative masters, ruthlessly exploit this enclave-level masternarrative resource to ensnare local recruits.[32] The Islamic *hallal-haram* construct activates and shapes disgust as a motivational system that, in turn, structures daily behavior, and both the religious and social identity, of Muslims worldwide. This MN sub-narrative gives its narrative community extraordinary volitional control over identity maintenance, which, in turn, fosters self-esteem, especially within a broader European societal context in which Muslims generally lack control over their social-identity and, therefore, risk succumbing to low self-esteem. Although the *hallal-haram* sub-narrative possesses high "survival value" for a distinctly European Islamic identity, this symbolic construct ultimately makes adherents vulnerable to the persuasive ploys of Islamic extremist recruiters, as I will explain.

We know from Paul Rozin's extensive, groundbreaking research into the psychology of disgust that it is, "a basic biological motivational system".[33] We also know that, as Rozin explains, "Core disgust is qualitatively different, in terms of meaning, from distaste." [34] Disgust is one of our most powerful physio-emotional responses. It is involuntary and contagious. We are disgusted by what disgusts other members of our in-group. Once that pre-adaptation has been activated and then linked via symbols to a specific object, group, or idea, it is almost impossible to undo the association, no matter how arbitrary (culturally bound) that association might be.

As Rozin notes, few of us (less than one percent) can drink water from a sterile, never-used toilet bowl without feeling disgust. Even thinking about that act triggers mirror neurons that trigger disgust responses. It is even difficult for most people to drink coffee from a cup shaped like a toilet bowl. As Rozin notes, "Disgust evolves culturally and develops from a system to protect the body from harm to a system to protect the soul from harm." [35] The *hallal-haram* disjunction in all variants of Islam is a superlative example of a body-protection system being narrated into a soul-protection system. European Islamic masternarratives activate an inborn, evolutionarily inherited disgust-detection system, link that system to specific symbols of *haram*, effectively transforming biological disgust into a *hallal-haram* antagonism that serves as an Islamic identity-protection system.

What begins as a relatively simple set of dietary rules is narrated into a complex set of sumptuary laws that regulate the entire life of an individual, determining what an adherent wears, what and where and how he reads, and with whom and where and when he affiliates with other human beings. Normative Islamic teaching in Europe constructs the primal disgust of communal members within a combatively exclusive *hallal-haram* dichotomy. Even within non-violent Islamic MNs, what begins as a body-protection system becomes an identity-protection system. Any thing, group, person, sets of beliefs, or behaviors that the local IMN symbolizes as *haram* will provoke an involuntary visceral response of disgust in MN captives. That's what the psychology of disgust teaches us.

What specifically gets *perceived* as a *haram* contaminant of the identity of the believer is determined by the *disgust symbolism* of his local IMN. Whether or not a narrative captive's disgust-detection program



becomes a total and totalising motivational system to which he subjugates his entire identity and lifestyle largely depends on how the specific MN of his respective Islamic community narrates symbols of disgust/*haram*. This is precisely where MN analysis and research should be focusing its attention, in order to generate insights intelligently useful to counter-radicalization operations. Future analysis of Islamic MNs should apprehend disgust symbolism, isolating its themes, sub-themes, and the semantic clusters in which it typically emerges, thereby generating a taxonomy of disgust, altruism, and procreation subplots.

Because European Muslims are effectively surrounded by an unselfconsciously profane society that abounds in identity possibilities, European Islamic MNs keep their adherent's disgust-detection system hyper-sensitive to contaminants from *Kuffir* culture. By pushing *Kuffir* contaminants to the outer parameter of Islamic identity, the MN eliminates the cognitive torments that might arise from contact with competing sources of identity formation, *Kuffir* women, the plays of William Shakespeare, the music of Bach, the paintings of William Turner, or theo-political debates with Jews, Christians, or atheists. Raffle describes this process in slightly different terms, "Coupled with steady demonization of other social identities (for example, Britishness), Muslims are steadily radicalised as religious frameworks – perceived and real – belonging to their Islamic social identity become dominant frames of reference in their daily interactions." (90-91)."[36] Bio-cognitive analysis reveals the cultural mechanics of the "demonization" process as deriving, in part, from *disgust/haram* plots.

Plotted within a *hallaal-haram* antagonism, a Muslim is made empower-ingly dependent *on his own ability* to keep his Islamic identity un-contaminated. This is the secret psychosocial strength of the *disgust/haram* MN subplot: identity control. What makes the *hallaal-haram* construct especially adaptive (and therefore "sticky") in today's European Muslim enclaves is that it gives adherents a great deal of personal control over the maintenance of their Islamic identity. That identity control, or illusion of control, creates a powerful sense of self-esteem. Crudely put, the *hallaal-haram* construct empowers a European Muslim to be his own identity cop. The power of identity self-policing equates to self-esteem in a broader European society in which avenues to consumerist-based self-esteem for many Muslims are obstructed. Exploiting the biocognitive resources of disgust, the *hallaal/haram* narrative gives the narrative captive a strong feeling of control over environmental contingency (luck) and a strong feeling of successful agency, empowering the European Muslim to stave off what Martin Seligman calls *learned helplessness*. [37]

For example, securing gainful, meaningful employment in today's Muslim enclaves is largely dependent on luck. Unemployment, a primary trigger for the loss of self-esteem in European society, largely remains outside of the volitional sphere of many European Muslims today.

Because social identity (and self esteem) in secular European society largely equates to what you consume, you effectively do not have a social identity if you do not have gainful employment. Therefore, social identity and self-esteem fall outside the volitional sphere of many European Muslims. [38]

The *hallaal-haram* antagonism performs the psychosocial task of making luck in identity formation and maintenance irrelevant, thereby granting identity control and bolstering self-esteem. Within a broader environment of under- or non-employment, the *survival value* (what makes it attractive to adherents) of the *hallaal-haram* construct increases, because it serves as an identity-preserving system for warding off low-esteem, yet another psychosocial strength of this *haram* subnarrative.

All variants of normative Islamic MNs activate the primal disgust programs of adherents by constructing the religious identity of followers within a *hallaal-haram* antagonism. However, specifically European Muslim MNs keep adherents hyper-sensitive to the threat of identity contaminants, which abound in European *Kuffir*



society and promiscuously infiltrate the Muslim enclave. Moreover, the disgust-detection program compels loyalty among narrative captives when it provides a sense of identity control and fosters self-esteem, pride in being an *uncontaminated* Muslim.

Analysing disgust and identity formation, Martha Nussbaum has noted, “And even in contemporary terms, it appears that a firm and overgeneral bounding off of the self from the disgusting serves to reassure the self about its own solidity and power.”[39] Nussbaum’s conclusion suggests that European IMN adherents will remain committed to an IMN precisely because its subplots, like the *hallal-haram*/disgust-detection construct, are cognitive balancers that make narrative captives (enclave Muslims) *feel* like they have personal control over the development and maintenance of their Islamic identity within a broader *liquid haram* society in which they have little or no control over their social identity, self-esteem, or group attitudes: “the disgusting serves to reassure the self about its own solidity and power.”

Analysing *hallal-haram* as a narrative activator of the disgust-detection motivational system enables CT experts to perceive how a distinctly European Islamic identity is formed: Along a plotline that moves from disgust activation to identity border policing (identity control) to self-esteem to group identification. As an adherent begins to externalize the *hallal-haram* distinction, after his disgust-detection system has been activated and is vigilantly on-the-lookout for *haram* toxicants, he is prepared for further identity formation, to strengthen his Islamic identity. Demonization of non-*hallal*, non-Islamic identities is nearly inevitable within the MN’s field of *haram* symbols, which represents a powerful masternarrative resource awaiting the exploitation of extremist recruiters.[40]

The formation of an MN captive’s Islamic social identity receives further plotting when the pre-adaptation of *altruism* (a *group-protection* motivational system) gets activated, usually by the articulation and contemplation of “hero plots,” such as martyr and sword narratives, that channel altruistic instincts into protecting the *hallal* community from that which is *haram*, *Kuffir* contaminants. His identity advances from disgust-detection to altruism/group protection. This is where non-violent, enclave-level Islamic MNs make adherents especially vulnerable to the recruitment ploys of extremists. “Ground floor” Islamic MNs prime adherents to extend identity maintenance from an individual level of self-policing in *Dar al-Haram* up and out to a social level of combating “*haram*” in *Dar al-Harb*.[41]

For example, ISIL masternarratives effectively exploit that vulnerability by hacking into disgust programs already activated in most European Muslims by their formative, normative Islamic community. ISIL communicators seek to activate or reactivate the same disgust-detection system in potential recruits that their primary communal MN had activated. But ISIL recruitment rhetoric gains access to primal disgust through the psychic doorway of self-esteem. They reverse the traditional, normative Islamic social-identity-formation plotline.

Most European ISIL recruits are educated by and semi-integrated into their “host” European cultures. They have had frequent contact with *haram* pollutants. Typically, recruits have arrived at or are beginning to arrive at an “identity crisis” marked by vague feelings of self-disgust, a common psychological denominator among ISIL’s European recruits. The self-esteem of, say, an under-employed, but highly literate post-university student of Muslim background living in Wuppertal, Germany is likely to be very low, especially where joblessness and cultural isolation from mainstream culture are inordinately high, and *especially if he has grown lax about keeping himself unpolluted by Kuffir toxicants*. I will discuss how ISIL exploit this MN resource in detail below.



To iterate, even normative European Islamic MNs typically seek to eliminate “ambiguity and uncertainty from individual souls in society.”[42] Normative Islamic discourse exploits the crisis in individual souls that is created by what the sociologist Zygmunt calls “liquid life.” Normative Islamic MNs offer something solid to clot up the bleeding soul of the liquid Muslim who, “flows through life like a perpetual traveler, changing locations, jobs, partners, values and even sexual and political orientation.”[43] Islamic narrative masters in Europe, extremist and otherwise, know full well that “liquid life is typified by ceaseless change, uncertainty, and lack of trust in general.”[44] And they know that Islamic identity becomes a means by which the “losers” in liquid life can build an identity. These “losers” do not have the ability to participate in Western “freedom,” the freedom to construct your identity through styles of consumption and political participation that confer dignity, a *social identity*.

Further applying Zygmunt’s terms, normative Islamic narrative masters offer a Muslim the *freedom* to construct a counter-identity. Even better, Islamic masternarratives transform the socially marginalized individual’s greatest weakness into his greatest strength. Now, instead of feeling “stripped of human dignity and feeling humiliated...and watching with a mixture of envy and resentment the consumer revelry”[45] of the winners of liquid modernity, his active rejection of modernity and other, *haram* identity possibilities is placed within the sphere of his own volition.[46] His position as an outsider living within the *haram* realm of *Kuffir* now becomes a psychic asset, a masternarrative resource highly vulnerable to exploitation by an extremist recruitment narrative.

Awash in *liquid haram* but still encumbered by impulses to keep his Islamic identity hygienic — that is, captive to his formative Islamic MN — this Muslim living in what amounts to an Islamic ghetto in the middle of Europe starts to re-experience the torments of his evolutionary cognitive inheritance.[47] This Muslim is, to swipe a pulpit phrase from another theological system, *backslidden*. To echo Fritz Heider, they are suffering from *cognitive imbalance*. To use the symbolism of their own MNs, they are contaminated with *haram* and require purification.

To sum up, both non-violent and violent Islamic discourse are responses to an identity crisis that is caused by the “filthy” facts of liquid modernity. Responding to social-identity competition (modern pluralism) as if the competition itself were a *haram* contaminant, Islamic narrative masters seek to establish the uncontaminated *hallal* identity of the Mosque. When the social realm is framed by this antagonistic sub-narrative, it’s but a hop, skip, and jump over to the moral imperative to de-toxify not only oneself but also one’s entire Islamic community (altruistic protection) from *Westoxification* (Occidentosis)—by any means necessary.[48]

How Extremist MNs Exploit the Resources of Normative Islamic Masternarratives:

Let us examine in a bit more detail how ISIL extremist MNs exploit bio-cognitive resources that are initially activated and plotted by non-violent, normative Islamic MNs.

ISIL narratives offer European Muslims tormented by modern identity competition a quick boost to their Islamic self-esteem. That much is oft noted by CT analysts of ISIL propaganda. However, the means by which ISIL MNs (as revealed through analysis of their respective rhetorical influencers) RE-activate a primal disgust program in recruits, a disgust system that had already been activated and educated by non-violent European Islamic MNs, has been overlooked.[49] ISIL and other extremist MNs do not merely re-balance an unbalanced Muslim social identity. Extremist MNs do not merely repair damaged self-esteem. They do not merely offer a *haram*-contaminated Muslim a means of purification.



Seeking to shift the center of a recruit's self-esteem to their black standard, Dr. Baghdad's narrative manipulators achieve that aim by *first* getting an individual to feel viscerally disgusted by his *own* low self-esteem. ISIL communicators exploit a deviously persuasive tautology: They provoke self-disgust before they offer the recruit a means of purging himself of his own self-disgust. ISIL narratives of identity transform the *hallal-haram* disgust-detection system into a total and totalizing motivational system. ISIL MNs fiercely expand the realm of *haram* into a voraciously expanding symbolic field that makes promiscuous use of a wide array of anti-Western discourses (such as the anti-imperialist, racialist tirades of Franz Fanon), Islamic symbolism (especially images taken from the "Salaf," the first generation of Muslims), and from popular street culture (for example, the Euro-gangster rap and urban "culture" of *Deso Dog*), all of which seek to increase a Muslim's sense of drowning in *liquid haram*.

ISIL identity narratives link the generative cause of a recruit's low self-esteem to the contaminating culture of *Kuffir*. ISIL propaganda represents the recruit's low self-esteem itself as "disgusting" *because* it is caused by "Westoxification" or "Occidentosis." The "self-loathing" Muslim is a common ISIL theme. *Kuffir* pollutants abound in ISIL descriptions of the infidel cultures of Belgium, France, and Germany. Low self-esteem in European Muslims is, according to ISIL's narrative argument, the result of a faulty disgust-detection system. His *haram* infection is the result of growing up Muslim in an environment rife with *Kuffir* pollutants. We might even worry that ISIL narrative masters have self-consciously studied and applied Martha Nussbaum's insights into disgust and the construction of social identity: "A ubiquitous reaction to this sense of disgustingness is to project the disgust reaction outward, so that it is not really oneself, but some other group of people, who are seen as vile and viscous, the sources of a contamination that we might possibly keep at bay." [50]

Once the disgust-detection system has been re-triggered in a potential recruit to ISIL, and once his primal disgust has been linked both to his own low self-esteem (self-disgust/*Occidentosis*) and then linked to the purported sources and causes of his disgust — *Kuffir* toxicants — the recruit becomes bio-cognitively captive to ISIL's MN.

Given what Rozin has revealed about the psychology of disgust, we must suspect that true emotional defection from the new masternarrative becomes nearly impossible. That insight bears profound implications not only for counter-radicalization operations but also for any CT practitioner who must assess the authenticity of an extremist defector's claims to have renounced violent jihad. [51]

ISIL have even developed a *haram* de-tox regimen—ritualised beheadings. By beheading a *Kuffir*, a recruit symbolically purges himself of disgusting "Western" spiritual contaminants. He not only cleanses himself in the blood of his victim of non-*hallal* food or contact with "infectious" women but also of toxic beliefs about Islam, Islamic history, septic political ideas about liberty, fraternity, and equality. By beheading *Kuffir*, an ISIL initiate symbolically beheads himself. He decapitates his "Occidental" mentality, thereby de-toxifying his Islamic identity and rehabilitating his or her self-esteem. Upon the ISIL MN plotline, the movement from primal mental ambiguity (the innate biological need for narrative) to self-disgust to social identification to redemption (beheading an unbeliever) is figured as a natural, even inevitable plot. ISIL re-formation (or deformation) of the Islamic social identity exploits what psychology calls a reaction formation, the repressed impulse being, in backslidden potential ISIL recruits: The impulse to keep an Islamic identity clean of *haram* contaminants, the competing possible social identities that the original Islamic masternarrative excluded in order to minimize the evolutionarily inherited cognitive torments of multi-level selection. [52]



ISIL MN communicators fully grasp Rozin's insights into the psychology of disgust, intuitively and quite possibly self-consciously. They fully understand how to use masternarrative (bio-cognitive manipulation) to transform primal disgust into a totalizing identity-forming system that makes recruits feel good about killing for a black standard.

