Assemblages of Radicalism: The Online Recruitment Practices

of Islamist Terrorists

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the various online radicalization and recruitment

practices of groups like al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, as well as Salafi Jihadists in general. I

will also outline the inadequacies of the federal government's engagement with terrorist /

Islamist ideologies and explore the ways in which early 20th century foundational

Islamist theorists like Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Abul ala Mawdudi have affected

contemporary extremist Islamist groups, while exploring this myth of the ideal caliphate

which persists in the ideology of contemporary extremist Islamist groups. In a larger

sense, I am arguing that exploitation of the internet (particularly social networking

platforms) in the radicalization of new communities of followers is much more dangerous

than cyberterrorism (as in attacks on cyber networks within the government and the

private sector), which is what is most often considered to be the primary threat that

terrorists pose with their presence on the internet. Online radicalization should, I argue,

be given more consideration when forming public policy because of the immediate

danger that it poses, especially given the rise of microterrorism. Similarly, through the

case studies that I am examining, I am bringing the humanities into the discussion of

extremist (religious) rhetorics, an area of discourse that those scholars have largely

ignored.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: RHETORIC AND THE RELIGIOUS

> Religion has often been looked upon as a center from which all other forms of human motivation gradually diverged. It is seen as a unifying principle, the vision of an original Edenic one-ness, with endless varieties of action and passion deriving from it . . . the history of religions has also been the history of great discord. It would seem that nothing can more effectively set people at odds than the demand that they think alike. (v)
> --Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: A Study in Logology*

The Rhetorical Significance of Religious Texts

The epigraph above, from Kenneth Burke's *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology,* is a fitting start for this dissertation in that it explores the effect of religion on the public, which is the general focus of the research presented here. Indeed, Burke goes on to claim that: "The study of religion falls under the head of *rhetoric* in the sense that rhetoric is the art of *persuasion*, and religious cosmogonies are designed . . . as exceptionally thoroughgoing modes of persuasion. . . . concerning the authorship of men's motives" (v). Even though Burke addresses the power of religion in both unifying and dividing populaces, however, he does not actually focus on the rhetoric of the religious, as he suggests that he will in the Foreword (from which both of the previous quotations are taken), but instead analyzes the rhetoric of *religion*. Although it may seem that I am arguing about semantics, as my students often tell me, there is a marked difference between examining actual religious texts, like the Bible, as in Burke's case, the Qu'ran or the Torah, and analyzing works created by those texts' adherents, in that oft-scrutinized (in many different disciplines over many centuries) religious works do not offer us insight into how religious devotees work to persuade others to join them in their faith. This is especially the case when we discuss the extremist rhetoric produced by groups occupying the fringes of mainstream culture—i.e. the cranks, crackpots,

conspiracy theorists, and, our particular focus here, Islamist radicals. The most extreme

Islamist groups, which include Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Taliban, al-Shabaab, and Hezbollah have

a myriad of different ideologies to which they ascribe, but they all share one common

characteristic: the use of computer-mediated communication in propagating their

message and radicalizing new followers. This dissertation seeks to unpack the online

texts produced by prominent violent Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, as

well as semi-legitimate, but oppressive and violent governmental regimes like that of the

Assads in Syria in order to better understand and, thus, better combat these organizations.

Although I have included a more detailed explanation of the rationale for choosing these

particular groups (one Sunni, one Shia, and one Alawite), it is important to note here that

I have chosen the texts I will examine, because: A) They either evince a very effective or

very ineffective way of utilizing new media in a way that brings light to larger trends in

radicalists' usage of the internet, B) They are high-profile targets of governmental

counterterrorism efforts, and this dissertation is meant to be useful both in academic and

non-academic settings, C) They use communicative strategies that can be most fruitfully

be examined by my specialization in rhetoric and composition, and D) They represent a

spectrum of contrasting ideologies, but similar persuasive strategies, hopefully proving

that more studies that systematically apply rhetorical / communicative theories should be

undertaken in order to better understand the ways in which violent extremist Islamists

recruit new followers so as to prevent or intervene in the radicalization process.

For those of my readers interested in the implications that this dissertation may

have on changes in counterterrorism strategies, I am arguing that radicalization of new

communities of followers and the exploitation of these social networking sites for

monetary gain are in fact much more dangerous than cyberterrorism (as in attacks on cyber networks within the government and the private sector), which is what is most often considered to be the primary threat that terrorists pose with their presence on the internet, and should be given more consideration when forming public policy. This is something that has recently been proven with the extended (and quite effective) media campaign undertaken by ISIS, so that there is an increasing awareness within the Federal Government that paying attention to how terrorist organizations are using the internet is important. Still, in order to fully engage in the war of ideas with these terrorist groups, however, the Intelligence Community (IC) must more clearly understand the rhetorical strategies of these groups so that they can understand how to diffuse their rapidly spreading messages of hate and terror that are so effective in provoking action in at-risk populations.

The Academic Response to the Study of Radicalism and the Challenges of Interdisciplinary Research

To address the last reason for which I am undertaking this research (to prove that rhetorical and communicative theories can be fruitfully brought to bear on the recruitment strategies of Islamist organizations), as well as explain the diversity of scholars cited in the following literature review, I will state at the outset of this section that inside my field of rhetoric and composition, texts coming from extremist groups of any color have been only minimally analyzed or written about. We only have to examine the most recent issues of scholarly journals to see that almost no one is talking about this issue. And, aside from a few scholars, my advisor Keith Miller, included, no one is addressing terrorist rhetoric or the rhetoric of contemporary radicalized religious organizations.

Perhaps this is because such rhetoric is largely based on pathos, which has been seen from the perspective of classical rhetors like Aristotle to be a "lesser" appeal that only works on an ill-informed and ignorant populace. Or, perhaps it is because the ideology of these groups is distasteful. In fact, when I have addressed the subject of my research both in my own department and at regional and national conference, the knee jerk response from many other scholars has been either "How can you read that stuff? Doesn't it make you sad/angry/depressed?" or "Isn't the government going to come after you?" or, "How are you really qualified to study Islam? Do you speak Arabic?"[1]

In one sense, this speaks to an inherent bias in our field against extremist rhetorics of any shade (including extremist Christian rhetoric, radical environmental rhetoric, and even radical conservative rhetoric), an ingrained fear of government observation and interference in research dealing with intelligence and national security, as well addressing some of the difficulty in undertaking interdisciplinary work. When the research of a given project spans as many different areas of study as the focus of this dissertation has (political science, rhetoric / composition, communication, material studies, philosophy, counterterrorist studies, strategic intelligence, sociology, psychology, etc.), it is difficult to address every aspect of the project thoroughly and with an appropriate amount of knowledge in order to make an effective and cohesive argument. I have even used my dissertation as an example to my composition students of how complex a project can get even *with* a specific focus like rhetoric of the recruitment practices of extremist Islamist

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[1] There are, of course, other researchers, including my mentors, who have continually emphasized that "This stuff is important" during those times in the writing process when I have doubted myself and my own skillset in exploring this incredibly complex set of issues.

terrorists online.[2] There are so many texts (of varying quality) that engage in a study of

Islamist terrorism and even Islamist terrorism and recruitment online, that it is almost

impossible to "cover" this topic in a cohesive way.

This problem was the inspiration for the title of this text, "Assemblages of

Islamist Radicalism", which was taken from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand*

Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. In their work, the authors describe the concept

of the assemblage as the internal incoherence of any text:

> In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and
>
> territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and
>
> destratification. . . . All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an
>
> *assemblage*. . . .We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier;
>
> we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions
>
> with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities,
>
> in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed. (4-5)

This is, indeed, the basic (non) structure of this dissertation and the theoretical basis for

its formation — it is a collection of parts, mostly taken from other disciplines and applied

to a (non) centralized selections of texts that fit within the genre of radical Islamist

communications. I have not chosen theories at random to apply to these Islamist texts, but

instead have peered through those lenses that render those texts clearer, more in focus.

Thus, the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation may not constitute a cohesive whole,

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[2] This conversation usually happens after a student proposes to write a five-page paper on immigration, abortion, etc. and we discuss how difficult such topics are to manage in such a short paper. After I tell them the length of my dissertation and mention that I have only really scratched the surface of this issue, my students usually rethink such general topics, especially after I offer to let them write a paper of a comparable size on their very general topic.

but instead functions as assemblage like that described in Deleuze and Guattari's work – full of "lines of flight", segmentations of thought, and metamorphosed theories of beings. And this way of approach resonates well with the structure of contemporary terrorists and their communicative efforts, in that they are not organized into a clearly hierarchical organization that is internally consistent and centralized. Instead, these collections of like-minded individuals, like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome[3] are scattered. They are, in some senses, the diaspora incarnate. Even those organizations like Assad's cohort in Syria includes supporters worldwide (especially in Russia), and there is no real centralized leadership in al-Qaeda, which exists across several countries, including the United States. They, themselves, are an assemblage of actors — geographically and ideologically scattered, but focused on the spreading of fear. Similarly, their texts exist in temporary shelters throughout cyberspace where they are taken down one day and reposted the next. There is no centralized location, structure, or ideology of terrorists' missives. Even one single document can have several iterations depending on where they are found, so that there is no one, true language of terrorism or one, singular authorized edition of the terrorist manual, even though these texts do share characteristic elements like the appeals to emotion, a reliance on those twentieth-century clerics detailed in Chapter 2, and the creation of myths surrounding the ideal Islamist state. So, the question then remains, how do we purge this sickness of terrorism from our bodies when all have

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[3] "In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states" (21). It would actually be quite interesting to teach the theory of the rhizome along with these Islamist texts, since they reflect so many of the characteristics outlined by Deleuze and Guattari. Similarly, *A Thousand Plateaus* is quite an opaque work with references and examples that are often difficult to grasp, especially for students. Islamist texts may help make to make more sense of the material in *A Thousand Plateaus* and vice versa.

are its symptoms to work from and when the only remedies we have available to us will kill the body in which the virus has replicated itself?

Research Questions and Texts Examined

This, in a general sense, is what I intend to remedy here. After I have outlined the inadequacies of the federal government's engagement with terrorist / Islamist ideologies, this work will be focused on two major areas: the first is in tracing the influence that 20th century foundational Islamist theorists like Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Abul ala Mawdudi have on contemporary extremist Islamist groups. In outlining these influences, I will also be analyzing the rhetorical strategies of these foundational scholars, looking primarily at the ways in which they create a certain kind of mythology – an ideal state (caliphate) built on their own interpretations of both Qu'ranic verses (itjihade) and excerpts from the Hadith –- that works to motivate their audiences. I will also examine their use of emotion (appeals to honor, religious zeal, shame, anger, etc.) as an added method of recruitment / radicalization, since it plays such a big part in the exhortations aimed at moderate Muslim audiences.

I will also focus on the use of new media, including websites, forums, online games, and especially social media outlets, by terrorist groups. I will look at the ways in which these Islamist organizations harness these new technologies as an inexpensive means of expanding their reach beyond what we might think of as their traditional audiences (local or regional at-risk communities) in order to radicalize a new, younger generation. Since Hezbollah, the Shi'a dominated Lebanese political party (and a terrorist organization according to the United States government) has a particularly elaborate website, I will explore their press releases and the interactive areas of their website. I will

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also be examining the widely-circulated, English-language webzine published by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), *Inspire*.

When undertaking research for this project, my questions were as follows:

1) How does the myth of the caliphate function as both an immediate and ultimately unrealizable goal for Islamists? How is this appealing to audiences?

2) What are the specific rhetorical techniques used by foundational clerics like Hasan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qtub, and Abul ala Mawdudi?

3) How does social networking impact the spread of influence of groups like Al-Qaeda? How are the ways in which ISIS and other Salafi Jihadists are utilizing social media different from how the Assads have been using these outlets? Why are the Salafi Jihadists more successful?

4) What are the practical uses of Facebook, Twitter, and MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*? What might theories of sociability online add to the discussion of the functioning of these online communities?

5) Why and how are organizations like Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda reaching out to an English-speaking audience?

6) What are the inadequacies of our government's rhetorical / communicative strategies in combating extremism? How can we, as academics, work to influence public policy makers so that they can more effectively win the "war of ideas"?

Because the kind of work that I am undertaking in my dissertation is interdisciplinary, my theoretical framework must be comprised of scholars from many different fields. I have (and will) make limited usage of popular texts on terrorism by journalists and political analysts, mainly because their inquiry into Islamism is rarely

systematic and is often plagued by inaccuracies and generalizations. I have / will also utilize works by social scientists like Marc Sageman, who has written several seminal texts on terrorism, and by Corman, Tretheway, and Goodall, the founders of Center for Strategic Communication, because they address the intricacies of the message influence model used by the federal government in fighting the "war of ideas" against extremists, as well as the ways in which strategic communication needs to adapt to radical ideologies. Texts from scholars in the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict have also been useful in getting more of the background information about Islam and African / Arabic cultures that is necessary in understanding how Islamist groups function (such as their virulent hatred of all things that reek of colonialism). My advisor, Souad Ali, has provided me with valuable insight into the arguments for and against a mosque / state separation, which is integral to the diffusion of the Islamist myth of the caliphate. I have also been undertaking research into the Qu'ran and Hadith, since radical ideologues rely on these texts to justify both the establishment of the caliphate and the use of violence against non-military targets.

I have also made use of rhetorical theory both classic (Aristotle) and contemporary (Kenneth Burke) in examining the structure of terrorist missives and gauging their use of appeals to ethics and of "God terms" (heavily connotative language), and the ways in which reasoning and logic so often fall to the wayside in favor of emotional appeals. In examining emotion and the part that it has to play in radicalizing audiences, I have reached out to scholars in Emotion and Organization (which combines management and communication studies) like Sarah Tracy, who, as well as foundational scholars like Arlie Hochschild, has included detailed analyses of the ways that emotion

functions in the workplace. Emotional appeals are heavily utilized by extremist groups and extremely underestimated / underexamined in rhetorical studies.

Marxist theories of ideologies have also brought much needed light to the circulation of ideologies among and within groups, as well as how these ideologies contribute to the overall process of meaning-making, as has material cultures theories, most of which are based in the Marxism. Marxism, as a whole, has also had a contentious relationship with Islamism and has figured into most of the missives by Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qutb. Marxist concepts are also essential in defining the mythical ideal Islamic state that forms the basis for the extremists' ideological struggle against what they conceive of as the corrupt and oppressive West as well as their own national governments which are, they say, immoral and unjust. Material culture theorists' concept of "social capital," "symbolic capital" (Pierre Bordieu), circulation, commodification, as well as new media scholars' embedding of that term into computer mediated discourses / networks, will also be integral part of my study of how extremists use the Internet to radicalize audiences and garner ideological fealty.

Methods and Major Theoretical Frameworks

As I am a humanities scholar, most of my research is text-based, rather than resulting from interviews, surveys, and the like. That is not to say that no humanities-based scholars undertake research involving human subject (the amount of complaining I've heard from colleagues filling out IRB request forms would belie this claim), but very practical considerations prevent me from actually interviewing radicalized individuals. Also, there is plenty of research available from political scientists, psychologists, and counterterrorist specialists that includes these elements that I have not examined. In fact,

it is the texts produced by these individuals that is often underexamined or not taken seriously by academics, as I have noted before. As part of the text-based research undertaken here, I have been gathering a compendium of extremist websites, jihadist posts on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and other social networking sites, and have compiled copies of most of the extremist tracts in circulation, including all issues of al-Qaeda's English language *Inspire* magazine and their *Lone Mujahid Handbook*. I have so far corroborated by findings with the State Department's list of terrorist organizations and have taken pains to obtain the original texts of works mentioned in my secondary research.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of my project as well as the varied nature of my audience (addressing both academic institutions and governmental agencies), I have included both popular and academic secondary sources (more of the latter than the former), governmental reports on counterterrorism and terrorism, primary sources from contemporary Islamist groups and Islamist theorists, rhetorical and communication theory, theories of ideology, and social media / new media texts. Because of the breadth of this literature, as well as the incredible wealth of texts about Islamism, terrorism, and radicalization (not to mention all the recent scholarly work in new media and online social communities, including games), I have had to include only a sampling of each aspect of this issue in my research. To give a better idea of the shape and depth of the texts I am utilizing in this project, I will briefly overview the highlights of each of the major research areas that I will be using.

The first, and broadest, area of research on Islamism and (especially) terrorism has been undertaken by journalists, popular writers, political pundits, and former members of the military. The popularity of these works has surged in the wake of

September 11, 2001, as the focus of the United States has more and more often shifted to the Middle East and our federal government has emphasized the danger of "Islamic" terrorism. As outlined previously, the usefulness of these texts is limited, in that they tend to make sweeping generalizations and often eschew any kind systematic methodology.[4] There are, however, some very useful texts like *The Al-Qaeda Reader* that compile previously unpublished missives by Islamist groups. The majority of the works, however, are either first-hand accounts,[5] general histories of / descriptions of terrorism,[6] or are focused on describing actions taken by / against terrorist organizations.

Another theoretical framework that is especially useful in the discussion of Islamist texts is the study of emotion. Sarah Tracy, one of the foundational scholars in the communication field, Emotion and Organizations outlines the various valences of emotion and how it functions within the workplace[7] (although I will argue that these same principles can also be applied to communities outside of workplaces). Emotions, she claims, are continually negotiated within communities and is fundamentally altered / constructed by communication. We see the same theme continued throughout much of the other literature that populates this field, which emphasizes the discursive construction and circulation of emotions. Fineman, in "Emotion and Organizing" also suggests that studying emotion in the workplace "has exposed [. . .] the hitherto uncharted, or

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[4]There are also quite a few fictional accounts, mostly in the form of novels set in the middle east featuring a hero / soldier combating against the forces of evil (Islamists / "Insurgents").

[5] *The Islamist: Why I Became an Islamic Fundamentalist, What I saw Inside, and Why I Left* (Ed Husain) is a good example of one of these texts written from the perspective of a member of an Islamist group.

[6] *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al-Qaeda* (Chaliand and Blin), *Inside Terrorism* (Bruce Hoffman), *Terrorism and Homeland Security* (Jonathan Randall White), *When the Eagle Screams: America's Vulnerability to Terrorism* (Stephen Bowman), and *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (Cindy Combs) are only a few of the plethora of works out there on terrorism that mention or focus on the Middle East.

[7] "Emotion and Communication in Organizations."

silenced, emotions and emotional structures that sustain and shape them [organizations]"

(675), suggesting that studying emotion makes clear those unsaid structures and

hierarchies that permeate workplaces. Indeed, if we look at articles like Sauer and Ropo's

"Leadership and the Driving Force of Shame," which suggests that "shame can be

constructed [by leaders] as a liberating and empowering emotion" (60), we see some that

some of those underlying structures of leadership are shot through with emotional

significance. Although emotion in organizations most often concentrates on the working

world (it is no mistake that the seminal text in this field studies flight attendants) we can

also connect some of these same principles as outlined in the Tracy's quotation to

terrorist organizations. Emotions bleed in and among our personal and professional

selves, eliminating that clear rational / irrational (emotional) split suggested in

enlightenment thinking and in classical rhetorical theory.

       Emotion needs to be taken into account when examining terrorist organizations,

since pathetic appeals are so often used in their publications. Unfortunately, emotion is

discussed minimally by political analysts, and has not been considered formally by

humanities scholars, partially because of the lack of cross-talk between differing fields of

study.[8] However, if we look to Steven Corman, et al.'s descriptions of the needs of the

varied audiences the federal government is attempting to reach in "A 21ˢᵗ Century Model

for Communication in the Global War of Ideas: From Simplistic Influence to Pragmatic

Complexity," we can see that emotion fits quite well in with the other "factors like

autobiography, history, local context, culture, language / symbol systems, power

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[8] There is a notable lack of any real analysis of discourse utilizing rhetorical or communicative theory
within these texts. Therefore, I would argue that their attempts to thoroughly explain the functioning of
terrorist networks is confined to an uninformed explanation of actions interspersed with political
commentary.

relations, and immediate personal needs" (7) that impact the reception of messages. Similarly, terrorist networks consistently use emotional appeals to shame, honor, anger, and fear within their rhetoric, which makes a formal consideration of the intricacies of these appeals necessary.

Theories of social and new media are also especially useful for this kind of inquiry, since most of my text have been created and circulated online. My discussion of the ways that Islamists use the internet will necessarily include logistics as well as theory, in that there have been some developments since books like Gabriel Weimann's *Terror on the Internet*, which has a comprehensive look at the various websites and forums built by radical groups, have been published. The more theoretical implications of online discourses will involve a discussion of strong and weak ties. Much of the current scholarship on strong and weak ties is based on Mark Granovetter's 1973 article, "The Strength of Weak Ties" and his 1983 follow-up, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." Although Granovetter is a sociologist and these articles are both concerned with formations of social networks in real life, there are some important implications of his work for those of us outside of the field interested in virtual communities and online social networking.

Rhetorical theories will also play an explicit part in my discussion of Islamism, as will Marxist theories of ideology. What is most important, as briefly mentioned before, for this project is the discussion that scholars like Kenneth Burke, Althusser, Zizek, Horkheimer, Adorno, etc. have about the function and circulation of ideologies. This is actually quite strongly linked to the material culture theories that I have also included in my discussion of Hezbollah and the images hosted on their website because the same

kind of interplay of competing levels and forms of religious or ideological fealty takes place in most of these online communities. The whole goal of these kinds of sites is to either reinforce existing groups of followers or to radicalize new audiences, and this kind of discussion of ways that ideologies function is essential in understanding the power of radical computer-mediated discourses.

Chapter List (beginning after the Introduction):

Chapter 2: Government Strategies in Combating Islamist Ideology: This section is primarily concerned with ways in which the United States' intelligence and law enforcement communities have addressed violent Islamist ideologies, especially as they are circulated online. In general, I will argue that the dissemination and publicizing of intelligence is still too complex, even after the major overhaul in the wake of 9/11. I will also discuss the shortcomings of the federal government's focus on action instead of communication, their use of outmoded communication models when such tactics *are* employed, and their lack of engagement with moderate Muslim communities.

Chapter 3: Islamist Ideology and the (Impossible) Reinstating of the Worldwide Caliphate: This chapter will be devoted to the exploration of the impact of Qtub, al-Banna, and Mawdudi on current Islamists. I will also outline their justification for the caliphate system, since most current manifestations of radical Islam rely on their work. I will also explore these clerics' presences in Islamist communities online. This chapter is really a lead in to the discussion of contemporary Islamists, since some knowledge of their forbearers and their intellectual inspiration is necessary if we are to understand the justification for their modes of thought.

Chapter 4: Avatars of an Ideal Future: The (Empowering) Symbolic Capital of Computer Wallpapers: The focus here will be split between elements of design of the website, the kinds of content hosted, and the images presented. What I will argue is that the computer wallpapers presented are a depiction of an ideal future that has been created from a pastiche of decontextualized religious, political, military, and natural images. It is at this point, as well, that material culture theories of circulation, commodification, and social capital become most useful in examining the power of these wallpapers. The texts from this website (including speeches, religious and political articles, etc.) have proven to be most useful in my discussion of the function of emotion in appealing to / managing followers. It is also important to include Hezbollah's website because it is one of the most elaborate in existence and it is affiliated with the Shi'a party, which should give some balance to my study, since many of the other groups I will be examining are Sunni (with the notable exception of the Assads in Syria, whom are Alawite Muslims).

Chapter 5: Making the Most of Web 2.0: Syria's Beleaguered Media Feeds, Salafi Jihadist Networks, and Social(ly) Media(ted) Communities: What I will look at in the chapter is the power of community building in organizing and recruiting new followers. Much of the social media theory of strong and weak ties will come into play here in that these forums fulfill the needs of the members to belong to a tightly-knit social construct, especially when those needs are not being met in their everyday lives. This is something that has not been discussed thus far in the current literature about radicalism online, since the texts focused on that subject are mostly devoted to describing the different kinds of uses that Islamists have for the internet. This application of social media theory should

bring light to the reasons for the success and pervasiveness of websites / forums that support radicalism.

Chapter 6: Al Qaeda's Inspire Magazine and Lone Mujahid Pocketbook: A Study in the Emotion-Laden Recruitment of (Digital) Western Audiences and the Spread of Microterrorism: In this chapter, I will examine al-Qaeda's English language electronic magazine. I hope to examine both the magazine itself and the reactions to it by the various media and political / counterterrorism websites, since these responses are indicative of the effectiveness of al-Qaeda's new tactics. The reaction to the magazine by American audiences is actually quite interesting in that it suggests that the animosity between "Western" and "Eastern" audiences is self perpetuating, rather than being a simple matter of the Islamists bringing violence and hatred and fear to the West. The magazine itself is useful in that it suggests that al-Qaeda is moving to a new method of micro-terrorism and what they call "open source jihad", a movement that empowers individuals to act on their own rather than large groups working together to create large-scale attacks. Similarly, their use of pathos as a method for overcoming the rule of inertia suggests that emotional appeals and the theories of emotions in organizations need to be given more credence in rhetorical studies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Making Sense of the Radicalizing (Online) Assemblage: This section will be devoted not only to summarizing the argument of the dissertation, but also to outlining the larger impacts of this project. I intend to include a list of suggestions in combating the online presence of Islamists as well as ways that we, as academics, can aid in the discussion of this kind of rhetoric.

