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Studying Jihadism 2

Rüdiger Lohlker (ed.)

**Jihadism: Online Discourses and
Representations**

Vienna University Press



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Studying Jihadism

Volume 2

Edited by Rüdiger Lohlker

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Rüdiger Lohlker (ed.)

Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations

With many figures

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Introduction

The second volume of “Studying Jihadism” is focusing on aspects of representations of jihadism.

In his first contribution Philipp Holtmann discusses various aspects of the symbolism of jihadi online representations in a semiotic and aesthetic perspective.

Rüdiger Lohlker introduces the concept of subculture into the analysis of jihadism. This concept facilitates the understanding of jihadism and its framing and reframing of Islamic ideas.

Bouchra Oualla is continuing her meticulous analysis of jihadi videos and the rhetorical argumentation used in these videos. Since videos are one of the most important tools of jihadi propaganda and the representation of jihadism this analysis will be continued.

Representing the jihadi groups as the sole interpreters of – Shariatic – justice is one of the most important Islamic memes used by jihadis. Nico Prucha analyzes the trials staged by jihadis and distributed as videos.

Two contributions analyze theoretical aspects of one of the most important representatives of the core group of al-Qaeda: Abu Yahya al-Libi. Orhan Elmaz looks at a small booklet on Hadith and the way al-Libi transforms Islamic traditions for jihadi aims. Philipp Holtmann writes about an often neglected aspect of jihadi text production: the poetry, in his case the poetry of al-Libi and another transformation of – literary – traditions.

Thomas Riegler describes the representation of jihadi terrorist in the media production in the USA. Since jihadi media production is understood by the project “Jihadism Online” as part of global media production and often participates in the global popular culture this kind of analysis is indispensable.

We have to thank the reviewer for helping us to improve the contributions to this volume.

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The Symbols of Online Jihad

How Jihadis Foster Central Myths in E-Environments to Guide Online-Groups

Introduction

The following chapter deals with the virtual architecture of jihadi websites from a semiotic and anthropological perspective. Research foci are the semiotics and aesthetics of Muslim extremist sub-cultures on the Internet.

The main research question is how jihadis use key signs, such as symbols, colors and icons in virtual propaganda to profoundly influence each other and win followers (communicative leadership).¹ These signs mainly reflect fundamentalist myths of community; conspiracy; and salvation, argues Monika Witsch.² Such a categorization and approach offer apt tools for students of fundamentalisms on the Internet to further develop their own methods of research. To put this into an aesthetic framework has obvious reasons, since aesthetics itself relies on categories. As Theodor W. Adorno observes in his “Ästhetische Theorie:”³

-
- 1 Thee goal is to strenghten in-group cohesion, raise out-group aggression, raise conformity, radicalize members, and “inspire” to terrorist attacks.
 - 2 Monika Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2003).
 - 3 Theodor W. Adorno, “Ästhetische Theorie,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Volume7*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2006), 3851, alternatively online, accessed April 26, 2012, <http://www.revalvaatio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/adorno-%EF%BF%BDhetische-theorie.pdf>, 125. The German original quote goes: “Hegel stellt die ästhetische Dialektik still durch die statische Definition des Schönen als des sinnlichen Scheinens der Idee. So wenig ist das Schöne zu definieren wie auf seinen Begriff zu verzichten, eine strikte Antinomie. Ohne Kategorie wäre Ästhetik molluskenhaft, historisch-relativistische Beschreibung dessen, was hier und dort, in verschiedenen Gesellschaften etwa oder verschiedenen Stilen, mit Schönheit gemeint gewesen sei; eine daraus destillierte Merkmal-einheit würde unweigerlich zur Parodie und ginge am nächsten besten konkret Herausgegriffenen zuschanden. Die fatale Allgemeinheit des Begriffs des Schönen ist jedoch nicht kontingent.“

“Hegel puts the aesthetic dialectics at a standstill, when he defines beauty in a static way as the sensual glowing of the idea. Just as beauty cannot be defined, one cannot give up on its definition, in the sense of a strict antinomy. Without categories, aesthetics would just be mollusc-like, and an attempted historic-relativistic description of the meaning of beauty in different societies and styles; a resulting measuring unit for aesthetics would inevitably become a parody, which would be smashed by the next best singled out aesthetic object. However, the fatal universality of the notion of beauty is not contingent.”

Thus, we can agree that there is no universally valid definition of aestheticism and beauty, especially so in modern societies. Also terrorist culture can be perceived as highly aesthetic by its adherents. It draws on popular concepts and drains that which has forgotten in terms of deep meaning from the soil of its mother culture in order to prosper. Its beauty lies less in the eye of the outsider observing this culture, but in the perception of the insider, who experiences strong emotions, which Victor Turner calls *communitas*,⁴ when surrounded by its signs. Culture must be aesthetic to work for its participants.

For example, Susan Sonntag argues that fascist art represents a utopian aestheticism of physical perfection.⁵ For a similar reason, Walter Benjamin tried to develop a new terminology for the discussion of arts and aesthetics, such as the concept of “aura,” that could not be used by fascists. Benjamin observed that the oldest artworks were created for ritualistic purposes; first magical and then religious ones. The mass-reproduction of art in industrialist-capitalist societies fostered its politicization and its detachment from cult and ritual.⁶ If one applies Benjamin’s thesis to today’s neoliberal capitalist information society, one can see a reconciliation of the quasi-cultic, neo-pagan and ritualistic use of “art-works” with the profane, which takes place on social networking sites. According to Benjamin, the photographic portrait is the only mass produced artwork that

4 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

5 Susan Sonntag, “Faszinierender Faschismus,” in *Im Zeichen des Saturn: Essays*, ed. Susan Sonntag (München: Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1981), 112. The relation between aestheticism and politics became especially clear during the Nazi era.

6 For example, the cultic function of antique statues for Greeks. Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 21–25. The work was first published in French translation in the “*Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*” in 1936. Aura, according to Benjamin, is an “einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag’, [und] stellt nichts anderes dar als die Formulierung des Kultwerts des Kunstwerks in Kategorien der raumzeitlichen Wahrnehmung. Ferne ist das Gegenteil von Nähe. Das wesentlich Ferne ist das Unnahbare. In der Tat ist Unnahbarkeit eine Hauptqualität des Kultbildes. Es bleibt seiner Natur nach ‘Ferne so nah es sein mag’. Die Nähe, die man seiner Materie abzugewinnen vermag, tut der Ferne nicht Abbruch, die es nach seiner Erscheinung bewahrt.”

retains an aura of the cultic ritual.⁷ Pictures of users of social networking sites have idol value; the cultic and exhibition value go hand in hand with the product. Fundamentalists also profit strongly from these possibilities of social media since they try to reconcile the aura of religious aestheticism with the marketing of ideology. A new trend in evolutionary biology theory states that concepts of aestheticism and art developed out of conflict and survival mechanisms. Primordial human beings were in need to defend themselves against stronger predators, when they first entered the open grasslands and Savannah in Africa several thousand years ago, and therefore developed social mechanisms to build groups. The use of body colors, rhythmic stomping of feet, singing and throwing objects, in short, the ritualistic and aesthetic display of fearless behavior became an effective defense mechanism and at the same time a powerful tool of socialization. This behavior induced an altered state of consciousness called “battle trance” and intimidated enemies by collective threat display (tactical deterrence by denial). At the same time it enabled primordial beings to build groups, and thus to switch from an individual to a collective identity, which was strongly connected to simple rituals and use of basic aesthetics.⁸ Frequently, human ceremonial rituals witness paradoxical effects in that the rise of in-group cohesion correlates with heightened out-group aggression.⁹ This article argues that some of the behavior on jihadi forums is a transformation of primordial socialization and ceremonial rituals into virtual space. This transformation is not a direct one, but happens via multiple cultural and technological layers in time and space. The use of colorful big lettered religious slogans by jihadis in their online discussions is a virtual substitute for ritualistic tribal threat display like dancing, singing, stomping and allegiance rituals to induce the altered state of consciousness called “battle trance.” At the same time, this online behavior successfully re-creates an “aura” of the “sacred” around myths and reconciles cultic visions with the utterly modern use of propaganda and mass-reproduction of images. Morbid examples are the ceremonial depiction of beheadings (see the chapter of Nico Prucha in this volume), the idolization of figureheads through pictures, or the ample use of jihadi symbols in online environments to foster central and guiding myths within virtual social networks (see also the remarks on “framing” in the article by Rüdiger Lohlker in this volume). Also movies and songs play an utterly important role for the reproduction of (fundamentalist)

7 Ibid, 31.

8 Joseph Jordania, *Why Do People Sing: Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: Logos, 2011).

9 Eugene G. D’Aquili, “Human Ceremonial Ritual and the Modulation of Aggression,” *Zygon – Journal of Religion and Science*, 20 (1985): 21 – 30.

aesthetics on the Internet. Jihadi audio-visual “art” has the power to express “the fairylife, miraculous, supernatural.”¹⁰

Jihadi net-culture seems at first glance to be a marginal and obscure phenomenon, but it co-shapes global fluid society, which presents itself through the rapid and efficient exchange of ideas and products at low cost and high speed. Therefore, terrorist aesthetics can be described as an integral part of global world culture and as co-representative of global trends of visual communication. Extremist net-cultures are a shadow phenomenon, and at the same time a measuring instrument for general cultural developments. With the help of modern communications, jihadis have attributed to painting an overly distorted picture of Islam, similar to the reflection given by a concave mirror, which is readily being taken up by many Western media. Yet, extremist culture is also an intensification of mainstream culture and its expressions and conflicts. It works like a distorted magnifying glass on culture. Therefore, looking at the perceived reality of extremists offers a lot to learn from, assumed that there is a willingness to understand and readiness to differentiate them from non-violent adherents of their meta-culture. Moreover, extremist fundamentalism is a cross-cultural phenomenon. For example, interested readers can compare concepts of this study to the ideology of the self-proclaimed “Justiciar Knight” Andreas Behring Breivik, who perpetrated two terrorist attacks in Norway in July 2011. There are clear similarities between the propagandist aesthetics of the Christian fundamentalist Breivik and jihadi web-agitation: They share the glorification of the knight’s character, the figure of the horse, the conspiracy theory, the uplifting music and the concept of individual terrorism.¹¹ Breivik and jihadists have more in common than they think. Key patterns of their ideologies and their audio-visual expressions are connected.

“Fundamentalism” derives its name from the Latin word *fundamentum* (foundation or basis) and is often perceived as something utterly back-warded and past-oriented. But fundamentalism can also be described as an utterly modern phenomenon, which merely orientates itself at a foundational mythology. Fundamentalists are “innovative world-builders who act as well as react, who see a world that fails to meet their standards and who then organize and marshal resources in order to create an alternative world for their followers to inhabit and vivify.”¹² This research focuses on the construction of *extremist*

10 Leaning on Benjamin, Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, 36.

11 Anders Behring Breivik, “2083 – A European Declaration of Independence,” De Laude Novae Militiae Productions, accessed January 8, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xk3ioe_video-by-anders-behring-breivik_news.

12 Martin E. Marty and Scott Appleby, *The Glory and the Power. The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 182. “Fundamentalists” does not only

fundamentalism, which often is connected to the justification of and support for terrorism. “Terrorism” is the systematic use of unexpected violence by substate-actors for political purposes to communicate a cause and to impose their own will on another party.¹³ The victims of terrorism often serve to communicate a message to a target group. The term “jihadis” describes in this chapter *Muslim extremist-fundamentalists*, who propagate a *terrorist ideology*.

The present study is strongly oriented at the theoretical framework of Monika Witsch’ “Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet” (The aesthetics of fundamentalist agitation on the Internet).¹⁴ Witsch takes a “hypothetical fundamentalist reader” by the hand in order to analyze which signs appeal to him and create identification with the own group and hate for outsiders (at the example of Scientology and Neo-Nazi websites). Methodically, Witsches draws on the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and the aesthetics-concept of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924–1998).¹⁵

Similarly, the author undertakes to analyze the content of jihadi websites. These sites bare their own aestheticism and artistic depiction of a culture of violence, which aims at triggering highly emotional reactions in percipients to activate a certain thinking, feeling and behavior. Culture, according to the American sociologist Clifford Gertz, is “a web of signification spun by meaningful actions, objects and expressions,” i. e. signs.¹⁶ A sign is “the smallest unit of meaning; anything that can be used to communicate (or to tell a lie).”¹⁷ Signs are words, sounds, gestures, pictures and their combinations in contexts, which in combination create audio-visual languages that help us to understand something.¹⁸

Culture is an ever evolving and never static sensual experience which is created with the help of signs. According to Schütz and Luckmann, participants perceive cultural realities like the “world of science,” “the world of religious

describe religious groups, but also political groups, such as Neo-Nazis with their glorification of Germanic mythology, or Neo-Conservatives who adhere to literal Protestantism. In another sense, capitalism may be described as a fundamentalism on its own, based on creating ideal worlds of consumption and the assumption that the exploitation of non-renewable sources will never end.

13 If one exchanges “substate” with “state” actors, then the definition becomes valid for state terrorism.

14 Monika Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2003).

15 Her synthesis can be described as an *aesthetic analysis of fundamentalist use of signs*.

16 Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures. Social Theory and Mass Communication* (London: Sage, 1995), 77.

17 “Semiotic Terminology,” University of Vermont, accessed January 21, 2012 http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html.

18 Mark Boulton, “Icons, Symbols and a Semiotic Web,” accessed January 21, 2012, <http://www.markboulton.co.uk/journal/comments/icons-symbols-and-a-semiotic-web>

experiences,” “phantasm-worlds” and “dream-worlds” like closed sensual areas. The coherence of a sensual area derives from its characteristic style of experience, which is connected to a specific psychological tension, a “consciousness-tension.” The transition from one sensual area to another takes place through a radical change of this tension, which culminates in a change of “life stance” (“attention à la vie,” borrowed from Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, 1907).¹⁹

Jihadi websites are a web of signification spun around the idea of global jihad by means of propaganda. Furthermore, in order to understand a sub-culture and its extremist community, one needs to go to the heart of what really matters to it. This understanding is “not governed by the author’s cleverness, but by his or her ability to take the reader to the ‘Heart’ of the symbolically produced common meanings.”²⁰ Fan-cultures are best understood, if one finds out how they see themselves. Similarly, this applies to the “fans of jihad” on the Internet.²¹

Around 25 websites from the jihadi milieu form the backbone of this study’s source material (“standard” websites, forums, YouTube-channels and BlogSpot-accounts). The influence of some of these sites has been acknowledged by jihadis and researchers. Other jihadi websites were chosen by the author due to their obvious depiction of jihadi aesthetics. The aesthetic-semiotic viewing and selection was oriented at Witsches three categories of key signs that seem to influence recipients of fundamentalist propaganda on the Internet: signs loaded up with the mythic meanings of *community*, *conspiracy*, and *salvation*.

Harold Lasswell, a key thinker of 2nd World War U.S. information operations, described propaganda as a technique to influence human behavior by manipulating symbols and the meaning behind them.²² Propaganda can also be understood as *the art of steering the thoughts and imaginations of a group of people and therefore their actions*.²³ Propaganda aims to signify certain politico-reli-

19 Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 47–49. Also discussed in Gabriel Dorta, *Soziale Welten in der Chat-Kommunikation* (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2005), 46; 69 ff.

20 Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, 77. According to the American sociologist Clifford Geertz, culture cannot be studied objectively. Empiricist quantitative schools claim that hard objective data are the only reliable sources for social sciences. But this claim is dismissed by Geertz. A socio-anthropologist needs to observe salient characteristics to develop a good understanding of the bigger picture. The author shares this opinion. The question is, therefore, what the concepts of Islam and jihad mean and signify for jihadis on the Internet and how this meaning is produced by using objects, signs and interpretations on jihadi websites.

21 Clifford Gertz, *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984), 292.

22 Stefan Krempl, *Krieg und Internet: Ausweg aus der Propaganda?* (Hannover: Heise Zeitschriften Verlag, 2004), 110.

23 Definition by the author

gious concepts with ideological meaning and thereby create stimuli, which guide followers' thinking and ultimately actions.

The content of propaganda is ideology, which consists of "codes that reinforce or are congruent with structures of power. Ideology works largely by creating forms of 'common sense,' of the taken-for-granted in everyday life." The French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918 – 1990) described ideology as imaginary relationships of individuals towards their real-life conditions. According to Althusser, ideology causes individuals to think that they are self-determined, whereas in reality they are subjects of a collective and constructed identity, which is formed through linguistic and psychic processes.²⁴

These processes have been investigated in the field of semiotics, i. e. the study of signs. A sign is the smallest unit of meaning. A signifier is any material thing that signifies, i. e. words on a page, a facial expression, a page, an object, symbol, sounds and combinations. The signified is the concept that a signifier refers to.²⁵ The process of signification (or semiosis) describes how meaning is created in the human mind by using signs. Signification is therefore the process by which a sign causes an effect on an interpreter.²⁶

The concept of signification draws on two major theoreticians. Firstly, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) is regarded as the founder of linguistics and structuralism. De Saussure claimed that "meaning" does not describe how things are, but how they are signified. Saussure model on signs is static, dyadic and structural. According to Saussure, the meaning of a thing is fixed and arbitrary, since it relies on agreed upon relations between signifiers and signified things.²⁷ The basic model of Saussure argues that "a sign always has two parts: the signifier and the signified. We could not say that ARBOR [tree] itself is a sign if the word does not elicit any mental concept in the beholder's mind."²⁸

24 Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, 37.

25 "Semiotic Terminology," University of Vermont, accessed January 21, 2012, http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html.

26 Rainer Schützeichel, *Soziologische Kommunikationstheorien* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004), 35. Communication is one form of the semiotic process, states Schützeichel.

27 The letters T-R-E-E resonate in the human mind of an English speaker as an image of a wooden trunk, branches and on it green leaves. According to Saussure, "convention" causes speakers of the same language to learn and agree that certain letters or sounds evoke specific images.

28 "Semiotics", *The Chicago School of Media Theory*, The University of Chicago, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/semiotics>

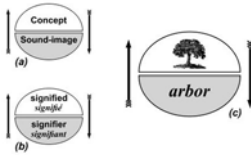


Illustration 1: Saussure's dyadic model of signification²⁹

Yet, every person seems to see a different mind-picture of “tree” when hearing its sound-image, which is connected to his or her feelings. Fundamentalist ideology heavily draws on emotional good-bad dichotomies. Meaning is created in dynamic, not static processes of communication and exchange,³⁰ which in the jihadi-subculture aim at the radicalization of percipients. Thus a third element can be added to the process of signification, which is called the “interpretant.” The interpretant is not a person, but the mental concept elicited in somebody's mind, when he or she perceives a sign.³¹

This leads to the second conceptual model of signification, namely that of the American logician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Peirce took the dynamic nature of signification as well as its cognitive-emotional element into account. According to Peirce's triadic model of signification (“sign-interpretant-object”), a sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.”³² The Chicago School of Media Theory states that “the dynamic relations between sign, interpretant, and object [...] lead to the process of signification, or semiosis... How meaning is generated therefore puts emphases on three aspects: the sign itself, the code or the systems into which signs are organized, and the context/culture into which these codes and signs operate.”³³

29 “Relations of Translations between Actants”, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://larval-subjects.wordpress.com/category/semiotics/>.

30 “Framework for using representations in the classroom,” University of Queensland, accessed December 29, 2011, <http://www.usq.edu.au/course/material/EDU8432/use.html>.

31 “Semiotics“, The Chicago School of Media Theory, The University of Chicago, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/semiotics/>.

32 Charles S. Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 99.

33 “Semiotics“, The Chicago School of Media Theory, The University of Chicago, accessed December 30, 2011, . The Chicago School of Media Theory comes out of the tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology, which since the 1920s has developed qualitative-interpretative approaches for the research of sociological phenomena. Most prominently, the sociological theory of *symbolic interactionism* and its approach *grounded theory* developed out of the Chicago School. They are based on methods of field research and on the premise that reality originates in a steady process of human micro-scale interaction with the environment, which takes place by symbols and communication. The Columbia School of Sociology, in contrast, traditionally relies on quantitative and critical rational approaches in the research of social

Modern mass media has facilitated the creation of millions of new signifiers. Also jihadi ideologues who frequently appear on TV or on the Internet “signify” the concept “jihad.” Within the triadic model of signification, the master task of a propagandist is to influence the “interpretant” of a percipient, i. e. his emotional interpretation through a manipulation of “signs” that suggests an interpretational sovereignty over “objects.” This creates a specific picture of the “outside world” in the inner world of a percipient.

Rules of convention and rituals in Chat-rooms such as virtual grooming, net-flirting, net-flaming, and the avoidance of “net-shitting” develop in a steady interplay of communication processes, which underlie certain codes of behavior (“Chatiquette”). They are steadily being applied and negotiated.³⁴ Based on Peirce’s theory, Witsch describes every mouse-click and each movement on the keyboard as a form of communication with the machine (*man-machine-man communication*). This form of communication allows interaction, integration, partaking and active sharing of fundamentalist concepts via the Internet.³⁵ Similarly, al-Qaeda’s Internet magazine “Inspire” applies an integrative concept of agitation by calling for contributions and cooperation by sympathizers, who can apply *man-machine-man communication* and become active partakers of virtual jihad.

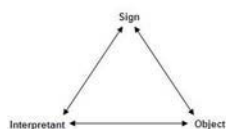


Illustration 2: Peirce’s basic triadic model of signification³⁶

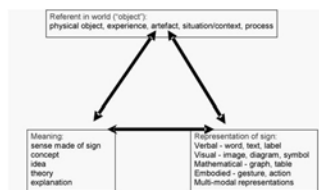


Illustration 3: Extended triadic model of signification³⁷

phenomena. The induction of massive amounts of data is used to deduct sociological theories.

34 Gabriel Dorta, *Soziale Welten in der Chat-Kommunikation* (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2005), 15.

35 Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*, 100.

36 “Semiotics”, *The Chicago School of Media Theory*.

37 “Framework for using representations in the classroom,” University of Southern Queens-

If we use Peirce's model, the abstract object "jihad" bears numerous meanings in Islamic culture. "Jihad" can be applied to public cleanliness, fighting one's own ego, helping the poor, striving for high standards of piety, or bombing a congregation of civilians. In jihadi net-culture, i.e. that subculture, which believes in a martial/terrorist interpretation of jihad, a symbolical and communicational construction of martial jihad takes place by the interaction of its followers. Signs such as "qualisigns", i.e. propagandistic "reporting" and "studies" (*taqarir wa abhath*) signify jihad. Symbolic colors of Islam and aesthetic depictions are attributed to jihad. "Icons" such as jihadi logos with their quasi marketing-oriented branding rationalize the concept of jihad. Theological arguments validate the concept of "jihad," while the chatting around jihad strengthens group identification. Recipients and activists of the jihadi subculture take and add to the concept of jihad their own interpretations and meanings. Yet, a guiding semiotic umbrella is created by administrators of popular jihadi websites. Regarding the ambiguousness of jihadi ideology, Peirce's dynamic model should be favored over Saussure's static one. But jihadis use very flexible popular concepts (Islam *per se*, pioussness, prayer, righteousness, calligraphy, Quran, colors) and try to reframe them with the meaning of "terrorist jihad." The divide between sub-cultural and mainstream interpretations shows that abstract concepts such as Islam and jihad cannot be interpreted simply by agreed upon conventions. They are culturally and contextually dependent. While one Muslim interprets Islam and its referential symbols in a peaceful way, followers of jihadi ideology construct around the meta-concepts of Islam and jihad a web of terrorist interpretations.

Jihadi propaganda, thus, hijacks popular Islamic concepts. The double-purpose is to preserve the own radical subculture and at the same time to invite mainstream Muslims. Regarding the construction of jihadi subculture on the Internet, the question is how jihadi websites try to create feelings of community, enmity and salvation among followers under the umbrella of global jihad. Semiotic processes are set in pace by the propagandist use of sound-picture-script combinations, uplifting music and videos. The iconography of jihadi subculture uses semiotic tools such as steady repetitions of pictorial, scriptural, visual and audio patterns to create authoritative representations of itself.

Klaus Theweleit claims that influences by new media, especially the listening of music, heavily influence neuronal systems in the human brain and body. The human body works ilike a hollow chamber, Theweleit argues. The human body does not forget the enervations caused by music, but seems to store them in its muscles and nervous system to imitate the music's characteristics in small and

land-course material, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://www.usq.edu.au/course/material/EDU8432/use.html>.

big movements. The brain reacts to music by pouring out endorphins. Listening to music causes a state of euphoria and ecstasy, which “blurs the borders of our existence [...] and allows us to immerse in a sea of emotions.”³⁸ Accordingly, one can argue that the sounds, symbols and visual messages of constant marketing and propaganda influence imitation and re-enactment among percipients. Leaning on Theweleit’s thesis, the consumption of propaganda can cause deep alterations in a person’s awareness. We can substitute the element “music” by listening, viewing and processing digitalized extremist content. “Beyond that, I store something in the body, in the whole sensomotoric system, which as a result of the impact with music lives its own live inside of me. For me, the decisive factor is that certain cell-structures of my body have changed after consuming certain music.”³⁹

Fundamentalists create their online-environments by using signs connected to three inter-related myths, which they present by way of propaganda. Witsch suggests a triadic categorization of myths, which bind fundamentalist online groups together:

1. Firstly, fundamentalists construct a *community myth* for the sake of *identification* and *mobilization*.
2. Secondly, they construct a *conspiracy myth* in order to *activate* followers to struggle towards an end goal.
3. Thirdly, the goal is based on a *myth of salvation* in order to present a possibility of *salvation*, which can be seen as a reward for the ideological rigidity claimed from members of fundamentalist-extremist groups.⁴⁰

Seemingly adherents of fundamentalist ideology can only accept brute extremism and violence, if they are offered a final justification and reward for it. Violence is then not a means per se, but justified with political, humanist, idealist and/or transcendental goals. Accordingly, if we research fundamentalist and extremist websites in terms of in-group identity, out-group alienation and goals, we have to look for three categories of signs. These are 1) signs of community and identification 2) signs of conspiracy 3) signs of salvation and reward for actions. Witsch concludes that the central sign tool to present and produce fundamentalist online culture is the picture.⁴¹ The sign “picture,” claims Monika Witsch, is the major aesthetic and semiotic tool of fundamentalist agitation.

38 Klaus Theweleit, “Übertragung. Gegenübertragung. Dritter Körper: Zur Gehirnveränderung durch die Medien,” in International Flusser Lecture, ed. Marcel René et al. (Köln: Buchhandlung Walter König, 2007).

39 Klaus Theweleit, “Übertragung. Gegenübertragung. Dritter Körper. Zur Gehirnveränderung durch die Medien.”

40 Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 57 – 61.

41 Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 129.

Fundamentalist agitation in the Internet, according to Witsch, takes mainly place via photos, photomontages, symbols, or text-picture combinations. The author would like to modify this assessment. Since Islamic culture is a text-culture, the importance of script and ideas through letters should not be underestimated. In another study, the author will focus on the emblematic meaning of theological texts in jihadi net-cultures. Furthermore, propagandists repeat the same illustrations time and again to prepare and support real rituals. Therefore, the term “ritualistic aesthetics” might be applied to pictorial semiotics as well. To get a better understanding of the concept, we will start by discussing categories, general layout and the arrangement of information of jihadi websites.

Entrance pages of jihadi websites

Entrance pages of jihadi websites try to mobilize followers and construct a first sense of community. They are essential first platforms on which identification with jihadi group ideology is created. The construction of virtual ideological worlds can only be understood in the light of topographic and semiotic authority on extremist websites; as well as the hierarchies of information on these websites. Let us therefore turn towards the very basic aspects of their layout and the effects, which they create in a hypothetical viewer. On the following pages, we will discuss the meaning of colors used by these sites, the layout and semiotic arrangement of information, i. e. hierarchies of information, and the use of pictorial script (mixing script and picture) for propagandist purposes. Afterwards we will turn to the semiotic content analysis, which includes signs of community, conspiracy and salvation.

Since the mid-1990s, the jihadi web has steadily developed. Forerunners and thus early models for today’s global jihad sites were Qoqaz.org, which distributed Chechnyan jihad propaganda, the nationalist-jihadi websites of Hizballah and Hamas, the website of the Afghan Taliban and Azzam.com, which was operated in the 1990s from Great Britain by a grassroots hacker and supporter (Babar Ahmad). These sites fulfilled the tasks of propaganda, incitement, recruitment and financing of various jihad agendas. Nowadays, the comprehensive jihadi media industry in the WWW also fulfills the role of virtual leadership for decentralized networks of followers. The idea of virtual leadership flows out of the idea that Islamic symbolism and text are authoritative. One of the main theo-strategic doctrines of virtual leadership (authoritative use of modern media and mobilization of single attackers) is incitement (*tahrid*), laid down in the Quran, Sunni tradition (*sunna*) and jihadi theology. In 2001 al-Qaida launched its first websites al-Neda (The Call [for jihad]). After 2001 and especially since the start of the Iraq war in 2003, the global jihadi web has developed in an explosive

manner. Various new sites appeared, and in 2005 the Norwegian scholar Brynjar Lia classified jihadi sites into five categories: Web forums (most important and authoritative sources); directories with links to external websites, mailing lists and message boards; non-interactive homepages of sympathizers; and “producers,” i. e. jihadi media groups and online libraries.⁴² In the last few years, this structure has basically been maintained by different jihadi web activists. Forums still seem to be the most important category.

Categories

Jihadi entrance pages concord by the use of core symbols like the black flag, the horseman, Quran and Kalashnikov, or scimitar and neo-classical Islamic calligraphy in their logos. In terms of coloring and structure, however, the sites vary considerably not only due to the different graphic-programs used to create them, but also to the visions of their creators. Roughly speaking, three different kinds of sites can be distinguished.

Firstly, person-centered sites of theological authorities appear most formal in their layout, since they are structured vertically and colored in a monochromatic manner, which dominates the front page.

Secondly, jihadi publication and discussion forums combine the vertical structure of hierarchical authority with the horizontal structure of participation and membership outreach. Vertical frames in the upper sections which stand for hierarchical authority carry the banners of jihadist organizations and link to their products on free file hosting services. Horizontal frames which represent the principle of participation in the lower half serve as gateways to different discussion platforms. The geometry of hierarchy (vertical frames) is mixed with the layout of participation (horizontal frames and links to the different subforums), which starts in the lower half of these websites. This also bears a clear message in terms of group coordination and hierarchy, since the principle of participation is stressed only underneath authoritative messages by jihadist organizations.

Thirdly, individual YouTube accounts and blog sites display jihadi symbolism intensively, but seem to be subordinate under ideologico-semiotic guidance of mother pages which set the tone. The suggestions of authoritative symbols and colors found on popular jihadi websites seem to influence and guide the individual interpretations. The lower the hierarchy gets, the more intensive becomes the semiotic reproduction of jihadi ideology. Thus, jihadi aesthetics and

42 Brynjar Lia, Al-Qaeda online: Understanding jihadist internet infrastructure, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 2006.

community building in the Net display clear chains of authority. Semi-official and person-centred webpages tend to appear in a formalistic layout. They lack the playfulness, which enhances in supporter administrated forums and peaks in supporter-designed YouTube accounts and blogs. Yet, also accounts are being used by authorities in the jihadi scene to gain followers. This owes to their grassroots character which stands for trustworthiness. In summary:

A. *“Official” Jihadi-Information sites* serve the representation of organizations and persons, as well as the publication and archiving of propaganda, but offer little possibility for participation. These sites want to appear formal and trustworthy and to reflect authority. They achieve this by arranging Information vertically and using white and grey shades of colors (white represents in Islam order, statehood and theological trustworthiness). Not breaking consent, but integrating extremist and popular Islamic culture is the goal.

B. *Forums* publish the latest products of jihadi organizations and offer possibilities for discussion and gaining prestige in these discussions. Forums strongly influence virtual group-processes (identification with and strengthening of in-group culture). They are at the same time extremist and inviting. Jihadi symbols together with popular Islamic colors like green (Prophet and Islam), blue (paradise imaginations), brown (conquest), and red (triumph and violence) dominate the forums. There is no break of consent. The hierarchical arrangement of information stands for authority (announcements by jihadi media companies); horizontal levels stand for participation (discussion rooms).

C. *User accounts and blogs* are grassroots-trendsetter, who republish, imitate and simplify jihadi messages. In addition, they build wide-branched networks of “friends” and “subscribers.” Characteristically, they display a strong exaggeration of jihadi symbols and colors. Their goal is to address target audiences that are already radicalized and find themselves in a radical counter-culture. Some imitate authoritative sites in order to address jihadis as well as Muslims in general. However, they do not predominantly display the dissonant aesthetics of “extremist consent” (such as information sites and forums), but favor layouts of “rebellion” and non-consent. Increasingly, important ideologues and media outlets of organizations are starting to use YouTube and BlogSpot accounts as well.

Semiotic authority and information structures on jihadi websites

“Official sites” represent organizations or persons. Another purpose of “official sites” is the publication and archiving of propaganda. However, these jihadi sites offer little possibilities for participation in the propaganda process or for the build-up of online-groups. In the above illustration, the site *tawheed.ws* by the

Jordanian cleric Muhammad al-Maqdisi shows how information is arranged. The main frame of orientation is vertical, when scrolling from the top to the bottom of the site this structure creates a clear hierarchy of information. Participation possibilities are very limited, users can ask for theological counsel (*istifta*), or contribute publications if these are good enough.

The tawheed-webpage is person-centered because it represents the prominent Jordanian Salafi-Jihadi Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who has been jailed for the most time since the mid-1990s. It thus retains salient characteristics of the iconography of a jihadi jurispudent's self portrayal in terms of information structuring and coloring. Over the last two years, the site has adapted its layout to the prominent jihadi forums, which play the key role in the distribution process of the productions of jihadist media companies.⁴³ It displays now advertisement banners for jihadi productions on the first page.

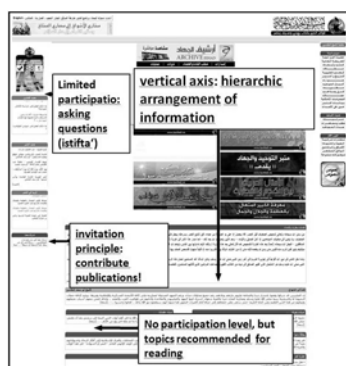


Illustration 4: dominant vertical arrangement of information on www.tawhed.ws

Tawhed.ws is so important because it is one of the most extensive online libraries of jihad texts, a platform for extremist virtual consultation (*istifta*), with its own Sharia-council, and it strives to act as a virtual organizer of Salafi-Jihadist movements in different Arab countries. Since the outbreak of the “Arab Spring” in Tunisia in late 2010, the site is directly addressing protesters and Salafi-Jihadi movements in Arab countries, such as in Libya, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia.

“Official” websites like tawhed.ws want to guide users towards a jihadi interpretation of Islam. Users are supposed to consume and download propaganda. These sites are often held in white or grayish colors, which we will explain in detail below. Maqdisi’s and other “official” jihadi web presences show

43 They post banners in their headpages with links to the newest jihadist productions, which can be downloaded from free file-hosting websites.

clear similarities in the layout and information structures. Examples are the website of the Afghan Taliban www.alemara1.com/, the website of the prominent media-jihad group “Jihadi Media Elite“ (*nukhbat al-i’lam al-jihadi*) www.nokbah.com/, the “Jihad-Archiv” by the same group and “shamilonline” www.shamilonline.org of the Chechnyan jihad, which is probably run by Turkish supporters and was set up in tribute to the popular Islamist leader Shamil Besayev (1965 – 2006).⁴⁴ These sites have different agendas, but bear similar formal and aesthetic characteristics, which are typical of person-centered and official jihadi information sites. The composition of news items related to jihad, is strongly focused on single praiseworthy individuals, but at the same time the viewer finds symbols of jihad spotted all over the sites to reconfirm jihadi subculture. The background colors are very light, some use a bright grey playing into white. Gray letters on grayish background that barely distinguish themselves are a typical fascist trait. Yet the grey also points into the direction of theological authority, purity, order and trustworthiness in the Islamic use of colors.

Another category of web-presences are jihadi forums, which display a characteristic division between upper and lower half layouts and information arrangement. The visitor first has to scroll through the upper half, which vertically aligns authoritative jihadist advertisement banners. This is a purposely created chain of information-authority and thus command of ideology within the geometry of the forums. The arrangement of information is authoritative, especially in the light of the fact that information-sharing is not voluntary, but contains strictly ideological commands. In contrast, the lower half of the site has a horizontal geometry that represents the principle of participation. While the upper half contains centrally aligned advertisement banners, the forum pages below follow the idea of mobilization through action. Suddenly the mouse-scroll direction changes from up-down, to a flat level where the forum member has to decide for himself which gateway for discussion he may enter. Once he has taken the decision, he clicks on the graphical user interface (GUI) of his choice.

Inside forums, different topics related to jihad are offered and new hierarchies

44 Turkish volunteers have since the 1990s been the biggest group of foreign fighters in Chechnya (as well as in this decade Waziristan). The website is registered under the name “Muhittin Kaspersky”, the first name being a Turkish male forename which means “the one who strengthens religion.” The accommodation address is in Moscow, Petrovka St. 38, which is probably a ridicule of Russian authorities who are the main enemy of jihadi groups in the Caucasus. Yet, the IP-address is located Berlin and the URL-extension stands for Turkey (tr). On the top left, for example, the “seal of the Prophet” can be seen, white on black background. On the top right the word jihad is written with a scimitar underneath it, the main horizontal top box being of different kinds of red presents the slogan “The Islamic Emirate of Caucasus” then a thin long white arrow towards the right and the sentence “...choses a new jihad generation.”

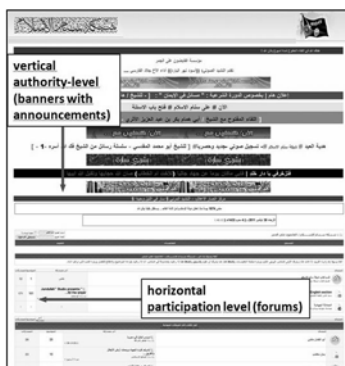


Illustration 5: Forum layout with a transition from vertical to horizontal lay out on (<http://snam-s.net/vb/>)

emerge according to the number of posts and ranks a member earns. In illustration 5, the transition from vertical to horizontal frames is visible. This layout structure (vertical authoritative and horizontal participative frames) distinguishes leadership from followers. The upper order suggests certainty and prohibits questions with the possibility in the lower order to participate and follow up on suggested topics. The goal of these sites is to offer a counter-narrative that converges with popular Muslim culture. They do not to break with conventional Islamic perceptions, but rather use Islamic symbols to frame them with the meaning of jihad. This way, forums as well as official sites try to prevent a gap between extremist thinking and broader Islamic culture (in contrast to single user accounts on YouTube and BlogSpot which appear much more radical in their layout). The layout mix of extremist content and classical Islamic aesthetics thus creates virtual rooms of authority, with a tension between rebellion and convention. The goal is to create a counter-world that still aims at agreement by the users and therefore forms a consensual counter-world. This tension stimulates emotion and therefore serves propagandistic and mobilizing purposes. However, one needs to keep in mind that jihadis rely on existing layouts provided by website software such as “Vbulletin.” Existing software already offers marketing oriented information and layout hierarchies, which can be well used for propagandist purposes.⁴⁵

45 Software for websites is planned by designer teams that pre-construct semiotic hierarchies for consumers, who want to present their agendas. If the agenda is “cooking,” for example, a consumer can use the existing basic frames of v-bulletin software to build a discussion forum. Adding emblems and a logo and arranging information according to the given horizontal or vertical frames, creates hierarchies of information on recipes, ingredients, discussions, etc. Jihadi-fundamentalists use the same possibilities to create hierarchies and rule of information. The geometric and semiotic elements of control are much more visible now, then they are in non-ideological topic sites.

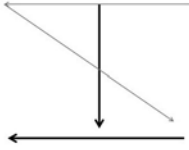


Illustration 6: Jihadi information hierarchy through semiotic symbiosis and geometric alignment

The thinner light arrows in illustration 6 represent the reading direction of text and viewing direction of pictures. The larger black arrows represent the main information alignment of websites. On forums, the verticality of the upper half of the website, which the visitor scrolls down, breaks the reading direction as well as the viewing direction of advertisement banners with script and pictures that are posted on it. In the lower half of the website, a change to horizontal forum sections indicates that the level of participation starts. The participation level is clearly aligned underneath the authority level with its advertisement banners which is reserved for messages by jihadi media, ideologues and leaders. The semiotics of jihadi virtual worlds are carefully constructed according to authority, power and invitations to participate.



Illustration 7: three levels of information on YouTube-account “AbuUsamaAlGharib”

YouTube and blog accounts are perfectly fit to be used for propagandistic and ideological purposes. Three levels of information arrangement allow users to present their agendas, to build communities by attracting “friends” and “subscribers.” There are ample possibilities for participation and communication in the “commentary-section” of YouTube accounts. The example of the YouTube account of the Austrian jihadi propagandist Mohammed Mahmoud aka Abu Usama al-Gharib illustrates this. In terms of authority in the jihadi netsphere, blogs and YouTube accounts appear to be at the end of the hierarchy line. Yet,

they gain importance since they are easy to create and administrate. Thus, these sites continue ideological production and are becoming trendsetters in jihadi media.⁴⁶ Individual accounts offer a lot of simple means for animation, personalization and design. They oftentimes look more impressive than the “mother pages” (i.e. person centered sites and forums). The reason is that key signs and colors are intensified by individual activists. Their semiotic expression is that of simplification, radicalization and selection. Individual user characteristically repeat key symbols in an exaggerated manner, for example, the seal of the prophet, the credo, the black banner, and the determined single horse-rider who is followed by an envisioned Muslim army. Many user accounts pick up well known signs of prominent jihadi websites. For example, the jihadi blogspot account <http://islamenmelilla.blogspot.com/> uses the head-frame and logo of the website of the Afghan Taliban (<http://www.alemara1.com/>). It uses the white flag (*liwa*) adopted by the Taliban, instead of the black war banner (*raya*), which is more typical for salafi-jihadis. Green dominates as monochrome background color, which reminds of the jihadi forum Shumukh al-Islam (Heights of Islam). The blog’s background is not dominated by the repetition of key-symbols, but remains plain and creates space for hundreds of links to other jihadi websites. The visitor can endlessly scroll down along the links and click on the jihadi propaganda of his choice. The account owner re-enacts the semiotic layout and thus the communicative authority of prominent jihadi-forums.

Propagandist semiotics

A. pictorial script (“Bildschrift”)

“Pictorial script” is an important tool for propaganda and marketing. It can be defined as a) the arrangement of pictures like letters and b) the combination of pictures and script. Pictorial script induces the rationalization of emotional concepts into a consumer’s mind. On jihadi websites, we can find it in three forms. These are, firstly, repetition of iconic pictures in a script-like form, secondly, the combination of propagandist pictures with text items, and thirdly, the propagandistic use of Arabic calligraphy.

In her conceptualization of pictorial script, Monika Witsch argues that the combination of picture and text enhances the rationalization of myths among fundamentalist readers. The way in which information is signified and ordered

46 If we look at the different categories of jihadi sites, apparently jihadi forums function like a link between individual user accounts and “official” authoritative sites. The forums combine both the principles of authority and individual participation with each other.

on websites plays an important role in the first stages of the propagandistic process, which aims at mobilization and the building up group-cohesion. Witsch illustrates this with an analysis of logos and emblems on Nazi-extremist and Scientology pages.⁴⁷ Jihadi websites combine picture and text similarly. While there are cultural differences in the reading direction according to different languages, the eye movements when looking at pictures are independent of culture and determined by a sensory process. The eye tends to examine interesting elements within a picture from left top to right bottom. Advertisers, for example, are recommended to place key parts of a picture on the right side. The brain perceives letters in written script differently from pictures. The brain does not read a sentence as a whole, but the eyes jump from one word to the next.⁴⁸ In English, the script reading direction is from left to right, while in Arabic it is from right to left. This brings us back to what Witsch calls pictorial script (“bildhafte Schriftform”), i. e. pictures that are arranged like letters and letters that are presented like pictures. Arabic calligraphy is unique for combining sacred emblematic script with aesthetic pictorial expression. According to Witsch, the combination of the rational category “reading” with the emotional category “viewing” is typical for fundamentalist web-agitation; it gives a rational meaning to myth and represents a mediation between emotional and rational concepts.

Firstly, let us illustrate how the combination of viewing and reading signs creates a link between myth and ratio on jihadi websites. As we have explained above, reading script is a rational act, while viewing pictures is an emotional act. This way pictorial script rationalizes the myth and makes it more trustable. Below, this technique is illustrated by the repeated alignment of face of a martyr and of a jihadi leader. The repeated arranging of their faces from right to left makes the messages which they represent (“martyrdom”, “leadership”) more readable and therefore more plausible.



Illustration 8: Constructing jihadi martyrdom ideology on the basis popular aestheticism with pictorial script Shumukh al-Islam forum⁴⁹

47 Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 68–73.

48 Dietrich Boles, Begleitbuch zur Vorlesung Multimedia Systeme (University of Oldenburg, 1998), accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www-is.informatik.uni-oldenburg.de/~dibo/teaching/mm/buch/node22.html>.

49 Advertisement banner of al-Qaeda’s media company *al-Sahab* for the video “*Yaumiyyat mujahid*” (Diaries of a Fighter), part three, accessed October 31, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=134859>.

One popular definition of beauty in Arabic-Islamic culture says that there are three things that appeal to the eye, “water, green and beautiful human features” (*al-ma’ wa-l-khudra wa-l-wajh al-hasan*).⁵⁰ This perception of beauty is reconstructed, for example, in al-Shumukh forum’s virtual environment through the iconic representation of a martyr’s face who smiles in front of a green background, which symbolizes Islam. There seems to be a tension at first sight between the happiness, reflected by the moving banners, which invite the viewer, and the cruelty, represented by the death image, which transports the ideology of militant jihad into the mind of the viewer. Yet, this is no contradiction since in jihadi ideology the pleasures of paradise require torturous efforts with the final goal of absolute happiness. The pictures of the martyr and the preparation for his attack are aligned in a pictorial script form. Below the feature of al-Qaeda’s leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is aligned similarly in an announcement-banner by the Jihadi Media Elite for a collection containing “all of his Messages and Studies.”⁵¹



Illustration 9: Alignment of al-Zawahiri’s face in pictorial script form

Similarly, we can find a repeated alignment of pictorial patterns in the background of Jihadi YouTube channels and BlogSpot accounts. A script tells us something, it is rationally understood. Thus, the perception of martial symbols, which are aligned like script, changes from an aesthetic viewing into a quasi-rational understanding. It is a sensory-psychological process that rings in the change because the eyes jump from picture to picture, start rationalizing them and thus add to the right-brain dominated emotional picture viewing (approximately from top-left to bottom right) the textual rational viewing (from sign to sign according to script direction). Below the Islamic credo (*shahadah*) “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger” is being used as repeated background pattern. Jihadis have appropriated it as a central Symbol of their sub-culture (meaning “only jihad is truly Islamic”). Likewise, the “seal of the Prophet” is a meta-sign of jihadi subculture and stands for the exclusiveness

50 This popular proverb goes back to a hadith and is frequently being discussed on popular Arabic and Islamic discussion forums, for example, the tawwat-forum, accessed October 3, 2011, <http://forum.tawwat.com/showthread.php?t=9426>. Different geographical and cultural interpretations of the *hadith* are mentioned in the threat. The original hadith can also be found in the collection of the medieval Islamic scholar al-Suyuti (1445–1505).

51 “*Majmu’ rasa’il wa abhath al-sheikh al-mujahid Ayman al-Zawahiri hafizahu Allah*” (All messages and studies of the fighting sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may Allah protect him), accessed December 15, 2011, <http://www.nokbah.com/mn.htm>.

of Islam and Muhammad, who has “sealed” the message of monotheism as last Prophet. This arrangement of signs rationalizes the claim that jihadis may carry forward the monotheistic message of Islam by violent means.⁵²



Illustration 10: Pictorial script as aesthetic background pattern

Secondly, the combination of propagandist pictures with text items is a form of pictorial script. In the illustration below, the logo of the www.tawhed.ws online library of jihad, the motto is skillfully combined with a meta-symbol of jihad: namely the contours of a scimitar swinging horse rider with a black standard in front of a globe, which creates a guiding rationalization of jihadi myth by combining the pictorial emblem with the emblematic theological sentence. The calligraphy of the logo reads “Pulpit for Monotheism and Jihad”. It rationalizes the horse rider who wants to install the global dominance of Islam. Underneath the logo the text reads: “*Qiwam al-din kitab yahdi wa saif yansur* – The base of religion is [built on] a book that guides and a sword that conquers.” Encapsulated within the quote is the principle of communicative guidance through religious propaganda. This means in plain words that one must fight in order to do justice to God’s commands. In a more abstract sense, authoritative text and its reproduction by followers guide physical combat.⁵³ Reproduction means any use of signs that support the jihadi message. Virtual leadership can also be understood as “guidance” by incitement that flows out of emblematic semiotics. However, it needs to be presented in a consumer-friendly and effective way. The concept of “a book that guides” and “a sword that conquers” was also

52 Both examples are Youtube taken from Youtube channels. The first one is a German jihadi grassroots supporter of Turkish origin, Ebu Ezzam, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/user/EbuAzzam>. The second example is the Youtube channel of the prominent Austrian jihadi propagandist “Abu Usama al-Gharib,” who is the emir of the salafimedia.de, which subordinates itself under salafimedia.uk and its emir Anjem Choudari, who in turn seems to be subordinate to Omar Bakri Muhammad in Lebanon, accessed January 2, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/user/AbuUsamaAlGharib>.

53 The website www.tawhed.ws interprets Ibn Taymiyya’s quote as a command to fight, since one needs to hit with the “sword” in order to do justice to the “book.” The website attributes the quote to Ibn Taymiyya’s work *al-Siyasa al-Shar’iyya* (Shariatic Policy), without citing the page number or volume. “*Hatmiyat al-muwajaha*” (The Necessity of Confrontation), www.tawhed.ws, accessed October 26, 2011, <http://www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=3441>.

used prominently by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. All 22 issues of their online magazine “Mu’askar al-Battar” (Training-Camp of the Cutting Sword), which was issued between 2003 and 2004, used this concept. The online magazine focused on military training. Each magazine-issue contained a section called “a book that guides.” This section provided the Islamic legal and strategic underpinning of paramilitary training, which was afterwards presented in a magazine-section called “a sword that conquers.”⁵⁴ The latter section discussed different tactics, weapons and their use in terrorist operations. In today’s jihadi net-culture, the concept of guidance by text and its application by weapon is very well-known. It comes to use strongly for the build-up of virtual groups, the strengthening of their cohesion, and the motivation of terrorist attacks; and it is used in combination with the “incitement-paradigm” (*tahrid*) that propagates individual terrorism (*irhab fardi*). In jihadi net-environments, virtual institutions such as caliphate, emirate and statehood are created to give quasi-institutional power to doctrinaire commands (see for example, the virtual Islamic State of Iraq ISI).⁵⁵



Illustration 11: Pictorial script to signify the communicative guidance concept in the logo of www.tawhed.ws

Thirdly, calligraphy sui generis is a form of pictorial script, a mixture of picture and text. Calligraphies enjoy enthusiastic appreciation by art collectors, even if they do not command the respective languages. Similar to Chinese calligraphy, Latin art scripts, or the Japanese *Sho*, Arabic is an aesthetic picture-text mixture and has traditionally been used for the iconic depiction of culture and transcendental concepts. Arabic calligraphy is today widely used in modern media, for graffiti and news-ads. But in a traditional sense, it stands for divine authority, strength and transcendental significance.⁵⁶ The Quran was written down in Arabic and represents the revealed word of God to Muhammad. From

54 “Majmu’ nasharat Mu’askar al-Battar,” www.battarpages.atspace.com, accessed January 3, 2011. The editors of the magazine were the chief propagandist Abu Jandal al-Azdi (aka Faris al-Shuwayl, arrested 2004) and the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda leader Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin (killed 2004), who succeeded Yusuf al-Uyeyri after the Saudi regime killed him in May 2003 (Al-Uyeyri also administrated the first website of al-Qaeda central, al-Neda.com, between 2001 and 2003).