It is important for CT experts to understand that Islamist MNs activate and mobilize primal disgust as a behavioral vector during the narrative re-formation of the social identity of the jihadist.[53] Within Islamist MNs, the extremist identity plotline is deliberately conflated with action in-the-real-world. Conflating narrative constructs with fatal action-in-the-real-world is a hallmark cognitive error of extremists and death cults.[54]

By contrast to contemplated narratives (like reading a novel), extremist masternarratives do not provide psychic relief from cognitive torment *without* requiring action-in-the-real-world. Aristotelian "catharsis" (emotional purification) is not the formative social-identity work primarily performed by masternarratives. Islamist MNs do not provide catharsis through aesthetic contemplation. Symbolic relief, from cognitive torment, *without-action-in-the-real-world* is deliberately denied by ISIL's MN identity plotline. Instead, ISIL narrative masters conflate real-world action and narrative plot, which is why ISIL communication strategies lack any sense of narrative irony or narrative humour, both of which arise from the perceived discrepancy between what a story tells and how it tells it. (As I will discuss below, this is also why ISIL augment their MN with ritual.) The only type of irony ISIL employs is *sarcasm*, when referring to *liquid haram* and *Kuffir* imperialists. "Sarcasm," MH Abrams reminds us, "derives from the Greek verb *sarkazein*, to tear flesh." It is the hallmark of communicators driven by disgust and contempt.[55] Dramatic and cosmic irony allow for symbolic, psychic catharsis, without requiring action-in-the-real-world. A lack of self-irony is a hallmark psychic trait of death-cult and terrorist narrative masters.[56]

By hijacking primary biological motivational systems already activated in European Muslims, the ISIL MN locks its narrative captives into a "fated" behavioral vector, a vector that begins in the adherent's formative Muslim enclave when his or her identity was constructed within the combative narrative of *halla* versus *haram*. ISIL MNs ruthlessly exploit psychological resources, in particular disgust, that have already been activated and plotted into Muslim social identities by non-violent Islamic masternarratives. ISIL narrative masters isolate seemingly non-violent perceptual influencers, like *haram*, and exploit them to narrate extremist identities. In this regard, Raffie is correct in insisting that, "radicalisation can be understood as a process of first fostering an increase in religious awareness and then manipulating this awareness for political ends"[57] Bio-cognitive MN analysis reveals how religious awareness is increased with normative Islamic communicator use of symbols to provoke and maintain an awareness in narrative captives of an identity-defining antagonistic distinction between *halla* and *haram*. ISIL communicators appear to share Raffie's insight and ruthlessly exploit this masternarrative resource.

To sum up, ISIL narratives link core disgust (*haram* soul toxins) to low self-esteem; they also link core disgust to group identification. They offer identification with ISIL as *the only* effective means by which to purge oneself of Westoxification and *Kuffir* pollutants and rehabilitate self-esteem. Self-esteem, group identification, and disgust (group attitude) become fused. Where fusion between a bio-cognitive program (like disgust) and a point in the social-identity triad (self-esteem) is detected, we have discovered an attack point for narrative disruption; this is where MN analysis can arm counter-radicalization operations. However, while we can swiftly identify openings for intervention, we cannot so swiftly counter-narrate incipient extremist identities.



Because rejection of the *hallaal-haram* distinction would be tantamount to rejecting an Islamic identity, the likelihood that any variant of Islam in Europe will jettison the *hallaal-haram* dichotomy and find new narratives by which to structure the social-identity of Muslims is almost null. What are the implications of a “*hallaal* identity” for CR operations? Should CR communicators and strategists actually encourage European Islamic narrative masters to strengthen their “disgust-detection” awareness as a psycho-prophylactic against ISIL recruitment, upon this premise: The less contaminated by *haram* a Muslim feels, that is, the more securely he structures his identity upon a non-violent European Islamic masternarrative, the less likely he is to succumb to ISIL psychological trickery and the less likely he’ll feel the need to “purge” himself of *haram* pollutants by shedding *Kuffir* blood? We urgently need field-level investigations of European Islamic enclaves that gather data to support or deny that hypothesis.[58]

To further emphasize what CT experts gain by apprehending the bio-cognitive mechanisms of extremist MNs, I will briefly examine ritualistic augmenters of masternarrative, discussing, briefly, how ISIL globally *canalizes* the primal disgust initially activated by local Islamic MNs into *blood rituals* that, in turn, tighten group cohesion and inspire altruistic self-sacrifice in ISIL narrative captives. I offer the following analysis of ritual augmenters of extremist masternarratives tentatively. It will serve, I hope, as a heuristic segue into my conclusion.

Ritual Augmenters of Islamic Masternarrative Communities:

Both normative and extremist Islamic masternarrative communities augment themselves with one of human kind’s most ancient and most effective social technologies—ritual. Both normative and extremist Islamic MNs exploit the bio-cognitive and psychosocial resources of *participatory ritual*: Ritual as a symbolic act; as communication; as a rite of purity; as in-grouping tribalism; and, knowingly or not, as legitimizing cultural violence.[59] Because participatory ritual gains even deeper and firmer access than masternarrative to the evolutionary pre-adaptations of ritual participants, Islamic narrative masters, especially terrorists, often make innovative use of this remarkably flexible social tool to bind their narrative captives even tighter to each other as a group and to bind the group as an MN community to their MN’s key themes, symbols, and plots. Thus, the bio-cognitive analysis of ritual may reveal otherwise overlooked openings for strategic intervention by counter-radicalization experts.[60]

Bio-cognitively considered, all forms of participatory ritual exploit the neuro-social resource of synchronous movement.[61] Because of the way our limbic system has evolved, when human beings make music, dance, drill, and otherwise keep time together in groups, participants automatically experience a feeling of group unity. We now understand the neurological reasons why we feel bonded as a group when we synchronize our movements. Because mirror neurons are globally distributed in our brains, synchronicity of movement leads to synchronicity of feeling, perception, and thought. Robin Dunbar has recently suggested that communal ritual (synchronous movement) precipitates endorphin bursts in ritual participants. Paul Zak’s research, among others, has confirmed his suggestion.[62]

The neuro-biologist Walter Freeman further explains why ritual is our most powerful tool for creating social-bonding. Our forebrain never fully closes. Thus, our neurological capacity for forming a “We” neuro-network remains perpetually open. Participatory rituals trigger the release of massive doses of oxytocin into the never-fully-closed basal forebrain. When oxytocin floods the basal forebrain, “it loosens the synaptic connections in which prior knowledge is held, this clears the path for the acquisition of new understanding through behavioural actions that are shared with others.” Freeman calls music making, drilling, dancing, and myth



making/story telling the “bio-technology of group formation.”[63] A surfeit of oxytocin, induced in the brain by communal participatory ritual, fuses members into a single neuro-network. An “I” network is dissolved into a “We” network.

The primary socio-psychological state induced by ritual is known as “ego boundary loss.” Ego boundary loss is described, in the terms of evolutionary psychology, by Steven Mithen like this:

All group activities start in a similar way. When five or six hominids or Early Humans set out together to hunt or to look for carcasses, one of them might have been feeling hungry, another fearful; some of them may have wanted to go one way, while others believed the opposite direction was best. When each individual begins a group activity in a different emotional state, the situation is ripe for conflict. Those individuals who practised the hunt and enhanced their levels of coordination would have been reproductively more successful.[64]

As exploited by normative Islamic narrative masters, participatory ritual diminishes the strong sense of distinct selfhood in individuals who live in democratic pluralities that abound in social-identity possibilities.

Ritual, “moulds the minds and bodies of the group into a shared emotional state, and with that will come a loss of identity and a concomitant increase in the ability to cooperate with others.”[65] A key insight into the process of ritually-formed social identity that CT experts should commit to memory is this: “As identities are merged, there is no ‘other’ with whom to cooperate, just one group making decisions about how to behave.”

Ritual participants, “see themselves as a collective or joint unit, feel a sense of *WE-NESS*, of being together in the same situation facing the same problems.”[66] Islamic MNs exploit these ritual resources to renew their members’ sense of *WE-NESS* amidst the challenge of pluralistic identity competition. As a leading expert on the neuro-mechanics of ritual notes, “Ritual...is usually practiced within a group, and, to that end, helps to bring the members of that group into corporate unity.”[67]

Moreover, CT experts need to consider why our limbic system is designed to respond so automatically to participatory ritual.[68] John Blacking’s studies of the Venda people of South Africa suggests why. He discovered that this tribe intensify ritualised synchronized movement *not* when they face times of stress, hunger, or crises. Rather, they perform rituals when food and resources are plentiful. Blacking discovered that the Venda use ritual to drive selfishness out of the group/tribe. Thus, ritual soothes the primal cognitive torments of multilevel selection (procreation versus group altruism), a fact bearing strong implications for the use of ritual by Islamic masternarrators to shape the social identity of Muslims living in a profane European society that is marked by both resource and social-identity plenitude.

Communal ritual lures individuals away from pursuing their own self-interest precisely when they least need the group for survival. In this regard, ritual, like MNs, soothes the primal cognitive torments of multilevel selection pressure. As Zak and other have noted, the reward to ritual participants of synchronized movement is a strong hit of feel-good oxytocin. By performing rituals during times of plenty, the Venda maintain the level of communal cooperation necessary to survive during times of scarcity and crisis. Ritual maintains social trust, reinforces horizontal cohesion, and shores up vertical obedience to the tribe’s MN. What are the social implications of the fact that the only oxytocin-rich environments, social realms marked by generosity and goodwill, that many European Muslims ever experience are strictly within Islamic enclaves?

(If Blacking’s Venda studies be indicative, then CT experts should detect an increase in the use of ritual augmenters by Islamic extremists precisely when their MN community is experiencing a collective sense of



success, is waxing in membership, is feeling unchallenged and unthreatened—not when it's facing leadership losses from drone strikes or when group membership is waning. Terrorist attacks are rituals acts of violence.) Current analyses of the human terrain of ISIL seed beds in Europe need to take seriously the social-bonding function of ritual. By studying ritual in the context of MN, we can gain a more accurate understanding of how non-violent, normative Islamic masternarratives prime adherents to respond enthusiastically to oxytocin-soaked rituals that celebrate violence (like ISIL beheadings). In particular, we need studies that show how (whether?) normative Islamic rituals prime Muslim youth for extremist recruitment. As Scott Atran discovered in his interviews of various Europe-based Islamic terrorist cells, these young men first met in “non-Muslim” settings, like sports clubs, that promote group bonding. These settings, according to Atran, activated their altruism bio-programming, which was later twisted by extremist Islamic MNs into terrorist killing, “for the good” of the Islamic community.[69] We need extensive studies of the kinds of participatory ritual being practiced in Europe's masternarrative communities, a taxonomy of ritual. We need corresponding studies of “ritual competition” within Islamic enclaves; for example, what other types of participatory ritual compete with normative Islamic rituals in and around the enclave? Such studies would be highly useful to counter radicalisation efforts.

Describing correlations between aggression and ritual, d'Aquili and Newberg note:

Human ceremonial ritual is best understood as a morally neutral technology that, depending on the myth [masternarrative] in which it is embedded, can either promote or minimize particular aspects of a society and promote or minimize overall aggressive behavior. Thus, if a myth that achieves its incarnation in a ritual defines the unitary experience that the myth generates as applying only to the tribe, then the result is only the unification of the tribe. It is true that aggression within the tribe has been minimized or eliminated by the unifying experience generated by the particular ritual. However, this fact may only serve to emphasize the special cohesiveness of the tribe vis-à-vis other tribes. The result may be an increase in overall aggression when considered on a more global scale (specifically, intertribal rather than intratribal). The myth and its embodying ritual may, of course, apply to all members of a religion, a nation-state, an ideology, all of humanity, or all of reality. As one increases the overall scope of what is included in the myth within which the unitary experience is generated, the amount of overall aggressive behavior decreases.[70]

CT experts will note that masternarrative (“myth”) plays *the decisive role* in determining the moral, social, political vectors of the collective ritual experience of unity, “WE-ness.” Masternarratives either promote or discourage aggression and use ritual to augment their primary thematic content, for example, policing for *haram* contagion.

All extremist Islamic MNs today, especially ISIL, employ ritual augmenters. They self-consciously practice blood ritual as purification rite to fuse group members together into a single neurological unit. The power of this bond is remarkable. Once coherence is achieved at the neurological level of members, it is nearly impossible to “undo” it. It's as if the ritual and the myth/narrative to which it belongs (along with its symbolism of *haram*) are tattooed into the brains of adherents. (Body tattooing before and after blood rituals further increases ritually-triggered neuro-hormones, and, despite orthodox Salafist prohibitions on tattooing, has become a ritual-within-a-ritual among ISIL members.)[71]

More disturbingly, ISIS leadership have been extraordinarily successful at exploiting ritual techniques remotely, to create out of non-genetically-related strangers a tightly bonded brother and sisterhood of terrorists who are geographically distant from their “home” territory. This practice is known as E-jihad,



Cyberjihad, and Neojihadism.[72] Much of ISIL's recruitment success derives from its ability to gain remote access, in recruits and sympathizers, to bio-cognitive pre-programming already activated by normative Islamic MN's.

For an illustrative comparative example, consider these field observations of current Mexican drug cartel use of ritual beheading:

...some observers speculate that modern Mexican sicarios who make a public display of their worship for Santa Muerte are also influenced by the internet and the videos posted by Muslim radicals beheading their enemies. It may be that the current criminal craze for beheading victims in Mexico was spawned in part by new age terrorists from the Middle East. In this scenario, Mexican sicarios saw beheading videos on the internet and thought it was a marvelous idea, especially in light of increasingly deadly competition and rivalries among themselves. The same anxieties that fostered the contemporary rise of Santa Muerte, likely also fostered public displays of ferocity as a means of survival.[73]

The field observer helpfully draws our attention to the phenomenon of violence contagion, which is contagious even in mediation, which is *why* jihadist "beheadings" belonging to masternarrative totally alien from Santa Muerte MNs seemed like a "marvellous idea" to Mexican sicarios. As bio-cognitive MN analysis explains: ritualized violence is highly contagious.

Ritualized violence hijacks the limbic systems of those within the symbolic setting, both proximally and distally. Ritual projections of violence can effectively get local populations and audiences (potential narrative captives) hooked on the psychotropic chemicals associated with extreme violent acts, symbols, and their proximal or distal contemplation. Getting a local-indigenous population psycho-tropically addicted to neuro-hormones associated with violence is an ancient strategy of subjugation and political dominance, as Daniel Smail reminds us in his discussion of how feudal lords employed "teletropic mechanisms" for influencing the bio-cognitive chemistry of their serfs.

For example, European feudal lords randomly punished villages, even highly productive villages, keeping them constantly afraid of murder and torture. These lords intuitively understood how to keep their serfs in a condition of constant cortisol toxicity, as a result of stress caused by the fear of *unpredictable* violence, which condition made it nearly impossible for the serfs to produce social-bonding hormones, like oxytocin, and, therefore, difficult to form the cooperative groups required for rebellion. Instead, serfs typically became psycho-tropically dependent on "soothing" social mechanisms like church rituals and religious festivals, further entrapping them in the neuro-power dynamics of feudal hierarchy.[74]

ISIL narrative masters have been extraordinarily innovative in techniques of "teletropic manipulation." Schooled by their Al Qaeda IO mentors, ISIL have used the *jihadisphere* not so much to, "instruct jihadist recruits and current fighters on how to wage jihad" as to create the virtual reality for remote recruits and sympathizers of *directly participating in Islamic blood rituals*. [75] One of the most disturbing aspects of ISIL has been its ability to transform media images of terrorist attacks, especially in Europe, into *visual rituals* that make remote viewers *feel* as if they were one of the terrorist attackers.[76] ISIL image collages exploit the full resources of *ritual* teletropics to reinforce its extremist masternarrative.

Although we are only beginning to understand how ritualised violence activates bio-cognitive programs like disgust or altruism in remote viewers of terrorist violence, we do know that, because terrorism is a symbolic act, it effectively makes narrative captives (at least momentarily) of viewers, both directly and in mediation.



Identifying themes of jihad/altruism and correlating them to disgust within the social-identity triad can help us better understand how mediated experiences of terrorist violence in the jihadisphere hijack disgust programming or altruism programming among Islamic viewers and prime them for a violent remaking of their social-identity—through remote activation.[77] Thus, we need studies that reveal how ISIL use remote ritual (teletropic manipulation) to make their terrorist violence contagious.

Biocognitive analysis of ritual allows us to perceive how, within extremist Islam, specifically ISIL, masternarrative and ritual mutually support a jihad motivational system. (Jihad is symbol-activated, MN motivated, ritualised violence.[78]) Ritual violence will have a contagious effect among any population for whom the ritual's masternarrative resonates with previous mythic forms and practices and masternarratives. Acts of ritual violence, like ISIL beheadings, are “symbolic vehicles” that can be projected into any Islamic enclave. ISIL use these *teletropic rituals* to project their MNs remotely, normalizing violence in distal Islamic MN communities.