I am covering a good amount of territory while bringing a new theoretical framework with me in the hopes that I might: A) bring humanities-based research into the discussion of extremist texts, B) bring new light to a subject that has not been discussed by rhetorical theorists, C) influence our government's communication strategies so that they might better combat radical Islamists, and D) eventually bring this discussion to the classroom, since fundamentalist rhetorics are understood and discussed very little by both humanities students and scholars.

CHAPTER 2: GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES IN COUNTERING TERRORIST

IDEOLOGIES

[W]e first need to better understand the mindset . . . of the al-Qa'ida movement, the animosity and the arguments that underpin it, and indeed the regions of the world from which its struggle emanated and upon which its hungry gaze still rests. Without knowing our enemy, we cannot . . . effectively counter their propaganda and messages of hate and their clarion calls to violence. And we cannot fulfill the most basic requirements of an effective counterterrorism strategy, preempting and preventing terrorist operations and deterring their attacks.
--Bruce Hoffman, "Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command Posed by the Global Terrorist Threat: Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?"

Introduction

The previous quotation, taken from Bruce Hoffman's 2007 testimony before the

Committee on Homeland Security recognizes the essential nature of our understanding of

terrorist rhetoric / ideologies in winning the "war of ideas" mentioned so often in the

public sphere by both journalists and policymakers. Indeed, many of the unclassified

reports, testimonies, and congressional hearings echo Hoffman's sentiment, including the

widely circulated 2007 report, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*,

authored by the intelligence arm of the New York Police Department, which claims that

"[i]deology is the bedrock an catalyst for radicalization. It defines the conflict, guides

movements, identifies the issues, drives recruitment, and is the basis for action" (6) in

terrorist groups. Despite a preponderance of evidence to suggest that the US must combat

radicalism on an ideological level, the federal government has no systematic way to

combat radicalism on an ideological level. This is the case for many reasons, including

the following: a lack of cohesion in the US intelligence community, fundamental

misunderstanding of the functioning of online communities, a misguided focus on

fighting a war of action instead of a war of ideas, a reliance on outmoded forms of

strategic communication when ideological counterterrorism is attempted, and a deep-seated lack of understanding of the process of radicalization, all of which has led to a failure to prevent the spread of terrorism.

The Complex Networked Intelligence Community

The lack of cohesion in the United States' Intelligence Community (IC) has been a subject of much discussion (official and unofficial) since the September 11 attacks in 2001. And, indeed, there has been a significant amount of change in the structure of the IC since that time.[9] The Department of Homeland Security was formed and the FBI, the CIA, and international bodies like the UN and NATO pledged to be more open about sharing intelligence in the future. As part of the international effort to consolidate counterterrorism (CT) efforts, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) was formed in 2011 by then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and a cohort of foreign ministers / diplomats. Also, the executive branch formed the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) in 2004 as hub combining both intelligence gathering and operational planning. The NCTC in particular was designed to "[integrate] foreign and domestic analysis from across the Intelligence Community (IC) and [produce] a wide-range of detailed assessments designed to support senior policymakers and other members of the policy, intelligence, law enforcement, defense, homeland security, and foreign affairs communities."[10] In fact, the NCTC is responsible for the President's daily briefing on issues relating to foreign terrorism (as opposed to domestic, which is the unique responsibility of the FBI) as well as the daily *National Terrorism Bulletin* (although the

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[9] All general information taken from the various institutions' websites.

[10] National Counterterrorism Center "Overview". <http://www.nctc.gov/overview.html>.

purpose and scope of this publication is not clearly delineated on any of their webpages).

The NCTC also runs a "Radicalization and Extremist Messaging Group" that keeps track

of "radicalization issues",[11] as they call it, that overlaps with the State Department's

analyzing of communities / populations that are deemed "at risk" of radicalization. The

NCTC reports to both the President's office and the Director of National Intelligence, the

latter of which oversees the following intelligence gathering / analysis agencies: the

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the FBI

National Security Branch (only when it cross international boundaries), the National

Geospatial Intelligence Agency, the National Reconnaissance Office, the National

Security Agency (NSA), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Office of National

Security Intelligence, the Energy Office of Intelligence and Counterintelligence, the

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the State

Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Treasury Office of Intelligence and Research,

and the five branches of the Armed Forces--the Coast Guard, the Marines, the Air Force,

the Navy, and the Army.[12]

That previous list does not, of course, include the various legislative committees

within the Senate and House of Representatives that deal with issues relating to terrorism

or intelligence gathering. Nor does the DNI govern all of the actions of the Department of

Defense or the State Department, which are both partially autonomous and include their

own counterterrorism initiatives. It also does not even begin to encompass the non-

governmental, academic, and privately sponsored organizations that study and publish on

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[11] Ibid.

[12] All information about the structure / oversight of the IC is taken from the various websites for each respective agency, as well as intelligence.gov's "A Complex Organization United Under a Single Goal: National Security," which has a handy infographic describing the chain of command among IC units.

the various aspects of Islamist extremism. Even when confining our scope to the official

branches of the Federal Government, the sheer scope of publications about Islamist

terrorists / radicals is staggering, especially when we consider the fact that the majority of

texts produced by the IC are classified and unavailable to the general public. What this

complex network of organizations, research projects, and documents suggests is an

internal lack of coherency within the IC community, even after the attempt was made at

the start of the first Obama administration to streamline the gathering / interpretation of

intelligence and to organize the CT efforts of United States. And, even though the NCTC

was originally designed as an intelligence hub for the federal government, it has not, in

actuality, functioned as such, since each of the other elements in the IC community has,

as mentioned before, remained autonomous in their gathering and analyzing of raw

intelligence. Indeed, to judge from the prominence that it is given on their website, the

most substantial accomplishment of the NCTC, aside from the intelligence briefings for

the President's office and the mysterious "National Terrorism Bulletin," is the publication

of the *Counterterrorism Calendar*, which mainly consists of reminders of significant

terrorist attacks listed next to their respective dates, as well as biographical overviews of

the most wanted terrorists, and instructions on procedures in case of bombing, chemical

attacks, arson, etc.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the complexities of the IC network, changes in

legislation dedicated to engagement with or the combating of terrorist ideologies have

been remarkably slow. For example, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has not

constructed legislation concerning ideology / radicalization prevention in the past five

years[13], despite receiving testimony from multiple experts exploring the importance of the "war of ideas" in general and the propagation of radical ideologies through the internet in particular since before the September 11th attacks. The discernable public action from the House of Representatives and from the Senate on the counteracting of radicalization has been remarkably limited, for which a lack of communication between the members of the IC and congressional bodies has been blamed in several reports, including the *Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States* from 2013, during which Senator Saxby Chambliss is quoted as saying:

> The Intelligence Community is obligated, under the National Security Act, to keep the congressional intelligence committees fully and currently informed of its intelligence activities, including covert action. We cannot do the oversight the American people expect of us if every request for information becomes a protracted battle … each one of you has made a commitment to this [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence] to provide information when we request it. We understand that there may be rare exceptions to this rule, but we are now operating in an environment in which the exception has become the rule, and this simply has to stop. (4)

What this suggests is that there is at least some truth to popular dramatizations of intelligence operations like *Clear and Present Danger* in which members of Congress are seen battling members of the CIA for access to information. Significant is the decision of a U.S. Senator to use a public hearing as a forum to chastise the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of the FBI, the Director of the CIA, the Secretary of State for

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[13] As of September, 2014.

Intelligence and Research, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, and the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). In fact, Chambliss suggests that the IC has insulated itself from those congressional bodies to which it is required by law to report. Also, not only is it difficult for Congress to "do the oversight the American people expect," as Chambliss claims, but it is also difficult for Congress to enact laws to allow for the combatting of terrorism on an ideological level, since they apparently do not have access to the necessary intelligence to do so from the IC.

Having said that, there have been numerous laws passed concerning the gathering and dissemination of information, including the highly controversial H.R. 624, which allows for the "sharing of certain cyber threat intelligence and cyber threat information between the intelligence community and cybersecurity entities, and for other purposes,"[14] as well as legislation dedicated to increasing education on the importance of cybersecurity. In the case of laws regarding the gathering of intelligence, especially by organizations such as the National Security Agency, there is little to no indication as to what will be done with the information once it is compiled, which is, I am certain, one of the reasons why both the American and international publics are uneasy about H.R. 624 and laws like it. Similarly, it is not clearly defined what "cyber threat intelligence" or "cyber threat information" really looks like, so that the scope of the intelligence gathering capabilities of the federal government allowed by law remain unclear. In a congressional subcommittee hearing on cybersecurity in 2011, Representative Bobby Scott even noted that "it is important that we examine whether the laws have maintained an appropriate focus on behavior we all feel rises to the level of criminal—Federal criminal liability . . .

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[14] The full text of the bill is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr624eh/pdf/BILLS-113hr624eh.pdf> as of March 2014.

we have expanded the scope of the law [to prevent hacking] on several occasions which has led to a disturbing expansive use in recent years."[15] This suggests that H.R. 624 is not the only bill that has been subjected to "expansive use" in the name of gathering intelligence on "threats" to security.

The NSA and the federal government have also opened themselves up to a certain amount of ridicule from both international and domestic audiences by admitting to monitoring various online communities, including popular games like *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) and digital worlds like *Second Life*. Although there is evidence to suggest that both *WoW* and *Second Life* have both suffered from money laundering in the aiding of terrorist efforts abroad,[16] popular programs like *The Daily Show* have poked fun at the suggestion that a collection of "gamers and geeks" might pose a threat to the federal government, resulting in a public relations nightmare for an administration still reeling from the revelation by Edward Snowden that the NSA had carried out extensive surveillance operations without the knowledge of the public (including those being carried out in online communities). Again, part of the problem here is that neither the Obama administration nor the houses of congress have clearly articulated the reasons behind such intelligence gathering expeditions. Instead, we have to rely on information made public by Snowden's filched reports as filtered through major news organizations, which simply claim that games are a "target-rich communication network"[17] and that "[b]ecause militants often rely on features common to video games — fake identities,

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[15] *Cyber Security: Protecting America's New Frontier* 3-4.

[16] See "Detecting Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Activity in Second Life and World of Warcraft" by Irwin and Slay. Also, "Terrorist Uses of MMOEs" by K.K. Hausman.

[17] As quoted in "Spies Infiltrate a Fantasy Realm of Online Games" by Mazzetti and Elliot and published in *The New York Times*.

voice and text chats, a way to conduct financial transactions — American and British intelligence agencies worried that they might be operating there, according to the papers" (Mazzetti and Elliot).

Putting on the Troll Suit: The IC and Online Communities

In regards to the uses of MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online communities), the emphasis has been placed on the tracking of money laundering[18] or on the real world / virtual world correspondence of environments (according to a 2008 report by Mennecke, McNeill, et al.), which has been the issue of importance in *Second Life*. Ignored are the communicative capabilities of these communities. This is the case for several reasons, all of which indicate a fundamental misunderstanding of the IC on the ways that these communities function. Peter Singer of the Brookings Institute states, "For terror groups looking to keep their communications secret, there are far more effective and easier ways to do so than putting on a troll avatar."[19] And, indeed, those who have played any kind of MMO would be aware of this, since many of them either rely on in-game chat protocols (with varying levels of privacy) or third party voice over IP (voIP) providers like Ventrilo that are easily replicable without having to deal with the added interface of the game or community in question. In fact, using an MMO to hold a secret conversation between various members of a terrorist group would be akin to attempting to hold a closed faculty meeting in the middle of a college's student union at lunch when all of the students are armed with recording devices of various capabilities.

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[18] Irwin and Slay, "Detecting Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing…" And McGraw and Hoglund's 2007 book, *Exploiting online games: cheating massively distributed systems*.
[19] Also quoted by Mazzetti and Elliot in "Spies Infiltrate a Fantasy Realm of Online Games."

Also, these terrorists would have to contend with a gaming community that is both wary of outsiders ("noobs") and that has a varying amount of expertise in hacking both in the game world and outside of it. Having been an active member of *World of Warcraft* and having been in contact with members of other MMOs, including *Second Life, Eve Online* (another MMORPG that rivals *World of Warcraft* in population), and the newly popular *League of Legends* on different servers for more than a few years, I can say that it would be much more secure and much easier to hold a conversation outside of the game using a voIP or a text chat protocol than to bother with downloading the game software, creating a character, and then traveling to a location that may or may not be populated with other players and may or may not be secure. Had any of these IC members thought to either question the lack of engagement of the scholarly community with the communication capabilities of MMOs and their aid to terrorist activity or to crowdsource their problem to the collection of gamers in question, it would have been readily apparent that there were other, more readily available technologies with less danger of observation available to these extremist groups.

It could, of course, be argued that it would be the height of idiocy for the IC to disclose specific information about ongoing intelligence gathering / counterterrorism missions, including those being carried out in online communities to combat cyberterrorism. And, indeed, revealing individual targets for surveillance or the details of particular real-world operations may compromise counterterrorism efforts. Having said that, this apparently idiotic move proved very effective when searching for the culprits of the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013. The FBI was able to effectively use social media to crowdsource information about the possible suspects in order to locate them more

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quickly than they would have otherwise. Also, disclosing non-specific information (like

the motivation behind such surveillance and the danger that these groups pose to both

virtual and real world targets) from already complete surveillance operations like those

carried out in *WoW* and *Second Life*, will hardly impact operations that *are* still ongoing,

especially since Snowden has essentially opened these previously classified documents to

various news agencies. Similarly (and I will expand on this in my conclusion), the IC is

more likely to get an educated and well-motivated response from an audience that is

invested in their online communities, like those who dwell in *WoW*. These are the people

who have spent hundreds of hours in the world that the IC needs to gain access to, and so

will be the most valuable resources in tracking down illicit activities.[20]

The War of Action Versus the War of Ideas

Another problem that the IC faces is a misguided focus on action rather than on

combating radical Islamist ideologies despite substantial evidence (enumerated both at

the start of this chapter and during the introduction) suggesting that their proliferation is

significant problem that must be counteracted in order to combat the radicalization

process that so often leads to acts of terrorism. We can see this emphasis on action rather

than ideas both in the public statements from the White House and in the longer, more

detailed publications coming from the various components of the IC involved in

counterterrorism efforts. This is especially true of the documents published by the IC and

the White House that are meant to articulate the overall strategy in counterterrorism in

which even when cyberterrorism is mentioned, the stress is placed both on acts of

hacking and espionage rather than on the more insidious proliferation of radicalizing

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[20] To be fair, the FBI does have a program available to the public through which they can report suspect
internet activity. However, it is not widely advertised.

messages. Likewise, the reports emphasize the physical or virtual actions that the IC can take in order to countermand these breaches of secure networks, despite the proliferation of hearings in front of the various congressional bodies dedicated to the risk posed by extremist rhetoric online. For example, in a yearly report required of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) (in this case, James R. Clapper) and released at the end of January, 2014, although "Cyber" is listed first and, thus, given precedence over "Weapons of Mass Destruction and Proliferation" and "Transnational Organized Crime" in the Table of Contents under the heading of "Global Threats," the "Threat Environment," as the report puts it, is all focused on acts of espionage and other forms of hacking and makes no mention of the radicalization efforts of various extremist groups: "We assess that computer network *exploitation* and *disruption* activities such as denial-of-service attacks will continue. Further, we assess that the likelihood of a *destructive* attack that deletes information or renders systems inoperable with increase as malware and attack tradecraft proliferate."[21] The report goes on to enumerate the dangers that China and Russia both pose to secure U.S. networks (a fear also exhibited in other reports, like the aforementioned hearing, *Cyber Security: Protecting America's New Frontier*) and international law for internet governance. We do have one recognition of the danger posed by terrorist organizations in the same "Cyber" section when the authors note that "Terrorist organizations have expressed interest in developing offensive cyber capabilities. They continue to use cyberspace for propaganda and influence operations, financial activities, and personnel recruitment" (2), but do not have any mention of

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[21] *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, Page 1.

possible remedies to that use of the internet for radicalization purposes, nor do we have any further articulation of particular strategies in use by these "terrorist organizations."

Similarly, in a recent report (*Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States*) stemming from an open meeting of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence designed to "inform the American public, to the extent we can, about the threats we face as a nation and worldwide" (1), the chairman of the committee, Senator Dianne Feinstein, credits the supposed diminishment of the "core of al-Qa'ida" to "terrorism-related arrests" (2) and then goes on to enumerate the "success of our criminal justice system in prosecuting terrorists" in the nine years since the September 11 attacks (438 convictions). She briefly mentions the importance of cyber-counterterrorism, but as with Clapper's *Worldwide Threat Assessment*, she emphasizes "cyber attack" and "cyber espionage" (2). And, indeed, at this same hearing Clapper states, ". . . when it comes to distinct threat areas, our statement this year leads with cyber. And it's hard to overemphasize its significance" (9). However, he then highlights the risk of "state and non-state actors . . . gathering sensitive information from public and private sector entities, controlling the content and flow of information, and challenging perceived adversaries of cyber space." He does not elaborate on what he means by "controlling the content and flow of information" or "challenging perceived adversaries" other than to claim that these unknown foes, which may include some terrorist organizations, put "all sectors of our country at risk – from government and private networks to critical infrastructures," although this is perhaps in part because of an earlier portion of his testimony in which he takes congress to task for holding an open meeting on intelligence matters. Clapper, as the Director of National Intelligence and the nominal head of the IC,

seems to be solely focused on issues of network security, although we do get a hint of concern over communicative matters when he mentions the attempt by threatening groups to "control the content and flow of information."

At the other end of the counterterrorism process, the Department of Defense (DoD) has dedicated a whole series of projects to "The CyberDomain: Security and Operations."[22] Nestled among dated (circa 1990) graphics depicting binary code and an illustration of a motherboard on a special portion of their website dedicated to "Top Issues," the DoD has included a both a comprehensive (albeit characteristically vague) game plan for their incursion into cyberspace as well as an RSS feed of news stories and features about cyberspace, press releases, and featured articles. Their strategy guide (entitled *Department of Defense Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace*), includes five different "Strategic Initiatives" that are, like the threat assessment from Clapper, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Army and Navy cyber-divisions (as seen on their pubic web presence and various strategy statements of their own), solely focused on network security and the prevention of hacking, exploitation, and espionage.

This collection of various documents, reports, webpages, etc. also evinces a growing preoccupation with state sponsored cyberwarfare coming from China and Russia, marking an shift away from their previous preoccupation with non-state actors, i.e. terrorist groups without a clear national identity. Even the organization of the texts from the DoD, CIA, and NCTC gives prominence to state-sponsored cyberwarfare, often devoting several paragraphs (or even whole sections) to China and Russia and relegating "other terrorist groups" to a few sentences here and there. This is not surprising given the

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[22] Findable at <http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2013/0713_cyberdomain/> as of March 2014.

cooling relations between Russia, China, and the United States, but is a cause for concern when we consider that even though reports suggest that the core of Al-Qaeda is diminished, fringe groups and sole actors have become more and more active, as have militant Islamist groups like ISIS within the contested areas of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and etc. And, although cyber-espionage and hacking are certainly an issue worth considering, the IC and congressional bodies seem to be solely preoccupied with network security instead of discovering and counteracting root causes of such espionage or even considering that the proliferation of radical ideology is a danger worth combating.

The one exception to this rule is the recent *Twitter* and *Facebook*-focused counter-radicalism campaign initiated by the State Department called *Think Again Turn Away*. It has, in recent months, been focused on diffusing the highly successful ISIS media campaign that has dominated the news in the latter part of 2014. However, the *Think Again* campaign, which utilizes text-like speech and internet-born slang along with graphic images of warfare, memes centered on the drawbacks of ISIS ideology, and hashtags has been a failure. According to Rita Katz, the director of the highly respected SITE Intelligence group, which monitors and analyzes jihadist activity online, the *Think Again* campaign, while "making a great step in the right direction by recognizing the importance of social media in jihadi recruitment" is largely ineffectual because it "provides jihadists with a stage to voice their arguments—regularly engaging in petty disputes with fighters and supporters of [terrorist] groups and arguing over who has killed

more people while exchanging sarcastic quips."[23] And, indeed, if we look at their *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *YouTube* feeds, we can see comments like the following, which was posted on the *Think Again Facebook* page after the State Department linked to an article about ISIS forcing the shutdown of Syrian schools due to ongoing violence on 10 November 2014: "These chanting rapist slavers don't have to look very far. Just copy the 'curriculum' of Hamas/Palestinian Authority, financed by U.S. and European 'aid'," or the *Twitter* pro-ISIS account that posted to the *Think Again Twitter* feed 20 November 2014 with, "To the evil forces of capitalism you are all dispensable, you are all collateral. The Islamic State sees you as a human being having rights." suggesting that the internet denizens that respond to these accounts are, indeed, using the campaign in order to voice their own radicalized views.

On the other hand, we have rabid believers in the obliteration of ISIS and "muslim" terrorists, such as one *Twitter* account that suggested that the United States "shove a missile" in an improbable orifice of ISIS followers and a *Facebook* account that notes: "Here's another 'crazy' idea. Don't allow massive immigration from countries that hate the United States. Am I a racist because I dare to say the OBVIOUS?" The comments on both of these *Think Again* accounts, of which the previous are a sample, tend to skew to the radical (either for against jihadist ideology) suggesting that there is very little real persuasion happening in this account – at least with the contested audiences in danger of radicalization that the State Department is attempting to recruit. Indeed, even if these at-risk populations visited these pages, (which is doubtful, given the narrow focus of social media accounts, unless they stumble upon posts in which accounts

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[23] "The State Department's Twitter War with ISIS is Embarrassing" appeared in *Time* on 16 September 2014.

they *do* follow are linked), these audiences are unlikely to be convinced by statements made by organizations associated with a government they may not trust. In essence, the State Department lacks the ethos needed to convincingly address anything related to terrorism with hostile or ambivalent audiences, since it is a branch of the U.S. government. This is reflected in the comments made by pro-ISIS or anti-western accounts that claim, for example: "Jihad is far more then the narrowness your giving it. We fight 4 a great & noble purpose while u wage war 4 worldly desires." or "no american has honor, dignity. americans don't care winning with honor, they just want to win at any cost," suggesting that any attempts at counter-radicalization made by *Think Again* can (and most likely will) be met with similar arguments based on the lack of credibility of Americans writ large or the United States government in particular.

The IC and the Complex, Rugged Communication Environment

Even when the IC makes the effort to fight the war on terror on an ideological level, like in the *Think Again* accounts mentioned above, however, they rely on outmoded communication models that have been proven to be ineffective. This is the point, of course, that the academic community could provide valuable insight into the necessary reformation of counterterrorism strategy. And, in fact, the theoretical basis for my discussion of the communicative strategies that are necessary in diffusion of the Islamist radicalization of communities / individuals is primarily taken from Corman and Dooley, two scholars working out of Arizona State University, and their "Strategic Communication on a Rugged Landscape: Principles for Finding the Right Message," along with several other publications form the Center for Strategic Communication, an academic think tank. One of the most important elements of the aforementioned article is

what the authors call the "rugged landscape" in communication. Corman and Dooley take

the idea of the rugged landscape from evolutionary biologist Stewart Kauffman's NK

model, which, according to the authors, "explains how a system of components

continuously improves by evolving over time" (5). A rugged landscape in the sense that

Corman and Dooley are using it necessitates a complex search for the optimal solution to

a problem because "[r]ugged landscapes are *integral systems* in which performance

results from interdependencies and nonlinearities that exist between components in the

system. This means you cannot change one variable in a patterned search without

changing other variables at the same time" (6-7). What this also means is that each

element in the system at hand, whether it is communicative or physical, is interdependent.

Similarly, the rugged landscape is a complex and variegated space populated with hills,

mountains, and valleys. Instead of conceiving of terrorists as one cohesive and

homogenous entity that seeks to take over the world and therefore must be counteracted

with a singular course of action, we must, the authors claim, take into account the

differences in and among groups of terrorists that may not have the same communicative

needs.

Similarly, the communicative field itself will necessitate strategic moves tailored

to the conventions of that medium as well as the population that utilizes it. This is

especially true of internet environments because these outlets, as renowned media

scholars, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green note in *Spreadable Media:*

Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture constitute "an emerging hybrid

model of circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how

material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier)

ways" (1).[24] This is especially true of the ISIS media campaign on *Twitter*, in that when

Twitter admins suspended the accounts initially posting post-jihadist materials en-masse,

ISIS proponents that had followed these accounts simply re-posted the banned content

and created new accounts until there were almost fifty-thousand pro-ISIS *Twitter* feeds

and up to forty-thousand posts per-day.[25] And, as SITE Intelligence's Rita Katz notes in

"From Teenage Colorado Girls to Islamic State Recruits: A Case Study in Radicalization

Via Social Media," which (as the title suggests) explores the recent (as of October 2014)

case of two moderate-Muslim American teenagers' attempt to join ISIS after being

radicalized by the group's media campaign, "[a]s jihadi material is widely spread on the

internet and then shared and retweeted, the once-distant conflict in the Middle East has

crossed boundaries and resulted in several hundreds of Americans fighting with IS and

dying in Syria and Iraq, only to be replaced by new recruits." This, again, suggests that

the very nature of the socially mediated internet environment requires a novel way of

thinking for which the current government strategy is ill-equipped.

    The counterterrorism strategies of the federal government seem to likewise miss

the second implication of the complexity of the communicative and ideological landscape

which is that: "Once a system – a social reality – is created, it has a tendency to sustain

itself even in the face of contradictory information and persuasive campaigns. Members

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[24] Jenkins, et al. are, of course, neither the first nor the only scholars to point out the changes that electronic media has brought to the communicative landscape. In fact, in Marshall McLuhan's 1964 text, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, the author coined the term "global village" in order to suggest that advances in media were contracting the world in ways that rendered it more and more similar to pre-literate times when oral communication was king. Similarly, the importance of the network in computer-mediated discourses has been well documented, as has the revision of the previous one-to-many communication model utilized by the big three (television) networks and large (or small) popular publications.