55 See as an example “*Bayan bi-sha’n khilafat al-sheikh Usama bin Laden fi imarat jamaat qaidat al-jihad*,” accessed June 2, 2012, <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?445261>.

56 Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

the perspective of a devout Muslim, Arabic calligraphy embodies the Quran.⁵⁷ The sacral meaning of Arabic script is also stressed in the Quran itself.⁵⁸

In order to prevent polytheist idolatry, figural art has been avoided in many parts of the Islamic world, which has led to the development of Arabic calligraphy as an art form. “Many religions have made use of figural images to convey their core convictions. Islam has instead used the shapes and sizes of words or letters. Because Islamic leaders saw in figural arts a possible implication of idolatry, Islam’s early theocracy looked to the artistry of calligraphy for religious expression. In Islamic and Arabic cultures, calligraphy became highly respected as an art – the art of writing.”⁵⁹

In addition, the “primacy of the word in Islam is reflected in the virtually universal application of calligraphy. Writing is given pride of place on all kinds of objects – objects of everyday use as well as entire wall surfaces, mosques furniture, the interior and exterior of mosques, tombs, and al-Ka’ba, the sanctuary of Islam.”⁶⁰ Also “new buildings, monuments and even private homes have Quranic verses etched deeply into their structures”⁶¹ Calligraphic art beautifies not only tangible objects of everyday use, but also virtual surroundings such as jihadi websites, their advertisement banners, logos, captions and e-book titles. In such environments, focus is put on the representation of power. Being the script of the divine message of the Quran “endowed it with extraordinary strength and transcendent significance: from this world’s manifold possibilities, Allah had chosen it, and the Arabic language it initially expressed, as the vehicle for his final revelation.”⁶² Of course, there are varying degrees to which this concept of authority and holiness is understood by different Islamic cultures. While mainstream Muslim cultures focus on the broader religio-aesthetic aspects of calligraphy, jihadis stress the literal meaning and authoritativeness of script. Important for their fundamentalist interpretation is also that Arabic calligraphy points back to the Golden Age of Islam. It reminds of piety and right

57 Helen Boyle, “Embodiment as a conceptual Framework for Describing The Practice of Quranic Memorization,” in *Recapturing the Personal: Essays on Education and Embodied Knowledge in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Irving Epstein (Charlotte: IAP, 2007), 121.

58 96:3–5: “3. *Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful*,– 4. *He Who taught (the use of) the pen*,– 5. *Taught man that which he knew not*.” The Holy Quran, Yusuf Ali Translation, accessed October 24, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation96.php.

59 “Arabic Calligraphy,” Imam Reza Network, accessed October 24, 2001, <http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=4202>.

60 Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 129.

61 Helen Boyle, “Embodiment as a conceptual Framework for Describing The Practice of Quranic Memorization,” 121.

62 Anthony Welch, *Calligraphy in the arts of the Muslim world* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 23 (referring to Yasin Hamid Safadi: *Islamic Calligraphy*, London 1978).

guidance of the “true” original Islam between the 7th and 10th centuries.⁶³ By these characteristics, Arabic calligraphy lends itself perfectly for propagandist purposes.

Jihadi calligraphy is neither traditional, nor does it follow the strict rules of the art of writing and symbolism in ancient Islam. The Islamic world is in a period of transition. This also influences stylistic experiments with calligraphic designs and fonts. “These range from personal formal experiments to representations of vernacular street art, cartoons and comic strips. The challenge, however, remains in testing the limits of legibility.”⁶⁴ Like designers, political activists or graffiti artists in the Islamic world, jihadis also test aesthetic limits. Their websites overflow with figurative illustrations and modern Arabic script fonts. This use reflects an acceptance of “taking creative risks that challenge the rules of the old establishment; of recognizing present realities of contemporary design and visual branding [...],” observes a recently published book on Arabic graffiti, which promises to become a standard work of reference on modern Arabic calligraphy.⁶⁵ Jihadi script is embedded into backgrounds with aesthetic calligraphic themes of dots and diacritical points, which animate the logos and give them depth. “When written without dots and diacritical points, Arabic script can look flat and barren. But when the dots and diacritical points are added, the script comes to life like a garden in spring.”⁶⁶ Jihadi websites use pre-developed calligraphic fonts in emblems and logos – often, design fonts that combine classical Diwani and Thuluth scripts. Deewani has beautifying curved elements, while Thuluth with its diacritical marks and horizontal alignment gives depth and organizes.

The head-section of the Ansar al-Mujahidin forum (script logo and pictorial emblem)⁶⁷ illustrates this use of Arabic calligraphy. When looking at its layout, the script automatically animates the eye, which continues with the reading direction of the logo (Arabic is read from right to left) towards the left and then meets the emblem on the far left side. The emblem is an explicit pictorial representation of the abstract concept “jihad.” Jihad is represented by a Quran, a Kalashnikov and a black flag embedded into a background of repeated arabesque and floral patterns. The black flag carries again the credo and the “Seal of the

63 Among the classical calligraphic scripts frequently used on jihadist forums are Thuluth, Eastern Kufi, old Kufi, Muhaqqaq, Naskhi, Nastaliq and Riq'a. See Jonathan Figchel, “Radical Islamic Internet Propaganda: Concepts, Idioms and Visual Motifs”, in *Intermedia Seduction for Terrorist Recruiting*, ed. Boaz Ganor et al. (Amsterdam: IOS, 2007), 34 – 38.

64 Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès, “Brief History of the Arabic Script,” in *Arabic Graffiti*, ed. Pascal Zoghbi and Stone AKA Don Karl (Berlin: From Here to Fame Publishing, 2011), 21 – 22.

65 Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès, “Brief History of the Arabic Script,” 22.

66 “Arabic Calligraphy,” www.imamreza.net.

67 Accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/>.

Prophets,” which creates a black-white, wrong-right dichotomy in the mind of the viewer. However, this does not break the aesthetic symmetry of the head-frame. The emblem combines script (Arabic), symbolized script (the picture of the Quran, containing Allah’s revealed words) and symbols of warfare (Kashnikov and black banner). The transcendental emblematic power of this arrangement on a radicalized viewer must not be underestimated. The eye follows first the logo-script direction from the right to the left, stops at the emblem, examines it and bounces back towards the right, where the logo attracts it again. An emotional and dynamic tension exists between the logo and the emblem, which is made pleasant to the eye by the balanced use of saturated earth and light colors in the background. The arabesque decoration patterns, which are typical elements of Islamic decoration, remind of the precious art of the Abbasid caliphate, but also of Ottoman document decorations, which stand for authority.⁶⁸



Illustration 12: head-frame the Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, logo and emblem separately below.

B. Colors

Colors play an important role in jihadi aesthetics and semiotics. The psychological meaning of colors has been exploited by marketing and advertisement strategists for decades. Yet, jihadis use colors not only for their trans-cultural psychological meaning. Certain colors bear a deeply rooted theological meaning in Islamic culture. It is not a coincidence that jihadi leaders and street preachers present themselves in white and black clothes in front of audiences and cameras. The meaning of colors described is not only important for jihadi web-propaganda, but also for their real-life use by jihadis. For example, al-Qaeda’s top theologian Abu Yahya al-Libi sometimes wears a white linen shirt and a black cap in video speeches. The street preacher Abu Izzadeen can be seen on demon-

⁶⁸ Another example of pictorial script on jihadi websites displaying similar aesthetic tools are advertisement banners of jihadi media companies which are created with the help of moving *Graphic Interchange Formats* (gifs). These are graphic-formats with a very good image compression yet little color depth (until 256 colors pro single picture), which enable users to save several pictures on one file. The files are represented like animations by web-browsers. The different pictures appear, disappear and move.

strations in Great Britain wearing black cloth and a white cap. This means that al-Libi puts focus on his theological authority – with dominant white clothes. The smaller black head-cloth stands for jihadi ideology. Vice versa, Abu Izzadeen puts stress on his jihadi credibility – with dominant black clothes. The smaller white head-cloth stands for religious trustworthiness.⁶⁹ This significance of colors in jihadi subculture will be explained in the following at the example of jihadi websites.

Jihadi websites are defined by very strong and vivid colors. The polychromatic nature of jihadi websites is at times overwhelming and does not remind of terrorism at all. Yet, there is a very intricate propagandist twist to it. This polychromasia – in the sense of colors – stands for paradise and jihad. Red can mean blood in a single graphic, but in the overall picture of different colored graphics appearing one after the other, it is one element in a composition of lustful and rewarding abundance. Such a composition includes elements of transcendental, martial and popular aestheticisms and is supposed to appeal to non-jihadi as well as to jihadi audiences. One perceives not only a propagandistic use of stark colors like red, which stands for blood and conflict, or black as representation of a counter-world and rebellious narrative, but an overall chromaticity that appears very energetic, but innocent, which the administrators of the sites try to link to broader Islamic culture by combining pictorial symbols of violence such as the Kalashnikov with metasigns of Islam such as the Quran. In a deeper sense, the colorfulness of jihadist websites can be understood in terms of hopes of redemption and ideals of salvation that are connected to an imaginary overflow of riches in paradise. Without understanding this deeply rooted vision of salvation in jihadi ideology, it is impossible to get the deeper meaning of the layout of their websites. Moreover, self-perceptions of jihadis as a Muslim vanguard and war concepts are expressed by the choice of colors. Since at the same time colors on jihadi websites are connected to broader Muslim aestheticism, as we have argued before, the goal is to create a counter-world that is anchored in consent. This dissonance stimulates emotions and serves propaganda purposes such as the mobilization of followers.

There is no uniformity in the choice of colors on jihadi websites. Forums, which until now are the most important websites in the jihadi Net, illustrate this. Although there are clear aesthetic and semiotic similarities on jihadi forums – all share the same symbolisms and symmetry of logo and emblem – the base colors and background themes are different, ranging from white to greenish to

69 Speech by Abu Yahya al-Libi, “Libya, madha yurad laha” (What is wished for Libya), al-Sahab media company, accessed December 11, 2011, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/show-thread.php?t=14119>; Speech by Abu Izzadeen, “Es ist ein Krieg gegen den Islam – Abu Izzadeen“, Youtube-channel “Rashidunarmy,” accessed January 3, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/user/Rashidunarmy#p/search/0/vk9Q_HO3Ozk.

brownish, or red and deep blue base-colors on white or light backgrounds, on which again polychromatic media banners (gifs) of jihadi organizations float and blink.⁷⁰

From a western perspective, the layout may seem confusing, immature and pubertal, because the simplicity of the message and its illustrations are at times overwhelming. Yet, it should be very clear that the pre-potency of Western perception of culture is irrelevant for our research. Let us describe the coloring of two prominent jihadi websites to illustrate their use of colors.

The use of white is very well illustrated in the online library www.tawhed.ws of the Jordanian jihadi cleric Muhammad al-Maqdisi. When entering the website, a wide range of colors draws the eyes to different directions and creates unrest. The blinking and movement of the banners is created by animated Graphic Interchange Formats (gifs), consisting of moving layers of pictures, which lack color depth and exhaust the human eye quickly, but are simple to design. This is an emotional element, standing for the urgency of the jihadi message and signaling that there is no time to waste. Everything must be clicked on immediately; everything is supposed to be consumed. From the jihadi viewpoint, the Islamic Umma has new input, and therefore waits for its consumers to devour the messages and emotionally participate in the plight of its victims and the victories of its warriors.

The basic background color of the site is white. Cross-culturally, white is perceived as the color of purity, peace and innocence. In Islam, white additionally stands for goodness, honor and theological purity.⁷¹ Most importantly in

70 Polychromasia together with a very similar build-up can be seen in the following forums: Greenish base colors define the Arabic language Al-Jahafal forum ("The Huge Armies," <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/>), the Turkish and Arabic language Hakka Davet Forumu ("Call to Justice Forum," <http://www.davetulhaq.com>) and the Somali language Qimmat al-Islam forum ("The Peak of Islam," <http://alqimmah.net/>), but also the Arabic language Forum Sanam al-Islam, The Hump of Islam (<http://snam-s.net/vb/>). Brownish base colors are used by the prominent forum Ansar al-Mujahidin "Supporters of the Fighters," <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/>, Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya ("The Islamic Network of Sacrifice," <http://alfidaa.org/vb/>), Shabakat al-Tahaddi al-Islamiyya ("The Islamic Network of Confrontation," <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/>) and Shabakat Hanin ("The Network of Longing (for martyrdom)," <http://www.hanein.info/vb/>), which are all Arabic language top forums in virtual jihadi media. The Persian language forum Rah al-Jihad ("Way of Jihad," <http://www.rahe-jehad.com/index.php>), however, as well as the Arabic top forum al-Shabakat Jihad al-Alami ("Global Jihad Network," <http://www.aljahad.com/vb/>) display martial red and deep blue respectively as base colors of their sites.

71 Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, "The philosophy of colours in the Holy Quran," accessed January 4, 2011, <http://www.muslim.org/islam/colours.htm>. Wearing white clothes is recommended by different Islamic traditions as a sign of purity. Muslim dead who die of a natural death are supposed to be shrouded in white sheets: "Wear your white clothes, because they are the best and shroud your dead in them." (martyrs, however, are according to some traditions supposed to be buried unwashed in their battle-stained clothes). Masnad

the context of the website, white represents distinguished Islamic scholars (*'ulama'*). Therefore, many scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi wear white in their television shows. Also salafi-fundamentalist (*da'wa* and *mu'tadili* strand) love to wear white linen clothes that reach until their ankles (following the tradition of Muhammad). The salafi-jihadi scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi is an icon figure of jihadi theology. He has probably chosen the background color of his website on purpose.

The Quran likens scholars to streaks (*thamrat*) of water in the mountains (*jibal*), and within these mountains there are white, red and black streaks. White streaks are likened to learned people (*'ulama'*), i.e. the most trustworthy scholars.⁷² Muslim scholars are thus allegorically likened to colors and grouped into three different categories, which represent their value and worth. Continuing the allegory, another verse from the Quran is applied in Islamic theology to liken the white-category of *'ulama'* to rocks “from which rivers and streams of knowledge flow, and springs and fountains of truths rise up.”⁷³ In this context, “white is the colour of peace, harmony, goodness and honour, red denotes danger and war, and black is the colour of evil and ignorance. The colours in this verse also refer to *three types of religious leaders*.”⁷⁴ The non-color black is excluded from other colors and stands for stark destruction and mischief. However, in contrast to Vidyarthi's negative explanation of black, jihadis love black. It is one of their most prominent colors. Black has its own historic significance in Islam, since the war flag of Muhammad is said to have been solid black with an eagle on it (“*rayat al-'uqab*). Therefore, black is associated in Islam with “war” and “conquest.” Furthermore, black stands for jihadi messianic visions of the Day of Judgment (*yaum al-qiyamah*, see below). Individual jihadi media activists (YouTube channels, BlogSpot accounts) tend to use stark colors,

Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, No. 2137, *Mausu'at al-Hadith*, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=2137&pid=672350

72 Quran Surat al-Mala'ika/al-Fatir 35:27 – 28 expliciteley says: 27. *Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky? With it We then bring out produce of various colours. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of colour, and black intense in hue.* 28. *And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colours. Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge [‘ulama’]: for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.* Accessed October 14, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation35.php.

73 Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, “The philosophy of colours in the Holy Quran.” This refers to Surat al-Baqara 2:74: *For among rocks there are some from which rivers gush forth; others there are which when split asunder send forth water; and others which sink for fear of Allah.* Accessed October 14, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation2.php.

74 Religious leaders refers here again to *'ulama'*, i.e. Muslim jurisprudents. See Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, “The philosophy of colours in the Holy Quran,” <http://www.muslim.org/islam/colours.htm>.

especially black, disproportionately. Black is the color of underworld and death. It expresses protest against conventions, stands for non-adaptation and revolution against the established, corrupted orders and poses a counter-model to the accepted world. It is a color that creates fear of the unknown. In jihadi culture, black stands for the fright that is supposed to enter the hearts of enemies.

Let us take a closer look at the use of the color “green” by the Shumukh al-Islam forum (<http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>).⁷⁵ *Shumukh al-Islam* (Heights of Islam) is one of the most prominent jihadi forums. The name of the forum, “Heights of Islam,” is a metaphor for jihad in the sense of fighting (*qital*). Unlike the Tawheed website, al-Shumukh forum is dominated by the color green, especially in the head-frame, which is vivid and fresh. In Islamic cultural perceptions, green is regarded as the color of the Prophet. Muhammad is said to have worn green garments, when sitting in the shade of the Ka’ba in Mecca.⁷⁶ Thus green is perceived as the color of Islam. It is also perceived as the color of Muhammad and the first Muslim community, which jihadis envision to emulate. In addition, green in Arab cultural perception has for centuries reminded of abundance. It stands in stark contrast to the scarcity of Arab reality on the Arabian Peninsula from which the Islamic message sprang. Green is like an oasis within the vast, sandy desert. Green thus also symbolizes hope, wealth and redemption in Islamic culture (which is similar to the trans-cultural meaning of the color green). Finally, the Arabic word for Paradise is “Garden” (*al-janna*). When thinking of a garden, green stands for a saturated flora. First of all, a garden is associated with the green of its plants. But there are also flowers, wells, fruits, silver decorations, and virgins with white complexions and black eyes said to be in the heavenly garden.⁷⁷ Paradise is a garden full of pleasures so plentiful that they escape human imagination. In addition, the Quran, Surat al-Dahr (Age)/al-Insan (Man) 76:21 says that Muslims will wear garments of fine green

75 As discussed above, jihadi forums combine hierarchic authority (represented by the dominant alignment of jihadi media products from so-called media-institutions “*mu’assasat*” and distribution centers “*marakiz*”) with participative elements, i.e. discussion forums. Jihadi forums are not only platforms for ideologues and organizations – like the person-centered website [tawheed.ws](http://www.tawheed.ws) –, but also pools for sympathizers. They are mostly run by media activists who have contact with the media outlets of jihadi organizations via the websites. Members can communicate with each other and leave comments on different platforms of the forums. The communication is strictly ritualistic and happens along agreed upon patterns of behavior and salafi-jihadi “Chatiquette.” If we apply the definition of ideology by Althusser, then members of these forums think they are self-determined participants, whereas in reality their discussions are strictly governed by ideological rules.

76 Musnad Ibn Hanbal, No. 17158, *Mausu’at al-Hadith*, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=17158&pid=672793

77 See the descriptions of paradise in Surat al-Dahr (76) and in Surat al-Fath (48).

silk in the hereafter.⁷⁸ The colorful description of paradise in the Quran and Sunna adds additional coloring possibilities, which are amply exploited by propagandists of the Shumukh forum. The forum displays an abundance of colors including yellow, pink, purple, blue and red in its advertisement banners and animated graphics.

1. The meaning of colors on jihadi websites: A summary⁷⁹

Jihadi visual culture uses colors intensively. Many colors found on jihadi websites, for example, yellow and pink are happy, can be seen in religious decorations and calligraphy all over the Islamic world. Their broader cultural use is exploited by jihadi websites to make the concept of martyrdom attractive. Brown, light-brown and yellow also remind of earth and sand and transport a “grounded” message. Sand covers also a lot of the ground of the Arabian Peninsula, the cradle of Islam. In addition, yellow stands for light. The propagandistic message is thus transported by shining rays. In short, polychromatic mixing of colors on jihadi websites appeals to Islamic aestheticism. It expresses popular aesthetics, paradise imaginations and jihadi martyrdom-ideology in parallel. Yet, some colors have very distinctive meanings in Islam and jihadi subculture. Each description will go from the general Islamic to the more specific jihadi meaning. Finally, some cross-cultural characteristics are mentioned.

White: Stands for truth, purity, piety, religious authority and Islamic order. Muhammad is said to have entered Mekka after its submission in 630 AD with a white flag (*liwa*). The flag of the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate Afghanistan is white (since 1996 it additionally bears a black *shahada*). In jihadi propaganda, white transfers its qualities on the object or person attributed to it. Psychologically, white represents the beginning of all possibilities and at the same time the running-away from the consequences. As the color of light, it stands in stark contrast to the non-color black and mixing both colors triggers archetypical symbolic categories in the brain. White stands for absolute “yes.” In combination with black it creates the perception of absolute order and starkly dichoto-

78 Surat al-Dahr (Age)/al-Insan (Man) 76:21, accessed October 14, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation76.php.

79 This summary is based on observations of the author, the Islamic Imagery Project of the United States Military Academy and the color-analyst Harald Braem. For the last two sources see The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda (Westpoint: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006), accessed January 4, 2012, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Islamic-Imagery-Project.pdf>; Harald Braem, *Die Macht der Farben: Bedeutung und Symbolik* (München: Wissenschaftsverlag LangenMüllerHerbig, 2009).

mist divisions (black-white, good-bad, etc.). In addition, the pure and untouched state of white is emblematic for truth.

Black: Is the color of jihad. Muhammad's war banner (*raya*) is said to have been black and the Abbasid caliphate was represented by black as well. Black also stands for the advent of the Mahdi at the end of times and the final universal battle. Black is thus the color of jihad, the caliphate and the apocalypse. In jihadi subculture is evokes a historical sense of the concepts jihad, conquest and caliphate, as well as a doctrinaire vision of salvation. Black stimulates looking back and forward at the same time. It creates the wish to emulate glorious military campaigns in the Islamic past and to establish a caliphate in the present. In addition, the color stimulates the radicalized viewer to usher in the Day of Resurrection (*Yaum al-Qiyama*). Psychologically, black stands for the struggle between light and darkness, good and bad, death and life. Contrasts are always dependent on each other and cannot sustain themselves alone. According to the color-theoretician Max Lüscher, black represents the will to destroy the existing and conventional order. It is a color of opposition and authoritarian coercion against other opinions and life-styles.

Red: Has positive as well as negative connotations in jihadi imagery. Most basically, it stands for blood and danger, battle and violence. As a color of violence it has both positive pro-jihadi and negative anti-jihadi meanings. It stands positively for jihadi triumphs and successes, and the dangerousness of jihadi forces. In a negative sense, it evokes the concepts of tyranny, torture and oppression by the enemies of jihadis. Emotionally, red is the oldest and until today one of the most popular colors among cultures. It is an ambiguous color that represents fire, health, energy and optimism, but also aggression, danger, injury and violence. The jihadi adaption of red on websites is similar to its cross-cultural meaning.

Green: Is the color of the Prophet Muhammad and thus symbolizes Islam. Green stands for piety and basic Islamic principles laid down by Muhammad. Many Muslims identify green as an especially Islamic color and use it to decorate items of faith. Green in popular Islamic culture as the color of Islam has a significant influence on jihadi propaganda. Jihadis use green to create a link between their cause and popular Muslim perceptions of piety. When used on jihadi websites, the color green indicates that the colored object is Islamic and belongs to Islam (such as green colored countries on a map, green backgrounds of martyr pictures). In parallel, green evokes imaginations of the afterlife, superfluous riches and paradise imaginations. Psychologically and cross-culturally, green stands for life, health and plants. Throughout history, green has been the symbol of hope for different peoples who suffered under scarce life conditions. The Vikings, for example, hoped to establish a saturated dwelling place amidst the ice of "Greenland." Muhammad identified a hopeful meaning with

green; it contrasted the sandy vastness of the Arabian Desert. Green is perceived like the glimpse of an oasis in the desert.

Blue: In Jihadi imagery as well as in broader Muslim culture blue stands for hope. Especially in jihadi images it represents the hope placed in jihad and martyrdom, awakening visions of superfluous water provided in paradise. Thus, blue is strongly connected to paradise imaginations and these visions are strengthened by an interplay of blue, green, yellow and red colors on jihadi websites. Emotionally, blue is a meditative color and reminds of water, sky and heaven.

Brown: Some Muslims say that brown stands for Islamic conquests, since it signifies earth that was conquered. Many websites use brown in different shades and this explanation seems reasonable. In Islamic dream interpretation, brown represents dignity, nobility, power and wealth. But it can also stand for hardships.⁸⁰ Maybe jihadis in their highly mystical almost Sufi-inspired interpretation of Islam (even though they would strictly deny this) interpret the color similarly. Emotionally and trans-culturally, brown stands for stability and security (ground underneath the feet).

Signs of (A) identification; (B) conspiracy and (C) salvation on jihadi websites

The development of media jihad and its symbolisms goes back to the 1980s (Afghan jihad), was further developed and strongly influenced in the Bosnian, Algerian and Chechnyan Islamic struggles as well as by the global jihadi scenes in “Londonistan,” Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi-Arabia during the 1990s. It has clearly peaked during the last ten years, which is strongly connected to Islamic terrorism being trump on the international security agenda, the popularity of jihadi topics and growth of jihadi subcultures connected to this, growing Internet-use and enhanced user-friendliness of web 2.0. Already in the 1980s, prominent media activists experimented with jihadi media and symbolism. Some of them subordinated themselves to the deans of global jihad, Abdallah Azzam (1944 – 1989) and Umar Abd al-Rahman (arrested 1993 in the U.S. for his involvement in the first WTC bombings). Tamim al-Adnani, Azzam’s right hand, Abu al-Walid al-Masri, an influential mentor of the school of “jihad front journalism”⁸¹ as well as Azzam’s jihad magazine “Majallat al-Jihad” strongly influ-

80 “Seeing brown color in your dream in Islam..”, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.myislamicdream.com/brown_colour.html.

81 “Front journalism” means that jihadi fighters, starting in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979 – 1989), were called upon to document their operations

enced marketing and branding of jihadi media products.⁸² The symbols and logos on jihadi websites and in contemporary jihadi videos are a continuation of the earlier product logos, core symbols and identifying signs in 1980s and 1990s jihadi propaganda. For example, the propagandist use of black flag and “The seal of the Prophets” go back to the 1980s media jihad. In terms of acoustic signs, for example, the “chirping of green paradise birds” can already be found in 1990s videos from the Bosnian jihad. Also the ample use of Anasheed (vocal singing without instruments) already belonged to the semiotic repertoire of jihad propaganda 30 years ago. The Internet is merely a new and better transport medium for the message. But according to Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message and thus strongly influences the output and way information is distributed.⁸³ If information is power then media jihad is as important as actual battle fields. Assassinations by the U.S. of top al-Qaeda media operators such as Samir Khan, Anwar al-Awlaqi and Ibrahim al-Banna (all 2011 in Yemen, Khan and al-Awlaqi were U.S. citizens) testify to this.

“Signs of community”, “signs of conspiracy” and “signs of salvation” stand for semiotic-psychic processes of identification, exclusion and reward. Firstly, “signs of community” are identifiers for the jihadi community and teach us how jihadi online groups see themselves. Furthermore, a dualistic counter-picture is needed to distinguish “we” (i. e. jihadis) from “them” (i. e. enemies). Witsch observes that the dichotomic construction of enemies relies on “signs of conspiracy.”⁸⁴ Societies and groups tend to identify themselves by labeling outsiders with unwished characteristics such as “criminal”, “crazy.”⁸⁵ The exclusion of outsiders for the sake of community building is also a typical trait of mass societies.⁸⁶ It becomes even more important for subcultures. In extremist and fundamentalist subcultures, signs of conspiracy reproduce hostile myths. These are summarized by jihadis under the myth of the Judeo-Christian Neo-Crusader alliance that leads a war against Islam and the Muslims, which is supported by Muslim apostates (*murtaddun*). “Signs of identification” and “signs of conspiracy” need to be complemented with “signs of salvation,” which refer to the essential promises of reward in fundamentalist ideology. Without a reward, the

with video and photo-cameras. The raw-footage would then be turned into propaganda material and distributed internationally or in the home-lands of the fighters.

82 Jihadi video database of the Jihadism Online Project; see also Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

83 Marshall McLuhan and Quention Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Random House, 1967).

84 Witsch, *Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*, 57 – 58, 113 – 121.

85 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 102.

86 According the Suisse philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778), “We not only hate the evil because they harm us, but because they are evil.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emil oder Über die Erziehung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), 302.

ideology would lack a goal. In jihadi terms, signs of salvation are based on selective interpretations of the rewards of jihad, which can be found in Islamic sources and theology, plus own signifiers that are invented by the jihadi community. This triad of key signs is ever repeated in jihadi propaganda, may it be in the layout of jihadi websites, jihadi movies, internet discussions, or advertisements for jihadi products. Understanding these symbols and depictions enables the sociologist and anthropologist to enter deeper into the subculture of jihad and to understand processes of communicative guidance through ideology.

A. Jihadi signs of identification and community

1. *Symbols, emblems and slogans* are not only among the most important identifying signs on jihadi websites, but also in jihadi reality. The way in which jihadis surround themselves with symbols of jihad in videos, such as black flags and horses testifies to this. Symbols “play a fundamental role in the process of creating identity”; and in the way groups build “cultural boundaries, self-protection and organize relations with the outside world.”⁸⁷ Jihadists perceive a state of war with all out-groups. This refers to non-Muslims such as secularists, to Christians, Jews, and maybe most importantly to relations with Muslims who do not follow the jihadi interpretation of Islam. Jihadis try to strengthen the perception that they are the chosen elite of Islam. They compare themselves to the proto-Muslim community around Muhammad (the “*sahaba*”). It is their task to fight all unbelievers around them. Identifying symbols on jihadi websites plays a crucial role in teaching members the core message of messianic mythology in a simple and understandable way. Only a glimpse shall suffice to awaken to live in a percipient apocalyptic visions and concepts of being victorious. For example, the contours of a black horse rider with a black standard shall create emotions connected to the concept of individual “heroism” and dedication. The strength of such semiotics goes at the cost on non-martial interpretations of Islam. Especially so, since a worldwide counter-terrorism policies focus on phenomena related to jihad and give ever more updraft to the phenomenon.

The repetition of certain illustrations and pictorial patterns can be called “ritualizing aesthetics.” The reason is that repetition of similar aesthetics and iconography represents and prepares for real rituals. One of the most prominent symbols of jihadi identification is the black flag (*al-raya*). In virtual space, it is a cluster of bits and pixels compressed into a bitmapped image that stands for jihad. As an emblem it can be found in variations on all jihadi websites. One

87 Zsdislav Mach, *Symbols, conflict and identity: Essays in political anthropology* (New York: State University Press, 1993), X (Preface).

variation of the black standard in Muhammad's time is said to have borne an eagle. Therefore, it is also referred to as *rayat al-'uqab*, or simply *al-'uqab*. The jihadi forum "*al-'Uqab*" has even chosen its name after it (www.alokab.com/). The most basic variation of the Muslim war banner is *al-riya al-sauda'* (black standard), which refers to a solid black piece of cloth. The black banner (*al-riya*) served the Muslim army as war banner and therefore represents war, conquest and destruction of the enemy. It is being hoisted in the "*dar al-harb*" (abode of war), where Infidels rule. In addition, there is a white banner that carries the credo in black letters. According to Muslim tradition the white banner (called "*al-liwa*") stands for Islamic statehood (caliphate, emirate) and government. It is being raised in the "*dar al-salam/al-Islam*" (abode of peace)⁸⁸, where the Islamic sharia is applied.⁸⁹ Sometimes, both flags, standing for Islamic jihad and for Islamic government and statehood, can be found on jihadi websites.⁹⁰ However, the black flag dominates jihadi websites.



Illustration 13: Jihadi adaption of Muhammad's war banner (*al-riya*) with the Islamic credo

For jihadis, the black standard (*riya*) is a sign of the past, presence and future. It stands for Muhammad; the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI – a coalition of jihadi groups under the umbrella of al-Qaeda since 2006) and global jihad; as well as the advent of the Mahdi. The modern jihadi adaption of the black standard carries the Islamic credo "There is not God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger" in white letters on it. Oftentimes, the "Seal of the Prophets" is added underneath it.

First and in a historical sense, the black standard evokes the concept of famous battles under Muhammad. Badr in 624 AD is the paradigm of an

88 In cultural use, "Dar al-Salam" is being used synonymously for "Dar al-Islam" which is actually the correct theological term for "the abode of peace." The division between "dar al-harb" and "dar al-Islam" goes back to Abu Hanifa (699–767), the founder of the Hanafi juridical school in Islam.

89 Muhammad is said to have entered Mecca after the conquest in 630 AD with a white standard. On jihadi websites, the white banner indicates support for the Afghan Taliban and represents the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban used a plain white flag between 1996 and 1997 and a white flag with the Islamic credo in black letters from 1997 on until today.

90 See the head-frames of the Persian jihadi website www.rahejehad.com and the entrance page of the Turkish/Arabic website www.davetulhaq.com.

asymmetric victory, when a small group of Muslims defeated an overwhelming enemy. The Battle of Uhud in 625 AD stands for steadfastness in the face of a superior enemy. The Muslim army was severely weakened and practically defeated at Uhud, but still not overrun by its enemies, the Quraish from Mecca. Both battles complement each other and are analogized to present events to illustrate the jihadi elite concept. The Saudi Arabian jihadi scholar Nasir al-Fahd analogizes that the quick victory at Badr drew a lot of hypocrites into the Muslims's rows and the hard battle at Uhud cleaned the Muslim battle lines again. Just the elite remained.⁹¹

Second, the black flag represents a successful jihadi insurgency in the present. It stands for the coalition of al-Qaeda aligned groups under the organizational umbrella of the Islamic State of Iraq (since 2006). Before its merger with al-Qaeda in 2004, the chief-group of this coalition led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (killed 2006) was called *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad Group). Its name was inscribed in yellow letters on the black standard.

Third, the black flag stands for an army of apocalyptic horse riders. This myth plays a tremendously important role in jihadi subculture. The end of times approaches, when riders with black flags will approach from the historic region of Khorasan towards Palestine.⁹² The messianic interpretation of the black flag, which is also attributed to the color black, dominates jihadi thinking. The messianic signification of the black flag has been fostered in jihadi propaganda since the 1980s. A propaganda movie from the 1990s by the "Islamic Media Center of the Black Flags" (*Markaz al-rayat al-sud li-l-i'lam al-islami*) states: "If you see the black flags approaching from Khorasan so come towards them, even if you have to crawl on ice, for they are the sign of the coming of the Caliphate of the Mahdi."⁹³ Furthermore, the interpretation is known in popular Islamic mythology as well, according to which an army of horse riders with black flags

91 Nasir al-Fahd, "*Kalimat sutirat bi-l-dima*," (Words written in blood), entry No. 101, accessed January 8, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/q>.

92 "Khorasan" refers to northern parts of Pakistan, the central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and a part of Iran.

93 "The Lovers of Martyrdom" (*'Ushaq al-shahada*), by "The Islamic Media Center of the Black Flags" (*Markaz al-rayat al-saud li-l-i'lam al-islami*), produced in the mid-1990s. The video uses the following hadith, from the collection of the 14th century Damascene Hanbali scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya: "*al-Manar al-munifi al-sahih wa al-da'ifi li ibn Qayyim*" (The lofty light-tower of correct and weak [ahadith] by ibn Qayyim), accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=948&hid=25&pid=231661.

The movie was probably distributed thousands of times in the streets of Arab countries during the 1990s. It plays with similar polychromatic color-aesthetics and symbolisms, which we have been discussing on the previous pages in the context of 21st century web-propaganda.

will arrive in Palestine to “fight against Kuffar Alliances in the Final War of Armageddon.”⁹⁴



Illustration 14: Combination of black standard (*al-riya*) and white standard (*al-liwa*) on www.davetulhaq.com/

“Strong hands” and “clenched hands” are common illustrations of community in popular Islamic web-culture. They stand for the Quran injunction “And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves.”⁹⁵ Even Arab nationalist propaganda has appropriated this originally theological concept because of its popularity. At the same time, clenched hands remind of 20th century socialist propaganda and its iconography of socialist realism. Both in secular and religious ideologies, the “hand”-illustrations stand for unity, community and action. Again, jihadis have hijacked “hands” for their claim to represent popular Islam. Hands can hold together, carry forward, write on a keyboard or fight with a weapon. The sign is loaded up with martial interpretations and the concept gains new meanings, i. e. those represented by terrorist jihad. The repeated use of the clenched hands and strong hands graphics by jihadis is also supposed to attract mainstream Muslim percipients and to awaken their interest in jihad. Furthermore, the combination of hands and arms in combination with the globe, or with rifles, has been frequently used in logos of social-revolutionary groups. For example, the logo of the “2nd June Movement,” an anarchist revolutionary German group founded by Till Meyer, had as its logo (a globe that is surrounded by an arm whose clenched fist holds a rifle. The arm stands for international workers solidarity and the rifle for armed struggle, together “solidaric internationalism.”⁹⁶

94 “Black flags from Khorasan,” accessed January 6, 2012, <http://blackflags1.blogspot.com/>.

95 Quran, Surat al-Imran 3:103, accessed January 4, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation3.php.

96 Till Meyer, *Staatsfeind: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2008), 53.



Illustration 15: Popular Islamic concept “strong clenched hands.” Jihadi forum “Hanin” (left) appropriation by Arab nationalists (right); below further jihadi variations of the strong hands concept⁹⁷

“The Seal of the Prophets” (*khatam al-nabiyyin*) is another major symbol of Islam. Over the last years, especially since the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006, jihadis have increasingly been using it for their propaganda. We can find the seal in most black flags underneath the credo. Muhammad is described in Surat al-Ahzab 33:40 as the “Seal of the [monotheistic] Prophets,” which is commonly translated and understood as “the last one.”⁹⁸ According to Islamic tradition, stems from Prophet Muhammad’s signet ring and thus stands for the concept of absolute authenticity.⁹⁹ In this sense, jihadi web propaganda uses it in order to give a stamp of authenticity to its messages; “this is true and final,” it implies. “[T]he primary significance of the word khatam is that something is being shown to be authentic and uncorrupted by means of an official seal (which is often put at the end or closure of the document).”¹⁰⁰ Thus the sign is used to create semiotic power relations in virtual rooms and to strengthen the impact of ideology.

Typically, the seal-sign is combined with other jihadi symbols. One of the most typical combinations is the seal on a black banner, a Quran and a Kalashnikov. Instead of a Kalashnikov, a scimitar may serve, which in a fundamentalist sense directs the mythology of fight to a more backward past. Alter-

97 1. Top left: One of the emblems of the jihadi forum “Longing”, <http://hanein.info/vb/>; 2. Top right: clenched hands as representation of “national unity” (*al-wahda al-wataniya*), accessed January 4, 2012, http://lawahadiftiraadiwala6eezi.blogspot.com/2007/09/blog-post_10.html.; 3. Bottom left: logo of the jihadi media company “Those who clutch the glowing coals”; 4. Bottom-right: Logo of the Jihadi Media Elite.

98 Surat al-Ahzab 33:40: Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets: and Allah has full knowledge of all things, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation33.php.

99 Encyclopaedia of Islam, electronic version, entry “Khatam, Khatim.”

100 “Seal of the Prophets,” accessed January 5, 2012, <http://qalandaria.blogspot.com/2011/08/seal-of-prophets.html>.



Illustration 16: “The seal of the Prophets,” black on white as used by jihadis

natively, a single rider or fighter may hold the banner with the credo and the seal on it. The Kalashnikov is a communist invention. Since the 1960s, it has become a symbol for revolutionary social-liberation movements the world over. It is the cheapest, most robust and most exported military assault rifle ever built. Jihadis display it enthusiastically. They present their cause as a timely revolutionary liberation struggle under the banner of Islam. This example again illustrates how jihadi fundamentalism is highly-modern, acts in the present, directs its goals at the future, and takes inspiration from the past. In addition, jihadis apply the most modern means of communicational asymmetric warfare and selectively interpreted theological concepts. The combination of popular Islamic symbols with modern secular emblems draws on cross-cultural semiotics of revolutionary struggle and presents their causes in a timely way.

The iconography of the rider can be found in different cultures. In Christian mythology, for example, the most prominent rider-saint (Reiterheiliger) is St. Georg. Medieval *ars sacra* used sculpture, picture and vitreous enamel to depict St. Georg as the savior of virgins, defender of the Catholic Church and upholder of justice. St. Georg is fighting with a dragon which represents evil. He served as name-giver for medieval brotherhoods and inspired the Crusaders. During the reformation period, the royal southern-German Wittelsbacher family commissioned sculptures of St. Georg. The sculptures were held in the colors red and white to signify loyalty to the Holy Roman Empire, as well as white and blue to symbolize the regimen of the Bavarian Wittelsbacher rulers.¹⁰¹ The St. George’s cross, a red cross on a white background, is the typical Crusader symbol. During the Crusades, it was referred to as “God’s flag.” The cross is associated with St. Georg as patron saint of many Christians churches all over Europe and the Middle East and was adopted by Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Anglicans and later by Protestants. Variations of the flag have since the Middle-Ages appeared on standards, emblems, and coats of arms. Until today, variations of the cross are used as city flags, emblems of associations, countries and military forces the world over. The Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik made ample use of the iconography of the medieval Christian knight-saint St. George.

101 Ulla Stöver, Email: Kunst aus dem Feuer (München: Karl Thiemig AG, 1976), 31 – 34.

His cross, knights and horses, as well as the colors red and white for the Holy Roman Empire and the Crusades characterize Breivik's web-propaganda.¹⁰²

The image of the horse-rider plays an important role in jihadi iconography as well. As discussed above, Islamic tradition tells that riders with black flags will re-conquer Muslim lands and finally reach Jerusalem, which thus becomes a self-evident final goal of global jihadi strategy. Similarly, this famous tradition also determines the meaning of the color black in jihadi culture. Riders with black flags are signs of the coming of the Mahdi, who will be the ultimate ruler on earth.¹⁰³ Moreover, the iconic image of the horse rider stands also for conquest in the golden age of Islam.¹⁰⁴ His image is connected to a vision of Muslim elitism and stands for the classical Muslim warrior. Finally, the single rider represents the concept of "lone wolves" and individualized terrorism, which gains importance in jihadi strategy.



Illustration 17: horse rider in the logo of the Arabic-Islamic discussion forum "I am a Muslim" (<http://www.muslm.net/vb/>)

The horse rider image is thus strongly connected to jihadi self-perception. In a past-oriented fundamentalist sense, Jihadis see themselves as the continuation of the "victorious group" (*al-taifa al-mansura*), which was first represented by Muhammad's army and is nowadays located in jihadi camps all over the Islamic

102 The ultra-nationalist neo-Christian fundamentalist killed 77 people in June 2011 in Norway. Anders Behring Breivik, "2083 - A European Declaration of Independence," De Laude Novae Militiae Productions, accessed January 8, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xk3ioe_video-by-anders-behring-breivik_news.

103 Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya: "*al-Manar al-munif fi al-sahih wa al-da'if li ibn Qayyim*" (The lofty light-tower of correct and weak [ahadith] by ibn Qayyim), accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=948&hid=25&pid=231661. Furthermore, Jalaluddin al-Suyuti's (1445 - 1505) hadith collection *al-Ala' al-masnu' fi al-ahadith al-maudu' li-l-Suyuti* ("The good deeds produced by the ahadith laid down by al-Suyuti") speaks about the destination of the horse riders from Khorasan. They will tie their horses at a place between Harasta in Syria and Beit Lahya in the northern Gaza Strip in Palestine. The middle could lie somewhere near Jerusalem in today's Palestine/Israel. Hadith no. 1079, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=1002&hid=1079&pid=235753

104 See also the "Islamic Imagery Project", Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint (CTC), accessed December 16, 2010, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usma/ctc_islamic_imagery_project.pdf, 33 - 39.

world, but especially in Pakistan's northwestern border-region Waziristan. Waziristan is a part of the lands of "Khorasan" according to Islamic tradition. By participating in this struggle online, Waziristan becomes part of every media jihadi's living room. Past and future paradigms are connected because Muhammad is said to have likened the apocalyptic journey from Khorasan to Jerusalem before the Day of Judgment to his emigration with the first Muslims from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD (i. e. *al-hijra*).¹⁰⁵ The comparison with the *hijra* bears a hardly imaginable agitating power, for the first Muslims established Islam and the last Muslims will participate by purifying it again in an act of unbelievable destruction – the final world war between "good" (*al-haqq*) and "evil" (*al-batil*). Thus, rider and black flag are interpreted both as past and future identifying points, merging in the present where jihadis try to revive both elements of Islamic mythology.

The head-frame of the "Global Jihad" forum illustrates this accurately.¹⁰⁶ The logo is written in a mix of richly decorated Diwani-Thuluth calligraphy, in white on a blue background. Blue represents hope and paradise imaginations, but also water, which was a precious resource in the scarcity of the Arabian Peninsula in Muhammad's age, and said to be plentiful in paradise. White beams shine on the logo and touch the motto underneath it: "There is no might but in jihad for the sake of Allah."



Illustrations 18: Logo on right side and horse rider guided by Arabic script flowing out of the Quran on left side

The motto is repeated on the left opposite side of the head-frame with an emblematic horse rider. The rider is directed westwards. He appears to the viewer from the worm's perspective, which elevates him to the status of a hero who is surrounded by rays of light and the holiness of Quranic letters. The background comes to life and gains depth with different layers of script being integrated behind the rider. Large Arabic letters repeat the swinging and swaying of the black banner, coming out of the background from the schemes of a huge Quran that is barely visible. The Book is larger than life sized and seems to guide

105 Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, *al-Ala' al-masnu' fi al-ahadith al-maudu' li-l-Suyuti*, No. 1124, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=1002&hid=1124&pid=235754.

106 <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/>, accessed January 7, 2012.

the silhouette of the rider from a dreamy, hopeful and promising blue depth. It sends its letters like guiding messengers towards the rider as if to inspire him with the spirit of jihad. This aesthetic depiction stands for the concept of a “book that guides” and “a sword that conquers” used, e.g., by the medieval Hanbali theologian Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya (1263 – 1328).

The horse is a costly and admired animal in Muslim history. The reproduction of its image is a very effective form of mobilization, since it touches cultural triggers in broader Islamic culture. In the Quran, the horse appears in at least six verses and is mentioned as a precious object of love, animal for racing, farming animal, war booty, but also as a war horse.¹⁰⁷ The horse and its picture play an important role in popular Muslim culture for “man by nature is infatuated by horses and takes considerable pride in the beauty, power, wealth, horsemanship and chivalry associated with them.”¹⁰⁸ According to a *hadith* attributed to Omar ibn al-Khattab (592 – 644), the second rightly guided caliph, “the good is [tied] into the forelocks of the horse until Judgement Day (*al-khailu fi nawasiha al-khayr ila yaum al-qiyama*).¹⁰⁹ It is thus also a symbol for the blessings of jihad and the Day of Resurrection. Jihadi propaganda puts focus on the messianic and martial characteristics of the horse, constructing the horse as one of its major icons. It is attributed with strength, piety and conquest. Propagandist depictions of the horse address possible sympathizers and strengthen the in-group. From a sociological perspective, it is important for the phenomenon of *communitas*, which describes a feeling of brotherly love between group members who undergo a process of social transition from mainstream to subculture. Jihadi self-perception is that of re-embodiment of a “victorious group that remains among my Nation to fight steadfast for what is right until Judgment Day.”¹¹⁰ Horses are said to have the same characteristic. They will remain until the last day. Both, group

107 See Surat 3:14; 8:60; 16:8, 38: 31 – 32; 59:6; 100:1 – 2. The horse is beautiful, fast and strong, however, it is merely material possession and nothing against the joy in the presence of Allah, states Surat al-Imran 3:14. In Surat al-Anfal 8:60 we find a “prophylactic” war-verse that can be understood in the sense of deterring the enemy from attack. The horse appears to be one of the major instruments of deterrence to frighten the enemy: “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah [...]*.”

108 Abu Eberle, “Al-Khail: Horses and virtues of horses and the commands about horses in Islam continuing until the Judgment Day,” accessed May 30, 2012, <http://abusalmandeyauddeeneberle.wordpress.com/al-khail-horses-and-virtues-of-horses-and-the-commands-about-horses-in-islam-continuing-until-the-judgment-day/>.

109 Herbert Eisenstein, Überlegungen zu einer Darstellung der Rolle des Pferdes in der arabisch-islamischen Kulturgeschichte, Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 86 (1996): 107 – 117.

110 Musnad ibn Hanbal, No. 14425, www.islamweb.net/hadith, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=14425&pid=672359.

and horse stand out from among the Muslims. The vision of a horse in jihadi propaganda evokes the deeply spiritual and emotional concept of the last battle. The horse, however, can also be a sign of misfortune, “if it has not been ridden during a battle” (*idha lam yaghzu ’alayha*), explains a propagandist article and analogically asks the rhetoric question “If such a horse is miserable, so how do you view someone who is just talking nonsense and speaks about jihad?”¹¹¹

The picture of the Quran is another Islamic meta-sign that has been strongly adopted by jihadi web-propaganda. It is hard to find a website that propagates jihad on which a graphic of the Quran is missing. We have already discussed the significance of Arabic script, which embodies the Quran, which in turn contains the revealed words of God. The Quran stands for authority and knowledge and its script represent power. In times of conflict, the Quran is an essential element of Islamic warfare – as strategic script and as a concrete tool. Being the highest icon of faith in Islam, the Quran serves every Muslim as most essential a guideline for proper Islamic conduct. It also contains numerous injunctions on Islamic warfare. Jihadi propaganda tells Muslims that they must realize those injunctions of the Holy Script before all others. A pious Muslim believes that God’s revealed words are untouchable, unalterable and function as divine commands. By using the graphic representation of the Quran ever and ever again in their web-propaganda, jihadis try not only to present themselves as watchmen of Islam, but also to construct scriptural chains of authority, i.e. virtual leadership. In reality, propagandists present their target groups with selective injunctions and interpretations. Therefore, the use of the picture of the Quran on jihadi websites is very significant. It is supposed to evoke a strong sense of obedience and service-mindedness under the “command of God.” In combination with a Kalashnikov, the sign “Quran,” represents the concept of jihad. It manipulates the receptiveness of perceivers and causes them to interpret Islamic meta-signs in new ways. Arabic script then “guides towards fighting,” or the Quran “stands for jihad”. A new visual branding takes place on the Internet, which – as a tool of mass-communication – influences global culture.