As we have seen in the example of disgust-detection systems that are captivated and plotted by *halla/haram* social-identity narratives, MNs can prime captives for acts of violence because they kick symbols of disgust, altruism, and procreation into motion and then link those themes to specific plots of social identity, self-esteem, and group attitude. *Halla-haram* symbolism, for example, primes adherents for specific behaviours, like redemptive identity cleansing (beheading/suicide attacks) or altruistic tribal defence, i.e. cleansing the Islamic “tribe” of *haram* toxicants. Rituals not only release the “magical” bonding energies (unity experience) in acolytes. Teletropic rituals also possess the potential to propel a normative MN community from being a passive moral tribe into being an actively cohesive, actively combative, global movement. We need studies that reveal the mechanics by which teletropic ritual translates contemplators of symbols into commissioners of symbolic behavior—terrorism.

For example, we need analysis that reveals how ISIL has concocted a new Islamic myth/ritual system out of material that is immediately recognizable to its target population. How does ISIL piggyback off of older Islamic “myths” that have been partially discarded or are currently breaking apart?[79] We need detailed analysis of the stories of violent acts, initially circulated by an IMN, that ISIL have formed into a new Islamic mythology. How have they morphed normative Islamic MNs into new kinds of ritual celebrations of violence?

Most insurgents, terrorists, and gangsters typically employ ritual of some sort as a basis for creating group coherence and loyalty. But ISIL go one step further, by using ritual as a vehicle to normalize violence among their target population. We need comparative analysis of extremist ritual exploitation of bio-cognitive resources.

For a comparative example, we might return, briefly, to Santa Muerta gangsters, who have concocted their own extremist masternarrative and reinforced it with ritualised violence. Mexican gang members not only incorporate Santa Muerta symbols onto their bodies as tattoos, they also build shrines and perform blood rituals to invoke and propitiate Saint Death. As studious as Dr. Baghdad, these gangster-cultists performed their own anthropological and historical research, locating past manifestations of this cult, both in texts and in “sacred” geographical locations. They very deliberately and self-consciously used their autodidactic scholarship to resurrect a blood cult. Mexican Drug Lords build Santa Muerta shrines and churches in their own narco-palaces, where they stage blood rituals, like torture and mass murder.

Today, the rituals of Santa Muerta have spilled out of the gangster's incarnadine ritual circle and now infect the locals who inhabit the trafficking territory of the drug lords, commonly known as cartel-land. Mexican



SM gangs have been quick to exploit that contagion, encouraging the locals to build their own shrines to Santa Muerta.

As noted above, ISIL beheading ritual infected the SM gangsters. While beheadings serve a distinctly purification role for ISIL, I suspect they serve a more complicated function for the bosses of the Mexican sicarios. The field observer adds:

Whatever their inspiration may be for the unprecedented barbarity with which Mexican criminals today torture, murder and mutilate their victims, including flaying their faces, it is evident that many of them turn to Santa Muerte for a sense of supernatural protection. She does not call for barbaric behavior, but she does not condemn it or discourage it either. She is amoral as were most of the Aztec gods. For example, the rain god Tlaloc did not consider whether or not his worshippers adhered to good moral standards. He rewarded those who pleased him by making proper sacrifices, irrespective of their behavior on earth. Incidentally, he liked to have children burned alive in large braziers before his idol because their tears were like rain drops. This is the product of a pre-modern mind, to which Santa Muerte beckons a return.

The sicarios needed a culturally recognizable means by which to transmit and project their violence, and the “myth” of Santa Muerta was, in a sense, waiting to be revived by these Mexican Drug Lords. Using ritual as a vehicle to project violence, they transmogrified the once-dead Santa Muerta myth into living masternarrative. That narrative, made widely available through the media, has become virulently contagious, even to remote viewers.

Constantly fearing capricious violence, local populations — be they in northern Mexico or northern Iraq — are flooded with stress and fear hormones. They turn to the Santa Muerta cult itself as a symbolic means by which to gain psychic relief from fear. They seek relief from cognitive torment in the masternarrative of the very gangsters who perpetrate the violence, because they are perceived to be the high priests of the rituals of violence.

Along drug trafficking routes in Central America, the Santa Muerta cult has largely displaced traditional Catholicism, much as ISIL is attempting to displace traditional forms of Islam in Europe, North Africa, and the Sunni Triangle. Where the Catholic Church and Catholic symbols fail to protect the local Mexican population from the capricious violence of drug cartels, locals defect to Santa Muerta, who, they believe, can provide psychic relief from fear of the cartels themselves. Ritual veneration of death and the purveyors of death is an act that still belongs within a population’s sphere of volition, and, therefore, soothes cognitive torment and counteracts cortisol toxicity. Ritual veneration of the very source of your terror also helps to stave off what Seligman calls, “learned helplessness.” We may suspect that ISIL blood rituals, especially ritualised terrorist attacks in Europe, perform a similar psychosocial task for Muslim diasporas in Europe. But we need studies to investigate that question.

For example, in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, a spectacular teletropic ritual that hijacked the limbic system of an entire continent of Muslim onlookers, we should have been tracking ritual vectors of violence contagion. Analysis of social-media responses to the attacks might have found useful techniques in bio-cognitive MN analysis, which understands the bio-cultural mechanics of ritual, violence contagion, and teletropic manipulation. Such analysis would position CT experts to consider the recent attacks in Brussels not as retaliation for taking a Paris attacker into custody but rather as a *ritualised blood tax* exacted upon Kuffir for laying hands on one of ISIL’s “holies.”



How does ritual logic determine a masternarrative community's perception of a justice system? Bio-cognitively analysed, the on-going narrative of the Brussels attacks is revealed as a deep-brain lesson aimed primarily at a Muslim audience in Europe. That lesson is about jurisprudence. The Brussels attacks were intended to make the European system of justice look ineffectual and weak and to make ISIL "shariah" justice feel omni-present. ISIL's blood logic is quantitative: How much more *Kuffir* blood has been spilled than ISIS assets taken into custody? The logic of ritual violence asks the Muslim Diaspora to choose between two mutually exclusive justice systems. By ritualizing the Brussels attacks, ISIL seek to make the murder of innocent men, women, and children feel like a victory for Islamic justice.

We need investigation of this question: How does ritualized violence in the name of Islam affect an Islamic Diaspora's perception of European justice and jurisprudence?

Analysed comparatively, both ISIL and the Santa Muerta cult employ tele-tropic exploitation of the biochemistry of local populations. They both normalize violence at the neurological level by getting a target population hooked on images and narratives of violence. Both SM and ISIL exploit masternarrative rituals augmenters to make criminal acts of violence "magically" alive, realer than life itself, for narrative captives. Both ISIL and SM rituals of violence should warn us that extremists narrative masters are already very savvy in teletropic techniques of manipulation. In sum, the more ISIL use ritual augmenters, the more successful they'll be at making their violence globally contagious. Ritual augmenters will also make them more successful at

recruiting and maintaining membership., remotely. I also suspect that it's their ability to augment their MNs with ritual that will continue to make ISIL resilient, global, and increasingly immune to loss of territory in the battlespace of the Sunni triangle.

Conclusion

I've been arguing that social-identity formation is the result how bio-cognitive substrates get activated and symbolically constructed by social masternarratives. It should amply clear by now that, when analysing MNs for their role in forming social identity, we are NOT performing a deconstructive "literary" un-reading of social "stories." As E.O. Wilson rightly notes of traditional "humanities" approaches to investigations of human cultural constructions, humanities scholars, from literary theorists to political scientists to historians and anthropologists, have typically made, "no allusion to the understanding of the cognitive processes that bind them together, nor their relation to hereditary human nature, nor their origin in prehistory." (277) The failure to account for the dynamics of universal hereditary bio-cognitive processes is one major reason that traditional masternarrative analysis of discourses of political Islam has failed to equip CT practitioners with critical tools for counter-radicalization operations. As I've been arguing, to correct that failure, we must seek to understand how masternarrative and its ritual augmenters activate universal bio-cognitive pre-adaptations and structure these programs to promote self-esteem, group-identification, and group attitudes that compel neurological obedience from adherents, shape social perceptions, and promote (or hinder) specific behavioral vectors.

I've also been assuming that an unavoidable psychological reality of modern political pluralism is identity competition, which exacerbates universally inherited, biological cognitive torment. This is why we need, psycho-politically considered, masternarratives: To alleviate the cognitive dissonance inherent to our experience of our own bio-cognitive processes as they occur within a pluralistic society.[80] Pluralist democracies require cognitively balanced citizens (*masternarratees*) whose identity remains, nevertheless,



ethically responsive to a diversity of *other* identity possibilities, citizens who know that identity paths not taken are as valuable as those that are taken.[81] That's a difficult psychological balancing act, demanding a great deal of deliberative effort, even from un-encumbered democratic citizens, those who have not been primed in childhood and adolescence, in the basement of their beings, by a masternarrative that exploits a bio-cognitive motivational system like disgust to preclude both identity and political competition.

Masternarrative analysis should become a go-to tool for social scientists who want to predict where, when, and under what psycho-political conditions MNs foster social identities amicable or inimical to pluralistic communities. To facilitate masternarrative analysis at the "basement" level, we need to develop metrics for measuring correlations between the bio-motivational triad and the cognitive-balance triad. We need metric tools for correlating the triangle of disgust, altruism, procreation to the triangle of self-esteem, group attitude, group identification. As noted above, in an active rhetorical setting, the communal "ground floor" where perceptual shaping takes place, the two triads overlap. Masternarrative field research can begin immediately by measuring for correlations among these six points.

Counterterrorist experts will note that extremist masternarratives exploit the psychological resources of biological torment in order to eliminate identity and political competition. As discussed above, Islamic extremist narrative masters exploit a pre-existing identity-narrative resource, an already widely disseminated, social-identity-forming *halla/haram* construct that is reinforced and enacted by both narrative and ritual. While the potential political violence of that disgust construct largely remains dormant among most European Muslim MNs, extremist narrative masters have been exploiting it as a resource for recruitment and for constructing disgust/*halla* obsessed identities that altruistically seek to de-contaminate themselves and their community of *Kuffir* pollutants.[82] We need to become better narrative masters than today's extremist communicators.

As we formulate counter-radicalization strategies, we will want to pay especially close attention to how social-identity-forming masternarratives exploit the resources of bio-cognition. We will want to sensitize ourselves to the symbolic and thematic patterns of disgust, altruism, and procreation. For example, where we find masternarratives that exploit disgust motivational programs and then build identities upon a primary, mutually antagonistic distinction between the uncontaminated and the contaminating, we should isolate that masternarrative (along with its disgust-triggering symbols) and set about dismantling it in the style that Raffie and Moghaddam have already modelled for us.

When communicating with purportedly non-violent, normative Islamic narrative masters (representative strategic communicators), counter-radicalization experts will want to monitor them for self-conscious awareness of the political implications of the masternarrative they are promulgating. We may ask, for example, if Islamic narrative masters in Europe understand the broader political implications of the *halla-haram* construct? Genuinely sincere Islamic masternarrative communicators may be not be aware that they're in bad faith with pluralistic democracy when they claim that their Islamic teachings in no way promote political violence. The psychology of disgust teaches otherwise.[83] Counter-radicalization communicators need to make Islamic narrative masters and other key influencers of normative Islam smarter about the political implications of their own masternarratives and how they exploit biological motivational systems, like disgust and altruism, to construct social-identities that may be inimical to pluralistic democracies. Extremist Islamic narrative masters have long been exploiting disgust-based, non-violent Islamic masternarratives as a template upon which to reform (really, deform) the social identity of narrative captives. CT experts must find



ways to educate sincerely non-violent Islamic strategic communicators about the bio-cognitive dynamics of the masternarratives they promulgate.

We need to find effective means to teach Islamic narrative masters why it is not psychologically viable to respect other religious viewpoints if you've been conditioned to view all other religious and political identities as *haram*, and you, therefore, *experience* them as disgusting. Although disgust and toleration may not be mutually exclusive, disgust and respect are truculently exclusive. Pluralistic democracies require more than mere tolerance of alternative identities. They require mutual respect as the bare-minimum basis for ethical responsiveness to other social identities.

Unfortunately, we should expect Islamic extremist strategic communicators to find increasingly innovative narrative and ritual means by which to gain access to and exploit the biological motivational systems of disgust, altruism, and procreation, thereby increasing their stock of narrative captives. Therefore, strategic analysis of Islamic masternarratives should do much more than provide in-the-field communicators with laminated ciphers by which to decode the symbolism of jihadist terrorism.[84] MN analysis should do more than draw maps by which to navigate normative, fundamentalist, extremist, and terrorist Islamic cultural terrain. The analysis of Islamic masternarratives should do more, even, than illuminate the terminological screens and behavioral models of terrorists. It should provide useable insights into the fundamental processes of *social-identity formation* among the Muslims that currently “sticky” Islamic masternarratives symbolically radicalise and physically mobilize. Analyzed from within a bio-cognitive framework, masternarratives are revealed as the keys to the formation of the social-identity of Islam extremists and, therefore, they are the keys to the un-formation of that same identity—*counter-radicalizing* through *counter-narration*.

Acknowledgements

I'm especially grateful to Dina Al Raffie, Mark Weiner, Dave Phillips, and Jonathan Shay for critical inspiration and analytical guidance. For their courage, commitment, and cunning, I'm grateful to numerous CT professionals from whose work I've had the privilege of learning downrange, firsthand, the labyrinthine warrens and treacherous alleyways of combating terrorism.

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Notes

[1] If European natives were confident that counter-radicalization operations have been and will be effective, they'd be much less apprehensive about incoming refugees. Policymakers who can point to their involvement in forming and implementing successful CR ops will gain, in Europe's increasingly refugee-leery environment, hefty political capital.



[2] For the epistemological dangers that the narrative fallacy poses to the work of social scientists, see Nassim Taleb's *The Black Swawn* (New York: Random House, 2010).

[3] Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

[4] See Raffie's "Social Identity Theory For Investigating Islamic Extremism in the Diaspora" in *Journal of Strategic Security* (Winter, 2013, Vol 6, n. 4).

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Andrew Silke's "Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes Of Jihadi Radicalization" in *European Journal of Criminology* (5 (1), pp. 99-123, 207).

[7] For groundbreaking science in this field, see Edward O. Wilson, "Resuming the Enlightenment Quest," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 1998); Simon Green, *Principles of Biopsychology* (Hove, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994); Eugene G. d'Aquili's *The Biopsychological Determinants of Culture* (Reading, Pa.: Addison-Wesley Modular Publications, 1972); Charles D. Laughlin, Jr. and Eugene d'Aquili's *Biogenetic Structuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 15. Laughlin and d'Aquili argue that, "The strength of biogenetic structuralist theory...lies in its capacity to explain much of the cognitive and structural aspects of classical structuralism by lodging structures squarely in specific cerebral structures and functions." (14-15) Examining and explaining how culture exploits (constructs itself out of) *cerebral structures and functions* is the goal of bio-cognitive analysis. All human cultures are structured atop universal bio-cognitive substrates.

[8] For the standard introduction to anthropological analysis of social-identity narratives, see H. Russell Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* 5th ed. (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2011). Unfortunately, Russell does not include a chapter on the bio-cognitive analysis of masternarratives.

[9] For studies of narrative as our primary cognitive operator, see Mark Turner's *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jeremy Hsu's "The Secrets of Storytelling" in *Scientific American Mind* (September 18, 2008), and especially, Brain Boyd's *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[10] For classical studies of narrative from the field of *narratology* that are relevant to and inform CT masternarrative analysis, see Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1990); James Phalen's *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Phelan's *Narrative as Rhetoric: Techniques, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Dayton: Ohio State University Press, 1996). For a practical guide to narrative therapy that has implications for CT masternarrative disruption, see Michael White's *Maps of Narrative Practice* (New York: WW Norton, 2007).

For a computational approach to narrative analysis that is potentially instructive to CT cyber-analysis of MNs in social networks, see Inderjeet Mani's *The Imagined Moment: Time, Narrative, and Computation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

[11] See M.H. Abrams's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th ed. (London: Harcourt Brace, 1999).



[12] In this argument, I'll examine in detail only one of these pre-adaptations, the biological motivational system of disgust. Although I mention only three primary motivational systems — disgust, altruism, procreation— there are certainly more than these three, such as fear. If my argument achieve nothing else, I hope it will, at very least, encourage CT scholars to locate, isolate, and analyze all of the bio-cognitive resources that Islamic MNs exploit to construct Islamic social identities.

[13] For a powerfully synthetic biography of the field of socio-biology by its foremost scientist, see Edward O. Wilson's *The Social Conquest of Earth* (New York: WW Norton, 2012).