[25] According to a *BBC* article published on 19 June 2014 entitled "How Isis (sic) is spreading its message online". The specific numbers of pro-ISIS accounts have varied from day to day as *Twitter* shuts them down and they reappear elsewhere under different usernames.

of the system routinely and often unconsciously, work to preserve the existing framework of meaning" (Corman, et al. 7-8). Thus, meanings and messages become even more difficult to disseminate due to the unwillingness of the audiences of those messages to shift their worldview. While Corman, et al. diffuse this problem by embracing the "pragmatic complexity" model, which emphasizes the disruption and variation of various communications as well as the embracing of complexity, I would also argue that the research being done in emotion in organizations (which I will outline briefly later) can significantly add to the discussion of how to engage in discourses with potential and current terrorist recruits.

This lack of understanding of the communication strategies needed in these complex situations is, in fact, demonstrated in the *Annual Defense Report* from the Department of Defense and the *Country Reports on Terrorism* from the Department of State, the documents that together outline the United States' official stance on communication with terrorist sects and present a detailed examinations of terrorist organizations. *Country Report* emphasizes the removal of key leaders from terrorist groups, although the authors of the report acknowledge that "[t]hese efforts buy us time to carry out the most important elements of a comprehensive counterterrorist strategy: disrupting terrorist operations, including their communications, propaganda and subversion efforts; planning and fundraising; and eliminating the conditions that terrorists exploit" (10). The authors then go on to say: "We must seek to build trusted networks of governments, multilateral institutions, business organizations, and private citizens and organizations that work collaboratively to defeat the threat from violent extremism," thus showing that non-combative tactics are important when counteracting terrorist networks,

even in the minds of the activity-based government. More importantly, the *Country*

Report notes that "[r]adicalization of immigrant populations, youth and alienated

minorities" (11) is a major problem and that:

> [I]t became increasingly clear that radicalization to violent extremism does not
>
> occur by accident, or because such populations are innately prone to extremism.
>
> Rather, we saw increasing evidence of terrorists and extremists manipulating the
>
> grievances of alienated youth or immigrant populations, and then cynically
>
> exploiting those grievances to subvert legitimate authority and create unrest.
>
> [. . .] Such efforts to manipulate grievances represent a "conveyor belt"
>
> through which terrorists seek to convert alienated or aggrieved populations, by
>
> stages, to increasingly radicalized and extremist viewpoints, turning them into
>
> sympathizers, supporters, and ultimately, in some cases, members of terrorist
>
> networks. In some regions, this includes efforts by AQ and other terrorists to
>
> exploit insurgency and communal conflict as radicalization and recruitment tools,
>
> especially using the Internet to convey their message. (10)

The authors of the report acknowledge the importance of communication and ideology in

the "radicalization" of at-risk populations. Even more interesting is the acknowledgment

that these potential converts are not "innately prone to extremism," but are seduced by

terrorist rhetoric. The report even claims that "Counter-radicalization is a key policy

priority for the United States" and that at-risk populations should be treated "not as a

source of threat to be defended against, but as a target of enemy subversion to be

protected and supported" (11). Once again, we see the emphasis placed on a complex

understanding of the motivations and ideologies of target audiences. We also see the

authors of the report stressing the importance of "counter-radicalization," a process that must include strategic communication and manipulation of ideologies within a recognizably diverse community.

Having said that, the emphasis, again, is placed on combative and legal measures against terrorism that the United States government has taken in conjunction with the international community directly before and after these acknowledgements take place and throughout the rest of the report. Similarly, the only statement that gives us a sense of "counter-radicalization" is the following: "The key success factor in confronting violent extremism is the commitment by governments to work with each other, with the international community, with private sector organizations, and with their citizens and immigrant populations. Local communities are also a vital part of countering radicalization strategies" (11). And later on in the report in a section that purports to outline a their strategy to counteract terrorist ideologies, the solutions to the radicalization of vulnerable communities are to eliminate terrorist "safe havens" and to "address the underlying conditions that terrorists exploit at the national and local levels. These two measures should then induce alienated or aggrieved populations to become sympathizers, supporters, and members of terrorist networks by "addressing people's needs and grievances, by giving people a stake in their own political future, and by providing alternatives to what terrorists offer." Much like the previously discussed *Worldwide Threat Assessment* coming from the ODNI and the various hearings in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the report fails to mention ways to disrupt the spreading of terrorist ideologies through strategic communication.

In the much shorter *National Defense Strategy* published in 2008,[26] the

Department of Defense betrays a much more simplistic view of the international

landscape. In the first paragraph of the report, for example, the authors claim that:

> Beyond our shores, America shoulders additional responsibilities on behalf of the
>
> world. [. . .] We remain a beacon of light for those in dark places, and for this
>
> reason we should remember that our actions and words signal the depth of our
>
> strength and resolve. For our friends and allies, as well as for our enemies and
>
> potential adversaries, our commitment to democratic values must be matched by
>
> our deeds. The spread of liberty both manifests our ideals and protects our
>
> interests. (7)

Aside from any immediate issues scholars in the humanities and social sciences might

have with the statements about the indiscriminate spread of "democratic values" and

"liberty" as a protection of "our interests," we can also see here a lack of awareness of the

complex nature of the communities that comprise those friends and enemies of the United

States. There is a similarly simplistic description of terrorist organizations later on in the

report:

> Like communism and fascism before it, today's violent extremist ideology rejects
>
> the rules and structures of the international system. Its adherents reject state
>
> sovereignty, ignore borders, and attempt to deny self-determination and human
>
> dignity wherever they gain power. These extremists opportunistically exploit
>
> respect for these norms for their own purposes, hiding behind international norms
>
> and national laws when it suits them, and attempting to subvert them when it does

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[26] The more recent versions of this document have not been altered much other than to include longer
sections devoted to China and Russia.

not. (8)

Not only are "today's violent extremist[s]" lumped into one group, their goals are also merged so that it seems like there is a single vast conspiratorial "other" that seeks to overthrow and undermine international "norms." Similarly, that "other," which the authors of the report most often define as an extremist terrorist group can only be defeated by a reduction in uncertainty (11), "winning the long war" (12), and winning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (13). What exactly "winning the long war" and winning the war in Iraq and Afghanistan mean remains unclear, which makes the likelihood of their achievement almost non-existent. There is likewise no mention of any specific ways in which we might accomplish those things nor is there any indication that there might be a communicative response necessitated by these violent extremists, perhaps because of the previously mentioned reluctance of the IC to publicly relate any information about counterterrorism strategy even in the most general terms.

We have a similar simplification of the international landscape in the public statement from the White House attached to the 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* as well as any documents marking the 10th anniversary of the September 11th attacks. Aside from the continued emphasis on action, the statement also reduces all "terrorist adversaries" to "al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and its adherents," which is a gross simplification of the varied nature of the terrorist landscape, especially given the differences in techniques and goals of terrorists worldwide. This statement, by both highlighting the "elimination" of al-Qaeda leaders and calling all terrorist threats al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda affiliates (even though we can assume that President Obama and his staff are well aware that there are other terrorist groups out there), however, works to

deemphasize the continued dangers posed by terrorist groups and emphasizes the manageability of the terrorist threat, while reassuring an uneasy American public that progress is being made in the War on Terror. Therefore, from a public relations standpoint, we can see the logic behind the generalization and the emphasis on action. But for marginalized Muslim communities looking for a recognition that not all terrorists are Muslim and not all Muslims believe in radical Islam, this kind of gross simplification constitutes just another example of the federal government's insistence on painting all Muslims with the same terrorist brush.

More recently, President Obama's speech addressing the ISIS (or ISIL, as the current administration calls the organization) threat not only simplifies the complex interplay of the groups in conflict in the Syrian and Iraqi regions (as well as worldwide), but also completely ignores the ideological threat posed by ISIS through their sustained propaganda campaign taking place on social media sites. In his speech, he claims that the United States (and a coalition of other nations) will "degrade, and ultimately destroy ISIL" while also aiming to eliminate the broader terrorist threat: "[W]e will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. . . . This is a core principle of my presidency: if you threaten America, you will find no safe haven." Again, we have a complex series of radical groups with varying tactics (both physical and communicative) rendered into a one-dimensional "terrorist threat." There is also a similar emphasis on physical rather than ideological warfare, despite the well-publicized (and quite effective) sustained propaganda campaign carried out by ISIS. There is only one mention of ideological counterterrorism, and it is buried in the middle of the speech along with other (mostly) non-military strategies in "degrading" ISIS: "Working with our partners, we will

redouble our efforts to cut off its funding; improve our intelligence; strengthen our defenses; counter its warped ideology; and stem the flow of foreign fighters into -- and out of -- the Middle East." What is perhaps most troubling, however, is the sentiment that ISIS and these amorphous "terrorists who threaten our country" can be defeated by "targeted [military] action" along with some humanitarian aid (something that has not been emphasized since this speech was given during prime time on 10 September 2014) rather than by a sustained campaign that includes ideological counterterrorism that is cognizant of the intricacies of terrorist organizations.

The (Not so) Smooth Path to Radicalization

All in all, there is very little attention paid to the not-yet-radicalized populations, even those within the United States and those in at-risk communities, as can be seen by the fact that almost all government publications are focused on current terrorists. Even the 2013 hearing before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs sponsored by the NCTC, *The Homeland Threat Landscape and U.S. Response* actually spends very little time talking about the homeland at all, and instead insists that the "[a]l-Qa'ida core is a shadow of its former self, and the overall threat from al-Qa'ida in Pakistan is diminished" (1). Again, this makes sense from a public relations standpoint, since the director of the NCTC has to take pains to convince the members of the senate committee that the IC is, in fact, making progress in the War on Terror, but Director Matthew Olsen shifts the focus away from actual strategies to prevent radicalization of what they call "lone actors and insular groups not directly tied to terrorist organizations" – in other words, those radicalized individuals that have actually been responsible for the majority of the violence in the United States. He then quickly adds that the NCTC and IC

"continue to monitor threat information, develop leads, work closely with domestic and international partners, and develop strategic plans to combat our terrorist adversaries."[27] This kind of vagueness, which is something that I addressed earlier in this chapter, is characteristic of reports and hearings attended by members of the IC, and tells us little about how seriously they take the radicalization of U.S. citizens.

There is also a tendency in the governmental literature for the authors / speakers (in the case of hearings and transcripts from various speeches) to dehumanize the radicalized individuals, as is the case in the aforementioned hearing, *The Homeland Threat Landscape and U.S. Response*, in which U.S. extremists moved to violence are reduced to the acronym, "HVE," which stands for Homegrown Violent Extremists. This use of an acronym, as well as the moniker, "Homegrown Violent Extremists" obliterates any consideration of personal identity, politics, beliefs, motivations, or any of the other myriad elements that has moved that individual to violence. And, even though NCTC Director Olsen acknowledges that these HVEs "remain the most likely global jihadist threat to the Homeland" (6), he then dismisses the danger that they pose by claiming that "the overall level of HVE activity is likely to remain the same: a handful of uncoordinated and unsophisticated plots emanating from a pool of a few hundred individuals" (6). And this is despite Olsen's concession that the Boston Marathon bombers and other HVEs like them "are motivated, often with little or no warning, to act violently by themselves or in small groups" and that they have "exhibited few behaviors that law enforcement and intelligence officers traditionally use to detect commitment to violence." In essence, we have a mixed series of messages in which these poorly trained

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[27] I will address this burgeoning trend of what has been termed "microterrorism" in Chapter 6.

and disorganized HVEs are portrayed as vaguely threatening, but not overly powerful

faceless actors with an anonymous series of motivations, except for those few inspired by

"recent political unrest" (6). Olson's report also relies on that assumption that there is

one, homogenous space existing on the internet, the "online extremist environment" (7),

instead of the varied communicative outlets that make up the networks utilized by

Islamist extremists.

This obliteration of both identity and differences between cohorts or individuals

in danger of being radicalized by extremists continues on into the NCTC's strategy

section, which claims that:

> As our understanding of the threat evolves, so too must our approach to defeating
>
> it. As the April [2013] attack in Boston demonstrates, we may have little to no
>
> warning when a homegrown violent extremist mobilizes to violent action. Over
>
> the past year, NCTC has continued to our work with federal, state and local
>
> officials as well as community partners to expand efforts to raise community
>
> awareness about the threat of terrorist radicalization and recruitment. This
>
> coordinated approach ensures centralized policy direction and assessment, but
>
> accommodates local and community-based programs that vary across the country.
>
> Therefore, working side by side with interagency partners, we are building whole-
>
> of-government approaches focusing on expanding government and community
>
> understanding and response of all forms of violent extremism, including al-Qa'ida
>
> inspired radicalization to violence in both real and online environments. (10)

Aside from the vagueness typical of the IC when outlining strategy, the notion that the IC

can "defeat" homegrown violence, points to the fact that they view the process of

radicalization as one continuously smooth path from normalcy to violent extremism that

they can intervene in and disrupt, thus "winning" the war. This is also the case of the oft-

cited NYPD report, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, which includes a

step by step progression to radicalization that reduces the transformation of a "normal"

citizen to an extremist, which includes the following: 1) Pre-Radicalization 2) Self-

Identification 3) Indoctrination 4) Jihadization (6). The shortcomings of this gross

simplification of the complexities of the psychological, political, and emotional

interaction that leads an individual to violence has been addressed in other works (like in

Marc Sageman's *Leaderless Jihad*), but what I want to highlight here is the fact that the

authors of these texts fundamentally misunderstand the at-risk populations even when

these populations are mentioned in their texts at all. This misunderstanding will,

according to the principles of effective strategic communication within the

counterterrorism field mentioned earlier, render any attempt at ideological warfare

largely ineffective.

Conclusion

Through the examination of these disparate texts, we can see that the IC employs

faulty communication and research strategies in several important areas due to four basic

principles: A) the misreading of online communities and the ways in which they function

for their users, B) a misguided concentration on the war of action instead of the war of

ideas, C) a reliance on ineffective forms of communication, and D) the oversimplification

of the radicalization process when they address such things at all. This is in addition to

the complicated structure of the IC community and their reluctance to share information

with congressional bodies as well as with the public. This then makes it even more

difficult to create a comprehensive strategy that includes ideological counterterrorism as well as communicative strategies that are better suited to the complex environment in which these agencies work. The failure of the current counterterrorism strategy (at least when it concerns extremist Islamist terrorists) is evidenced by the fact that al-Qaeda is still in operation and has actually increased their recruitment of Western audiences with English-language propaganda, as have other terrorist groups like Hezbollah, ISIS, and al-Shabaab. Similarly, the growth of terrorist organizations in the recently war-torn areas of northern Africa and the Middle East testify to the failure of counterterrorist strategies abroad when the U.S. has intervened. Without a fundamental change in how the IC combats terrorist ideologies, the presence of extremist texts online is certain to spread, especially with the advent of technologies render it simple and cost effective to create communities of (potential) recruits.

CHAPTER 3: ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY AND THE (IMPOSSIBLE) REINSTATING OF

THE WORLDWIDE CALIPHATE

It must be squarely stated that there is and was no ideology except Islam that can
unite the world and serve as a basis for a world state. Islam is the only religion in the
world that considers entire mankind to be one family and proclaims that all human beings
have descended from the same parents "O mankind, We created you from a single male
and a female", declares the Qur'an.
--Abul ala Mawdudi "Unity of the Muslim World"

Introduction

In order to fully understand the current ideology of Salafi Jihadist groups like

ISIS, which make up a good portion of the active Islamist terrorist population,

counterterrorist strategists working the Intelligence Community (IC) and in other

organizations with stakes in the diffusion of terrorist ideologies need to likewise

understand the religious underpinnings of that ideology. As explored in the previous

chapter, without a deep understanding of the motivations of these groups as well as the

evidence cited in their texts, it is almost impossible to counteract their rhetoric. Similarly,

non-Sunni groups like Hezbollah and the Assad regime rely on techniques explored later

on in this chapter in order to keep their proponents continually motivated, even in the

face of massive external pressure from international communities. Thus, what we are

exploring here are the works of several foundational clerics, as well as the persuasive

techniques that Islamist groups, both Shia and Sunni, have utilized based on the texts of

these clerics.

Starting with the passage above, transcribed from a speech by notable Muslim

theologian Abul ala Mawdudi, we can see reflected a widely held ideal among both

twentieth-century Islamist scholars like Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb and

contemporary "fundamentalist" groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir and Al Qaeda. According to these clerics / organizations, national and pan-national governments are "the root of all the evils in the world" (Mawdudi, *Let us be Muslim*) and are to be fought either ideologically or physically or both, depending on the philosophy of the organization to which the cleric belongs. The only answer to the moral crisis that these scholars see taking place in secular (and in most Islamic) governments is the establishment of a worldwide caliphate – an Islamist government guided by the principles set forth in the Qu'ran and by Shari'a (family law) as interpreted by the philosophy of the group in power.

There is a historical precedent for this type of state, which is based on constitutional and theocratic forms of governance, both in the time period directly following the death of Muhammed (called the "rightly guided" caliphates) and later on through the Umayyad (661-750) and Abbasid (750-1258) dynasties. There was also an attempted revival of the title of the caliphate during and directly following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, as well as a few smaller caliphates in the time periods between 1258 and the early twentieth-century.[28] The justification for the formation of these later caliphates varied depending on the group in power, but generally relied on verses from the Qu'ran and Hadith and classical theories of jurisprudence, especially those from Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammed ibn Habib more commonly referred to as al-Mawardi). Al-Mawardi is especially useful to Islamist groups because he argues that the caliphate

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[28] Specific information about the history of the caliphate is taken from Amira K. Bennison's *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the 'Abbasid Empire* and Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds's *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Century of Islam*. If interested in general information on the history of the caliphate, *Wikipedia* has a surprisingly thorough article on all of the major developments with specific recommendations for further reading.

system is not just a political necessity, but a religious one as well. He cites the same passage from the Qu'ran utilized by most Islamists, Surat al-Nisa 4:59, which states, "Obey God, obey the Prophet and those in authority among you."[29] al-Mawardi takes this as evidence of a hierarchy of authority starting with God and Muhammed and continuing with the descendants of the Quraysh (Muhammed's) tribe who, al-Mawardi claims, should stand at the head of caliphate-style government. The reason I mention the historical instantiations and the juristic / religious bases for the caliphate system is that clerics that I will be focusing on in this chapter very seldomly mention the specific details of the kind of government that they would like to put into place, instead relying on a kind of nostalgic idealism that only tangentially connects with concrete realities historical or contemporary governance.

This is, in fact, what I what I will be focusing on here: the use of this nostalgic idealism used by Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qutb (the three most often cited twentieth-century clerics in contemporary extremist websites). Specifically, I will examine the ways in which these clerics utilize what could be called ideal(ology) – the spreading of a certain set of beliefs (a caliphate style government) through the strategic use of heavily connotative, almost fable-like language. Because of both the political nature of this kind of discourse, as well as the clerics' use of a certain kind of mythology, Louis Althusser, who examines both mythology and ideology will be particularly useful here. In fact, I will be utilizing Althusser's well known essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" In order to further explore the ways in which Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qtub

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[29] As cited in Souad Ali's *A Religion, Not a State: Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's Islamic Justification of Political Secularism*. She has a useful summary of the four schools of jurisprudence along with her exploration of al-Raziq's text, which will be examined in this paper later on.

employ the Ideal to sell their vision of the caliphate. I will then look at some of the key texts in each of these authors' arsenals and examine the ways in which the concepts outlined in section one are utilized. Finally, I will investigate impact of these texts on contemporary Islamist groups.

Although this chapter is focused on these early twentieth-century clerics, these scholars have had a significant effect on later jihadists, especially Salafi Jihadists, who are the among the contemporary incarnation of the populations calling for the establishment of the worldwide caliphate. If we look at Islamist texts being published by al-Qaeda, for example, we will see sections devoted reprints of Mawdudi and Qtub. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood, which is now the ruling party in Egypt was both founded and takes their philosophical stance from al-Banna. Thus, an exploration of these clerics and their texts is important in understanding these later Islamist groups, especially given that the majority of counterterrorist specialists, including the members of the IC, are specialists in political or military strategy and not Islamic and Middle Eastern cultures and are, therefore, often ignorant of these foundational scholars. Similarly, as stated before, in order to combat the ideologies put forth by the contemporary Islamists, we must first understand their patterns of thought and then work within them in order to be effective.

Althusserian Ideology and the Myth of Reality

In Althusser's works, as for many Marxist theorists like Horkheimer, Adorno, and Gramsci, myth and ideology in political and religious structures are of the utmost importance. Althusser defines ideology as an ahistorical construct. It is, he says "a pure illusion, a pure dream . . . nothingness"(33). He goes on to complicate this notion by

saying that "ideolog*ies have a history of their own*" (his italics) but "that ideology *in general has no history*"(34-5). What this means is that ideologies / ideology have a tenuous link to actual historical events. Instead, they (ideologies, in particular) create their own history. Althusser goes on to further articulate this concept, arguing that "they [ideologies] do not correspond to reality" (36) and that "they constitute an illusion" by "making an allusion to reality." This results in the fact that "in ideology men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form" (37). This suggests then, that ideology has a dialectical relationship with actual historical events in that it refashions history in order to create this set of "beautiful lies" that re-present their conditions of reality for their consumption.

Althusser names, as a cause of this need to refashion history / reality "Priests or Despots . . . a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the 'people' on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations" (37). This, of course, would fit with the overall emphasis that Marxists place on the domination of the lower classes by the ruling elite, but it also explains the utility of ideology for clerics and extremists alike in that, in order to be successful, they must motivate a large group of mostly uneducated, mostly poor, mostly disenfranchised followers.[30] Having said this, Althusser goes on to complicate this notion that there is a one to one correspondence between a real event / reality and a false event /reality created by an evil power claiming that:

[A]bove all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is

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[30] See the US State department's reports on terrorism for further analysis of the potential recruits for Islamist extremists.

represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every

ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this relation that

contains the 'cause' which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the

ideological representation of the real world. Or rather, to leave aside the language

of causality it is necessary to advance the thesis that it is the *imaginary nature of*

this relation which underlies all the imaginary distortion that we can observe (if

we do not live in its truth) in all ideology. (38)

Or, as he later states, "[T]he representation given to individuals of their (individual)

relation to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence and their

collective and individual life [is] necessarily an imaginary relation" (39). Therefore, any

relationship that the sets of beliefs that make up ideology might have to real historical or

contemporary circumstances (and we can, I think, expand this beyond the relationship

between men and their means of production) is a fiction.[31] The process of meaning

making in this kind of system is confined to the subjects between whom the ideology

circulates. The importance of this for the discussion here lies in the fact that any reference

that ideology might make to historical circumstances is a pretense based on an elaborate

mythology that does not exist. And, in fact, this mythology is something that we can see

appearing within these twentieth-century clerics' and contemporary Islamists' texts when

they refer to this original Islamic state. This mythical state, as we will see, forms the basis

for their ideological struggle against what they conceive of as the corrupt and oppressive

West as well as their own national governments which are, they say, immoral and unjust.

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[31] This idea is picked up and expanded on by post-structuralist theorists like Derrida and Foucault.

It is interesting to note that both al-Banna and Qutb had dealings with the Marxists in Egypt as part of their work with the Muslim Brotherhood. Mawdudi also mentions Marxism (socialism) in his texts as a philosophy that is less effective as a total system of beliefs (something that we will get to later) than Islam. The reason mention this connection is that all three of these clerics have been, in one way or another, influenced by the modes of thought as set out by Marx, even if it was only a familiarity by way of combating their philosophical treatises. Aside from the overtly political nature of Marx and, later on, Althusser, that makes his discussion of ideology and myth in "Ideological State Apparatuses"[32] particularly important here, the conceptual link between Marxism and Islamism according to these clerics will become more apparent as we examine their works.

Abu ala Mawdudi and the Rule of Men over Men

Mawdudi, a twentieth century Pakistani Islamist theologian and the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, which is an influential political party in and around Pakistan even today, is one of those oft-cited scholars in extremist publications, namely because of his stance on the inherent corruption of Western and Western-influenced governments. As he explicitly states in "Let Us Be Muslims," "The root of all the evils you find in the world lies in the bad character of the government," which is, according to Mawdudi, characterized by oppression, injustice, and immoral acts (like adultery and prostitution, for example). This is, he argues, because:

> [T]he government is out of gear. The hands that hold power are bad. They
>
> themselves commit oppression and also side with oppressors. . . . the prevalence

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[32] This is an essay in his book *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays.*

of wrong concepts of business and dealings, bad methods of living, the prevalence

of oppression and misdeeds and destruction of God's creation, all these result

from one thing: the keys of authority and power being in wrong hands.