The emblem of the “Confrontation” forum, <http://www.atahadi.com/vb>, contains the black flag with a Kalashnikov as a flagpole and in front of it the Quran with a quill placed on it. The Quran itself stands for divine authority and propaganda to spread the word of God. The quill also stands for writing and propagandistic activity, at the same time for learning, since it leans on the Holy Book of Islam. The flag, typically, carries the credo and the seal of the prophets. The red-brown background reminds of dried blood, but is also an earth colour.

111 Salih Abd al-Sa’id, “*Al-Khail ma’qud wi nawasiha al-khair ila yaum al-qiyama*,” accessed May 30, 2012, www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=957.

The glow around the flag and other symbols evokes holiness and heavenly promises.



Illustration 19: Quran depiction on “The Confrontation” forum

The Heights of Islam forum, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>, displays the black standard, on it the credo and the seal of the prophets together with a Quran. The key symbols send beams of light to evoke hopeful and enthusiastic feelings about this message. There are no further martial symbols added. However, the map in the background as well as the Quran are coloured in green, which means that these elements belong to Islam. Colouring objects or symbols means that they adopt the quality of the colour, and green stands first and foremost for Islam.



Illustration 20: Quran depiction on “The Heights of Islam” forum

2. Leaders: iconography and cult

To stage the leaders is a very important tool for the strengthening of group identification and ideology. In virtual rooms, leaders can be made omnipresent. The role of leaders in visual spaces and their perception are much stronger than in reality. They can be installed and constructed larger than life-size. Dead leaders even bear advantages for this kind of propaganda. A typical trait of totalitarian organizations, writes Hans-Gerd Jaschke, is to exploit dead leaders for propagandist purposes after they have passed away. In their life-times, leaders have functioned as actual commanders. After their death, they still live on as “leading figures, figureheads, ideological fix points and spiritual autocrats with an aura of infallibility.”¹¹² In propaganda, dead leaders are carefully kept alive to exercise a significant level of ideological authority, command and con-

112 Hans-Gerd Jaschke, *Fundamentalismus in Deutschland. Gottesstreiter und politische Extremisten bedrohen die Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1998), 243.

trol. The “advantage” of the dead leader by idealization and glorification through pictures and symbols is twofold. He becomes a reference-point for “proper conduct” in reality. In this sense, the targeted killing of jihadi leaders is the best favor the U.S. does the global jihadi movement. Moreover, any killed jihadi leader becomes a mythic hero. The heroic depiction divides into two classes. Firstly, authorities with theological competence, which are represented by medieval scholars like Ibn Taymiyya or contemporary al-Qaeda scholars like Anwar al-Awlaqi and Atiyat Allah al-Libi. Secondly, authorities of struggle, which are presented by Usama bin Laden or Mustapha Abu al-Yazid (formerly third in command of al-Qaeda central). Past and present are reunited through the pictorial and symbolic installation of leaders in the Internet, claims Witsch. This concept of fundamentalist agitation strengthens an urgent sense of emulation among followers. In addition, a “timeless installation of leadership” and ideology takes place through writings, symbols, pictures and movies about leaders.¹¹³

In jihadi web agitation, living and dead leaders are iconized all the same. We will put focus on dead leaders and illustrate some characteristics of their presentation. The timeless installation of dead leaders in jihadi propaganda draws on a mix of Sunni Islamic theology, jihadi symbolism and Sufi mysticism. These elements are united in pictorial representations, often script-picture combinations, which bear the image of the respective person. The depiction of Usama bin Laden below, who was killed in May 2011 has been taken from the logo of the jihadi forum “Islamic Lions” (<http://66.225.155.72/~leyothin/vb/>). The arrangement of light and shade appears like a halo around bin Laden’s head shrouded in a white head-cloth (white stands for theological knowledge). The smoke-clouds stand for God, for God is the “mover of the clouds” (*mujri al-sahab*)¹¹⁴, and in the background the northern tower of the World Trade Center (WTC 1) awakens bin Laden’s role in the attacks.



Illustration 21: Iconic depiction of Usama bin Laden

113 Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 96–98.

114 See Musnad ibn Hanbal, No. 18707, accessed January 7, 2011, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=18704&pid=673062.

Bin Laden appears like a saint and reminds the viewer of a Sufi *murabit*, i. e. a religious spiritual leader in a Sufi order who is represented as an icon. Killed jihadi leaders are not dead, argue supporters on the basis of a Quran injunction. “Think not of those who are slain in Allah’s way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord;” this verse is the theological underpinning for the timeless installation of leaders.¹¹⁵

Karamat are another element that reminds of Sufi mysticism. They come to use in the iconic representation of jihadi martyrs and dead leaders. “*Karamat*” describe the “wonders” of martyrs, i. e. the alleged smell of musk that emanates from their corpses, the intactness of their bodies, and the smiles on their faces in expectation of Paradise. This is by no means to say Sufis are militants. It only points to the fact that jihadis appropriate mystical elements. The e-graphic below is a martyr wall-banner of the former leader of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda, Abd al-Aziz Muqrin (1971 – 2004). It focuses on the concept of “wonders” (*karamat*) and reads “Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin... I swore that I will not live by my power and by wonders unless they will destroy verily.” The verse is from a poem that mobilizes for jihad and struggle.¹¹⁶ At the same time, the smiling picture of al-Muqrin with the halo and the dove in the background picks up a popular narrative that developed after his death. Al-Muqrin’s corpse was laid out in a Riyadh hospital after Saudi security forces had killed him. According to hospital workers, the smell of musk emanating from his body was so overwhelming that they refused to touch him.¹¹⁷



Illustration 22: Iconic depiction of Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin

115 Quran Surat al-Imran 3:169, www.harunyahya.com, accessed January 7, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation3.php.

116 The *qasida* is titled “Conversation between a fighter and his mother” (*Hiwar bayn mujahid wa Ummuhu*). It can be found on hundreds of different websites. This version is from the Arabic discussion forum vb.arabseyes.com, accessed January 7, 2011, <http://vb.arabseyes.com/t52382.html>.

117 Psychologically, it can be interpreted as an outbreak of collective hysteria. Source: Anonymous who studied the case of al-Muqrin at length.

3. Anguish, sacrifice and shame

Signs of anguish, sacrifice and shame serve to illustrate how Muslims are abused and mistreated by the West and its allies. They are an integral part of jihadi community myth, yet also touch the conspiracy myth. Someone must be behind the suffering of Muslims. Regarding the concept of “suffering,” jihadis identify with Muslims in general. Their self-depiction as elite derives out of the claim that they defend humiliated Muslims. They claim to be saviors and defenders of all oppressed Muslims (*musta’difun*). Often, pictures of dead children exemplify the malevolence done to the own community. Children stand for innocence, defenselessness and hope. Their violent death awakens feelings of indignation and contempt across cultures. The picture-text combination of illustration 23 from the Ansar al-Mujahidin forum shows a killed child shrouded in white cloth and on it the word “*majhul*” (unknown). The red background around the child displays a halo, which is a stylistic device of Islamic martyrdom aesthetics.



Illustration 23: Picture of dead child. Headline: And you sit around! Text on white cloth of the child: “Unknown”¹¹⁸

Often, text-picture combinations carry the message that jihadis are steadfast in the face of Muslim humiliation. Illustration 24 shows an elderly Afghani man sitting crouched on the ground next to a Western soldier. A jihadi forum member comments on this picture, using the same mobilizing poem “Conversation between a mujahid and his mother” that we found above in the glorification of the Saudi-Arabian al-Qaeda leader al-Muqrin. The text below the picture reads: “I swore that I will not live by my power and by wonders unless they will destroy verily... [Adding the next two verses] I will remain a fighter in this life, and I keep on walking on my way decisively.”¹¹⁹

118 Source: “The Sheikh, The Mujahid, The Shaheed: Sheikh Said Abu Sa’ad (may Allah have mercy on him),” accessed October 21, 2011, <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=20265>.

119 “To the nation of a billion people, with regards,” accessed January 8, 2011, <http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=105628&page=12>.



Illustration 24: Theme of humiliation (picture) and steadfastness (text)

4. Resistance, punishment and deterrence

Signs of resistance, punishment and revenge stand for empowerment. They can be found in the marketing of suicide attacks, assassinations and executions of enemies in videos and pictures distributed on jihadi websites. In jihadi web-semiotics, these signs testify to the effectiveness of terrorist tactics. At the same time, they aim at mobilizing followers. Followers are supposed to re-enact terrorist acts and violence against enemies. The emotion of victory against an overwhelming enemy dominates this sign-category. Examples of these signs are manifold, some very abstract and some concrete. One explicit example shall suffice to demonstrate the concept. A screenshot from a video of al-Qaeda in Iraq that was posted on jihadi websites (illustration 25) shows the execution-style murder of government employees of the interior ministry. The men were kidnapped, rowed up and shot in the back of their heads. The media company of al-Qaeda in Iraq, “al-Furqan” (Divine Inspiration) stands with its logo (visible in the upper left side of the screenshot) for ruthless and brutal killings and has strongly influenced jihadi aesthetics of terror over the last years. Such pictures and videos exemplify the “we” versus “them” divide of jihadi group mobilization, using the theme of punitive “resistance.”



Illustration 25: Execution of government employees by al-Qaeda in Iraq

B. Signs of conspiracy

Signs of conspiracy are as essential for the mobilization and construction of community as signs of identification. Conceptually, the myth of conspiracy is diametrically opposed to the myth of community and also complements it.

Moreover, the myth of conspiracy has three functions. Firstly, it represents itself. Secondly, it represents the signs of identification of the enemy's community; i. e. they are brutal mercenaries, suffer from a loss of values, kill innocents, destroy and rob property. Thirdly, it represents the reprehensible myth of salvation of the enemy, namely pure capitalist goals under the cloak of democracy, human rights and freedom.

Fundamentalist community building works multiple times better, if an enemy is identified. "Conspiracy theories" are often shrouded in pseudo-rational scientific explanations, but bear all characteristics of emotional concepts (myths and ideology) that belong to propaganda. They are age-old and can be traced back to Classical Antiquity and archaic times. "Conspiracy theories allege that secretly acting conspirators try to realize a comprehensive scheme by dishonest practices and by deceiving the population." At present, they seem to thrive vividly. The globalized world lacks explanation models and conspiracy theories offer possibilities to present complex relationships in a simple way. They create a semblance of order in a world full of irritating complexity.¹²⁰ To this end, a wide range of concepts is applied. Also the fundamentalist construction of an outside threat to foster in-group identification requires a dichotomy of "good" and "bad," which is created by conspiracy models. In jihadi ideology, such dichotomies, and through them explicit enemy pictures, are created on religio-political grounds. The constellation of the enemies of Islam is threefold. It consists of Jews, Crusaders and – apostate – Muslims. Jews lead the conspiracy against Islam; the West (represented by the U.S., the NATO, the U.N, plus international allies) realize the "New Crusade against Islam"; and apostate Muslims help executing it. The roots of this conspiracy concept can be found in the 1960s writing of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb and the 1980s writings of the Palestinian-Jordanian ideologue Abdallah Azzam, who was profoundly influenced by Qutb.¹²¹ Yet, the concept only started developing effectively after the fall of the Soviet Union and throughout the 1990s. It was supported by an internationally growing trend of Islamic militancy and by more Western military interventions in Muslim countries. With the U.S. led Iraq invasion in 2003, the concept had fully developed in jihadi thinking.

Representative for the conspiracy concept are the writings of the al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and "al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia's" online magazine Mu'askar al-Battar, which between 2003 – 2004 steadily referenced to "the Crusaders and their supporters among the Jews and the apostates (*al-salibiyun wa*

120 Tobias Jaecker, Antisemitische Verschwörungstheorien nach dem 11. September: Neue Varianten eines alten Deutungsmusters (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 14 – 15.

121 Philipp Holtmann, Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 2009), 36.

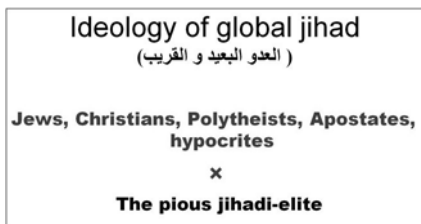


Illustration 26: Conspiracy and friend-enemy concept in jihadi ideology (source: Holtmann)

a'wanuhum min al-yahud wa-l-murtaddin), “the Crusader campaign,” (*al-hamla al-salibiyya*) and “zionized Crusaders” (*al-Sahyusalibiya*).¹²² Illustration 26 shows the conspiracy concept in global jihadi ideology. Semiotic representations of this concept accompany every mouse-click in jihadi web-rooms.

The next illustration shows a text-picture montage by “al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula’s” online magazine “Inspire.” It contains all major signs of conspiracy discussed above, i. e., the Jews who secretly guide and the U.S., who in turn rely on apostate Muslim collaborators. The Israeli flag appears right next to U.S.-President Barak Obama and symbolizes a conspiring Jewish leadership behind the zionized Crusade against Islam. Here, “strong hands” hold the Israeli flag and signify the enemy’s community agenda (compare illustration 15). Apostates, “their agents, the treasonous rulers,” are explicitly named in the text-captions of the graphic. The U.S. dollar with a bloody handprint on it expresses the reprehensibility of the enemy’s goal. It is pure hunger for power and wealth at the cost of Muslim children’s lives and their suffering. Part of it is the grabbing of Muslim lands, symbolized by a bulldozer. Muslim lands, according to Islamic jurisprudence may not remain under the control of infidels.



Illustration 27: Signs of conspiracy in the jihadi online-magazine “Inspire,” issue 1

122 Complete collection of *Mu’askar al-Battar Magazine*, accessed January 8, 2012. Issue 1, page 4, <http://battarpages.atspace.com/Battar01-04.htm>; issue 22, pages 3;8; <http://battarpages.atspace.com/Battar22-08.htm>.

The same conspiracy theory is repeated in jihadi-videos, which are distributed digitally via websites. Therefore, videos are an integral element of jihadi web-agitation. The screenshots of illustration 28 “demonstrate” that, despite the complexity of Western-Muslim relations, Islam is under constant attack by the West. However, such myths works in two ways, as Uri Avneri, the Israeli peace activist, observes. “This was proved in 1982, when Ariel Sharon attacked Lebanon, despite the fact that the Lebanese border had been absolutely quiet for 11 months. (After the war, the myth was born that it was preceded by daily shooting. Today, almost every Israeli can “remember” the shooting – an astonishing example of the power of suggestion.”¹²³ Very correctly, Avneri observes that myths are fostered by suggesting “facts.” Below, three screenshots taken from a jihadi video illustrate once again how suggestive fundamentalist propaganda works. The first screenshot (in the background) shows a graphic animation of the exploding head of Israeli president Shimon Peres next to the Israeli flag. “Crusaders” are symbolized by a Christian cross with the inscription “democracy.” A meeting between former U.S. president George W. Bush and the present president of Afghanistan, Ahmad Karzai, illustrates the alliance between apostate Muslims and Crusaders, who are secretly led by the Jews.¹²⁴



Illustration 28: Triad of Jews-Crusaders-Apostates in jihadi video propaganda

C. Signs of salvation

Jihadi propaganda and martyrology overflow with death-glorification. A fundamentalist community relies in its ideology on three interrelated myths, which are extremely important to build community, define enemies and justify goals. So do jihadis. Firstly, they construct a COMMUNITY MYTH for the sake of IDENTIFICATION and MOBILIZATION. Secondly, they construct a CONSPIRACY MYTH in order to ACTIVATE followers. Thirdly, they construct a

123 Uri Avneri, “The Stolen War,” accessed January 8, 2012, <http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/avneri/1325859818/>.

124 “Qafilat al-fath” (Caravan of Martyrs), “al-Hijra Media Studios” (Afghan Taliban), accessed January 8, 2012, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13355>.

MYTH OF SALVATION to justify their end-goals. Since jihadi ideology is lacking clear realizable concepts of statehood and government, focus is put on the rewards of martyrdom, i. e. paradise. Salvation is not only a reward, but also a command. If read selectively, then the Holy Book of Islam dictates believers to gain salvation by way of fighting: “Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Quran: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah. then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.”¹²⁵ It should be mentioned that jihadi strategy also addresses realizable goals. In a concrete sense, this refers to getting rid of Western domination and setting the course for Islamic systems (*an takun shar’at Allah hiya al-mahkama wa kalimatuhu hiya al-’aliya*).¹²⁶ But in an abstract messianic sense, the long term strategy is to prepare a chaotic and anarchic world order to facilitate the coming of the Mahdi and the Day of Judgment. Partaking in this struggle includes rewards, the highest one being salvation by gaining entry to paradise. Jihadi semiotics of salvation borrow from these and similar shariatic concepts, thus concentrating on the supreme, i. e., the “aesthetics of the maximal” and “grammar of climax.”¹²⁷ Understanding this concept, one can detect manifold signs of salvation on jihadi websites. The most prominent ones are e-wallpapers and e-banners which present martyrs. More subtly, the salvation myth is expressed by colors in jihadi propaganda as well as arabesque and floral patterns which remind of paradise. They constantly evoke the theme of salvation within the aesthetics of jihadi ideology.



Illustration 29: E-wallpaper displaying myth of salvation and rewards of martyrdom¹²⁸

125 Quran Surat al-Tauba 9:111, accessed January 9, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation9.php.

126 Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti, “*Kalimat sutirat bi-l-dima*,” (Words written in blood), entry No. 100, , accessed January 8, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/q>.

127 Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*, 130.

128 “*Surat al-shahid Abi Hafs al-Ansari min shuhada’ masjid Ibn Taymiyya taqabbalahu Allah*,”

Conclusion

Neither the coordination of colors, nor the alignment of signs, or the combination of text and picture on jihadi websites happens accidentally. The creation of semiotic rooms on jihadi webpages underlies certain considerations by their makers. For example, the vertical arrangement of authoritative media banners goes against the viewing direction of the picture and the reading direction of text. This tension creates topographic and semiotic rule in the virtual sphere. Witsch argues “the semiotic room in the Internet is deliberately put to use as a rhetoric Interface. Worlds are constructed by the deliberate arrangement of colors, the integration of mythic pictures and symbols as well as the axiomatic of picture and text: Worlds that lessen the difference between reality and fiction are created by combining fictional dimensions (myth) with reality [...]”¹²⁹ In a similar way, jihadi websites, especially forums, present doctrinaire agitation together with real conflicts in Muslim countries and thus reduce the space between fiction and reality.

The last step of a successful process of propaganda is its adaption by followers and sympathizers, people who have been caught in the web of signification spun around the ideology and then re-enact it. The construction of a community myth requires identification with the group-ideology (mobilization) and offers for participation (communication) and partaking (action). This leads to ultimate consensus and conformity with the group.¹³⁰ Nico Prucha defines re-enactment as one of the central goals of jihadi web propaganda.¹³¹ Our last illustration shows this effect quite clearly. It is a sign of empowerment and re-enactment, and in parallel it is a fully integrated element of jihadi web-propaganda. A sympathizer has published this wallpaper in the “design”-section (*tasmim*) of Shumukh al-Islam forum. The computer screen with a screen shot of the forum is connected to a bomb that carries the “Seal of the Prophets” on it. A Muslim fighter sits beside it. The picture illustrates two things. Firstly, the creator wants to express that the propaganda flowing out of the jihad web is similar to a bomb in its effects. Secondly, the fighter-image stands for a frequent claim in online jihadi discourse: “You are not different from the mujahidin in the physical war!”¹³² The creator of the graphic also seems to adapt this motto of self-por-

accessed January 11, 2012, showthread.php?t=36044http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=36044.

129 Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 107.

130 Witsch, 80.

131 Nico Prucha, Die Stimme des Dschihad: “Sawt al-gihad”: al-Qa’idas erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac), 82–95.

132 From the discussion “Abu Dujana al-Khorasani wa tanabbu’at Nostradamus” (Abu Dujana

trayal by media jihadis. He presents himself as an active fighter on the media front and has clearly gone through a neo-traditional rite of transition and identification in the sense of van Gennep, yet with the difference of time, space and information technique.¹³³ The ceremonial self-identification with media jihad culture lies in its aesthetics and symbols, which have been drained from the Islamic mother-culture in order to fit into a new cult-culture whose interpretations succeed everything else. The text on top reads: “Our Islamic media is guided, resisting, so you may hois the [black] standard.”¹³⁴ A few years ago, online supporters were rebuked as layouts. But today, online jihad has the same status as physical jihad. The underlying idea is that virtual activity creates terrorist reality. This is rooted in the classical concept of *jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan* (jihad by the pen) that serves like a collective mobilizer for *jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan* (jihad by the sword and the spear) in Islamic conflicts. Members of jihadi forums have perpetrated suicide attacks such as Badr Mashal al-Harbi, Abu Dujana al-Khorasani and Abu Umar al-Shami.¹³⁵ They are icon-figures, and their glorification on forums additionally strengthens the self-confidence of jihadi online communities.



Illustration 32: Typical design by a sympathizer – Signs of empowerment and re-enactment (source: <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>)

al-Khorasani ...and the prophecies of Nostradamus), accessed 25 January 2010, <http://alfaloja1.info/vb/showthread.php?p=706509>.

133 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1960.

134 Shumukh al-Islam forum, design section, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>, accessed December 5, 2012.

135 The Kuwaiti al-Harbi posted more than 1000 entries on jihadi forums before he committed a suicide attack in Iraq in 2008, the Jordanian al-Khorasani was a prominent forum member before he perpetrated a suicide attack in Afghanistan for the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in December 2009, and the Syrian Abu Omar al-Shami was very active on jihadi forums as well, before he went to Iraq where he died in a suicide attack in February 2011. Allegedly, he perpetrated the attack for the “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI).

Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses

One of the most important early sources for military matters on the Web was the online journal *Mu'askar al-battar*, “the military camp of the slicing sword”, one of the two journals published by *al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula* (AQAP). The other one is the “Voice of Jihad”, *Sawt al-jihad*. Both form the first full-fledged Jihadi media platform on the Web.¹

Looking at the title of *Mu'askar al-battar* provides us with the context to understand this genre of texts. The contemporary context: The *nom de guerre* of Yusuf al-'Uyairi (1974–2003), AQAPs most impressive figure in its early stage, who was called *al-sayf al-battar*.²

The historical context: Eight of the nine swords of the prophet are in Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey, the ninth one in the Husayn mosque in Cairo, Egypt. These swords are – following the list by Ibn al-Qayyim³ – *al-'adb*, *dhu l-fiqar*, the most famous one, *hatf*, *al-ma'thur*, *al-mikhdam*, *al-qadib*, *al-qal'i*, *al-rasub*, and *al-battar*, called “sword of the prophet” due to the names engraved on its blade.



Illustration 1: *al-battar* (Topkapi Palace, Istanbul)
(<http://mysteriunsolvedstory.blogspot.com/2010/05/owned-swords-of-prophet-muhammad-saw.html>, accessed November 14, 2011)

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- 1 Nico Prucha. Die Stimme des Dschihad “Sawt al-gihad”: al-Qa'idas erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2011), 31.
 - 2 Roel Meijer ed., *globalsalafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009); Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 170 sqq.
 - 3 Shams al-din Abu 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyya, *Zad al-ma'ad fi huda khayr al-'ibad Muhammad*, edited by 'A. Al-Mahdi, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-kitab al-'arabiyy, 2005), 50.

The title of the publication is deeply embedded in a history going back to the foundational period of the Islamic community and denotes a semantic field also available in contemporary Saudi religious discourse⁴ or Salafi discourse⁵. And *al-battar* is still popular in Jihadi fora, e. g., “the sharp sword” in *Sanam al-islam*.⁶ An in-depth study of a book gathering articles in *Mu’askar al-Battar* states referring to the Islamic frame of reference used in these articles:

“However the Islamic framework used in this book is not just a cosmetic or marketing factor. The Islamic basis for legitimacy is embedded throughout the text with recourse to the Qur’an, Sunna, and religious scholars, as one might expect for a text originating from an organization that views itself as the champion of genuine Islam. The preoccupation with Islamic legitimacy goes beyond mere phraseology and impinges on key concepts of al-Muqrin’s thinking. [...] Islamic principles, however controversial the Islamists’ interpretation of these may be, provide the moral compass for Al-Muqrin and inform his view of *jihad*, or the equivalent of basic just war considerations. [...] Al-Muqrin’s evident religious vision and frame of reference notwithstanding, this does not cloud his practical approach to preparing for and fighting a war.”⁷

Is this the whole story of *Mu’askar al-battar*? We will take as a case study the fourth issue of the magazine. The M-16 rifle, logo and title of the magazine dominate the front cover:

In this issue, we read an editorial on propaganda and its importance using many Islamic references interspersed in the text and a closing paragraph devoted to the praise of god, then a short text on the praiseworthiness of being killed in Jihad, and a discussion of a verse of the Qur’an. The next articles include a text with a certain amount of religious references and two purely religious ones.

The first military article deals with technical details of the M-16 rifle. On the right, so at a prominent place we find two words “and a sword that helps” (*wa-sayf yansur*). This refers to a famous saying “the foundation of religion is a book leading the right way and a sword assisting” (*qiwam al-din kitab yahdi wa-sayf yansur*) attributed to Ibn Taymiyya (1263 – 1328), the famous Hanbali scholar, which is often used by Jihadis to legitimize their fight.⁸ There are two variants to

4 Mahmud bin Ali al-Sahli al-Harbi, “*Sayf al-battar fi nahr al-shaytan nizar wa-man wara’ahu min al-murtaddin al-fujjar*”, accessed May 25, 2012, <http://www.gnanim.com/vb/showthread.php?t=7823>.

5 Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, “*Sayf al-battar ’ala man kharaja ’an huda al-nabiyy al-mukhtar*”, accessed May 25, 2012, <http://www.twhed.com/vb/t1242.html>.

6 Al-’Aliya’ (pseudonymous), “*Al-Sarim al-battar ’ala sab al-rabb al-qahar raddan ’ala mad’uw Eliyas*”, accessed May 25, 2012, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9914>.

7 Norman Cigar, *Al-Qa’ida’s Doctrine for Insurgency: ’Abd al-’Aziz al-Muqrin’s A Practical Course for Guerilla War* (Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2009), 35 – 36.

8 A conscious misinterpretation in most cases: In 2010 a conference in Mardin in Turkey discussed the (mis-)use of Ibn Taymiyya by Jihadis, cf. Behnam Said, “Die Konferenz zur



be found in the *Majmu' fatawa* of Ibn Taymiyya.⁹ This saying is often used in jihadi fora¹⁰ at least back into the 1980s and by Jihadi authors like al-Maqqisi (1422 h).¹¹ Salafi preachers use it, too.¹² And it is part of the Jihadi visual imaginary, e. g., at the *Hanein* forum:¹³

The article closes with an insert quoting some lines from the Egyptian poet Mahmud Ghunaym, not an important modern poet, but famous for his emotional poems. The editors embed their project in a broader popular culture quoting a poet like Ghunaym.

Mardin-Fatwa Ibn Taimiyas und zwei Repliken hierauf aus der dschihadistischen Szene", in *Zeitgenössische islamische Positionen zu Koexistenz und Gewalt*, ed. Tilman Seidensticker (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 99 – 127.

- 9 "Majmu' fatawa Ibn Taymiyya", accessed May 25, 2012, <http://www.al-islam.com/portal.aspx?pageid=1284&Words=وسيف+يحصرون&Level=exact&Type=phrase&SectionName=Page&ContentLanguage=1>.
- 10 "Qiwam al-din: Kitab yahdi wa saif yansur", accessed May 25, 2012, <http://muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=439531> or "Al-Qaeda tad'u al-shabaab al-thair wa yuakkid annahu la budd min quwwa tuqabuha quwwa", accessed May 25, 2012, <http://muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=445261>.
- 11 For example, by the Egyptian *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* in 1987, as well as on the tawheed-website by Maqqisi: "Hatmiyat al-muwajaha: Kitab yahdi wa saif yansur", accessed May 25, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=3441&x=i5oyo76w>.
- 12 Ahmad al-Naqib, "Ya ikhwani qiwam al-din kitab yahdi wa-sayf yansur", accessed May 26, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Amlm5rioF7U&context=C3c6ac0>.
- 13 <http://www.hanein.info/vb/>, accessed April 12, 2011. However, the layout has changed by May 25, 2012.



The next text is about “swedish gymnastics”¹⁴, written by Yusuf al-’Uyairi himself, this text has no religious framework, just mentioning “God willing” (*bi-dhn allah*) several times. The text is discussing which schedule should be followed to reach physically fitness.

But the editors do not only care for the body of the Mujahids. The following text, a lengthy poem announced at the cover page, intends to “sharpen the minds”.¹⁵ Then al-Muqrin contributes one of his articles on Guerrilla warfare. We have described his religious framing.¹⁶

The fourth volume of *Mu’askar al-battar* closes with articles on renunciation of the world (*zuhd*), a religious discussion, on nutritional matters and cleanliness, on security and gathering of information, a lengthy quotation from ’Abdallah ’Azzam. The closing remarks encourage readers to prepare for fighting, the last lines referring programmatically to a religious framework: “We are the people of the weapon; our community is the community of Jihad and battle”.

Reading the journal we notice that technical articles – most of them free from religious references – are framed by articles explicitly discussing religious questions. The overall vision seems to be material and ideational preparation for Jihad as understood by the jihadi tendency.

The religious and technical/military articles operate independently but form an integrated system of references. These articles – without denying the practical aspect – signify the willingness of jihadis to engage in military action and thus construct a crucial difference to Islamic mainstream culture. The technical/

14 Invented by a Swedish physician in the 19th century and intended to improve the physical fitness of the general public.

15 The poem can be found on non-Jihadi internet for a, published by ’ahmed_j’, no title, accessed September 19, 2011, <http://www.shamela.net/vb/t75649>.

16 Cigar, Al-Qa’ida’s.

military articles follow their own logic without being structured by religious references. Religious articles are used to frame the nonreligious logic in an Islamic framework with religious memes used emblematically to signify the overall jihadi character of the discourse. These frames are not integrated in an ideational system affecting the structure of technical discourses.

On another level, the combination of two journals *Sawt al-jihad*, the ideational journal, and *Mu'askar al-battar*, the technical journal, both published by AQAP express the same logic.

Jihadist subculture and Framing

We adopt the concept of framing introduced into the field of the study of Islamic social movements by the volume edited by Quintan Wiktorowicz. As Wiktorowicz puts it, the

“use of framing by Islamic groups reflects the cultural and ideational components of contentious politics; and while frames alone do not explain every dimension of collective action, they are important interpretive devices that translate grievances and perceived opportunities into the mobilization of resources and movement activism.”¹⁷

Framing is to be understood as a set of dynamic processes of production of meaning, socially constructed, sustained, contested, and altered, experiencing phenomenological and infrastructural constraints with specific effects of mobilization of social movements.¹⁸

“Framing is typically seen in the literature as a verbal activity. Frame analysis, in other words, are analysis of texts and speeches. But activist communication and framing also have a symbolic dimension. This insight might be particularly important in a global perspective. [...] symbols travel well across space and across social, cultural and political differences, because symbols condense meaning and identity in a manner that is not necessarily dependent on verbal explanation. Two aspects are worth mentioning here. First, the terrorist act in itself can be viewed as a form of symbolic communication [...] The terrorist organization sends a message through its choice of places and targets. Second, certain events and situations can attain a symbolic character. Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo, for example, are of course very real events and situations, but they are also global symbols in the sense that references to them condense

17 Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory”, in *Islamic Activism: a Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. by Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), 19.

18 David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Clarifying the Relationship between Framing and Ideology in the Study of Social Movements: A Comment on Oliver and Johnston,” accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/PROTESTS/ArticleCopies/SNOW_BED.PDF, 3.

and illuminate a certain conception of injustice that is to some extent independent of the empirical realities.”¹⁹

When an individual frame is anchored in a master frame the chances of frame resonance increase.²⁰ Jihadism emerging and operating in an Islamic environment uses Islam as a master frame. In this context

“it is important to suggest the existence of a radical Islamic master frame in which the West and Islam is portrayed as fundamentally at odds with one another (this master frame, it should be noted, is also found in reverse, so to speak, in the West and represented mainly by the extreme or conservative right). In the radical Islamic version, the West is viewed, in a historic and contemporary perspective, as an aggressor against Muslims and Islam. As suggested in the section on political opportunities, this master frame is centered around globally available symbols of injustice and aggression against Muslims, such as for example the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and the Guantanamo prison facilities.”

The master frame of jihadism operates specifically in the greater radical Islamic master frame. The jihadi way of rearticulating this master frame makes some members of the jihadi subculture(s) “not speak of and act for ‘jihad’ because they are Muslims but rather they *feel* Muslim because of jihad” as Marranci put it.²¹ Military Jihad becomes the most suitable act to break the “circle of panic” produced by “rejection from host societies [...]; shocking images [...] of Muslim tragedies around the world [...]; challenges of identity and loyalty [...]; emotional dynamics of gender relationships [...]; and fear of Westernization [...], the idea [...] that Islam (seen as a religion but also as an element of identity) is under attack.”²²

Understanding the complex interplay of Islamic, radical Islamic master, and general jihadi master frames and the specific jihadi frames emerging from different textual, symbolic²³ and visual sources is necessary to reflect on counterstrategies.

19 Thomas Olesen, “Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism,” in Center for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation – Islamism as Social Movement, Aarhus: Aarhus University, 2009, 25. Accessed May 26, 2012, http://cir.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_-statskundskab/subsites/cir/pdf-filer/H%C3%A6fte2final.pdf.

20 David A. Snow and Rodert D. Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest,” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Eldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (Yale: University Press 1992), 133 – 155.

21 Gabriele Marranci, *Jihad beyond Islam* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2006), 158.

22 Ibid.

23 For the jihadi imagery see The Combating Terrorism Center; Department of Social Sciences, “The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda” (United States Military Academy 2006) and the chapter of Philipp Holtmann in this volume.

Jihadi subculture(s)

It is tempting to try to understand transnational Jihadism as a specific Islamic social movement, but Jihadism is better understood as a religiously framed subculture sharing some traits with other modern, globalized subcultures. This may help us to understand the blending of popular culture elements into jihadi online presences and the structural similarities to other online subcultures, e. g., the gaming industry.²⁴

The Islamic references are used as religious memes operating in the jihadi environment, producing a specific religious knowledge we may call subcultural capital, a concept developed first by Thornton²⁵ and enlarged including Bourdieuan concepts of social capital. Religious subcultural capital raises the status of jihadis as being *the* true Muslims and differentiating themselves from members of global mainstream culture²⁶ and Muslims in general by their willingness to use violence, creating a style that can be interpreted in accordance with values being subversive to the frame shared by Muslims in general.²⁷ Jihadism may thus be characterized by a negative relation to mainstream societies (Muslim or not), their association with a virtual territory, the *umma* as understood by jihadis, their non-domestic forms of belonging to the jihadi *jama'a* the specific stylistic ties to exaggeration and excess, the refusal of ordinary life and belief.²⁸ These characteristics are all part of modern subcultures.

If we understand jihadism as a religiously framed subculture, it is possible to understand why there is no political project developed by jihadis, only a vision a caliphate or even the Last Day to come as part of the general jihadi master frame, constructing their subculture as a self-referential community. This perspective lends some credibility to the idea Jihadism/al-Qa'ida may be a globalized ethical movement.²⁹ There is no fixed boundary between the jihadist subculture and other (sub-)cultures, from Jihadism may emerge socio-political movements as in the case of the Egyptian Gama'at al-islamiyya forming a political party in the

24 Nico Prucha, "Worldwide Online Jihad versus the Gaming Industry Reloaded – Ventures of the Web," in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Vienna: University Press, 2012), 153–183.

25 Anne Stenersen, Anne. "Nuclear Terrorism: Hype, Hoax or Waiting to Happen? Nuclear Ambitions and Capabilities of Terrorist Organisations," in *Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century. Old Players, New Game – New Players, Old Game*, ed. Kari M Osland and Magnus Eriksson (Oslo: NUPI, 2008), 924–946.

26 Ibid.

27 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London et al.: Routledge, 2004).

28 I am adopting the terminology of Ken Gelder to the Jihadi case.

29 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity* (London: Hurst, 2008).

aftermath of the Egyptian revolution 2011³⁰ or Islamic social movements may be influenced by Jihadism as in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

How does religious framing work when a discourse styled as religious discourse is produced? We have seen some aspects of it in the case *Mu'askar al-battar* discussed above. We may now look at the discourse on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or more precisely chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons (CBRN). We will use WMD because the Arabic expression is a translation of WMD into Arabic.

Fatwas on WMD³¹

The core group of al-Qa'ida was planning to acquire or develop WMD before 9/11³² and is seen as still trying to do so³³, but no religious opinion by a trained scholar has been issued before the fatwa the Saudi cleric Nasir Hamid ibn al-Fahd³⁴ (b. 1968) discussed here.³⁵

30 "Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya unveils political party, voicing reservations about women's rights and secularism," accessed May 28, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/14695/Egypt/Politics-/AlJamaa-Allslamiya-unveils-political-party-voicin.aspx>.

31 A first version of the following argument has been published in Rüdiger Lohlker, "Dschihadistischer Gebrauch von Hadīṭ und Koran", in *Zeitgenössische islamische Positionen zu Koexistenz und Gewalt*, ed. Tilman Seidensticker (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011a), 22 – 35.

32 For example, Rajeh Said, "Libyan jihadist: al-Qaeda sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction," accessed May 27, 2012, http://al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en_GB/features/meii/features/main/2010/09/28/feature-01 or Mowatt-Larssen, Rolf. "Islam and the Bomb: Religious Justification for and Against Nuclear Weapons" (Harvard University – Belfer Center, 2011), accessed May 27, 2012, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/uploads/Islam_and_the_Bomb-Final.pdf, 29 ff (the references to religious reasoning in Mowatt-Larssen are not convincing); Paz, Reuven. "Global Jihad and WMD. Between Martyrdom and Mass Destruction," in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology 2*, ed. Hillel Fradkin et al. (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2005): 74 – 86; as well as Wesley, Robert. "Al-Qaeda's WMD Strategy Prior to the U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan", in *Terrorism Monitor 19* (2005a), accessed May 27, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=580.

33 Andrew Coburn et al. *Terrorism Risk in the Post-9/11 Era: A 10-Year Retrospective* (Newark, CA: RMS, 2011), accessed February 2, 2012, http://www.rms.com/Publications/9_11_Retrospective.pdf, 15 ff.

34 Born 1968; author of many publications, often polemical and anti-Western. After his arrest in 2003 by Saudi authorities he recanted several of his fatwas on Saudi television. It is unclear whether the fatwa on WMD was among them, See Mowatt-Larssen, "Islam and the Bomb: Religious Justification for and Against Nuclear Weapons," 33. Subsequently he wrote a letter from prison to tell others that this recantation has been coerced by the authorities (the references by Mowatt-Larssen: 148 are misleading). For his recantation on television v. transcript see the "Revisions"-Website of Sheikh Anid al-Qarni and al-Fahd's guest appearance, accessed May 27, 2012, http://www.murajaat.com/Al-Fahed_read.php.

35 An interesting new aspect of this question may be seen in news that the Norwegian anti-

The first analysis of this fatwa was done by Reuven Paz.³⁶ Paz mentioned an earlier text of al-Fahd on 9/11 praising the attack and using an argument common to Jihadis: “If the American are using F-15 or Tornados they are allowed, and if the Mujahidin used Boeing or Air Bus they are not?”³⁷ This argument of responding in kind is often used by Jihadis as it is in the fatwa discussed below.

The argument of responding in kind has been severely criticized by the al-Gama’at al-islamiyya ideologue Sayyid Imam in his rebuttal of al-Zawahiri’s critique. Sayyid Imam concludes:

“Look, community of the Muslims: Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri argue with words fitting their whims even against Shariatic indicators, e.g., the words of Shaykh Nasir al-Fahd who applies comparisons without any restriction thus declaring the killing of tens of millions of American for licit with one strike. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri abandoned the Book, the Sunna, and the saying of the two Imams, al-Shafi’i and al-Shaybani because they conflict with their whims. The weighing of Shariatic indicators (*tarjih*) is for them mediated by their whim making them judge upon the Shariah. [...] From what has been said above know that the discourse of Nasir al-Fahd is a futile one and must be repudiated. For a Muslim, it is not allowed to apply it in words or actions [...] [Al-Fahd] must be prevented from promulgating Fatwas at all not knowing the basics.”³⁸

But al-Fahd promulgated one Fatwa! He begins with the *basmala*. Then he continues:

“One of the dear brothers, God may grant him success, writing on the Web asked me [...] about the judgement (*hukm*) weapons of mass destruction. [...]

Question:

Peace be upon you, God’s mercy and blessings!

Everybody knows what has been published in the mass media about the intention of al-Qa’ida to strike America with weapons of mass destruction. The

Muslim terrorist Anders Breivik considered the use of CBRN, esp. anthrax, recruiting Muslim suicide attackers and helping them to pass controls; see “Norway shooter considered WMD, jihadi alliance,” accessed May 27, 2012, <http://www.wnd.com/2011/07/325769/>. So the discussions on Jihadi WMD gave birth to an unexpected offshoot.

36 Reuven Paz, “YES to WMD: The first Islamist Fatwah on the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction,” Project for the Research on Islamist Movements, 2003. Accessed April 12, 2004. <http://www.e-prism.org/>.

37 Reuven Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD. Between Martyrdom and Mass Destruction,” in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology 2*, ed. Hillel Fradkin et al. (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2005), 74–86.

38 Sayyid Imam, “*Al-Muraja’at al-thaniyya li-tanzim al-Jihad, ‘al-halqa al-rabi’a’: Sayyid Imam, mufti al-Jihad yaruddu ‘ala ‘Tabri’at al-Zawahiri*,” in *Misir al-yaum* Nr. 1623, November 22, 2008. For further details of this part of Sayyid Imams answer to al-Zawahiri see “The denudation of the exoneration”. Accessed December 27, 2012, <http://www.jihadica.com/the-denudation-of-the-exoneration-part-4/>.

so-called weapons of mass destruction being a modern phenomenon, we find, however, no contemporary scholar talking about the following questions:

What is the Shariatic judgement (*hukm*) on their use by the Mujahidin? If one upholds permissibility: Is the use permissible unconditionally or is it only permissible for reasons of necessity (*darura*)?³⁹ Maybe if the enemy's evil intentions can only be repelled by using these means or these means are used if the Mujahidin do not strike them first with them?⁴⁰ Is this antithetical to humans purpose of making the earth prosper? Do such weapons fall under God's pronouncement: "he goes about the earth spreading and destroying [man's] tilth and progeny" (2, *al-baqara*, 205) Or does this verse bear upon an action committed not in the pursuit of justice as it is in the case of the verses condemning killing (*dhamm al-qatl*)⁴¹?

Answer:

The question you raised, dear brother, deserves a comprehensive research, including all the evidence and sayings of scholars. It concerns issues such as the House of War (*dar al-harb*); ways of defeating the aggressor; Jihad of self-defense; the meaning of the destruction of tilth and progeny according to the Shariah; etc. [...]

Dear brother, you should know that the term 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' is not well defined. They mean by that only nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. If someone uses these weapons and kills thousand people, they would accuse him and launch against him a propaganda campaign since he was using weapons that are internationally prohibited. If he uses huge bombs of seven tons each, thereby killing 3000 people or more, he uses weapons that are internationally accepted.⁴²

It is obvious that the effect of several kilograms of T.N.T. is regarded mass destructive, if you compare it to the stones of the ballista in the past; a R.P.G. or a Hawn mortar shell is regarded mass destructive if you compare it to the arrow in the past. It is known that the infidels of our times have made these weapons called WMD as a means of deterrence to frighten others. We have just witnessed the American threat against Iraq to use these weapons if it attacks Israel. Why

39 There are some general rules applied in the methodology of Islamic law (*fiqh*). One of the rules is: "Necessity makes forbidden things permissible". In this context 'necessity' is not unconditional. So there is no general excuse.

40 The well known argument of responding in kind out of necessity. The question fits perfect the answer to al-Fahd. It may be interesting to know if the question is not tailor-made for the answer.

41 6, *al-an'am*, 151; 17, *al-isra'*, 33

42 This reflects the double-standards accusation against the West, which is common in the "radical Islamic" frame.

should it be allowed for the United States and the infidels and prohibited upon the Muslims?⁴³

If a Muslim group should assault life or honour [of another Muslim group] and could only be repelled by killing all its members, it would be permissible to kill them⁴⁴, as scholars have mentioned in the chapter on repelling an assailant. [...]

If the Muslims could defeat the infidels only by using this kind of weapons, it is permissible to use them even if they kill them all, and destroy their tilth and progeny.”

The answer of al-Fahd is clear: It is permissible for Mujahidin to use WMD because it is necessary to repel the assault of the 'infidels'. He tries to obscure the difference between WMD and conventional weapons using the kind erroneous comparisons Sayyid Imam criticizes some years later. Al-Fahd continues:

“All this has a foundation in the biography of the Prophet, the stories of Jihad, and the writings of the scholars, may God have mercy on them. [...]

Important preliminary remarks [...]

God, He is the most sublime, said: “Hence, do not utter falsehoods by letting your tongues determine [at your own discretion], ”This is lawful and that is forbidden”, thus attributing your own lying inventions to God for, behold, they who attribute their own lying inventions to God will never attain to a happy state!” (16, *al-nahl*, 116)⁴⁵”

After a short quotation from the Quranic commentary of Ibn Kathir, often used by Salafi authors, al-Fahd continues:

“I hold that things in the laws of the infidels today belong to the same category.⁴⁶ For example, phrases they use like 'internationally banned', 'contrary to international law', 'forbidden by international law', 'in violation of the Charter of Human Rights', or 'in violation of the Geneva Convention' etc. The subject of this treatise belong to the same category, insofar as they use the term 'internationally banned weapons'.

All these terms have no standing in the Shariah, because judgement and legislation belong to nobody, only to God. As the most sublime says: “Judgment [as to what is right and what is wrong] rests with God alone [and] He has ordained that you should worship nought but Him” (12, *yusuf*, 40).⁴⁷ And the most sublime says: “Is it that they [who care for no more than this world] believe in forces supposed to have a share in God's

43 The double standard argument combined with the responding in kind argument.

44 Referring to the verses on the condemning of killing mentioned above in the question.

45 We understand, there is no truth, but al-Fahd's truth. Non-jihadi views are merely lying inventions.

46 The category of lying inventions.

47 The beginning of the verse, not quoted by Asad, refers to 'invented names' (*asma'*) implying the lying inventions; the end of the verse states “this is the [one] ever-true faith (*din*)” implying the truthfulness of jihadi thought (and practice).

divinity, which enjoin upon them as a moral law something that God has never allowed?" (42, *al-shura*, 21)⁴⁸ And the most sublime says: "oh, verily, His is all creation and all command" (7, *al-a'raf*, 54).⁴⁹

This is an obvious matter for all Muslims and needs no demonstration. [...]"

The arguments follow a clear pattern: 1) the international conventions are lies invented by humans and 2) the only law acceptable is the Shariah, those living by the rules of the Shariah are saved, and the others are punished. If punishment is the logical consequence of not obeying the Shariah, it has to be done properly:

"An authentic tradition in the *Sahih* [of Muslim] from Shaddad ibn Aws⁵⁰, may God be pleased with him, clearly states: 'God has enjoined benevolence on everything. If you kill, kill in a good manner. If you slaughter animals, slaughter in a good manner. Verily, if the slaughterer sharpens his blade, this puts his victim at ease.'

This religious framing allows the Mujahidin to perceive even the use of WMD as a benevolent deed. If WMD are understood as weapons similar to conventional weapons, they should be used effectively.⁵¹

In the second part of his treatise, al-Fahd introduces authoritative texts:

"I mentioned in the previous section that the rule is to kill in a good manner and that killing infidels falls under this rule, but this can take place only, when one has the ability to do so. The infidels may be in such a position that they can not be resisted or repelled from Islamic territory and Muslims be spared their violence unless they are bombed with what are called weapons of mass destruction, as people with experience in Jihad affirm."⁵²

We pass over the arguments in favour of the permissibility of killing even children – of infidels. In the next section, we read that burning the enemy's land is permitted:

"Authoritative texts proving the permissibility of burning the enemy's land."⁵³

48 In the next verse we read the promise of the paradise for those who have done righteous deeds, for al-Fahd evidently the Mujahidin. And the verse 21 closes "grievous suffering awaits the evildoers [in the life to come]", for al-Fahd all other humans.

49 Stressing what has been said before.

50 A companion of the Prophet Muhammad. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 59, 265 and 290.

51 This may remind us of the centrality of slaughtering animals as a sacrifice for the jihadi imaginary. Blood as a legitimation for blood.

52 So the expertise is the expertise of jihadis. Al-Fahd promulgates a Fatwa in favor of the jihadis based on the expertise of the jihadis...

53 This section argues against the Islamic main frame referring to texts saying the burning of the enemy's land is forbidden.

In both *Sahihs*⁵⁴ we read from Ibn 'Umar⁵⁵, may God be pleased with him: He said: "The messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, burned and cut down the date palms of the Banu Nadir. About this, God says: "Whatever [of their] palm trees you may have cut down, [O believers,] or left standing on their roots, was [done] by God's leave" (59, *al-hashr*, 5).⁵⁶

We can easily understand al-Fahd's use of Quranic verses and Hadiths accumulating religious symbolic subcultural capital, making his opinion seemingly authoritative by citing authoritative texts. He is leaving the complex web of discussions Islamic religious scholars of former times created. Part of this structure of argumentation goes back to the Salafi/Wahhabi tradition al-Fahd originates from, but part of it, the basic logic of his arguments, is due to the need to legitimize a jihadi use of WMD. It is not an open, scholarly discourse. It is the legitimation of a modern style subculture in traditional disguise.

Al-Fahd continues with lengthy quotation from works on Islamic law. We will take the quotation from works of the famous Hanafi legal scholar al-Sarakhsi⁵⁷ as an example:

"Al-Sarakhsi quoting Muhammad ibn al-Hasan⁵⁸ [...] said: 'He said that there was nothing wrong with the Muslims' burning the polytheists' strongholds or flooding them with water, setting up catapults against them, cutting off their water supply, or putting blood, dung, or poison in it to befoul it for them. [...] All these things are military tactics that will cause their strength to break [...]'⁵⁹

Al-Sarakhsi said in *al-Mabsut*: There is nothing wrong in pouring water into the city of the enemy, burning them with fire, or bombarding them with the catapult, even if there are children or Muslims, prisoners or traders, amongst them [...]"⁶⁰

An interesting case to understand the way al-Fahd operates is the second quotation from al-Sarakhsi. Al-Fahd quotes selectively. He cuts out from the quotation all the complex arguments al-Sarakhsi adduces criticizing the strategy of burned earth al-Fahd supports. Al-Fahd needs the selective approach to prove his opinion.

54 The Hadith compilations of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

55 The son of the second caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (Juynboll, *Encyclopedia*, 10–11).

56 By many commentators of the Quran this verse (and the Hadith) has been understood as referring to an exceptional situation. As a rule all destruction of enemy property has been forbidden.

57 Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn abi Sahl Abu Bakr al-Sarakhsi, called Shams al-a'imma; died 1106; lived in Central Asia.