[14] For a broad-stroke, very readable historical overview of our *tribalistic* cognitive inheritances, see Robin Dunbar's *The Human Story: A New History of Mankind's Evolution* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005); see also,

Joshua Greene's *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013). For a stark warning about the cultural, political, and legal challenges that resurgent "tribalism" poses to pluralistic democracies, see Mark Weiner's *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient form of Social Organization Reveals About the Future of Individual Freedom* (New York: Picador, 2014). Islamic extremist terrorist organizations are a species of resurgent "clannism."

[15] Narrative vehicles can be almost any media, from sacred texts to *Youtube* image collages to ISIL beheading rituals. Whatever medium they exploit for transmission, a masternarrative hijacks and structures *primary biological motivational systems* of disgust, altruism, and procreation. MNs contain many sub-narratives that recursively circulate and elaborate upon the primary disgust, altruism, or procreation "plotlines." MNs ultimately strive to pull biological motivational systems away from other masternarrative "competitors" and submerge them into their own self-contained, autonomous world, a world in which the torments of multi-level selection (ambiguity) are contained and soothed. See Kenneth Burke's *Language as Symbolic Action*, below, for an examination of how symbolic systems compulsively seek to perfect themselves by the internal logic of their own terminology.

[16] Biocognitive analysis, as I am defining it, takes analytical, theoretical, and methodological inspiration and guidance from these groundbreaking studies:

For a classic introduction to the methods and aims of cognitive sociology, see Eviatar Zerubavel's *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999). For the leading textbook in the field, see Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor's *Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture* (New York: Sage, 2013). To observe the field's methodology at work as cultural analysis with implications for social-identity analysis, see Wayne Brekhus's *Culture and Cognition: Patterns in the Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Polity, 2015). For an introduction to how and why the field of cognitive sociology has taken a turn into neurological descriptions of social phenomenon, see David Frank's *Neurosociology: The Nexus Between Neuroscience and Social Psychology* (New York: Springer, 2010). See also the especially astute overview of methodology provided by Todorov, Fiske, and Prentice in *Social Neuroscience: Toward Understandings of the Social Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For an apposite viewpoint, see Schutt, Seidman, and Keshavan's *Social Neuroscience: Brain, Mind, and Society* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015). For a reliable handbook to this emerging field, see Jean Decety and John Cacioppo's *The Oxford Handbook of Social Neuroscience* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2015). For a neuro-social description of social-identity formation, see Liou Cosolino's *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain* (New York: WW Norton, 2014).



For withering criticism and wholesale dismissal of the entire field of neuro-socialscience, see Carlo Umiltà's *Cognitive Neuroscience Is Still Too Young to Marry To Social Science* (Springer, 2016). I strongly encourage any CT analyst who might consider practicing biocognitive analysis of social-identity formation and masternarratives to heed Carlo Umiltà's many legitimate warnings, in particular his concerns about reductionistic explanations of complex social phenomenon and his especially worrying concerns about overdetermining incomplete and poorly understood "neuro" evidence. Although I share Umiltà's epistemological trepidation, I still feel compelled to apprehend the biocognitive mechanisms of the terrorist social-identity with the best analytical tools we currently have available.

[17] Masternarrative symbols break into two parts like a Greek symbolon, which was a coin (or potsherd) broken in half and given to two parties for identification in a legal agreement. One side of a masternarrative symbolon is biological; the other side cultural. Masternarratives form social identity by successfully fitting these two halves together.

[18] For an analytical model, see Meir Sternberg's "Universals of Narrative and Their Cognitive Fortunes (II)" in *Poetics Today* 24 (3: 297-395).

[19] For an analytical model, see Michelle Sugiyama Scalise's "Predation, Narration, and Adaptation: Little Red Riding Hood Revisited" in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* (5: 108-127).

[20] For groundbreaking works in this field, see Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Bantam, 2006), pp. 29-30. See also, V.S. Raamachandran's "Mirror Neurons and Imitation Learning as the Driving Force Behind the Great Leap Forward in Human Evolution" at www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge69.html. See especially, David Franks and Jeff Davis's confirmation of Raamachandran's research "Critique and Refinement of Neurosociology of Mirror Neurons" in *Biosociology and Neurosociology, Advances in Group Processes* (Vol. 29, 77, 2012).

[21] An introduction to narrative and social identity intelligently useful to the CT expert is Michael Bamberg, Anna de Fina, and Deborah Schiffrin's *Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse 9th edition* (John Benjamin's Publishing House, 2007). See also, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[22] See Berns, Chappelow, Zink, Pagnoni, Martin-Skurski, and Richard's "Neurobiological Correlates of Social Conformity and Independence During Mental Rotation" in *Biological Psychiatry* (vol 1, 58, 3, August, 2005).

[23] For a description of the neuro-cognitive sources of social-identity competition, see Rebecca Saxe's "Reading Your Mind: How Our Brains Help Us Understand Other People" in *Boston Review* (February, 2004).

[24] For a review of cognitive balance theory, see Ernest Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later" in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68, 1982.

[25] Evolutionary scientists call those programs "preadaptations": a structure or function evolved in one setting that is accessed and exploited in another setting. See Wilson, above, for a detailed explanation.



[26] For a classic analysis of how *symbolic communities* get formed, see Kenneth Burke's *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). His theory of anthroposemiosis assumed that rhetoric, language, narrative, symbols exploit universal bio-cognitive substrates long before the brain-science watershed of the past decade confirmed his methodology's enabling premises. For a related approach to human communication systems as creating symbolic communities, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). See also, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

[27] Ibid.

[28] I will discuss the required cognitive equipment of the MN analyst in detail below; however, it should be obvious that the MN analyst must be fluent in current anthropological, cognitive, and psychological insights about our primary pre-adaptations and their relation to social-identity formation. In other words, fluent in symbolic convergence theory.

[29] Although there are more than three primary motivational systems, I isolate disgust, altruism, and procreation because they are central to the formation of the social-identity of Islamic extremists. Fear is certainly another biological motivational system exploited by Islamic masternarratives; in most instances, fear of losing a distinctly Islamic social identity—not fear of *Kuffir*, per se. *Kuffir* (non-Muslim identities) are far more typically thematically associated with disgust/*haram*.

[30] Scott Atran has performed extensive field research on Islamic extremist MNs, but he does not articulate any theory or methodology, as such. Atran is an extraordinarily erudite anthropologist who possesses a powerful combinatorial analytical mind. When discussing the bare-minimum cognitive equipment of the MN analyst, I'll return to his *Talking to the Enemy* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) to discuss its heuristic value to MN research.

[31] For a basic introduction to counternarrative, see Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews's *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense* (Jonh Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2004). For competent reviews of standard methods of narrative disruption (counter-narrating), see H.L. Goodall's *Counter-narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2010) and Timothy Khun, Mariann Wolf Lundhol, and Sanne Franson's forthcoming *Counternarratives and Organization* (New York: Routledge, 2016). For a useful model of applied MN analysis that observes techniques that were employed for *narrative disruption* in a specific political context, see M. Al-Rasheed and R. Vitalis's *Counter-narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For a discussion of narrative and counter narrative in the context of CT research, see Dina Al Raffie's "Whose Hearts and Minds: Narratives and Counternarratives of Salafi Jihadism" in *Journal of Terrorism Research* (vol 3, issue 2, 2012).

[32] I'll analyse this "piggybacking" process, how ISIL exploits a normative *haram narrative* already circulating in Islamic enclaves, in detail below.

[33] See Paul Rozin and Edward Royzman's "Negativity Bias, Negativity Dominance, and Contagion" in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, 2001; also, Rozin and P. Fallon's "A Perspective on Disgust" in *Psychological Review* (94, 1987) as well as Rozin and R. Mandell's "Family Resemblance in Attitudes to Foods" in *Developmental Psychology* (20, 1984).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.



[36] See Raffie's "Social Identity Theory For Investigating Islamic Extremism in the Diaspora" in *Journal of Strategic Security* (Winter, 2013, Vol 6, n. 4).

[37] I owe these psychological insights to many long conversations with Dr. Jonathan Shay, who helped me understand the full implications of "learned helplessness" to social-identity *de-formation*. See Abramson, Garber, and Seligman's classic study, "Learned Helplessness in Humans: An Attributional Analysis" in *Human Helplessness: Theory and Applications* (New York: Academic Press, 1980). For an introductory overview of Seligman's cognitive theory of human helplessness as it relates to social-identity formation, see Martha Nussbaum's extensive discussion in the chapter, "The Resurgence of Intentionality: Seligman, Lazarus, Ortony, Oatley" in *Upheavals of Thought*, see below.

[38] For a sociological examination of how luck/chance (environmental contingency) determines social-identity formation in modern society, see Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

[39] For an exhaustive analysis of how both individual and social identities get constructed out of the bio-cognitive resources of disgust, see Martha Nussbaum's *Upheaval's of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[40] Islamic cyberactivists have already developed internet search engines whose algorithms distinguish between *hallal* and *haram*. These engines are programmed to exclude *haram* from search results. They are collectively known as *Hallal Verified Engines* (HVE), such as *Hallalgoogling* and *I'm Hallal*. We need field studies of who hallalgoogles and how HVE's globalize Islamic social identity, especially among European Muslim demographics. How are HVE's influencing normative Islam, globally?

[41] For an anthropological examination of *hallal* in a global context, see J Fisher's *The Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in Global Market* (New York: Palgrave, 2011). For an updated examination of the economic implications of *hallal* identity to global markets, see *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics, and Markets in Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2015). Neither work investigates the centrality of *hallal* to Muslim social identity; they merely assume it as the enabling premise of their arguments.

[42] See Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Jonathan Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism: Motivation, Communication, and Behavior* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

[48] For detailed examinations of the violence potential of our disgust motivational system, see W.I. Miller's *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Paul Rozin, "Disgust: The Body and Soul of Emotion" in Power's (ed) *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1999); A.S. David et al, "Disgust—the Forgotten Emotion of Psychiatry" in *British Journal of Psychology*, 1998. I owe all of these titles to Paul Ekman, see *Emotions Revealed* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003).

[49] Dina Al Raffie corrects this oversight. See, "Investigating Social Identity Theory in Islamic Extremism" in *Journal of Strategic Security* (vol 6 no 4, Winter, 2013).



[50] See Martha Nussbaum's *Upheaval's of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp. 200 – 206.

[51] For a reliable analytical tool with which to evaluate a defector's claims, see Dina Al Raffie's "Straight From the Horse's Mouth: Exploring Deradicalization Claims of Former Egyptian Militant Leaders" in *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Vol, 9. issue, 1 2015).

[52] For an analysis of the ISIL beheading narrative, see Doyle Quiggle's "The ISIS Beheading Narrative" in *Small Wars Journal* (February, 2015).

[53] See Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism*, chapter five.

[54] See Adam Lankford's *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage, Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

[55] Defining irony, M.H. Abrams recalls the origins of irony in Greek comedy, "the character called the *ieron* was a dissembler, who characteristically spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the *alazon*, the self-deceiving and stupid braggart." *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th ed (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

[56] For psycho-symbolic analysis of the most infamous political death cult, see Klaus Vondung's "National Socialism as a Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of an Analytical Concept," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (6 (1), 2005, pp 87-95).

[57] See Raffie, above.

[58] Influenced — unduly, perhaps — by Nussbaum and Seligman, my suspicion is that any MN plotting *other*, competing identity possibilities as disgusting or contaminating will construct social identities radically inimical to pluralistic democracy, but we need data culled from European Islamic masternarrative communities with which to investigate that question. For an extended analysis of the consequences to pluralistic democracies of social identities constructed out of disgust, see Martha Nussbaum's *Upheaval's of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Nussbaum notes: "A ubiquitous reaction to this sense of disgustingness is to project the disgust reaction outward, so that it is not really oneself, but some other group of people, how are seen as vile and viscous, the sources of a contamination that we might possibly keep at bay."

[59] For in-depth, sequential analysis of each ritual mode, see Matusitz's *Symbolism in Terrorism*, p. 80 –86.



[60] For accounts of the evolutionary psychology of ritual, see Roy A. Rappaport's *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, *Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 226-30; Victor Turner's "Body, Brain, and Culture," in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987): 156-78; Ronald Grimes's *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Revised Edition (University of South Carolina Press, 1995); James B. Ashbrook and Carol Rausch Albright's *The Humanizing Brain: Where Religion and Neuroscience Meet* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997); Scott Atran's *In Gods We Trust The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nathan Mitchell's "What Biogeneticists Are Saying About Ritual: A Report," *Liturgy Digest*, 1:1 (Spring 1993: 75-76); Tom F. Driver's *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1998, 13, 23); V. S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee's *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* (New York: Quill, 1998); Pascal Boyer's *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits, and Ancestors* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) and Robin Dunbar's *The Human Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004). For an early but still-useful look at the neurological basis of ritual, see Eugene D'Aquili's *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Analysis*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1979) and *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (New York: Fortress Press, 1999). For a historical analysis of the use of ritual in human society, see William McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[61] Collective prayer and collective ablution are ritualised forms of synchronized movement, like dancing and music making, which is why many Islamic extremists ban dancing and music making—they represent oxytocin competition.

[62] See, *The Moral Molecule: The New Science of What Makes Us Good and Evil* (London: Bantam, 2013) and Joshua Greene's *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013).

[63] See Mithen and Zak.

[64] See Mithen.

[65] For the groundbreaking study in this field, see Robert Axelrod's *The Evolution of Cooperation* (London: Penguin, 1984).

[66] Quotations in this paragraph are from Mithen.

[67] See, d'Aquili and Newberg, *The Mystical Mind*.

[68] The cognitive archaeologist (brain evolution) Steven Mithen notes, "Music aids the performance of collective tasks by rhythmically facilitating physical coordination. But in the majority of cases it appears to be cognitive coordination that is induced by the music, the arousal of a shared emotional state and *trust* in one's fellow music-makers." See, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body* (London: Phoenix, 2005).

[69] See Atran's *Talking to the Enemy*.

[70] See D'Aquili and Newberg, *The Mystical Mind*, pp. 95-96.

[71] For a collection of instructive models of *ritual analysis* conducted within the parameters of *symbolic convergence theory*, see Jeffery Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason Mast's *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[72] See Matusitz, pp. 296-7.



[73] Source asked to remain anonymous. I am fully aware of and take responsibility for the ethical implications of citing an unnamed source.

[74] Daniel Smail's *On Deep History and the Brain* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

[75] See Matusitz, chapter 16.

[76] What we now know about the global distribution of mirror neurons explains why viewing violent images is almost the same, cognitively considered, as committing violent acts. What we actually go out and do with our experience of viewing terrorist violence is largely determined by our own governing MN. Teletropic manipulation is both possible and effective because of the *global distribution* (pun intended) of mirror neurons. ISIL narrative manipulators are exploiting the *global* nature of mirror neurons.

[77] For a field-level discussion of how jihad symbolism hijacked the primal altruism of specific groups of young men and transformed their altruism motivational system into a specifically extremist social-identity and then vectored them along terrorist plots, see Scott Atran's *Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What It Means to Be Human* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

[78] For historical analysis of jihad, see Andrew G. Bostom's *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic Holy War and The Fate of Non-Muslims* (New York: Prometheus, 2005); Majid Khadduri's *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1955); Rudolf Peters's *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Marcus Weiner, 1996).

[79] Claude Levi Strauss's ground-breaking work *The Savage Mind* (1962) is an enduringly informative description of the process of mythic disintegration and reintegration, which he calls "bricolage." I prefer the more homespun metaphor, "piggybacking."

[80] Recall, Fritz Heider's *imbalance-balance theory* and Martin Seligman's *learned helplessness*.

[81] For a now-classic delineation of the predicament of modern political "pluralism," see Hannah Arendt's essay "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)" in *Essays in Understanding: Uncollected and Unpublished Work by Hannah Arendt, 1930-1954* ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994). For a discussion that makes the political aspects of a pluralistic identity explicit, see Martha Nussbaum's "Secret Sewers of Vice: Disgust, Bodies, and the Law" in S. Bandes's (ed) *The Passions of Law* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) and her *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Nussbaum seamlessly discusses the legal and political implications of disgust-based social identities in trenchant detail. Her characterization of Paul Ekman's science of emotion-recognition is, unfortunately, inaccurate.

[82] Scott Atran has discovered how Islamic MNs activate altruistic bio-motivational programs in Muslim youths to form them into terrorists who kill themselves and others for the "greater good" of their Islamic community; see, *Talking to the Enemy*.

[83] A psychic litmus test for evaluating masternarrative communicators is whether they be capable of manifesting a self-consciously ironic attitude toward their own masternarrative. Do they reserve irony only for other identity narratives? Tone determines meaning. And style is psychological attitude. ISIL typically lack any sense of irony, because ISIL MNs conflate a narrative construct with the real world. Irony is the mark of the mature user of language. Irony usually emerges from our perception of a discrepancy between our working narrative about reality and how reality actually works.