These "wrong hands" of which he speaks do not only belong to Western governments

like the United States, but also to any institution in which "men rule over men." In other

words, any nation state and even pan-national organizations (Mawdudi specifically

discusses the post World War 1 League of Nations) are inherently corrupt because men

(and Mawdudi expressly uses this pronoun when discussing any issue in which power

structures play a part) are inherently corrupt, especially if they are at all influenced by

Western thought. The solution to this problem as he sees it is a worldwide government

based on the early days of Islam, during and after the life of Mohammed. The Prophet,

Mawdudi claims, "succeeded in setting up a model Islamic society and state" in which

"[t]he social order was a perfect manifestation of the Islamic ideals of human civilization

and culture, of morality and private ethics, of social justice and economic equity, of

brotherhood and fraternity, of solidarity and cohesion."[33] Thus, we have this ideal state

(and that is the chapter title for the section that the previous passage resides in) in which

the subjects' religious, social, and political lives are united under God during

Mohammed's reign as both the political and religious leader of Medina.

This ideal Islamic state based on the caliphs from that first generation of Muslims

is continually harkened to in Mawdudi's other works, throughout which he claims that

Islam is the only religion that can bring together all races as they were united in the early

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[33] Unfortunately, almost all of the tracts that I will mention in this paper are available through web sources and are not paginated. Works like "Let us Be Muslims" that I mention here are often difficult to track down in print but can be found posted in various Jihadist or fundamentalist websites.

days of Islam. In "Unity of the Muslim World" he again references the caliphate established after Mohammed's death, saying:

> When during the days of the pious Caliphs Islam crossed the Arab frontiers, a large part of the world came under its sway, Muslims of all parts of the world had only one spiritual and temporal head, the caliph. The entire Islamic world was governed by the same law. All Muslims formed one family. If a person, irrespective of whether he came from the East or West, accepted Islam, became a member of the Islamic society and enjoyed the same rights and privileges as did the Arabs.

Thus, we have this representation of an idyllic world in which all men were united under the banner of Islam and in which all differences (apart from religious) were not just tolerated, but respected. This is in contrast to the image of the corrupt nation state (built earlier on in "Let us be Muslims") that continually oppresses the devout. This ideal Muslim state in which "[t]he teachings of Islam no longer remain mere theoretical expressions, [but] they became a living reality in individual and social life" is what we (as his audience members) should strive to implement by obliterating national and pan-national organizations and establishing a world caliphate.

Having said that, Mawdudi's own description of this state based on the teachings of Islam suggests that reaching such a thing is *not* possible and that it is, in fact, a myth. He consistently relies on terms like "perfect" and "ideal" to describe the original caliphates while building for his audience the image of a world in which all men resided and will reside again in peace and harmony, willingly divesting his readers / listeners of

the actual historical events during that time period.[34] Aside from the historical inaccuracies of Mawdudi's account, we must recognize that the picture of the Islamic government, that thing that we should (again) strive for, is just what he claims it to be: an Ideal in the Aristotelian sense in that it is an unreachable perfection, a veritable Garden of Eden, the establishment of the "Kingdom of God on earth."[35] It is a utopia, in the same manner as the Christian conceptions of the Garden of Eden. This use of what rhetoricians like Kenneth Burke call "God terms," or words with a heavy positive connotative meaning (like "family," "holy," or, indeed, "Garden of Eden") and emotional resonances, along with his stark black and white divisions between wrong and right, evil (West) and good (East) coupled with his rosy description of the all encompassing Islamic "family" united by the total system of Islam despite a large population of what he would term "unbelievers," elides the complex nature of both the start and the continuation of Islam as well as its relationship to external world.

Indeed, these simplistic renderings of the past and present actually work to dissociate Mawdudi's conception of Islam and Muslims from everything else. Mawdudi's ideal caliphate exists without references to regions, people (other than the general "pious Muslim"), and time, decontextualizing this utopian vision upon which his ideology rests in much the same way that Althusser argues when claiming that ideology is "ahistorical" or, perhaps more to the point, that ideologies are "omni-historical" in that they are "immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history." In this

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[34] There are many good accounts of the early "guided" caliphates established by Mohammed's successors. Since my focus here is on the nature of the tropes used by Mawdudi et al., I do not delve too much into what has already been well explained by historians and religious theorists.
[35] This excerpt is taken from a transcript of Mawdudi's 1963 speech entitled "Islam Today." Available at: <http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/islamtoday/index.html>. Last date of access: 7 May 2011.

particular instance, for example, Mawdudi's caliphate could exist at any point throughout time, as could his original generations of Muslims, partially because of the lack of detailed historical / contemporary references, but also because of the fairy-tale like quality of his prose in which absolutes hold sway and evil inevitably falls before the tide of the good. If we look back at the earlier passage with this in mind, "When during the days of the pious Caliphs Islam crossed the Arab frontiers" becomes the start of a fable in which "Muslims of all parts of the world had only one spiritual and temporal head, the caliph," the righteous spiritual leader of the Kingdom of God on earth, the ideal place where "[t]he entire Islamic world was governed by the same law," and "[a]ll Muslims formed one family."

This fable-like quality of Mawdudi's text then leads us back to Althusser's claim that any ideology's relationship to actual historical and contemporary circumstances is illusory. In this case, the original, perfect generation of Muslims as well as the ideal future in which all people are united under the banner of the caliphate-to-come, are really symbols of what was and what will be. If this is the case, the actual historical accuracy of these symbols should not (and, in fact does not, if we look at the popularity of these texts) matter to the audience because, as Althusser claims, "all ideology is *centred* . . . the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects" so that, in a theoretical sense, belief in the ideal caliphate, the symbol at the heart of Mawdudi et al.'s, automatically makes the individual a subject in the Islamist ideology. Thus, the actual connection of the symbol (ideal caliphate) to any kind of "real" time and place is irrelevant. Indeed, if we look at the specific phrase used by Althusser in context with the post-structuralist theories on the

absence of the reference, the "Absolute Subject" cannot and always will be absent, an ephemeral image constituted by and of the beliefs of those "infinity of individuals" that are its subjects. Mawdudi and those like him have brought the ideal caliphate into being by their very belief in it. And because their texts on the caliphate continue to circulate, the ideal(ology) persists in existing. This, in fact, is part of what makes his rhetoric so powerful, because it can, in essence, apply to any circumstance and any time, which is something that will come up in Al-Banna's work, as well.

Hasan al-Banna and the Sacrifice of Jihad

Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the mid nineteen-twenties is another of those clerics that is often cited by contemporary Islamists, particularly because of his emphasis on the physical as well as spiritual / ideological nature of jihad. As he states in "The Message of the Teachings," which is a short document outlining the ideology (guiding beliefs) of the Muslim Brotherhood, "Allah is our goal, / The Messenger is our example, / the Qur'an is our constitution, / Jihad is our way, / And martyrdom is our desire." This is, in fact, one of the major differences between al-Banna and Mawdudi: al-Banna declared that the perpetuation of his particular set of beliefs (as shared by a multitude of his followers) should be carried out by "struggling with the tongue, pen, or hand,"[36] whereas Mawdudi and his group, Jamaat-e-Islami, concentrated on political and not military action, for the most part. Having said this, al-Banna and Mawdudi shared similar goals in uniting the world under a Islamist caliphate, just as their texts share analogous rhetorical appeals / structures.

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[36] "The Message of the Teachings." Found at: <http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/tmott/>. Last accessed on 7 May 2011.

Like Mawdudi, al-Banna harkens back to the early Muslims during the reign of the original, guided caliphates, which "reached the highest level of justice and mercy ever reported of any nation" and contrasts it with the failure of the modern (post World War II) governmental organizations, which he deems to be "alien systems" founded on "materialist pillars" that lead to "corrupted vices."[37] His emphasis on the materiality of the Western governments is a slight shift from Mawdudi, but fits in with both al-Banna and Mawdudi's emphasis on the totality of the Islamic system, which is designed to "[offer] the most detailed, most complete, all-encompassing system compared to all other social philosophies that have ever emerged."[38] al-Banna further articulates this idea by claiming:

> Islam is a comprehensive system which deals with all spheres of life. It is a country and homeland or a government and a nation. It is conduct and power or mercy and justice. It is a culture and a law or knowledge and jurisprudence. It is material and wealth or gain and prosperity. It is Jihad and a call or army and a cause. And finally, it is true belief and correct worship.[39]

In this passage, we can see al-Banna's emphasis on the totality and the perfection of the Islamic system, something that is likewise highlighted by Mawdudi when he outlines the functioning of Islam as a political, theoretical (spiritual), and social entity.[40] Interestingly

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[37] "Towards the Light". Available at: <http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/towards_the_light/index.htm>. Last accessed on: 18 May 2014.

[38] "Peace in Islam". Available at: <http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/peace_in_islam/index.htm>. Last accessed on: 18 May 2014.

[39] "The Message of the Teachings"

[40] This is perhaps best articulated in "Islam Today": [T]he starting point of the history of Islam as a world force was the acceptance by the whole Arab nation of the social, economic, political and cultural system of Islam sad its willingness to mould individual character and communal life in harmony with the principles of the new Faith." "Islam Today" can be found at: <http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/

enough, al-Banna also stresses the economic manifestations of Islam ("It is material and wealth or gain and prosperity"), which he decries in his description of the allegedly soulless Western state.

Part of the reason for this apparent contradiction, I think, is al-Banna's use of absolutes, much in the same way that Mawdudi utilizes God-terms to bring forth his ideal Caliphate. Islam, al-Banna claims, is the perfect governing system that stands against the evil materiality of the western governments as well as the (middle) eastern nations that have become tainted by their association with colonial states (e.g. England and Egypt). Islam also "came to announce human brotherhood and give glad tidings of a call to universality, to eradicate all forms of discrimination" and is a harbinger of "absolute equality."[41] in attempting to recreate Islam as this comprehensive and perfect system that will resolve all the ills of the world, al-Banna must forego coherence in some of the details of his doctrine, which then results in inconsistencies. In that aforementioned instance, he had to recover the material benefits of the Islamic system (while decrying materialism in the West) in order to create that complete and total perfection necessary in his myth(idea)ology. We can see this kind of inconsistency more clearly in the latter part of "Peace in Islam" when al-Banna attempts to both claim that Islam is an "uncompromisingly" peaceful religion of "absolute equality" that will "unite religions," "respect every law before Islam, and . . . praise every nation of believers that existed in the past," and justify violence as a response to the ideological opposition of Islamic doctrine. As he states, "Islam is a comprehensive message of social reform founded on

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peace_in_islam/index.htm>. Last accessed on 18 May 2014.

[41] "Peace in Islam".

the noble principles of truth and goodness; it must remove from its path all sources of hindrance which may delay or prevent the propagation of its message." In this latter quotation, al-Banna does not just validate force (and it is clear from the context of that quotation that "remov[ing] from its path all sources of hindrance" equates to the usage of physical violence) as a last resort "after exhausting all peaceful means of reconciliation," but also rationalizes its use if another (and it is never really specified who this other might be) entity inhibits the spreading of Islamic ideology. And this is despite his earlier claim that Islam is a merciful religion that exists in a tolerant and cooperative world with other religions / races. Again, the reason for this lies in al-Banna's attempt to create an ideal version of Islam that negates the "traditional view" of Islam as a "religion of the sword" while vindicating the use of violence as a means of spreading ideology, so that we have a version of Islam that is both peaceful and powerful, both material and spiritual, both unifying and singular. It is, like Mawdudi's version of Islam and Althusser's ideology, a fable-like creation with a tangential relationship to "real" circumstances.

Sayyid Qutb and the Unique Generation of Muslims

Sayyid Qutb was, like al-Banna, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. He was heavily influenced by both al-Banna and Mawdudi and cites them often throughout his most well known works, including the most relevant text for our discussion here, *Milestones*. Like Mawdudi and al-Banna, Qutb conceived of the post World War I and World War II world as being in a state of crisis due to the lack of spiritual guidance in the modern (Western) nation states. As he states at the start of *Milestones*, "Mankind today is on the brink of a destruction . . . because humanity is devoid of those vital values which are necessary not only for its healthy development but

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also for its real progress" (23). This passage (and others throughout his works) have this image of the soulless Western-based / colonial governments that cannot possibly fulfill the spiritual needs of men (women are noticeably absent from Qutb's works). Qutb also harkens back to the original "perfect" generation of Islam during the time of Mohammed, explicitly (more clearly, perhaps, than Mawdudi and al-Banna) attributing the flawlessness of that generation to a life lived solely to the guidance of the Qur'an rather than to the presence of Mohammed.[42]

What is also distinctive about Qutb's work is his call for a complete separation between the Muslim and non-Muslim world, an idea that runs contrary to the unifying image of Islam proposed by Mawdudi and al-Banna. This perfect generation of Muslims at the time of Mohammed was so perfect, he argues, because of the new Muslims' separation from their polytheistic roots. Thus, contemporary Muslims must strive to do the same and separate themselves from what Qutb terms to be the "Jahiliyyah," the non-Muslims (or those ignorant of Islam):

> We must . . . free ourselves from the clutches of Jahili society, Jahili concepts,
> Jahili traditions and Jahili leadership. Our mission is not to compromise with the
> practices of Jahili society, nor can we be loyal to it. Jahili society, because of its
> Jahili characteristics, is not worthy to be compromised with. . . . Our aim is to
> change the Jahili system at its very roots, this system which is fundamentally at
> variance with Islam and which, with the help of force and oppression, is keeping
> us from living the sort of life which is demanded by our Creator. (34-5)

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[42] "The Holy Qur'an was the only source from which they quenched their thirst, and this was the only mould in which they formed their lives" (30).

In this way, Qutb argues for a complete separation from / transformation of the non-Islamic world, so that his ummah (Islamic community) becomes a closed system. This resonates with his earlier declaration that the first "perfect" generation of Muslims was so because of their adherence to a strict Qu'ranic way of life, separate from their polytheistic roots. It is also, as stated before, at odds with both al-Banna and Mawdudi's insistence that the Islam is a unifying religion that brings all peoples together. However, if we look at the latter part of that passage, we can see his ideological affiliation with the other two clerics in his insistence that the non-Muslim world must be transformed "at its roots" so that the faithful can be free of its oppressive influences.

It is also apparent early on in *Milestones* (in the Preface, in fact) that Qutb has the same objection as Mawdudi to the structure of the non-Islamist governments. As he states: "This Jahiliyyah is based on rebellion against Allah's sovereignty on earth. It transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of Allah, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others" (27), which is similar to Mawdudi's claims that it is the inherently corrupt nature of the non-Islamist men in power that has resulted in the downfall of the Western state. Qutb, in fact, expands on this by arguing that the Jahiliyyahh have asserted "the right to create values" and "to legislate rules of collective behaviour without regard to what Allah Almighty has prescribed." He goes on to say:

> The result of this rebellion against the authority of Allah is the oppression of His creatures. Thus the humiliation of the common man under the communist systems and the exploitation of individuals and nations due to greed for wealth and imperialism under the capitalist systems are but a corollary of rebellion against Allah's authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by Allah

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Almighty. (27)

In this manner, Qutb goes a step further than Mawdudi in claiming that the non-Islamist governments' oppression of its people is just a part of the larger goal of these men to usurp God's authority. Thus, the Jahiliyyah becomes a singular entity, a stark figure determined to take the place of God in the lives of men. This, in fact, is why Qutb sees it as a thing that cannot be communicated or compromised with. Similarly, "It [the Jahiliyyah] is against the system of the universe" (57), Qutb says after he outlines the schema of natural laws, which are all attributed to the wisdom of Allah (56-7). Because of this opposition to "natural" laws, as well as the usurpation of divine authority, any contact with the non-Islamist modern world (Qutb takes pains to declare that the contemporary (twentieth-century) Western world is much more devious than the simple Jahiliyyah that populated Arab lands during Mohammed's lifetime) will necessarily pollute the wellspring from which the faithful must drink. What this means, as well, is that the West becomes a representation of the unnatural, the corrupt, and the faithless. The West is not just faithless in the sense that it is secular, however. As we can see from his text, there is an added valence of meaning to that word, in that being without faith is, for Qutb, an active state, meaning that the faithless are, by their very existence, acting out against God, even if they are not purposefully spreading their unbelief. Thus, the Jahiliyyah are appropriating the authority of Allah.

What all of this means rhetorically, is that the Jahiliyyah becomes an Absolute, in Qutb's text, just as the caliphate-to-be becomes a symbol of the Ideal for Al-Banna, and Mawdudi. And, in fact, Qutb enhances the purely symbolic nature of the Jahiliyyah by further claiming that it is anathema to "the Perfect" and "the Real," which are both

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embodied by "Allah Most High" (34), and the faithful that worship him in the "correct" way, so that each of these factions are decontextualized and ahistorical, in the same manner as Mawdudi's ideal Muslim state and al-Banna's "perfect" generation of Muslims that have been and will become again (which is something that Qutb details, as well).

This use of opposing ideals (the Jahiliyyah as the representation of evil and the ummah as the representation of good) also, I think, brings new valences of meaning to Althusser's claim that ideologies are constitutive, meaning that they bring their subjects into being by their very belief in them (that the sets of ideals and beliefs of ideologies are embodied in their subjects), in that the ummah, as the purveyors of True Religion can never quite break free of the Jahiliyyah, or the non-Muslim world. There can be no complete separation due to the complex interplay between nations on the global scale and the pervasiveness of mass and social medias (although the latter came to prominence after Qutb's time). In this way, these two factions are eternally at odds so that we can never have the Jahiliyyah without the ummah.

Ideology, Myth, and Contemporary Islamists

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qutb are all cited as foundational scholars by many of the contemporary Islamist and extremist groups. If we look at the forums on Jihadist websites or the virtual libraries of organizations like Hizb-ut Tahrir (which calls for the foundation of a worldwide caliphate by political and physical means), we can see a plethora of each of these authors' texts. In fact, most of the tracts used in this paper are from a Salafi Jihadist website called "The Pulpit of Monotheism and Jihad," which calls for the use of suicide bombers and praises

the activities of organizations like Al-Qaeda. A basic search for any of these texts on a search engine will lead to these kinds of websites, in which *Milestones* might sit on a virtual shelf next to Awlaki's "44 Ways to Support Jihad." The reason for the pervasiveness of these works can be attributed, I think, to the ideological characteristics explored here through the lens of Althusser. As I have shown, these clerics continually decontextualize and idealize the worldwide caliphate, the "perfect" generation of Muslims (that were and that will be), and the opposition of the faithless West to the pious ummah. What this means is that these texts transcend specific times and places so that the beliefs that these authors espouse can then be applied by these groups to suit their own specific needs. This decontextualization and idealization, which will be explored in more detail even extends to Shia groups like Hezbollah, despite the ideological differences between the Sunni Salafi Jihadists and the Shi'ites. What this means in broader terms is that Islamists (and maybe radical religious groups in general, although that is beyond the scope of this text) rely on similar rhetorical principles even though the different factions may be hold a virulent hatred of each other.

In a practical sense, this may be because the use of ideals and symbols instead of specific groups and historical circumstances makes these ideologies much more difficult to diffuse. The power of these constructs lies in the fact that these they are unattainable. We will never, for example, create Mawdudi's perfect caliphate or come to know / resemble Qutb's Perfect and Real God. Because of this, the followers of these belief systems will always have a goal to fight for (whether with the pen or with the sword). They will always have that driving force that propels them towards the divine. And, for those opposed to this kind of belief system it becomes a matter of necessity to attempt to

discredit these ideals, which is an almost impossible task given the malleability of the ideology in question. How, for example, can one combat a system of government that these organizations equate with the divine? How can counterterrorism experts diffuse this myth of the perfect caliphate or the Real, especially since those same counterterrorists are part of the system that these Islamists equate with the unfaithful, the corrupt?

A partial answer to these questions lies in the works of Islamic scholar 'Abd al-Raziq, who refutes the necessity of the caliphate system. He stands in direct opposition to clerics like Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qtub, who all argue that the caliphate is a necessity according to religious doctrine and historical precedence. Although al-Raziq's contemporaries claimed that he was irrevocably tainted by western philosophy, the whole of his text, *Islam and the Foundations of Governance*, uses the same texts as these clerics (the Qu'ran, Hadith, theories of law, and historical precedence) to argue for the separation of mosque and state. Because al-Raziq utilizes evidence / texts that are considered to be authoritative by the parties involved and works within their systems of ideology in order to diffuse them, his argument against the caliphate system and for political secularism should resonate more with an Islamic/ist audience. Al-Raziq's exploration of the failures of the later caliphates are particularly useful in combating the claims that the system has been historically successful. In fact, the more often al-Raziq and scholars like him are read by both the Muslim and non-Muslim world, the easier it will become for those without social capital (governmental agencies, for example) in at-risk communities to communicate with those who are likely to be radicalized by terrorist groups. Without these kinds of texts and without the recognition of the underlying

mechanisms utilized by terrorists in order to garner ideological fealty from their audiences, we have little hope of preventing the recruitment of new followers.

CHAPTER 4: AVATARS OF AN IDEAL FUTURE: THE (EMPOWERING)

SYMBOLIC CAPITAL OF COMPUTER WALLPAPERS

One ardent vernal day, his untroubled spirit shrilled cries of joy to cross over to the rays of light, his visage beamed for the florid freedom, and his virtuous body keened to bravely depart this life and repose in the soil of the South. He was notorious for being a stouthearted man, having the features of a fierce knight amid a battle in chorus with those of an innocent angel cascading with the rainfall on an inspirational day. The smile of this combating "Malak" (Arabic for angel) crowned his being with passion, granted the nation a pioneer man, and refused to fade away. This smile proclaimed him victorious after his martyrdom.
-- Al-Intiqad Fatima Shaito, "A Martyrdom Story of an 'Angel': Martyr Salah Ghandour"

Introduction

He stands tall above a striving crowd, holding his hand out as if to bless those

reaching towards his imposing figure. Black and white clouds float close to his looming

figure as the sun shines clearly on his craggy face, his white beard, and his dark turban.

Most of his body is indistinct, as if a grey fog lays over everything below his robed chest.

His expression is both serene and stern as he gazes out at the crowd, who hold their hands

up above their heads in supplication.

We see a rocky beach at sunset. Pinks and blues streak across the sky and reflect

off of the slight waves foaming among the dark grey stone outcroppings. A dainty seagull

stands in profile at the center of the image, right at the horizon. In the foreground, a

soldier is frozen in midair with his back to us. He is holding a flag on a long stick and is

kneeling as if to thrust it into the ground. Next to the soldier's body is a sentence in

Arabic, praising the power of the Almighty, superimposed above the dark rocks of the

beach in gleaming gold lettering. Above the soldier's bent form, a large semi-transparent

face gazes at us, his glasses, beard, and turban almost blending into the background

colors of the water and sky. He appears four different times in the image, in the same

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semi-transparent form, with his disembodied head and torso in different attitudes – as if he were caught at different points in a single speech. In one pose, we can see the shades of three microphones as he gestures up at the sky, in another, his fist is clenched, and in still another, he looks out over an invisible crowd and holds a finger to his temple.

These two images not only exemplify a certain kind of visual artifact that has been popularized among Shia Muslims in the wake of the invention of technologies like Photoshop that make the manipulation of photographs relatively easy, but also demonstrate (as will be show later in the chapter) the usage of the same idealization of religious figures and radical-fueled ideology explored in the previous chapter. We can see these images, which promote sympathy in their audiences for the pictured figures, populating photographic websites like Flickr as well as individual websites and blogs. Both of the images mentioned here, the first of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the second of Hezbollah leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, were created by unnamed Hezbollah members and posted on various websites, including Hezbollah's main website, officially called "The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon".[43] The religious figures depicted in these particular images (and others that I will address later on) are decontextualized in the same way that a deer is decontextualized if I use computer software to remove it from its original place in a picture of a forest and paste it into the middle of a city. This decontextualization is demonstrated particularly well in the image of Nasrallah mentioned earlier in which we can still see shadows of the microphone bank on the

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[43] The incarnation of the image of the Ayatollah Khomeini used on this paper was taken from the website for the AhlulBayt Islamic Mission, which is operated by U.K. Shia students, but it was originally circulated by Hezbollah as part of the promotional material for a documentary on the late Khomeini's life and has been posted by a few different Shia websites in various different sizes and resolutions.

lectern in front of him, because he (and the microphones) are clearly not part of the sunset and beach in the background. They and the other religious and political figures I will discuss later on have been superimposed onto backgrounds depicting mosques, beaches, grass, and other manmade or natural landscapes. This decontextualization stands in stark contrast with the other kinds of images of religious and political figures on these sites, in that photographs in this second category are clearly embedded in a context – they are images from speeches, prayers, or meetings with other officials and are not clearly altered in any way. The Hezbollah website, for example, differentiates these kinds of contextualized photographs from decontextualized images by creating different sections within the general "Photos" page in which all their photographs, altered or not are included. The reason why I take pains to say this here is that the differences between these two categories of images not only exemplify what Susan Pearce, in *Museums, Objects and Collections*, would call "the ability of objects to be simultaneously signs and symbols" (27), but also demonstrate a shift from the ability of a material thing to commemorate into a capacity for it to act as an avatar for an idealized future in computer-mediated cultures, rendering it into an Ideal in much the same fashion as the caliphate system for the Salafi Jihadists.

Material Culture Theories of (Social) Being

Before I get to my central argument, however, the following questions need to be addressed, especially given that I am using material cultures theories to explore these virtual texts: Are these images material objects? Are they part of a material culture that can be studied in the same way that a vase or an archive or an artisan-created bust can be studied? Do they have a social function? Furthermore, are the images commodities?