58 Muhammad ibn al-Hassan al-Shaybani, a prominent early Hanafi scholar.

59 Muhammad ibn Ahmad Sarakhsi, *Kitab al-Siyar al-kabir*, ed. Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shafi'i (Beirut: Dar al-fikr, 1997), 221.

60 Muhammad ibn Ahmad Sarakhsi, *Kitab al-Mabsut*, Vol. 10 (Cairo: Muhammad Effendi, 1916), 64. *Kitab al-Mabsut* is one of the most important works of the Hanafi-school consisting of more than 30 volumes in print.

Superficially al-Fahds treatise may look like a traditional scholarly treatise, discussing Quranic verses, Quranic commentaries, Hadiths and Hadith commentaries, and opinions of scholars of Islamic law. But al-Fahd operates selectively leaving out controversial scholarly discussions with the aim to prove the permissibility to use WMD responding in kind to a perceived Western threat to use WMD against Muslims.⁶¹ The so-called authoritative texts are used emblematically to symbolize the insertion of al-Fahds discourse to the Islamic master frame and its scholarly subframe, accumulating additional symbolic capital.

The Jihadi Nuclear Bomb

Looking at a more technical text the arguments are slightly different. We will take an excerpt from a lengthy treatise. We are following the structure of the original to analyze the religious arguments used. The text is on the basics of nuclear physics of nuclear weapons, not useful if somebody intends to build a nuclear weapon reminding us that there may be elements of a hype⁶² in the discussion of Jihadi capabilities to use nuclear weapons.⁶³

“Course for the Mujahidin on the preparation for the use of nuclear weapons

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Enmity only against the oppressors, honour and peace be upon the envoy, the trustworthy, Muhammad b. 'Abdallah, may God honour him and grant him, his

61 There were many ancient Fatwas written on behalf of personal interests of the people asking for this Fatwa.

62 Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qa'ida's Quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction. The History behind the Hype* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009); and Anne Stenersen, “Nuclear Terrorism: Hype, Hoax or Waiting to Happen? Nuclear Ambitions and Capabilities of Terrorist Organisations,” in *Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century. Old Players, New Game – New Players, Old Game*, ed. Kari M Osland and Magnus Eriksson (Oslo: NUPI, 2008), 924–946; against it Andrea Plebani, “Attractiveness of WMD for Radical Islamist Movements: Ideological Constraints, Black Spots, and Failed-Weak States,” in *Strategic Insights 6* (2007), accessed April 12, 2011, <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccp/publications/OnlineJournal/2007/Aug/plebaniAug07.pdf>; also Gary Ackerman and Jerry Tamset, eds., *Jihadists and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, 2009); critical Robert Wesley, “Al-Qaeda's WMD Strategy After the U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan,” *Terrorism Monitor 20* (2005), accessed May 27, 2012, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=590.

63 The plain text is available on. e.g., accessed November 10, 2011, <http://www.karicom.com/vb/t2982.html> or, accessed November 10, 2011, <http://www.phys4arab.net/vb/showthread.php?t=1546>.

family, his companions, and the following generation peace until the Day of Judgement.

This is the book

On the Jihadi and Nuclear Bomb and tools for making nuclear energy fertile

The drafting of it was finished by saying praise be to God and by his graciousness with 19 lessons [...] ⁶⁴ [signed] The Black Banners”

The text starts with an insert showing two pictures of an exploding nuclear bomb, followed by some pictures from 9/11 and Usama bin Ladin. The text is dedicated as a: “Gift to the commander of the Mujahidin, Shaykh Usama bin Ladin, God may preserve him, on behalf of the jihad in the cause of God.” By using this framework, the text is tied to the jihadi subculture and its history:

The introduction mentioned above is repeated, in the last part slightly modified by “and who is near to him by performing good deeds until the Day of Judgement”⁶⁵; a Quranic verse (Surat *Muhammad* 47:4)⁶⁶ is inserted:

“Now when you meet [in war] those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and then tighten their bonds; but thereafter [set them free,] either by an act of grace or against ransom, so that the burden of war may be lifted: thus [shall it be]. And [know that] had God so willed, He could indeed punish them [Himself]; but [He wills you to struggle] so as to test you [all] by means of one another. And as for those who are slain in God’s cause, never will He let their deeds go to waste.”⁶⁷

Then an invocation:

“After expressing our trust in God (*tawakkul*). O God! I am free from anybody killing a Muslim⁶⁸, turning his face to you, without a just cause.⁶⁹ O God! You know the hidden and the secrets. Praise be upon you. – O God! Receive us together with the Mujahidin and witnesses of faith (*shuhada*)!”⁷⁰

As a Quranic reference, the ‘traditional’ reference to the Surat *al-Tauba* is added after the *basmala*:

64 A list of the lessons follows.

65 Referring to the Mujahidin and using the Arab verb “man walahu” placing them on the same level like Sufis having reached a higher level of spiritual knowledge.

66 Alternatively known as *al-qital*, the fighting; it has been used as a justification for beheading hostages.

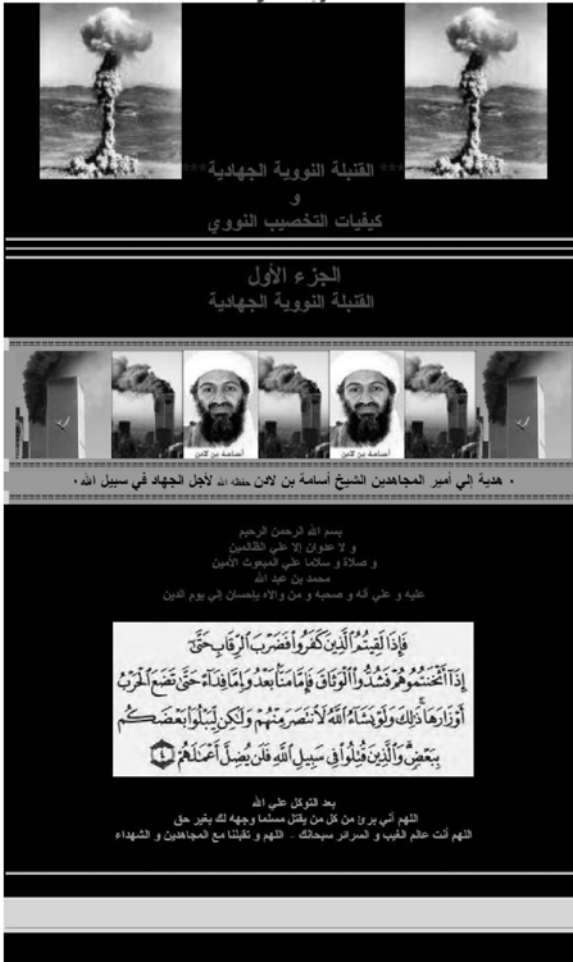
67 Using the translation of Muhammad Asad.

68 Referring to a tradition in Abu Dawud’s *Sunan*.

69 Referring to Surat al-Isra’, 17:33. The author is freeing himself from any responsibility for any Muslim killed through the weapons he is talking about. There must be a just cause, legitimizing the death of any Muslim that may happen. It is the will of God.

70 Variations of this invocation can be found in several jihadi texts.

“Fight against them! God will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them; and He will soothe the bosoms of those who believe, and will remove the wrath that is in their hearts. And God will turn in His mercy unto whom He wills: for, God is all-knowing, wise.”⁷¹



The Islamic framework used by the author indicates he is doing a “good deed” writing a treatise on WMD. The verse from Surat *Muhammad* legitimizes the fighting of the Mujahidin as a punishment for evil-doers and as a text for the Mujahidin who will not be misled. The decision to use WMD cannot be wrong. After freeing himself from any responsibility since God is all-knowing, the au-

71 Surat *al-Tauba* 9: 14 – 15.

thor can plea for acceptance by God, religiously necessary because he is the only one who is able to accept the deeds of the Mujahidin. They are not the active part in relation to God. This is stressed by the verses of Surat *al-Tauba*, a Sura in the center of the jihadi religious framework. The author appears in the following lines:

“A scientific study by Mujahid No 1

It took me two years studying nuclear physics in several scientific and jihadist fora as I studied the devices of rocket technologies, and different forms of explosives and bombs. I know for sure that the balance of strategic powers in the military field will not change in favour of the Mujahidin without correct scientific preparation [...]”

The other, dominant framework of this text, the scientific framing, is introduced, the utilitarian argument of Nasir al-Fahd taken up. And the depth of knowledge of jihadists is evident... Another textual-iconical insert closes this introduction:



The iconographical structure reminds us of common epigraphic or calligraphic texts including the prophet Muhammad and his first successors: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali. The title of the iconical insert is *The Caliphate (al-khilafa)* hinting at the content of the hadith in the center.

At the end of the text, Mujahid No 1 is changing back to the religious frame. He starts with an invocation: “To God is the glory and to the prophet and the

Mujahidin.”⁷² and “Praise to God, the Gracious.” Then a sub-title is inserted: “*The Black Banners*” (*al-rayat al-sud*) followed by the black banner with the *shahada* written in white, the icon often used by jihadis. We understand what is meant with “black banners”: the banner of the prophet, to be raised before the Day of Judgement.

Then a quotation from the Sura *al-Nuh* 71:26: “O God! Leave not one of the disbelievers on earth.”⁷³ demonstrates the ultimate aim of the technical discourse. A compilation of Hadiths on the black banners as a symbol for the apocalyptic events happening before the advent of the Last Day closes the text.

The last line of the text tells us: “Don’t forget the compiler and composer of this document in your pious prayers.”

The technical aspects of the text left aside – just another example of the (lack of) knowledge of *ji-hadis* in the field of CBRN – the religious memes adduced in the text are an excellent example of jihadi framing.

The text starts with the *basmala* and the praise of the prophet introducing the Last Day as the ultimate point of reference, esp., “the black banners from the East”. One of the signs of the coming the Day of Judgement is the appearance of these black banners.⁷⁴ All these elements are part of the Islamic master frame. The stress on the Day of Judgement hints at the jihadi master frame.⁷⁵ The first graphic elements are two pictures of the explosion of a nuclear bomb, a quite appropriate illustration. The integration in the jihadi master frame is evident with the dedication of the treatise to Usama bin Ladin. This framing is enforced by quoting appropriate Quranic verses, especially from the most emblematic Surat *al-Tawba*. The framing aims at demonstrating that the use of WMD is permissible against evildoers, i. e., the ‘infidels’. The beginning of the technical discourse takes up the argument of necessity developed, e. g., by al-Fahd. The next religious image evokes the necessity to establish the caliphate, part of several radical Islamic frames and of the jihadi master frame, too. Theologically it is somewhat surprising, since the fall of the caliphate is one of the signs of the coming of the Day of Judgement. Another verse from the Quran stresses the permissibility to erase every ‘infidel’ from the earth. The Hadiths adduced at the end return to the general idea of the Day of Judgement.

To summarize it: For *Mujahid No 1* the nuclear bomb is the ultimate means to

72 Equating the Mujahidin with God and the prophet sounds a little bit blasphemous...

73 The quotation is not correct. There are jihadis who know the correct version: accessed December 27, 2011, <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=371327>.

74 Cf. Cook, David, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

75 Cf. Elmaz, Orhan, “Jihadi-Salafist Creed: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s Imperatives of Faith.” In *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlke (Göttingen: Vienna University Press), 15 – 35.

secure that the ultimate target, the Day of Judgement, is reached. The caliphate mentioned in passing is just an episode on this way and symbolizes an Islamic legitimacy and uses an icon that is part of the jihadi sub-cultural capital.

Online discussions on WMD

To take some random samples from online for an analysis of the discourses may help us to contextualize what al-Fahd and Mujahid No 1 have written.

One post in the *al-Alukah* forum with the date of September 30th 2009 by Abu 'A'isha al-Maghribi⁷⁶ states that it is necessary to know about the permissibility of the use of weapons of mass destruction by "armies of the Muslims" (*juyush al-muslimin*). He makes a distinction between weapons destroying everything, e.g., nuclear bombs, weapons only destroying humans, animals and plants, leaving buildings and infrastructure intact, e.g., biological and chemical weapons with a short paragraph on neutron bombs. This discussion is quite technical without any technical references.

The post continues with a view on the Shariatic judgement (*hukm*) on the use of WMD. It states that there is divergence of opinion (*ikhtilaf*) among Islamic scholars. There are two groups we read in the post: one group, the majority the post tells us, saying the use of WMD is allowed, among them Nasir al-Fahd, and another group not allowing the use.⁷⁷

Both groups discuss different verses from the Quran and several Hadiths, a conventional approach – at least at face value. The author of the post then weighs the different opinions, the traditionalist way of *tarjih*⁷⁸, and develops an Islamic theory of deterrence justifying the possession of WMD and imposing specific preconditions for the extraordinary case WMD are used.

There are few reactions to the post, one directing the users to the Fatwa of Nasir al-Fahd.

In another thread in this forum⁷⁹ at 28 September 2009, Sulayman Ahmad

76 Abu 'A'isha al-Maghribi, "*Hukm al-shari'a fi istikhdam aslihat al-dimar al-shamil*," accessed December 27, 2011, <http://majles.alukah.net/showthread.php?t=41611>.

77 There is a thorough discussion of the ethical issues at stake in Sohail Hashmi, "Islamic Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction." In *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. Sohail Hashmi and Steven P. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004). There are very outspoken positions against the use of WMD, e.g.: "The authors of this blog hold the view that it is impossible to accommodate the use of WMD in war, as regulated by Allah and His Prophet (SAW)" (accessed July 30, 2011, <http://therealislam1.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/wmd/>).

78 Rüdiger Lohlker, *Islamisches Recht* (Vienna: facultas/wuv, 2011b), 144.

79 Sulayman Ahmad, "*Hukm istikhdam aslihat al-dimar al-shamil*," Accessed December 27, 2011, <http://majles.alukah.net/showthread.php?41520>.

asked for the Fatwas of “our religious leaders” on WMD. Another member tells him about the Fatwa of Nasir al-Fahd. Sulayman Ahmad is not convinced. He asked for Fatwas of “eminent scholars” naming al-Barrak⁸⁰, al-Khudayr⁸¹ and others like them.⁸²

Sulayman Ahmad presents in a later posting a Fatwa by 'Ali al-Halabi.⁸³ He is talking about some Fatwas declaring the use of WMD allowed. In his introduction al-Halabi speaks out against the use of WMD. Then he presents a lengthy Fatwa by the Egyptian Fatwa authority (*dar al-ifta'*).⁸⁴ The Fatwa argues that the possession of WMD may be justified as a means of deterrence of enemies, but the obligation to use it as some (jihadi) groups are arguing for it is forbidden (*mamnu'*) shariatically.

The acceptance of al-Fahd's Fatwa is not as widespread as the author and his jihadi sympathizers may have intended.

Other technical texts & images

One thread in the forum *alqimmah* offers some insights into the form the religious framing of technical and military texts is operating. The Somali forum *alqimmah* offers many – some of them out-dated⁸⁵ – manuals for manufacturing explosives of any kind, written in English and used as a library for jihadi purposes.⁸⁶ Its Islamic framework is reduced to the *basmala* at the beginning, followed by “My brothers Mujahidin, I present to you the explanation on video of the weapon MP5⁸⁷ used by the Special Forces and the Anti-Terrorist Forces, God may kill them, [...]”⁸⁸

80 This is 'Abd al-Rahman al-Barrak (b. 1933/34), a Saudi cleric, drawing attention for issuing controversial Fatwas. Cf. his homepage at, accessed December 27, 2011, <http://albarra-k.islamlight.net/>.

81 'Ali b. Khudayr al-Khudayr, a prominent Saudi cleric, is a leading member of the oppositional *al-Sahwa* (Awakening) movement. He was imprisoned in 2003.

82 We can understand this post as implicating Nasir al-Fahd is not one of the important scholars, the “great scholars”.

83 He is a Salafi preacher from Jordan, and a pupil of Nasir al-Din al-Albani, who is active in Europe, North America and the Far East since the 1990s. See “A Brief Introduction to Ali al-Halabi,” accessed December 27, 2011, <http://www.salafitalk.net/st/viewmessages.cfm?forum=33&topic=11387>.

84 Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta'* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 1997).

85 Jules Bebie, *Manual of Explosives, Military Pyrotechnics and Chemical Warfare Agents* (New York: Macmillan, 1943); *The Anarchist Cookbook*, *Simple Sabotage Field Manual* etc.

86 Al-Bara' al-Misri, “*Mujahid mubdi' fi al-bahth al-'askari*,” accessed November 29, 2011, <http://alqimmah.net/showthread.php?t=3015&page=15>.

87 Heckler & Koch MP5, a 9 mm submachine gun of German design, developed in the 1960s. Accessed November 29, 2011, <http://world.guns.ru/smg/de/hk-mp5-e.html>.

Look! We have raised the banners⁸⁹ of Jihad and unsheathed our sharp swords.

However, knowledge is for action guided by it⁹⁰. There is no victor except God. Your brother al-Bara' al-Misri, brigades of the *Ansar Qa'idat al-Jihad*.”

There are some basic references to the jihadi imaginary. The last lines are often used by al-Bara' al-Misri in his postings on technical issues.⁹¹ The emblematic elements tie the technical discourse to the jihadi subculture and contribute to the religious framing of jihadi activism.

A video on the preparation of ammonium-nitrate⁹² – again by al-Bara' al-Misri – starts with a *basmala*, written in white on a black background, decorated with floral elements. The next screen shows information for participants about the necessity all of the course to gain success in this field. The next screen changes to the title of the course: “Scientific Course on the Preparation of Ammonium-Nitrate”, part of the “Courses for the Destruction of the Cross”, in the background the wall of an ancient fortress on the sea shore, in the foreground a saber.⁹³



Follows a clear cut and new setting: The jihadi 'professor' wearing a black hood and a white lab coat, signaling his professionalism, greets the viewer with the *basmala*, the praise of God and the prophet. Then he turns to the demonstration how to prepare ammonium-nitrate. In the background we hear an Islamic hymn. Near the end of the video, the introductory picture described above appears again. Now we see a cross, the saber cuts it, and the cross disappears in fragments. Then the word “cross” (*salib*) from the headline drops down, and a

88 Followed by the usual links for downloading.

89 Once again this element is common to the imaginary of the jihadis.

90 Referring to armchair-jihadis.

91 Cf., accessed November 29, 2011, <http://78.47.241.158/~aljahad/vb/showthread.php?p=27857>.

92 Accessed November 29, 2011, http://www.archive.org/details/2n_part_of_it.

93 In another course the word “cross” (*salib*) appears and is cut in two pieces. This is an animation demonstrating that the producers of the video are part of the global youth culture loving this kind of pubertal jokes.

baseball bat appears, hitting the word “cross”. The saber cuts the word, and it breaks in two pieces. A triumphant “God is great” (*allahu akbar*) appears.

The last screen shows a statement about the end of the course and asks the viewer to pray for a reward for the producers. The background music is turned up in this last part of the video.

The *basmala*, written and spoken, and the other Islamic formulae refer to the common Islamic frame. Islamic hymns (*anashid*) are part of the common staging of jihadis videos, in this case indicating the framing in the jihadi sub-frame. The same is true for the reference to the cross, an emblematic part of the jihadi imaginary understanding the jihadi subculture as an anti-crusader alliance. The animation indicates that this kind of video is produced using elements of global youth culture; “youth” culture, because this kind of pubertal animations loved by jihadis publishing on the web, is significant.

The *allahu akbar* in the end tells us the jihadi way, i. e., the use of violence (=sword⁹⁴), is the only effective way to repel the crusaders’ aggression. Once again the responding in kind argument – less technically sophisticated.



This video, the references to the Islamic and jihadi frames emblematically shows the double frame alignment jihadis use in their propaganda.

In the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of God’s Servant Dhu ’l-bijadin*⁹⁵ (*Mausu’at ’abd allah Dhu ’l-bija- din al-musawwara*) dealing with the preparation of explosives we read only marginal Islamic references. The author writes, e. g., in part four of the *Encyclopedia*: “but this is what god enabled me to do right now” (p. 1). In the following part on “preparing nitrate-urea without nitric acid” we read: “At first and before preparing say: In the name of god, I put my trust in god, the living one, who never dies.⁹⁶” The following 125 pages are free from religious references. The reference to early Islamic history (the companion of the

94 Reminding us that the references to early Islamic history and the swords associated with it are part of the jihadi master frame. We may think of the omni-present jihadi knight on his horse waving his sword (see the chapter of Philipp Holtmann on symbols in this volume).

95 A companion of the prophet, who died in the battle of Tabuk in 630 CE. Being killed in a battle makes him attractive in a jihadi context.

96 Referring to Surat *al-furqan* 25:58.

prophet), a religious formula and the Qur'an introduces a predominantly technical, secular text. This seems to be another minimal form of religious reference in an isolated, decontextualized form, using the religious references emblematically as part of the jihadi discursive and practical universe.

Conclusion

The religious elements of the texts discussed are not necessary to develop the technical arguments following their own secular, functional logic. As technical discourses, these texts and videos are part of modernity, the shadowy side of modernity. The religious elements disconnected from any scholarly discourses – even in the case of the superficially scholarly discourse of Nasir al-Fahd – are freely available for use in the jihadi subculture as markers of the specific jihadi identity and the specific subcultural capital that is needed to be accepted in the subculture. This decontextualization of religious memes making them liquid, available for anybody using the memes is part of the modern commodification and standardization of religious symbols, well known in other contexts.⁹⁷

But the technical texts and videos of Jihadis and the impact they have can only be understood by taking account of the religious dimension⁹⁸ framing the technical and military discourses. The emblematic structure of the religious framework is not a sign of intellectual deficits, but a symptom of the mingling of technical and religious discourses characteristic of jihadi discourses. The decontextualized religious memes introduced in the texts and videos discussed in this contribution integrate these texts into the jihadi master frame.

97 E. g., Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005).

98 Cf. Rüdiger Lohlker, "The Forgotten Swamp Revisited." In *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2012), 125–139 and Orhan Elmaz, "Jihadi-Salafist Creed: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Imperatives of Faith." In *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press), 15–35.

Traditions to die for Abu Yahya al-Libi's collection of 40 ahadith

Abu Yahya al-Libi (*nom de guerre* of Hasan Muhammad Qa'id, from now on: Libi), one of the first volunteers who fought in Afghanistan¹, escaped from Bagram U.S. military prison in Afghanistan in 2005 and established himself as a supreme figure in al-Qaida's global network. He has not only been considered al-Qaida's number three after Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, but Libi is also number one concerning its leadership since he is the 'formally trained' theological hardliner², Internet scholar³, chief ideologue of al-Qaida, and a member of its *sharia* committee ("the next Osama"⁴) – with dubious religious credentials⁵. Little is known about his childhood and youth aside from the assumed birth year of 1963 and that he left supposedly Libya for Afghanistan around 1990, just after the Afghan-Soviet war during which Jihadis were still supported by Western powers. He is said to have studied Islam in Africa, more specifically in Mali and Mauritania, and has appeared widely in Jihadist video propaganda. YouTube analyses reveal for instance that the audience of one of his

1 Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 114.

2 Michael Scheuer, "Abu Yahya al-Libi: Al-Qaeda's Theological Enforcer – Part 2," *Terrorism Focus* 27 (2007), accessed May 18, 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4375&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=240&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4375&tx_ttnews[backPid]=240&no_cache=1).

3 Reuven Paz, "Debates within the Family. Jihadi-Salafi Debates on Strategy, Takfir, Extremism, Suicide Bombings, and the Sense of the Apocalypse," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 279, and quite the same in Reuven Paz, "Reading Their Lips: The Credibility of Militant Jihadi Web Sites as 'Soft Power' in the War of the Minds," in *Home-Grown Terrorism – Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalisation Among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*, ed. Thomas M. Pick, Anne Speckhard, and Beatrice Jacuch (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2009), 125.

4 Jarret Brachman, "The Next Osama," *Foreign Policy*, September 10, 2009, accessed May 18, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/09/10/the_next_osama.

5 Youssef Aboul-Enein, *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 104sq.

videos is mostly made up of 13 – 17 year old males from Saudi-Arabia, Algeria and Sudan using a mobile device⁶.

Libi calls for repelling infidels and tyrants and expelling them from Muslim lands and targeting those who give aid to tyrannical governments and foreign invaders⁷. Among others, his call to oppose UN forces in Somalia, to kill the Saudi monarch 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-'Aziz for engaging in interfaith dialogue⁸, and urging the Uyghur to revolt in China⁹ may be regarded highlights of his career until now, but, also, providing six ways of how to defeat al-Qaida¹⁰. In the last year he raised attention for his poem from 2009 in which he 'predicted' Ghaddafi's fall¹¹.



Illustration 1: Abu Yahya al-Libi (http://jarretbrachman.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/lyb1.divx_002438560.jpg)

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- 6 Jarret Brachman, "Abu Youtube al-Libi," The Jarret Brachman Blog, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=1318>.
- 7 Mohammed M. Hafez, "Takfir and violence against Muslims," in *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, strategic, and ideological fissures*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 32.
- 8 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Cindy D. Tan, *Profile of an Ideologue: Abu Yahya al-Libi* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Terrorism Research, 2009), 12 and 14, accessed May 18, 2012, http://wsprod1.webrecruiter.com/fdd2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11783331&Itemid=354.
- 9 "Qaeda urges Uighur jihad against China: SITE," AFP, October 8, 2009, accessed May 18, 2012, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jd-1p_1tIECZqniIbtXqvDukvSbQ.
- 10 Jarret Brachman, "Making The Next Bin Laden," The Jarret Brachman Blog, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=1450>, and Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, p. 89 ff.
- 11 Jarret Brachman, "Abu Yahya al-Libi's Poem on Muammar Qaddafi from 2009," The Jarret Brachman Blog, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=1753>.

The booklet

We mentioned the dubious religious credentials of Libi. In an attempt to increase his credibility he uses elements of the Islamic scholarly tradition in his argumentation trying to reframe the Islamic master frame as the jihadi frame.¹² One of the most important corpora of Islamic religious knowledge, the Sunna, the corpus of traditions of the prophet, *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*), is an appropriate field to prove religious credentials.

“Although it stands second to the Quran in terms of reverence, it is the lens through which the holy book is interpreted and understood. [...] For much of Islamic history the Sunna was preserved, transmitted and understood has been the *hadith* [...], or a report describing the words, actions, or habits of the Prophet. Unlike the Quran, the hadiths were not quickly and concisely compiled during and immediately after Muhammad's life. Because hadiths were recorded and transmitted over a period of decades and even centuries, they are not in and of themselves contemporary historical documentation of what Muhammad said and did. In the century after Prophet's mission, the Muslim community passed through no less than three civil wars and numerous sectarian schisms. As a result, hadiths were forged by different parties trying to manipulate the authority of the Sunna. The question of the authenticity of hadiths and how one can distinguish true ones from forgeries has been a perennial concern to [...] the Muslim scholars who turned to the Sunna to elaborate the Islamic tradition [...] The Prophet's words, however, have always been more than just a type of proof used in discussions of Islamic law and dogma. For the Muslim scholarly class [...] tracing [...] a hadith back to Muhammad is to follow one's genealogy of sacred knowledge back to its source. It is a medium of connection to the Prophet [...]”¹³

The discussion whether a *hadith* is to be considered authentic is one of the most contested fields of Islamic knowledge until today. The Salafi tendency, methodically close to jihadism, and similar tendencies claim that the heritage of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad is to be understood as normative, static, and universalistic, to be applied decontextualized in a spatial and temporal vacuum. This literal understanding of *ahadith* claiming an absolute knowledge of the prophetic practice lends itself easily to authoritarian attitudes. Thus discussing *ahadith* can in the case of Libi be understood as part of a project to form the ideal jihadi reincarnating the tradition of the early Islamic community and appropriating this tradition for jihadism.

12 Cf. the chapter by Lohlker in this volume.

13 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, Oxford/New York: Oneworld 2009, 3sq.

In December 2010 Libi finished editing a collection of forty Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) under the Arabic title of *al-arba'un fi fadl al-shahadah wa-talab al-husna wa-ziyada*, i. e. a collection of *ahadith* describing the merits of martyrdom, a genre of Islamic literature¹⁴, to which among others the founder of al-Qa'ida and mentor of Osama bin Laden, 'Abd Allah 'Azzam¹⁵, contributed too¹⁶. In fact, on the very day Libi's booklet was published by al-Fajr media – that is 23 March 2011 –, Artur Wejksznner wrote on his blog about Jihadism that he would give an account of the most important theses held by al-Libi in a future entry (*postaram się odnieść do najważniejszych tez przypominianych przez al-Libiego*) but as of May 2012 he has not done so yet.

Fortunately, from a preventive perspective, and unfortunately, from a scholarly perspective, this 61 page booklet has not been translated into English yet since an English translation could pave the way for translations into various other languages. As to the quality of possibly forthcoming translations, one may mention that three different English titles for the booklet's announcement can be found using Google: 1) "Forty Virtues in Martyrdom and the Required Attributes", 2) "Forty – virtues of Martyrdom and the Required of Beautiful and Increase" and 3) "Forty Points in the Merit of Martyrdom and Pursuit of Goodness and More". Obviously, the third one is the correct translation with "points" being added for a better understanding.

Actually, the title alludes to a very well-known *hadith* collection of Imam Nawawi (d. 1278) that is commonly known as Nawawi's "Forty" – lots of collections of "forties" should follow in the Islamic tradition¹⁷ with the possible omission of the counted entity that is *hadith*. For instance, we may mention Patel's "Forty Ahadith Concerning Masjid al-Aqsa" or Iqbal's "Forty Ahadith on the Virtue of Women".

The number 40 itself is not only highly significant in Christianity (e. g. 40 days between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus) and Judaism (e. g. Hebrew people spent 40 years in the Sinai desert) but also in Islam. In the Quran we encounter that number four times: in Q 2:51 and 7:142 in "forty nights", and in Q 5:26 and Q 46:15 in "forty years" which is the age of human maturity mentioned in the Quran.

14 A wider known example of *fadl al-shahada* is e. g. the book of Ghumari published in 1970 in Cairo.

15 David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith and Politics of Martyrdom Operations* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 44.

16 Abdallah 'Azzam, *Ithaf al-ibad bi-fada'il al-jihad* (N.p.: n.p., n.d.), accessed May 18, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=vhk6q6q>.

17 Yahya b. Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Das Buch der vierzig Hadithe: Kitab al-arba'in. Mit dem Kommentar von Ibn Daqiq al-'Id. Aus dem Arabischen übersetzt und herausgegeben von Marco Schöller* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2007), 10 f.

By giving the collection a rhyming, rhythmic title in classical manner, Libi has succeeded in getting in line with traditional scholars, since the Islamic book tradition has been used to rhyming and rhythmic titles. Hence, Libi's success within his readership is twofold by this title. First, he evokes comparisons of great scholars of Prophetic traditions like Nawawi to himself which is not only wrong but unreasonable at least. Second, he pictures himself to be a man of great scholarship – alas, of traditional scholarship – which he certainly is not. One can surmise that the climactic subtitle encompassing the idea of martyrdom, the pursuit of goodness and “more” (*ziyada*) will make this apparently traditional looking booklet even more popular among his readership. Therefore, Libi has made a good point in choosing a promising title and this will certainly suggest (if not impose) the idea of a newly coined, purist and righteous *hadith* collection in one mind or another.

However, it is not our task to translate the possibly explosive contents of this booklet. Rather, we shall investigate the ideas and their interconnections given by Libi through his selection of 40 Prophetic traditions chosen painstakingly from the basic six major and canonical *hadith* collections. Yet, we should bear in mind that the two commonly best known hadith collections, the two Sahih of Bukhari and Muslim respectively, contain several thousand unique traditions – a fact which makes any collection of 40 *ahadith* like Libi's obviously highly selective and thus exclusive to its utmost. But, also, that each major collection contains a section or chapter on jihad or materials relating to jihad in general¹⁸. In the following, we shall give definitions of what the concepts of “martyrdom”, “goodness” and their augmentation mean to Libi and how he supports them. Specifically, we want to demonstrate whether and how he legitimates suicide attacks and what kind of rhetoric he uses for purposes of conviction.

Contents

Starting off with a quote of Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350) in which the relationship between God and man is (as so often) compared to a purchase in which man is the merchandise, God is the purchaser and paradise together with being able to see God and to listen to His speech is the price. Hence, man belongs to God. With this in mind, Libi tells us why he wrote this booklet.

He wrote it in order to race people to attain the honor of martyrdom and to stimulate those willing martyrdom to fulfill their wish because martyrdom means salvation (*najah*) but a lot of people would not know that it is the way of

18 Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 49.

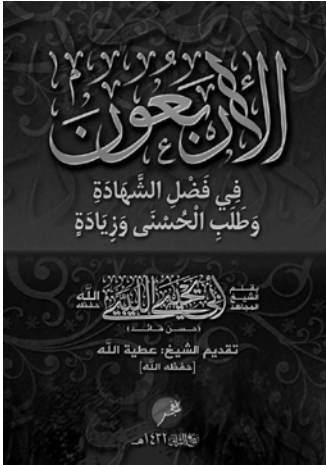


Illustration 2: Cover of the booklet (<http://tawhed.ws/dl?i=23041121>)

peace (*salamah*) and security (*amanah*). Then he gives the forty best of topic related *ahadith* which he has selected and arranged under 30 headings which reflect the journey or career (*sayr*) of a typical *mujahid*. Roughly, one can classify the 30 headings into three main blocks:

- 1) *ahadith* about getting killed in fight,
- 2) *ahadith* about the merits of martyrdom, and
- 3) *ahadith* about waiting and hoping for martyrdom and attaining it by other means.

1st block

I. Fight

1. The requirement of having a sincere intention in all actions
 2. The necessity that the fighting of the believer should be for the elevation of God's word
 3. Avoiding [fighting for] unknown causes (*rāyāt 'ammīya*) and the threat of fighting in anger for one's community while at fault
 4. It is not [to be deemed] community-related for a Muslim to fight for his life, honor, sanctity or possessions¹⁹
 5. Paradise is under the shadow of the swords and swords are its keys²⁰
 6. The great merit of steadiness when facing the enemy and the high status of the ones killed in the first line (2)
 7. The most favorable and most honorable death
-

19 The *hadith* given reads: Whoever is killed in defense of his {property, family, religion and blood} is a martyr. Libi does not comment this hadith at all.

20 Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi, *al-Jami' al-Sahih: The Book on Government* (Book 20), Hadith 4681, accessed May 18, 2012, <http://sunnah.com/muslim/34>.

The first *hadith*, a very well-known *hadith*, is also the very first *hadith* in Nawawi's collection of 40 *ahadith* that we mentioned before²¹. This *hadith* makes clear that actions are but by intention, and therefore, one should have a sincere intention in all actions. Since the number of good deeds increases with the number of good intentions in an action, Libi presents several possible intentions for the fighter in God's way, e. g. protecting Muslim possessions or helping the oppressed triumph.

The first block is about getting killed in fight and comprises 8 Prophetic sayings under 7 headings about the causes of fighting which relates to the first *hadith*. Actually, this links very well to the idea of propagation of faith through combat, a central theme of jihad²². We learn that fighting for the cause of God means to fight for the elevation of His words²³, that one should not fight for causes of family pride, or honor, or the cause of his family or his tribe, that one should fight for just causes only²⁴, and that whoever is killed in defense of his property, family, religion or blood dies as a martyr²⁵. These traditions obviously are related to the topic of the correct intention²⁶.

As to fighting and getting killed in fight, Libi cites one *hadith* stating that swords are the keys to Paradise, which Bonner – rather, to put it simply – takes to be a discriminator between the Muslim, Jewish and Christian notions of martyrdom although Crusading doctrine seems to have had a certain amount in common with Jihadism²⁷. There are two more *ahadith* about the steadfastness when meeting the enemy in battle, and the high status of the ones killed in the first line, while in what follows getting killed in fight (i. e. dying as a martyr) is defined as the most favorable and most honorable death.

21 Al-Naysaburi, Book 20, Hadith 4692.

22 Bonner, Jihad, 49.

23 Al-Naysaburi, Book 20, Hadith 4684.

24 Al-Naysaburi, Book 20, Hadith 4555.

25 Abu Dawud Sulayman b. al-Ash'ath al-Sijistani, Sunan Abi Dawud: Model Behavior of the Prophet (Kitab Al-Sunnah) [Book 40], Hadith 4754 (Sunan Abi Dawud 4772), accessed May 18, 2012, <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/42>.

26 Bonner, Jihad, 51.

27 Bonner, Jihad, 79 f.

2nd block

 II. Merits

8. God graces the martyr by letting the pain of getting killed go. (2)
 9. The martyrs are not trialed in their graves.
 10. What great blessings God specified for all martyrs. (2)
 11. By what God graces some martyrs additionally
 12. The hurry of the large dark-eyed and their descending to the martyr when he is raised from the place of his death
 13. The martyr enters Paradise after getting killed and he is given to eat, to drink and left to wander about therein as he pleases. (3)
 14. The one who is killed for the cause of God will enter Paradise with the first group [to do so] without being called to account or punishment. (2)
 15. The wish of the most bighearted (*akram*) of creation, God's peace and prayer be upon him, to be repeatedly killed for the cause of God due to its honor. (2)
 16. The wish of martyrs to return to the world again and get killed again and over again, for the honor they experience
 17. The variation in the levels of martyrs and that some are not topped by prophets if it were not for the level of their prophethood (2)
 18. In martyrdom there is a reason for attaining the highest level of Paradise (*firdaws*).
 19. For the martyr at sea there is the reward of two martyrs.
 20. The homes of the martyrs in Paradise are the most beautiful and best homes
-

In the second block we find 20 *ahadith* under 13 headings describing God's graces towards martyrs, one of which is the painlessness of being killed (in a martyr's death) which is given in two *ahadith*. We learn that martyrs are not afflicted in their graves, and that there are six blessings for them (2 *ahadith*): "he is forgiven at the first shedding of his blood; he is shown his abode in Paradise; he is preserved from the punishment in the grave; he is kept safe from the greatest terror; he has placed on his head the crown of honor, a ruby of which is better than the world and what it contains; he is married to seventy-two wives of the maidens with large dark eyes; and is made intercessor for seventy of his relatives"²⁸.

Further, there will be some extra grace, for instance, the dark-eyed girls will descend to the martyr. A total of 3 *ahadith* tell us that the martyr eats, drinks and entertains himself in Paradise right after being killed. One of them reads:

It has been narrated on the authority of Masruq who said: We asked 'Abdullah about the Qur'anic verse: "Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord ..." (iii. 169). He said: We asked the meaning of the verse (from the Holy Prophet) who said: The souls, of the martyrs live in the bodies of green birds who have their nests in chandeliers hung from the throne of the Almighty. They eat

28 Muhammad b. 'Isa b. Sawra al-Tirmidhi, al-Jami' al-Tirmidhi: The Book on the Virtues of Jihad (Book 20), Hadith 1663 (*Jami' at-Tirmidhi 1663*), accessed May 18, 2012, <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/18>.

the fruits of Paradise from wherever they like and then nestle in these chandeliers. Once their Lord cast a glance at them and said: Do ye want anything? They said: What more shall we desire? We eat the fruit of Paradise from wherever we like. Their Lord asked them the same question thrice. When they saw that they will continue to be asked and not left (without answering the question). they said: O Lord, we wish that Thou mayest return our souls to our bodies so that we may be slain in Thy way once again. When He (Allah) saw that they had no need, they were left (to their joy in heaven).²⁹

Martyrs (in the way of God) will enter Paradise with the first group to enter Paradise without being called to account or punishment (2 *ahadith*). The merits of martyrdom are such that the Prophet himself wished to be killed for the cause of God (2 *ahadith*) and martyrs wish to return to the world in order to get killed again. Given that latter *hadith* is nearly the only Jihad-related *hadith* given by Patterson³⁰ in his discussion of *ahadith* as the second source of Islamic theology next to the Quran – one can imagine how problematic it would be to use his book which was published by Cambridge University Press in an academic context.

Finally, there are levels of martyrs and some of the martyrs have such high degrees that Prophets only top them due to their being prophets (2 *ahadith*). Martyrdom qualifies for the highest level of paradise, while the martyr at sea will get the reward of two martyrs and the heavenly homes of the martyrs are the most beautiful and best homes.

3rd block

III. Extras

21. Attaining martyrdom through patience and anticipation, and what sins it removes (2)
 22. Whoever is sincere with God, God will be sincere with him
 23. The grace for every injury in the Cause of God – what about getting killed?
 24. Who did a little and was rewarded a lot
 25. The grace for speaking the truth openly and requesting martyrdom and attaining it without fighting
 26. The smiling of the Lord, glorified and exalted be He, about the killed and the killer who Paradise brought together
 27. The sincerity in requesting martyrdom will make reach its state and if not attained by getting killed
 28. The permissibility of saying so-and-so is a martyr as to exterior factors while not deciding his [eternal] abode
 29. The threat of fraud, and that it is harmful to the fraud even if he was killed in battle (2)
 30. As to an end (death), we ask God for a nice one
-

29 Al-Naysaburi, Book 20, Hadith 4651.

30 David Patterson, *A Genealogy of Evil: Anti-Semitism from Nazism to Islamic Jihad* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 50.

The third and last block consists of 10 headings and 12 *ahadith* that do not form a category of their own and do not connect to any of the given subjects in the two other blocks, either. The *ahadith* collected here have nothing to do with fighting in a narrower sense but are of more general nature. The first *hadith* is about attaining martyrdom by patience and anticipation, the second heading stresses sincerity as a heading although in the *hadith* given the Prophet says that he sees 'Amr b. al-Jamuh killed in battle walking into Paradise with a foot recovered from palsy. The following two praise martyrdom since God graces every injury, so what about getting killed, and getting rewarded a lot for having done a little. A further *hadith* stresses the attaining of martyrdom by speaking the truth openly and not by fighting, which resembles to heading number 27 about the sincerity in requesting martyrdom. The remaining three headings are about God's smiling about a killer and his victim who are together in Paradise (after the killer embraces Islam), about the labeling of someone as a martyr according to exterior factors (e. g. being killed in battle) and about asking God for a nice ending (death). The very last heading consists of a longer quotation of Ghazali's *Ihya 'ulum al-din* which ends with the explanation of the quote of Ibn al-Qayyim which Libi started with.

His well-chosen and rhyming closing words translate as: "We ask Allah for a nice ending (death), a clean, satisfying, high-level martyrdom which lets us enter the highest Paradise together with the prophets and the sincere and the martyrs and the devoted and the goodness of those as a companion and praise be to God in the ending (*intiha'*) just as I praised him in the beginning (*ibtida'*) and blessings and peace be upon the seal of the prophets, and his family and companions, stars of guidance (*anjum al-ihida'*)". The last predicate is in the style of a *hadith* ["My companions are like stars, whoever of them you follow, you will be rightly guided" (*ashabi ka-l-nujum bi-ayyihim iqtadaytum ihtadaytum*)], at least the second part of which has been claimed to be fabricated by e. g. Salafi *hadith* scholar al-Albani³¹ who is cited by Libi a total of ten times (p. 16, 17, 23, 26, 32, 38 (twice), 47, 51, and 58). Maybe Libi chose to use the plural form *anjum* instead of *nujum* for "stars" therefore.

Libi's commentary

Firstly, Libi clarifies the meaning of specific words just after giving a *hadith* (and the authors of the collections in which it is to be found) quoting the Quran or various traditional scholars at times (e. g. *al-shahid al-mumtahan* quoting the

31 Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Silsilat al-ahadith al-da'ifa wa-l-mawdu'a wa-atharuha al-sayyi' fi al-umma* (Riyad: Maktabat al-ma'arif, 1992), 1:144 f.

great scholar al-Mulla [ʿAli] al-Qari and lexicographer Ibn Manzur on p. 39). His knowledge of traditional scholars and suitable quotes for his purpose can be amazing but it is also very Jihadist in the way of dealing with information: no matter what the intention or the view of the author is or whether or not the various views comply, he quotes him. To give only some of the various scholars he quotes, we may mention Hanafi al-Tahawi, Muʿtazili al-Zamakhshari, Hanbali Abu al-Faraj b. al-Jawzi, Maliki Al-Qurtubi (a most famous Quranic exegete), Shafiʿi al-Bayhaqi, Salafi al-Albani, but also Hanbali-Athari Ibn Qudama and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. He takes all the broken threads he needs in order to weave his text.

Secondly, Libi quotes commentaries by scholars, explains and/ or adds to them, or he tells the reader to read up on a hadith if the meaning is clear (e. g. hadith #4 on p. 11). A comment can be of pragmatic nature about the benefit (*faʿida*) of a hadith like the comments to the very first hadith about the necessity of sincerity of the intention for an action in which he states that the reward for a single action is multiplied by the number of intentions. Hence, the number of good deeds done by the fighter for the cause of God is multiple for fighting for the cause of God means executing His will, fighting for the elevation of His word, helping the weakened etc.

Thirdly, Libi adds some paragraphs with the title “miscellanea” (*muta-farriqat*) in which he e. g. gives further headings for a hadith to be found in classical hadith collections and more topic-related quotes. The process of quoting the headings selected by traditional scholars (which is repeated for each hadith, i. e. a total of forty times) brings Libi in line with them since this process makes one compare Libi to them.

However, and even worse, this can also give the impression of Libi being superior to earlier scholars since he is able to look at all previous scholarship and choose the best as a basis and provide the optimal solutions or headings in this very case. Not to mention that he introduces his own opinion in a perfectly classical Arabic manner using “I said” (*qultu*) at times (p. 34 and 45). Worthy mentioning is that he quotes a letter written to him (p. 25) as if it were a traditional testimony, and the account of the prisoner tortured by Americans in Kabul who saw two *huris* descending to him in a near-death experience (p. 27) – both of which resemble classical hadith studies. It is striking that in the last account Libi uses a specifically Quranic expression to describe the Americans: “frightened asses” (*humur mustanfira* in Q 74:50).

It is notable that he gives his own opinion in an interesting context which is the hadith about Paradise being in the shades of swords (hadith #5 on p. 12) and about entering Paradise after getting killed (hadith #18 on p. 31) where Libi (p. 12) states that – God knows better – but it seems that the martyr attains Paradise just by getting killed (*bi-mujarrad maqtalih*) *expressis verbis* – a view that is

strengthened by the following quotation of Ibn al-Hajj. Further, Libi finds in hadith #7 the guarantee (*thubut*) of Paradise for someone who becomes a martyr for the cause of God.

The idea of attaining martyrdom by getting killed in battle reaches its apex in the following hadith, hadith #8, in which Libi explains that this hadith clarifies the dissension of people about the honor of getting killed for the cause of God, and that this hadith actually brings people to long for martyrdom. The taking away of the agony of death in hadith #9 is reason enough for Libi to seek martyrdom and if it were its only benefit. In fact, he summarizes his view in his commentary on hadith #18 (cf. hadith #29) in a couple of words: martyrdom is the reason for entering Paradise and jihad is its gate (*[al-shahada] sabab dukhul al-janna wa-l-jihad babuha*). He provides a rather graphic description of dying for the cause of God in his commentary on hadith #32 contrasting injury with death: the hadith grants a favor for any light or serious injury; then, Libi asks rhetorically the question (p. 47), what about someone who is torn to pieces, and whose limbs and members are flying around (*tataqatta' ashla'uh wa-tatatayar atrafuh wa-a'da'uh*)? In good manner, he adds some – unfortunately unquoted – poetry. In fact it is the second of two verses which can be found following each other online³² and are attributed to Khubayb b. 'Adi (a companion of Muhammad) who was tortured to death by pagan Meccans³³ with a typo (?): instead of “limb” (*shilw*) which obviously makes more sense in our context, Libi gives the verse with “remaining water” (*shawl*):

Since (When) I'll get killed in submission (as a Muslim), I do not care which side it comes from; my death is for God.	ولست أبا لي حين أقتل مسلماً على أي جنب كان في الله مصرعي
This is for God himself, and if he wants he will bless the limbs of a mangled corpse. (translation by author and Watt ³⁴)	وذلك في ذات الإله وإن يشأ يبارك على أوصال ثلوه ممزوع

32 In Ibn Hisham's biography of Muhammad, the verses do not follow each other and have a different wording, see 'Abd al-Malik Abu Muhammad Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-nabawiya*, ed. Mustafa al-Saqa, Ibrahim al-Abyari, and Abd al-Hafiz Shalabi (Beirut: Dar al-ma'rifa, 1989), 2:176 f.

33 David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21 f.

34 Muhammad b. al-Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 7:146. Cook's translation reads: "I do not care what part my struggle for Allah was, since I am being killed as a Muslim. Since this is part of the essence of godhood; if He wills, He can bless the severed members of [my] body!" see Cook, *Martyrdom*, 22. Cook's incorrect translation is also to be found in Paul Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 170.

Further, Libi mentions in his comments on hadith #10 that martyrdom is a Muslim's biggest win and that the sincere should strive for it. In this context he uses a direct command to the reader: be like them (*kun mithlahum*) – i. e. like the Prophet's companions who used to greet each other saying "I won – by the Lord of the Ka'ba" when taking one's leave (and preparing therefore) from this world. In hadith #11 we find that in Libi's understanding waging jihad demands patience (*sabr*) and heart's doubtlessness (*yaqin al-qalb*) and strong faith (*quwwat al-iman*), and that jihad tells the sincere (*sadiq*) from the hypocrite (*munafiq*) and the bad (*khabith*) from the good (*tayyib*).

Contrary to others but in accordance with *shaykh al-Islam* Ibn Taymiyyah, Libi sees a good remedy in jihad for those who have committed sins and lived in sin and regards people with a sinful past [but not actual hypocrites] also as qualified for waging jihad (on hadith 28, p. 40). Additionally, in his comments on hadith #13 and 28 we find that a martyr's sins are abolished (*takfir al-dhunub*) – except for debt (*dayn*; cf. heading 21: hadith #29, #30). Moreover, Libi wonders in his notes on hadith #14 about the (many) mysteries of martyrdom which will be understood only after attaining it (*kam fi al-shahada min sirr la yudrak kanhuhu illa ba'd mu'ayanatih*).

Conclusion

It is not only saddening that Libi wrote this booklet "to race people to attain the honor of martyrdom and to stimulate those willing martyrdom to fulfill their wish" but also, on the other hand, that the objective of living a religious life striving and hoping to enter Paradise after death, is – to simplify matters – being reduced to be the consequence of (mostly) getting killed in battle or its like. We may recall Libi's well exaggerated description of death which most likely describes a suicide bombing in his opposition of injure and death given above. For the sake of completeness, we may add here that Libi (p. 42) explicitly concedes women the supplication for attaining martyrdom and states that a woman can attain higher levels of martyrdom the way men can, and that Libi does mention some ways of attaining martyrdom without fighting (*muqatala*) – obviously for the sake of completeness, too. One of them is to command right and forbid wrong (*al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, hadith #34, p. 51) in the context of which he cites another hadith which defines saying the truth in front of an unjust ruler to be the best jihad (p. 52). But, as we could see, in most cases martyrdom is linked and set equal to getting killed in fight in this booklet. On the contrary, fighting does not occur in the minimal description of how to attain salvation in the Qur'an. It consists of one verse which does not give us 10 Biblical Don'ts, but 10 Quranic Do's, in which fighting does not occur:

“For men and women who are devoted to God – believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often – God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward.” (Abdel Haleem, Q 33:35)

Since Libi used “goodness” (*husna*) in his title, we may mention that there is at least one Qur’anic verse which defines “goodness” (*birr*) and “sincerity” (*sidq*) other than through engaging in some kind of battles although in Arabic the words for “goodness” are not equal:

“Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.” (Abdel Haleem, Q 2:177)

In fact, bearing in mind the very personal realm of the link between a human being and God or, in other words, the various duties a servant of God does or does not fulfill (cf. Q 33:35 above) and the social context of existence (cf. Q 2:177 above), people capable of being influenced by a booklet like Libi’s must lack religious knowledge as well as social support or a social network. This of course has been being studied by other disciplines, so we could just conclude with the words of Bonner³⁵:

“The warriors of the new jihad are often young people who, like many of their Christian fundamentalist counterparts, begin with little knowledge of their religion’s holy texts. On the level of individual psychology, some of them appear trapped, not only by their poor prospects in life, and by the enemy whom they fight, but also by existence itself.”