[84] I do not mean to knock the painstaking work performed by criminologists who carefully index the symbolism of gangs and terrorist groups. My own thoughts on this subject began when I started recording tattoos, symbolic markings, magical talismans, and identity narratives of the Afghans with whom I tented at FOB Fenty, Jalalabad.



Quantifying Salient Concepts Discussed in Social Media Content: An Analysis of Tweets Posted by ISIS Fangirls

by Shadi Ghajar-Khosravi, Peter Kwantes, Natalia Derbentseva and Laura Huey



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Abstract

In this paper, we measure the extent to which we can accurately measure the salience of topics/concepts that might be of interest to an analyst tasked with analyzing the content posted on social media platforms. We also evaluate whether concepts like positive and negative sentiment can be meaningfully extracted from Social Media content. As a test case, we examined Twitter content generated by female users who are sympathetic to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Although the results were based on a small sample of users, we demonstrate that ISIS fangirls differ in the content of their tweets from other, non-radicalized, teenage girls, and that automated text analysis techniques can detect the differences. The basic technique proposed here is a promising step in devising techniques for quantifying the salient topics being discussed on social media platforms, and should be developed further to create more fine-grained examinations of such content.

Keywords: Social Media; Islamic State; Twitter; radicalization

Introduction

Social Media has become an important source for information about people and important events around the world events. Its importance is driven largely by the enormous number of people generating and updating content in Social Media platforms on a constant, sometimes more than hourly, basis. Twitter represents one of several social media outlets that have become a widely used and popular technology for radicalized groups like ISIS proponents to spread their real time messages around the world. Lack of strict regulations, the ability to remain anonymous, easy access to a wide range of audience, and the fast flow of information within Twitter and similar Social Media platforms have made these tools a popular choice for broadcasting extremist beliefs and values to the more susceptible audience (Weimann, 2015). While many of radicalized community members have posted radicalized content on their social media pages before they committed a terrorist attack (for example, the shooting on Parliament Hill in 2014), there are limitations to the intelligence community ability to proactively and efficiently identify these individuals from their social media content. Part of the limitation comes from the volume and rate at which user data get posted in these environments and the low signal to noise ratio in social media content in terms of the amount of content suggesting pro-radical ideas versus anti-radicalization or neutral content.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, we sought to explore some techniques and strategies for analyzing the content of twitter feeds. The proposed analytical strategy starts by defining a set of topics of relevance that might be relevant to an analysis, and then measures how often the concepts are used and the association of concepts to positive and negative sentiment. The second purpose of the paper is to apply the technique to see how the content of tweets posted by radicalized teenage girls who support the Islamic State



in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) differs from a) content posted by an age-matched control group of non-radicalized users and b) content about ISIS from a random sample of twitter users. We refer to these radicalized teenaged girls as “ISIS Fangirls” (Huey & Witmer, 2016). Taken together, our analysis tries to answer the following questions:

1. Can we validly determine the salience of certain topics discussed in twitter content?
2. To what extent do the tweets posted by ISIS fangirls differ from control tweets in their expression of sentiment towards the content topics we have chosen?

Content Analysis

Broadly speaking, Content Analysis refers to a set of manual, automatic or semi-automatic techniques whereby the language used in a narrative is processed to objectively summarize the salient topics and extract the meaning being discussed. How the language is processed will vary depending on what the researcher wishes to include as the basic linguistic unit (e.g., words, phrases) for analysis. Once the linguistic units have been extracted from the text, they can be quantified to determine, for example, the salient topics being discussed, the frequency with which they are discussed, or what sentiments are associated to the topics. Various content analysis methods exist and the choice depends on the specific research objectives (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). The analysis we conduct here is similar in nature to ones that use a lexicon-based technique (O’Connor, Balasubramanyan, Routledge, & Smith, 2010; Kouloumpis, Wilson, & Moore, 2011) rather than a corpus-based (Pak & Paroubek, 2010) or hybrid approach (Kumar & Sebastian, 2012). In it, concepts are formed by collecting the linguistic units mentioned above into a lexicon for a higher-level topic. For example, the concept of *friend* might include terms like, ‘friend’, ‘bestie’, and ‘bff’. Analysis then proceeds by tabulating the presence of the topics in the text. In doing so, the researcher is able to characterize what can be a very large collection of text as a manageable collection of analysable concepts, and infers the salience of topics in a person’s or group’s generated content from the frequency with which they appear in text.

In what we report here, we apply our analysis to text generated by ISIS Fangirl on Twitter. Our analysis of the ISIS Fangirl content begins with an *a priori* set of topics to examine. We then find and count segments of text belonging to each of the topics. The topics are then ordered by their frequency of occurrence—a property that, we postulate, reflects the topics’ relative importance to those generating the content. An aspect of the approach we take in this paper includes validating the salience of topics when it is based on the frequencies of the topics. The frequencies with which concepts are used in text *could* be determined randomly, making their order unrelated to their salience. We validate the order of topics by comparing it to that from text sampled from two control groups. Specifically, our analysis on twitter content generated by radicalized high school girls was compared to that of two collections of content that serves as controls: a sample of tweets written by non-radicalized high school girls, and a sample of tweets from multiple authors that reference the Islamic State. The first control collection allows us to compare how radicalized and non-radicalized teenaged girls differ with respect to how our concepts are discussed. The second control group allows us to compare how the concepts that radicalized teenagers discuss might differ from others who also generate content related to the Islamic State, but may or may not be supporters.

Once tabulated, the topics can also be assessed for expressions of positive and negative sentiment. The same technique we used to create concepts for the content discussed in the tweets is used to create concepts for positive and negative sentiment. That is, two collections of words were created: one comprising positive words and one containing negative words. The sentiment concepts allowed us to measure the relative extent



to which the content concepts were expressed in a positive or negative manner.

ISIS fangirls

Following Huey and Witmer (2016) we refer to the radicalized teenaged girls as “ISIS Fangirls”. In the terrorism context, ‘fan girl’ has been used to describe a girl or woman – usually a teenager – who joins a jihadist network in order to enjoy the notoriety that comes from participating in a group that is seen by some as ‘rebellious’ and therefore ‘cool’ (Huey & Witmer, 2016). The term, which is commonly used by both IS and AQ affiliated networks to refer to enthusiastic, but often naive joiners, comes from popular culture. It was spawned by the sometimes hysterical reactions generated among young fans to such pop culture phenomenon as the Twilight movies, Justin Bieber and/or One Direction fans (Herrmann, 2008). What marks IS fan girls as distinct from their One Direction loving counterparts, is that the object of their interest is the Islamic State. Although female adherents to IS ideology are supposed to refrain from open adoration of males, and certainly from contact with males, beyond the benefits of association with a group espousing a form of ‘jihadi cool’ (Huey, 2015; Picart 2015), fan girls are likely also attracted by a plethora of images of highly attractive young male jihadists, whose pictures, often in highly romanticized form, frequently dominate their twitter streams (Erelle, 2015).

To the extent that these young women are often recent joiners, and typically reveal an ignorance of IS ideology – often behaving in ways that contradict this ideology by, as an example, posting pictures of their faces – we could argue that they have not been completely radicalized yet. However, their association with regular IS members and, in many instances with notable recruiters and IS propagandists, does place them at significantly higher risk of radicalization than other young people in the general population. Increasing this risk is, as some commentators have noted, the presence of a “jihadi girl power subculture” that recruiters and propagandists use to increase the attractiveness of joining IS (Pandith & Havelicek, 2015). For these reasons, the content of their posts is of scientific value to the extent that it can tell us something about how to differentiate individuals who may be at different stages in the process of radicalization.

Method

Concepts

Content-Related Concepts: The first step in addressing the research questions was to prepare a list of topics that would be of interest to analysts studying radicalized individuals. Normally, such an analysis would be conducted by analysts who are subject-matter experts in the domain and would use it to decide upon concepts of interest. For the example we report here, we identified ten concepts relevant to radicalization: Islamic State (IS), Punishment, Unbeliever, Jihad, God, Islam, Marriage, Violence, Middle-East countries that are enemies of ISIS, and Western countries (‘the West’). A concept was constructed by compiling a potentially exhaustive list of terms that described the concept.

In addition to the concepts related to radicalization, we included four control concepts that represent topics that would be of more general interest to teenage girls. These were: High School, Friends, Dating, and Sports. The complete list of concepts is shown in Table 1.

Sentiment Concepts: To compare and contrast the sentiment that Fangirls and control users have toward content-related concepts, we created two concepts related to sentiment. Sentiment concepts were created



in three steps. First we started with the positive and negative sentiment word lists created by Hu and Liu (2004) for their lexically-based sentiment analysis approach. Second, we sorted the words in each list by their frequency of usage in everyday usage using the CELEX word frequency database from the Max Plank Institute for Psycholinguistics and selected only the 300 most frequent words as candidates for each sentiment concept. As a final step, we examined each word of the two lists and removed any word that did not have a clear association to a sentiment. For example, the terms 'wicked' and 'hot' can be associated with negative or positive sentiment. The resultant lists contained 210 keywords comprising the positive sentiment concept and 159 keywords representing the negative sentiment concept.

Datasets

Three datasets of tweets were collected from Twitter using Twitonomy.

ISIS Fangirls: The first dataset contained tweets from 14 different teenage girls. The dataset, referred to as the "Fangirls", contained approximately 5000 tweets and included expressions of appreciation or dedication to ISIS in their tweet content. The tweets were collected from January 2015 to April 2015. One fangirl (#6) was removed from the analyses due to the limited number of tweets available for her in the dataset.

Control Girls: A second dataset, referred to as "Control Girls", contained tweets collected from 14 randomly selected teenage girls who, at least from the content of their tweets, did not appear to have any affiliation with ISIS or radical Islam.

ISIS-control: A third dataset was collected to explore the differences in how ISIS Fangirls and other users who mention ISIS differ with respect to the concepts we had selected. These tweets were extracted using the Twitter API and by searching for tweets containing the keywords assigned to the IS concept. The tweets collected could be pro-ISIS, anti-ISIS, or neutral. Hence, this tweet collection was a second control collection and referred to as the "ISIS-control" dataset. After the dataset was cleaned (detailed in the next section), 3332 tweets remained in the dataset. All the tweets were posted on July 10, 2015 the date the online search was conducted.

Importantly, all of the tweets used in the analysis below were completely anonymized before being submitted for analysis. We therefore have no information about the nationalities or identities of the persons. Table 2 details the amount of content we were able to sample for each twitter user in the Fangirl and Control datasets.

Pre-processing of Data

Clean-up and substitution: A 3-step clean-up process was conducted on the three datasets: 1) any non-English words, characters or emoticons were removed from the tweets. 2) Empty or repeated tweets (including retweets from Fangirls and Control Girls) were removed from the tables and 3) example, different spellings of the transliterated Arabic terms *kuffar*, *kufar*, *kuffaar*, *kafirs*, *kafiroon*, etc. were all replaced with *kuffar*.

Tokenization and Preliminary Variables: A Java program was coded to parse the individual tweets and search for keywords related to each of the concepts. The list of keywords was fed into the program to return the following variables:

1. Number of tweets containing each keyword for each girl.
2. Number of tweets containing each concept for each girl. Put simply, for every tweet, we determined whether it contained words from any of the 14 concepts. If a tweet contained one or more keywords



from a concept, a counter for the number of tweets containing the concept was incremented by 1.

3. Number of tweets expressing positive or negative sentiment for each concept together for each girl.

Sentiment Expression in Tweets: The expression of sentiment was measured separately for each content concept by calculating the conditional probabilities that positive and negative concepts appeared with tweets containing terms from the content concept (see equation below). Done this way, we can measure, for each content concept, the extent to which a concept, or topic, accompanies expressions of positive and negative sentiment.

$$P(\text{Concept}_{\text{Sentiment}} | \text{Concept}_C) = \frac{n(\text{Concept}_{\text{Sentiment}} \& \text{Concept}_C)}{n(\text{Concept}_C)}$$

where $n(\text{Concept}_C)$ refers to the number of tweets in which the content-related Concept_C (i.e., one or more of its associated terms) has occurred and $n(\text{Concept}_{\text{Sentiment}} \& \text{Concept}_C)$ refers to the number of tweets in which both $\text{Concept}_{\text{Sentiment}}$ (i.e., a positive or negative sentiment concept) and Concept_C have occurred together. Hence, $P(\text{Concept}_{\text{Sentiment}} | \text{Concept}_C)$ refers to the probability that the terms from a sentiment concept appear with tweets containing terms from a content-related concept.

Results

Dominant Content-Related Concepts

Table 3 shows, in order from highest to lowest frequency, the content-related concepts mentioned in the datasets. The content-related concepts are comprised of varying numbers of keywords. For example, the concept, Dating has three terms, while Punishment has 13. These differences raise a possibility that a concept's frequency in the text is driven by the number of words that constitute the concept. In other words, the frequency of a concept may increase with the number of terms comprising the concept because the more terms in a concept, the more opportunity there is to have a match between the tweet and the concept. As a check, we correlated the number of keywords in the concepts and their frequency in the tweets for each dataset. The correlations were not significant (Table 4). That is, the frequency of concepts' presence in tweets was independent of how many terms comprised the concept.

The Order of Concepts' Frequencies

Table 3 orders the 14 content-related concepts from highest frequency to lowest. We can interpret the order as reflecting the salience of the concepts to the authors providing content. One way to validate the order of the concepts is to compare the order to that of one or more control groups. In our case, we can compare the order of concepts in Fangirls tweets with Control Girls and ISIS-Control tweets. Because Fangirls and ISIS-Control tweets may be written by twitter users that are similar in some respects, we hypothesized that the prioritization of the concepts they discuss might be similar. To test the notion, we calculated Kendall's τ , a correlation measure that is applied to ordinal data, on the order of the topics in Table 4. Specifically, we measured the extent to which the order of topics in Fangirls tweets matched that of Control Girls and ISIS-Control tweets. We found, as hypothesized, that the order of Fangirls and Control Girls concepts was in far less agreement ($\tau = .18$) than it was for ISIS-control tweets ($\tau = .67$).



The key finding from this section is that, we were able to measure and prioritize the concepts discussed in tweets. We validated the order in two ways: first, by establishing that the position of a concept in the list was independent of the number of terms comprising the concept, and second by comparing the order of concepts in Fangirls tweets to that of two control groups of tweets. We demonstrated that the order reflected in the Fangirls' concepts was far more similar to that of a random collection of tweets about ISIS than a collection of tweets from non-radicalized teenaged girls.

Sentiment Towards Concepts

The next analysis concerned the expression of sentiment associated with our 14 concepts. Specifically, for each concept, we calculated the likelihood that it appears with at least one term from the positive and negative concepts described. We did the analysis for the tweets in each of the three tweet samples. So, for each concept, we have a measure of the extent to which the concept is associated with positive sentiment and negative sentiment. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis.

Using the table, we can inspect the extent to which Fangirls differ or are aligned with the pattern of sentiment expression in the control groups. In other words, to what extent are the positive and negative expressions of sentiment about the concepts similar to, or different from, those of controls?

Four examples of where the groups differ stand out and are highlighted with x's in the table. First, whereas the expression of sentiment around unbelievers is neutral for Control Girls, it is decidedly more negative than positive for both ISIS-Control and Fangirls tweets. Second, whereas Control Girls express more positive than negative sentiment associated with The West, Fangirls (not surprisingly) associate The West with more negative than positive sentiment. Sports are associated with more negative sentiment than positive sentiment for Fangirls; a pattern that reverses for Control Girls. Finally, whereas jihad is associated with positive sentiment for Fangirls, it is associated with negative sentiment for Control Girls.

As a second analysis on the sentiment data, we can compare the pattern with which positive and negative sentiment are assigned to concepts, and measure how similar the pattern is across different groups. For example, in our dataset here, we can look at the pattern of Positive and Negative associations across the concepts and measure the extent to which it is shared with our control groups. We predict, for example, that the pattern of positive and negative expressions of sentiment for Fangirls will be more similar to that of ISIS-Control tweets than Control Girls' tweets because the ISIS-Control tweets are more likely to express pro-ISIS sentiment like the Fangirls. To test the hypothesis, we calculated the difference between positive and negative associations for each concept separately for each group. We then used Pearson's correlation coefficient on the differences between Fangirls and Control Girls and between Fangirls and ISIS-Controls. As predicted, ISIS-Control tweets contained a pattern of sentiment expression that was more similar to the Fangirls' pattern ($r = .53$) than it was for Control Girls ($r = .34$). Although suggestive and consistent with our hypothesis, the difference between the two correlations was not statistically significant ($p = .29$).