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Another reason that I am raising these questions, aside from attempting to address

concerns about the theoretical lens I am using to explore these texts, is that these images,

all taken from Hezbollah's website, are virtual "things" with no physical residue, unless

you count the computer screen on which they are shown. They are formatted to be

computer wallpapers (an interesting term, in itself) and not to be sold, as demonstrated by

the dimensions of the images, the various conventions of computer wallpapers that are

used in these images, as well as the fact that they are free and available to the public, so

that their status as material objects with the kinds of social capital that goes along with

that status is suspect.[44] We cannot hold these things. We cannot touch them or feel their

weight, nor can we trace an extensive history behind each of these artifacts.[45] These

images are not even "true" photographs – representations of a particular time and place

that we can visit, because they have been altered so fundamentally. These characteristics

make the images I am discussing quite different from the objects usually discussed in the

scholarly discourse on material culture. Having said that, there are essential

characteristics in these images that render them examinable using the theoretical toolbox

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[44] Although I cannot declare definitively that Hezbollah's photographs are indeed intended for this specific purpose, there are certain qualities belonging to images designed for use as computer wallpapers, like the inclusion of natural landscapes, "framing" (the use of borders or repeated smaller images intended to mimic the physical framing of a picture or painting), and well-recognized symbols or figures. Hezbollah has utilized these conventions in the particular genre of images that I am examining, which suggests that they are primarily being thought of as virtual and not physical artifacts. Similarly, these images have been circulated in blogs / other pro-Shia sites and have been marked as computer wallpapers.

[45] This is one of the major problems in taking on this kind of research into artifacts or texts produced by extremist groups, in that it is difficult to trace "true" authorship or complete a thorough biography as Igor Kopytoff would have us do for all material culture artifacts because these groups have such a strong point of view that colors any information they release and collectivist stance towards materials (this is a product of the Party of God, or the Islamic Resistance is a phrase oft repeated). Similarly, most of the information we get about virtual or physical artifacts is mediated through several different institutions, including our own government, which often does not include full citations or histories with their publication of these texts. Extremist websites also tend to disappear or are shut down by our state department, or are password protected. In fact, as I am writing this paper, the website where I retrieved the images I talk about here is non-functioning. **As of May 2014, Hezbollah has a new website that has been posted at a different address. It does not include the extensive photo archives included in the older sites.

of material culture. This lens of material culture theory will, in turn, help us to better understand the circulation of ideological fealty implied by the consumption of these virtual artifacts.

Their status as commodities with a definite social function, according to the standards set by Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai, two of the foundational scholars in the realm of material culture, are suspect. As Kopytoff declares in "The Cultural Biography of Things", the "exchangeability" of a thing is foremost in the definition of a commodity, as is the equivalence of the transaction taking place between giver / seller and recipient / buyer. Kopytoff later distinguishes this kind of transaction from that of a gift (and he uses Mauss to define the parameters of gifting) in which there is not an equivalence between the value of the given and the value of the received. And, although he claims that monetary gain is not a necessary element of the commoditizing process, he also argues that there must be some kind of exchange, implying that if there is no monetary gain, there should at least be some form of bartering. Similarly, this process of commoditization is distinct from the "counterdrive" of culture, which, as an essential part of its makeup, "needs[s] to set apart a certain portion of [its] environment, marking it as 'sacred,'" and "singular" (73), so that cultural impetuses are a counterpoint to the material commoditizing efforts of the capitalistic element of societies. Although Kopytoff does not specify whether this is a one-to-one, a one to many, or a many to many transaction in this passage, he later on references "commodity spheres" (71) in addition to equating the process of exchange to a bartering of a pot for a yam, suggesting that there are a various amount of levels for this kind of activity. According to this definition, no

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matter the scale there must be a material and immediate (69) exchange of materials among the participants in this process.

Arjun Appadurai, in "Commodities and the Politics of Value" likewise decries efforts to widen the definition of commodities / commoditization to include "goods intended for exchange, regardless of the form of the exchange" (6), again in deference to Mauss and his notion of gifting in which "total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat voluntary way" (5) and in which the "economic transaction is only one element, and in which the passing on of wealth is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract". It is this long-term contractual element that both Appadurai and Kopytoff object to.[46] Each exchange in the commoditizing process must then, according to Kopytoff and Appadurai, be immediate (and it is this immediacy that is definitively foregrounded in Kopytoff, especially) and finite, which would firmly eliminate Hezbollah's images from commodity status. Hezbollah is not, in fact, getting an immediate and material equivalent return of goods or services from the consumers of their images. These images are then rendered into gifts, an exchange in which an eventual return of goods or services is contractual.

Is that true, though? Is there even a long-term contractual element to the circulation of these virtual things? Hezbollah does not require a promise of an eventual gift in return for the consumption of their products. These images are public, available for download just as any other image on a photo-sharing website without any form of monetary gain or bartering implied in the transaction. There are not even advertisements

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[46] Although it may seem that I am being a bit unfair to both Kopytoff and Appadurai, who go on to focus their articles on other things besides the properties of commodities (Kopytoff on the cultural aspects of commodities and Appadurai on the social aspects of things), they found their articles on these axiomatic beliefs about the fundamental nature of commodities, which, I think, need to be interrogated.

on the screens on which they are displayed, ostensibly eliminating any overt economic

gain from traffic on that page. Even had there been advertisements or paragraphs of text

describing their needs for certain goods or for funds, there is still no *requirement* that the

user give those things in return for the things he or she has received – the anonymous

nature of the internet allows for the navigation and consumption of materials without

Mauss' "pain of private or public warfare" (5) as a consequence for a broken contract.

As far as my particular argument is concerned, the status of the Hezbollah images

as non-gifts and "non-saleable" items, as well as their lack of an immediate material and

equivalent return of capital from the consumers of these products suggests that they are

not commodities and *not* material culture artifacts, especially, again, given that there is a

distinct lack of physical objects being circulated. However, not only are these images not

singular or private (they are, included in a publicly displayed website, available for

circulation among and consumption by the public), but also these artifacts do imply an

equivalence of a certain kind of exchange in their circulation and display.[47] There is an

ideological fealty implied by the downloading of these images for personal (and not

academic, as in my case) use that is tacitly, if not openly, acknowledged by the "giver"

(and I use that term very loosely here).

This ideological fealty, or, at the very least, ideological sympathy to Hezbollah's

cause is implied in the displaying of these images on our desktops (or in our homes if

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[47] In fact, reading through these articles again has brought home to me the limitations of this kind of material culture in which most of the examples used are from "primitive" cultures. On the one hand, these cultures are, in a way that these scholars capitalize on, "pure" or in a "natural state," which is, I think, why they are studied. On the other hand, the processes described are often so far removed from the forms of exchange we engage in every day, especially given the popularity of computer-mediated consumption, that the impact of the theoretical elements that are based on these examples is made a bit too abstract – a bit too distant from our everyday lives. This is partially, I think, due to the time period on which some of these articles are written, but is also a lapse in the current scholarship on material culture, in that the later scholars have not really engaged in complicating this material / virtual.

these images are eventually printed), in that the Hezbollah imams or political figures are the dominant characters in these images.[48] He (for the imams and politicians are always male) is usually pictured in the foreground, surrounded by a natural or religious environment and, if not, then he is surrounded by an area of visual interest so that the eye is drawn to him. For example, one of the images including Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah features a field of grass with an intensely blue sky in which Nasrallah is pictured in a large cartoon heart in the upper right quarter of the image holding a (rather terrified seeming) baby. The heart, as well as the framing and baby work to draw our eyes to Nasrallah rather than to the sky or grass, both of which are generic and undistinguished in addition to lacking any singular areas of focus. The prominence of these officials as well as the display of the images on computer desktops suggests that there is an element of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital" caught up in the circulation of these artifacts that is not acknowledged in Kopytoff's or Appadurai's discussion of the characteristics of the commodity, which is, to them, distinguished by that immediate economic exchange. This element of symbolic capital, as well as the implications that Pearce and Radley's work has for Hezbollah's images (which I will get to soon) suggests that they are, indeed, material objects, if we consider the wider implications of exchange and commoditization.

Social Capital and the Implied Fealty of Display

Bourdieu, in "Symbolic Capital" decries the notion that the term "commodity" is restricted to those things with a finite economic value and claims that there needs to be some consideration "for the strictly symbolic interest which is occasionally recognized

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[48] There are also, I think, some interesting implications for the study of these images as material culture in this act of display that will be explored elsewhere.

(when too obviously entering into a conflict of "interest" in the narrow sense, as in

certain forms of nationalism or regionalism) only to be reduced to the irrationality of

feeling or passion" (177). What Bourdieu complicates is the duality between commodity /

non-commodity based on an immediate and equal material return of capital that Kopytoff

establishes in his general description of commoditization. This view of commoditization

is faulty in that it is too restrictive, too dismissive of the kinds of exchange that involve

immaterial, symbolic elements. Similarly, there is not, as Bourdieu suggests, a clear line

between the decommoditized culture and commoditized things.[49] In fact, Bourdieu claims

that such "symbolic capital" as is generated by Hezbollah's images, is "unthinkable" or

"unnameable" to these "economists," but is of the utmost importance. As he states later

on:

> Thus we see that symbolic capital, which in the form of prestige and renown
>
> attached to a family and a name is readily convertible back into economic capital,
>
> is perhaps *the most valuable form of accumulation* [. . .] Should one see in it a
>
> disguised form of purchase of labour power or a covert exaction of corvees? By
>
> all means, as long as the analysis holds together what holds together in practice,
>
> the *double reality* of intrinsically *equivocal, ambiguous* conduct. This is the pitfall
>
> awaiting all those whom [assume] a naively dualistic representation of the

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[49] The "[. . .] the fundamental tautology 'business is business' strictly 'cultural' or 'aesthetic' interest, disinterested interest, is the paradoxical product of the ideological labour in which writers and artists, those most directly interested, have played an important part" (177), suggests a pointed critique aimed at scholars who discount the "superstructure" as Marx would call it, or the symbolic order in which their very texts circulate and are consumed. Perhaps this is one reason for the limitedness of this economic view of commodities? The authors of the texts do not want to believe that their works are involved in the process of commoditization and exchange?

relationship between practice and ideology, between the 'native' economy and the 'native' representation of the economy (179).

In Bourdieu's estimation, then, the "symbolic capital" that is generated through increased respect, fealty, etc. is *the* most important commodity and can be directly translated into later wealth or, perhaps, social capital. And, although he is speaking about "primitive" cultures, specifically, we can see how this translates into more "advanced" cultures.[50] If Hezbollah, through their distribution of images of their leaders can inspire in an audience an ideological fealty or sympathy, or even just an awareness of their cause, they can potentially call on that audience later on when they are in need of resources. This is especially important in extremist groups deemed to be terrorists or fundamentalists by various governmental organizations in that these groups cannot radicalize, an audience that they cannot reach – that they cannot publicize their cause to. Without new audiences, especially audiences in their target regions, these groups will stagnate.

This is, if we look at any kind of propaganda or strategic communication (which is where we could categorize these artifacts), the goal of the sponsoring group is to raise the kind of "social capital" that Bourdieu refers to in order to convince a potentially hostile audience that their cause is just. We can see these appeals playing out tin he Hezbollah images pretty clearly through the use of religious icons (mosques, quotes from the Qu'ran), natural / peaceful scenes, and even through the very poses of the figures in question – they loom over a beseeching crowd or they hold their hands out in benediction or they look unswervingly and sternly out from our computer screens – all of which suggests an intended affiliation with Allah (nature, mosques, Qur'anic verses) and

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[50] The use of quotation marks around the word "native" also suggests an awareness on Bordieu's part of the limitations of such designations as "primitive" or "advance" or, indeed, "native."

righteousness (various stances and facial expressions, the inclusion of children). And, even though the crudeness of these images may invoke ridicule from a skeptical or hostile audience, the circulation of the images still spreads the message of Hezbollah. In fact, by the use of these images in my paper, although this is in an academic setting, I am increasing the awareness of a (potentially) new audience about Hezbollah, their leaders, and their rhetorical strategies.

Another important element of Bourdieu's claim for us here is his refutation of the limited time frame for commoditization, in that the spreading of ideology is a long-term effort. As Bourdieu states:

> The acquisition of a clientele, even an inherited one, implies considerable labour
> devoted to making and maintaining relations, and also substantial material and
> symbolic investments, in the form of political aid against attack, theft, offence,
> and insult [. . .] As well as material wealth, time must be invested for the value
> of symbolic labour cannot be defined without reference to the time devoted to it.
> (180)

These kinds of exchanges, Bourdieu argues, take time and effort – the accumulation of social or symbolic capital does not, as in Kopytoff's commoditization process, happen immediately and in a one-time finite exchange. Instead, social capital is more akin to the process of gifting in that it implies a lengthy effort, if not a contractual one. This is, indeed, the process of exchange inherent in Hezbollah's circulation of their images. Even though the cost of the production of these artifact is minimal given the availability of editing software (free or sold) and the quality of the images, there is a considerable

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amount of time involved in the circulation of ideology so that that immaterial element is really foremost in this process.

Myth, Memory, and Hezbollah's Idealized Islamist State

Now that we have recovered Hezbollah's images from their exclusion from the exchange of goods / services inherent in the circulation and consumption of material culture and have established them as commodities with social / symbolic capital, let us turn back to the Susan Pearce and her postulation that objects in fact embody or represent the symbol (as presented in the chapter, "Objects Inside and Outside Museums"), which is another important element in the consideration of the shape of the ideological landscapes hidden in these images and provides us with a framework for discussing the temporality of these artifacts. Essentially, what she argues is similar to what Bourdieu has to say about the inextricable way that exchange and commoditization are linked to social processes. To use her own words: "One way of putting their [objects'] social centrality is to say that they are intentional inscriptions on the physical world which embody social meaning [. . .] Idea and expression are not two separable parts but the same social construct" (21). Again, she emphasizes that the object is a "real" physical thing, but also highlights the fact that the material thing is a thing embedded into a social context. She also claims that: "Objects (and other messages) operate as *sign* when they stand for the whole of which they are an intrinsic part [. . .] the relationship between the different parts of the whole is said to be metonymic. They operate as a *symbol* when they are brought into an arbitrary association with elements to which they bear no intrinsic relationship" (27).

What is significant for my purposes here is the fact that Pearce, emphasizes the ability of these artifacts to "carry the past into the present" and so to become a symbol for a time and place, thus establishing a specific framework for viewing material artifacts that we can alter in order to make better sense of how these wallpapers function, because this is *not* what the Hezbollah images that I have discussed so far have done. Instead, these images are so radically decontextualized that they do not stand for a single place or an event. They cannot be a symbol for the past in that they are composed of a pastiche of different images from different pasts – some so generic that we could not tell where or when that image was taken, so that we have neither sign nor symbol. There are, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, such images on Hezbollah's website. These other images are of these same religious and political leaders at different events – prayers, speeches, meetings, or even, in several cases, funerals. Funereal images are actually quite numerous in the Hezbollah's photo galleries and are incredibly important in Shia cultures. We can see the coffin and deceased body of the Ayatolla Khomeini, for example, as well as the flower-strewn hospital bed of another religious leader. These photographs do, indeed, stand as a symbol for the event in question – as do the other photographs on Hezbollah's website that commemorate what they call "Zionist terrorist attacks", which feature dead children, displaced homeowners, soldiers, and other signs of violence In each of these cases, a date and an event name (such as the "terrorist attacks of 2006") are attached to the collection of photographs, confirming their status as things which bring the past into the present for the viewers.

So what, then, do we make of the altered images that Hezbollah has included in their collections – those pictures that are so manipulated that they do not stand for a real

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place or time? What happens instead, I would argue, is that these images stand as a

symbol for an *idealized* past, especially in the case of the artifacts from leaders, religious

and otherwise, who have died. In these idealized representations of a past that never was,

the man in question *is* a looming figure, giving a blessing to a crowd of worshippers. He

is lecturing an invisible crowd with a sunset in the background and a lonely seagull

vigilantly guarding the horizon, so that we have a virtual manifestation of an idealized

version of the deceased leader. In those images that do not have this commemorative

quality, we still have a symbolic link between the figure depicted and those elements I

mentioned before: God, religion, righteousness, and power, so that the leaders of

Hezbollah are symbols, again, for an ideal – they manifest those intangible, ephemeral

elements in a material, if not truly physical, way. If we look at the rhetoric of the

speeches from these selfsame officials, we will also see that there is continually a

harkening forward to an idealized time and place free from the domination of the West.

For example, in Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah's speech on the Lebanese "Day of

the Martyrs" (which coincides, incidentally, with our Veterans Day), we can see a

celebration of the "chaste blood" of the suicide bombers and soldiers involved in

repelling the American and Zionist attacks (as they put it):

> [T]here is a predecessor [martyr] who is among the living, in the midst of life, and
>
> there is a subsequent follower. The martyr predecessor happily awaits the
>
> succeeding follower and the subsequent follower, insisting on his pledge and
>
> truthful promise yearns to join the predecessors, with his heart, mind and feet
>
> seeks that meeting, to earn that glorious honor.

We have pathetic /emotional appeals to honor (felt by those who are part of this Islamic resistance community) and fear (of those barbaric cultures intent on destroying Muslims and Arabs), but this time they are mixed with invocations of happiness and religious duty. Interestingly enough, we also have Nasrallah giving an epideictic speech in praise of the martyred suicide bombers while at the same time using those promises of honor and happiness after death in order to recruit those "subsequent followers", i.e. future martyrs. These uses of fear, honor, anger, and satisfaction in religious duties completed, returns again and again throughout the speeches given by Hezbollah's leaders (as well as leaders from other Islamist sects (see Sageman 2008)). There is also, however, a harkening forward to an idealized future – not only one in which God's plan has finally come to pass, but also one in which the heroic figure has already died and is waiting to be joined by future martyrs, thus fulfilling the same function as the idealized caliphate system explored in the previous chapter.

This looking forward to a romanticized and unattainable future is clearly manifested (symbolized, if you will) in these decontextualized images. Again, we have that idealized natural or religious background, the official gazing into the future or directly into the camera, and the shades of soldiers in the background (or foreground, in the case of the image with Nasrallah), melding both their militarism, their strong leadership, and their emphasis on the creations / will of God into one single artifact. We can see an example of this in one of the images of a non-Hezbollah party member that has been posted on Hezbollah's website. The Ayatollah Khamenei (who has an interesting website of his own), the successor to the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran who is highly revered by the leadership in Hezbollah, is pictured in the foreground of the image

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using a large pair of binoculars to gaze at an image of mosque, with the proverbial sunset

in the background and a semi-transparent soldier in the wide border above the mosque.

Thus, this image is a literal depiction of that looking forward to a religious future being

watched over by a vigilant soldier, with an idealized sunset (perfect coloration and cloud

cover) in the background in an interesting reversal of Pearce's claim that "[i]t is the

ability of objects to be simultaneously signs and symbols, to carry a true part of the past

into the present, but also to bear perpetual reinterpretation, which is the essence of their

peculiar and ambiguous power" (27). Because these images are acting as a symbol

(acting as an avatar to a thing in which they are not intrinsically related) for an idealized

future, they are essentially acting as a sign for that future, as well. What I mean by this is

that this idealized future is just that – an ideal which cannot and will not come to pass – it

is continually deferred in the same manner as the signified meaning of signifiers is

always already deferred / differed in Derrida's conception of *differance*. Thus, in standing

in for such an ideal future, in representing that ideal future, the images intrinsically relate

to that future. In fact, they *are* that future.

(Co)Memory and Public Nostalgia

This, then brings us to Alan Radley and his article, "Artefacts, Memory and a

Sense of the Past". What he argues is that objects act on two different levels:

At the level of the individual, we are used to the idea of personal possessions

being kept as mementos of times which we wish to remember. The assembly of

such items is likely to be more haphazard that planned [. . .] Tossed into drawers

or boxes and left for some years, these objects eventually become interesting

because they are displaced from their time, from the context shared with other

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items, and from social practices as part of which they were perhaps merely

functional. [. . .] [They become marked out as indices of the past, as object to

'remember by'. [. . .] [T]he collective recounting of a shared past and the

commemoration of events which may be prior to each individual's own

experience, is not only sustained by the world of objects and artifacts, but is, in

part, shaped through the ways in which the world of things is ordered. (51-2)

Thus, Radley argues that there is both individual (memory) and group (co-memory and

commemoration) remembering. On the individual level, memory is messy, "haphazard",

relatively idiosyncratic, and related to an experienced event, whereas a group co-memory

is a shared experience that is often carefully arranged by a sponsoring organization

(museums, foundations, non-governmental organizations like the Daughters of the

American Revolution) and is often related to an event or person that has preceded the

lives of the participants. There is, however, another facet to individual and collective

remembering in that both individual and communal remembering are "ordered to sustain

certain myths and ideologies both about people as individuals and about particular

cultures" (51).

Radley even specifically mentions images, albeit images "as mental constructs" in

conjunction with his discussion of the ideological implications of order and memory /

commemoration and the thoughts of Frederic C. Bartlett, a psychologist studying

memory in the 1930s:

[. . .] [I]t was through the function of images that things appeared to play their

part in remembering. Images – as mental constructs – serve to pick out significant

features of experience through the affective colouring of a number of interrelated

interests. These interests, as mentioned already, are not haphazard but are constituted with the culture of social groupings who adopt or fashion objects to serve as condensed symbols. These artifacts are the material aspects of the relationships in which people act together, the object of the 'attitude' engendered by their interests and ideals. (56)

In this way, Radley builds on what Pearce and Bourdieu have already established (and I am ignoring timelines here in favor of the ordering of the scholars in this text, which, in itself, has ideological resonances, since I am attempting to assemble an sense of coherency and symbolic ordering by manipulating the "real" theorists and their texts) in arguing that materiality has a symbolic / ideological representation through evoking certain kinds of memories, especially in commemorative displays, which are ordered in a way that is meant to evoke a certain ideological view of an event or person (dependent upon the culture and the aims of the organization). And, although he is speaking of Bartlett's work and mental construction of imagery, we can transfer this discussion to physical / virtual images as well. They are, as I have demonstrated, arranged in a deliberate way to evoke a certain kind of feeling or thought in the minds of the viewers and a reflective of a definitely ideology / culture. Similarly, they are, in a way, reflective of a kind of nostalgia – a longing for an idealized future.

This is where we can pick up that use of the idealized future in Hezbollah's images again, in that we have the same principles of deliberate arrangement, a focused rhetorical use of tropes to evoke a longing for a time in which God and Man (and I use that pronoun deliberately) are united under the military / religious rule of the caliphate (a government ruled by Hezbollah's unique interpretation of Shar'ia, Islamic law) and

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Hezbollah's leadership, but this is a continually deferred future and not an idealized past. In both cases, however, the fact remains that the material artifacts that come to act as an avatar for this future and past are saturated with ideological and symbolic resonances. They are not static or quiescent things, but are continually (acted upon) act upon (by) their audience.

Conclusion

As commodities with a definite social and symbolic capital as well as objects with a clearly embedded social function, these images also problematize some of the current scholarship in material culture and, more importantly for us here, the rhetorical study of both virtual and radical religious texts. There are elements in these particular artifacts that need to be taken into account, including that element of nostalgia for a future that cannot come to pass. Similarly, there are some ideological implications for imagery and representation of faith / religious and political figures that also need to be considered, especially given the stricture in the Qu'ran against the holding of worshiping of idols. These men have taken on a larger than life (sometimes literally) status – they have come to represent an ideal -- and have, thus, stepped into the realm of the idol, which has immediate political ramifications not only for the sects within Islam, but also for the United States government, in that these organizations are deemed to be sponsors of terrorism and, thus, must be combated against. As of yet, there is no literature examining these kinds of images, which have proliferated beyond the bounds of Hezbollah's website. Yes, there are texts that study the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims and the belief by the Shia population in these Imams (who, the Sunnis argue, are saints / idols), but there is no scholarship as of yet on the manipulation of images of political or

religious figures, nor has the IC really taken into account the rhetorical power of the artifacts or discourses surrounding these men, which is why this chapter is included in this dissertation, despite its emphasis on material cultures and rhetorical theory with an emphasis on the spread of ideologies in the world of (virtual) artifacts. Also, we can see many similarities between the rhetorical uses of the idealized caliphate system as well as the "perfect" generation of Muslims during the life of Mohammed and right after his death for the Sunni-based Salafi Jihadists and the idealized Imams and martyrs of the Shia Hezbollah organization. This suggests that, although their ideology differs vastly, there are links that can be exploited in their use of ideal tropes – perhaps by emphasizing those similarities to the groups in question, given their animosity for each other.