But, texts like Libi’s do not only form the very backbone of an ideology with a religious touch but they can pave the way for activism, i. e. militant – in fact, some historical commanders were hindered and frustrated by the presence of Paradise-longing disorganized, unreliable volunteers (*muttawwi’a*)³⁶ – or rather, terroristic activities, if the two points given above are provided.

35 Bonner, Jihad, 164.

36 Bonner, Jihad, 76.

Casting Supernatural Spells and Fostering *Communitas* Abu Yahya Al-Libi's Qasida Poetry

Al-Qaeda's chief theologian Abu Yahya al-Libi not only captures his audiences with his eloquent and sharp style of theological speech, but also with his poetry that is widely cited in jihadi online circles. He is not the most prolific jihadi poet, nevertheless an important one due to his high-ranking position in al-Qaeda central organization and his large jihadi following. In the following article we will discuss al-Libi's poems from the website www.tawhed.ws and analyze their role for jihadi community building and role identity from a socio-anthropological perspective.



Illustration 1: "al-Libi file" on www.tawhed.ws

Poetic performance in Bedouin society has been described as *poetic ritual*.¹ This ritual fulfilled central functions in pre-Islamic Arab tribes. Poetry was spoken, and not written. The correct recitation of poems among Bedouins on the Arabian Peninsula was subordinated to strict content and stylistic rules. Poetic recitation during tribal gatherings thus helped to create social cohesion and foster collective identity. It accompanied all kinds of tribal ceremonies such as rites of passage, birth, death, conciliation and allegiance; all stories and myths of

1 The "recitation of pre-Islamic poetry was strangely reminiscent of a ritual; the officiating poet, who did not create poetry for himself, but for others, encouraged active participation on the part of his public," which could so join in at any time. "The poetic ritual," in: *Shi'r*, Encyclopaedia of Islam CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999).

a tribe were told through poems. The creativity of a poet was reduced to the manner of speech, but the ritualistic character of the poem elevated his performance to a supernatural level.

The creativity of a poet was thus reduced to the manner of speech, but the ritualistic character of the poem elevated his performance to a supernatural level:

“Poetic individualism consisted not in what was said but in the manner of its saying [making it] an art of expression and not an art of creation [...] the “ritualistic aspect of poetry was consolidated by the concept of divine inspiration [...] If traditions are to be believed, the great bards of the *Jahiliya* [pre-Islamic pagan period] considered that the poem was the speech of a god or of a jinni (demon) [...] This discourse, communicated to the poets by supernatural creatures, possesses a magical force on account of its provenance and also on account of the perfect arrangement of the verbal veneer.”²

Today’s jihadi poetry deals with similar intentions. In 2009, al-Libi ‘predicted’ in one of his poems the fall of the late Libyan leader Muammar al-Ghaddafi.³ The jihadi belief in the supernatural power of poetic expression, however, goes back to early tribal culture. It plays an important role in present jihadi poetry as well, which is an expression of neo-tribal sub-culture, with extremely cultic and sectarian elements.

According to the interpretation of the 19th century Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher, also curses, wishes and eulogies in poems can have magical force and be endowed with supernatural characteristics.⁴ This idea is still present in neo-traditional poetry, however, in a mitigated form owing to the general demystification of traditional societies. The supernatural power of pagan spirits in poetic verse was first subsumed under a monotheistic doctrinal umbrella (with the advent of Islam). It became frequently strengthened when belief doctrines fostered magic, miracles and superstition in cultic and sectarian Islamic circles. Examples can be found in Shiite Islam, Sufism or in jihadi sub-culture over the last 30 years. In fact, the belief in supernatural force and miracles (*karamat*) is eminent in jihadi culture; and thus reflected in its poetry. The poet al-Libi

2 “The poetic ritual,” in: *Shi’r*, Encyclopaedia of Islam. Any poet, who wanted to gain success, had to abide by the fixed rules of the poetic-narrative discourse and its auditory aesthetics. This meant: The waiver of hermetic, ambiguous or alluding statements that might break the continuity of the known poetic style; the recourse to a specialized language with a multiplicity of synonyms and comparisons; obliging oneself to be predictable in order not to upset the audience.

3 Jarret Brachman, “Abu Yahya al-Libi’s Poem on Muammar Qaddafi from 2009,” The Jarret Brachman Blog, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=1753>.

4 Ignaz Goldziher quoted in G.E. von Grunebaum, Growth and structure of Arabic poetry A.D. 500 – 1000, in *The Arab heritage*, ed. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), 123. The argument is that if poetic language is enforced by non-earthly creatures, spirits and gods, then also its content, i. e. curse, wish, carries this characteristic.

combines his verses accordingly with religious doctrine to curse and threaten enemies, or eulogize his own group, which is similar to the function of the medieval Muslim *qass*, or story-teller.⁵ Al-Libi's poem "*Fa-la al-tahdid yathnina*" (The threat does not bend us) is but one example of his use of the quasi-prophesying curse-theme.

*The scream of faith rises in us
– we will knock away with it the thrones of the infidels*

[...]

*Using the swords, we will smite the necks of a people
– which will inflict upon them a reaping fate, may they become extinct⁶*

تعالّت صرخة الإيمان فينا ندكّ بها عروش الكافرينا

...

تصيرهم حصيدا خامدينا ونضرب بالسيوف رقاب قوم

Furthermore, the pre-Islamic curse theme became in Islamic poetry integrated into the *hija'* (satire). According to the 9th century poet Ibn al-Rumi (9th ct.), he would switch in ceremonial poetic description from praise (*madih*) to satire (*hija'*), if he had not been rewarded for recitation. The effect was as grave as a curse. It could damage a well repudiated man's standing in society.

*When I have praised a man and he did not reward me
– the due of praise being in legal determination obligatory
Then it suffices me as satire of him that I stand up declaiming
– his praise, and the people say to me, 'You are a liar!'⁷*

إذا ما مدحتُ المرءَ يوماً ولم يُثبِّب مديحي وحق الشعر في الحكم واجِبُ
كفاني هجانته قيامي بمدحه خطيبا وقول الناس لي أنتَ كاذِبُ

In the context of our discussion it should be mentioned that the poetry of war and death is not singular to extremist Muslim romanticists and jihadis. On the contrary, classical and modern Samurai death poetry cherishes the blessings of martyrdom, determinedness and the transition of fighters to after-life, as well as

5 Fundamentalists (no matter if neo-Fascists, Christian and White Supremacists, Nationalist Orthodox Jews or Jihadi Salafis) cherish essential myths of their past; hark back to the very roots of their culture and drain from its fruitful soil what is needed for present purposes of social construction and propaganda.

6 Abu Yahya al-Libi, "*Fala al-tahdid yathnina*," accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=t8v4 m2ac>.

7 Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rumi and the patron's redemption* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 47.

their re-incarnation in order to enter battles anew. For example, says a death-poem by the Japanese commander-in-chief at the battle of Iwo Jima in 1945: “*Foe unvanquished, I won’t perish in the field; I’ll be born again, to take up the halberd seven more times.*”⁸ Death and war poems also played essential community-building and identity-forging roles in 9th century Norse mythology. Several Nordic poems describe sexual fantasies connected to death and the wish of Nordic warriors to “die in battle,” portraying the deaths of heroes with erotic themes.⁹ The Cape Frontier and Zulu wars in the 18th and 19th centuries (lasting for more than a 100 Years) were portrayed in British and Dutch war-poetry as heroic and sacrificial deeds on the side of their soldiers, whereas in reality colonialist armies brutally repressed native Africans.¹⁰ Since WW I, and in the following western wars of the 20th century, uncountable poetic accounts of battle have become known as “war-poetry.” “War poets” lyrically describe their front-experiences, many of them highly critical, while others are supportive of heroism and sacrifice.¹¹ War-poetry is known to almost all societies with distinct differences in style and manner within space, culture and time.

The poems of al-Libi are based on the classical poetic form of the Arabic *qasida*. The *qasida* may be described as the crown-jewel of Arab poetry forms and meters, and it is indeed very challenging to both the poet and his readers. The name “*qasida*; pl. *qasa’id*” means “purpose,” or “intention” and is a sub-genre of Arabic poetry (*shi’r*). The *rajaz* poem with its simple and short metres, often used for toil and labor songs (the Arab “blues”) and the *qasida* with its more elaborated metre, grammar and vocabulary lie at the heart of tribal oral culture. As mentioned above, one of the central intentions of early and simple *qasa’id* poems among pre-Islamic Arab Bedouins was to praise the own tribe and denigrate opposing tribes.¹² The *qasida* genre powerfully developed from the 8th

8 Kuribayashi Tadamiichi (1945), Japanese commander-in-chief during the battle of Iwo Jima. Accessed July 11, 2012, <http://174.132.129.219/~jisei/samurai.html>.

9 The reason was to attain a place in Valhalla in the heavens. Warriors allegedly cut themselves with spears before dying a natural death to trick the Gods waiting for them in afterlife into sending them to the warriors’s realm of the dead. Gro Steinsland and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Människor och Makter i Vikingarnas Värld* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1998). Lars Lönnroth, *Dómaldr’s Death and the Myth of Sacral Kingship*, in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. J. Lindow et al. (Odense, n.p., 1986), 73–93; also Olof Sundquist, “Freyr’s offspring. Rulers and religion in ancient Svea society” (Upsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004).

10 For example, “The Fight at Rorke’s Drift (January 23, 1879),” by Emily Pfeiffer, accessed July 11, 2012, <http://www.1879zuluwar.com/t1883-poems-of-the-zulu-war>.

11 Pinaki Roy, *The Scarlet Critique: A Critical Anthology of War Poetry* (New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2010).

12 “Qasida,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999).

century in Arabic, later in Persian and in Turkish Islamic cultures, blossoming ever further stylistic themes, and in fact develops until today.

In his standard work *Kitab al-shi'r wa-al-shu'ara'* (Book of Poetry and Poets) the 9th century writer ibn Qutaybah says that the ideal *qasida* has a tripartite structure. However, like its modern variations, many classical *qasa'id* merely bear elements and/or combinations of it. "While the insights gained about this 'typical' *qasida* are inestimable, it is equally vital to realize that poets took great freedom in the thematic composition of their *qasa'id*."¹³

- The first part of the *qasida* is a nostalgic opening in the form of an amatory prologue (*nasib*) that reflects on something that has passed. A common concept is the poet's pursuit of the caravan of his love; often a woman from another tribe.¹⁴ The amatory prologue is divided into several leitmotifs. In the first section the poet sheds tears over the traces found at the camping place of his beloved (*buka' ala-l-atlal*), envisions her again at night (*khayal*), while his comrades sleep, then he poetically describes the charms of his love whom he forebears to pursue.
- The second part is a release or disengagement (*takhallus*) from sadness and beginning of optimism. For example, the poet can decide to forget his love affair and find consolation in the description of the strength of his camel. The poet now narrates his journey (*rahil*) to the person to whom the poem is addressed. He also contemplates on the harshness of nature and life far away from the tribe. The *rahil* generally leads without transition to the main theme.
- The third part constitutes the central theme. The central message can take several stylistic forms, such as the panegyric praise of a tribe, a protector or a patron as well as self-praise (*fakhr/mufakhara*); satire, including curse, of enemies and other tribes (*hija'*); moral maxims (*hikam*), the eulogy of a person or family (*madih*); funerary elegy (*marthiya' ritha'*).¹⁵

13 Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rumi and the patron's redemption*, 13.

14 However, this affair is fruitless, and the voice of reason says that he has to let her leave with her own tribe (since for both parties individual interest stands behind that of the group, which is the *raison d'être* of tribal culture). By the time he reaches the campsite her caravan has already moved on.

15 Under the Abbasid Caliphate, the recitation of poetry was divided into ceremonial genres of *madih* (panegyric) and *ritha'* (lament), and informal genres such as *ghazal* (love poetry), *khamriyya* (wine poetry) and *wasf* (descriptive poetry). The ceremonial poem could be recited at official and private audiences, the informal only at private audiences. Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rumi and the patron's redemption*, 13. There is no division between private and official audiences on the Internet. The informal genre is not used by al-Libi, who as a puritan sectarian objects wine, descriptive or erotic love poetry. Eros is almost entirely restricted to the homo-erotic love of the mythic hero, or comrade-love in al-Libi's poems.

In addition, each element of the poem from section 1 to 3 has the potential to develop into an autonomous genre, and in fact did so over the course of history.¹⁶

Al-Libi uses some of these principal poetic and stylistic themes to anchor jihadi doctrine in traditional frames of expressions and highly respected auditory aesthetics.¹⁷ He vaguely orientates himself at the classical structure, and integrates motifs of lament, release and different main foci such as praise, elegy, eulogy and curse into his poems. The content deals with issues of contemporary jihad, however, and the reader can roughly identify these topics with the longing, disengagement and panegyric sections of classical poetry.

One such example is the *nasib* in al-Libi's "The knight passed by silently" (*Wa mada al-faris fi sukun*),¹⁸ where a motif of absence (*buka' 'ala al-atlal*) dominates the prologue. In al-Libi's poems the prologue comes often as an introductory explanation written in prose that features poetic themes such as longing, praise, or satire, and then continues into the poem. Let us begin with the prose part, and then turn to the poem itself, which is the eulogy of a prisoner, partly written out of a woman's perspective:

"Don't you see that the poem expresses what I want?

Or that the words describe that what excitedly moves between my lips?

So where are the poems that express the excitement of senses...or where are the well-arranged flowing expressions?

I do not do think that any of this suffices or fulfills ... but what else can we do other than struggle to fulfill only a bit of what we owe you, even if we cannot fulfill it all. Your company on the way incites us... your escort on the path encourages us...your subscription by blood on the pages of sacrifices inspire us...and from that all resulted this scar which is weakened by a scar."

"If my poetry is absent, so the senses will speak
-¹⁹ or if my ink dries out, then my tears will write."

16 The above description of the tripartite structure is based on Abdallah bin Muslim ibn Qutaybah, *Kitab al-shi'r wa-l-shu'ara'* (Amman: *Dar al-thaqafa wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzi'*, 1969); the Encyclopedia of Islam, "Kasida," Encyclopaedia of Islam CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999), and the Webster's Dictionary, "Qasida," accessed July 10, 2012. <http://www.websters-dictionary-online.org/definitions/Qasida>.

17 According to the 9th century writer Ibn Sallam al-Jumahi (d. 231/845), ghazal (autonomous love poem), *nasib* (amatory prologue), *fakhr* (praise) and *hija'* (satire) constitute the houses of poetry (*buyut al-shi'r*), i. e. the four classical principal poetic themes. Al-Jumahi is an often cited, yet by far not the only classical opinion. Moreover, different styles often appear in one poem as a main theme with sub-themes. See Muhammad ibn Sallam Jumahi, *Tabaqat al-shu'ara'* (Beirut: *Dar al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya*, 1969)..

18 Abu Yahya al-Libi. "Wa mada al-Faris fi sukun," accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=5tu37vug>.

19 "in the transliteration stands for the division of the verse in two symmetrical half lines; the *qasida*-metre.

The prologue is directly followed by a theme of disengagement (*takhallus*):²⁰

*“Let the reins of the memories go
– they will not be accompanying a Bedouin this time”
“Tell us something delightful, perhaps the
– glowing separation in the heart will disappear.”*

The next few lines introduce an element of *khayal* (envisioning), namely the description of the beloved comrades, and blend in with the *takhallus* theme. The imprisoned comrades were like shelter against roaring storms. Now the waiting companion must be patient (*sabr*), not to lose belief and to remain unswerving. Sometimes it is better to stop thinking and digging in the heart and to counter the heart's deception by emotional storms with a steadfast mind (*jaldan qaw-wiyy al-ja'sh*).²¹

Then the poem turns toward the central theme: It addresses the praise of an incarcerated jihadi, named Mus'ab and 'Abd al-Hakim (mentioned two times). It might be about the famous jihadi strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, aka 'Umar 'Abd al-Hakim, who reportedly was released from a Syrian jail in early 2012.²²

*Until when will your partner stay orphaned?
– when sadness is overwhelming, answer and say, oh Mus'ab
(‘Abd al-Hakim) peace greetings from a weakened heart
– shall be led to you when the air becomes rich*

[...]

*You did not cave in to someone who acted tyrannically and acted tough
– who entertains himself with straying thoughts (afkar al-dalal) and plays
And thinks that the prison breaks the conviction of someone
– whose conviction hardens with every day
Isn't it known that men with conviction
– shatter big armies and desire and become more
(‘Abd al-Hakim) I see that the qasai'd are shallow
– do not comply with my demands*

20 From the moody contemplation

21 *They used to be familiar and warm when storms (of war) roared around us
– even worse, how comes that storms bring
and reveal things and grow
– They surprised my heart, but where, where is the escape?
She said, ‘do you demand to release from what has happened’
– you better forget this yourself, and when you are smart, beware!
Or did I not pledge you gloriously, in times of misfortune
– to remain unswerving; do not lose respect*

22 Syria releases the 7/7 'mastermind', The Telegraph, February 4, 2012, accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/9061400/Syria-releases-the-77-mastermind.html#>.

*I see the meanings lofty high in the summits
– from time to time it seems to us to as if they disappear [behind clouds]*

It is easier to understand al-Libi's paradoxically utterly modern, yet traditionally styled poetry keeping in mind the development of classical Arabic poetry; and if one does not try to frame jihadi poetry into a sclerotic and opinionated framework (such as the general "backwardness" of traditionalism). This paradox dissolves itself if we – in the sense of Habermas' and Geertz' perceptions of culture²³ – accept poetic tradition also as utterly flexible cultural phenomenon, being like an ever evolving and never static "web of signification spun by meaningful actions, objects and expressions." The rationality or irrationality of traditional culture, accordingly, are both so intricately intertwined that a solution can only take place by putting it into social context.²⁴ The creative struggle between conservative and progressive 8th and 9th century Arab poets, which led to the emergence of a whole range of new principal poetic themes, may illustrate this point.

"At the end of the 2nd/8th century, the classical *qasida*, while it continued its triumphant reign among poets with a classical tendency, on the other hand bursts forth among the 'modern' poets and gives birth to a whole series of autonomous poetic genres, which are however already present in embryo form in the themes employed by the classical *qasida*; thus the *nasib* gives birth to the erotico-elegiac genre, directly associated with the Bacchic genre; the description of the desert becomes description of nature and gardens; the description of the mount and the ride results in the poetry of war or hunting; etc."²⁵

By the same token, romantic descriptions of training camps, community, nature, and war that appear in jihadi poetry are the continuations of the adventure, nature and hunting genres within a specific frame of jihadi subculture. The same goes for lyrical descriptions of attacks, praise of jihad and "legitimate" terrorism. Myths of community, conspiracy and salvation – essential pillars of fundamentalist mindsets – are treated extensively in jihadi poetry, clad in traditional motives and themes, which may appeal also to non-extremist readers.²⁶ Al-Libi picks up the poetry of war, for example, in his elegy of the jihadi warrior

23 See Jürgen Habermas on the solution of the paradox between intuitional communicative and strategic rationality. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Band 1, *Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981), 260–261.

24 Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures. Social Theory and Mass Communication* (London: Sage, 1995), 77.

25 Extract from the Encyclopaedia of Islam CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0 © 1999 Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands. Entry "Qasida."

26 For the role of these three myths in fundamentalist aesthetics see Monika Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2003).

Abu 'Umar al-Saif, a Saudi citizen, who was known as “the mufti of Arab fighters in Chechnya.”²⁷ The elegy carries the title “The lofty mountain left as a stranger” and must have been written at the time of al-Saif’s death in 2006. Allegoric themes of nature and man in struggle dominate this elegy (*ritha*), that starts again with an introductory explanation that mixes prose with poetry, which is typical for al-Libi’s poems:

“Abu 'Umar al-Saif, the two names contain a destiny and a fortune, for he was a lifetime (*'umr*) in his justness, piety and knowledge, and he was a sword (*saif*) in his strength and braveness and hardness.²⁸ He connected between the light of knowledge, practical life and performance of jihad, and tell me who else gained this honor, was patient in the midst of uproar and battles until his temples turned grey, and he pushed the terrors (*al-ahwal*) until they complained about the excess of his bravery, while he had a calm expression on his face, as if he was about to say:

*'I dealt with all things until I was finished
– they said 'he killed death and horrified horror'*

[...]

“He lived and passed as a stranger (gharib, i.e. like one of the first companions of Muhammad), he lived and passed as a mountain [...] The Islamic Umma owes him maximal respect!”²⁹

Jihadi poetry notwithstanding, modern Arabic *qasa'id* are powerful expressions of Muslim Zeitgeist, and there is a linguistic lyric link between sub- and main culture through poetry. The interested reader can find magnificent examples of modern *qasa'id* by Arab writers, such as Khalil Jibran, characterized by an exuberant vocabulary and lavish expression of emotions.³⁰ Also popular Arabic proverbs can bear the typical *qasida*-metre, in which a verse has two symmetrical half lines. The following Tunisian proverb is an example of this. It combines traditional wisdom (*hikma*) with an amatory theme (*nasib*):

*“Do not be spellbound by the Oleander [a poisonous plant with beautiful flowers] that casts shades in the dry riverbed
– And do not be blinded by the beauty of a girl, before you haven't seen her deeds.”³¹*

27 Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Abu Omar Al-Saif: His Life and After His Death,” accessed July 15, 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=31305](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=31305).

28 “Piety” is here termed *wara'*, signifying the same as *ittiqa'*.

29 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Abu Umar al-Saif; wa rahala al-tawad al-shamikh ghariban*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=hvayrgdw>.

30 Khalil Jibran, “*A'tini al-nay wa ghanni*,” accessed July 14, 2012, http://www.poetsgate.com/poem_5521.html, see also the mainpage <http://www.poetsgate.com/>; also the forum *Muntada al-mushaghibin*, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.bdr130.net/vb/f5.html>.

31 Field research by the author on popular Tunisian expressions among Tunisian exile com-

ولا يعجبك زين طفلة حتى تشوف الفعائل

لا يعجبك نُدُور دَفلة في الواد عامل ظلال

Yet, jihadi poetry such as that of al-Libi focuses on other aspects of poetic expression, namely the justification, call for, and admiration of militant struggle and jihadi culture, using similar popular stylistic means.

'Abd al-Muhayman, oh you valiant youth

– glad tidings to you, my dwelling place is near the Most Gracious

We sincerely hope that your homes will be

– the Gardens of Eden, home of kindness³²

بشرى لكم سكنى لدى الرحمن

عبد المهيمن يا فتى الشجعان

جنات عدن منزل الإحسان

إننا لنرجو أن تكون دياركم

Al-Libi strongly concentrates on conservative and restoration aspects in his poetry to vivify a mythological past with imaginations of spiritual grandeur (*fakhr*) within a brutal reality, which is characterized by conflict and lack of “true” spirituality (a modernized and adapted form of *buka'ala 'l-atlal*): “They said: What is the value of life in the shade of a government

– with which scattering evil prevailed.”³³ Another point in case is the poetic recreation of the myth of the “single attacker” (*munghamis*). A single attacker was a Muslim warrior who plunged himself alone (*inghimasa li wahdihi*) into the rows of the enemy, for example, at the Muslim siege of Constantinople in 674. This case is often quoted in Islamic military jurisprudence. The single attack is a fundamental myth of jihadi community within the semantic field of fighting and martyrdom-seeking (*istishhadiya*).³⁴ Such daring attacks are theologically justified on the basis of critical claim and counter-argument.³⁵ Al-Libi treats the

munities in Berlin. The poem is until today very popular, and it uses a specific vernacular that varies from classical Arabic (*fusha*).

32 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Ya fata al-shaj'an*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=56jzvvyq>.

33 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Sunnat al-haya..wa butulat al-rijal*,” accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=uy4xcdsp>.

34 *istishhadiya* = active martyrdom seeking, in contrast to *shahada* (passive martyrdom, death).

35 In analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), claim and counter-argument can be used supportively, such as “the people said that this was a mistake,” being answered by “No, this is righteous.” One can compare this to the discussions around single attacks, martyrdom operations and the meaning of the term “*tahluka*” (self destruction) in Quran Surat al-Baqara 2:195. There are different versions of the hadith of the single attacker at Constantinople with reference numbers to their transmitters, among them: Abu Daw'd (1512), Abu 'Umran with a supposedly sound hadith by the fourth century a.H. Hanafi scholar al-Jasas, al-Tirmidhi (2972), al-Nis'i's interpretation (48), and Ibn 'Atiya in “Al-Muharrir al-wajiz,” “interpretation of the

theme similarly in his poetry. He writes a eulogy on Muhammad al-Qariu and another member from the Libyan group *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya al-Muqatila*, who attacked the late Libyan leader Muammar al-Qadhafi in November 1996 with hand-grenades.³⁶ The martyrdom story of al-Qariu is very popular in Libya until today.³⁷ Al-Libi first quotes critical voices against al-Qariu, but only in order to refute them and then declares al-Qariu and his partner as role-models, who wear the “crown of glory” (*taj al-'izz*):³⁸

*Confirm your pride in them and thereof,
– I mean the example of those who decline boasting about themselves*³⁹

بمثل أولئكم يأبى افتخارا ففُحُّ لك الفخار بهم ومن ذا

Furthermore, al-Libi's poetry contrasts the wickedness of the enemy (a form of malevolent *hija'*) with the benevolence of slain fighters (*ritha'*). Other topics found in al-Libi's poems thus move in the larger semantic fields of the present geo-political conflict between Western and Muslim state and jihadi sub-state actors; including the poetic integration of central jihadi doctrines (martyrdom and self-sacrifice); myths of struggle, victimization, and suffering that strengthen the jihadi community. As a typical example may serve al-Libi's eulogy of Umar Abd al-Rahman, who is imprisoned in the U.S. for his involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing,⁴⁰ or al-Libi's elegy of Abu 'Abd al-Hafiz, who died in a jihadi camp after he had been suffering for two years from an illness. The death of the latter moved al-Libi deeply and almost rendered him speechless, which indicates a strong friendship with al-Hafiz. Al-Libi named this elegy “The *qasai'd* proudly turned away” (*Abat al-qasa'id*): “*He cries for you, heartthrobs, from afar – surely a lofty erected corner was broken; brothers, whose companion you remained for an age, cry for you – and they shed tears which don't dry out.*” The poem reassures the deceased not to worry about his “un-heroic” death from illness. “*He answered me: I did not infringe the pact [with God], no! – but I worry that [I died] not praised; leave your poetic sayings – the patience has a*

Koran 2/146.” See also Philipp Holtmann, Martyrdom, not Suicide: The Legality of Hamas' Bombings in the mid-1990s in Modern Islamic Jurisprudence (München: Grin, 2009).

36 See for details on the attack Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq, “Al-Qadhafi yafurr; wa al-Mujahidun lahu bi-l-mursad,” *Bayan raqm 8 min al-Jama'a al-Muqatila al-Libiyya*, accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=f3r722sv>.

37 “*Shuhada' Libya: damm al-shuhada' ma yimshish hiba'*,” “Muhammad Abdullah Qariu,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.shuhada.ly/html/redwan.htm>.

38 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Sina'at al-majd*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=d-cacx2um>.

39 Ibid.

40 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Ila al-shaykh al-sabir Umar abd al-Rahman*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=fx3pjix>.

border after which is disperses [...] I answered with tears, they tell from unrecanted heartbreaks.”⁴¹ In stark contrast stands al-Libi’s cynical satire (*hija’*) on the occasion of the death of Moroccan king Hassan II. in 1999. Hassan II. was one of the most Western-leaning Arab leaders and a staunch ally to the U.S. and its partners:⁴² “You could not anticipate that death came – Nay, and not that there are bursts of fire behind the palace [an allusion to the July 10, 1971 attack of mutinous troops against the king’s Palace]; How much you lived, attempting to gather money by wickedness – and today you lost everything that you collected [...] Oh villain, taste!, hell-fire is the dwelling place for those who refuse surrendering to piousness and obedience.”⁴³ This verse can be understood as a curse to put a bad spell on the dead enemy in the hereafter.

Al-Libi’s poetry also favors a picture of the past that is dominated by simple good-bad dichotomies. Consequently, he avoids the discussion of alternative life designs, yet features complicated epic questions of life, destiny and death, which are clad into emotional allegories and themes, and uses an elaborated discourse and vocabulary. In a sense al-Libi’s *qasa’id* follow early rules of tribal poetry on content conformity (this time, however, within a 21st century neo-tribal jihadi framework), feature an elaborated poetic lexicon and style, yet lack stimuli for independent thinking. This evident neo-tribal outlook also helps to reduce the identity conflict, which al-Libi, like other fundamentalists, experiences when being confronted with the incalculability of globalized culture and the alleged “mangling” of social structures and traditions. Another reason for his use of classical poetry might be the countering of unstructured diglossia and dialect groups in the Arab world.⁴⁴ This way, the classical style is supposed to unify jihadi language under a common intellectual and ideological horizon.

Usama bin Laden was a prolific writer of jihadi poetry as well. Bin Laden was a successful poet inasmuch as fans and followers the world over are still copying quotes and pieces from his work into their own propagandistic output.⁴⁵ There are several reasons why poetry was such an important vehicle of communication for bin Laden. Flagg Miller has pointed them out. Firstly, the late al-Qaeda leader used classical Arabic poetry style, because it is central to the oral traditions of Arab tribal culture. “Poetry is part of the oral tradition in the Arab world, which

41 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Abat al-qasa’id*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=vz4mj7r3>.

42 Hassan II. died in 1999 of a heart attack. Joseph R. Gregory, “Hassan II of Morocco Dies at 70; A Monarch Oriented to the West,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0709.html>.

43 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Mahlak taghiya*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=xekjiwxh>.

44 For this phenomenon see Reem Bassiouney, *Arabic Sociolinguistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

45 Michael Hirst, “Analysing Bin Laden’s jihadi poetry,” BBC News, accessed July 10, 2012. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7630934.stm.

Bin Laden uses to tap into the cultural orientation, the history and the ethics of Islam.” Secondly, poetry was an apt tool for Bin Laden to formulate extremist messages seemingly within a legitimate and authoritative Islamic main frame. ”The violence and barbarism of war can sicken anybody and poetry is a way to frame that violence in higher ethics.” Thirdly, the success of Bin Laden as an orator with a high appeal to Arabic speaking audiences greatly owes to his use of poetry. Bin Laden’s poetry shows the “evolution from a relatively unpolished Muslim reformer, orator and jihad recruiter to his current persona, in which he attempts to position himself as an important intellectual and political voice on international affairs.”⁴⁶

Al-Libi’s use of poems follows similar rules. He is eager to address neo-tribal sentiments of his audiences, which possibly appeal to broader audiences, not extremists only. Furthermore, al-Libi wants to present himself as an authoritative figure and embed jihadism into a traditional Arabic framework. The sub-culture of jihad, with its corresponding sub-frame of radical doctrines, is integrated by way of poetry into the overarching frame of Islamic meta-culture and its co-frame of Arabic desert culture (for the concept of “framing” see the article by Rüdiger Lohlker in this volume).

Within the jihadi sub-frame, for example, the myth of jihadi community and hostile conspiracy is strengthened frequently by the prisoner theme. The prisoner theme can be traced back to anarchist and social-revolutionary literature and poetry, for example the *Narodnaya Wolya* (People’s Will) in late 19th century Russia or the *Bewegung 2. Juni* (Movement 2nd June) in 1970s Germany, but also Palestinian liberation literature of the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁷ Jihadi groups are not different in that they make the stories and plight of their prisoners a focal theme. Al-Libi addresses this theme exemplary in his poem “Outcry from the son of a prisoner” (*Sarkha min ibn asir*). The extreme suffering of the anonymous son stretches throughout the *qasida*; the dramatic, sad poetic description also strengthens jihadi role identity, which is defined by sacrifice. “My father, my wounded heart is torn apart – and in my breast live only sorrows; You see my gloomily walking among the mortals – as if their costume and alienation enslave me.”⁴⁸

In al-Libi’s poetry, eulogy (*madih*) and praise (*fakhr*) are also frequently combined with “greetings” (*tahiya*; pl. *tahiyat*). These poetic greetings to other groups play an important role for collective jihadi identity, because they foster a sense of international jihadi solidarity and shared cause. One such example is al-

46 Michael Hirst, “Analysing Bin Laden’s jihadi poetry.”

47 See Vera Figner, *Nacht über Russland* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988); Till Meyer, *Staatsfeind: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2008)

48 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Sarkha min ibn asir*,” accessed July 14, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=s-keuzy0 m>.

Libi's poem "Greetings to the Chechen Mujahidin" (*Tahiya ila mujahidin al-shishan*). The poem overflows with Paradise imaginations. These imaginations belong to the semiotic and mythological field of "salvation,"⁴⁹ which plays an important and mobilizing role for jihadi communities [and fundamentalists in general]. The poem starts again out with an explanatory introduction, a mix of prose and poetry, which is typical for al-Libi's prologues. He praises the Chechen fighters and their former leader Shamil Besayev, who was killed in 2006, to the skies.

"To the poisonous lions and the knights of war, who cracked the structures of secularism [...] to those who patiently faced the party of Satan and revealed its faults [...] to those who raised the banners of Islam in countries that almost excused themselves for their depictions [of Islamic flags and symbols] ... to those who were not repelled by heavy losses and not terrorized by visitations; and not by death, but met all of them with cheerful hearts [...]"

Salam to those who built with the help of thunderclouds
– A rocket that disturbed every fledging hypocrite

...

Oh Shamil, you symbol of bravery and pride,
– you have risen lofty high to the throne of praise

...

You have closed a gainful deal with the Most Merciful⁵⁰
– you agitated with overflowing action in the trenches

...

You watered soils with blood and they blossomed
– and became a garden above the lawns of the gardens⁵¹

In another poem, called "love-greeting" (*Tahiyat hubb*), al-Libi praises media activists of a well-established online jihadi distribution and production company. "The Islamic Media Center is their center, and this center has a toughness – that cannot be bent away from the righteous way, or thrown off; it is indestructible."⁵²

As we have already mentioned above, paradise imaginations are an independent theme of al-Libi's poetry. These imaginations are firmly embedded in the semiotic-mythological field of "salvation." Strong examples thereof are al-

49 Compare to Monika Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet.

50 This "deal" refers to Surat al-Tauba 9:111.

51 Al-Libi means the highest level of Paradise. See Abu Yahya al-Libi, "Tahiya ila mujahidi shishan," accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=2sbg8vp6>.

52 Abu Yahya al-Libi, "Tahiyat hubb," accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=vjtyr80z>.

Libi's poems "The thirsty longing" (*Al-Hanin al-zami*),⁵³ "The garden of the righteous" (*Riyad al-salihin*), "Rise for jihad" (*Qum li-l-jihad*),⁵⁴ "They are the men" (*Hum al-rijal*),⁵⁵ and "The time to choose is passing by" (*Yamdi al-khiyar*).⁵⁶ In the latter poem al-Libi expresses grievous pain, sorrow and mourning about the death of a comrade. There is no sign of a general contempt of life, often mistakenly attributed to jihadi sub-culture in general. Instead, these lines show that death and salvation among jihadis are more complicated themes than the over-simplification with which they are often portrayed. Furthermore, comrades who die are seriously mourned. "A wound plagues the heart after his departure – and the soul burns in a heartbreaking fire; the plague from his loss and parting is mighty – allow the eyes to weep bitterly!" However, the introductory motif of the poem, which sheds tears over the traces of the companion (a form of *buka' 'ala-l-atlal*), is followed by a classical motif of disengagement (*takhallus*). This motif switches between slain fighters in general and a single fighter, who is addressed in particular. "The decision is taken and the moments of their death have gone by – but the sun of their deeds will not set! He preparedly strived for the gardens of happiness – surely, for what a wonderful happiness has he prepared himself!"

Conclusion

A good strategy and analysis of an actor's behavior, according to Bernard Brody, are always based on good anthropological and sociological analysis.⁵⁷ We might also orientate ourselves at Amir Lupovici's exploration of the interpretative version of the concept of strategic culture.⁵⁸ Knowing the role of jihadi poetry for self-identification, mobilization of central myths, spell-casting, *communitas*, and cultural framing, we could ask ourselves: What is the role of the poem among jihadis, and in larger circles of Islamic culture? Not only creates the poem a social context through which jihadi ideas are better adopted, but the social context that is created following the internalization of ideas seems to further shape actors' behavior.

53 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Al-Hanin al-zami*, accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=fe8zosai>.

54 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Qum li-l-jihad*, accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=gch5sfwb>.

55 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Hum al-rijal*, accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=3p4jn6mm>.

56 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Yamdi al-khiyar*, accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=dvc7b5e8>.

57 Bernard Brodie quoted in Colin Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham: Hamilton Press, 1986), 40.

58 See Lupovici, in this context on deterrence, Amir Lupovici, "The Emerging Fourth Wave of Deterrence Theory—Toward a New Research Agenda," *International Studies Quarterly* 54 (2010): 706.

The culture in which al-Libi's poetry emerges and fosters is essentially a neo-tribal one. Therefore, we have put some focus in the beginning of this article on the use of poems as oral *poetic rituals* among ancient tribes. The performance of poems was tightly connected to superstitions and spells, as well as to social processes in and between tribal communities. In regards to their culture, jihadis are highly modern fundamentalists of the 21st century information age. They are thus neo-tribal warriors. As such they are also adherents of neo-tribal warfare concepts within a religious framework, which mixes political ideology, virtual communications warfare and the use of terrorist doctrines.⁵⁹ All of these characteristics come clearly to the fore in al-Libi's poetry. This estimation is not a normative one, but orientated at an interpretative and contextual analysis of culture. Neo-tribalism also exists in Mexican gang culture, with ritualistic murders, initiation rites, and tattoos leaning on Aztek emblems.⁶⁰ Also the cultic admiration of the "self" through pictures and discourses in social networking culture bears traces of neo-tribal ritualism. However, as of yet this phenomenon lacks and requires an orderly categorization (in the sense of continuing the spadework of van Gennep, Turner and Goffman in virtual space).⁶¹

Based on our analysis, we can categorize the 17 poems of al-Libi on the www.tawhed.ws website⁶² into several main themes. Al-Libi makes a strong, but also strongly modified use of some of the classical poetic motifs and forms of the *qasida* described above, especially the main themes with according ceremonial functions (*madih, ritha', nasib and hija'*). At the same time, it is clearly visible, that al-Libi's poetry fits into a fundamentalist framework inasmuch as it represent myths of community, conspiracy and salvation to varying degrees. The activation of these three interrelated myths is the key for successful fundamentalist agitation.⁶³ Al-Libi addresses these myths to foster the ideological, cultic and sectarian in-group cohesion of wide-spread and physically disconnected jihadi audiences. We have pointed at his use of these myths in particular above.

59 Tribal warfare includes ritualistic show of force such as hostage taking, duels, and tackles. In a distorted way, similar elements can be found in jihadi culture, for example, deterrence by punishment through beheading of hostages, ritualistic killings of prisoners, show of force and determination through suicide attacks and engagement in guerilla warfare against state-actors.

60 See for an interesting anthropological (not always realistic) insight into Mexican gang culture the movie *Sin nombre*, Scion Films, 2006.

61 See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1967); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

62 The poems can be accessed on his personal profile page under the rubric "*qasa'id wa ash'ar*" (qasida-poems and (general) poems). Accessed July 14, 2012. <http://tawhed.ws/a?a=hv5zrv47>.

63 See Monika Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*.

Thus, al-Libi's neo-tribal spell-casting and the steady availability of his work on the Internet further virtual *communitas* (the feeling of brotherly/sisterly love between in-group members). This also thrusts into a new research direction and opens up interesting further thought-venues, namely the link between guidance, narratives and emotions on the Internet, but also the question of the sustainability of *communitas* in virtual space as compared to physical environments.

Furthermore, al-Libi focuses in his poetry stronger on traditional style and message than on religious doctrine. This way, al-Libi substitutes his jihadi theological framework, discussed at the example of "Abu Yahya al-Libi's collection of 40 *ahadith*" (see the article by Orhan Elmaz in this volume), with a poetic one.

The main categories and themes of al-Libi's poems are:

1. Praise (*fakhr*) and eulogy (*madih*), community myth, semantic fields of sacrifice and martyrdom with a specific jihadi framing of Islamic culture⁶⁴
2. Satire (*hija'*) and curse (*la'n*), conspiracy myth, semantic fields of enmity, infidelity and wickedness⁶⁵
3. Elegy and lament (*ritha'*), salvation myth, semantic fields of divine reward and paradise⁶⁶

The statistics and numbers given on the tawhed-website on views and downloads of al-Libi's poems are not reliable. The website counts every access anew, regardless of IP-address. If people click three times on the same link, it will show three more views. Also the download number of al-Libi's poems cannot be a reliable indicator. However, numerous people – regardless how repeatedly and how frequently – view or download his poems. The maximum number of views is 18797 (*Qum li-l-jihad*) and 1691 downloads (*Qum li-l-jihad; Riyad al-salihin; yamdi al-khayar; fala al-tahdid yathnina*).⁶⁷

64 Namely, *Al-Hanin al-zami'*, *Riyad al-salihin*, *Qum li-l-jihad*, *Hum al-rijal*, *Yamdi al-khiyar*; *Tahiya ila mujahidin al-shishan*; *Tahiyat hub*; *Abat al-qasa'id*; *Ila al-shaykh al-sabir Umar abd al-Rahman*; *Sina'at al-majd*; *Sunnat al-haya..wa butulat al-rijal*.

65 Namely, *Sarkha min ibn asir*; *Mahlak taghiya*; *Fala al-tahdid yathnina*.

66 Namely, *Al-Hanin al-zami'*, *Riyad al-salihin*, *Qum li-l-jihad*, *Hum al-rijal*, *Yamdi al-khiyar*. *Sunnat al-haya..wa butulat al-rijal*.

67 "Malaff Abi Yahya al-Libi," accessed July 15, 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/a?a=hv5zrv47>.

رقم	العنوان	الصفحة و تاريخ
8052	1166	٢٠ صفاة المجد
10769	1207	٢٠ ابن الشيخ البار عمر عبد الرحمن
14703	1691	٢٠ فلا اليهود نبيا
8645	1166	٢٠ سمة الحناء . وطفولة الرجال
8826	1166	٢٠ ابن الفصاح
9520	1240	٢٠ مولد لثانية
14354	1611	٢٠ مرحة من ابن أسير
9390	1166	٢٠ تحية ابن جاهد في السنين
14092	1691	٢٠ رياض المالحي
7914	1166	٢٠ حمة حب
7913	1166	٢٠ الحسب الطامح
18767	1691	٢٠ فم للجهاد
13545	1691	٢٠ بعض النبار
8975	1166	٢٠ فخر الرجال
1405	1166	٢٠ بعض الفارس في سكوت
8947	1166	٢٠ يا فني السنين
6047	1207	٢٠ أبو عمر السيف . ورجل الطود السامح غرباً

Illustration 2: Download links and statistics of al-Libi's poems on www.tawhed.ws

Strategies of Argumentation in the Propaganda of Jihad. The Analysis of a Jihadi YouTube Video

In this chapter we will analyze the strategies of persuasion used in a Jihad propaganda video that was uploaded on YouTube in July 2011. This video, “*Yawmiyat al-Mujahid (1)*” (Daily life of a *Mujahid*) has been produced by *al-Sahab Media*¹ as one of at least 7 parts. The analysis will take three steps: In the first chapter, we will describe the video and its structure; in the second, we will extrapolate the strategies used to persuade and classify them following the rhetoric classes as defined by Aristotle²; finally, we will describe in detail the “Arab-Muslim” key-elements of these strategies. Throughout the article, two main questions shall be kept in mind, one practical and one theoretical:

How does this video succeed (or fail) to persuade/convince viewers of the message that the authors (rhetors in the jargon of rhetoric) intend to propagate?

What are the characteristics of the sub-elements within these strategies that belong to the Arab-Muslim tradition and why are they successful?

1 Al-Sahab Media is commonly seen as the media front of al-Qaida. They produce films, iPod files, etc.

2 Ethos, Pathos and Logos are the three ways to persuade as defined by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*: “Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. [...] Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. [...] Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. [...] Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question.” As introduction to the rhetoric see also: Joachim Knape, *Was ist Rhetorik?* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000).

The video

The video was placed on YouTube³ in July 2011. It was removed after only a few weeks by the management of the platform⁴. During this brief period, it had approximately 50,000 views. Some viewers left comments; most of these comments were felicitations and thanks. The video, however, remains on YouTube with significant lesser views due to sympathizers who uploaded the film. Also, the first installment of the “*Yawmiyat al-Mujahid*” series with English subtitles provided by the multi-lingual Jihad forum “*Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahideen*” that is analyzed in this article remains active on YouTube as of writing.⁵

Author and message

The video is a production of “*al-Sahab Media*”. At the beginning of the video, the logo of “*Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahideen*”⁶ is also shown as we are describing the version with the English subtitles. Throughout the duration of the video both logos are present in the upper-right and -left of the screen respectively.

The commentator’s first words announce the primary message of the video; its goal is to demonstrate “that contrary to popular thought, the mujahedin live a good life” and don’t lack anything while going on the path of the Jihad; accordingly, the video shows images of young men engaged in different activities: reading, walking, swimming, etc. The producers show only blood-free battles.

3 *Yawmiyat al-Mujahid* 1. Accessed October 10, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_yDSa_Ae3I.

4 Erasure (or removal) is a common “anti-terrorist” strategy. In an article in the Washington Post (June 24, 2008) Craig Whitlock addresses these efforts but underlines their inefficacy because videos of this kind and propagandist material “are so widespread and can resurface almost immediately on other sites”.

5 Daily Life of a *Mujahid*. Accessed July 13, 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho_j-tAEnaes. It has approximately 4,000 views.

6 The *Ansar al-Mujahideen* forum is online at <http://www.ansar1.info>. They welcome visitors to their site with the following words: “As-Salaamu ’alaykum wa Rahmatullaahi wa Barakaatuh, Welcome to the *Ansar Al-Mujahideen* Network. This is a virtual platform for the active sharing of Islamic knowledge and information among Muslims. Our members post and respond to a range of subjects and contributions regarding Islam, Muslims, Jihad and the *Mujahideen*.”

Audience

Most likely, the video was intended for Jihadist websites. YouTube has then been used as a secondary “agora”. The analysis of the communicative strategies will show that the video was intended for a “sympathizing” public that is already acquainted with the subject. However, its placement on YouTube, which is a “neutral” platform, allows us to infer that the targeted audience is even bigger; anyone interested on the topic and with basic knowledge of Internet functions could access this video. The English subtitles presumably allow even non-Arabic speakers to view the video and understand its message⁷.

Detailed description of the structure of video underlining the strategies

The video has four sections, an introduction, which is divided into two parts, and a conclusion.

The introduction begins with a 48-second graphic simulation and then one and a half minutes of “funny” video sequences. The end of the introduction is marked by the appearance of the “*al-Sahab* Media” logo. The first section after the introduction lasts one minute and announces the message of the video. The voiceover invites viewers to follow the *Mujahidin* for one day to gain insight into the “Daily Life of a *Mujahid*”. The second section (one minute and 20 seconds) narrates moments of that specific life. The third section is the longest. It accompanies the *Mujahidin* while preparing an attack that ultimately could not be realized. This part contains the two main testimonies of the video. The last section lasts one minute and 40 seconds and shows a rocket attack. The 40-second conclusion is a summary of the main ideas of the video⁸.

Strategies

We will now identify the persuasion strategies and classify them following the categories of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. Because the three genres can be (and often are) intertwined, it will require particular care to differentiate the levels; the goal

7 How much of the video can be understood by only reading the subtitles is an interesting and important question that we will discuss later.

8 To help clarify this structure, I'll describe the video in greater detail and put a maximum of information about the video on a schedule.

is to see where in the video the effort of persuasion has been made on each level. In other words to find out where and how the authors try to persuade by:

- a. Using rational argumentation [*logos*];
- b. creating a trustworthy, authentic etc. image of themselves [*ethos*];
- c. manipulating the emotions of the addressed audience [*pathos*].

The theoretical question of what exactly is persuasive, convincing or credible in those strategies and how the Arab- Islamic background intervenes to assist in this process will be treated in the third paragraph.

i. Introduction 0 to 2:27

The introduction is divided into two parts. The first part is laden with information. It contains the names and logos of the production institutions. Apart from the logos, the first images and sounds included in the graphic composition are images of explosions, missiles, a praying man, etc.⁹, all of which are strong indicators that the video is part of the propaganda of Jihad. For this part, the makers have chosen sensational images and sounds to catch the attention of viewers and encourage them to continue watching. Everything is hyper dramatized: repeated sound of explosions, shouting of “*Allahu Akbar*”, images of solemnly praying men etc. All images and sounds are integrated in a graphic animation. This animation stimulates a virtual movement through a virtual hall with walls covered with framed pictures of the above mentioned explosions, praying individuals, missiles, etc are shown.

The second part of the introduction is a mix of different short clips of “funny” moments filmed by the makers of the video. It is meant to make the viewer smile or at least make him feel “sympathy” for the smiling and laughing people in it. In the background, the *Nashid*¹⁰ “Strangers” (*ghuraba*) can be heard. Within a few seconds the *Mujahidin* are (re-) introduced as sympathetic (through the funny clips) and on “the right path” (through the *Nashid* that we will discuss later). This strategy is of building a positive *image* of the *Mujahidin*. This *image* will be continuously refined in the video.

Finally, the complex introduction shows how “serious” the video makers are about producing a quality video.

⁹ For details see the time-schedule of the video in the appendix.

¹⁰ *Nashid* is a song using few or no musical instruments.



Illustration 1: Graphic animation as introduction to the video – windows at a hall

ii. First Section 2:27 to 3:28

The calm and controlled voiceover announces the (primary) message of the video: “*katiran ma yaddunu an-Nas anna... al-Mujahid... ya’ichu Hayata al-Bu’si wal-Ju*” (people often think the *Mujahideen* have a miserable life) “*walakinna al-Haqiqa anna a-Mujahid min as’adi an-Nas... wa yajidu mina... al-Khayr ma lam yan’am bihi min qabl*” (but the truth is that the *Mujahid* is among the happiest people...and that he finds a better life than the one he had before).