Discussion

In this paper, we explored a method for conducting a quantitative analysis to measure the salience of concepts discussed in tweets generated by teenaged girls who support ISIS, and used tweets from two different populations to serve as controls. The results of the analysis were promising. We were able, with some certainty, to accurately characterize the salience of content-related concepts. We were also able to measure



the extent to which positive and negative sentiments were expressed in tweets by measuring the extent to which terms in a sentiment lexicon were present in tweets mentioning our 14 topics of interest. For the most part, the pattern of tweets seems reasonable. For example, Fangirls associated positive sentiment with jihad, whereas for Control Girls it was negative. Conversely, Control Girls had a more positive than negative association to the West, where the pattern reversed for Fangirls. Although the results were based on a small sample of users, they demonstrated that users with different ideological orientations differed in the content of their tweets, and that automated text analysis techniques can detect the differences. We would caution however, that such automated techniques should always be interpreted with care and be supplemented with a domain expert's validation.

Although we do not claim that the methods we describe in this paper provide a complete treatment of the analysis of the content in tweets, it is a promising step in devising techniques for quantifying the salient topics being discussed in social media platforms. We see the techniques as being complementary to social media analytic techniques performed on massive collections of content. Whereas social media analytics focuses on understanding the concepts expressed in massive aggregated collections of say, Twitter content, understanding the more nuanced content of individual users can be accomplished techniques similar to the one we used here. We therefore recommend further work to develop quantitative methods for analysing social media content at the lower, user-based level.

There are two aspects of the work here that, in our opinion, represent opportunities for improvement to the analysis capability. First, in what we report above, the analyst must decide *a priori* what concepts will be examined in the analysis. While such a strategy is useful, it is somewhat limited in that there may be other salient concepts in the text that will remain undiscovered because they are not present in the set of concepts under examination. There are computational models that are capable of automatically extracting topics from text (e.g., Blei, 2012). These so-called, Topic Models are typically applied to documents that are longer than tweets, so it is unclear how well they can be applied in the social media context where texts are very short. The Topic Model's applicability to extracting topics automatically from tweets will be explored in upcoming work.

The second opportunity for improvement could be developed using the lexicon-based approach we used to tabulate the frequency of concepts. Recall that each concept was comprised of a set of words, and that if a tweet contained one or more words of the concept, the frequency of the concept was incremented. Clearly then, how well the system is able to characterise the presence of a concept will depend on how comprehensively the concept is represented by the words in the lexicon. The technique worked well in the results we reported here, but could be improved by algorithms that are able to match terms on their meaning rather than a strict match on spelling. For example, our concept for marriage did not include the terms, 'bride' and 'groom', when clearly they could (or perhaps should) have been. Not having them in the concept means that tweets containing either 'bride' or 'groom' would not be identified as being relevant to the concept. The solution would be an algorithm that knows when words are related to a concept even if the word is not present in the list of words that comprises it. There are semantic models that can, in an unsupervised fashion, generate 'meaning' representations for words. Perhaps the most popular example is Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA; Landauer & Dumais, 1997). LSA performs statistics on a matrix describing the frequency with which terms appear in each document of a large collection of text. In the end, each word is represented as a vector which behaves much like a "meaning" in that the vectors for two semantically related words like dog and puppy will be similar as measured by their cosine (akin to a correlation coefficient wherein a value of 1 means they are identical, and a 0 means that the two are completely dissimilar). The power of LSA as



a semantic model lies in its ability to deduce that terms are related even if they never occur together in the same document.

Unfortunately, models like LSA do not represent the form of the semantic relationship between words. Specifically, they cannot differentiate among the various forms of semantic association. So, a term like married is as similar to its synonym, wed as it is to its antonym, divorced. As they currently exist then, unsupervised models of semantics do not provide the required precision to support the technique and would require further development.

The most promising way to advance the technique is to exploit knowledge stored in ontologies to identify terms that are relevant to a concept, even if they are not contained in the lexicon describing it. Ontologies formally represent the relationships between words/concepts in a domain as a network of connected nodes where the links between them describe the nature of the relationship. So, for example, an ontological representation of English words would identify divorce as an antonym of marriage, and wed as a synonym. Perhaps the most extensive lexical ontology for identifying synonyms is Princeton University's WordNet (Fellbaum, 2005) which if it could be incorporated into the analysis we conducted here, would increase its precision (<https://wordnet.princeton.edu/>).

Conclusion

Social Media represents an increasingly important source of information about people and events. This article explored how well a lexicon-based technique characterises the salience of concepts and the sentiment associated with them. We see our techniques as being complementary to, so called, 'big data' techniques for analysing Social Media content. Specifically, while big data analytic tools are adept at extracting themes and networks from very large repositories of content, they are not designed to explore content at the individual user-level. The analysis we conducted here is designed to be done after analysis on a large repository has been done, and key content generators of interest have been identified for further analysis. The results were promising, and justify further exploration in order to increase the precision of the technique.

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Tables

Table 1: The 14 content-related concepts along with their keywords.

| Concept | Keywords | Number of keywords |
|-------------|--|--------------------|
| IS* | caliphate, dawla, ummah, sharia, Islamicstate, IS, ISIL, ISIS | 8 |
| Punishment | punish, punished, punishing, prisoner, execute, execution, revenge, behead, beheading, torture, tortured, kill, killed | 13 |
| Unbeliever | Kafir, kuffar, pagan, pagans, atheist, apostate, apostasy, unbeliever | 8 |
| Jihad | Jihad, jihadi, mujahid, mujahideen, mujahidin, mujahadein, mujahadeen, mujahidin, mujahedeen, mujahedin, martyr, martyrdom, salvation | 13 |
| God | God, Allah, Alla, Jehovah | 4 |
| Islam | Muhammad, Koran, Qu'ran, Islam, Muslim, Muslims, Islam, Mecca | 8 |
| Marriage | marriage, marry, married, husband, wife, wives, wedding, nikah, zawj | 9 |
| Violence | attack, attacking, attacked, exploded, explosion, bomb, bombing, invasion, invaded, destroyed, destroy, obliterated, obliterate, annihilate, annihilated, battlefield, battle, war | 18 |
| ME local* | Jordan, Saudi, Iran, peshmerga, PKK, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Turkey | 9 |
| The West | USA, America, France, UK, Britain, Australia, Canada, Japan | 8 |
| High School | essay, homework, teacher, principal, classroom, textbook, highschool, prom, classes | 9 |
| Friends | buddy, bestie, clique, friends, friend, bff | 6 |
| Dating | boyfriend, girlfriend, dating | 3 |
| Sports | soccer, baseball, basketball, hockey, sports, athlete, athletics, volleyball, wrestling, football | 10 |

*IS = Islamic State; ME Local = Middle East local enemies

Table 2: Number of tweets collected from each user in Control and Fangirl datasets.

| Fangirls | | Control Girls | |
|----------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| User ID | Number of Tweet Posts | User ID | Number of Tweet Posts |
| 1 | 1708 | 1 | 3156 |
| 2 | 1324 | 2 | 3170 |
| 3 | 199 | 3 | 3121 |
| 4 | 212 | 4 | 3041 |
| 5 | 254 | 5 | 1561 |
| 6 | 3 | 6 | 3158 |
| 7 | 795 | 7 | 3142 |
| 8 | 205 | 8 | 2114 |
| 9 | 146 | 9 | 918 |
| 10 | 54 | 10 | 432 |
| 11 | 250 | 11 | 3180 |
| 12 | 264 | 12 | 3064 |
| 13 | 236 | 13 | 2689 |
| 14 | 121 | 14 | 1752 |



Table 3. Frequency of content-related concepts in the three tweet datasets. Frequency is expressed as a percentage of tweets containing the concept.

| Fangirls | | Control Girls | | ISIS-control | |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| Concepts | Frequency (%) | Concepts | Frequency (%) | Concepts | Frequency (%) |
| God | 9.81 | God | 1.46 | IS* | 54.47 |
| Islam | 9.10 | Punish | 1.34 | Islam | 15.49 |
| IS* | 8.72 | Friends | 0.99 | Violence | 7.44 |
| Violence | 3.33 | Violence | 0.93 | West | 5.07 |
| Punish | 3.19 | Islam | 0.84 | Punish | 3.96 |
| West | 2.53 | High School | 0.75 | ME local* | 2.73 |
| Unbeliever | 2.50 | West | 0.75 | Jihad | 2.40 |
| Jihad | 1.61 | Marriage | 0.48 | God | 0.60 |
| ME local* | 1.30 | ME local* | 0.35 | Unbeliever | 0.30 |
| Marriage | 0.81 | Dating | 0.35 | Sport | 0.21 |
| Friends | 0.54 | Sport | 0.34 | Marriage | 0.15 |
| High School | 0.16 | Unbeliever | 0.03 | Friends | 0.12 |
| Sport | 0.10 | IS* | 0.01 | High School | 0.06 |
| Dating | 0.07 | Jihad | 0.01 | Dating | 0.03 |

* IS = Islamic State, ME Local = Middle East Local Enemies

Table 4. Pearson correlation of number of words in concepts with frequency of concepts in Fangirl and control tweet collections (N=14).

| | Fangirl | Control | ISIS-control |
|-------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <i>r</i> | -.143 | .001 | .019 |
| <i>Sig.</i> | <i>ns.</i> | <i>ns.</i> | <i>ns.</i> |



Table 5. The Proportion of Tweets Expressing Positive and Negative Sentiment for Tweets Mentioning Each of The 14 Concepts ($P(\text{Concept}_{\text{Sentiment}} | \text{Concept}_c)$).

| Concepts | Fangirls | | Control Girls | | ISIS-Control | |
|-------------|----------|----------|---------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| | Negative | Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative | Positive |
| dating | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.17 | 0.28 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| friends | 0.16 | 0.45 | 0.14 | 0.41 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| God | 0.16 | 0.25 | 0.10 | 0.29 | 0.05 | 0.25 |
| High School | 0.00 | 0.33 | 0.09 | 0.18 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| IS* | 0.16 | 0.16 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.15 | 0.12 |
| Islam | 0.18 | 0.18 | 0.14 | 0.18 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| jihad | 0.09 | 0.25 | 0.33 | 0.00 x | 0.04 | 0.08 |
| marriage | 0.15 | 0.26 | 0.13 | 0.17 | 0.20 | 0.40 |
| ME Local* | 0.16 | 0.11 | 0.14 | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.05 |
| punish | 0.45 | 0.12 | 0.40 | 0.13 | 0.45 | 0.10 |
| sport | 0.33 | 0.17 | 0.04 | 0.28 x | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| unbeliever | 0.23 | 0.17 | 0.17 | 0.17 x | 0.40 | 0.00 |
| violence | 0.21 | 0.14 | 0.29 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.06 |
| west | 0.25 | 0.12 | 0.15 | 0.20 x | 0.14 | 0.14 |

* IS = Islamic State, ME Local = Middle East Local Enemies



The Spectacle of Terrorism: Exploring the Impact of 'Blind Acting Out' and 'Phatic Communication'

by Wilson Mwenda Kailemia



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Abstract

This article utilises theoretical developments on 'spectacular public disorder' to contribute to understanding of terrorism. Using examples from the 'Arab Spring' (2011), the Paris riots (2005) and London riots (2011) we show how the 'flashpoint' hypothesis- for example the deaths of the central figures (from Bouauzizi in Tunis, to Mark Duggan in London) influenced the scope and duration of the disorder. We show that the trajectory of public disorder, from their initial 'spark' to post-incident debate, have points of contact with recent episodes of 'spectacular' terrorist attacks, from the 2013 mall siege in Kenya to the 2013 attempted decapitation of the marine Drummer Lee Rigby in London. To draw these parallels we develop and elucidate on the toolkit for staging and extending the spectacle, including passage à l'acte, developed by Badiou (2006) apropos of the Paris riots, 'Phatic communication', developed by Gluckman (1960) and 'Channel Testing' hypothesis developed by Žižek (2011).

Introduction

Criminologists have long grappled with the challenge of designing (and agreeing) clear definitions, let alone explanations, of terrorism with Laqueur (2000:5) noting, for instance, that 'there are more than hundred definitions which have been offered'. The result of this debate is a remarkable variety of approaches and definitions. Recently, some criminologists have even proposed 'general' theories, focused on, say, the role of strains in terrorism (Agnew, 2010), while others have highlighted the developmental processes in the worldview of potential terrorists. A notable example of the latter is Cottee's (2010) 'mind-slaughter' hypothesis, which explores the 'neutralizing' worldview of 'jihadi salafism', an extension of Matza and Sykes' (1957) 'neutralizations' theory.

The question of terrorism is therefore not a recent one: The history of terrorist behaviour extends into antiquity, meaning that there common themes and concepts which span all ages. As Martin (2014) also notes, state terrorism, dissident terrorism, and other types of political violence are found in all periods of human civilization. Nonetheless, recent thinking has, justifiably perhaps, concentrated on the post-9/11 conflict between, on the one side, those who are waging a self-described 'war on terror' and, on the other, those who are waging a self-described 'holy war' in defence of their religious ideology (Martin, 2014; Laqueur, 2000). But because of the sheer width and breadth of the subject of terrorism, there is an ever-expanding scope to enrich this discourse through explorations of other, sometimes neglected, points of view.

The present work is offered in that spirit, and is specific to debate on what could loosely be termed as 'staged' terrorism; that is, incidences of terrorist attacks (such as the 2014 attempted decapitation of the Marine drummer, Lee Rigby, by two self-claimed 'Jihadists' in London) which aim to draw maximum attention to an



issue via the ensuing post-attack debate. Deploying the examples of ‘spectacular (in)’security’ (Bauman, 2012) we develop a perspective which emphasizes the value of (extended) visibility, and the critical role played by ‘flashpoints’ (Newburn, 2014; Waddington, 2000; Waddington et al. 1989). We show how, for example, post-attack debate is ensured by well-timed release of a post-attack video or images. We claim that the purpose of such video or images is to perpetuate the ontological insecurity that characterises the period of uncertainty immediately after a disturbing incidence (Bauman, 2012).

There is no suggestion whatsoever here that street protests- or, for that matter, sports events- have the same motivation as terrorism: Neither is it being suggested that the staged spectacle in either achieves the same level of effectiveness. Rather, the point is to illustrate, very loosely, how both reconstruct the terrain of ‘denied space’ (Badiou, 2006; Pape, 2005; Waddington, 2000), reconstructing the basic coordinates of their comparative weakness into a strength- at least for purposes of debate and limelight (Badiou, 2006; Zizek, 2011; 2014). Our comparisons of terrorism and public disorder are therefore limited to this parallel only: While both may aim at redressing a set of acknowledged- or even legitimate- grievances, terrorism stands out for its *ab initio*, and mostly indiscriminate, use of violence as a tool (Agnew, 2010; Cottee, 2010). Public protest, on the other hand, may turn chaotic, but research (for example, Reiner, 2010; Newburn, 2014; Waddington, 2000; 2012) has revealed multiple influences on the scale of violence during protests, the prominent factor being the methodology and choice of policing equipment and tactics.

This article is divided into 5 sections. In the first section, we aim to shed light on the general problematic of theorizing terrorism, including the fact that who/what is or isn’t terrorism is far from agreed. The caveats offered in this section lay ground for the debate extended onto the section after that, which details the linkage of terrorism and strains and how the notion of strains is itself problematic. Thereafter, we explore the linkage between terrorism and public disorder using the examples of the Arab Spring, and the Paris and London riots. Subsequent sections seek to explain terrorism from the perspective of the main concepts, including *passage a l’acte* (blind acting out) and *phatic communication*.

Terrorism: the conceptual problem

A proposal to theorize on terrorism is problematic for a number of reasons: First, delineation of what should constitute terrorism is rife with controversy. A recent twist, involving deployment of new-fangled terminology- such as ‘Jihadism’, ‘Islamism’ or ‘extremism’- in both policy and social commentary circles, complicates things even more. A debate on the delimitation of these concepts would itself require a whole article. Although there is broad agreement that terrorism involves the use of violence to achieve political ends (Agnew, 1992; 2010; Cottee, 2001; Post, 2007; Araj, 2008), what is political- or for that matter, violent- is itself the subject of debate (Newman, 2006; Zizek, 2008). As Zizek (2008) posits: Is ‘structural’ violence, for example the destruction of ecosystems by dumping of toxic waste, or rising child poverty from deliberate shrinkage of the welfare state, any less violent than a gun attack? The point here is: Contextual constraints can make it difficult to analyse, much less to ascribe meanings to terrorism.