CHAPTER 5: MAKING THE MOST OF WEB 2.0: SYRIA'S BELEAGUERED

MEDIA FEEDS, SALAFI JIHADIST NETWORKS, AND SOCIAL(LY) MEDIA(TED)

COMMUNITIES

[I]n the past, the ideology of violent Islamist extremism was limited to select web
forum and pre-approved web videos…the [U.S. Senate Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs Committee] has seen a marked shift in online recruitment and
radicalization [of individuals]. Previously, extremist web sites (sic) were primarily
restricted from the general public. As a result, a potential recruit had to search out and
befriend members of radical forums in order to be accepted and subsequently gain access
to the functionality of the sites. Today, however, with the popularization of social
networking sites, individuals who are becoming radicalized have the ability to find like-
minded individuals more easily.
--Staff Members, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

A almost totally deviant [American] society full of illicit disgusting stuff can produce this
type of events.
May allah guide them or destroy them ameen
--Forum Post in IslamicAwakening.com

Introduction

The first quotation, taken from a 2012 report entitled *Zachary Chesser: A Case*

Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown

Terrorism explores a fundamental shift in the functioning of internet communications by

Islamist terrorist organizations, especially in their communication with populations

outside of their immediate sphere of influence. This particular report is focused on the

aforementioned Zachary Chesser, who was an American, nominally Christian teenager

with no ties to any terrorist organizations when he was radicalized between his senior

year in high school and his freshman year of college. According to his own testimony and

research carried out by both the FBI and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security,

Chesser, who is now serving twenty-five years in a federal prison for providing material

support to a terrorist group (in this case, al-Shabaab), along with several other terrorism-

related charges, was first exposed to Islamist extremism by several members of a soccer team sponsored by Hizb ut-Tahrir (an organization dedicated to the reestablishment of the caliphate) that he played for in the summer after his high school graduation. After that initial in-person exposure to radical Islamism, however, he was increasingly radicalized by Islamist content posted on various internet sites, especially in forums, on *YouTube,* and on blogs. (8) He eventually became a prolific producer of radical Islamist texts, posting frequently on various Islamist forums (including a few on IslamicAwakening.com, the website from which the second quotation at the start of this chapter was taken) and creating his own *YouTube* channel.

The report, which also mentions that the median age of an American recruit to Islamism is 27 and "often very familiar with computers and the Internet" (1-2), also claims that "Chesser represents a growing breed of young Americans who have such comfort and facility with social media that they can adeptly use it to facilitate radicalization and recruitment to violent Islamist extremism that is accelerated as compared to traditional avenues of recruitment" (8). This suggests at least an awareness on the part of the federal government of the increasing importance of the internet in general and social media in particular, especially in the dissemination of radical ideologies and in the accelerated recruitment of often far flung adherents, despite the unwillingness of the IC in countering these radical ideologies (outside of surveilling online communities with suspected terrorist affiliations). In fact, the report goes on to argue that:

> With the popularization of social networking sites, individuals who are becoming
>
> radicalized have the ability to find like-minded individuals more easily [than in

previous years]. In addition, these social networking sites allow for a level of
interaction and information sharing that was not feasible even a few years ago.
Incendiary materials – including videos and lectures – are increasingly found not
only on obscure web sites (sic) but also on some of the most widely accessed sites
in the world – including Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube. (2)

And, indeed, a quick Google search will yield Islamist-affiliated accounts in all three of
the major social networking platforms, as well as in the now *Facebook*-owned *Instagram*.
In fact, *Instagram* has become a major platform for the public relations posts of Syria's
Assad regime, which regularly updates its account with photographs of both President
Bashar al-Assad and his British-born First Lady, Asma al-Assad.

Assad's regime, while not classified in itself as a terrorist organization, has
undergone sanctions from both the U.S. and the international community since Syria was
designated as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1979.[51] And, even though it is a national
government (despite losing ground to both political dissidents and ISIS), it has also
employed public relations tactics through social media apparatuses that will add to our
discussion here, especially given the regime's need to overcome the poor conception that
Western / international governing bodies have of their recent actions. In particular, their
repeated human rights violations as well as their reported use of chemical weapons
against non-combatants has caused enough of an outcry from official international
bodies, including NATO, the UN, and human rights organizations, that it has necessitated
an employment of rhetorical techniques on social media that attempt and fail to deflect

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[51] U.S. Department of State, "State Sponsors of Terrorism." Also see their Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs'
fact sheet on Syria for more information. To sum up my rationale for the Assads' inclusion in this
dissertation, I am essentially focusing on their communication techniques, which share key characteristics
with terrorist organizations.

criticism while building a community of adherents that add to their overall social capital, which makes an examination of their (mis)use of rhetoric relevant to our discussion of otherwise non-state, Sunni and Shi'ite terrorist groups.[52]

The use of social media platforms in propelling forward grassroots movements has been well documented in contemporary academia, especially as it relates to the 2011 Arab Spring Revolutions.[53] Egypt has been a particular focus for social media scholars and has some significance for our discussion here given the country's continual political (and sometimes physical) struggle with Islamist forces like the Muslim Brotherhood (although the emphasis in these analyses has been on the aforementioned Arab Spring revolution). Also, the use of the internet by terrorist organizations has also been widely explored by various social science scholars, including Gabriel Weimann and the previously mentioned Steven Corman, et al. Having said that, the locus of these studies remains on the general practicalities of new media usage by Islamist terrorists, especially in official government documents. The humanities as of yet have had little to say about religious rhetoric in general, much less how these radicalized Islamist populations are utilizing social media in particular, which is part of the reason that I am taking pains to complete a detailed analysis here, in addition to exploring the functioning of strategic communication and propaganda in an inherently interactive media.

The Assad regime in particular has conducted a failed campaign on social media for the purpose of deflecting criticism and enhancing its public image while the Salafi

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[52] Indeed, the majority of the social media use by the Salafi Jihadist groups, as well, have been utilized to fulfill these two purposes – to enhance the public image of the organization in question and to build a community of followers (in multiple senses) loyal to their cause (which also builds their public profile), while also quickly coordinating activities between participants in disparate locations, something that I will discuss in more detail later on in this chapter.

[53] See Ali and Fahmy, Allagui and Kuebler, and Bashri, Metzley, and Greiner, among others.

jihadists like Al-Shabaab and Hamas have utilized these outlets to build relationships

with disparate new audiences with more positive results. In order to more clearly

articulate this claim, I particularly want to focus on the use of *Instagram* and *Facebook*

by the Assad regime, and the use of interactive forums, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, and

iPhone/Android applications by Salafi Jihadists in the vein of Zachary Chesser. Although

these two communities have vastly different ideologies, I am bringing them together in

this chapter because the rhetorical dimensions of their use of social media outlets bring

light larger issues of interest to academics and counterterrorist strategists alike, including

the implementation of persuasive and propaganda strategies and the formation of

relationships in online, socially interactive environments. First, we will explore the

borders between persuasion and propaganda by way of investigating the failures of the

Assads' social media feeds. We will then discuss the work of social scientist, Mark

Granovetter, who has established a baseline for how we interpret the creation and

maintaining of social networks, as well as more contemporary scholars focused on social

media and the establishment of relationships / communities.

The Social Media Accounts of the Assads: A Study in Propaganda or Persuasion?

The Assads' most frequently utilized social media outlet is the *Facebook*-owned

Instagram, which, for the uninitiated, is an iPhone application that is also viewable on the

internet, although some functions, like the ability to see who that account is following

and who they are followed by is restricted to iPhone viewers. It allows for users to post

images, mostly taken with their mobile devices, and apply various filters designed to

mimic classic (some would say hipster) methods of film development while also

captioning each image with text or a hashtag, which then places the image into a pool of

other hashtagged photographs. Users can have both private (meaning that other users have to request access to their photographs) and public accounts and can also cross post images to *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Flickr*, and other social media outlets. Other account holders can follow, like, and comment on each image in a similar manner to *Twitter*. The Assads, who use the moniker "syrianpresidency", have posted almost 300 images and have over 41,000 followers as of April 2014, making them one of the most popular accounts on *Instagram*. They are also clearly taken at various public events staged by the first family and are not candid cell phone photographs.[54] They also have an account on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube*, all of which are linked to their *Instagram* account through a periodically posted image of the icons utilized by each platform along with a caption in both English and Arabic that reminds their audience that they also can be found on those other forms of social media. In fact, if we look at their *Facebook* account, which, unlike their *Instagram* account, only uses the Arabic language, we will see many of the same images posted on their *Instagram* account posted on their timeline.[55]

Their *Facebook* page is also quite popular, having over 150,000 likes (which allows *Facebook* account holders to see updates from syrianpresidency in their news feeds) and between 15 and 200 comments on each post, including photographs, that they include on their own timeline. There is not much interaction between the account holder / managers on either *Facebook* or *Instagram* aside from one of their latest posts (as of April 2014), which asked *Instagram* users to post images and illustrations of the Syrian

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[54] The professional nature of these photographs is detectable in several areas, including the lighting, depth of field, and observation of basic photography rules, including proper framing.
[55] An interesting area for further research, even though it is slightly out of the scope of my examination here, would be to look at why the Assads' *Facebook* page is Arabic only while their *Instagram* page is bilingual, including both Arabic and English.

flag that they then compiled into a video that was crossposted on both the Assads' pages. Although the account managers (and I think it is safe to assume that both the *Instagram* and *Facebook* accounts are not managed by the Assads, themselves) have the capability to response to comments, they have yet to do so. This is especially apparent on their *Instagram* page in which they are following no one (not even the pages affiliated with the Assad militia, cyberwarfare division, or supporters), which indicates either a desire for impartiality or a reluctance in showing support for or an affiliation with other account holders.[56]

If we look in detail at the photographs posted on *Instagram*, we'll see that they are mostly of the (quite photogenic) Asma al-Assad, the elegant first lady, during her various outings completing charity work around Damascus, giving awards to deserving children, planting trees, and, in one case, wiping away a woman's tear, as she hugs her – and this is all while wearing immaculately styled Western clothing, tastefully modest jewelry, and, in some cases, a Tiffany blue FitBit (a device that tracks the user's exercise and sleep patterns, among other things). All of these images of Asma al-Assad in some way relate to the giving of comfort to women and children, fostering the burgeoning of new life, or raising the morale of her people, whether it is through the distributing of much needed goods to the Assads' supporters or the giving of awards to accomplished Syrian students. Scattered among these Asma al-Assad are photographs of President Bashar al-Assad

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[56] For example, the White House *Facebook* page, for example has "liked" several governmental initiatives like "Race to the Top", websites like Stopbullying.gov, and organizations like the U.S. Marine Corps, which allows their audience to see those organizations in their timeline (at the right side of their page), thus suggesting a tacit support of that organization. The White House *Instagram* page, on the other hand, follows four other accounts, including one just (April 2014) created by Vice President Joe Biden, as well as the accounts operated by the staff of Michelle Obama, the official White House photographer, and, oddly enough, the account operated by the Department of the Interior.

attending meetings, giving speeches, putting up tents during his military service, or consulting with the his troops, all while wearing a dark blue or black suit and somber tie. When looking at these images, it is easy to contrast those featuring Asma al-Assad and those focused on her husband, Bashar al-Assad, in that Asma al-Assad is portrayed as the nurturing, giving community leader while her husband is the military leader and policy maker who resides in the halls of governmental buildings, board rooms, and in the camps of his soldiers. What this suggests is that there is a clearly crafted message being conveyed by these images that emphasizes both the power and the compassion of a regime that has been troubled by international scrutiny and internal strife, and this has been picked up on by the popular media, who's response we will get to in a moment, as well as by the *Instagram* users that have commented on the photographs.

What is particularly interesting about the comments from the Assads' followers is that both the positive and negative comments persist along with the image itself, even though the account holders do have the capability to delete comments. Whether this indicates a lack of attention on the part of the account managers, a reluctance to seem as if they are "policing" the comments remains to be seen. There is also a possibility that the Assads' staff is either allowing their community to police itself or creating dummy accounts to post positive things so that it seems as though there is a balance between positive and negative comments. For example, in on one of the more recent photographs posted to the syrianpresidency account of Asma al-Assad embracing an elderly woman in a full hijab with the caption (transcribed as was posted on the syrianpresidency account with a quotation from Asma al-Assad): "'Syria, like our #mothers, is pained but #strong, #tired but resilient.' The First Lady, Mother's Day - 21st March 2014 "متلكم سورية

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Watch 2014 آذار 21 الأم عيد – الأسد أسماء السيدة ".صامدة بس تعبانة ..قوية بس موجوعة the full event: http://youtu.be/YfRQUP00nUQ #Firstlady #MDSyrianpresidency #Mothersday #Syrianpresidency #Syria #momday #instagood",[57] we can see both the author's (or authors') use of hashtags and links to other media (in this case, *YouTube*), as well as a not-so-veiled reference to the ongoing struggle against the rebel forces that reinforces the pathos of the image. The comments on the post are in several languages, including Arabic, Russian, and English. While the English-language comments are mixed (both negative and positive), the Assad supporters take pains to response to almost every negative comment, as we can see in the following transcript from the image in question (excluding usernames and transcribed as-is, including grammatical errors):

---: Whats with the mothers of the sons who get shooted by the syrian army forces?

---: @--- they were not killed by Syrian army forces, but the armed terrorists group the ones who did that with supporting from Arabian and some of foreign governments ,,

---: Peace for Syria. Hope all satanic salafists "rebels" will be kick out of Syria. Pray for real people of Syria. Peace

---: Bashar el asad is better than you and your family and he will stay and we love him he is our president if u dont like him go find a life stupid ans you are the dog

---: ---, ---, you going down after those comments!!! You should love your neighbors. Hang on Assad!

---: ALLAH ,SYRİA ,BASHAR.

---: Firaun!!!kill your own people,why u kill a kids!!truly firaun!! Allah will punish u!![58]

As we can see, members of the pro-Assad community have addressed all but the last comment, which was added two weeks after the initial photograph and comments were posted, suggesting that comments that are initially posted are "handled", whereas comments posted some time after the image are ignored. Nowhere in this comment thread (or any of the comment threads on the account's images) does syrianpresidency intervene – leaving the negative comments to be addressed by the account proponents— either through overt threats or through ideological opposition.

We can see the same kind of behavior on several images of President Bashar al-Assad, as well, some of which include comments such as the following (on an image of al-Assad in a monastery reading a copy of the bible with a Greek Orthodox priest): "you protect Christian; (enemies of Islam) and you destroy muslims person, where's your brain? You're hitler, i'm not afraid of you, i'm indonesian, meet me there . And you're also syiah, and syiah is not islam, syiah is a fake religion which is financed by the Jews , once again, i'm not afraid of you ." This is then balanced with another comment on the same image: "Saudi is the real terorist! Allah bless u Mr. Al Assad! (I'm not syi'ah)".[59] In this instance, there is the added valence of the Sunnis' (especially the Sunni Salafi jihadists) vehement dislike of the Alawite Assad regime – the "syiah" refered to in the first quotation— that has most likely prompted the second, pro-Assad respondent to add that he or she is "not syi'ah" and yet is still in favor of the regime— present here and in other

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[58] Retrieved from *Instagram* on 30 October 2014.
[59] Retrieved from *Instagram* on… 15 November 2014.

"conversations" on the Assads' *Instagram* feeds. These assaults on the Alawite tradition of the Assads as well as their ties to Shia Islam are of a similar nature to ad-hominem rhetorical fallacies employed by any number of internet users (and this particular attack is one of the ever-popular "you aren't a real/authentic _____" responses to online texts that populate almost any webpage with a "Comments" section) and is not distinctive from them. In fact, we can see the same kind of responses to media posted by

Having said that, there is not always a clear counterbalance between positive and negative comments, especially on the Assads' Arabic language *Facebook* account on which most comments on images are positive. Their *Instagram* feed, which is clearly bilingual, skews more to the negative and includes more English-language responses.

As mentioned before, these accounts, like al-Shabaab's *Twitter* feed, have not gone unnoticed by popular media sources or the public. In the case of the popular media, the response typical of the U.S. and international publications is that the Assads' *Instagram* is, at its core, "sickening" or "propagandatastically fantastic".[60] But rather than dismiss this as another example of a dictator using the media to enhance his or her own public image, there is an added valence to their use of *Instagram*, which is briefly picked up on in another popular media publication, *The Atlantic*, in which the author, Megan Garber claims that:

> Syria can say what it wants about itself and its activities; people, however, can
> now say things right back to it. They can scoff at the image being presented. They
> can express outrage at it. They can agree with it. The point is that they can react to
> it, publicly – and their reaction can become part of the presentation of the image

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[60] "Syrian President Bashar al-Assad joins photo-sharing internet tool Instagram" in *The Telegraph*, and *CNN.com's* "Syria's president is all smiles on is new Instagram account", respectively.

itself. . . . It's the core logic of the Internet – conversation, exchange, discourse

that runs from top to bottom and vice versa – brought to strategic messaging. It's

what happens when propaganda, one of the most closed systems there is, meets

the World Wide Web: a structure that is, by design, open. It's what happens when

propaganda comes with a comments section.[61]

So, then, this analysis begs the question: How does audience interaction with

communicative materials alter the "closed systems" that Garber claims is characteristic of

propaganda? Also, how does this add to the overall failure of the Assads' message in

persuading external audiences?

If we look at the definition proposed in Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell's

foundational work, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, we will see a definition that very

closely resembles the "closed systems" that Garber describes: "Propaganda is a form of

communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the

propagandist" (1) Although this may sound like circular reasoning, this conception of

propaganda is immediately contrasted with persuasion, which they see as "interactive",

and which "attempts to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee", suggesting

that we should add "and not the needs of the audience" to their first definition. In fact, the

authors further define propaganda as: "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape

perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that

furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (7), so that the desires and goals of the

audience are really only important in that they provide material for the propagandist to

work with in creating their text.

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[61] "Assad's Bizarre Instagram Account: Propaganda With a Comments Section".

Also, propaganda is a one or several-to-many form of communication that should "give the impression of being personal" (5), even though, as Jaques Ellul claims in "The Characteristics of Propaganda", which is another foundational text in the study of propaganda, "the individual must never be considered as being alone" (4), since "[e]motionalism, impulsiveness, excess, etc.—all these characteristics of the individual caught up in a mass are well known and very helpful to propaganda", since the manipulation of these emotions are what propaganda is built on. This is even true of propaganda that is addressed to a single audience member Ellul claims, (as in the case of proselytizers going door to door to spread their belief systems) because, "although apparently one deals here with a single individual, one deals in reality with a unit submerged into an invisible crowd composed of all those who have been interviewed, who are being interviewed, and who will be interviewed, because they hold similar ideas and live by the same myths, and especially because they are targets of the same organism" (4). And, for those of us who have been hailed by that characteristic "Ma'am/Sir, this will just take a moment of your time!" or "Ma'am/Sir, may I ask what cable/internet/plumbing/moisturizer/etc. you use?", we recognize that a "canned" speech with certain responses will follow if we stop to investigate what that person has to say. Indeed, if we deviate from the expected responses for an audience member for which the speaker has no scripted reply, we will most likely see the speaker falter, since the "conversation" is in reality not really a dialogue. Instead, it is a communicative action built on the message → receiver model, in which the receiver is expected to have a certain set of beliefs based on their age, gender, body type, class, etc. that the propagandist will manipulate. What is emphasized here is both the purpose of the text

and the intent of the author / speaker, which is what differentiates propaganda from formal and informal speeches given in front of a crowd or texts written for a mass audience. Propaganda is seen as an unscrupulous form of persuasion in which truth and truths are suborned and the aims of the speaker/writer are what matter most.[62] What is also important for our purposes here, especially given our discussions Chapters 3 and 4, is the prominence given to the use of myth and desire in propaganda, since they are the fertile ground from which this form of communication grows.

From this simple definition, it would seem that the inherent nature of social media in general and *Instagram* in particular would, in fact, defy the traditional nature of outright propaganda given the fact that it is inherently dialogic. Social media outlets should then fall more in line with what we would expect from persuasion, especially given that their further articulation of the parameters of persuasion, which they claim is "a reciprocal process in which both parties are dependent on one another" (33). In fact, Jowett and O'Donnell's explanation of their vision of the "mutually satisfying" (32) persuasion is quite similar to Corman and Dooley's "rugged landscape", in that it, too, emphasizes the need for persuasion to filter into and negotiate within the persuadees' existing system of ideologies.[63] Indeed, without the give and take between participants in which systems of beliefs are integral parts of the communication process (communities are built around them, friends are connected by them, etc.), there is no "social" in this form of media.

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[62] See Bennett and O'Rourke's "A Prolegomenon to the Future Study of Rhetoric and Propaganda" for more detail on this.

[63] As Jowett and O'Donnell claim: "What happens is that the recipient of the persuasive interaction relates to, or contrasts the message with, his or her existing repertoire of information, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences" (32).

So, then, if return to the Assads' *Instagram* and *Facebook* feeds, we have to question whether or not they actually fit within that system of persuasion, since these media are interactive and, like the previously mentioned *Atlantic* article claims, allow for the comments, including negative feedback to "become part of the presentation of the image [or text] itself". If we look closely at syrianpresidency, however, we will see that it is, only minimally interactive and is, as noted earlier, a carefully crafted collection of images presenting a view of the orderly and nurturing world the Assad family inhabitants that is at odds with other accounts coming from Syria, in which violence and chaos reign supreme, especially since ISIS has carved out large sections of the country. This latter element of the account falls much more in line with both the traditional view of propaganda that highlights the manipulative quality of this mode of communication (something that is definitely evident in syrianpresidency's use of pathos, in addition to their crafted image), as well Jowett and O'Donnell's claim that propaganda is "deliberate" (17), "systematic", and is designed to "achieve a purpose that is advantageous to the propagandist" rather than being a "free and open exchange of ideas". And, aside from one image that calls for audience members to send them drawings or pictures of the Syrian Flag ("Join Karim Bashar al-Assad and send us your #favorite picture or photo of the #Syrian #Flag. We will be posting your #best contributions on this page from 15 April. Send your contributions to [email address omitted] Happy Snapping#!"), the account is minimally interactive / responsive to its audience, at least openly so.

What this suggests is that syrianpresidency and accounts like it are hybrids of traditional persuasive and propaganda techniques, partially because their purpose (to

present a positive view of the Assad regime and to gain new followers) is at odds with the technology they are utilizing. What I mean by this, is that *Instagram* and *Facebook* are designed to facilitate the interaction between individuals and groups – we can see this in written into the structure of both platforms and in the various ways in which we form connections and networks of family, friends, and acquaintances, both professional and personal. These are peer to peer networks, not one to many, as was the case for most written forms of mass communication before the advent of the internet, and are thus not suited to more traditional methods of propaganda in which a message is given and received without the exchange of ideas typical of a debate. Thus, we have syrianpresidency attempting to utilize *Instagram* to gain a sympathetic audience through the use of an obviously crafted (false) message and failing, because the platform they are using allows, in fact does not function without, interaction between users. And they are failing in a way that actually gives their opposition an outlet with a large audience on their own media apparatus. What is interesting, as well, is that the Assads' misappropriation of social media for propagandistic purposes actually highlights what our other population in focus, the Salafi jihadists, are doing correctly, therefore gaining an audience for themselves with an astounding rapidity.

Granovetter's Strong and Weak Ties in Online Communities of Salafi Jihadists

This discussion of the connective properties of social networking sites then also brings us to Granovetter's theories of social interactivity, which brings an added valence to the functioning of these communities and the success of the Salafi jihadists, like those groups Zachary Chesser adhered to. Before specifically addressing how these communities work for Salafi jihadists, however, I will briefly outline Granovetter's 1973

article, "The Strength of Weak Ties", so that we can get better idea of how his work can be applied to our texts. In his widely cited article, Mark Granovetter, an American sociologist currently teaching at Stanford University, posits that "the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (1361) and then goes on to claim that "most of us can agree, on a rough intuitive basis, whether a given tie is strong, weak, or absent", all of which suggests that our relationships with others are pretty easily calculable by the amount of "face-time" that we spend with each other as well as the emotional commitment and the overall "intuitive" sense that tells us whether or not that person is a close friend / family member (he doesn't distinguish between the two categories), something that is dramatically changed in the situation of the jihadists utilizing social media platforms, since intuition is a difficult and ephemeral sense that often relies on senses only available to us for face-to-face contacts. Indeed, this is proven out by the fact that researchers like William McCants, who works out of the Center for Naval Analysis, can both post in and observe jihadist forums without detection. And, although I have not posted in these groups myself or contacted any of these Salafi groups, I have been able to monitor them without detection, despite being shown as a "follower" on some of the ISIS *Twitter* feeds. And, as McCants claims, "Al-Qaeda forum users are usually anonymous. The links between them are unknown . . . they are already members of the radical choir singing to one another", which suggests that there is an expectation on the part of the typical user that the denizens of these communities will both belong to a certain ideology and will share a set of homogenous beliefs that are typical in strongly-tied relationships, something that is proven out by the

comments on these feeds and the interaction between users. The other option, of course, is that the visitor to these sites will act as a hostile audience, given that interest followed by searching for social media feeds followed by interacting with those feeds can attract audience members that strongly disagree with those feeds, as well. We can see this in the "Think Again" campaign carried out by the State Department that was mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation. Interactions with that feed were both strongly negative and strongly positive, but definitely not apathetic or indifferent.

Before we discuss that last point further, however, let's return to the formation of strong ties in order to more thoroughly understand how these ties are transformed in online communities, since the complexities of these ties inform how we might understand and then counteract the spread of ideologies through these communities. Strong ties are further defined by the ideological and personality similarities between individuals (1362), which is, in particular, what complicates the relationship structures in these jihadi forums. These ties are strengthened by the amount of time that the strongly tied people spend together, whereas weak ties are more likely to involve heterogeneous thoughts and beliefs. Weak ties act as bridges between close knit networks of strongly tied individuals so that "individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends" ("A Network Theory Revisited" 202). This classification of connected individuals into strong and weak ties has implications not only on the interpersonal level, but also on the organizational level, which is what Granovetter is primarily concerned with. As he claims (again in "A Network Theory Revisited"): "The macroscopic side of this communications argument is that social systems lacking in weak ties will be

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fragmented and incoherent. New ideas will spread slowly, scientific endeavors will be handicapped, and subgroups separated by race, ethnicity, geography, or other characteristics will have difficulty in reaching a *modus vivendi*" (203), hence the title of his work, "The Strength of Weak Ties", since these interpersonal relationships between networks of strong ties are responsible for the movement of new information and the spread of ideas.