So the authors dismiss a common idea (“the *Mujahidin* live a miserable life”; let’s call it “A”) and suggest that the “contrary” is true (“the *Mujahidin* live a good life”; “B”). To prove it, they propose to “go to ...Afghanistan to see how the *Mujahidin* live there”. This argument is logically incorrect¹¹ but is nonetheless often used in documentaries and TV in general.¹²

iii. Second Section 3:29 to 4:52

As promised, the video delivers the “proof” with images that are anything but dramatic. They show a group of young men walking, reading, swimming in a river and preparing a meal; they seem happy. The voiceover and the second *nashid* accompany the images of the group of *Mujahideen*. The voiceover is still calm and serene, but now in addition the *nashid 2* can be heard as background

11 An affirmation about ALL *Mujahidin* cannot be proven only anecdotally. In other words, if we can “see” that some *Mujahidin* live well, this doesn’t mean that all do. It only means that some of them do.

12 An author using examples like this would soon be discredited. Examples are not proof, however, in “new media” examples are often sold as proof. This is an interesting comment on how media affects what is logically accepted and would be ripe for further examination by other authors. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman wrote a highly recommendable book (also) on this subject. Noam Chomsky, and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the Mass Media*. (New York:Pantheon Books, 1998).

and fills the pauses of the commentary. The portrait of the life of a *Mujahid* gains a dimension of *pathos* through the melody and the testimony of a *Mujahid*¹³.

iv. Third Section 4:52 to 7:32

The theme of this section is the preparation of an attack. The *Mujahidin* are on their way to attack; they arrive and wait, but ultimately have to cancel the assault due to unfavorable circumstances. The narration of the voiceover is interrupted twice allowing the *Mujahidin* to address the viewers twice. The first address invites the viewers to join the Jihad and criticizes the youth who neglect this presumed duty for worldly affairs. The second *Mujahid* underlines another of the video's messages by relating a story of the "Ansar" (supporters) that provide his group with food while they wait for the opportunity to ambush. The commentator concludes: "*wa ba'da tul Intizar 'ada al Mujahidun adrajahum [...] wa hada Amrun yatakarraru fi Sahati an-Nizal [...] walakinnahum maw'dun bil Jaza' wa Allahu la yudi'u Ajra al-Muhsinin*" (After long waiting, the *Mujahidin* went back [...] and this is a common thing on the terrain [...] but they're promised reward and Allah doesn't waste the reward of the good-doers).

The aim of this part is to show – again through an example – that often the *Mujahidin* can't realize the attacks they have planned. This means the *Mujahidin* often make "excursions" that don't end in a fight. The life of the *Mujahidin* are thus less frequently in danger than one might assume; often "the circumstances" don't permit action but the *Mujahidin* are still "promised a reward" as "*Allah la yudi'u Ajra al-Muhsinin*". (Allah doesn't waste the reward of the good-doers.)

The authors also introduce guilt as a new element of their *ethos* strategy. Until this part, the *Mujahidin* were shown in a manner that was "at ease", "funny" and entertaining; it has now become heavier through the testimony that incite people to join the Jihad and berate those who don't. Accordingly, the lyrics of the accompanying *nashid* are about the "lowliness of not participating". By making Muslim viewers feel guilty, the authors subtly plant an appeal to participate in the Jihad in the middle of a video whose primary message is about how well the *Mujahideen* live.

13 See below.



Illustration 2: A Mujahid speaks of “rizq” (food in this case) that unexpectedly came to them

v. Fourth Section 7:32 to 9:11

This section shows a rocket attack; the comments don’t specify against whom¹⁴. The voiceover stops at 8:12, which leaves a whole minute of uncommented images with original sound. Only the *nashid* 4 can be heard mixed with the shouting of the *Mujahidin* while they fire the rockets. They shout Arabic formulas such as “*Allahu Akbar*”, “*Rabbana wa laka al-Hamd*” etc. but their accents reveal they are not all Arab.

The illustrative attack was chosen carefully. In this attack no *Mujahid* is injured and this goes along with the scope of the authors; even in the battles, the *Mujahidin* are not in danger and even have fun (some laughs are audible).

vi. Conclusion 9:12 to 9:58

At the end of the video, the voiceover shortly summarizes: “*Mashahidu wa Ahdat... satu’ajjilu bi-Rahili al-Ghuzat...wa...Swarun mina as-Sa’adati al-Haqiqiya allati yajiduha al Mujahid...*” (Situations...which will hasten the departure of the invaders... and...pictures of...the true joy that the *Mujahid* finds during...Jihad). The voice is calm but now even slower. The images accompany the words. The *nashid* 4 is still playing. The optimistic sentiment is unmistakable.

14 “Didd al-Quwat al-Salibiya“(against the crusaders) can mean any presence (military or not) from a Christian country (a country with Christian majority).

vii. The strategies – Results

The strategies of persuasion of this video are multiple while simple and harmonious. The *logos* strategy is a pseudo-argument that is often used in multimedia productions. The argumentation with examples is nowadays widespread and consequently easily accepted. It also leaves much space to the *ethos* strategy that is more important. Much attention was given to the portrayal of the image of the protagonists of the video (the *Mujahidin*). They were shown “sympathetically” and “authentically”. Also the surrounding ambiance that is constructed with the help of the *pathos* strategy sustains the intended image.

The whole video lacks the “stereotypical” Jihadi elements such as religious arguments through citations of the Quran and *Hadith*. The images contain no (direct) violence since its intention is to show that the life of a *Mujahid* isn’t that dangerous (and what little danger exists is balanced by great reward). So the atmosphere is extremely relaxed, friendly and pleasant.

The Elements (specific to Arab-Islamic culture used in Jihadist propaganda)

Each of the strategies described above is built with different microelements. Some of those elements belong to the Arab-Islamic tradition. A closer examination of the recurrent and central elements will help us to determine why (and how) they are successful.

The Arab-Islamic amalgam

Arabic language and Muslim faith are two different entities yet they are often confused: What sounds Arabic seems Muslim and vice versa; and speaking of Arab-Islamic culture is sometimes a way to avoid identifying precisely which aspect is being studied. The confusion of terms is not just a “mistake”; it is the consequence of fourteen centuries of history¹⁵. A significant challenge while studying persuasion and attempting to determine what makes something culturally accepted (convincing etc.), is to try to determine whether its acceptance is based in a language, a faith, a religious system, etc. This should allow for more precision about the contours of both entities (Islam and Arabic) from a rhetorical perspective.

15 For example: even in non-Arabic countries, the Quran is taught in Arabic, converts to Islam learn Arabic (or try to), etc.

Testimony

The video contains three main testimonial messages. The length, quality and message differ; the second and final testimonies are those of “martyrs”. Testimony is clearly not exclusive to Arabic or Islamic use. But are there characteristics of these testimonies typical to the Arab-Muslim tradition?

i. First Testimony 2:58 to 3:11 (Authenticity)

A young man sits near the water and holds a fish in his hands. He turns to the camera, shouting (he speaks loudly) and enthusiastically in a peninsula Arabic dialect:

“Hadihi Kalima uwajihuha li Ikhwani fi Bilad al Haramayn wa fi kulli Makan. Wa Allah al-’Adim inna fi Afghanistan fi Ni’ma wa ‘Afiya Allahuma laka al-Hamd wa fi Khayrat min Intissarat wa Futuhah wa Khayrat minna Allah ’azza wa jall. Onzor ha as-Samaka kef sobhana Allah”

(This is a word I’m sending to all my brothers in the Land of the two sacred sanctuaries (Saudi Arabia) and everywhere else. [I swear] by Allah *al-’Azim*¹⁶ we here in Afghanistan are enjoying blessings and wellbeing, thanks to Allah, and [enjoying] victories and *Futuhah*¹⁷ and graces from Allah *’azza wa jall*¹⁸. Look at this fish, praise be Allah!)¹⁹

The message is short and simple. He informs his “brothers” that he and the other *Mujahidin* are fine and that they have victories. He swears they don’t miss anything, which reinforces the message of the video. (This is another indication of how carefully the authors have chosen their video material.) The face of the man is hidden (digitally) but his gestures and his voice convey enthusiasm, spontaneity and authenticity. It is easy to believe he’s saying what he really thinks.

Belief in the authenticity of a speaker is probably a universal need/premise to believing their words. Dialect, simplicity, spontaneity and sincerity seem to be

16 Allah is one of the 99 names of God in Islam. I decided not to translate Allah with God (which I would do normally) because with the word Allah, often, other names (most are adjectives describing the qualities of God – as in this case *Allah al-’Azim*) are used. And to translate all with “God” would be restrictive. *Al-’Azim*: The Great.

17 *Futuhah*: This word is normally used only to describe the wars of expansion of Islam; the exact translation is “Openings”. In fact, history teaches young Muslims that Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula to India and Andalusia in a very short time thanks to the strength of belief of “early Muslims” and their bravery. Islam was so strong and “high” that often there was not even need to fight. And for that we speak “of openings” and not wars. The use of this word for contemporaneous war indicates fundamentalist indoctrination.

18 “’azza wa jall” is an attribute of God. ’azza derives from ’izza and jalla from *Jalal*. Both are related to power, highness and glory.

19 This is my translation.

the decisive elements here. These are ingredients that could have also worked anywhere else.

ii. Second testimony 5:21 to 6:15 (Citation)

A young man is filmed in the verdant nature. “Abu Kandahar”²⁰ appears in the middle of the screen, to his right and left stand two other men whose faces are invisible. While the camera zooms on him, he says:

1. “*Ayna hum Shababu Muhammad sAaws yaddubu ’an Muhammad sAsws fi hadihi as-Sahat haytu tatannazalu al-Karamat.... , aynahum Shababu at-Tawhid alladin ya’buduna Allah ’azza wa jalla al-’Aziz al-Majid wa la yardawna bi’an yudannassa Kitabu Rabbihim subhanahu wa ta’ala... ama aana lahum min Waqfatin sadiqatin ma’a Allah subhanu wa ta’ala kayyaqumu wa yastayqidu wa yastafiqu min Ghayihim?*”
2. “*Shababa Dinn lil-Islami ’udu faantum Majduhu wa bikum yassudu*”
3. *wa antoum siru Sahwatihi qadiman wa antum Majduhu ashadi attalidu*”
4. “*Allaha Allaha fi hada Ddin [...] wa an nuqatilahum wa nughlida ’alayhim kama qala Allahu ’azza wa jal fil-Quran al-karim an nughlida ’alayhim wa la yaraw minna illa l-Ghilda liannahum Addila’ wa hum Jubana’... wa nahnu al-A’izza’u bi-Idni Allahi ta’ala wa lillahi al-’Izzatu wa li Rassulihii a lil Muminin[...] wa salla Allahu ’ala Muhammed*”.

Abu Kandahar invites Muslims to join the Jihad. This is the longest testimony of the video. The speech is one minute long and has three parts. In the first part he appeals to young men to join the Jihad. In the second part he recites two verses of a poem that contains the same message and in the last part summarizes his view of “the ethics of war”. Since it would take too much to discuss the whole speech, we should concentrate on analyzing the last part. He says:

3. ([...] and we [should] fight them and be brusque/rude to them as Allah said in the holy Quran to be rude to them and they should see only rudeness from our parts because they’re lowly and because they are cowards...and we are the lofty ones with the grace of Allah, the almighty, His prophet and the believers. And Allah is the greatest. All praise be His and prayers and peace upon Mohammed).²¹

Abu Kandahar speaks in an accent-free classical Arabic (*fusha*). He is surely an “educated” person. He might have been a teacher or have been in a métier that placed him into frequent contact with written Arabic. His face is controlled and serious (except in the last seconds; he shyly smiles as the other group members surprise him with the “*takbir*”²² at the end of his speech).

20 Abu Kandahar is the man’s war name, on the screen you can read: “The Martyr as we think him to be, Abu Kandahar, may Allah have mercy on him”.

21 This is my translation.

22 *Takbir* is the name of the formula “*Allah Akbar*”.



Illustration 3: Abu Kandahar

As he speaks about rudeness in the fight against enemies, he says it is the will and word of God. At this point he doesn't properly cite the *sura*. Throughout the video, the Quran *suras* are only mentioned in passing without being formally cited²³.

Citing Quran and *Hadiths* correctly is fundamental for an inner-Islamic argument. Yet both are nearly absent in the argumentation and the few mentions to Quran are cited improperly. Instead the *sura* is integrated in the speech appropriating (unlawfully) the authority of Quran so it can serve the meaning of the speaker's words. In Arabic this figure is called "*isti'ara*" (a genre of ellipsis: borrowing – famous – words and integrating them into one's own speech.). Basically the *isti'ara* cannot replace a citation, especially in serious religious argumentation. This leaves space for questions: Is a citation superfluous as insiders (the makers of the video, the protagonists and the addressed public) are already familiar with the referenced texts? But the video is not only intended for insiders. So are the people that produced the video or gave their testimonies incapable of citing properly? Are they suggesting that they are "above" proper citation? Are the addressed viewers judged unworthy of correct citation (i. e. assumed ignorant)?

If loose citation of holy texts is a trend in Jihad discourses to apply the scripts according to individual understanding, then it will be difficult to predict the consequences.

23 The Qur'an is referred to four times. Once by Abu Kandahar, twice in the comments, and a fourth time by the cameraman. All references are "*isti'ara*" quotes.

iii. Testimony 3 6:42 to 7:04 (Karamat)

As can be read on the screen “Abu Hajar al-Makki”, too, is a martyr. He is shown sitting with other men dining. They eat and drink as he looks up to the camera and says:

“*Al hamdillah wa as-Salat wa as-Salam ‘ala ashrafi l-Anbiya’ wal-Mursalin. Alhamdillah ‘ala kul Shey. Alhamdillah nahnu fi Intizar hal Kamin wilhamdillah Allah at’amna. subhanaallah. ha l-Qariya illi jayseen fiha ne’mel Kamin subhan Allah Allah sakhar lana Ansar biha Ta’am we ha as-Sharab. hada Ni’ama min Allah. wa Alla-huakbar.*”

(Thanks to Allah and peace and prayers be upon the most honorable prophet. Thanks to Allah for everything. Thanks to Allah we are waiting for an ambush and thanks to Allah, Allah who fed us. Praise Allah, in the village where we are waiting for the ambush, praise Allah, Allah gave us sympathizers [who provided us] with this food and drink. This is a gift from Allah. And Allah is the greatest!)²⁴

The message is similar to that of the first testimony: The *Mujahidin* suffer neither hunger nor thirst. Even when unexpected, they find what they need.

The speaker is obviously from the Arab peninsula. He speaks in a strong dialect that even ignores basic rules of (classical) Arabic grammar. Unlike the preceding testimony, he seems neither very cultivated nor an intellectual. He seems nervous as he speaks to the camera, while speaking he names Allah ten times in four sentences²⁵. Something that he does not say directly but can be inferred is that he is speaking of (small) miracles; this is indicated by the choice of words, namely: “*sakkhara*”²⁶ and “*subhan Allah*”²⁷ accompanying the narration

To believe (and hope) that aid will come from God, is very common in Arab-Islamic culture. So, speaking of “*karamat*” (small miracles) is frequent especially in particular milieus²⁸; Jihad propaganda often uses this phenomenon²⁹. In this

24 Translation by the author.

25 We will speak about using the name of Allah and related formulas below.

26 *Sakkhara*, (subjected) as in Vers 31:29: “...and [He] has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term”.

27 *Subhan Allah*, is commonly translated with “glory to Allah”. This doesn’t take in consideration the origin of the word “*sabh*”, the root of “*subhan*”. *Sabh* means void. So the expression *subhan Allah* originally is nearer to “God is devoid” It means, by saying it, I absolve God from all (all evil and all that I can imagine about Him, which surely is wrong since my imagination cannot define Him). As in Vers 2:116: “They say, ”Allah has taken a son.” Exalted (devoid) is He! Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him”.

28 The milieus are different and the kind of *karamat* must be differentiated. For example, the milieu is either not very cultivated (superstitious) or Sufi etc.

29 There are videos in the net that are based only on “observations” that some *karamat* are for the *Mujahid*.

case, Abu Hajar al-Makki seems convinced that the support of the people who brought the *Mujahidin* food and beverage is a gift from Allah. This confirms for him, and the viewers who believe him, that Allah supports the *Mujahidin* and their actions. It is very subtle but the existence of *karamat* is a very important “argument” for some people. I think this element deserves more attention³⁰ than can be paid here for obvious reasons.

Takbir

Bismillah and *Alhamdulillah* (just as *Allahu Akbar* and *takbir*) are formula and prayers that have existed since the beginning of Islam. All Muslims are asked by the prophet’s example to use and repeat them. Many *Hadiths* explain how and why this is done. Meanwhile, the use of this formula, as they are often said loudly has gained a social dimension. Praise of God, then too, is a way to show and possibly even impose one’s own faith of others. The formula of appraisal becomes a means to communicate, to define oneself and to become accepted by others; thus, the praise to God is no longer from “inside” to “beyond”, it is from “around” to “around”. Also this aspect seems important to understand the use of the named formula everywhere in Arabic, a language that is definitely strongly shaped by Islamic tradition.

The Songs: Nashid

Almost all Jihad propaganda media productions use *nashids*. They are a sub-element of the *pathos* strategies because, even though containing logos messages, the pathos dimension remains dominant. In other words, the chant, melody and lyrics have a disproportionately large affect on the emotions of the viewers. That is probably why the authors use them also as background; when the words are imperceptible but the melody and intonations can still resonate. The analysis should therefore consider the melody and “background” as well as the lyrics of the songs.

*First Nashid*³¹

Ghuraba x 25

30 Who is likely to believe of *karamat* or speak of them? Is there a correlation between the degree of education and this kind of belief? What is the religious status of *karamat*?

31 *Ghuraba* is widespread on the net and You Tube also translated and sang in other languages (for example: *Ghuraba nashid* (Old Version). Accessed July, 15 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVMjAG_xXvY&feature=related).

Strangers x 25

Ghuraba' wa li ghairi Allah la nahni l-Jibah

Strangers and we don't lower our heads to anyone but Allah

Ghuraba' wa irtadaynaha Shi'aran lil-Hayat

Strangers and we chose it as our life motto

In tassal 'ana finna la nubali bit-Tughat

If you ask about us: we don't care about tyrants

nahnou Jundu Allah dawman Darbuna Darbu al Ubat

Always the soldiers of Allah, our path is the path of the grave

Ghuraba x 10

This classical Arabic *nashid* that we shall call “Strangers” describes the *Mujahidin* (it is some kind of self-portrait of the *Mujahidin*). The concept of the “strangers” is widespread. It refers to a Hadith³², which announces the return of the Muslims to the status of strangers as the prophet Muhammad and his companions had been at the dawn of Islam. This hadith states that few Muslims will succeed in maintaining true faith and real attachment to the religion. The video (and the Jihadi propaganda in general) presents the *Mujahideen* as those few real Muslims.

The *nashid* describes “true” Muslims and insinuates the characteristics of the “wrong”. Unlike true Muslims, the others adore entities other than God³³. They obey and fear tyrants. The strangers, the soldiers of God, are the dignified, while the non-soldiers are the unworthy. This *nashid* both praises the *Mujahideen* and indirectly berates those who don't join them.

The masculine chant is melancholic and steady

The second Nashid

Siri...wa l-Quluba al-khafiqat

Go ahead... and (with) ...beating hearts

Siri fi Rakkiki wa unshuri 'abra al-Muda wa al-Makramat

Go on your way spreading...miracles

kannur yajtahu ad-Duja kal-Ghayiti yuhyi min Mawat

Like the light invading darkness, like rain reviving from death

32 An often cited Hadith states: “Bada'a al-islamu ghariban wa saya'udu ghariban. Fatuba lil-ghuraba” (Islam began alien/stranger and so will it return. Blessed are (then) the strangers)

33 Sympathy or even coexistence with non-Muslims might be for example interpreted as “Adoration” and “Submission” of the West.

qudi an-Nufussa lil-Fadilati wat-Taharati wa an-Najat

Lead the souls to virtue, pureness and salvation

wa bni bihim Rukna al-'Ula, ya Qafila ...

And build with them the Height, o caravan...

This *nashid* is jovial; it invites the caravan to advance. The caravan is obviously the group of *Mujahidin*. Keywords like *umma*, *Islam*, *kufr*, etc. are absent in this song. Instead, light, darkness, caravan etc. are used. This style, the “*kinaya*“, is often used in poetry and songs.

Another noteworthy aspect is the “imperfect” language; the language – classical Arabic – contains mistakes; some words and some structures derive from a dialect (*Qulub khafiqat*, *Makramat*, *Mawat* etc)

The chant is fast, like a march: optimist, bright, joyful.

*Fourth Nashid*³⁴

...al-Majdu tantidiruna

...Glory awaits us

...satuladu Shamsu Nahditani

...the sun of our rebirth will be born

nassiru wa nahmilu l-Iman...sanmhu Dulumat ...

We walk carrying faith (*Eman*)..... we will erase the darkness...

sanahmilu Jadwata at-Tawhid nosbiho fi Duna alaqla biha ...Jinana l-Khuldi naskunu Jannata l-Ma'wa

We will carry the flame of *Tawhid* we will become the strongest among lowers...[we will] enter the eternal paradise (*Jannat al-Khuld*).... We will live in paradise (*Jannat al-Ma'wa*)

[sanahmilu]... L-Qur'an ramza an-Nasri wal-Judi ...sanaqtifu Atira Rayhan...

[we will carry]...the Quran symbol of victory and generosity ... we will reap the smell of basil (*rayhan*)...

This *nashid* in classical Arabic is about hope and the promise of a better life (and post-life); it is about all that could be different if only “we” lived following the rules of Islam. “We” Muslims, who are also “we” Jihadi, could reach glory, awareness (rebirth of civilization) and progress. The *majd*, glory meant here is the glory missed by all Arab-Muslims during times of Colonization³⁵. So when

34 The lyrics of this *nashid* are only partially audible because parallel scenes of a rocket attack are shown. The sound of the fired racket covers parts of the *nashid*.

35 The rise of political Islam in the 20.th century is related to the previous colonialism of Muslim

we speak of *majd*, we mostly refer to the first few centuries of Islam (*majd* and *futuh* are closely related). The Muslim world is commonly said to have been in a state of lethargy for many centuries; to recreate the “*majd*” of the past means to provoke a “*sahwa*” that would lead to a “*nahda*”³⁶. Good Muslims – those on the right path – cannot “perform” either *sahwa* or “*nahda*” because they are but a few. However, they can still contribute to its arrival by staying on their path: “*satuladu Shamsu Nahdatina*” (the sun of our *nahda* will be born) is a passive form. A kind of fatality can be read between the lines despite all of its optimism; the Jihad should also follow his path hoping for (and singing the hope of one day seeing) the *umma* awakening.

The melody is quick, optimist and enthusiastic. It is sung by a chorus and two main voices.

The logos

Throughout the Islamic world, even in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, media institutions of Jihad groups take care to show images belonging to Islam through Arabic logos.³⁷ This is another aspect of the Arab- Islamic amalgam. They not only use Arabic letters but also choose forms that are reminiscent of a varying “Arabic”. For example *al-Sahab* has a logo which is inspired by – if not copied from – the logo of *Al Jazeera*. Yellow-gold in an old script, it is positioned in the bottom right of the screen. The similarity with *Al Jazeera*’s logo cannot be coincidental and implies that the authors (of the logo) are attempting to “borrow” the trust that people (might) have in that institution to invest themselves in a veil of professionalism.

The logo of “*shabakat Ansar al-Mujahidin*” is silver-grey with a little yellow-gold. This logo, too, has an ancient typography, though with some modern elements. It is obviously a well-devised logo; it is not uniform but a sum of different details that are combined harmoniously. The parts “*Ansar*” and “*Shabakat*” are not written in the same style and the “r” of *Ansar* evokes audio waves – which are an allusion to media work or an emission.

countries. See for example Giles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l’islamisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

36 *Sahwa* is a noun derived from *Saha* (to wake up) and *Nahda* from *Nahada* (to stand up).

37 See the chapter of Pilipp Holtmann on symbols in this volume.



Illustration 4: Logos of Al Jazeera and al-Sahab

Voiceover

The comments are in classical Arabic and read by a calm controlled voice. The commentator makes pauses and articulates clearly. It is commonly known that calmness and serenity indicate strong faith, so the producers probably chose the speaker's style with this idea in mind. Naturally, it also adds an element of professionalism.

Technically, if one listens carefully, a lot of cuts on the sound track can be heard. There are up to 4 cuts in 10 seconds. It is obviously easier to work on the comments if their tone is monotone. So the calm and serenity may simply be a technical necessity.

As we lack space here to fully examine the content of the comments, we will only make a few remarks:

The correct pronoun to use when describing the *Mujahidin* is “*hum*” (they, third-person plural). And, it is used by the voiceover except at 8:07 and then again at 9:45 where instead the pronoun “*antum*” (you, second-person plural) is used³⁸.

The commentator says at 8:07:

“faburikat Aydikum awyuha al-Mujahidun al-Abtal”

Allah bless your hands, o you *Mujahidin* heroes!

38 Following the laws of concordance, the endings of the corresponding words are “-hum” for the third-person plural and “-kum” for the second-person plural. So for the word *Kitab* (book) for example, we have:

(antum: second-person plural) *Kitabukum*

(hum : third-person plural) *Kitabuhum*.

Then at 9:45

“*fali-Allahi Darrukum wa ‘ala Allahi Ajrukum*”

... And may Allah reward you!

The use of “you” at these points is surely deliberate. There are many other possible formulations that would have used “they” without significantly altering the meaning. The authors use “you” to try to create a connection; they want the viewer, for an instant, to identify as a *Mujahid*. It is very subtle, but – I think – obvious.

Translation

The subtitles lack the logical order that would have made them more comprehensive. They are a verbatim translation of the all levels of the audio. The translation and/or the insertion of the subtitles were probably made automatically. The authors may also have used translation software³⁹.

Since the subtitles reflect everything, it is hard following them, and thus to understand the video. They jump from translating a *nashid*, to translating a comment to the voiceover without visual distinctions and they appear and disappear very quickly. The authors have made a choice: automatic translation; probably with the hope that this would carry a maximum of information to the viewer. But in reality, the viewer is left with many decoding obstacles.

1. The subtitles are fast and incoherent (it is not clear when which element of the soundtrack is being translated)
2. Some meanings change when translated.
3. Some Arabic words are not translated

The second obstacle is less significant for the current analysis, but it is still an important factor. When an author tries to address an audience outside of his own language and chooses to translate the words he would have used for a public of his own, misunderstandings and unintended messages are very likely to arise. This is in general a central issue. It has been studied⁴⁰ from different perspectives but its presence in Jihad propaganda must be discussed too. However, since this

³⁹ The automatic translation is nowadays a quite easily acquired service (even if not yet capable of perfect translations). For example by Google and babelfish.

⁴⁰ See for example Zeinab Ibrahim et al., *Diversity in Language: Contrastive Studies in English and Arabic Theoretical Applied Linguistics* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2000) and more deeply see for example the work of Nisbett on how differently even thoughts are shaped through culture and language Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

video already fails (as mentioned before) to communicate clearly through the subtitles, it is unnecessary to treat it in detail here.

The final obstacle that those may face who do not speak Arabic is the fact that central words don't get translated. For some words (e. g. *Allah*, Jihad, etc.) it does not seem problematic, however, with other words (e. g. *Eman*, *Ijtihad*, *Tawhid*) it does leave voids. It is an interesting phenomenon that exists in other languages and discourses too: Some words, because they are judged very important don't get translated so the meaning can't get perjured. Perhaps the translators expect some basic knowledge of Arabic Islamic culture. Contrarily it may just point to their inability to understand or explain a word. In either case, not translating these terms leaves the unversed viewer with no additional understanding of the named point, which is an obvious obstacle to propagation of the intended message.

As said before, the first obstacle is the greatest flaw of the video. By translating nearly everything, the producers supersaturate the subtitles given the speed at which they must be read and therefore make them hard to follow. Persuasion strategies are based on succeeding to communicate, and the subtitles clearly fail to accomplish this task for the non-Arabic speaking audience.

Conclusion

This video combines different persuasive strategies to propagate two messages. Its first target is to "show" that the *Mujahideen* have a pleasant life (nature, river, swimming and eating, praying in groups...): Jihad is not only struggle. Its second message, the basic one, is an obvious appeal to join the Jihad. The chants, melodies, beautiful images of nature bathed in sunlight and the absence of blood, as well as ignoring suicide attacks and instead speaking of attacks that are planned but not executed, etc. serve the scope of the authors: show the "boy scout" dimension of Jihad. To a certain extent the strategies are effective: they enable the creation of an alternative image of the life of the *Mujahideen*. However, at the same time, "boy scoutism" may not seem like a compelling enough reason to join the Jihad.

The analyzed strategies contain different Arab and Islamic key-elements. Arabic arguments and language structures are shaped partly by Islamic traditions (e. g., the use of praise formulas). Some of the arguments (like *karamat*) can only be understood through interdisciplinary converging efforts. Also the importance of *pathos* in such a context has been shown in the discussing of the diverse *nashid*. Finally, building an "authentic" and "religious" but also "relaxed" image of the *Mujahidin*, i. e. *ethos* elements, has been the foundation of the most important persuasive strategy used in this video.

Kangaroo Trials. Justice in the Name of God

The jihadist media has drastically improved and expanded in the past ten years, with the center of operative output, in terms of propaganda, being the Internet. The virtual spheres of al-Qaeda (AQ) nowadays provide substantial, credible and authoritative propaganda for sympathizers and followers. This material can easily be found, retrieved and re-published thanks to the open source nature of the electronic materials and cloud computing utilized by modern actors of *Jihad*.¹ The consumer can download and collect unique propaganda files (written and audio-visual) and is not required to have any personal connection to the producers of the jihadist materials.

The hostage-taking and subsequent execution of “prisoners” is one example of the genre making up jihadist propaganda materials that are freely available online. In most cases the hostages are exhibited and put on a ‘trial’ that carries a sentence, a punishment, for their personal actions or their membership to a collective – being, for example, local police or soldiers, or foreign workers. The kangaroo trials, the staging of a court-styled trial by non-state actors of hostages has become popular in the jihadist spheres of the Internet since the beheading of Daniel Pearl (2002), Nicholas Berg (2003), Paul Marshall Johnson (2004), and many others. Such kangaroo trials are not limited to foreigners kidnapped in Islamic countries but often applied on captured local governmental workers and soldiers who are portrayed as apostates of Islam and henchmen of the west. The nature and the justification of such trials and executions as well as the portraying of the hostages by the jihadi media as well as key ideologues are outlined in this article.

Access is not confined to contemporary material. Propaganda, mostly videos of previous conflicts such as Afghanistan in the 1980s² and Bosnia in the 1990s

1 Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Dschihad “Sawt al-gihad”*: al-Qaedas erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010), 37 – 38.

2 Asiem El Difraoui, *Al Qaida par l’image ou la prophétie du martyr. Une analyse politique de la propagande audiovisuelle du jihad global* (PhD diss., Science Po, 2010), 135 – 169.

have been digitalized and are part of the greater contemporary jihadist online corpus. The quantity and quality of contemporary digital propaganda has increased rapidly, especially since digital cameras have become an integral tool of jihadi groups. With the dawn of highly professional jihadist media battalions and translations departments –Arabic remains the most important marker of identity of jihadis and their sympathizers.³

The jihadist ideologues and leaders, including local military leaders, assume authoritative religious positions and deploy a specific interpretation of divine and sacred texts to justify their deeds and actions. Explanations and justifications are issued as guidance and as legitimate acts, declared as Islamic and therefore as legal by Islamic law. AQ and affiliated ideologues by using the internet as the public platform of expression and to publish their sermons, legal decrees (*fatwa*) along side the filmed military operations of non-virtual, offline jihadist groups provide answers and issue role models for the global audience with the intention to re-enact. By a virtual/communicative leadership⁴ the jihadists advocate themselves as human guides of exercising ‘true’ belief (*iman*) with the only proper religious conduct and methodology (*manhaj*). This accounts particularly for those in resistance to disbelief (*kufur*), the praying and fighting *Mujahid* who manifests as the ultimate role model of the ‘true’, steadfast (*thibat*) Over the past years, more and more gaps in the jihadists’ worldview have

3 Rüdiger Lohlker, “The Forgotten Swamp Revisited”, in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Vienna: University Press, 2012), 125. Jihadist writings are oftentimes translated into English and other languages to widen the effect. Mostly statements and speeches by AQ leaders are translated into English. Jihad videos, on the other end of the agitating propaganda, are subtitled to be comprehensible for the global audience. Arabic, Pashto, Urdu, Russian, German videos are subtitled to enforce ideological and operational coherences.

Pro-jihadist, salafist, websites are in parallel – and since the Arab Spring – developing internationalization means by connecting virtually online and expanding their personal connections in the offline. The website *SalafiMedia*, for example, is available in English, German and French and is directly reproducing jihadist ideological contents that do not primarily advertise violence but justify violent acts. *Salafimedia.de* and the corresponding *Millatui-braheem.de* has been shut down recently after violent protests by Salafists against the right-wing anti-Islam movement “Pro-NRW” in Germany. A similar rhetoric was issued by Ahmad ‘Ashush in a *fatwa* demanding the killing of the director, producers, and actors of the film “Innocence of Muslims” on September 17, 2012: Nico Prucha: *Fatwa calling for the death of the director, producer, and actors involved in making the film “Innocence of Muslims”*, *Jihadica*, September 18, 2012, <http://www.jihadica.com/fatwa-calling-for-the-death-of-the-director-producer-and-actors-involved-in-making-the-film-‘innocence-of-islam’/>

4 See for this concept Philipp Holtmann, “Virtual Leadership: How jihadists guide each other in cyberspace,” in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2012), 63 – 124; and Philipp Holtmann, “Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications and Discussion,” Working Paper, The Institute for Policy and Strategy, Herzliya Conference February 6–9, 2011.

been closed and bestowed with ideological answers on how to conduct the proper service for God, prophet Muhammad, the Muslim believers in fighting and resisting the enemies of God.

Such gaps, or yet to be occupied ideological niches, are filled when changing realities of jihadist groups evolve, as had been the case with the kangaroo trials, in particular the beheading of hostages. Another, more recent example constitutes the jihadists claim control over territory ‘liberated’ from governmental forces, ‘freeing’ the local people, a proper implementation of the propagated principles must be established. Questions arise on how the propagated alternative forms of governmental rule according to the *shari’a* are established and implemented. The propaganda is quick to upload and disseminate videos of groups such as the *Ansar al-Shari’a*, who claim policing and governing according to proper interpretation and rulings as set by ideologues. Likewise, the jihadist propaganda by its massive responses to the ‘Arab Spring’⁵ attempts a similar authoritative stance claiming the jihadists’ history of violence as the cause of the toppling of the dictators, even when peaceful protestors achieved this. The self-notion and awareness of the jihadi ideology affects in general questions and uncertainties tormenting the jihadi-sympathizer regarding the lawfulness (*halal*) or prohibition (*haram*) of specific acts or daily aspects of life, seeking to escape by all means potential sin. “The need for clear definitions can be stressed by the jihadists worldview urging clear cut divisions of the chaos of everyday life”⁶, the urge for control by reliant practices and policies to regulate the daily affairs of the ‘true’ believers. Naturally, such policies or authoritative rulings (*hukm*) and interpretations (*ta’wil*) affect the treatment of non-Muslims as well and strictly excommunicate (*takfir*) anyone considered a Muslim by harsh values. These values are applied to the prisoner (*asir*) of jihadist groups while executions as such are sanctioned and placed in textual and/or visual context.

Next to the vast corpus of written propaganda and ideological tracts are the filmed productions of jihadist movements, which have increased likewise. The jihad videos are in most cases perhaps more important and dangerous than the texts. The videos clearly depict and portray ideological torrents in a grand and

5 Naturally, jihadists seek to claim authority over the ‘Arab Spring’, arguing only their continued efforts, their *jihad* without cease, resulted in the successful ousting of long-term Arabic dictators. Ideological writings and clerics formerly only able to agitate under the scrutiny of local secret services, facing harsh punishment now act and preach in the open and publish videos of their sermons and writings on jihadist online forums. It should be noted, that the Islamists and pro-jihadist sympathizers are one – growing – torrent manifesting in the post-‘Arab Spring’ world.

6 Rüdiger Lohlker, “The Forgotten Swamp Revisited”, in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Vienna: University Press, 2012), 125.

most potent narrative whereas role models are addressing the virtual *umma* with the ambition of being re-enacted by the consumers. These role models are the one who are fulfilling, living out, re-enacting the presumed acts and deeds of early Muslims, thus transforming themselves by their own acts – and most importantly their own words documented by the digital lens – as the only ‘true’ believers and real men. The captors are portrayed as judges and executors, as men, as true *Mujahideen* loyal to God, sacrificing everything for the Islamic cause. The jihadist is a practitioner of verses of the Quran, by his belief and standards, directly exercising the divine command by God’s words.⁷ Being alive in our contemporary times is a punishment, with the wishful dream to fight alongside the prophet. The collective is unified by the imagined taking part in historical battles together with Muhammad – these battles, for the prophet and for God, are re-enacted today in the mindset of the *Mujahideen*. Believing to fight as the early Muslims had, for Islam and justice, has spilled into salafist pro-jihadist milieus worldwide in recent years. Abu Abdullah, a German salafist preacher, employing the same iconography as jihadist groups in Iraq or Yemen, asks in his sermon:

“Why are we not bestowed by God with the honor of living together with the prophet” as his companions had? “To spread the message, to fight with the prophet, to protect Islam, real men are needed (...). They are the most truthful men to have ever lived, the companions of the prophet, who gave their life for God.”⁸

This dream, this imagined world, is shared within the *jihadist* and especially the *salafist* spectrum who seek to re-enact the lives and deeds of the early Muslims. As such, the historical texts of the Quran and *Sunna* are the ultimate playbooks and guidance.

For only real men are ‘true’ believers manifesting themselves as such, who are able and capable, physically and mentally to fulfill the covenant to God as based on an often-cited verse of the Quran (33:23):

“There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.”⁹

7 As the German jihadist Abu Adam states in the video “Boden der Ehre, part 1” (Waziristan, March 2010), the *Mujahideen* are “practitioners of the verses” of the Quran, unlike most Muslims. Therefore, most Muslims dwell in the unchanged status of sin, particularly the diaspora in western countries while the *Mujahideen* have by their contribution to *jihad* and by undertaking the emigration (*hijra*), ‘cleansed’ of such sin and neglect of God and His religion.

8 For example Abu Abdullah, “Wahre Männer”. Accessed July 5, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXoEJE2I8e8>.

9 All following verses of the Quran are quotations of: Muhammad A. S. Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).



Illustration 1: Remembering Usama bin Laden

The jihadists' arbitrarily reproduced knowledge is manifest in the above shown picture. The verse 33:23 misses the word *sadaqu*, the men who *honored* their pledge to God. Jihadist self-criticism is rare. One may argue that the incorrect reproduction of a verse of the Quran bears a sin in itself.

Those who have fulfilled their pledge to God, however, are kept alive within the jihadist propaganda of commemoration and tied to essential ideological components. These are visualized here by the al-Aqsa Mosque next to bin Laden who is imagined in a paradise like setting. The *jihad*, the pledge to God, continues in this world by the *shaykh al-Mujahid* Ayman al-Zawahiri and the mounted horse rider (*murabit*) carrying the black banner with the *shahada*.

Any hostage, especially westerners, forced to 'testify' or confess (*i'tiraf*) are a boost of the propagated jihadist worldview with the confession of the individual – prior to his punishment by God's representatives. They are the self declared *Mujahideen*, acting as judge, executor and most important as fulfilling divine commandments within the overall frame of reference.¹⁰

For almost no other textual or audio-visual genre of jihad is as popular and in need of clearly issued ideological sanctions and definitions then the executions of hostages. In particular the beheading videos, that at first sparked critique and misunderstanding ideologically while being most popular due to its content, have been thoroughly addressed by various high-level ideologues. The overall

10 Sönke Neitzel, Harald Welzer, Soldaten – Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2011), 17.

theme is foremost about the declaration of sin and betrayal of God, having committed treason against the Islamic community and faith in general – if the offender is a Muslim. Non-Muslims, however, are addressed according to specific circumstances, the individual nationality, work related status, or are in sum simply termed as “occupiers”, “crusaders” or plain and simple as “criminals”. Chief ideologues such as Yusuf al-‘Uyairi (“al-Sayf al-Battar”), Muhammad Hasan Qa’id (“Abu Yahya al-Libi”), or, the *fatwa* of Abd-al Mun’im Mustafa Halima (“Abu Basir al-Tartusi”) serve as a basis to decipher and annotate the jihadi video genre of decapitation or execution in general. *Shari’a-law* binding rulings and propositions by authoritative renowned scholars are adopted, implemented, operationalized and thus reproduced by jihadist groups by their statements and videos.

This article details the jihadists’ reasoning and justification of executing non-Muslim hostages by beheading. This reasoning, however, is applicable by choosing and similar to the justification of killing prisoners in general. Most victims of jihadist operations, this must be emphasized, are fellow Muslims that the jihadist simply claims as traitors and apostates to justify his cause. This is applied to the filmed executions of hostages, that in most cases show the shooting, in some the beheading and in rare cases the execution of alleged spies by explosive means. The vast majority of recent cases is embedded into lengthier *jihad* videos that broadcast the overall cause and ideology worldwide showing the confessions of fellow, mostly Arab, men who are shot after confessing working as spies.¹¹

The Jihadist Genre of Hostage Videos – Staging Trials and the Allocation of Guilt and Sin

The strategy behind a terrorist group action to kidnap individuals to further their cause is certainly neither new nor by any means innovative. Terrorism is as old as mankind, confined in a seemingly endless insurgency against rulers and authorities with the ambitions of establishing true versions of “freedom” or “authority” entangled in discourses for liberation. For Islamists the rhetoric of liberty and freedom and in particular for the militant jihadist milieu this reasoning thereof comprises of the *haqq / batil* scheme.¹² According to the firm and

11 A recent case, for example, is shown in the Iraqi al-Qaeda video *Salil al-Sawarim*, where several alleged intelligence workers and spies are kidnapped and then shot in the open in the head – after their filmed confession. Accessed June 30, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qWlqUv9Jwg>

12 Roel Meijer, “Yusuf al-‘Uyairi and the Making of a Revolutionary Salafi Praxis.” *Die Welt des Islams* 47 (2007), 422 – 459.

universal belief of a cosmological battle of the “program of truth” (*al-haqq*) versus a “program of falsehood” (*al-batil*). Naturally, the self-perception of being a member of *al-haqq*, thus speaking and acting on behalf of the ‘truth’ in contrast to the evil and demonic ‘other’ leads to an absolute elevation of the ‘self’ that justifies extreme decisions and influences group-dynamical decision-making processes. This sentiment is vital for understanding the jihadists’ self-perception and righteousness, the *moral-defenders* who are in absolute proximity to God (*taqarrub*). This conviction is fundamental and eminently manifests when the jihadists are confronted – or dealing – with non-Muslim enemies.

The tactics of terrorist groups have in principal not changed – for demands to be met, pressure must be exercised. Terrorism as much as counter-terrorism are in most cases merely military and tactical strategies. Public statements and pre-mediated information for public release is part of such strategy, by all sides. Deterrence cannot work if not efficiently conveyed to those who are intended of refraining future operations. Kidnapping, taking hostages and or the executions of prisoners as means of punishment and deterrence is an old phenomenon and not confined to non-state actors.¹³ In some cases, these bloody means turn into extreme forms of violence, as a manifestation of group-dynamics and in parallel to an ideology unraveling by increasing militancy and the desire to inflict maximum damage and thus coercing enemies into halting their actions out of fear.¹⁴

As part of a global media strategy, the Internet in the meantime is fully cultivated by the jihadists and their usage of new media in general within the virtual spheres. To boast its appeal and affectivity, *real-time statements* – written statements (*bayanat*), memoranda (*taqarir*) and films or clips (*fidiyyuhat*)¹⁵ of attacks are published on the Internet right after the strike, with filmed footage (the testimonies of martyrdom operatives for example) prepared prior. This strategy may be particularly valid for cases of successful kidnapping operations, whereas the militants’ media departments publish immediately after the disappearance of individuals or groups¹⁶ to claim responsibility and issuing a first

13 Sven Olaf Berggötz, ed. Ernst Jünger, Zur Geiselfrage – Schilderung der Fälle und ihrer Auswirkungen (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2011).

14 Following an ‘eye-for-an-eye’ logic, the Nazis declared all French nationals in German detention centers as their hostages to be punished for assassinations of German officers and soldiers in occupied France. The number of executed rose dramatically with the continued assassination of the occupiers.

15 A modern term consisting of the English *video* in combination with the Arabic *-at* ending for the plural – Apple, for example, uses this term officially for its Arabic iPad YouTube application.

16 The examples of groups being abducted in the jihadist spectrum are unfortunately plentiful, even more so in the case of al-Qaeda in Iraq who oftentimes kidnapped scores of members of the government (policemen and soldiers). AQ’s African branch, AQIM, frequently kidnaps

proof of life by broadcasting a video of the captive(s). This proof of life is also undermining the groups' ability and is, of tactical importance: credibility.

Jihadist groups rely on this type of media strategy and emphasize this importance in strategy papers, assessments and aftermath analyses of their operations.¹⁷ In hostage situations, mostly videos and accompanying writings where demands are emphasized¹⁸ and threats invigorated are issued within few days online.¹⁹

AQ can be understood as the first truly global terrorist network. It claims operating by coherently deploying its principles of belief and its political agenda according to its ideological propaganda outlets in its successful and thwarted attempts worldwide. Every failed assassin, after all, is by AQ's means a successfully indoctrinated operative. Even if the reality is more complicated and the unison of the online-propaganda does not reflect the divisions of various AQ affiliated groups.²⁰ In its propaganda, its films and writings, the preaching and instructions for actions are delivered by the most technical up-to-date means of the Internet. These steady factors of its acclaimed ideology come into affection and take the consumer, the audience into action, to join the fields of battle²¹, or, in

and exhibits western hostages in their videos issuing political demands with mostly a financial background as well.

- 17 A recent example is the video published by the *Ansar al-Islam* group describing the successful assault on a convoy exiting the *Asad* American military base in Iraq in May 2005. In the developing firefight, Japanese citizen Akihiko Saito was injured and abducted. The group claims he was a "director of security" in the base. He died in captivity of Ansar al-Islam who by the end of May 2005 disseminated a video of the dead body. In an analytical assessment of this operation, with interviews by commanders and soldiers of Ansar published in August 2011, the group emphasizes the need to publish both written and filmed media content as proof of their credibility as soon as possible. It was essential to receive the greatest possible media and non-media attention of their highly successful operation, being heard by the Japanese Prime Minister who demanded the release of Akihiko Saito; *Diwan al-i'lam jama'at Ansar al-Islam: shadd al-wathaq*.
- 18 A 'classical' case is the fate of Paul Marshal Johnson in 2004, as later detailed. First generation AQAP members sought to pressure the release of their imprisoned brothers in Saudi Arabia, according to a statement published online.
- 19 AQIM, a group notoriously known for abducting western nationals, oftentimes threat to execute European hostages as a response to military pressure on the ground by respective governments. For example: "Urgent Warning to the nation-states of the European Prisoners held by the Organization [AQIM]." Published 13.01.2012, dated 11.01.2012.
- 20 Lahoud et al. Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined? (Harmony Program, CTC 2012) 1–3.
- 21 A recent example is the movie *The Spring of the al-Anbar [Province]*, Iraq, published by AQ's local al-Furqan media wing. The Arabic-language video was first offered to download on the English forum *Ansar al-Mujahideen*, a sister-forum of its Arabic-language mother-forum *Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahideen* on January 14, 2012. A car pulls up to an Iraqi Army checkpoint, the armed *Mujahideen* quickly disembark and open fire on the surprised soldiers. The viewer is with the driver, speeding up to the checkpoint and then disembarks with

the case of hostage-taking and demands, to condemn and criminalize the abducted likewise. Most notably, the showing of abducted westerners, whereas the criminal offender responsible for the suffering of Muslims is finally in proximity for receiving the legitimate punishment, has enabled localized groups to gain quick prominence. This has even greater value, when such videos are offered for download within jihadist forums. By doing so, credibility of the group is granted by the means of having the video placed on the forums initial page, with blinking gif-animated banner advertising the new video, issued by the pertaining media logo(s) of the group. Multiple download locations in various sizes and formats (high quality – to the mobile phone compatible low-size 3gp-format) are offered with a link to YouTube, to view the video without physically downloading it into ones hard disk.²²

One recent example is the claim by the Yemeni al-Qaeda branch (al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula, AQAP) to have kidnapped the deputy spokesman of the Saudi consul in Aden, Yemen. A video was published immediately on May 26, 2012 via the jihad forums, claiming the kidnapping of a Saudi diplomat.²³



Illustration 2: Kidnapped Spokesman of the Saudi Consul in Yemen by al-Qaeda – advertised by an animated banner on the jihadist forums

In the video al-Khalidi is forced to confess how the Saudis co-operate with the Americans. Furthermore, diplomatic missions are exploited by the Saudi secret service to recruit spies and place agents to infiltrate the al-Qaeda network. These agents are locals as well as Saudis, therefore Muslims for whom as a policy AQ issues specific death sentences. Spies and agents are “working directly for the consulate, collect information, confirm AQ statements and monitor its locations as well as to observe the organization’s leadership and spy on the *Mujahideen*. Their role consists of submitting this intelligence to the American forces so that

the fighters. During the disembarking, the viewer switches the perception (camera) showing the first camera mounted on the dashboard of the car.

22 Several hours after publishing this video, individual sympathizers placed it also on their own YouTube channels. The user “thenouraltawhid” had 25,219 views just few hours after the release by al-Malahem media on the jihad forums. One week after, on 2 June 2012, the number of views has risen to 176,476 clicks with 268 “likes” and 233 “dislikes”. A peak seemed reached by July 3, 2012, with 183,356 clicks, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwAWWJfn5fw>.

23 The abduction of Abdallah Muhammad Khalifa al-Khalidi was confirmed on May 28, 2012 by the BBC and other news agencies, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-17534644>.

drones will be dispatched to bombard these locations.”²⁴ The diplomat, speaking directly into the camera looking at his audience, finishes his appeal by calling out to the Saudi king and the government: “save me by freeing the imprisoned sisters of the organization al-Qaeda in the secret police prison.” As we shall see later in the article, the demand to free imprisoned sisters was the main demand by al-Zarqawi that led to the beheading of Nicholas Berg and later Olin Armstrong in 2004. In a second video, disseminated within the usual jihadist forums on July 1, 2012, “the prisoner” al-Khalidi is forced again to speak directly into the camera, seeking direct eye contact with the audience, demanding the release of the female prisoners in Saudi Arabia. “My fate is tied to the *harim*”, referring to the women who are deemed as inviolable (*hurma*) and sacred. Addressing the “Saudi people if the government has forgotten me” to use the social “media and forums on the internet” to make his case known and exercise pressure on the government to respond to the demands.²⁵ The video, simultaneously posted on YouTube by the user “1Ansar15” received over 5.000 views in about ten hours. Two days later, the video was viewed over 30,000 times.²⁶ The member “mz885”²⁷ posted a comment (second most liked with 32 “thumbs up”) that reflects the practical thinking and the effect of such clips:

“God willing, all of the political male and female prisoners will be set free... The thinking of al-Qaeda to kidnap high-ranking governmental employees²⁸ to free men of the religion (*rijal al-din*) and their women, or to kill the kidnapped in cold blood is very clever to convey [the group’s] defiance of the corrupt [Saudi] regime... May God lead the *Mujahideen* everywhere to victory, o Lord of the Worlds.”