Perhaps the best way to avoid lengthy (and unhelpful) interrogation of terrorism and its related concepts, is to invite the reader’s attention to the pitfalls of ascribing concrete, much less uniform, meanings acceptable across board. That is to say; even where delineation is (for the sake of argument) possible- for example on what ‘Jihadism’ is- such delineation cannot be freed from other meta-ideological factors (of social class, gender or race), let alone that it would be an arduous task to try to establish the relative influences of these factors on a protagonist’s ‘Islamism’ (Mamdani, 2001; Moghadam, 2006). In that sense, while the reading of



terrorism this article relies on everyday understandings of ‘terrorism’- such as ‘use of indiscriminate violence for political ends’ (Martin, 2014; Cottee, 2010; Agnew, 2010)- we must nonetheless remain alert to the ideological context of key phrases such as ‘violence’, or for that matter ‘political ends’. Indeed, recent critiques have shown how standard readings of terrorism are problematic- for example, in their assumptions of a post-colonial, mono-cultural interpretation of events (Mamdani, 2001; Post, 2007).

Secondly, and relatedly, we must be careful to avoid the pitfalls of those readings of terrorism, and ‘terrorist groups’, which assume permanent organizational methodology: There is a standard assumption, for example, that *Al Qaeda*, or the so-called *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL), have a final unreviewable take on events and ‘will not rest until a certain demand is met’ (Malechova, 2005; Martin, 2014). The contrary evidence is that terrorist organizations, like all organizations, go through various stages (Cottee, 2010; Ahmed, 2005; Araj, 2008), and that in this road of evolution, not only do their message (and demands) change but that they are influenced by both the political economy of their operational environment including competition from other groups with a similar ‘enemy’ (Mamdani, 2001; Post, 2007). To take an example, the weakening of *Al Qaeda*, and the subsequent rise of ISIL has, has influenced the message and targets of Somalia’s *Al Shabbab*- and to an extent Nigeria’s *Boko Haram*- as both seek to endear themselves to more sophisticated and wealthier jihadist umbrellas[1].

This useful awareness should not deter further exploration of terrorism, however. Rather, it should encourage greater exploration of how the useful analyses of other social problems can enhance our understanding of terrorism. Below, we attempt an exploration of the sociology of strains (developed by, among others, Agnew (2010), Meier-Katkin et al. 2009) in order to lay ground for analysis of spectacular violence. But before we do that, we must offer the caveat that our perspective is not a unique- or even an original- one: Recent commentary has engaged with the content of post-attack messages (most notably Osama Bin Laden’s famous DVD’s, or very recently Khaleid Sheikh Mohamed’s (KSM) ‘journal’ smuggled from Guantanamo bay[2]). Here, analysis has (albeit narrowly) focused on the ‘ideological map’ of the material- on the Jihadist worldview or the scope of western military interventions as a radicalizing strain, for example (Martin, 2000; Zizek, 2014).

(There are policy influences to this perspective even, including the present UK Conservative Government proposals for the involvement of institutions of learning in so-called ‘de-radicalisation’[3]. While de-radicalisation discourse has certainly benefitted from analysis of, say, so-called ‘jihadist material’-including website posts by teenagers who have escaped to join so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-, we take issue with its homologous construction of post-attack Jihadist communication. Post-attack communication, which we shall revisit later, differs in context and location, as do the myriad causes of terrorism.)

From strain to stampede

One of the major influences on post-9/11 thinking on terrorism has been Agnew’s *Strain Theory* (1992; 2001; 2010). In *The General Strain Theory of Terrorism*, Agnew (2010) proposes that the spring pool of terrorism is accumulated strains which are (1) high in magnitude, (2) perceived as unjust (involving civilians) and, (3) which are perpetrated by a more powerful other (including the complicit population). As such, analyses of terrorism should focus on: (1) the nature of the strain, (2) the cause of the strain and, (3) the reason for the strain. As Agnew reminds us, however, while the presence of these three factors on their own is not sufficient to trigger terrorism, they have an associative impact on strong negative emotional states on



a potential terrorist: When combined with other traits- such as humiliation or anger—they give rise to a desire for corrective action, by for example convincing the perpetrator that violence is the only available or most effective coping mechanism or redress. Apropos of ‘societal strains’ (from economic or political exclusion or environmental harms) Agnew shows how the lacuna from reduced social control- for example undermined religious or family authority- incubates ‘beliefs favorable to terrorism’. Such beliefs- for example that it is proper to target those outside one’s framework of faith—become not only the response but also the interpretive framework of perceived strains. The genius of the ‘strain’ logic is therefore the emphasis it places on perception in respect of injustice: The way things are perceived is as decisive, if not more so, in choice of reaction compared to the facts of the matter. Taking this cue, post-9/11 discourse has emphasized the need to understand how grievance is constituted and articulated, more so in the states engaged in or affected by the so-called ‘war on terror’ (Post, 2007; Pape, 2005; Martin, 2014; Agnew, 2010). Accordingly, the key thing is in understanding the specific ways in which the actions of the ‘powerful other’ (say, targeted killings of Muslim clerics by a state) help to create a vacuum (of political, familial or religious) authority. Such vacuum, as Araj (2008), Pape (2005) and Post (2007) also show, is normally filled with a perception that there is no alternative to violence when it comes to the injustice of the more powerful ‘other’.

The ‘strains’ hypothesis has points of contact with wider discourse on violent crimes, including ‘crimes against humanity’, such as genocide (Meier-Katkin et al. 2009; Jamieson, 2009) and ‘state crimes’ (Jamieson and McEvoy, 2005). In this wider discourse, the absence of a powerful authority figure (as happens following the overthrow of a military dictator) may facilitate a vacuum that may subsequently be filled by extremist or ethnic militias, who may, in turn, target moderate cultural or ethnic voices. Apropos ‘crimes against humanity’ Meier-Katkin et al.’s (2009) reading of strains highlights the role of spontaneous change in group dynamics; the explosive critical moment in which subliminal desire (greed, revenge, fear, shame, racist rage...) toxically meets with opportunity of loss of authority. This could happen after the removal of a figure of control, as the examples of Gadhafi’s ouster in Libya, or the assassination of Rwanda’s Habyarimana, or the death of Tito’s regime in the former Yugoslavia have shown. Analyses (for example, Jamieson, 2009; Mamdani, 2009) have shown the game-changer role authority vacuums play in political violence.

There is no doubt then that the logic of strains is very helpful in not only outlining but also measuring the risks of societal strains that could engender terrorism. What we should guard against, however, is what Kahneman (2011) refers to as *associative coherence*- the erroneous assumption of causality usually based on co-occurrence: For example, it may very well be that the perpetrator’s strain is merely coincidental to (and not caused or enhanced by their) religion, or ethnicity, or material condition. Space does not allow us an exhaustive discussion of the richness and weaknesses of the strain argument. Let us, by way of extending this argument, see how a homologous notion of strains can also occlude wider considerations of the structural causes of terrorism

Charlie Hebdo’s ‘friends’

A profound critique of existing theoretical frameworks of terrorism is that they tend to be state-centric, emphasizing a geo-political reading of ‘strains’. This creates simplistic dichotomies of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ protagonists- suggesting, for example, that ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ are easy to delineate. The recent *Je suis Charlie*’ march in Paris is a case in point: Everyone, including leaders of regimes that could easily be indicted for torture and war crimes, marched for *Charlie*. It is as if the incidence of attack on a cartoon magazine had condensed the wide and varied world of terrorism (and terrorists) into its visible dichotomies of ‘good guys’



(visible in the streets) and ‘bad guys’ (out there hiding). (It is notable that the logic of dichotomies has been in force for sometime now, since George Bush’s famous ‘You are with us, or against us’[4].) There is agreement among commentators of the so-called ‘war of terror’ that the power of such dichotomies is its polarising effect (Zizek, 2008; 2010; Mamdani, 2009); it forces witnesses, bystanders and anyone else unaligned with some form of pre-existing conflict to either become allies of the speaking/grieving party or to risk losing favour. In the case of the attacks on (a low-circulation) *Charlie*, wasn’t the offer, as Zizek (2010) would put it, ‘the freedom’ to choose as long as one chooses correctly (that, is, in a certain direction?). Of course: Between the implied consequences of not joining the team on the streets, *Charlie’s* unlikely friends joined anti-globalization and anti-war activists- for the common cause of press freedom. The problem, apropos Charlie and easy dichotomy, is how the ‘fake participation’ (Zizek, 2010) it engenders depoliticizes intersectionality; for example by providing protest stage to those who may sympathize with press freedom, but turn a deaf ear to oppression of women or sexual and ethnic minorities, as the case may be. The irony of the presence of some leaders (of Saudi Arabia, which has been accused of limiting the rights of women and non-Muslims, by *Human Rights Watch*, for example) in the streets of Paris was not lost on commentators.

As Cohen (2000) taught us in ‘States of Denial’, neutralization of intersectionality goes hand in hand with constructions of (the complex) nature of strains into easy moral panics: The standard trope in which all problems of post-9/11 terrorism derive from Islamic ‘extremism’ is a case in point, and shows how superficial presentations of complex phenomenon ignore the (complex) ways in which religious ideology, say, is predicated in the environment or the global political economy. Martin (2014) correctly observes that we cannot read Jihadist extremism in Northern Nigeria, to take one example, as merely the product of a religious worldview; we must also look at the trajectory of that country’s fossil-fuel industry or its history of military rule (which weakened civilian/policing institutions) and so forth. Similarly, we cannot look at the rise of Al-Qaeda affiliated *Al Shabbab* in Somalia exclusively from the perspective of Islamist ideology: We must at least cast a glance at the wider political economy, including the theft of (what is left of) Somalia’s natural resources, especially fish, or the dumping of waste by foreign multinational corporations (Zizek, 2010; Mamdani, 2009). How about spontaneous, spectacular violence?

Spontaneity and spectacular violence; from the Arab Spring to the London riots

One of the indictments of the simplistic notions of strains is the little regard they have given to ‘spontaneity’, especially in regard to spectacular violence. While the involvement in spectacular public disorder of (mostly Muslim) ethnic minority young men has been adequately analysed (for example, Waddington, 1998; 2000; Badiou, 2006; Zizek, 2008) the involvement of young men from upper middle class backgrounds in spectacular acts of terrorism in the West has received little exploration. The attempted ‘underwear’ bombing of a Delta airlines plane with 286 people on board by Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab, is a case in point: Umar, the son of a former chairman of a Nigerian bank, enjoyed the trappings of a wealthy upbringing, including being privately educated in a highly regarded international boarding school. (Among his classmates was the daughter of Karl Hoffman, an adviser to the former US secretary of State Colin Powell.)[5] Under the simplistic reading of ‘strain’, it is difficult to empirically justify involvement of someone who enjoys the trappings of Umar Mutallab- or to show why the strains were experienced more by Mutallab than by other Muslim young men. It is even more difficult to construct Umar as a naïve young man who was misled by cunning extremist recruiters- the victim of the ‘bad guys’.

To make sense of cases such as Umar, we must, in addition to acknowledging the complexity of strains, also



understand the important, but neglected, link between strains and spontaneity. While both the role of social dynamics and strains has been explored in depth, there has been little exploration of the role of spontaneity on violent crime, generally, and even less on terrorism. Take the example of so-called 'Arab spring': On 17th December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, unable to find work, was selling vegetables on the streets of Tunis. To sanitize the 'central business district' of hawkers, municipal inspectors confiscated Bouazizi's wares, leading to his self-immolation two hours later. His death on 4th of January triggered a protest which would engulf not only Tunisia (leading to the overthrow of the dictator Ben Ali) but cause unrest across majority of the Arab states, especially Egypt where Hosni Mubarak was subsequently overthrown and put on trial. Here, the 'irrational' gesture of 'acting out' by Bouazizi served as the catalyst for others to take on an entrenched system, not so much out of hope or even awareness that the regime could be overthrown, but as gesture to the same regime that 'it may carry on' but must do so under the awareness of this daring gesture of defiance (Zizek, 2012). So, although the strain of oppression (denial of freedom of movement, self-determination and expression, in Tunisia) underlay the protest across the Arab world, the critical moment was Bouazizi's 'act proper' (subsequently recognised by the *Time Magazine* when it named Bouazizi as its 2011 'person of the year') that signalled this moment of defiance.

Similarly, between 6th and 11th of August 2011, young people took part in riots across the London boroughs. The resulting chaos and looting led to the death of 5 people, with more than 3000 arrests reported. Criminologists have drawn a link between systematic marginalization of young men from working class backgrounds and the riots. Newburn (2014:10) apropos Waddington et al. (1989) critically applies the 'flashpoints' approach to the riots, showing how 'structural' and 'political/ideological' alienation combines with situational (spatial and social determinants) and interactional (the dynamics of interaction between the police and the protesters) to determine the scope and length of the riots. The conclusion is that, while the riots were motivated by this 'injustice' of unemployment and controversial police tactics such as 'stop and search,' the riots were themselves 'set-off' by (what would later be ruled as) the lawful killing of a black man Mark Duggan, by Metropolitan Police officers. It is instructive that, even though majority of the rioters had no direct knowledge of the police shooting of Mark Duggan, they saw the riots as an opportunity to make a point about their alienation and also to stage the recovery of their 'public space' (Zizek, 2011; Newburn, 2014).

Waddington (2012) has developed what he terms as 'the law of moments' to articulate the phenomenon he refers to as 'the precise moment when things might have turned out differently'. The 'flashpoint moment' hypothesis presupposes that a critical point in the process of public disagreement signifies the ultimate unwillingness of one party to 'accommodate the systems of beliefs and values, interests and objectives of their rivals' (Waddington, 2012:1). In the case of London riots, this was a combination of the shooting of mark Duggan with the long period it took those in his immediate cycle (including his family) to receive any support and information from the police. In the case of the Arab Spring it was the period between the confiscation of Bouazizi's wares and the indifference of the regime to his plight in the days leading up to his death several weeks later. This period of indifference is a critical stage in re-establishing or totally losing communicative contact between the victim and her more powerful 'other'. Ensuing pubic disorder is, in that sense, an attempt to highlight this loss of communicative contact- an attempt to force the other to re-establish the contact. In the case of London riots, the point was that, by staging the protests in as large numbers as possible, it would be difficult to ignore both the present predicament and the future plight of young people. Here, however, Zizek (2011) goes further than most critiques of the riots and posits that the riots were characterised by a lack of an articulated message- just a display of camaraderie among looters: Although



there were protesters motivated by the injustice of Mark Duggan's shooting, Zizek argues, majority of the rioters were mere opportunists, entrapped in the *jouissance* of getting something for free from the local shopping premises. His point is corroborated by Bauman (2012) who reads the riots as 'consumerism coming home to roost'; the young people were capitalising on the breakdown of law and order to bridge the gap of their symbolic alienation (by post-modern consumerism) through the only avenue available to them- theft.

In *'The year of dreaming dangerously'* (2012) Zizek compares a lack of an articulated message (which he claims to be the main feature of the London riots) to Badiou's (2006) reading of the Paris riots as a *passage a l'acte* (Passage to the act). The phrase *passage a l'acte*, a synonym for 'blind acting out', comes from French clinical psychiatry, and was initially proposed by Freud to designate those impulsive acts, of a violent or criminal nature, which sometimes mark the onset of an acute psychotic episode. Jacques Lacan (in his seminar of 1962-3) developed the concept further to denote the action of someone who, overcome by anxiety, does something which may not make sense ordinarily- for example, committing suicide- but which turns out to be a decisive course of action[6]. In this 'passage into the act' (proper), the psychotic physically exits the scene, but remains active and influential to the narrative's plot: Aren't the invocation of the images of Bouazizi (or Duggan) good examples of actors who exit the scene, but continue to influence things (through the sheer memory of the incidence of their exit)?

As the phrase itself indicates, the *passage a l'acte* is supposed to mark the point when a subject proceeds from a violent idea or intention to the corresponding act: The Paris riots between October and November 2005) were sparked by the death (by electrocution) of two young men who had hidden in a power station to avoid police arrest. (Prior to that, a group of young men had successfully prevented the arrest of their friends by a group of Paris police who had responded to a reported burglary.) These deaths, like Mark Duggan's or Bouazizi's, ignited riots across Paris for two months in which young people, predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds, protested against perceived harassment by the police. The point here and in the other examples above is that, although analyses have usefully highlighted the 'strain' background (police harassment, lack of jobs...) of such protests, there has not been corresponding focus on the impact of the central figures in the plot: Bouazizi, Duggan and Zyed Banna and Bounna Traore- two of the men men electrocuted in the Paris Power Station.