This last part, of course, is complicated in virtual communities like *World of Warcraft* in which differences between individuals of different colors, creeds, and genders are flattened by the taking on of different personas and avatars that do not always align with the particular characteristics of the player in question, but what is also what is also important to the argument that I am making here is this notion that weak ties are the means by which information and ideas spread between dense networks of like-minded people. We can see an example of this "bridging" quality of weak ties in academia all the time, especially at large conferences where we go hear various speakers outline theories and works from scholars outside of our narrow specialties that we may not be familiar with. Similarly, we go to these conferences in order to network with others outside of our departments – we exchange business cards, we promise to e-mail or call if we find something of interest to that other person, etc. We often do not spend much time with these other academics, since they may live in other regions of the U.S. or other countries or work in other departments, but we can and do call on them in order to get or spread information.

Because we tend to have specialized degrees and expertise, these kinds of contacts are necessary for our advancement into various positions with other universities

as well as in the furthering of our own knowledge. It is through these weak ties that we can also learn about new research being done in and outside of our fields, which demonstrates the power of weak rather than strong ties, since the people we tend to spend the most time with in our department have access to the same resources that we do. And this is not limited to work-related information. Weak ties are also responsible for the dissemination of cultural knowledge – slang terms, dirty jokes, etc. – that homogenous groups might not have access to ("Network Theory" 215), so that both cultural and professional resources are disseminated through these "bridges" between communities.

Social media scholars have been adapting Granovetter's work since the late 1990s. In an early (1997) article by Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, the authors argue that "The lack of status or situational cues . . . encourage contact between weak ties. Often the only thing known about others is their email address which may provide minimal or misleading information." (8). What this suggests that the authors not only take for granted that Granovetter's strong and weak ties can be transposed from face to face communities / relationships to online communities, but also that the flattening (obscuring differences in race, gender, etc.) nature of discourse / relationships on the internet encourages the flourishing of relationships in the virtual communities in question, which are, they say, likely to form among the lines of mutual interests. Having said that, the mutual support that Granovetter mentions in his discussion of the formation of strong ties is present in these communities as well, since they are organized around lines of similar interests / ideologies so that participants with a heavy investment in the group are more likely to give support to other heavy users with which they have strong ties (9). Nor do the similarities between strong real life ties and strong online ties stop

there. Participation in virtual communities in which there are strong ties or participation

in a one-on-one strong-tie relationship, they argue, is easier than it would be in real life.

However, the authors do note after that excerpt that "much contact is between people

who see each other in person and live locally", which mitigates any kind of claim that

they might make about the power of online communities in forging strong and weak ties,

since the real-life / virtual-life distinction is blurred.[64]

Wellman and Gulia are not the only researchers investigating relationships that

we form in online communities, although many other scholars like Danah Boyd, Judith

Donath, and Nicole Ellison confine their discussion to websites explicitly dedicated to

social networking (and with good reason, given the variety of virtual communities

available) like *Facebook* and the mostly extinct *MySpace* and *Friendster*. A reoccurring

theme in this literature is that inhabitants of these social networking sites use them to

reinforce offline ties, as is the case in many *Facebook* pages used for local recreational

team sports. For example, in Ellison's piece, the authors claim in their study of a

Facebook group that "Facebook users from this particular community are primarily using

Facebook to increase their awareness of those in their offline community, which is

contrary to the popular view of how inline social networking sites are used" ("A

Facebook in the Crowd: Social Searching vs. Social Browsing" 3). Boyd and Ellison

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[64] "Strong ties that are on-line have many characteristics that are similar to strong off-line ties. They encourage *frequent, companionable* contact and are *voluntary* except in work situations, One of two keystrokes are all that is necessary to begin replying, facilitating *reciprocal, mutual support* of tie partners' needs. Moreover, the placelessness of email contact aids [a] *long-term* contract, without the loss of the tie that so often accompanies geographical mobility." (10, authors' italics) This claim is actually proven out in one of the groups that I helped create on Facebook to help facilitate the local recreational hockey community in the Phoenix metro area. I have met most of the 60 odd members of my Goalie Network Forum (modeled on the Research Network Forum, which operates at both CCCC and RSA) in person and consider some of them to be strong ties, but these mostly-weakly tied individuals are members of this group in order to gain information about local hockey games that may need a goalie, since they are often scarce and are difficult to play without.

likewise claim that "most sites support the maintenance of preexisting social networks" ("Social Networking Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship" 1), although they do acknowledge that other sites "help strangers connect based on shared interests". Boyd specifically addresses strong and weak ties in her article, "Signals in Social Supernets" in saying that social networking sites "make establishing and sustaining large numbers of such [weak] ties more efficient" (7) in much the same manner that Wellman and Gulia assert that virtual communities of all types aid in the formation of acquaintances and gathering of other weakly tied contacts.

What is interesting about their study and is applicable to my discussion here is their argument that websites and other kinds of online organizations fulfill the needs of the audience that their real-world lives have somehow not adequately met.[65] I would also claim that instead of merely reinforcing real-world ties and facilitating the collection of weak ties, these online communities being formed on *Facebook*, *Youtube*, and various forums by jihadists function as a cohort of like-minded adherents to a certain ideology, so that they essentially become a collection of (at first and perhaps only) anonymous strongly / weakly tied individuals. This, then, has consequences for how scholars view the functioning of online relationships, but also how counterterrorism experts work to foil the proliferation of these ideologies and the acts being carried out by those moved to violence.

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[65] There is also an interesting connection to the claims being made by foundational scholars like Qtub, al-Banna, and Mawdudi (whose work I have already outlined in the second chapter), since they argue that the West and secular governments in general do not address the spiritual needs of their constituents, which is why their caliphate system should be implemented.

The blurring of the strong / weak ties is reflected in the acceleration effect that the

FBI and Senate Committee on Homeland Security noted in the previously mentioned

profile of Zachary Chesser. Previously, terrorist organizations would require a lengthy

vetting process in order to bring a new member into the fold, so to speak. Salafi jihadist

groups like al-Qaeda would previously have needed months, or even years to fully

integrate a new member into a terrorist cell, something that is explicitly mentioned in

their *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* as being overturned in the Web 2.0 era and which we will

talk more about in the next chapter. Even as of a few years ago, according to *Zachary*

Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and its Meaning for the Threat

of Homegrown Terrorism (hereafter referred to as *Chesser*) and mentioned at the start of

this chapter, "Previously, extremist web sites (sic) were primarily restricted from the

general public. As a result, a potential recruit had to search out and befriend members of

radical forums in order to be accepted and subsequently gain access to the functionality

of the sites" (2). In-person radicalization, training, and planning could take several years,

as in the case of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which required more than two years just in the

planning phase and would have required several more years in the recruitment and

training of the terrorists in question.[66] This is echoed by several other reports and

congressional hearings, including the 2010 *Internet Terror Recruitment and Tradecraft:*

How can we Address an Evolving Tool While Protecting Free Speech, in which Texas

Representative Michael McCaul notes that "[t]errorists once had to travel to terror

[training] camps in Pakistan to receive indoctrination and training. Now aspiring

terrorists only need to open their laptop and connect to the internet" (3).

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[66] *Chesser,* 3.

Indeed, since the advent of social media apparatuses, there has been a marked shift in the vetting process so that potential recruits and ideological adherents are much more quickly added into the existing online communities of extremists. As the authors of the *Chesser* report claim, "the interactive online experience can accelerate the radicalization and mobilization process" (3). They then go on to quote the 2010 testimony of Garry Reid, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, who stated in a congressional hearing that "[w]hat was once a lengthy process of establishing contact, exchanging ideas, arranging meetings, providing training, and developing attack plans can now be condensed into a much short timeline, across international boundaries, and beyond the reach of any single law enforcement agency or military task force" (3), so that the lengthy and complex implementation of an attack like that of the 9/11 is rendered obsolete, especially in light of the transnational nature of this new kind of terrorism. No longer do we have this reliance on strongly tied face-to-face contacts or even strongly tied online contacts reinforced by face to face meetings. Instead, we have the establishment of (sometimes solely) online communities of adherents that seemingly violate the principles set out by Granovetter and transposed to online communities by scholars like Donath, Wellman, and Gulia, as well as transforming traditional methods of propaganda, thus forcing scholars and counterterrorist strategists to reconceptualize the ways in which computer mediated discourses / networks function for extremist groups to account for both the acceleration effect that these hybrid social ties have on the radicalization of individuals as well as the increasingly rapid movement of intelligence between individuals and groups that would seem to only have access to the same pool of information.

CHAPTER 6: AL QAEDA'S INSPIRE MAGAZINE AND LONE MUJAHID
POCKETBOOK: A STUDY IN THE EMOTION-LADEN RECRUITMENT OF
(DIGITAL) WESTERN AUDIENCES AND THE SPREAD OF MICROTERRORISM

R u dreamin' of wagin' jihadi attacks against kuffar? Have u been lookin' 4 a way to join
the mujahideen in frontlines but you haven't found any? Well, there's no need to travel
abroad, coz the frontline has come to you. Wanna know how? Just read 'n' apply the
contents of this guide, which has practical 'n' creative ways to please Allah by killing his
enemies 'n' healing the believers' chests.
-*Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*

Introduction

Al Qaeda's *Inspire Magazine* was first published in the summer of 2010 on

several jihadist forums, after which it spread, much like any extremist ideology, to

countless other websites, social media networks, and counterterrorism discussion groups.

There have been twelve issues of this English-language online-only publication, which

has persisted despite the deaths of both its creator, Anwar al-Awlaki, and its primary

technician, Samir Khan in 2011.[67] The last issue, published in the spring of 2014 was

directly preceded by the *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*, from which this chapter's epigraph is

taken. The *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* is comprised of a compilation of attack strategies

from the first ten issues of *Inspire* that both empower the radicalized individual to act and

eliminate the need for that person to undertake an often dangerous and expensive journey

to training camps in the Middle East through the calculated usage of pathos, especially

those emotional appeals focused on guilt, anger and sadness.

Before we get to one of the central arguments of this chapter, however, I will

briefly outline the history and contents of *Inspire* so that we may better understand the

strategic value of the publication in the radicalizing of new individuals as well as the

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[67] Yahya Ibraham claimed responsibility for the magazine's editing after Awlaki and Khan's deaths.

functioning of emotion within the publication. I will then outline the move from large-scale terrorist attacks that were previously the hallmark of al-Qaeda to "microterrorism", or small-scale attacks capable of being undertaken by individuals. After this, we will discuss the specifics of emotion theory that will shed light on the functioning of affect in moving the audience of *Inspire* to action.

Public Reactions to Inspire

There has, first of all, been some suggestion that this magazine is a hoax either published by an Islamist organization not affiliated with AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) or created by the CIA. Although it is impossible to know for sure who exactly authored *Inspire,* the details in the text have been corroborated with other speeches, videos, interviews, etc. previously published by al-Qaeda and have been found to be a match. Similarly, the instructions for the creation of chemical weapons, pipe bombs, and other devices designed to promote violence suggest that this is *not* a creation of the CIA or another intelligence agency, since they would most likely balk at giving such information to the public. Having said that, American audiences, at least the American audiences and media that have become aware of this magazine, were skeptical of *Inspire* until it became clear that the Boston Marathon bombers were, in fact, inspired by the magazine. After that news was released, the tone of the news articles being published about the magazine changed and *Inspire* became "Al-Qaeda's scariest and most unpredictable weapon"[68] instead of jokingly naming it "the *Southern Living* for

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[68] "*Inspire* Magazine: The Most Dangerous Download on Earth" published in *GQ* and written by James Bamford, December 2013.

aspirational terrorist death-cultists".[69] In fact, the same publication (*Huffington Post*) that

made light of *Inspire* along with Stephen Colbert in 2011, outlined the dangers posed by

Inspire and its effects on radicalized Islamists living in the U.S. in 2014.[70] *CBS News*

even mistakenly claimed that that *Inspire* was a "new magazine in English" in a video

posted to the CBS website in March of 2014, although the magazine has been in

existence since 2010, reinforcing the fact that the publication was only to be taken

seriously by the media after the bombings took place.[71] Despite the American public's

initial skepticism, the resurgence in prominence of this publication after a single (albeit

effective) attack from two individuals claimed to be motivated by the magazine suggests

that that it is, in fact, effective in moving western Islamists to action, as well as providing

them with the tools to carry out violent attacks.

A Well Designed Call to Action on the Behalf of Jihad

Indeed, if we look at the magazine, itself, we can see that it *seems* like a

legitimate text, not like a creation of the archetypal "guy in his mother's basement" that

we blame for most amateurish web / text design. *Inspire* Magazine's twelve issues feature

pages of image-laden, heavily edited text with colloquial (not always correctly colloquial)

English[72] carefully placed among backgrounds featuring digitally-rendered illustrations

of desks, pencils, handguns, computer desktops, and other elements that are a

commonality in their young, Western audiences' home. These illustrations have even

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[69]"Al-Qaeda Magazine Awash in 9/11 Nostalgia, 'Sour Grapes'" published in *Huffington Post* by Jason Linkins on 28 November 2011.

[70] "Al-Qaeda Magazine Calls for Car Bombs in the U.S.", posted on 20 March 2014.

[71] "Al-Qaeda Launching new Terror Magazine in English".

[72] After the deaths of Anwar Awlaki and Samir Khan, who are thought to be responsible for the majority of the editing and composition of *Inspire*, the English-language use of the magazine becomes much more erratic and full of errors.

included a soda stain on a background image of a table in one issue and a screenshot of the authors' own computer screen that includes an English-language menu and the familiar Apple icon, perhaps in an attempt to bridge the gap between themselves and their targeted Western audience. In fact, it is clear from their first issue, in which the editor (who was at this point Anwar Awlaki) claims that "[i]t is our intent for this magazine to be a platform to present the important issues facing the *ummah* today to the wide and dispersed English speaking Muslim readership" (2) as well as from their choice of the English language, the various appeals that they use specifically targeting Muslims living on "hostile" soil, and design elements like the ones mentioned previously, that al-Qaeda is specifically addressing a Western (and perhaps westernized) audience.

Each issue of *Inspire* focuses on a different theme, such as the life and death of Osama bin Laden and the September 11 attacks ("The Greatest Special Operation of all Time"), although there are many commonalities between the twelve texts. Each issue, for example, includes a detailed explanation of an attack strategy that is capable of being undertaken by an individual, a section on responses from the international community that heighten the ethos of al-Qaeda, and a collection of short biographies of martyrs. There is also a "Letter from the Editor" section that provides valuable insight into the thought processes of the al-Qaeda leaders. What is particularly unique to this publication and also ties into the exploration of social media apparatuses in use by extremists in the previous chapter is the interactive nature of this publication. For example, in the very first issue, the editor specifically calls for input from their readership: "We . . . call upon and encourage our readers to contribute by sending their articles, comments or suggestions to us" (2). This is echoed on the last page of each issue, which includes the following call to

action: "If you are interested in contributing to this magazine with any skills – be it writing, editing, designing, or advice – you can contact us at any of the email addresses below. We strongly encourage you to use the Asrar al-Mujahideen [encryption] program to get in touch with us" (65). This same message appears on the back of every issue except for the twelfth[73] (the last issue published at the start of this year) with slight variations, including one in particular (in the second issue) in which the warning, "[p]lease take special precautions when using the [encryption] program in order to avoid detection from the intelligence services" (72). After this statement, the editors include several email addresses from different hosts (Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc.) along with the encryption key in question.[74] Even the *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*, which is mostly focused on reiterations of the various chemical weapons, shooting, and bomb-making instructions featured in the first ten issues of *Inspire*, includes seven pages of secure communication tactics and, in addition to the usual call for submissions, editing skills, etc., includes a question and answer section from previous audience feedback. There is a small red box on a white page (as distinguished from many of the other sections of the *Pocketbook* that are dark or filled with various brightly-colored graphics) with a small column of text that features advice for ways that doctors in particular can aid in jihad that says, "You can send your question to AQ via the emails provided in the Contact Page below. It is your right to ask, our duty to answer" (54). What is particularly interesting

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[73] This issue is exceptional in several ways, the lack of the "how to communicate with us" section being one of them. It was also much more difficult to find than the previous eleven issues and is about half the length of the previous texts, as well. Whether this suggests that there is a break in the ranks of al-Qaeda or that the drone strikes and other counterterrorism measures are actually having an effect remains to be seen.

[74] In an interesting aside, I have shown these magazines to my students several times when we address the uses of particular design elements and emotional appeals in extremist texts and have had to warn them not to email the addresses listed, even if it just to "troll" al-Qaeda.

here are the words "right" and "duty" in reference to the asking of questions, since much is made in both *Inspire* and *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* of the violation of religious rights by Western governments as well as of the duty of Muslims in the West to carry on the burden of jihad. What this suggests is that there is a reciprocal relationship between the audience of these publications and AQAP. In this case, it is AQAP that has the "duty" and their audience that has the "right" to ask for a response. Thus, this is, in some senses, the return on investment for the AQAP audience that had previously responded to the call to action that has been the focus of *Inspire* and *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook.*

This interactivity is a striking change from their previously "closed" systems of terrorism that were restricted to a select few strongly-tied individuals and is an echo of the various uses of social media apparatuses explored in the previous chapter by Salafi Jihadists in general. Having said that, I think that we can presume that the email addresses used are only functional for a short period of time and are monitored by intelligence agencies in the U.S. and abroad, which limits their functionality as well as the input that *Inspire* editors can expect from their readers. What this suggests is that, in some senses, it is the *seeming* of openness to new recruits / new contributors that matters in appealing to new audiences, not the actual implementation of those contributions from outside sources. In the seemingness of adaptability, AQAP builds credibility with their audiences, especially audiences that feel disenfranchised by the authority figures in their own lives. Similarly, in a young population that is familiar with virtual organizations built on crowdsourcing and the hive mind (such as software and game developers, who often rely on beta testers and feedback from their subscribers or *Facebook* users, for that matter, who look to their friends for problem solving suggestions), this public appearance

of being an open system carries weight – it associates AQAP with other communities that their target audience is already embedded within.

Also, there is a marked shift overall strategy in *Inspire*, by which I mean that AQAP is moving away from large-scale, complex attacks to what has been termed, "microterrorism," i.e. small-scale assaults carried out by individuals or small groups of radicalized followers in what they would term "hostile territory", as in the case of the Boston bombings or the foiled Times Square attacks. In fact, law enforcement agencies claim that the brothers responsible for the Boston Marathon bombings garnered instructions for building their weapons from *Inspire*, according to the testimony of the surviving terrorist. What is also significant, and something that I will address more in detail later on, is that instead of the claims based on reasoning and logic (albeit faulty logic) as we saw in the foundational clerics in Chapter 2 (although these clerics do make appearances in *Inspire*), they rely on a host of emotional appeals especially aimed at moderate Muslims and even more particularly at Muslims living in the West rather than focusing on the immediately present audience in the Arabian Peninsula that they can physically affect.

Microterrorism and "Open Source Jihad"

First of all, however, let us return to this move away from large-scale attacks to smaller and more difficult to track individualized terrorism. This shift in tactics has been explored by popular media outlets in very general terms and by members of the IC and counterterrorism scholars working with the IC. Microterrorism (alternately called micro-terrorism) has been recognized as a pressing danger, especially in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings in April, 2013. However, the texts stemming from governmental

agencies exploring microterrorism have yielded contradictory results. There are even several reports, such as *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat* that have both dismissed microterrorism as being perpetuated by "a tiny minority…exhibiting a number of conventional shortcomings" (1) and also highlighted the difficulty of tracking and preventing these attacks, all in the span of two paragraphs. Matthew G. Olsen, the 2013 director of the NCTC likewise claims that lone violent extremists "lack advanced operational training" that requires that they "seek assistance from like-minded extremists or pursue travel to overseas jihadist battlegrounds to receive hands-on experience" (*The Homeland Threat Landscape and U.S. Response* 6), the latter claim of which is incorrect given the availability of detailed tactics for individual violence available through the internet. His claim also suggests that terrorist operatives acting outside of a cell are ill-prepared and ill-suited to individualized action, since they must seek aid through what is likely a dangerous trip to overseas camps or risk being seen with other extremists inside their own communities, something that AQAP actually cautions against in *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*. At the same time, Olsen argues that microterrorists "pose the most serious HVE [Homegrown Violent Extremist] threat" (6) despite the fact that microterrorists constitute only a small minority of "unsophisticated" and "uncoordinated" actors in the larger terrorist landscape. These contradictory claim suggest that more detailed research needs to be carried out in the examination of microterrorism tactics, especially given the potential complexity of tracking and preventing these lone-wolf attacks as well as the success that ISIS has had in attracting Western audiences to join their movement.

To that end, let us look closely at the various ways in which AQAP suggests that the readers of *Inspire* and *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* undertake individualized terrorist operations. In addition to the feature included in every issue of *Inspire* and compiled in the *Pocketbook*, the first issue of *Inspire* actually includes Part One of an article called "What to Expect in Jihad" written by Mukhtar Hassan.[75] In it, he outlines two key elements for carrying out a successful mission, one of which is concerned with tactics to stave off depression and culture shock, and the other of which is focused on a list of things to bring on the journey. In the introductory paragraph to his article, Hassan states that he writes this particular article because of the following:

> Knowing what to expect in jihad is vital in order to avoid confusion, shock, and
> even depression. The psychological state of mind one is required to have in jihad
> is far removed from what we see in jihadi videos. In simple language, it's not
> about he shooting and ambushing of the enemy; rather it is much greater than this.
> Here we will be covering numerous points throughout this series [of articles]. The
> *transition in mindset* is what one needs to focus on when reading these points.
> (45)[76]

What is particularly interesting in this passage, aside from the fact that AQAP claims to be concerned with the mental wellbeing of their potential recruits, is the "transition in mindset" referred to by Hassan. What that suggests is that there is a particular way of

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[75] Some authors in *Inspire* have retained the usage of their real names, but some have been altered for anonymity's sake. It is never made clear which authors go by pseudonyms and which are real, aside from a few well-known figures like Anwar Awlaki.

[76] I'm basing the page numbers here on the PDF document pagination, which was originally set by the magazine creators. However, depending on where one finds their copies of *Inspire*, the pagination may differ slightly.

seeing and thinking and feeling required of potential mujahid, and that they view the path

to jihad as more than just "the shooting and ambushing of the enemy".

This is further articulating in the next section, which appears as a handwritten

page from a diary or notebook made to look as if it is resting on a partially concealed map

casually thrown on a wooden desk. There is also what looks like a Post-it with a scrawled

note that proclaims, "Not tackling the language makes you feel like a ghost", holding

down an image of a man sitting in the shadowed corner of a room with his head bowed.

The passage, which is entitled, "Language Barrier", states that:

> When coming to any land of jihad, it is important to be able to speak the local
>
> language fluently. . . . At first, it doesn't bother one for some time as long as they
>
> know some basic expressions and words to get around. However, after weeks pass
>
> and as time goes on, it starts to have an effect on the heart. . . . One would begin
>
> to miss their homeland, the comforts, the easiness in life and so on. In other
>
> words, the whispers of shaytan will hit very hard even though you might be a very
>
> strong individual. (45)

This quotation makes clear the motivation for addressing the issue of mental health in the

mujahid as a method of preventing the potential terrorist from straying from the path.

Additionally, AQAP is addressing an inherent ethos problem that most terrorist

organizations have – i.e. the appearance of not caring about their followers, since they are

essentially asking their recruits to risk or forfeit their lives for their cause. Thus, this

appearance of caring solves the risk of losing potential terrorists to homesickness and

depression and also adds to their credibility with their audience with their display of good

will. Also, the initial display of compassion is followed by the advice to bring a friend

with to jihad so that "[you can] express yourself properly" (46) and avoid isolation and loneliness. The friend should, Hassan claims, "be a friend that understands you, and whom you trust. . . . to have a companion is essential in staying steadfast and remaining patient". This further display of caring, however, is balanced out with the admonishment that "it you are unable to bring a companion, that doesn't excuse you from performing jihad". Aside from the use of emotions, both compassionate and cajoling, this article is focused on individual or small-group enterprises. These tactics are appropriate for small-scale operations, but not for large group attacks, given that it is aimed at the lone actor and is further evidence of AQAP's emphasis on microterrorism.

This focus on microterrorism is highlighted even more by the additional contents of the magazine, which include an except from Abu Mus Ab al-Suri's book, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* that is focused on the failures of traditional jihadist attacks featuring multi-person cells and large-scale attacks, and the detailed article on encrypted communications that was adapted for use in the *Pocketbook*. Furthermore, the article outlining the procedures for making a pipe bomb (followed by the Boston Marathon bombers) called "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom" by an author with the clever moniker, the "AQ Chef", claims that:

> [E]very Muslim is required to defend his religion and nation. . . . There are many Muslims who have the zeal to defend the *ummah* but their vision is unclear. They believe that in order to defend the *ummah* they need to travel and join the *mujahidin* elsewhere and they must train in their camps. **But we tell the Muslims in America and Europe:** There is a better choice and easier one to give support to your ummah. This is individual work inside the West . . . My Muslim brother:

we are conveying to you our military training right into your kitchen to relieve you of the difficulty of traveling to us. If you are sincere in your intentions to serve the religion of Allah, then all what you have to do is enter your kitchen and make an explosive device that would damage the enemy if you put your trust in Allah and then use this explosive device properly. (33 author's emphasis and italics)

The empowerment of the individual in this passage in many ways echoes what I tell my composition students when they are drafting their proposal arguments at the end of the semester, which is that in order to move an audience to action, they must provide a manageable task or series of tasks for them to accomplish. And, what we see so often in effective proposal arguments stemming from the public sphere, we also see here. Namely, we have a plan of attack that is accomplishable by the individual using easy-to-locate items that he or she can assemble in their own homes.