Usually particular western hostages or high-ranking non-westerners, such as diplomats or envoys, receive plenty of media attention and grant the captors multiple platforms in multiple languages to address their demands and grievances. The hostages are trophies that are shown-off and exhibited. Jihadists in recent years have used this as a strategy to plant demands in the mouths of the kidnapped to directly appeal to their respective governments or their peoples,

24 *Munashada na’ib al-qunsul al-sa’udi bi-aden Abdallah Muhammad Khalifa al-Khalidi*, Al-Malahem Media. Accessed May 26, 2012. <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=163382>.

25 *Munashada al-thaniyya li-na’ib al-qunsul al-sa’udi bi-aden Abdallah Muhammad Khalifa al-Khalidi*, second Video, Al-Malahem Media. Accessed July 1, 2012. <http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?p=359622>.

26 *Munashada al-thaniyya li-na’ib al-qunsul al-sa’udi bi-aden Abdallah Muhammad Khalifa al-Khalidi*, second Video, Al-Malahem Media. Accessed July 1, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YG3wZ-9oyDk>. The most liked comment (50 likes) by “MLOKZOT” states: “*allahu akbar* – release the *harim* and the consul is free. Easy thing, oh Al Sa’uuuuud!”

27 According to his profile (<http://www.youtube.com/user/rmz885>), he is a 25-year old Saudi and a YouTube member since early 2011. Bin Laden pictures enhance his profile page.

28 Lit.: “to kidnap symbols of the state” (*rumuz al-dawla*).

who should pressure their representatives. The foreign policies of governments thereby are directly criticized and conveyed by the hostages themselves, demanding the withdrawal of troops or the release of prisoners in exchange for their lives. Apart the propaganda, financial motivations and demands are addressed in secret and mostly kept out of the media as well as the propaganda films. This has enabled a ideological and political merger of jihadist groups, who internationalized their demands by hostage-taking, demanding a shift of foreign policies or a withdrawal of troops, consolidating a transnational and global appeal of jihadist groups within the specific – unified – frame of reference. Besides the demand to release fellow *Mujahideen* or imprisoned sisters, hostages are often coerced to ask their family and friends to exercise pressure on the government – in hopes of creating enough public pressure for a shift of policy to negotiate with terrorists. This had been the case, out of many, for example, with the kidnapping of German nationals Hannelore and Sinan Krause in 2007 in Iraq by a group calling itself *Siham al-Haqq* (“The Arrows of Truth”). This is an ample example for this globalization and professionalizing of terrorist media handling: Hannelore Krause was forced to beg German Chancellor Angela Merkel to withdraw the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan to guarantee her and Sinan’s release from captivity. The “Arrows of Truth” had later released Hannelore Krause, the fate of her son Sinan remains unclear.²⁹ In a similar move, al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) published a video online showing German citizen Edgar Fritz Raupach begging for his life. The short film shows Mr. Raupach placed between two armed *Mujahideen* in front of a hand drawn Islamic banner. He was abducted in early 2012 in Kato, north Nigeria. In a similar wording as the call by the kidnapped Saudi diplomat al-Khalidi in Yemen, “the German prisoner” Edgar Raupach calls (*nida*) upon “his state to save me... save my life.”

29 Judith Tinnes, Internetnutzung islamistischer Terror- und Insurgentengruppen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von medialen Geiselnahmen im Irak, Afghanistan, Pakistan und Saudi-Arabien (Saarbrücken: Universität des Saarlandes, 2010), 480–495.



Illustration 3: Edgar Fritz Raupach appealing to "his government" to be exchanged for Filiz Gelowicz.³⁰

In a written communiqué that clearly addresses the demands that are absent in the video, the release of Filiz Gelowicz aka "Umm Sayf Allah al-Ansariyya", the "German government" is directly addressed: "Release Umm Sayf Allah al-Ansariyya and we will hand you your prisoner".³¹ In concluding remarks of the statement, the kidnappers "call upon the family of the prisoner and his friends as well as the German public opinion to hurry the pressure on the German government to force an end to the suffering to the oppressed Muslim sister."

Edgar Raupach was killed on May 31, 2012 during a failed rescue attempt. Filiz Gelowicz had been out of prison after serving her sentence by the end of April.³²

30 The video was disseminated on March 19, 2012 and is dated to March 18. A statement released prior set the demands that the hostage does not repeat. He appeals to the German government to fulfill the demands to save his life and states his name, profession, employer and place of residence in Germany – in German and English. Filiz Gelowicz is the wife of the Sauerland chief Fritz, a member of the *Islamic Jihad Union*, who had planned to bomb American installations in Germany. Filiz Gelowicz has mutated after her trial in Germany and her prison sentencing into an icon misused by the jihadists. Despite her early release from prison due to her good behavior and her pledge to resume a normal life, media jihadists are portraying her as steadfast on the path of God, not renouncing her conviction and continuing her efforts online by all possible means. "Wife of Sauerland-terrorist Filiz Gelowicz released from prison", accessed April 24, 2012. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/ehfrau-des-sauerland-terroristen-filiz-gelowicz-aus-haft-entlassen-a-829439.html>.

31 The written statement bears the same date as the video, March 18, 2012. Both files had been simultaneously published online.

32 "German hostage dies in Nigeria rescue attempt", accessed May 31, 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/05/2012531141350940867.html>.

In a “special statement in regard of the killing of the German prisoner in Nigeria”, published by AQIM on June 10, 2012, the German government is blamed for his death. The killing of the hostage is justified as an act of ‘self-defense’ when the “special police unit attempted to free him by force.” Directly addressing “the family of the German citizen that the blood of your son is tied around the neck of your government, having given the green light to the military assault operation to free him. Therefore, you should demand the permission to open an investigation to uncover the perpetrators of this crime.”

Besides Iraqi jihadists kidnapping Germans to demand the German troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, the sanctioning of the execution of Russian special police force (OMON) members by Saudi AQ ideologue and first-generation leader Yusuf al-‘Uyairi for the Chechen *Mujahideen*³³ or the explanation of Libyan AQ ideologue and leader Abu Yahya al-Libi legitimizing the release of South Korean hostages,³⁴ taken by the Taliban and released in exchange for the promise of troop withdrawal, undermine and portray the commonalities in the struggle against oppression, injustice and occupation that jihadist groups nourish on. The lessons learned since 9/11 and military interventions in the Islamic world are that jihadist media must properly portray hostages and issue clear demands to be perceived by the global media. If not directed at governments, then the message is for the people of respective governments.³⁵ Beheadings of hostages has proven at first in this context as an effective media strategy to gain the mainstream media’s attention and to make the intentions of the *Mujahideen* clear.

Ultimately, the jihadist fights for the implementation of *shari’a-law* besides the salvation and restoration of honor and purity for Muslim populations worldwide. Kangaroo Trials are attributed by a special nature within the genre of the *jihad* videos and are in the meantime following specific codes, set in some regards by the beheading videos of Daniel Pearl, Nicholas Berg and Paul Marshall Johnson. These codes, vary, but are also applied to Muslim victims whose

33 Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, “*Hadayyat al-Hiyara fi jawaz qatl al-asara. Markaz al-Dirasat wa-l Buhuth al-Islamiyya*”. His writing was originally published in 2000.

34 Abu Yahya al-Libi, “*Daf’a al-rayn ‘an asri asabat al-kureen: Mabath mukhtasar hawl al-kureen al-ladhina ukhtadifuhum al-mujahidun fi Afghanistan*” (Global Islamic Media Front, 2007). Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?247969>.

35 Another example is of two portrayed Kenyan soldiers captured by the *Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen* in Somalia. In their filmed statements (February 23, 2012), a video beginning with Quran 47:4 that is used oftentimes in connection with hostages and prisoners, one captured soldier states: “My release, it depends on the action of the Kenyan people and also on the action of the Kenyan government. I would like to appeal to my president. How many Kenyans are we willing to sacrifice?” In a similar *modus operandi*, al-Sahab released the appeal of American hostage Warren Weinstein who has a “message from the prisoner Warren Weinstein to his president.” The video was released in early May 2012.

confession is enforced in the films. One main and visual distinction for non-Muslim hostages had been the subtle comparison to incarcerated Muslims in Guantánamo Bay by dressing the hostages likewise up in bright orange prison jump suits.³⁶ The standardized *modus operandi* has become a trend, even if the actual killing scene, the beheading or shooting, is since the beheading video spree of 2004–07 not necessarily shown.

The kangaroo courts by the jihadists follow a somewhat coherent layout and codex. The Oxford reference dictionary describes kangaroo trials originally as courts “improperly constituted or illegal court held by strikers, etc.”³⁷ Such kangaroo trials thus are non-state courts that are based on independent judiciary. Ironically, the jihadists renounce any state or governmental maintained court and the corresponding legal system as disbelief (*kufr*) and subsequently do not recognize any court-rulings other than their own. The massive amount of filmed jihadist kangaroo trials in combination with the ideological sanctioning has established a pseudo Islamic legal standing on prisoner treatment and alternative justice that is in competition with mainstream or legitimate Islamic scholars and the legal systems of states. Jihadists on trial, sentenced by governments for their actions, are portrayed as victims, as mistreated and misplaced prisoners. Kangaroo trials – by jihadist *modus operandi* – differ from case to case, dependent on the hostage(s) on trial and the corresponding circumstances. However, the video genre portraying the hostages – and unfortunately in most cases the violent end – consist in general of the following elements:

- *The Trial*: The individual hostage is accredited to greater crimes, such as the occupation of Iraq, the mistreatment of Muslim prisoners by non-Muslim forces (particularly women) or by the presumed direct involvement in supporting these crimes. In some cases the hostage is granted to speak before the verdict is read out. When the hostage speaks, it only serves to plead guilty or to ‘confess’ (*i’tiraf*). This is of great greater value for the exploitation of propaganda. This applies especially to Arab Muslim prisoners whose apostasy weighs as heavy as their allocated guilt due to their actions. Captured Arab Sunnis are thus frequently exhibited in their governmental (police, army) uniform, serving a system of *kufr* and as such sentenced to death without further justification.
- *The Demands*: This only applies when the hostage is depicted in a video for the first time and demands and conditions of his/her release are issued, as had been the case for Paul Marshall Johnson (2004). Demands consist of

36 Nicholas Berg was exhibited wearing such a dress and almost all non-Muslim hostages that had been beheaded by al-Zarqawi in Iraq wore such a jump suit. Olin Armstrong was executed in late 2004, as well as his colleagues Kenneth Bigley, Jack Hensley among others.

37 Judy Pearsall et al. Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 2nd rev. ed. Edited (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 772.

releasing imprisoned fellow combatants, ideologues or the release of women from non-Muslim operated detention centers. In some cases the hostages demand that their governments shift their foreign policies towards Islamic countries or withdraw their troops, as had been the case with German hostages in Iraq (2007) or Japanese backpacker Shosai Koda (2004) that renewed domestic pressure on the Japanese government to withdraw the troop contingent. To underline the justification as well as the ‘morality’ of beheading Shosai Koda, he was executed kneeling on an American flag.

- *The Indictment*: In some cases this is part of a greater narrative of western imperialism and the alleged ‘war on Islam’ and de-Islamization by occupying Muslim territories. Jihadists by their words justify the killing of individuals by their partaking in western interests or the violation of Islamic principles. Revenge is essential and oftentimes explained by the harsh conditions and torture of Muslim prisoners in western detention centers in combination with declaring the hostage mostly as a combatant (*muharrib*) and thus a part of destroying the religion of God, sent by war faring Crusader states.
- *The Confession (i’tiraf)*: In some cases the hostages have the chance to ‘confess’ their crimes and wrongdoings that mostly include criticizing western foreign policies and appeals to the respective governments. In other instances, the hostage refrains from confessing and the jihadists simply claim this a greater victory and further proof of the immense guilt by the perpetrator. In any case, the hostage receives the status ‘criminal’ (*mujrim*), elaborated by the individual’s confession. Muslim captives furthermore are coerced to confess their wrongdoings that constitute a harsh violation of God’s commandments and as sinful. Apostasy (*ridda*) bears the death sentence, working against the *Mujahideen* and worst, espionage for local governments and their western allies, is the most obvious form of apostasy.
- *Repentance (tawba)*: The option to repent is sometimes applied for Sunni Muslim prisoners, who, in jihadist terms and definition, have become apostates (*murtaddin*). The chance persists, to repent and pray, before the killing, as is common for Muslim prisoners sentenced to death by *shari’ah-law*. In some cases repentance is only offered *after* the execution and therefore only accounts to the viewers to find the right path according to jihadist standards. This is intended as a warning and mostly addresses police and soldiers working for governments.
- *The implementation of the rule of God (tanfidh hukm allah)*: The execution of the prisoner. The killing is not always shown; the corpses mostly are, as a response to criticism of the extreme graphic scenes propagated particularly by Iraqi groups at the height of the ‘resistance’. The implementing of the *rule*

of God is a most pious act for the executors, deeming themselves as direct agents acting on the order of God.

But also the stage, the scene or surrounding of this kind of sub-genre has been somewhat standardized, depending on the respective geographical and social circumstances. For most execution videos have been filmed inside, showing a room with the flag (*rayah* of the jihadist group, brigade or battalion, but in some cases, as by the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, the victims, mostly Pakistani soldiers and border guards, had been coerced to confess and were shot or beheaded outside. Mostly, however, the hostages are lined up in a symmetrical fashion or placed in the middle and the flag or banner of the group is placed at the center (consult the chapter of Philipp Holtmann on the visual aspects in this volume). The centrist visual attributes, depicting the hostage in the middle of the jihadist camera lens, with symmetrical elements on both sides, is similar to the portraying of most suicide-bombing operatives testimonies, declared prior to his operation and ultimately embedded into a greater (filmed) narrative along the corpus of jihadist sources online.

The forced confession and beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl – a new paradigm that evolved into an innovative genre

American Wall-Street journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted on January 23, 2002 in Karachi, Pakistan. Shortly after his disappearance a video was disseminated online showing what would set the standards for the future of the genre of *confession* and *execution* videos. It also introduced a new *modus operandi* of depicting and portraying a hostage. The case of Daniel Pearl had been the most ideal type by jihadist standards, for Pearl was an American and a Jew. As such, Daniel Pearl was being held and personally made responsible for the occupation of Palestine, the mistreatment of Muslims by the Israeli forces, the unlawful detention of terrorist suspects in Guantánamo bay and the growing American interventionism within Islamic countries. The context of this perception is clear in the wake following the 9/11 events, the ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the coercion of Pakistan into cooperation in the so-called “war on terror”. Furthermore, he was deemed a spy, thus providing his captors even more so the reasons for his brutal death as advertised in the video. Even ten years later Daniel Pearl is named as an example of foreign agents operating in the disguise of journalists in a English language jihadist intelligence operations handbook published by the Global Islamic Media Front:

“The most important for the intelligence is to employ agents as journalists. Then they use taxi drivers, shop owners, etc. However the most common are journalists, an example is Daniel Pearl, who was an agent for the intelligence services in America. When an agent uses such a cover, he is free to travel to any location in the world with the perfect cover. So when he probes and asks people sensitive questions, he is doing his job – as journalist[s] like to get to the inside of any story. Another reason is that is a respectable profession and provides the opportunity to mix with the bureaucrats and senior officials of any country as you will always be interviewing them attending their press conference.”³⁸

Despite the fact that in reality the individuals responsible as well as associated jihadists had been divided about killing Pearl, he was set up in a staged trial. Subjected and forced to a confession, taking personal and direct responsibility for existent grievances in the Islamic world as well as being an American-Jewish spy³⁹ – sent to collect information that would be used against Muslims, making him somewhat of an ‘active’ element in a perceived “war against Islam”. In this regard, too, the video of Daniel Pearl was innovative and conclusive. The film set standards used for jihad videos of this kind until today on a global level, having created a new genre of jihadist propaganda videos.⁴⁰ The alleged ‘truthful’ confession (*i’tiraf*) of the hostage provides the legality and the moral leverage for the execution. Whereas for this genre, the hostage seems to speak in his own words, on his own terms, *confessing* to individual and/or collective crimes committed by outside actors against Islam and Muslims, and then, mostly subsequently, the captors – the *moral defenders* – “implement the ruling of God” (*tanfidh hukm allah*) by executing the individual.

38 Abu Abdallah bin Adam (pseudonym), Class Notes from the Security and Intelligence Course (Global Islamic Media Front. Pakistan: 1432), 5.

39 According to the *Gitmo Files*, the classified files by the United States Government obtained and released by *Wikileaks*, there had been internal divisions regarding the killing of Daniel Pearl. The file of Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, listed as US9KU-010024DP, notes that “Pearl was transferred to detainee’s (i. e. Khalid Shaykh Muhammad) custody”, according to the statement of “al-Qaida operative Sharif al-Masri [who] declared that Sayf al-Adl, a former al-Qaida military commander” spoke out against the killing of Pearl. Muhammad was “in charge of all al-Qaida activities in Karachi at this time. Al-Adl counseled detainee, stating that it would not be wise to murder Pearl. Al-Adl recommended that Pearl be returned back to one of the previous groups who held him, or freed. Al-Adl indicated to Sharif al-Masri, that both detainee and al-Qaida chief financial officer, Shaykh Said al-Masri, disagreed with al-Adl on this point. Pearl was then taken to the house of al-Qaida’s finance chief in Pakistan, Saud Memon, and murdered.” All “Gitmo Files” are available at <http://wikileaks.ch/gitmo/>, accessed March 23, 2012.

40 Beheadings and the filming of executions, by whatever means, is not new and unique but had an influx in 2004 starting with the beheadings of American hostages in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Various examples exist for the jihadist genre, ranging from executions, including beheadings as early as the Balkan War (early 90s) or the cutting of the throats of Russian prisoners in Chechnya (mid-late 90s). But the setting and the framing of such executions for propaganda purposes set a precedent.

As Judith Tinnes writes in her outstanding dissertation, “terrorists place in their medial publications the defenseless prisoners as actors, who neither speak for themselves or act on their behalves. Rather, by coercion, they follow the script of the kidnappers.”⁴¹ Citing Grindstaff and DeLuca, Tinnes further demonstrates the “utilization of hostages”:

“Daniel Pearl’s body is forced to testify on behalf of Islamic fundamentalism, the very force that takes his body. More archly, Islamic fundamentalists take his body in order to make it speak for them, to make the body of Daniel Pearl into a text that testifies to the truth of their power, the truth of their grievances, the truth of their worldview.”⁴²

In the case of the Daniel Pearl video the future for the genre of confession and execution films by jihadists was defined by the portrayed *modus operandi*. Pearl is dehumanized by his confession and he is exhibited as a *prisoner*, who deserves severe punishment for his purported crimes. He is more than a mere captive. He is a lawful prisoner, by and under *shari’a-law* and thus a legitimate criminal in contrast to all Muslim prisoners in the Arab countries held by “apostate governments” – or by the West in prison facilities such as Guantánamo Bay, who are detained without any legal standards. Pearl is to receive a lawful death sentence, a just punishment, even if the full extent of the jihadist corpus of rulings, seemingly backed by *Quran* and *Sunna* as well as ideological validation by historical scholars was yet to be developed and propagated in the coming years, it had already a basis on the writing by Yusuf al-‘Uyairi (2000) and a *fatwa* by Abu Basir al-Tartusi (2000). This, however, did not matter for the video showing the gruesome death of Daniel Pearl, who was murdered by 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaykh Muhammad – according to his confession obtained under torture while in U.S.-custody.⁴³

The video, 11 megabyte in size, opens with a black screen and a caption, written in big white letters in Arabic saying “The *dhabh* (slaughtering) of the American Journalist and Spy Daniel Pearl, the Jew, by the Hands of the National

41 Judith Tinnes, Internetnutzung islamistischer Terror- und Insurgentengruppen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung vonmedialen Geiselnahmen im Irak, Afghanistan, Pakistan und Saudi-Arabien (Saarbrücken: Universität des Saarlandes, 2010), 459.

42 David Allen Grindstaff and Kevin Michael DeLuca, “The Corpus of Daniel Pearl.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2004), 305.

43 The confession is deemed by most jihadists as controversial due to the presumed consequences of his murder. Khalid Shaykh Muhammad was arrested in Pakistan in March 2003. According to *Gitmo Files* by *Wikileaks*, affiliated jihadists feared the “fallout” and “left Karachi following the death of US journalist Daniel Pearl believing association with the LT [*Lashkar-e-Tayyiba*] would place them in jeopardy.” See for example case file US9SU-000719DP, page 4. Mustafa Ibrahim of Sudan (b. 1957), a member of LT, was arrested “attempting to enter Afghanistan with a group of extremists dressed as women”, page 2, trying to evade being arrested in Pakistan for implications in the abduction and slaying of Daniel Pearl.

Movement for the Restoration of Pakistan Sovereignty,”⁴⁴ implying therein Pakistan as a next potential Muslim country for American aggression. Imparted fears of direct occupation and the need to remove the Pakistani government, an early ally on the “war on terror”, are instilled in a fashion that would soon gain prominence for such videos that went viral from Pakistan to Iraq (Nicholas Berg beheading) or Saudi Arabia (beheading of Paul Johnson) – and set precedents. In all cases, the Arabic term *dhabah* and *nahr*, are set with the implications of legitimacy. However, these terms are applied generously in the jihadist propaganda in the portrayal of Muslim victims, such as the case in Syria in times of mass murder by the al-Asad regime or, in a more abstract form with the same sentiment, when portraying Muslims allegedly being butchered in Burma. The active forms of *dhabah* and *nahr* are used with the intention of the *moral defender’s* legitimacy to respond to the massacring (*madhbaha*) and the butchering of Muslims.

The video of Daniel Pearl, however, seemed to have inspired the medial ‘handling’ by first letting the abductee speak, ‘confessing’ for crimes against Islam and Muslims and then justifying therefore the execution. Daniel Pearl’s throat was slit, his neck cut open and then his head was sawn off with the same knife.

The Video of Daniel Pearl – setting the frame of reference

After the written title, the video right away shows Daniel Pearl addressing the audience. He speaks directly into the camera, directly to the viewer. On the left hand side of the video, next to Pearl, various pictures are shown, underlying alleged crimes against Muslims, of which he is sought being part of. He introduces himself as “my name is Daniel Pearl, I am a Jewish American”, stating his address in California. A picture of a deceased baby, probably from Palestine, with an eye patch is faded in. “I come from, uh, on my father’s side the family is Zionist [*sahiyuniyya*]” is emphasized by sequences showing dancing orthodox Jews. “My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish. I’m Jewish. Furthermore, I am Jewish.” This statement is accompanied by a still showing two faces, next to Pearl, who in this setting is shown from the side: a young man in agony carrying another young man’s body in a burial procession with a Palestinian flag in the background. His captors present Pearl’s statement of his Jewish descent as a

44 In the opening of the video the name of the group is shown in Arabic (*jama’at al-harakat al-wataniyya l-isti’ada siyyada Pakistan*) and in the end in English with Arabic subtitles showing what the group “still demands”.

confession. The grievances of the fate of Palestine under *Zionist* occupation are the main theme in this video.



Illustration 4: “My name is Daniel Pearl, I am a Jewish-American”; being blamed for the fate of Palestine

A brief sequence of Muhammad Durra and his father follow⁴⁵, out in the street in despair to shield themselves from bullets fired by the Israeli Defense Forces. Pearl, now again speaking and looking directly into the camera states: “We follow Judaism. We have visited Israel numerous times. Back in the town of Bnei Brak there is a street named after my great grandfather Chaim Pearl who is one of the founders of the town.” A picture of a Palestinian mother looking after the corpse of, what seems to be her infant, is shown and brief sequences are flashing: Palestinian victims of violence in the occupied streets, being taken away by Israeli soldiers. Showing Daniel Pearl from the side, he states: “Not knowing anything about my situation... not being able to communicate with anybody... only now do I think about some of the people in Guantánamo Bay must be in a similar situation... and I’ve come to realize that.”

Parallel to this statement, corpses of Muslims and prisoners are shown. In one still, while Pearls mentions Guantánamo; a picture appears of two U.S.-soldiers taking a captive in his flashing orange jumpsuit away. The flashing orange

45 A controversial issue: “The image of a boy shot dead in his helpless father’s arms during an Israeli confrontation with Palestinians has become the Pietà of the Arab world”. Accessed March 3, 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/06/who-shot-mohammed-al-dura/2735/>.

jumpsuit was, just as much as Guantánamo and later Abu Ghraib in Iraq would be, in the progress of turning into a symbol and an icon of injustice. Manifest as the proof for the moral actions of the jihadists worldwide. Jihadist follow-up groups, such as the *Organization al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula*, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l Jihad* in Iraq or even the *Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen* in Somalia used the powerful symbol of the orange jumpsuit as an effective media strategy, forcing their victims to wear one as a representation of revenge for the unlawfully kept prisoners in western detention centers. Pearl is forced to conclude: "this is the sort of problem that Americans are going to have anywhere in the world now. We can't be secure, we can't walk around free as long as our government policies are continuing and we allow them to continue." A sequence shows an Israeli soldier with a firm grip on a Palestinian juvenile, Pearl, again speaking directly into the camera continues: "We Americans cannot continue to bear the consequences of our government's actions." A sequence of Bush and Sharon shaking hands follows, "such as the unconditional support given to the state of Israel. Twenty-four uses of the veto powers to justify massacres of children." The sequence is emotionally laden by the sequence of a young boy bending over the corpse of an infant – a victim of Israeli aggression. The arguments used here follow the known paradigm of blaming individuals for collective actions – in the case of the jihadists – consisting of the foreign policy of respective countries. As individuals of democratic societies have the right and political obligation to vote, the approval of the policies in regard of continued support for Israel and the backing of Arab dictators is a clear verdict of guilt. Thus, 'guilt' is allocated and distributed, put onto Daniel Pearl in this case, who nevertheless is a "Jewish-American spy." Pearl states: "and the support for the dictatorial regimes in the Arab and left-wing world" is accompanied by pictures of Arab governmental councils that are in the jihadists' understanding mere puppets of the west. The at the time new American military presence in Afghanistan is summarized by flashing images of explosions and corpses. A woman sitting in, what appears to be a primitive hospital is shown and paraphrased as "victims of the American bombardment of Kabul." The picture appears for only about half a second and is followed by the another picture of a deceased infant.

Here the viewer quickly (half a second) has the chance to catch the caption "victims of the U.S.-bombing of Jallalabad." The infant is deceased and bandaged. Two more children, one wounded and staring into the camera and the other deceased are shown before fading out. This short sequence of death and mayhem is paired with audio elements of war: machinegun firing and the sounds of ricochet bullets.

The next sequence shows Daniel Pearl's body. The taped coerced 'con-

profession⁴⁶ of Mr. Pearl matters even more so within the jihadists' frame of reference as he is marked being a Jew. He is forced to take responsibility for the suffering of Muslims in Palestine as well as for the fate of the Guantánamo detainees and connected to the U.S. military actions in Afghanistan. The actual killing is not shown, but his corpse with his throat cut (*dhabh*). His throat is cut wide open and his head, in a similar style to the ritual butchering of animals according to the traditional Islamic principles, held up.



Illustration 5: The head of Daniel Pearl

A man allegedly Khalid Shaykh Muhammad wearing a white T-shirt lifts Daniel Pearl's severed head up in front of his unseen face. On the left a small picture fades in showing the Palestinian burial procession, followed by shackled men in orange jumpsuits kneeling at the Guantánamo detention center and a picture of a man lying on the ground.

The frame freezes and the severed head serves as a further statement to enforce the following text, written in English and Arabic:

“National Movement For The Restoration Of Pakistan Sovereignty (NMRPS)

We still demand the following:

- The immediate release of U.S. held prisoners in Guatinamo Bay, Cuba [sic];

46 Abdelasiem El Difraoui (2010: 236) notes that Omar Shaykh Muhammad, aka Omar Saeed Shaykh, took part in the murder of Daniel Pearl.

- The return of Pakistani prisoners to Pakistan;⁴⁷
- The immediate end of U.S. presence in Pakistan;
- The delivery of F-16 planes that Pakistan [sic] had paid for and never received.
- We assure [sic] Americans that they shall never be safe on the Muslim Land of Pakistan.⁴⁸
And if our demands are not met this scene shall be repeated again and again...”

While the horrible fate of Daniel Pearl has not been the first case of a videotaped decapitation, it seemed to have inspired the developing Sunni jihadist trend led by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq to re-enact and to imitate it, perhaps also in hopes of invoking as much as a global outcry and attention by the international press as the filmed ‘testimony’ of Pearl had.⁴⁹

When al-Zarqawi and his lieutenants, among them Abu Anas al-Shami⁵⁰ killed American contractor Nicholas Berg in Iraq in 2004, the jihadist online outlets were quick to praise and disseminate the filmed execution – within the Online forums and on pro-jihadist websites. Unlike the dissemination of the Pearl video, al-Zarqawi had online jihad forums and websites at hand to ensure the rapid circulation of the video.

While the online *jihad* genre was still unfolding, especially in unison with *The Voice of Jihad* – the first coherent online published magazine by the Saudi al-Qaeda branch – and a flow of improving jihadi videos – the actual filmed beheading of Nicholas Berg set a new and gruesome standard for the media of *jihad*. Nicholas Berg was beheaded after one of the masked men read a statement to the audience, justifying this act. Berg was sitting on the ground, wearing an orange jumpsuit as the detainees are in Guantánamo. Standing behind him were five masked men dressed in black. The Video opened with a short sequence that showed Berg in the jumpsuit addressing the viewers stating his name and origin. Afterwards, Berg was beheaded and his head was held in the camera. While this

47 The Arabic translation shown as captions says “the return of *all* Pakistani prisoners to Pakistan.”

48 In Arabic: “we assure to the Americans that they will never be safe on Pakistani-Islamic grounds [or territories],” possibly emphasizing the Federal Administered Tribal Areas where the Taliban in the following years would evolve after the being driven from power in Afghanistan following US-intervention after 9/11.

49 As detailed in the article, the beheading of nine Russian OMON troops in Chechnya spurred the ideologues’ need to justify such acts. Nevertheless, beheading of prisoners had occurred prior, in the 1980s in Afghanistan as well as in Bosnia in the early nineties and Chechnya (mid- and late nineties). Pictures and clips of executing soldiers by beheading them are online and mostly consist of VHS-taped jihad movies that had been digitalized.

50 Al-Shami was a high-level ideologue. After his death he was eulogized by the Iraqi al-Qaeda al-Furqan media department in the 44th installment of the series *min sira a’lam al-shuhada’*. For more details: Asiem El Difraoui, *Al Qaida par l’image ou la prophétie du martyr*. Une analyse politique de la propagande audiovisuelle du jihad global (PhD diss., Science Po, 2010), 285.

video was disseminated via jihadist forums in 2004, propaganda pictures of this video are to this day visible on the online outlets of the Internet-based *jihad*. One year after the U.S.-led war against the regime of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent occupation of Iraq, Iraqi insurgent groups had been on the rise and particularly the jihadist group *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l Jihad* by Jordanian Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, who would later swear his oath to Osama bin Laden and thus become a part of the globalized al-Qaeda.⁵¹

Iraq: The filmed execution of Nicholas Berg by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi

The original video was placed online on May 11, 2004 and many versions were later re-disseminated. American citizen Nicholas Berg had been abducted in Iraq under circumstances that remain unclear. He had been arrested by Iraqi police, accused of being a Jewish spy due to his name and a Israeli visa in his passport.⁵² He was handed to the coalition authorities during the unraveling Abu Ghraib prison scandal.⁵³ He was reportedly released by Iraqi authorities after being interrogated by the F.B.I. on April 6, 2004⁵⁴ and went missing shortly after. Nicholas Berg re-surfaced in a digital video that – as in the case of Daniel Pearl – was exclusively published online. The video and subsequent killing of Nicholas Berg, potentially inspired by the Pakistani video, set the precedents for the genre of *slaughtering*, of, literally, cutting the throat (*dhabh*). Innovative, however, was that the hostage was dressed up as a Guantánamo inmate, wearing an orange jumpsuit. The original video was entitled *Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi slaughters an American (Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi yadhbah Amriki)*. After al-Zarqawi's gain of fame with the filmed beheading, consequent versions of the very same video include, for example, one with German subtitles, entitled *al-Amir al-Dhabbah Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi Terrorizes the Crusaders and Slaughters (yanhar) their Infidel*⁵⁵ Berg. Being the *amir al-dhabbah*, the *Leader of the Slaughterers*, was and

51 Philipp Holtmann, "Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications and Discussion" (Working Paper, The Institute for Policy and Strategy, Herzliya. Herzliya Conference February 6–9, 2011), 5. Hasan Muhsin Ramadan, *Tashrih al-fikr al-salafi al-mutatarrif* (Damascus: Dar al-Hassad, 2009) 37–42.

52 "Beheaded American was arrested as a spy 'because of his Jewish name'", accessed March 27, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1461743/Beheaded-American-was-arrested-as-a-spy-because-of-his-Jewish-name.html>.

53 "US pledges to catch Berg killers", accessed March 27, 2012. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3706081.stm.

54 "THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: THE VICTIM; Family Charges Military Failed Slain Civilian", accessed March 27, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/13/us/the-struggle-for-iraq-the-victim-family-charges-military-failed-slain-civilian.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

55 *Alj* is a term frequently used for the *occupiers*, the *Godless*, or in the jihadist sense in the

is a title within the jihadist circles of sympathy reserved for Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi who also bears the honorary title, as uttered by Ayman al-Zawahiri after his death, as the *amir al-istishhadiyyin*⁵⁶ – the *Leader of the martyrdom seekers*. The term *amir*, leader, is also used for any local ring- or cell-leader. Naturally, the *amir* is always a role model, personally in charge to propagate jihadist ideology by his actions and deeds. In this particularly case, al-Zarqawi continues being a role model even years after his death by having butchered, in the figuratively meaning of the word, Nicholas Berg in a ritual slaughtering style intended for the butchering of animals. Only men of high social standing are entitled in the classical sense to butcher the animals ritualistically on special occasions. The viewer may be reminded of this, when seeing how al-Zarqawi cuts Berg's throat and lifts his head that at this stage is not severed yet, upwards with blood gushing out.

The video starts with Nicholas Berg, dressed in a Guantánamo styled orange overall sitting in a white plastic chair, introducing himself to the audience. As had been the case with the Daniel Pearl video, Berg speaks English and introduces himself: "My name is Nicholas Berg, my father is Michael, my mother is Susan." 'Lacking' the 'credentials' in the jihadist frame of reference that Pearl had, having been a Jewish-American with Jewish parents, Berg only refers to his parents, his siblings and where he is from (Philadelphia). Although he was Jewish it may be assumed that his killers had not been aware of this,⁵⁷ or had simply been overwhelmed by frantically demanding the release of prisoners incarcerated at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison.

However, unlike the beheading video of Daniel Pearl, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi provides shallow reasoning for the beheading of Nicholas Berg. Unlike Daniel Pearl, Berg neither has to 'testify' or to 'confess' anything. All allegations are made by his murderer, perhaps improving his role as both judge and executor, in a staged trial where the 'criminal' is subjected to wider circumstances of the violent occupation of Iraq. The mere presence of Berg in Iraq, being an American citizen, by all means includes him as an individual in the perception of the

combination of both. Paul Marshall Johnson is entitled being an *alj* as are US-soldiers in Iraq in the al-Furqan production videos. This term is another description of anyone non-Muslim with proposed hostile intentions against Muslims in general.

56 Ayman al-Zawahiri eulogizing al-Zarqawi in an al-Sahab video (2006): Nico Prucha, "Worldwide Online Jihad versus the Gaming Industry Reloaded – Ventures of the Web," in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Vienna: University Press, 2012), 158.

57 "US pledges to catch Berg killers", accessed March 27, 2012. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3706081.stm. His father said that the "fact that his son was Jewish may have exacerbated his predicament. "If there was any doubt that they were going to kill him that probably clinched it, I'm guessing, he said." Referring to his son being Jewish as well as the unfolding prison abuse scandal by US-personnel in Iraq.

occupying, non-Muslim forces. Furthermore, as a non-Muslim, he is illegally residing on Islamic territory.⁵⁸ For the jihadists, this is a verdict in itself carrying the death sentence, although not specifically expressed in the Berg case.⁵⁹ Rather, he is killed for the reason that al-Zarqawi's demands of "releasing some prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison for the sake of this prisoner had been prohibited by the American administration." After Nicholas Berg's introduction, the viewer sees him sitting shackled, still dressed in the notorious orange jumpsuit, on the ground. Standing behind him are five masked men, dressed in black, some armed with assault rifles and wearing tactical military vests (mostly for ammunition clips). Unlike in later videos, the wall behind the masked men is plain and does not bear the flag of the jihadist group. In the middle, exactly behind Nicholas Berg, Abu Mus'ab starts reading out the *bayan*, the statement.⁶⁰ Addressing the "Islamic *umma*" about having been bestowed by God upon with great victory in Fallujah with the "winds of victory",⁶¹ he criticizes his fellow Muslims who refrain from supporting the *Mujahideen*. Al-Zarqawi asks whether there is "any excuse remaining for those who abstain [from *jihad*]?⁶² And how can the free Muslim sleep in peace while he sees Islam being slaughtered (*yadhbah*), while watching the dignity (*karama*) rendered invalid, the disgraceful pictures and the news of the satanic maltreatment of the people of Islam; men and women alike, in the prison of Abu Ghraib?"

The concurrence of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal with the kidnapping of Nicholas Berg meant the death sentence for the American who sought job opportunities in post-Saddam Iraq. Pictures obtained and published by the mainstream media of abused prisoners became the source of new grievances and served as proof of the proposed American-led war against Islam for the jihadists' frame of reference. The visualized ill-treatment of prisoners in Iraq, detained in

58 In some cases, Iraq is deemed by the jihadists as being integral part of the "Arab Peninsula", a territory that is by its nature denied for non-Muslims to enter. See the chapter on the "Staged Trial and Execution of Paul Marshall Johnson".

59 As further discussed, this is had been, for example, the case for Paul Johnson. He was abducted and beheaded by the Saudi al-Qaeda branch in 2004 and had also been killed due to his illegal residing on the Arab Peninsula – a crime for any non-Muslim.

60 After al-Zarqawi's death, a collection of all of his speeches and declaration were published in a electronic document. This was part of the "workshop of the Islamic al-Buraq Forum" entitled "The Complete Archive of the Speeches and Sermons of the Amir al-Istishhadiyyin", published in mid-2006. The transcription of the Berg killing is dated to May 11, 2004 as "a short speech in the filmed butchering of Nicholas Berg."

61 *Riyyah al-nasr* is also the title of a video.

62 For the qa'id, he who remains "sitting" and thus refraining from personal involvement for the divine cause is a sinner and of less value than the firm believer who wages jihad on the path of God. Jihadists, for example notorious ideologue al-'Uyairi, based his claims in the selective reading of Quran 4:95. Yusuf al-'Uyairi, *Hukm al-jihad wa-anwa'ih*. Accessed June 3, 2012. <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=vz8kosys>.

Saddam's interrogation and torture facilities, showing piles of naked men forced upon each other, prisoners treated as dogs, kept on a leash, or the infamous hooded prisoner, standing on a paper box forcing him to stand still as he is connected to electroshocks, became icons that were directly related to mistreatment in Guantánamo.

Thomas Hamill, as based on his account, was abducted on April 9, 2004 in Iraq. He was working as a truck driver for Halliburton supporting the logistics of the U.S.-Army. After his abductors showed him off as a trophy, placed in the back of a car driving around shooting and shouting "Amriki, Amriki", the kidnappers stopped at an international news vehicle forcing Hamill to be briefly interviewed by journalists. Later, when the Abu Ghraib prison scandal hit the local Iraqi news, his conditions deteriorated rapidly:

"One of the guards said to me: "we hear, we see, our people are being abused at Abu Ghraib prison. What do you have to say?" (...) I am thinking, what are they gonna do, take this out on me? I am their prisoner; I am on the other side. What are they going to do to me? Are they going to torture me now?"⁶³ "That night they came in and shackled my hands," says Hamill, "And they shackled my legs with a dog chain."⁶⁴

Furthermore, al-Zarqawi was obsessed by the imagination that Muslimas are being raped and ill treated inside of American-run prison centers. As it were even worse that Saddam had used Abu Ghraib to torture and execute political opponents, including Sunni Islamists,⁶⁵ now a coalition of foreign, mostly non-Muslim armies led by the United States government used the same prison centers to torture and rape, merely having replaced the perceived secular, non-Islamic, local vassal Iraqi government of Saddam for Christian-crusader aggressors. "Where is the wrath (*ghadab*) for the religion of God? And where is the zeal to [protect] the inviolabilities (*hurmat*) of Muslims? Where is the retaliation for the [violated] honor (*'ird*, pl. *a'rad*) of Muslims and Muslimas in the prisons of the crusaders?"

Berg received the death sentence for the collective actions, particularly the foreign policy of his country of origin. The positioning and the make-up of a

63 Thomas Hamill on his account of his abduction in Iraq by the Islamic Army of Iraq in an interview for the National Geographic TV-Series *Locked Up Abroad*, Season 6, Episode 4, "Highway To Hell". Accessed July 4, 2012. <http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/national-geographic-channel/full-episodes/locked-up-abroad/>

64 Thomas Hamill on his Iraq Escape, CBS News. Accessed July 4, 2012. http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500186_162-648445.html.

65 But, and this is completely neglected in the jihadists' notion, it had been Shiites who rose up against Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991 and were subjugated to harsh treatment and random imprisonment. Without US-backing and support, the Shiite uprising in southern Iraq had been brutally crushed by Saddam's forces once the United States and other countries pulled their troops back, ending the second Gulf War in 1991.

Guantánamo prisoner, being responsible for the abuse of Muslims and especially Muslimas in Iraqi prisons, justify his execution, even *without* a ‘confession’. Berg is contextualized in a local – Iraqi – setting. He was killed for Abu Ghraib and the U.S. occupation but propagandized as part of the global cause. An analogy to perceived crimes against Muslims; this was a simple ‘eye-for-an-eye’ reasoning. Berg’s beheading is justified by the beheadings of prisoners taken in the historical battle of Badr by Prophet Muhammad. Speaking to the “scholars of Islam” (*‘ulama’ al-Islam*), referring to what the jihadist comprehend as ‘state-owned’ and ‘paid-off religious authorities’ who issue their sermons and verdicts in unison with their respective governments,⁶⁶ al-Zarqawi states: “for you, *‘ulama’ al-Islam*; for by God we will complain about you or can’t you see that God has indeed established arguments (*hujja*) against you by the youth of Islam that has humiliated the fiercest power in history.” The intermediaries of *jihadism*, whether embodied by characters as Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq in 2004 or by his ideological siblings in the following years, such as Anwar al-Awlaqi in Yemen (d. 2011), Attiyatullah al-Libi in Pakistan (d. 2011) or Abu Dujana al-Khurasani (d. 2009),⁶⁷ seek to segregate Muslims into their propagated “truth” (*haqq*) versus “falsehood” (*batil*) scheme. By his actions, by implementing acts supposedly backed by divine commandments, the jihadist and his fellows deem themselves as the only true or pure Muslims, in contrast to other Muslims. The *youth*, the *shabab al-Islam*, are the steadfast core of the *Mujahideen* who comprehend the “truth” and accept the religious authoritative – older and thus of higher social standing – figures of jihad and thereby, idealistically, distance themselves from any ‘state-owned’ Islamic scholars. As such, al-Zarqawi and his ideological surrounding, including most prominently Abu Anas al-Shami,⁶⁸ seek

66 This accusation is often expressed for the Saudi scholars at the time, who in most cases had publicly recanted writings and *fatwas* issued previously – before 9/11 or the 2003 Iraq-war.

67 Abu Dujana al-Khurasani gained prominence and a legendary status for tricking the Central Intelligence Agency in Khost, Afghanistan. Believing to be the perfect asset in the war on terror, the CIA recruited al-Khurasani, Hummam al-Balawi. He was a medical doctor from Jordan, but of Palestinian origin. Instead of working for the CIA, he used the trust he had gained to kill seven American agents and his Jordanian handler when he was invited for a meeting at the American military base Chapman. His martyrdom-operation was well planned, his testimonies and appeals to the *umma* televised and prepared before the deadly attack.

68 Hazim al-Amin, Al-Salafiyyat al-yatim – Al-Wajha al-filastiniyya li-“l-jihad al-alamī” wa-“l-Qaeda” (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2011), 114 – 127. Abu Anas al-Shami was a renowned ideologue and a vital figure for al-Zarqawi and his group. He was a Palestinian based in Jordan. He grew up in Kuwait, where arguably many Palestinian workers and engineers had been exposed to the strict teachings and interpretations of the Saudi dominated Arab Peninsula Islam. Experiencing war and expulsion again, the Palestinian migrants, who nevertheless had been refugees in Jordan and who had come to Kuwait in pursuit of economical opportunities, had to flee back to Jordan with the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait in 1990, taking the Arab Peninsula Salafism with them. As the PLO sided with Saddam Hussein, the Palestinians lost

to reach out to a greater audience. Capitalizing on the weariness of pro-governmental Islamic scholars, jihadist ideologues and leaders seek being driving forces and identity markers of the operationalized ideology of al-Qaeda they ultimately sanction, extend and put into practice. As the jihadist assumes the moral high grounds as defenders of a greater and a legitimate cause, his actions of violence are deemed as being just and the executor is a moral defender against profanity. The *shabab*, oftentimes referred to in the jihadist literature and the videos as the remarkable examples of morality who have joined this legitimate cause in the cosmological fight are by al-Zarqawi furthermore designated as those, who the illegitimate ‘*ulama*’ should follow. Dethroning the classical role of any scholar, the mostly elder and well educated authorities should now accept the actions of the youth as their guidance:

“Isn’t it time for you to learn from them [the youth] the meaning of relying on God (*tawakkul*)⁶⁹ and by their deeds learning a lesson in regard of sacrifice and devotion (*fida*).⁷⁰ How much longer are you going to hide like women, not able to understand anything else but a slap in the face, not knowing any other way but only that of weeping and crying?”

Al-Zarqawi tries to exploit the role of the hypocritical Islamic scholar further by providing examples:

“This one here eagerly turns to the free of the world! This one runs off to complain at Kofi Annan⁷¹; the third one throws himself before Amr Moussa⁷². The fourth demands peaceful demonstrations!⁷³ They indeed have not listened to His, exalted is He, saying: “Prophet, urge the believers to fight.”⁷⁴”

With Nicholas Berg placed on the ground in front of him as subsequent hostages prior to their execution, al-Zarqawi “asks of you [the ‘*ulama*’] to not judge us as you usually do and thus please the Americans.” For “the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him –, the master of those who are merciful, decreed to strike the

their base in Kuwait and in most cases returned to the refugee camps of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and elsewhere.

69 *Tawakkul* – relying on God – is part of the comprehensive belief systems in where the believer, by his firm trust and devotion to God, attributes everything to God.

70 *Fida* in the sense of self-sacrifice and devotion without limits i. e. taking physical death for granted. *Fida* also means “ransom” as used by most Quran translators.

71 The United Nations General Secretary at the time.

72 Referring to the Egyptian diplomat and Secretary-General of the Arab League.

73 Ironically, the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 led to the ousting of Mubarak in Egypt, the killing of Qadhafi in Libya and a growing armed insurgency against the al-Asad regime in Syria. Where AQ failed, mostly peaceful protestors – and in the case of Libya, armed resistance with the aid of NATO – succeeded. Criticizing peaceful means, the jihadists later sought to exploit the Arab Spring and peaceful protests as part of the fight of AQ.

74 First part of 8:65, widely propagated as a divine command for incitement (*tahrid*), including the means of modern communications technologies.

necks of some prisoners of the battle of Badr, killing them slowly.⁷⁵ And thus, we have a fine role model.” This is the only reference al-Zarqawi provides justifying for the beheading of the ‘prisoner’. Although beheadings were criticized, it became a fashion that is still used by jihadist groups particularly in the Afghan-Pakistani border region as of 2012.⁷⁶ Directing his address to U.S.-President Bush as well as to the “puppet, the traitor Pervez Musharraf” of Pakistan, the occupation of Iraq is pictured by Zarqawi as something that the enemies are going to regret. In 2004, during the ongoing the war in Afghanistan against the Taliban,⁷⁷ who staged a highly successful guerilla war against NATO troops inside and particularly outside of the Afghan cities,⁷⁸ Pakistan allowed U.S.-drones to hunt Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives in the neighboring tribal areas of Waziristan. In the following years, the war in the frontier region increased drastically while al-Zarqawi’s vision, part of the justification of killing Berg, became a reality:

“We say to him that we are graving with the greatest [impatience to meet your (Pakistani)] soldiers and by God, we will want them even before the Americans. We are going to revenge the blood of our brothers in Wana [Waziristan] and elsewhere.”

Finally, al-Zarqawi addresses the “mothers and wives of the American soldiers: “we say to you that we offered to the American administration to savior this prisoner by [releasing] some of the prisoners [detained] at the Abu Ghraib facility – but they declined. And we say to you that the dignity (*karama*) of Muslims and Muslimas in the Abu Ghraib Prison and elsewhere will be repaid by blood and by the lives [of your soldiers]. You won’t be getting anything else from us other than casket by casket and coffin by coffin, slaughtered, just like this – *allahu akbar!*”

Immediately after shouting *allahu akbar*, al-Zarqawi grabs Nicholas Berg’s head, with a knife drawn and the five masked men joining the continuous

75 *wa-qatluhum sabran*

76 After the influx of beheading videos, contemporary videos have the habit of showing the prisoner(s) confessing before being executed – which in most cases, especially the Arab jihadist films, is not shown but rather stated. Criticism was also expressed by a pro-jihadist scholar only revealing himself as “Abu Sarah” on the radical website of said.net. His main concern, as later described in greater detail, was that the violent end of Nicholas Berg was counterproductive for *da’wa* and for Islam as most peoples’ opinion would simply turn sour in regards of the *Mujahideen*.

77 As the Taliban had been ousted in Afghanistan by the military intervention when demands to extradite Osama bin Laden after 9/11 had not been met, the Taliban began a bloody and effective insurgency against the Americans and, with the involvement of NATO, allied countries. In technical terms of the United States Armed Forces, the insurgents (mostly Taliban) have to be combatted, branding the military engagement of a counterinsurgency nature, or COIN. For further reading on the various COIN policies: Chaudhuri, Rudra / Farrell, Theo: Campaign Disconnect: Operational Progress and Strategic Obstacles in Afghanistan, 2009 – 2011, Manuscript, published in: *International Affairs*, 87:2 (2011).