As the examples above show, the aim of spectacular public disorder is the debate and the coverage they force. Let us now relate this logic to terrorism:

Post-attack discourse; the 'method in the madness'

When, in 2013, the marine drummer Lee Rigby was murdered in the streets of London by two men claiming allegiance to *Al Qaeda*, media pundits and sociologists were at pains to explain the 'root' causes of their troubling behaviour.[7] In *'How did Michael Adebolajo' become a killer'* the BBC[8] pointed out, for example, that Adebolajo- one of the killers- was a good-boy-turned-bad who had been dealt a bad hand by Kenyan authorities after his arrest for trying to sneak through its borders in order to join the Somali militants, *Al Shabbab*. (The BBC revealed, for example, that Adebolajo had been sodomised in the Kenyan jail while awaiting trial.) Similar post-Rigby murder commentary focused on the role alienation of ethnic minority Muslim young people played in 'radicalization'[9]: The debate re-ignited following the attacks on an 'upper end' shopping mall in Kenya, in which armed *Al Shabbab* gunmen randomly executed shoppers on a Saturday morning before taking more than a hundred hostages. Instantly, media pundits sought to explain the attacks as an example of western de-linkages with the (homologous) 'Muslim world' or (homologous)



Western belligerence under the so-called 'war on terror' in which the West essentially 'asks' for these types of attacks by funding incursions into Muslim countries and so on. Apropos of *Al Shabbab's* attack in Nairobi, their spokesman told the Qatari TV channel, *al Jazeera* that he saw no need to shed tears for the death of '1 per cent of 1 per cent' - the local elites who shop in such complexes[10].

The point of the above is that, however it is regarded, terrorism succeeds precisely when it manages 'not to be ignored'! It works because its methodology is carefully chosen, anticipating the discourse in its wake. As Cottee (2010) brilliantly argues, the notion of terrorists as 'mindless' or 'confused' misses the crucial point of terrorism: That this 'mindlessness' actually works- it gets attention, sends fear and highlights the issues. The success of terrorism is therefore not necessary in its battlefield victory, but in the mere success of becoming an issue. This point is corroborated in Pape's (2005) notion of 'dying to win' apropos suicide terrorism. Here, the point not to be missed is how terrorism itself precisely relies on the superficial dichotomies of 'good' and 'bad' to be effective (Pape, 2005; Post, 2007; Moghadam, 2006). In simple language, the point of terrorism is to divide, to force a quick choice between 'us' and 'them' so that the choice is between 'who gets the other', first.

In order to maximise its spectacle, and extend its coverage and debate, terrorism relies on another tool, however: Phatic communication.

Phatic communication and strains

In the aftermath of Rigby's murder, the *Guardian* (2013) cited the brother of Adebolajo (one of his attackers) as having declared that: 'It won't be the last attack, simply because of the tactics of the British secret service and foreign policy, for every violent action is a violent reaction'. Prior to that, Adebolajo himself, brandishing a bloodied machete with which he had attempted to decapitate Rigby, made the following announcement, which is worthy quoting at length:

"We swear by almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you. The only reason we have done this is because Muslims are dying every day. This British soldier is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We must fight them. I apologise that women had to witness this today. But in our land our women have to see the same. You people will never be safe. Remove your government, they don't care about you. You think David Cameron is going to get caught in the street when we start bussing' our guns? You think politicians are going to die? No it's going to be the average guy, like you, and your children. So get rid of them. Tell them to bring our troops back so you can all live in peace" (Guardian, 2013)[11].

As the 'appearance' on *Al Jazeera*, cited above in the incidence of *Al Shabbab's* attacks in Kenya above also show, media declarations of the attackers' intent have usually accompanied terrorism incidences. The effectiveness of such declarations is in extending the dominance of the incidence in the media. (The irony, of course, is that the media provides extended coverage, with 'experts' invited to analyse the achievements and failures of the attacks, or policy makers who call in to remind viewers that the terrorists have failed (('they have only killed innocent people, but that will not help their cause...')) and so on.)

The best way to look at the communication accompanying terrorist attacks is to read it as 'Phatic communication', a concept developed by Gluckman (1952) and Jacobson (1960), apropos of Malinowski. Quoting a dialogue from Dorothy Parker, here is how Jacobson outlines the phatic function in communication:



'Well, here we are', he said.

'Here we are', she said, 'Aren't we?'

'I should say we are', he said (Jackobson, 1960: 357).

As Jakobson argues, the effectiveness of phatic communication lies in its power to prolong communicative contact. In the case of post-attack communication, we should perhaps view them as a strategy to extend the contact between the potential victims and the attackers through the usually pre-staged media analyses. Apropos this communicative contact Zizek (2011) has added another dimension: Phatic communication functions as a 'channel-testing' kit, as happens when a speaker shouts 'Hello, one, two, three...do you hear me?' to a crowd. Here, the phatic function should not be confused with a real question (where, for example, the speaker needs the audience to shout back the answer and so forth): Instead, Zizek argues, the gesture serves the metalinguistic function of checking that the equipment is working- if it can it still be put to one's use. Apropos Adebolajo's speech during the murder of Lee Rigby (or Bin Laden's post- 9/11 videos) is the message not a kind of 'Hello, do you hear me?' - a testing of the channels, even if just to remind viewers what the attacker is capable of?

Conclusion

Although public protest differs from incidences of terrorism in both its (articulated) legitimacy and choice of method, we can learn something from the one, which may enrich our understanding of the other. The argument we have made above is that, we can enrich our understanding of terrorism by further concentrating the gaze of analysis to the impact of the choices made by the central figures in a conflict, not only in sparking the protest/violence, but also in determining the duration of the engagement. Specific to terrorism, although the strains of underlying disenchantment fuel the need to act, sometimes it is the desire to 'exhibit', to 'act-out', which may be the decisive fuse setting the process in motion. Sometimes matters depend on the momentary exhibition of the one who becomes the face of an issue or incidence. The *activation energy*, to deploy a chemical adjective, may be the structural strain, but the boiling point- the point of no return- is spectacle: While it may be possible that the majority of terrorist incidences are deeply rooted in strains, or are masterminded by calculating sociopaths who exploit various background conditions to stage the attacks (Cottee, 2010), it is still possible that certain acts of terrorism involve acting out.

The tangent of the spectacular is common in the present (postmodern?) culture of alienation. As Zizek (2010) and Badiou (2006) show, increasingly populations are finding it hard to obtain or maintain meaningful contact with policy makers and governments, even in liberal democracies. This occlusion of communicative contact leaves spectacular display of displeasure as the most effective form of public protest- from anti-globalization and anti-austerity 'occupy' protests, to violent demonstrations against police brutality. These forms of protest serve not only to pressure political regimes into desired causes of action, but also provide spectacular exhibition of assumed injustice (including the presence of detested political or economic actors).

The idea is to 'act out' disenchantment and to gain maximum coverage of this acting out. The effectiveness is thus not in the issues being raised, but in the sheer scale of the response to action. The anti-racist 'million-man' marches in the US or the 2005 'Make Poverty History' in Scotland are good examples of this. Here, the key point is that the success of the spectacle is not necessarily in the wider policy responses (which are certainly desired and even demanded), but in the very gesture of temporary control (Newburn, 2014; Waddington, 2000): The power is, as some of the young London rioters told the media[12], seeing the



police on the run- or, better, others seeing the police on the run. This symbolic control- being the centre of attention- is important and should not be dismissed.

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Notes

[1] See, for example, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/02/23/rivals-islamic-state-al-shabaab-treaten-usa-malls/23899397/>

[2] See, for example: <http://www.channel4.com/news/thoughts-of-9-11-mastermind-revealed-in-new-document-khalid-sheikh-mohammed-al-qaeda-guantanamo> for channel 4's coverage of Khaleid Sheikh Mohamed's 'smuggled' journal.

[3] See <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/ken-mcdonald-obnoxious-anti-radicalisation-measures-attack-free-speech>, for example, for a loose discussion of this issue.

[4] See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>

[5] AFP 'Online preachers of hate: Anwar al-Awlaki, bin Laden of the internet', The Telegraph, December 10th 2013 accessed March 20th 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/6896128/Detroit-terror-attack-profile-of-Umar-Farouk-Abdul-Mutallab.htm>

[6] Lacan, Jacques. (1962-3) *Le Séminaire. Livre X. L'angoisse*, 1962-63, unpublished. Seminar of 16 January 1963.

[7] There is no agreed-upon definition of what 'Jihadi terrorism is'. Broadly, however, Jihadi terrorism, or Jihadism is used in reference is to acts committed by groups or individuals who profess Islamic or Islamist motivations or goals. Islamic terrorists have relied on particular interpretations of the tenets of the Quran and the Hadith, citing these scriptures to justify violent tactics including mass murder, genocide, and slavery.

Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam by Gilles Kepel, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, (2002), p.331

[8] Casciani, D 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer', BBC, December 19th 2013, accessed February 17th 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25424290>

[9] Dodd, D and Halliday, J 'Lee Rigby Murder: Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale found guilty', The Guardian, December 19th 2013, accessed March 18th 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/19/lee-rigby-murder-michael-adebolajo-adebowale-guilty>,

[10] See <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/09/2013923628350977.html>

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Book Review

Yair Hirschfeld, *Track-Two Diplomacy toward an Israeli-Palestinian Solution 1978-2014*

reviewed by **William W. Thomson**



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Keywords: *Mediation; diplomacy; spoilers; Israel-Palestine; protracted conflict; track-two, peace*

This review engages with Hirschfeld's work over three sections. The book primarily provides an analysis of Track-Two diplomacy efforts from 1978-2014 in the context of the Israel-Palestine dispute. The review discusses and critiques the historical context of each mediation engagement, the actors and political ideologies at play, the process of track-two (problem-solving) mediation, and the reflective sections which outline the successes, failures and lessons learned from decades of track-two experiences.

Section One: The first section discusses the bilateral and multi-track negotiations from 1978-1991. In Chapter 1, Hirschfeld opens (conceptually) by defining the term 'track-two', utilising Montville's definition, suggesting that it is 'a type of informal diplomacy, where non-officials engage in dialogue, towards conflict resolution and confidence building'. Hirschfeld extends this definition in his own work, suggesting that track-two diplomacy endeavours to 'assist the official negotiating tracks, known as track-one diplomacy to succeed'. Biographically, Hirschfeld explains his route into the field of track-two diplomacy based on an initial meeting with the Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky, a Social Democrat and anti-Zionist ideologue. Kreisky played a pivotal role as a peace diplomat facilitating talks between Sadat and Peres, which secured the Camp David Accords. Historically, although Hirschfeld and his team were influenced by Gurion, it was Kreisky who made the initial invitation for them to become involved in track-two diplomacy efforts and the Camp David Accords.

With the signing of the Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty (1979) as a result of the Camp David accords, Hirschfeld in Chapter 2, outlines the problems of facilitating economic development into track-two diplomacy efforts and discusses the implementation of these through a range of European, US and Middle East actors. The reflective and evaluative nature of the work consistently provides a 'lessons learned' account of track-two engagements. Hirschfeld suggests that from 1979-1988 the main lessons to be learned were that it was important to build coalitions and win their support; it would be beneficial to discuss and agree on new key concepts in track-two work; that spoilers and barriers should not be overlooked; that there is no exclusive political representative of the Palestinian people; and that the expansion of Israeli settlements should not be ignored.

In the third chapter the author discusses the approach to multi-track negotiations from 1989-1991, which paved the way towards the Madrid Conference in 1991, and led directly to the Oslo Peace Process. Building on the track-two work of the eighties, Hirschfeld provides a robust summary of the various developments in US thinking, and US-PLO relations. Emphasis is made to discuss the track-two negotiations that took place between Israel and Palestinian political parties, describing their diverging policies and needs. Similarly, the



procedural engagements at *The Hague* are discussed, outlining the principles for achieving a lasting peace from these initial meetings. The chapter ends by offering a robust lesson learned discussion.

Section Two: Chapter 4 discusses the domestic and geopolitical factors which shaped the moment for Oslo back-channel negotiations to get underway. Hirschfeld provides a detailed account of the machinations of entering into negotiations, particularly the difficulties of interpreting the complex negotiating tracks between Israel-Palestine, Israel-Jordan and Jordan-Palestine. Hirschfeld goes on to detail his first-hand account, developing three negotiating models to bring about a two-state solution, which involves a *minimalist*, *maximalist* and *compromise* approach to negotiations. He details succinctly the differences in Israeli-Palestinian positions prior to the opening up of official back-channel negotiations in 1992. The chapter further discusses the opening gambit and process of the back-channel negotiations in Norway, and concludes by reflecting on the successes and failures of the pre-Oslo negotiations 1991-1993.

In Chapter 5 Hirschfeld discusses the work of his group involved in developing the principles and guidelines with their Palestinian cohorts. Outlining the arguments surrounding the permanent status issues such as territory, Israeli settlements, Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees. The discussion turns to explain why these issues were not politically settled during the 1993-1996 phase of track-two diplomacy. In this regard Hirschfeld provides a degree of insight into the emerging political dilemmas, such as the assassination of Rabin by Jewish right-wing actors and the rise of Islamic extremism against Israel and the impact these efforts had upon spoiling the negotiating process.

The discussion in Chapter 6 provides insight into the track-two efforts of Hirschfeld and his colleagues engaging with the first Netanyahu government from 1996-1999. It discusses the positive influence that track-two negotiations had towards influencing the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to accept the Hebron Protocol and the Wye River Agreement. The strength of this chapter is the discussion outlining the ideas used to keep the official Oslo negotiations on track, such as, identifying agreements and working to realise these; creating principles for permanent status negotiations; developing popular legitimacy for peacemaking, and preparing bilateral and tri-lateral working groups to work on core issues of settlement. Covering the Oslo negotiating period from 1999-2001, Chapter 7 details the limitations of multi-track negotiations and suggests new empirical evidence for the breakdown of the Oslo process, based on insights gained from Hirschfeld and his colleagues' close association to Prime Minister Barak and the American peace teams at the time. This is a contentious claim that requires further explanation and evidence, and must be viewed in context to the complexity and historical weight of factors imposing themselves on the Israel-Palestinian issue.

Section Three: The final three chapters of the book discuss track-two mechanisms post-Oslo and reflect upon the achievements of track-two and multi-track diplomacy while also looking forward in relation to the Kerry Plan. Chapter 8 covers the changing dynamics of track-two intervention and expounds the role of the Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF), and its strategies, following the breakdown of the Palestinian Permanent Status negotiations. The discussion in Chapter 9 reflects upon the implementation of: The Roadmap, Sharon's Unilateral Disengagement Plan and the return by the Olmert government to discuss the Permanent Status negotiations from 2006-2009. Hirschfeld provides a great deal of detail in this chapter outlining the role of the ECF, and advises on the successes and failures of multi-track diplomacy during the period 2003-2009, he concludes the chapter by citing six lessons for future engagement. The final chapter discusses the Kerry Peace Initiative concerned with achieving a two state solution based on six pillars. Kerry's initiative is built upon the development and maintenance of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; security issues; Palestinian state building; regional support for Israel and Palestine; the prevention of spoilers,



and lastly, the development of public legitimacy. Hirschfeld provides a reflective and probing response to Kerry's plans. He asks, if and how the irreconcilable can be reconciled? If so, how can the end of conflict be maintained and sustained to prevent backsliding? If a peaceful two state solution is achievable, how can support for peace be achieved in Israeli and Palestinian societies? Hirschfeld distils and raises a number of perplexing problems that require engagement in the Israel-Palestine conflict and concludes with optimistic tones to move the debate beyond the narrow confines of state intervention.

Conclusion

Each chapter informs the reader of track-two diplomacy efforts from 1978-2014, highlighting the efficacy, processes and impact of multi-track and back-channel engagements affecting mediation. In sum the book captures the relatively repetitive geopolitical attempts of conflict management and conflict resolution approaches to international mediation. Placing the various mediation approaches or models within the context of the theoretical literature on mediation would strengthen the text. The greatest strength of the book is its thick description, based on the biographical first-hand accounts of Hirschfeld and his colleagues, yet providing a deeper level of referencing could further strengthen this. Overall, the book provides a glimpse into the political interactions and alliances of multiple actors engaged in track-two negotiations and mediation. The text provides clarity and sensitively distinguishes between policy recommendations and realistic goals for track-two support mechanisms. Hirschfeld's timeline of track-two engagements opens a window onto the long-term knock-on effect these efforts have had in moving actors ever closer towards renewed and more robust talks, particularly detailed in the shift from the Madrid Conference to the Oslo Process. The Israel-Palestinian conflict is far too complex to suggest that violent actors are the main cause of mediation spoiling, it may be that the applied model and process of mediation could well be attributable, alongside internal political spoilers, with reference to Oslo. The work shall prove valuable to scholars and practitioners of mediation, conflict analysts and historians interested in the Israel-Palestine context. The text would serve as a useful comparative model to evaluate alongside other (Palestinian/International) actors who have engaged in the process of track-two diplomacy and mediation in the Israel-Palestinian dispute.

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