Cyberwarfare verses Cyberrecruitment

What is also interesting here is that there is no mention of cyberwarfare in any of the plans of attack presented in this issue of *Inspire*, and such things are minimally present in the eleven subsequent issues, as well as in *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*. Their discussion of tactics dealing with the internet are mostly confined to the communication with other jihadists, especially AQAP. And, although there is a section of the magazine reminiscent of an entry in a dictionary that reappears in other issues of *Inspire*, called "Open Source Jihad", the focus is not on the manipulation of cyber systems, even though the moniker "open source", is most likely a reference to open source code. Instead, the text of "Open Source Jihad" is "[a] resource manual for those who loathe tyrants;

includes bomb making techniques, security measures, guerilla tactics, weapons training and all other jihad related activities" (32). Similarly, "[i]t allows Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad", suggesting that, once again, NCTC Director Olsen was mistaken in his claim that microterrorists would need to "seek assistance from like-minded extremists or pursue travel to overseas jihadist battlegrounds to receive hands-on experience" as he stated in his examination of homegrown terrorists. The reason why I mention this here harkens back to the introduction of this dissertation and the first chapter in which I mentioned that the federal government has solely focused on combating cyberwarfare and hacking to its detriment, especially given the importance of combating terrorism on an ideological level. This, in fact, is partially proven true by the contents of this magazine, which stands as the most detailed set of tactics ever published by an extremist organization and includes a very minimal emphasis on hacking and the compromising of secure systems. That is not, of course, to say that there are no terrorist organizations dedicated to cyberwarfare – the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA) is, in fact, one of these extremist groups that frequently infiltrates and subverts cyber networks. However, the emphasis in this series of publications as well as the instances of recruitment / calls to action in the other case studies that I have presented throughout this text indicate that the more much more attention should be paid to the proliferation of extremist ideologies on the internet and not just the waging of cyberwarfare, which is a much more straightforward problem.

An Emotional Call to Action

This, then, brings us to the last part of this chapter, but also to the discussion of emotion initiated in the introduction of this dissertation. As stated in that introductory

chapter, emotion and its functioning as a motivating factor for (especially sympathetic) audiences has been undervalued in academics. As noted throughout this chapter, however, pathos plays a large part in the overall rhetorical strategy of both *Inspire* and *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*. And, if we look back to Sauer and Ropo's article, "Leadership and the Driving Force of Shame", we can see that scholars in the communication and management field claim that "shame can be constructed [by leaders] as a liberating and empowering emotion" (60), something that is definitely present in the quotations mentioned throughout this chapter.

Another article that emphasizes the power of pathos published in 2009, "Political rage: terrorism and the politics of emotion", written by two political science scholars (David Wright-Neville and Debra Smith) likewise notes that there has been little scholarship in the study of terrorism and emotion despite the recent resurgence in the study of affect and politics. In fact, much of the literature that Wright-Neville and Smith utilize is from other fields, including philosophy, psychology, and sociology. As the authors note, "[T]here has been a tendency [in studies of terrorism] to focus on delegitimising the actions of terrorists and favouring the objectives and perspectives of state security over any systematic examination of the subjective journeys of those who engage in sub-state terrorist practices" (88), suggesting precisely what I have argued over the text of this dissertation in that literature produced by counterterrorism strategists have focused on action rather than ideology – whether the ideology circulated within radicalized groups or the ideological warfare necessary to win the war of ideas against Islamist terrorists.

What is also interesting, especially considering that the literature that *does* mention emotion is often dismissive of pathos, is the authors' claim that:

> Reasons for this [lack of systematized examination of emotion] may include real difficulties surrounding both methodology and the obvious dangers in accessing and interviewing subjects. However, it may also be interpreted as a side-effect of long-running debates surrounding pathology or normality within terrorists' psychology. That is to say, in the largely successful attempt to establish that terrorists are driven by rational political beliefs rather than psychopathological tendencies, emotions may have been inadvertently relegated to the category of the "irrational". (88)

This is, indeed, the case for many works that discuss emotion, even when texts focus the radicalizing power of emotion rather than solely on its psychological origins /impact on potential terrorists, something that is still of much debate in counterterrorism studies. In fact, one of the only texts that I was able to find on radicalization and emotion (John Reich's *Radical Distortion: How Emotions Warp What We Hear*), after summarizing several texts from radicalized individuals and groups, claims: "In spite of all the examples of hateful talk that I gave in chapter 1, we humans nevertheless have the capacity to be cool, rational, thinking, and calculating organisms" (49). The author then goes on to elaborate by saying, "We are not always dominated by our passions, and we would not do as good a job of getting along in life if we do as if we were always so emotional about things" (48), thus reinforcing the rational mind / emotional self split that Sarah Tracy talks about so often in her research on emotion in the workplace and what Wright-Neville and Smith likewise explore when they note:

The tendency to ignore the role of emotion in the public sphere has a long history. The Enlightenment's favouring of science and reason over emotion has left us with an understanding of emotion as something that needs to be conquered or subsumed by reason. Underpinning most Enlightenment theories of emotion and human behaviour has been a conviction that emotion is problematic, something that distorts or interferes with reason. (89)[77]

Despite these shortcomings in the academic and popular exploration of emotion, especially in rhetoric, Wright-Neville and Smith's look at emotional appeals in what they call "neojihadist" literature is very useful for our discussion in that it highlights the power of emotion as a motivating factor in getting audiences to act, something that is often present in proposal arguments in mainstream culture as well as in the populations we are discussing here. In fact, the use of pathos in overcoming the initial conservatism of audiences is well documented in introductory composition textbooks like *Everything's An Argument* (Lunsford, et al.) and *Writing Arguments* (Ramage, et al.) and is present in the advertising efforts of many advocacy groups.[78]

Part of the motivating factor for jihadists, Wright-Neville and Smith claim, is the long history of colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa, resulting in feelings of resentment and anger towards "the West". As the authors note, "Grassroots Muslim resistance to these perceptions has a long history stretching back several centuries when the accoutrements of Modernity were transposed onto the Muslim world via

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[77] This problematic view of emotion in academic research will appear again in the conclusion, since part of we, as researchers, have to overcome is this bias against pathetic appeals in rhetoric in order to more fully understand how radicalization works.

[78] See, for example, UNICEF advertisements featuring Alyssa Milano and ASPCA advertisements featuring Sarah McLachlan.

colonisation." This is something that I explored at length in the third chapter when discussing foundational twentieth-century Islamist clerics, but is also present in *Inspire*. For example, the most recent issue of the publication includes a partial transcript from a film entitled "Iman Defeats Arrogance" (roughly translating to "Faith Defeats Arrogance") in which the author, called Dr. Aiman Adh-Dhawāhiry, states:

> Twelve years have passed since the blessed Battles of New York, Washington and Pennsylvania and since the American ignorance of invading Afghanistan; [A]n American ignorance that led to the crumbling of the American pride and exposed the crusaders' weakness. An ignorance which entangled America in Afghanistan and Iraq, and eventually running away from both defeated.

The use of phrases like "American pride" and "crusaders" is deliberate in evoking cultural memories and, thus, shared emotions of anger towards colonial powers.[79] Also deliberate is the use of the phrase "American ignorance" and "crusaders weakness", both of which conjure up the seemingness of power on the part of the defensive party (in this case, al-Qaeda). This empowerment of the terrorist group in the face of (what they see as) hegemonic power structures that exist to subsume their culture and values works to likewise empower the individual potential or current jihadist as they see themselves as part of that structure working to take down these corrupt and evil forces. This seeing of the world as a series of corrupt forces is likewise noted by Wright-Neville and Smith when they explore how cognitive changes in an individual's life can lead that person to

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[79] Wright-Neville and Smith actually suggest that this resentment towards colonial powers is actually a "default setting" for those citizens of nations formerly under the rule of these powers. As they state: "Understanding the long history of humiliation, anger, resentment, envy and frustration which has arisen as a result of this history, and combining this with an understanding of the possible emotional default position of human agency under conditions of globalisation, is a critical step towards understanding the deeper dynamic forces which drive the urge to violent political behaviour in the modern world" (93).

"foster a hostile world view that leads to the possibility that an individual will seek out and join a group of like-minded individuals" (94), thus leading them to groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda. This empowerment of the individual "freedom fighter" in a world perceived to be dominated by hostile forces is also a good portion of the reason why the foundational Islamist clerics mentioned earlier as so popular with contemporary radical groups, in that these clerics offer what can be seem as an official (coming from within the respected communities of religious scholars) validation of action against the evil West.

What is also significant is Wright-Neville and Smith's further exploration of the importance of power structures in evoking emotion. As the authors state:

> [P]eople do not join extremist or terrorist groups easily; membership is preceded by a series of evolutionary events whereby emotions are directed along a path hewn by the manner in which the individual experiences the socio-political environment in which they exist. In short, emotion, including that shaping terrorist behaviour, is inherently referential. Terrorists are not just angry, they are angry *at* something. Terrorists are not just humiliated, they perceive themselves humiliated *by* something or someone. In this sense, emotion is not merely a somatic reaction or reflex but a richly social occurrence in which the concept of power, or more precisely the personal experience of power, lurks as an ever present factor. (94)

In this sense, Wright-Neville and Smith echo Corman and Dooley's "Strategic Communication on a Rugged Landscape: Principles for Finding the Right Message", in which they claim that an individual's perceiving of outside events and messages will be filtered through their worldview, affiliations with groups, religion, etc., thus making it

difficult to reach hostile audiences. Wright-Neville and Smith, in adding an emotional component to this "rugged terrain" constituting an individual's lens for perceiving the world, both provides additional insight into A) the proliferation of emotional appeals in jihadist literature like *Inspire*, B) the continued usage of foundational clerics by contemporary Islamists and C) the reason hostile and radicalized audiences are so difficult to reach.

Conclusion

As I have shown throughout this chapter, both *Inspire* and *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* can provide valuable insights to the counterterrorism community into both the shifting tactics of al-Qaeda from large-scale terrorist attacks to microterrorism and from group efforts to "lone wolf" attacks that are much more difficult to stop. What is perhaps more useful for both those of us in academics studying radicalized rhetoric and those in the IC attempting to diffuse the spread of radicalization by al-Qaeda are the communicative tactics utilized in these publications. What we can see, especially in conjunction with Neville-Wright and Smith's article on the part that emotion has to play in the part of the radicalized or potentially radicalized audience, is the strategic value of the emotional appeals in *Inspire* and *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* despite the lack of a systematized way of analyzing emotion in terrorist groups and a reluctance on the part of academic scholarship to take emotion seriously. As will be explored in the conclusion to this dissertation, this all has stakes in the ways that we can understand and then counteract the spread of radical Islamist ideologies.

CHAPTER 7: MAKING SENSE OF THE RADICALIZING (ONLINE) ASSEMBLAGE

> Following the 9/11 attacks, law enforcement agencies came to realize that the prevention of terrorist attacks would require the cooperation and assistance of American Muslim, Arab, and Sikh communities. At the same time Muslim, Arab, and Sikh Americans recognized the need to define themselves as distinctly American communities who, like other Americans, desire to prevent another terrorist attack. . . . Although many public officials support community engagement, significant challenges in the development of programs that foster substantive relationships rather than token discussions or community relations events. Striking a balance between security and liberty—relying on local communities to provide critical information to further proactive policing while simultaneously building trust and preserving the freedoms of community members—is seen as difficult. (4-5)
> --*American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*

Introduction: The Variegated Islamist Landscape

One of the things that has been highlighted again and again in this dissertation is

the overall complexity of this issue, by which I mean the rhetoric employed on both sides

of the prevention / recruitment rhetorical practices of violent Islamist extremists. As can

be seen in the various case studies I have included in this text, this subject has wide-

reaching implications for scholars, counterterrorist experts working within the

intelligence community as a whole, and law enforcement officials both internationally

and domestically. As I have said throughout this work, scholars and IC members ignore

the power and scope of religious rhetorics to their detriment, especially given the

demonstrated power of the texts that I've examined, which have included everything

from computer wallpapers, internet magazines, jihadist forums, *Instagram* and *Facebook*

accounts, and foundational Islamist texts from the early twentieth-century. And this is

only a sampling of the Islamist literature that exists in cyberspace. The importance of the

internet as a radicalizing force and as a means of procuring a wide-reaching audience

quickly and cheaply has also been brought to the fore with the rapid rise of ISIS, which is

perhaps the most prolific user of social media outlets to this date. There are many texts that have yet to be explored that can yield insight into the thought processes of terrorist organizations, including one of the most dangerous groups, al-Qaeda. Again, despite all of these factors, the growing number of political analysts that claim that "this stuff is important", as well as the critical lenses that can be profitably applied to these groups, as proven by the sampling of primary texts and secondary research from different disciplines, we are not paying nearly enough attention to the rhetoric produced by these extremist groups in the academy and in the government. What follows in this conclusion is a brief overview of the findings of this dissertation as well as some suggestions for change in the future based on the analysis presented thus far.

Why the Internet?

The internet provides several key advantages to terrorist organizations, including the ease with which materials can be transmitted to disparate groups, the inexpensive nature of most media, including social media platforms and email, which are both free, and the fact that large audiences can be accessed with a minimum of effort. It is also quite simple for these extremist groups to evade government scrutiny due to both the proliferation of texts and sundry communities in existence on the web. Similarly, if the IC finds a terrorist-affiliated account within a social network / website / forum or an entirely suspicious website and shuts it down, it is quite simple for that organization to repost the account or website somewhere else, so that governments cannot eliminate the threat of extremist website without blocking entire sections of the internet wholesale. This has, in fact, been the case with terrorist groups both large and small. Hezbollah's website, for example, which includes those images examined in detail in Chapter 3, has moved three

times since I started this dissertation. Likewise, the Syrian Electronic Army, the sector within the Assad regime's government that is responsible for the hacking of *Facebook*, Microsoft, and (reportedly) the CIA, has recreated *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram* accounts multiple times after being shut down. ISIS has had a multitude of *Twitter* feeds and *YouTube* channels that they have successfully used to lure in new audiences, including two young women from Colorado despite said feeds / channels being repeatedly deactivated.[80] In a sense, cyberspace has become the new public forum – a virtual town square that terrorist organizations are only too happy to take advantage of. This, of course, is not a new idea, given that Marshall McLuhan had introduced the idea of the "global village" in the 1960s with *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. What *is* new, however, is the fact that previously marginalized extremist Islamist groups that were restricted to an audience that was physically accessible from their secret compounds are now able to take advantage of an audience of an almost unimaginable size.

The Governmental Response

The federal government and, more particularly, the IC, have recognized that the internet is an important tool in the terrorist handbook. We can see that recognition in the majority of the reports, hearings, and press releases available from the U.S. (and international) organizations involved in counterterrorism and counterintelligence, including the text featured in the quotation from the epigraph at the start of this concluding chapter. What we *don't* have is an effective and systematic way of addressing these admittedly dangerous uses of the internet. Instead, they have focused on actions and

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[80] Rita Katz, "From Teenage Colorado Girls to Islamic State Recruits: A Case Study in Radicalization Via Social Media"

communicative strategies that have been demonstrated to be ineffective. As explored in

Chapter One, this is the case because of a lack of cohesion in the US intelligence

community, fundamental misunderstanding of the functioning of online communities, a

misguided focus on fighting a war of action instead of a war of ideas, a reliance on

outmoded forms of strategic communication when ideological counterterrorism is

attempted, and a deep-seated lack of understanding of the process of radicalization. This

is not to mention the lack of successful engagement with Muslim communities in at-risk

communities, much in the vein of the previously mentioned passage, which claims that,

although "law enforcement agencies came to realize that the prevention of terrorist

attacks would require the cooperation and assistance of American Muslim, Arab, and

Sikh communities" (Bjelopera 4) there are:

> [S]ignificant challenges in the development of programs that foster substantive
>
> relationships rather than token discussions or community relations events.
>
> Striking a balance between security and liberty—relying on local communities to
>
> provide critical information to further proactive policing while simultaneously
>
> building trust and preserving the freedoms of community members—is seen as
>
> difficult. (4-5)

This, of course, is in addition to the ethos problem that government agencies have with

Muslim communities, as noted when Bjelopera, a specialist in organized crime and

terrorism working for the Congressional Research service, states that: "law enforcement

activities [are] perceived by [Muslim] community members to be unfairly targeting law-

abiding citizens or infringing on speech, religion, assembly, or due process rights" (5).

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A lack of ethos is, in fact, what renders many outreach programs from governmental agencies ineffective, including the leafleting carried out in war-torn regions like Afghanistan and Iraq and the "Think Again" campaign carried out on social media outlets by the State Department mentioned earlier. Simple logical reasoning will tell us that if the organization pamphleting a community is seen as being invasive, untrustworthy, and ignorant of your customs and beliefs, the members of that community will constitute a hostile audience that is unlikely to be persuaded to an alternative point of view or convinced to take action on behalf of that organization. This is, indeed, what has happened in many Muslim at-risk communities, which have been shown to feel marginalized, disenfranchised, and misunderstood, not to mention that these populations may also be suffering under economic hardships. And this is, in essence, what the communicative theories outlined in Chapter 2 and mentioned elsewhere have claimed: that the government strategies for countering terrorism ideologically are largely ineffective because they do not recognize the "rugged landscape" of the communicative environment in communities that are especially at-risk of radicalization.

The Rhetorical Power of the Ideal

As explored in Chapters 3 and 4, despite the ideological difference between the foundational clerics often utilized in Salafi Jihadist groups and the current instantiation of the Shia Hezbollah, both groups rely on an unreachable Ideal to (continually) motivate their audiences. In essence, both groups create an unattainable, perfect landscape – for the foundational twentieth-century clerics like al-Banna, Qtub, and Mawdudi, this Ideal is based on the generation of Muslims alive during and right after the death of Mohammed that current Muslims should attempt to emulate by instituting the caliphate system. For

Hezbollah, it is a future built on the military might of their country, coupled with natural surroundings, and spearheaded by religious leaders like Hassan Nasrallah. These Ideals are only tangentially related to actual historical instances of the caliphate, in the case of al-Banna, Mawdudi, and Qtub, and only slightly resemble actual contemporary life in Lebanon, in the case of Hezbollah. For both groups, these Ideals are hallmarked by the use of fable-like language that highlights the absolute perfection of a culture-that-was and a culture-that-should-be. By retaining this fable-like language to describe the unattainable, these groups continually motive their audiences to reach for a reality that cannot and will never exist. Additionally, the quality of the language used catapults these Ideal futures / pasts into symbolic territory, making their usage by contemporary adherennts even more significant, since the spread of these artifacts (including the texts of Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qtub) implies an ideological fealty on the part of the audience that posts and shares this media online.

Social Media, Propaganda, and Persuasion

In Chapter 5, we explored the usage of social media software by the Assad regime in Syria and contrasted their usage of social media outlets with the far more successful use of this media by Salafi Jihadist groups like ISIS. In the Assad's case, the regime mainly shares propaganda materials on their *Facebook* and *Instagram* feeds, which is an inappropriate use of that media, given its inherently dialogic nature. ISIS, on the other hand, encourages collaboration with their viewers and has a reciprocal relationship with their multitude of followers. In many ways, the ideological fealty implied by the sharing of foundational scholars' texts and Hezbollah computer wallpapers resembles the functional relationship between distributors and "likers" (those people who "like" posts

and, thus, show support for the cause by having their screen names posted on that organization's page, feed, etc.), for that matter, of radical texts in that the audience in question is demonstrating overt or implicit (if said audience member only "likes" a post, but does not comment in support of the cause or repost the material on their own pages) sympathy with that organization. This allows the organization to amass a large audience very quickly, especially given the ease of sharing and posting comments on social media feeds. This appearance of ideological fealty then also increases the presence (or seeming of power / importance) of the movement or group, even if it is not particularly effective on the ground. Said appearance of power then works to enhance the appeal of radicalizing organizations with an audience that feels disenfranchised and powerless in their daily lives.

The Emotional Appeal of *Inspire* Magazine

Inspire magazine and the *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook* were the focus of Chapter 6, in part because these publications, which constitute the first comprehensive attempt by al-Qaeda to specifically address an English-speaking audience, offer insight into the tactics of this group. There has been a shift in their strategy from focusing on large-scale (more easily foiled) attacks to microterrorism, which are small, more difficult to detect and prevent assaults. These acts of microterrorism are capable of being undertaken by individuals and, thus, can happen anywhere at any time. While the scale of microterrorist attacks are much less grand than those events that were previously the hallmark of al-Qaeda, they are capable of wreaking great havoc, as was the case of the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013. Thus, they constitute a great danger in the overall threat landscape that will be difficult to diffuse just using action – i.e. assassinating leaders of causes and

arresting individual terrorists – since detecting these attacks is problematic, to say the least.

This, then, leads us to the other portion of this chapter, which was devoted to the ideological threat posed by *Inspire* and the *Pocketbook*. Despite their initial dismissal by mass media and political pundits, both of these publications proved effective in prompting action in at-risk audiences, like those constituted by the two marathon bombers. Much of the effectiveness of the magazines lies in the authors' usage of emotion to persuade their adherents and potential adherents to action. First, the authors create a semblance of compassion for their lone wolf terrorists by including articles on mental and bodily well-being. Then, they instill feelings of guilt (for not acting, if he or she is a passive audience member), anger, and resentment by playing on the legacy of colonialism by Western countries as well as rendering hostile governments into vast and evil hegemonic constructs that can only be defeated by the righteous indignation that leads to action of al-Qaeda. In more thoroughly exploring the part that emotion has to play in the appeal to at-risk audiences like in case study presented here and Wright-Neville and Smith's article, which was mentioned in that chapter, we can better understand the rapid spread of radicalization, especially in nations previously under colonial rule.

A Call to Action

Based on my findings in this dissertation, I can make several recommendations for changes in both the academic community and the Intelligence Community in order to better understand and counteract the terrorist threat.

In the academic community, we need to complete the following tasks:

1) Pay more attention to religious and radicalizing rhetoric. By largely ignoring these texts, we are A) suggesting that these populations and their texts are not worthy of study and B) Ignoring an important component of the larger discourse community that has become more and more prominent in the wake of the internet's anonymous structure, which allows for extremists of many different ideologies to voice their opinion with little consequence.

2) Take into consideration the part that pathos has to play in the dissemination of arguments and the moving of an audience from sympathetic to active. By dismissing pathos as a "lesser appeal", we undervalue its use in overcoming the initial conservatism in an audience, thus moving them to action.

3) Explore discourse communities, even if we find their ideologies distasteful. Although we may not agree with their points of view or find them destructive, that does not mean that there is no value in analyzing their texts. To the contrary, in order to affect change, we must understand the ways that their groups function.

For the Intelligence Community and congressional bodies involved in counterterrorism efforts, I have the following recommendations:

1) Focus on ideology as well as on action. The exclusion of ideology in public policy concerning counterterrorism efforts only partially addresses the terrorist threat. Although leaders of radical Islamist groups may be assassinated by drone strikes or arrested, that does not prevent the radicalization and then action of a new terrorist. In fact, the death and martyrdom of prominent Islamist ideologues only works to galvanize new populations into action.

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2) Recognize the fact that the terrain on which these terrorist organizations operate is complex and difficult to manage. By relying on outdated modes of communication, as well as showing gross ignorance of the media in which they are attempting to intervene, the IC is only working against their own cause by losing credibility with an audience (of gamers, hackers, and nerds) they might otherwise have been able to use to their advantage.

3) Construct a comprehensive means of counteracting the proliferation of radicalizing materials on the internet. Shutting down websites, social media feeds, etc. of extremist groups is ineffective. It is much to simple for them to create a new site, a new IP address, or even encourage their followers to spread their message after the initial source of those materials is deactivated. Instead of focusing on shutting down these websites, create a countermessage on these same media outlets that works to diffuse the ideology. The "Think Again Turn Away" project spearheaded by the State Department is a step in the right direction, but is hampered by the lack of credibility that the institution has with any at-risk audience.

4) Thus, the federal government should offer incentives for authority within the moderate Muslim community to become involved in this counter-radicalizing effort. Only by increasing the volume of the moderate Muslim community, thus solving the lack of ethos of the State Department in counteracting extremist media, can we work to combat these extremist groups by working within their ideological system. Souad Ali's text, *A Religion, not a State: Ali 'abd al-Raziq's Islamic Justification of Political Secularism* provides a comprehensive example of

a respected scholar using religious text to diffuse the myth of the caliphate system.

5) And, finally, the IC needs to pay more attention to scholars in the humanities and social sciences that research radicalization and terrorism. These constitute some of the best scholars with expertise in areas that will be of benefit to the Federal Government in their War of Ideas.

By following the previous suggestions, we can more clearly combat the spread of extremist ideologies worldwide. These groups constitute a very real danger both in the regions in which they are active as well as in far reaching corners of the world, as has been shown most recently by ISIS, an organization that managed to recruit young women from the United States to join their cause solely through the use of the internet. Without taking measures to stem the spread of these Islamist ideologies online, we may face a war on multiple fronts, since these texts are readily available and easily found using a computer (or a phone or a tablet), an internet connection, and a search engine.

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