78 With repeating high profile attacks inside of the Afghan cities, including Kabul.

screaming of *allahu akbar*. Berg is heard squalling in despair; the masked men converge on his shackled body, lying on the ground. At least two men hold his feet and push his tied arms behind his back on the ground while al-Zarqawi cuts his throat open. Berg screams and his murderers shout *allahu akbar* over and over again, the more so in response to Nicholas Berg's final groans, with the blood gushing out. With Berg's head almost severed – al-Zarqawi was using a relatively small knife – his head is pulled up and finally cut off. The viewer is reminded of the butchering of cattle by the ritual Islamic code whereas the animal's throat is cut, its head pulled up to bleed out more quickly.

One of the men, before the severance of Berg's head shouts takbir, to which the group chants in reply *allahu akbar*. The severed head is lifted up high and held proudly into the camera, as a trophy. The last sequences shows Berg's head placed on his back, the camera moving to the neck, showing a large pool of blood.



Illustration 6: Berg's head as a trophy; original video screenshot

In the transcription of this video, published shortly after the death of al-Zarqawi by the – at the time functioning and popular – *Islamic al-Boraq Forum*, the editor notes for the reader:

“and here the *shaykh* Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi – may God have mercy with him – undertakes the slaughtering of Nicholas Berg. After his butchering, your brothers the *Mujahideen* hung the corpse of this atheist *kafir* on one of the bridges of Baghdad;

being an unprecedented example of the atheists and visible proof for the might of Muslims.”⁷⁹

Extreme images of violence are attractive and used within online *jihad* discourses by technical able sympathizers who often times ‘re-craft’ or ‘enhance’ such stills taken from the jihadist footage for their personal propaganda. And share it within the forums with the like-minded.

Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi as well as his group attained a legendary status, fighting the Americans – the most severe “enemies of Islam” – on all fronts in Iraq. Resisting the occupation, kidnapping and executing an actual American citizen, almost in unison with AQAP kidnapping the American engineer Paul Marshall Johnson in Saudi Arabia, continues to inspire many sympathizers on the Internet to this day. This finds its expression in the crafting of homemade propaganda pictures. In a picture published on the *Shumukh al-Islam* Forum (2011) the beheading of Berg is recalled. The picture, showing bloodstains on what appears to be papyri styled paper, with Arabic letters imprinted, in the background reads:

“Oh enemies of God! The majority of us are passionate, sensitive and disgusted to see the blood of one of you arousing this pleasure of him being slaughtered while your blood run like torrents irrigating [our] terrain like rivers.”⁸⁰

As already noted, the barbaric act of the slaughtering of Nicholas Berg by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi was also criticized by Islamic scholars – including those of the Islamist and jihadist spectrum.

“An Opinion Regarding the Slaughtering of the American Prisoner” – Abu Sarah criticizes Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi

The killing of Nicholas Berg caused a great impact on the western and non-western mainstream media. With al-Zarqawi’s doubtful fame, criticism of the beheading arose. One critique of the filmed beheaded was published in a fatwa-styled response by Abu Sarah. The writing “Opinion regarding the slaughtering (*dhabh*) of the American prisoner” is written in a relatively neutral style and was published by the author on Saaid.net, an Arabic language website dedicated to

79 This statement, not mentioned or by any way part of any version of the video, may remind the reader of the mutilated and burnt bodies of the two American mercenaries, hung from a bride in the city of Fallujah in March 2004, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-06-10-fallujah-deaths_N.htm. The jihadi-media aware consumer may feel reminded of the video *Sawt al-Jihad*, published in mid-2004 by the *Islamic Army in Iraq* where the attack on the two mercenaries is shown and a third American, truck-driver Thomas Hamill, taken hostage.

80 The image was published by a user in the *Shabakat al-shumukh al-Islam* forum, end of 2011.



Illustration 7: The still enhanced in 2011: fan-made art

the *salafist* and *jihadist* cause.⁸¹ Abu Sarah, a *shaykh* who publishes frequently on Saaid.net, neither criticizes the hostage taking of Nicholas Berg nor his killing, but rather only concentrates on questioning the execution by beheading and the filming thereof. He refers to Nicolas Berg only as “the prisoner” (*al-asir*) and never judges the permissibility of al-Zarqawi abducting him. His eight-page long writing follows a classical structure: At first Abu Sarah describes how the Prophet had dealt with prisoners in some cases, without being very detailed. Relating to verses of the Quran, certain conditions and handling of prisoners are decreed next to the Muhammad’s habits based on historical accounts. He seems mostly concerned about the filmed beheading of Berg that may distort the view on Islam and jeopardize *da’wah* (missionary) ambitions due to a negative image of Islam broadcast on the mainstream news as al-Zarqawi claims this as a legitimate Islamic act. Also, showing the act of the killing is not approved, rather Abu Sarah advises to show the alive prisoner and only his corpse after the execution. This has become a *modus operandi* implemented nowadays in Yemen where the actual killing is not filmed while the prisoner prior to the execution is portrayed and the execution justified. In some cases the Yemeni video footages show pictures of the bodies. Arguably, the staging of a trial, by showing a prisoner and forcing him to confess, while the act of killing is not shown, is the modus of most *jihad* videos nowadays of this genre. This also applies to groups

81 Saaid.net is one of the oldest pro-jihadist websites on the net. It hosts, for example religious decrees and writings of Saudi *shaykh* Humud bin Uqla’ al-Shu’aybi, a pro-jihadist cleric who is frequently cited. It also hosts writings of the literal genre of the martyrs, such as the collected tales of Arab martyrs in Bosnia.

such as the “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” who in their videos often show captured Pakistani soldiers and in a later sequence the severed heads.

In general, the question revolves for Abu Sarah around the permissibility of showing the actual execution and he criticizes the “slaughtering of the prisoner by knife, just as an animal is slaughtered.”⁸² The overall intention and the obligation for defensive actions against any occupying army of Islamic territories is not questioned, for “the truth is, there is no objection to the *jihad* against the occupiers of the Islamic countries. It certainly is an obligation (*fard*), and the *umma* is sinful if it stays quiet or surrenders. For *jihad* bears killing and combat, it comprises captives and prisoners; indeed this is beneficial for Islam.”⁸³

1. Killing the prisoner (*qatl al-asir*);
2. or: keeping the prisoner detained (*al-ibqa’ ‘alayhi*);
3. or: to act in his favor (*al-mannu ‘alayhi*)”⁸⁴ releasing the prisoner.”

Abu Sarah refers two verses as “proof for the three conditions, based on Quran and *Sunna*:

“When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the neck, and once they are defeated, bind any captives firmly – later you can release them as a grace⁸⁵ or for ransom – until the toils of war have ended.” (47:4)⁸⁶

Abu Sarah, however, provides his own *tafsir* on the verse, writing that it describes “two circumstances: in favor [for the prisoner], that is pardoning him (*al-‘afu*). And ransom (*al-fida*’), meaning receiving pay prior to releasing the prisoner.” Abu Sarah furthermore relates this subsequently to 8:67:

“And by His speech, exalted He is: “It is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has conquered the battlefield. You [people] desire the transient goods of this world, but God desires the Hereafter [for you];” – referring to “the third condition: killing [the prisoner].”

82 Abu Sarah, “*Rai fi dhabh al-asir al-amriki!!?*” Saaid.net. Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.saaaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/126.htm, 3. The author signed his writing with his e-mail address (abu_sarah@maktoob.com). All of his writings can be accessed at http://www.saaaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/index.htm.

83 Lit.: “Of interest to [further] Islam” – *wa-qadd yakun min maslahat al-Islam*.

84 Abu Sarah, “*Rai fi dhabh al-asir al-amriki!!?*” Saaid.net. Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.saaaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/126.htm, 1.

85 M.A.S Abdel Haleem notes: “Commentators highlight the fact that ‘grace’ is the first of the two options given here, concluding that this is the preferred or recommended course of action.”

86 This verse was used by the first generation Saudi-based AQAP in May 2004 as an introduction to the “statement regarding the American prisoner Paul Marshall Johnson and the conditions of his release”.

These are the core verses used to justify and sanction the killing of prisoners by the ideologues, foremost by Saudi ideologue Yusuf al-'Uyairi.

After the battle of Badr, fought in March 647 against the Quraysh,⁸⁷ a great number had been taken prisoner by the Muslims. "For God mildly admonished his prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – by his capturing of [some] of the *mushrikin* [idolators]⁸⁸ in the [battle of] Badr. He was counseled by his companions, Abu Bakr – may God be pleased with him – advocating to offer ransom for the prisoners." As most prisoners of the Quraysh were either wealthy themselves or had ties to the rich class of Mecca, consisting of industrious businessmen engaged in trade, this notion had both: practical and reconciliatory essence. 'Umar, the second Caliph succeeding Abu Bakr after the death of Muhammad, however, "advised the Prophet to kill them." This statement is the ultimate basis for most *jihadi* ideologues, such as Abu Yahya al-Libi, to justify the execution of mostly non-Muslim prisoners. As Nicholas Berg being a non-Muslim defined as a prisoner, he is equated to the 'handling' of the historical *mushrikin*. By his advice to kill the prisoners, "supporting inspiration was revealed by 'Umar's opinion, as is generally known. And verily, Muslims have implemented these two legacies practically." 'Umar's advice to Muhammad is for most jihadist scholars a written corpus and ultimate proof, neglecting Abu Bakr,⁸⁹ serving as judicial precedencies for their legal decrees and the propagated codes of conduct. Abu Yahya al-Libi exploits a statement made by 'Umar to behead Hatib ibn al-Balta'a, a companion of the prophet who was deemed a spy when he had attempted to send a letter to his family in Mecca, prior to the attack by Muslims⁹⁰ legitimizing the execution of Muslim spies in general. Abu Sarah argues in a similar fashion, referring to the historical outcome of the battle at Badr and the dealing of the prophet with non-Muslim prisoners. Abu Sarah seeks to portray the historical conditions first, before relating to the killing of Nicholas Berg in 2004:

"The Muslims had taken 70 *mushrikin* as prisoners at Badr. Some of them freed themselves by paying ransom or by teaching the children of the *al-Ansar* how to read and write. The prophet treated them well, but some of them he commanded to be killed, not granting them any excuse or pardon. Whereas when they exaggerated themselves in

87 Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Dschihad "Sawt al-gihad": al-Qaeda's erstes Online-Magazin* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010), 40.

88 For an explanation in the context of executing non-Muslims consult the following chapter on the Paul Marshall Johnson case in Saudi Arabia.

89 Yusuf al-'Uyairi, on the other hand, provides an account where Abu Bakr had been the main driving force to deny captured Quraysh to be freed for a ransom and rather be killed.

90 Abu Yahya al-Libi, "*Al-Mu'allim fi hukm al-jasus al-muslim*" (Markaz al-Fajr li-l'i'lam, 2009). Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl/?i=y34deswq>, 46–47. Joas Wagemakers, "Defining the Enemy: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Radical Reading of Surat al-Mumtahana." *Die Welt des Islams* 48 (2008), 348–371.

wronging God, His prophet, and the believers by throwing the innards of a sheep at the prophets head”, they had been killed.

As a tactic, perhaps, the worst enemies could not be pardoned and were subsequently executed, which in some cases seems a natural part of any conflict or war. Many accounts, however, are available whereas former enemies became Muslims and gained prominent positions after the fall of Mecca and the spread of Islam beyond the Arab Peninsula.

In a similar example, Abu Sarah tries to explain the reasoning of the prophet, who, after “the conquest of Mecca provided its people with security and pardon.” Four individuals are named as an exception, “two men and two women, their blood decreed as legal, even if they were intertwined with the curtains of the Ka’ba”, meaning that by any cost these four were sanctioned to die. “Ibn Khattal was killed at the Ka’ba and Ibn Sababah in the *suq* of Mecca.” The other two, Akramah bin Abu Jahl and Ibn Abu al-Sarrah were saved “when they came before the prophet, arriving safely, then accepting Islam. And this is the habit of the prophet with prisoners, depending on the conditions and the people.”

Both, the execution as well as the pardoning of prisoners is dependent on varying factors:

- “Those, who have intensified their hostility [against Islam] are obligatory to be killed by Muslims – just as the case of Aqaba [who threw the innards of the sheep at the prophet] and Ibn Khattal.
- And for those who are unlike Aqaba; Muslims are allowed to treat them with kindness and favor.”
- This, however, can also apply to those who had been fierce opponents before. “For if they abandon their way, refrain from fighting, Muslims are obligated to treat him beneficial with pardon, just as the Prophet had with Akrama when he converted to Islam at the hands of Muhammad.”⁹¹

But how is this the case “regarding the slaughtering of the prisoner [Nicholas Berg] with a knife and by publishing [a video] showing him being alive in the general media?” Abu Sarah declares three opinions serving as the legal foundation for the execution of prisoners:

1. “For [taking and executing prisoners] is part of *jihad* as commanded by God with the intention to fight the enemy combatant. There is no particular manner.
2. Terrorizing (*irhab*) the enemy and persecuting his allies⁹² is part to compel the occupant to depart. This also applies to any allies.

91 Abu Sarah, “*Rai fi dhabh al-asir al-amriki!!?*” Saaid.net. Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.saaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/126.htm, 3.

92 The rhetoric reminds of Quran 8:57: “make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them” and was also used – and introduced into the jihadist sphere – by the Saudi AQAP branch in 2004 and their electronic magazine *Sawt al-Jihad*. Referring to the writings of Yusuf al-Uyairi and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin in their reasoning of punishing individuals for

3. Another part [of taking prisoners and killing them] serves as a relief for the chests of the believers (*shifa' lamma fi sudur al-mu'minin*) easing their pain caused by the enmities by the enemy against the lives and the honor (*i'rad*) [of the Muslims].”

All means are legitimate to fight the enemies occupying Islamic territories, even more so when the aggressors are non-Muslim. Therefore “there is no objection to the killing of the enemy combatant, even when he is a prisoner. This is legally approved.” For Nicholas Berg having been an American, kidnapped in Iraq during the occupation by mostly American-forces, Abu Sarah, as al-Zarqawi had, approximates him to the status of prisoner of war, suggesting Berg was involved in direct or indirect hostilities or espionage. Abu Sarah, however, objects to the video of the execution, marking two main points:

1. “The slaughtering of the prisoner by a knife, just as animals are slaughtered.
2. The dissemination of the filmed operation of the slaughtering (*amaliyat al-dhabah*) via the mainstream media, [showing Nicholas Berg] alive and calm.”

Abu Sarah refers to the mainstream media, perhaps not having been aware of the digital clips published by al-Zarqawi's *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l Jihad* group online at the time. The video was re-published and shown by some media outlets in full, with the scene of the beheading dominating media reporting regarding Iraq for weeks. And for Abu Sarah this seems to be a dilemma. While he approves the kidnapping and killing of any ‘prisoner of war’, he disapproves of the depicted violence by butchering a prisoner as if he were an animal, butchered following the Islamic tradition. Rather, he proposes, “if there is any benefit in executing the prisoner, when his aggressions in the war against God and His messenger are known, so kill him by shooting him, or in a similar manner. There is no objection whatsoever. But the problem consists of his execution in such a manner. For the reason to object to this manner of execution is due to the following fault for Islam and Muslims alike.” Abu Sarah provides three main arguments, with the main problem being that any missionary efforts (*da'wah*) are more complicated with the media attention on violent aspects of Islam. “For in the world are people who haven't heard of Islam anything but distorted facts (...). When they watch the slaughtering of the prisoner by a knife, won't this affect them negatively in their view on Islam and won't they consider our religion as greedy for blood?”⁹³ Furthermore, the brutal slaying may not only distort the opinion on Islam but rather may misguide any western sympathy against the U.S. led occupation of Iraq. “There are plenty of sympathizers for the cause of the Muslims, those who

collective actions, as described in the case of Paul Johnson and the ideological-operational reasoning of Yusuf al-'Uyairi.

93 Abu Sarah, “*Ra'i fi dhabh al-asir al-amriki!!*” Saaid.net. Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.saaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/126.htm, 4 – 5.

criticized the occupation of Iraq, who demonstrated in the countries supporting it. If those watch this kind of vendetta, they may rise up against Muslims, believing the lies that Islam has barbaric elements.” Finally, it allows the enemies to mistreat any Muslim prisoner following the ‘eye-for-an-eye’ reasoning, neglecting the statement by al-Zarqawi who killed Nicholas Berg for the mistreatment of Muslim prisoners in Abu Ghraib. But it “gives the enemies the justification the treat the Muslims likewise, sanctioning their slaughtering, being convinced that no Muslim approves of mercy, even if he would indeed love the death of a *Mujahid*.” For the interrelated elements of *qital* (combat) and *da’wah* (missionizing) are disturbed by these harsh scenes of violence that Abu Sarah relates to the slaughtering of animals. The ideal is twofold, while the *Mujahideen* have obligations to fulfill:

“First: Terrorizing the enemy (*irhab al-’adu*), in order to compel him out, forcing him to withdraw from the countries of the Muslims;

second: [acting according to the] interest of Islam (*maslahat al-Islam*); by conducting *da’wah* among the people, by missionizing them (*tabshirihim*) and by arousing sympathy.

The only criticism is due to apparent mistreatment of Nicholas Berg by beheading him like an animal, thus complicating *da’wah* efforts worldwide and possibly loosing public support by western societies opposing the occupation of Iraq.

“For it may be that those who slaughtered the prisoner only saw things with one eye: terrorizing the enemy. They haven’t looked at it with the other eye, the *da’wa* for Islam, that requires tolerance and forgiveness, or abstaining from excessive use of force in combat and revenge [operations]. The Muslim must always conduct *da’wa* for God, by all means, even by waging his *jihad*, he calls to Islam.”⁹⁴

This comprises of showing good will to the prisoner, as mentioned, including to release or to pardon them. In the particular case “like this American prisoner, it would have been possible to display Islam to him”, with all the good elements contained in the social- and traditional habitus. “For if he would have become a Muslim, he would have been a brother in religion, understanding that practicing Islam is impossible without one’s own free will (*tawa’iyya*), persuasion (*qana’a*) and consent, free of any coercion. He would have been released, no matter if he had converted to Islam or not.” The impact would have been greater than just “terrorizing the enemy” – Abu Sarah is more concerned about the global impact on Islam and the potential havoc a negative image can have for future missionary efforts. He seeks to emphasize the missionary angles worldwide:

94 Abu Sarah, “*Rai fi dhabh al-asir al-amriki!!?*” Saaid.net. Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.saaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/126.htm, 6.

“And how would the case have been if this prisoner had been released and then would have returned home to his folk? How would he, his family, and the world have seen Muslims? Peoples oppressed by injustice, their territories occupied by the enemy, able to grab prisoners but bestowing upon them mercy and forgiveness.”⁹⁵

For the proposed greater good of Islam was violated “by killing this prisoner with a knife and by publishing the film. Rather, the opposite happened”; his execution is – again – advised by Abu Sarah by firing squad instead of being beheaded on digital tape. “The enemy was terrorized, independent of his death and of the filming of his corpse.” But cases vary and each must be dealt with individually, as prophet Muhammad had. Abu Sarah cautions the overall use of pardoning prisoners after all. “For pardoning this prisoner [Berg], would not have meant by all chances the destruction of the believers, and leading them astray, granting victory to the enemy; for those of the occupiers, who have penetrated the territory of Iraq everywhere, with their war machinery and their armored vehicles, they are the main objectives of every *Mujahid*. Pursued by anyone who wishes to cleanse the Muslim territories of the occupier. For any success against them is termed as healing for the chests of the believers” The *Mujahideen*, however, must be considered as those acting “for the interest [of Islam], by the means of terrorizing the enemy, for they are the people of the battlefields of *jihad*. For those who are far away from these battlefields, shall not say they are neither supporting them nor wanting to join.” Abu Sarah doesn’t disapprove of the *jihad* in Iraq and never refers to al-Zarqawi or any *jihadist* group. Instead, he seeks to assume an authoritative role by providing guidance to the overall readership at the *saaid.net* website, who nevertheless are in ideological proximity to the extreme and hardline online spheres of *jihadism*.

“This criticism of this act [of beheading Nicholas Berg] is not an objection to waging *jihad* against the occupier. Neither is the critic in any way a supporter (*mawal*)⁹⁶ to the disbelievers (*kuffar*)”, but he stresses to consider his arguments and to understand the *Mujahideen* as what they are: “just people who make mistakes in their judgment, so don’t assume that they are infallible.”⁹⁷

95 Abu Sarah (p.6) also relates the demands of the Iraqi *ulama*’ to release some prisoners, arguing that this sign of forgiveness is more beneficial to Islam, and to conduct (in-) direct *da’wa* worldwide. Islam would be more renown so “that the people would understand and convert”.

96 The term *mawal* comprises the essential understanding of greater dependencies such as “client” or in any other way being possibly “loyal” to the disbelievers. This would imply a decrease of Abu Sarah’s faith and thus lower his status as a believer.

97 Abu Sarah, “*Rai fi dhabh al-asir al-amriki!!?*” Saaid.net. Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.saaid.net/Doat/abu_sarah/126.htm, 9.

Saudi Arabia – The Legality of Killing Westerners on the Arab Peninsula

About two months after the brutal video of the Nicholas Berg slaying went viral on the Internet, the first generation Saudi-based *Organization al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula* (AQAP) announced the “kidnapping of an American aviation engineer and the killing of another.”⁹⁸ The kidnapping was undertaken by a well-established and approved AQ branch, whose main ideologue and leader, Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, had been a bodyguard for Osama bin Laden.⁹⁹ His ideological framework justified and sanctioned the kidnapping and subsequent beheading. Perhaps inspired by al-Zarqawi’s *Jama’at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* group in Iraq, AQAP foresaw the need to conduct a similar media-effective execution operation by later beheading Paul Marshall Johnson. However, the filmed slaughtering of Nicholas Berg was embedded in a narrative of revenge and grievances suffered by Muslims particularly in Iraq and the Abu Ghraib Prison.

In the 13th statement published in the – at the time – bi-monthly first electronic jihadi magazine *Sawt al-Jihad, The Voice of Jihad*, AQAP declared the kidnapping of US-citizen and U.S. Air Force contractor Paul Marshall Johnson on June 13, 2004 and the murder of Kenneth Scroggs. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin ‘Aisa al-Muqrin, who gained fame by his alias Abu Hajir al-Muqrin, was the leader of AQAP after his predecessors had all been killed, including high-profile ideologue Yusuf al-‘Uyairi. He was the mastermind behind the Johnson kidnapping and had prior resorted to targeting westerners inside the Saudi kingdom in a bid to expand the jihadist fields of operations from Iraq into the Islamic heartland, the Arab Peninsula, termed as the “soil Muhammad” (*ard Muhammad*) in jihadist speak.¹⁰⁰ In 2004, at the height of the Sunni jihadist resistance to the American occupation of Iraq and two consecutive massive close quarters combat battles inside and surrounding the Iraqi city of Fallujah, AQAP sought to destabilize neighboring Saudi Arabia and called out “to not go to Iraq”¹⁰¹, and rather start a

98 *Sawt al-Jihad* number 19, page 9. For a thorough description and commented translations on these statements and the *Sawt al-Jihad* in general, Nico Prucha: *Die Stimme des Dschihad – Sawt al-jihad: al-Qaidas erstes Online Magazin*, Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2010.

99 The first leader, Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, had been bin Laden’s bodyguard and accompanied him to Sudan and allegedly participated in fighting the Americans in 1993 in Sudan. The second leader, the Yemeni Khalid Hajj, was also a member of bin Laden’s security detail. For al-‘Uyairi’s biography: *Sawt al-Jihad* number 1, pp. 16–19; number 2, b15–18; the martyrdom of Khalid Hajj is detailed in the 8th memorandum of the *Sawt al-Jihad* (number 13, 15).

100 A definition frequently used for the Saudi Kingdom where Islam’s two most holy sites, in Mecca and Medina, are located. For example: *Sawt al-Jihad* number 18, 22

101 *Sawt al-Jihad* number 7.

violent uprising in the kingdom.¹⁰² After the kidnapping of Nicholas Berg by the at the time non-affiliated AQ group of al-Zarqawi, AQAP copied the medial *modus operandi* and exhibited the victim Paul Marshall Johnson in a similar fashion, but with a more grave and detailed narrative framework. With the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Americans became the primary and most prestige target of jihadist groups. The massive troop presence, with all its logistical personnel and sub-contractors,¹⁰³ exposed American and foreign citizens, mostly non-Muslims, in Iraq to insurgent operations. While most insurgent operations are undertaken by hidden Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), car bombs, hit-and-run missions, sniper attacks and – most prominently – martyrdom operations (*al-amaliyat al-istishhadiya*), the ideological and tactical-operational necessity to take hostages became evident. AQAP was clearly a sanctioned branch of AQ approved by the central leadership residing in Afghanistan and Pakistan. AQAP was set up and operationalized by combat veterans who had either known bin Laden personally, such as AQAP's main ideologue and leader Yusuf al-'Uyairi, or veterans like Abu Hajir among others who had managed to escape the U.S. forces in Afghanistan and also the persecution in neighboring Pakistan.¹⁰⁴ The veterans were essential in providing a new generation with the ideological writings and sanctioning in the framework of global jihadist reasoning in combination with the practical handwork of guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics. Prominent ideologues, such as Abu Jandal al-Azdi (Faris al-Zahrani), had been vital elements of AQAP and a successful novelty, being an operative and a main ideologue boosted online by all means.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, AQAP did not lack a proper and comprising ideological framework reasoning and justifying kidnappings and executions, as set by Yusuf al-'Uyairi and the following electronic magazine *The Voice of Jihad*.

Paul Marshall Johnson was 'tried' and sentenced to death for a number of reasons. The argumentation and the justification had been detailed in writing by memoranda and statements, while the videos sought to underline the jihadists'

102 As stated by Abu Hajir al-Muqrin in his interview for the *Sawt al-Jihad* and by various articles such as "Do not go to Iraq!", published in the seventh edition of the magazine (23 – 25).

103 Contractors and sub-contractors, workers in general hired by the US-Army in Iraq became the target of various insurgent factions and jihadist groups in general. For example the execution of 12 Nepalese workers in 2005 and the kidnapping and execution of a Japanese soldier by *al-Ansar* in Iraq was defended and legitimized by senior operatives and the leadership in the video *Shadd al-wathaq* (2011).

104 Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Dschihad "Sawt al-gihad"*: al-Qaeda's erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010), 55 – 62.

105 Joas Wagemakers, "Al-Qaeda's Editor: Abu Jandal al-Azdi's Online Jihadi Activism." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12 (2011): 355 – 369. Nico Prucha, *Jihad on the Internet – The Anomalous Case of Abu Jandal al-Azdi*. Accessed June 6, 2012. <http://www.univie.ac.at/jihadism/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Prucha-Version1.pdf>.

demands. Johnson was working for the United States Air Force and thus personally made responsible for the deaths of Muslim civilians. Therefore, in the jihadists' reasoning, Johnson was a criminal with blood on his hands. Furthermore, Johnson was illegally residing on the Arab Peninsula, thus violating the ultimate ideological fundamental of AQAP who claimed of exercising prophet Muhammad's testimony to "expel the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula." Another distinction is the condition of Johnson's release, when a clear ultimatum of 72-hours was published online three days after the initial memorandum declaring the kidnapping. As set in the ultimatum, Johnson was beheaded. The execution of Johnson has parallels to the killing of Nicholas Berg: Both had been termed as "prisoner" and both hostages had been forced to wear a Guantánamo styled orange jump suit and were placed in the center in front of the jihadi camera lens. AQAP released three videos that had a general similar layout to the one video showing the killing of Berg. Johnson was placed confessing to various crimes prior to his execution due to the nature of his work for the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia.

In a following military aftermath-assessment styled report on the kidnapping operation, "the story of the American prisoner, the Apache engineer Paul Marshall – from imprisonment to the slaughtering",¹⁰⁶ is detailed in greater context. The second, in the statement unnamed, American is described as "another killed U.S. soldier, whose job was being the director of the kidnapped"¹⁰⁷. This is most likely a reference to Kenneth Scroggs, an American who was shot to death outside of his residence in Riyadh on the day of the Johnson kidnapping. Johnson worked for Lockheed Martin, a U.S. company supplying the military. Scroggs was employed by the Saudi firm Advanced Electronics Co., that lists on its website Lockheed Martin as a customer.¹⁰⁸ Johnson, Scroggs and other victims¹⁰⁹ are embedded in the perception as being local Crusader assets in Saudi Arabia, thus determined and defined as military occupants (*muhtallin*) on the most sacred Islamic territory, personally made responsible for spreading 'profanity'. Therefore, both Johnson and Scroggs, according to the "story of the

106 "Qissat al-asir al-Amriki: muhandis al-Apache: "Paul Marshall"", *The Voice of Jihad* number 19, pp. 18 – 19. This was quite typical and distinctive for the *Sawt al-Jihad*, providing interviews, personal accounts or further details by operatives after concluded operations.

107 Ibid, p. 18.

108 <http://business.highbeam.com/company-profiles/info/932269/advanced-electronics-co>

109 Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin was driven to target individual westerners and initiated multiple attacks, including the murder of German Hermann Dengl at a automated teller machine in Riyadh, the staging of multiple attacks on the Oasis Compounds (29 May al-Khobar Massacre), the killing of BBC cameraman Simon Cumbers and the wounding of his reporter Frank Gardner and then the – filmed – assassination of American Robert Jacobs of Vinnell Corp. in his home in Riyadh.

American prisoner” had been graded as military personnel, and not as civilians, working directly for the United States military, stationed illegally in Saudi Arabia. The attack on BBC cameraman Simon Cumbers and the attempted murder of his reporter Frank Gardner is justified as a legitimate “targeting of two British spies, specialized in collecting information regarding terrorists; killing one of them while severely wounding the other.”¹¹⁰

The Killing of Robert Jacobs – expelling the *mushrikeen*

Robert Jacobs, also an American citizen living in Riyadh worked for the “U.S. defence contracting firm Vinnell, a unit of Northrop Grumman (NOC.N) Corp which trains the Saudi National Guard, an elite force protecting the pro-U.S. monarchy”¹¹¹ was shot and killed by AQAP operatives just outside of his home on June 8, 2004. The video and the execution served somewhat as precedence for the following kidnapping and ‘trial’ of Paul Johnson. Jacobs was termed in “the story” as a “Jewish-American officer, of Vinnell,” thus by no means a non-military individual. A video showing the shooting of Robert Jacobs was published online. The short clip starts with bloody white letters on a black background: “killing of the Jewish-American Robert Jacobs – the officer in the intelligence company Vinnell.” As in the case of the later Johnson videos, and had been the case in the filmed execution of Daniel Pearl, pictures of killed and maimed children are shown while Muslims in general are humiliated. The picture of a killed boy in Palestine is set in the same frame as the humiliating stop and searching of – what appears – civilians in Iraq by US-troops

A *nasheed* is playing to the visual framework, emphasizing the reactionary – avant-gardist – attitude of AQAP’s self-perception in terms of being the ‘true’ Muslims defying the enemies of Islam:

“Get up and stop sleeping / for Islam has returned / on the path of God we are marching in secret / and we declare the *jihad* / we are returning with machineguns / today we are the leaders.”¹¹²

110 *Sawt al-Jihad* number 19, p. 19; “the story of the American prisoner, the Apache engineer Paul Marshall.”

111 The Washington Post, “UPDATE 1-Saudi Qaeda tape says shows killing of American”, accessed June 1, 2012: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A37299-2004Jun12.html>

112 A popular *nasheed*, sung by “Abu Ali” that has about 40.000 views on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qn_KMXiyYAM. Showing what appear being scenes of a historical movie about the companions of the prophet (*sahaba*). Horsemen (*al-murabiteen*) carrying Islamic banners (*raya*), armed with swords, speeding off in an apparent attacking formation in a desert environment provide the visual theme for the audio notion. The clip was posted on October 28, 2010. The same part of the *nasheed* is playing at the end of the *Sawt al-Jihad*



Illustration 8: Killed children

Immediately after the pictures intended to shock the audience, the camera shifts. A foot in a sandal running, the cameraman pointing the camera to the ground, is the next sequence, while one man keeps on saying “*hadaf, hadaf*” (target), referring to Robert Jacobs. The camera is set on the ground, catching the driveway with a parked jeep what appears to be the corner of perhaps Mr. Jacobs’s villa. Robert Jacobs screams “wait, wait”, as at least two men approach him, opening small arms fire. As he falls to the ground two men rush up to him and the man on the left fires his whole magazine onto Mr. Jacobs. Then the scene quickly fades and the viewer sees the unchanged scene with the shooter replaced by another man, holding the body of Robert Jacobs down while the other one beholds the corpse. Neither the body nor the head are shown in detail and not exposed as a trophy; a fate that descended on Paul Marshall Johnson when he was

video. The most liked comment (23 likes) by JackEl3elm, according to his profile a 24-year old Saudi whose avatar is a picture of a smiling Saddam Hussein states: “But there is the sort of person who pays for distracting tales, intending, without any knowledge, to lead others from God’s way” (31:6). The prophet of God said: “of my umma are to be people who declare silk, alcohol and musical instruments as legal” (al-Bukhari, 5590). My noble brother, the songs with instruments are forbidden by the unanimous consensus of the ulama’. In this nasheed no instruments of whatever kind are present. [The intention of this song] is to incite the Muslims (li-tahrid al-Muslimeen) to do the right thing when under attack or occupied, as is the case in our current situation. The disapproval is not for the people committed to avoid what is forbidden, but who are making fun of those, who say, “this is forbidden”, including what God and His messenger have said. God has guided us and for Him is the righteous path.” With over 700.000 views the nasheed’s popularity is underlined in a clip showing pictures of fighters in Chechnya, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQo67iiPqJk&feature=youtube_gdata_player. The film was uploaded on YouTube on October 9 m 2008 by “qoqazi” (The Caucasian), the most liked comment states: “These are the Mujahideen, real men.”

beheaded. The video ends with the *Sawt al-Jihad* logo flying into the center with AQAP's slogan "expel the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula" written underneath.

In accordance with the ongoing 'Crusader campaign' (*al-hamlat al-sali-biyya*), the U.S. military machinery was engaged on a full-scale war in neighboring Iraq. In the jihadists framing and perception the "Crusaders" deliberately targeted civilians and imprisoned scores of Sunni Muslims in the name of the "war on terror". Due to the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, AQAP vowed to prevent a similar outbreak of hostilities by taking pre-emptive steps. This led to a massive targeting of westerners, U.S. military personnel as well as civilians, with the aim of coercing westerners to leave the Arab Peninsula. By AQAP's definition, any westerner, any non-Muslim in general, was in violation of the prophet's command that no non-Muslim may enter the Arab Peninsula. Therefore, by not having proper Islamic authoritative credentials to reside on the Arab Peninsula, but rather the permission of the Saudi government, deemed as apostates of Islam and a mere marionette-regime of the west,¹¹³ all westerners became by the jihadist definition of *shari'a-law* righteous targets.¹¹⁴ The underlining motivation was the commitment of the prophet's commandment prior to his death, allegedly demanding the removal, the expelling, of any non-Muslim from the Arab Peninsula. For the jihadists' reasoning this clearly implies the use of force, to "expel the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula." In a classical jihadist authoritative reading of this commandment, the *hadith* was frequently used by the Saudi-based AQAP and is the underlining justification for the

113 This type of rhetoric is frequently used for the ruling Saudi dynasty, mostly termed as apostates (*murtaddin*), agents (*umala'*) of western interests or idols (tawaghit) implying the violation of the monotheistic fundamentals of Islam. In the introduction to the first edition of the *Sawt al-Jihad* in October 2003, the obligation to open a new jihad-front in Saudi Arabia was established and sanctioned to repel the direct or indirect colonization of Islamic countries: "Of the greatest places destined for mandatory *jihad* is the country of the Two Holy Sanctuaries. For the occupying Crusader enemy is present [and it is] the apostasy (*al-murtadda*) [the Saudi regime] that implements the planning of the colonization [process]."

114 This essential notion re-surfaced prior to a second-generation *Organization al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula* in Yemen, the southwestern part of the Arab Peninsula. A 'new' AQAP was declared in January 2009. Before the January 2009 declaration, that was broadcast by the newly found al-Malahem Media Institution and that declared Nasir al-Wuhhayshi (Abu Basir) as its emir, Yemen served as a new basis for operatives and ideologues who started in 2008 to irregularly publish electronic magazine the "Echoes of the Epic Battles" (*Sada al-Malahem*). In the eighth edition (March 2009), the basic motivational understanding of the *Sawt al-Jihad's* propagated permission and illegality for non-Muslims to enter the Arab Peninsula was repeated in the jurisprudential section committed to "the Characteristics of the Arab Peninsula"; *Sada al-Malahem* number 8, pp. 9 – 10. As the first generation vowed, "anyone not strictly believing in Islam on the Arab Peninsula is targeted, who do not implement Islamic rule and who prohibit everyone judging by *sharia-law*."

subsequent execution of Paul Marshall Johnson. AQAP and its media outlets online had forcefully advocated three main motivational components:

1. Rallying support and active recruitment to fight against the Saudi rulers;
2. as well as their western “masters.” Including expelling the local westerners inside the kingdom, the *mushrikeeni*;
3. while defining the territory of Saudi Arabia as the Arab Peninsula (including Iraq). This is the most holy Islamic territory, occupied by and the main basis for the Crusader armies to undertake tactical operations and airstrikes against Muslims in the region.

The foremost definition of the *mushrikeen* is as described by the jihadist ideologue Abu Ahmad Abd al-Rahman al-Masri in his treatise “Stance on the Positions regarding Expelling the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula”:

“What is the intention with the *mushrikeen*? They are not Muslims. That is what the prophet – peace and blessing be upon him – said just as ‘Umar – may God be pleased with him – bequeathed: “To expel¹¹⁵ the Jews and Christians from the Arab Peninsula until only Muslims are there! (Muslim 3313; Abu Dawud 2635; al-Tirmidhi 1532). And likewise what he said in the *hadith* of ‘A’isha – may God be pleased with her:

“Do not permit *two* religions on the Arab Peninsula” (Ahmad 25148; al-Tabari fi l-awsat 1116).¹¹⁶

The term *mushrik* (plural *mushrikeen*) refers to those being in absolute contrast to the *muwahhideen*, the practitioners of the “oneness of God” (*tawhid*). *Mushrikeen*, or *shirk* is thus the ‘association’ of partners next to God and is a violation of the monotheistic principle. By this violation of *tawhid*, jihadist and Islamist torrents worldwide justify, for example, the destruction of gravesites and shrines.

The testimony (*wasiyya*) of prophet Muhammad is therefore the ultimate legitimacy to undertake kidnappings, assassinations and greater bombing operations against western housing complexes, defined and determined as religious obligatory acts. A sentiment that was exported by the Saudi AQAP into neighboring Iraq and Yemen and that has found its way into German Islamist propaganda over the years as well.¹¹⁷ The justification of combating the *mush-*

115 In Arabic the re-enforcing commitment is emphasized – *li-ikhrajanna al-yahud wa-l-nasara min jazirat al-Arab*.

116 Abu Ahmad Abd al-Rahman al-Masri, “*Waqfat ma al-waqfat hawla “ikhraj al-mushrikeen min jazirat al-arab”*” (Al-Ansar Mailing List Newsletter 2009), 3.

117 For example the short clip entitled “The Pride of a Muslim” (Stolz eines Muslims) showing former rapper Deso Dogg now acting as Abu Talha al-Almani as a member of the Salafist movement in Germany confronting German police officers in Berlin. The uniformed German police officers are, among other definitions, also designated as “*mushrik kafir*”, accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCb2mHJZxMY&feature=related>. *Kafir mushrik*, the other way around, is also used to determine Paul Johnson, further promoting the legality of his killing, *Sawt al-Jihad* number 21, 43, “*Risala ila zawjat al-ilj al-*

rikeen also plays a dominant role in the testimonies of the 9/11 hijackers, where in part the aforementioned *hadith* is shown next to the hijacker.

In general the jihadists convey a historical understanding based on a selective reading and interpretation of the Quran into modern times. This is intended to serve as a basis for the potential consumers that are aware of the term *mushrik*, as it is a legitimate term of the Quran and essential for Islamic history. The consumers actively distinguish themselves as Muslims accordingly to the principle and rituals of *tawhid* and as such refute the accreditation with anything related to *shirk* or the *mushrikeen*. Al-Qaeda and the pro-jihadist propaganda in general, however, exploit this sentiment successfully for their political agenda and by crafting a frame of reference where the historical *mushrikeen* have once again emerged as the ultimate foes of the ‘true’ believers – empowering the individual in his or her aspiration to re-enact the times of early Muslims, and to fight once again against the threatening forces of evil. Furthermore, the purported historical and religious obligation to fight the *mushrikeen* enables the jihadists as advocate and role models fulfilling in reality the testimony of Muhammad, fulfilling the divine command of protecting Islam and defending the Islamic *umma* against its enemies.¹¹⁸

The Kidnapping and Staged Trial of Paul Marshall Johnson

According to “the story of the American prisoner”, Paul Johnson was kidnapped on June 13, 2004 when he was stopped at a fake checkpoint. AQAP claims that “an individual of the Saudi Police arranged police uniforms and cars and helped set up the checkpoint on the maintenance road leading to the airport.” As had been the case in the car bombing attacks on the al-Muhayya¹¹⁹ and other housing complexes hosting westerners, AQAP operatives had been disguised as National Guard or Police units, avoiding suspicion while having the element of surprise.¹²⁰ The 19th edition of the *Sawt al-Jihad* published both the 13th and 14th memorandum (*taqrir*), announcing the “slaughtering (*nahr*) of the American prisoner

qatil: Paul Johnson... min zawja ahad shuhada' jazirat al-Arab” (Letter to the wife of the slain occupier Paul Johnson – by the wife of one of the martyrs of the Arab Peninsula).

- 118 Nico Prucha, Die Stimme des Dschihad “Sawt al-gihad”: al-Qaedas erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010), 62 – 71.
- 119 AQAP committed its first major mistake in the martyrdom-operation of the *al-Muhayya* complex on 14 November 2003, believing it was a residential zone for westerners. Instead, many Muslims were killed and a broader critique on AQAP’s operations arose for the benefit of the Saudi counter-terrorism forces who had been taken by surprise by the major and professional attack waves.
- 120 In two lengthy films, *Badr al-Riyadh 1 and 2*, the suicide-operatives were introduced and issued their last wills.

Paul Marshall,” dated to June 19, 2004. Interestingly, and perhaps due to a hotheaded and arrogant reaction, the “statement regarding American prisoner Paul Marshall Johnson and the conditions of his release” (15.06.2004) had not been included in the electronic magazine. Rather, the statement was published on the usual online forums and websites used by AQAP¹²¹ and the globalizing jihadi media forums. This may have been the case as the demands were unmet by the Saudi government to release incarcerated *Mujahideen* and AQAP’s leader and presumed murderer of Paul Marshall Johnson, Abu Hajir al-Muqrin, was killed by Saudi security forces on the day of the beheading. A lengthy memorandum was published next to the 13th and 14th memoranda in the *Sawt al-Jihad*, commemorating the slain leader by the apostate (*murtaddin*) forces of the Saudi rulers, the idols (*taghut*, pl. *tawaghit*).

The 13th memorandum starts without the usual citation of a verse of the Quran and announces the “kidnapping of an occupant (*‘alj*) Christian American” by the al-Fallujah Brigade. To avenge the American siege and bombing of the Iraqi city, AQAP dedicated the kidnapping of Paul Marshall Johnson to their fellow Sunni Muslims who suffered by the United States Air Force, for which Johnson worked. To revenge the second siege and taking of Fallujah, AQAP attacked the U.S. consulate in Jeddah in early December of 2004. While Johnson was ‘trialed’ and executed for being a *mushrik* on the Arab Peninsula and working for the Air Force as an aviation engineer on the Apache attack helicopters, the assault on the U.S. consulate was reasoned in a video to avenge American combat sorties entering Iraq on bombing missions from the Prince Sultan Air Force Base outside of Riyadh. Johnson was a personalized enemy of Islam due to his work embedded into a greater narrative that comprises of U.S. air superiority to terrorize Muslim civilians by deliberate targeting. As the “war on Islam” intensifies, Muslims, foremost women and children are sought being systematically targeted by western air forces and ground troops according to the audio-visual jihadist propaganda. The pictures and sequences of killed children, crying women and dehumanized and subjugated men (deprived of their male honor and totally disempowered) are substantial for the jihadists’ reasoning and appeal. This propaganda element would be emphasized years later when the U.S. drone program would be operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen.

As for the Johnson ‘trial’ the video published in combination with the 13th memorandum provides the clear cut allocated guilt, for his work as an engineer on the Apache helicopters sentencing him to death. “He is one of four leading engineers, specialized in the [development] of the electronic systems of these helicopters on the Arab Peninsula. It is well known, that this kind of aircraft are frequently used by the Americans and their allies, the Zionists and the apostates,

121 Primarily via its website www.qa3edoon.com at the time. The link is defunct.

to slaughter Muslims, to terrorize and to dislocate them; [this is the case] in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq.” The legal reaction of the moral obliged *Mujahideen* to act by “*shari’a-law* entitlement (*bi-l-haqq al-shari’*) to take revenge as given by the example of the American actions against our brothers in Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib according to the *shari’a*.” Two days after this memorandum was published, a video of Paul Marshall Johnson was released online on June 15, 2004 as had been stated in writing: “However, we will – with the permission of God – broadcast a filmed statement of the kidnapped of his personal affairs and of his confessions (*i’tirafat*). We, we will clarify the demands of the *Mujahideen*.” The video begins with the logo of the *Sawt al-Jihad* flying into the screen, with “expel the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula” written underneath in white letters. The same verse of the Quran (47:4) stated to reason the killing of Berg and later as the *sharia-law* basis for the Iraqi *al-Ansar* jihad group to execute 12 Nepalese workers and a Japanese soldier is chanted in the Johnson video while the *Sawt al-jihad* logo appears:

“When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the neck, and once they are defeated, bind any captives firmly – later you can release them as a grace or for ransom – until the toils of war have ended.”¹²²

A similar same black screen with white letters as in the Jacobs and Berg video announces the personal data of the hostage in Arabic and English:
The second frame of the video lists in Arabic and English:

“Job: Apache’s Planes System Engineer
Advanced Electronics Company.”

Then the viewer sees the hostage, filmed in night vision mode, with Johnson blindfolded from the side. His left upper arm is exhibited as a trophy showing what seems to be an army tattoo. The interrogation starts:

“Name?
– Paul Marshall Johnson.
What is your nationality?
– I am an American of the United States.”

The video is poorly edited and suddenly from another sequence, with a scarf tied around Johnson’s neck:

122 As stated in the chapter “An Opinion Regarding the Slaughtering of the American Prisoner” – Abu Sarah criticizes Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi” and the subchapter on al-’Uyairi’s writing *Guiding the Perplexed in regard of the Permissibility to Kill Prisoners*.



Illustration 9: Personal data of Paul Johnson

“On what project does the company work?”

With a distressed reply: “On the Apache helicopter.”

Yet another sequence is blended, with Johnson in unchanged position but without the scarf repeating “I work on the Apache helicopter.”



Illustration 10: Video of Paul Johnson

The video blends into a brief sequence – in color – where Johnson probably ‘confesses’. On the left, an audio-recorder is in place and the hostage is at the center of the camera, with a man wearing a *Jalibiyya* standing behind him. This sequence shows Johnson from the front, with his exposed tattoo and wearing a Guantánamo styled orange jumpsuit.



Illustration 11: Abu Hajir al-Muqrin

Abu Hajir al-Muqrin follows the exhibition of Paul M. Johnson, declaring the 72-hours deadline that was made public in the written statement as well. Wearing a guerrilla styled combat outfit with an ammunition vest, an – what appears – RPG-launcher and holding a commando version of the AK-47 rifle, al-Muqrin is standing in front of a red background with the Sawt al-Jihad logo (top right) and the slogan “expel the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula” in place. Referenced as a “local leader” (*al-qa’id al-midani*) al-Muqrin directly addresses the Crusaders who are waging a war against Muslims by all means. Killing women and children, looting the countries of Islam and deploying agents as well as local rulers, the apostates (*murtaddin*), are loyal to the west and thus rule contrary to Islam’s commandments. Announcing what would become popular slogans, al-Muqrin emphasizes AQAP’s commitment to fight the Al Sa’ud, the Saudi royal family, and to expel all foreign elements from the Arab Peninsula. For “the *Mujahideen* are striving on the path of God (*fi sabil Allah*), without fearing anyone’s reproach¹²³, loving death as much as you love life. Seeking the *shahada* just as you are seeking the worldly affairs (*dunya*).” The 72-hours deadline is issued and Paul Marshall Johnson criminalized by al-Muqrin, who now basically reads out the electronically published statement:

“By the grace of God the *Mujahideen* of the Organization al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula (al-Fallujah Company) had been able to strike a group of engineers in charge of supervising the development of the aviation systems for the American Apache [heli-

123 A direct reference and citation of Quran 5:54 and used frequently in the memorandum and statements (for example: Statement regarding the operation on the al-Muhayya Crusader compound

copters]. The Apache are invincible with their fire [power] for the Muslims in Palestine and Afghanistan [and raze them by it].”¹²⁴

“For if the idols of the Saudi government want their captivated American master released, they shall set our prisoners free, the imprisoned *Mujahideen* in the prisons al-Ha’ir, al-Ruways and Alisha¹²⁵; within the next 72-hours of this date of the statement (27. rabi al-akhir 1425 – 30. Rabi al-akhir 1425, corresponding to June 15, 2004 – June 18, 2004). And if not, then we will approach God by the blood of this occupant¹²⁶, taking revenge for our Muslim brothers, who have spilled their blood free of charge everywhere. And this occupant will – if God wills it – follow the blood of the Crusaders that is flowing in torrents in this blessed year on the Arab Peninsula.”

The statement ends with the vow to support the Muslims worldwide by focusing the war against the ruling Saudi family.

“The slaughtering of the American Prisoner” – the manifestation of the criminal on trial and retaliatory punishment by film and in writing

As the Saudi government had not responded to the demands, AQAP proceeded in the execution of Paul Marshall Johnson on June 19, 2004 by issuing the 14th memorandum entitled “regarding the slaughtering of the American prisoner Paul Marshall.” A video was disseminated on July 8, 2004, downloadable on AQAP’s website www.qa3edoon.com. The six-megabyte real-media player file

124 The Apache helicopters carry out airstrikes against individuals on the ground or fortified / housing complexes and are in most cases out of range of any potential threatening weapons on the ground. The “fire” (*nar*) is a reference to the missile attacks that incinerate ground targets, mostly referring to the AGM-114 Hellfire missile, the standard armament for Apache helicopters and unmanned drones.

125 These are prisons in Saudi Arabia and are mentioned in the overall jihadist propaganda, as the prisoners have to endure harsh conditions being humiliated in front of their visiting families that sometimes are attacked by guards. The jihadists’ visual spectrum regarding the prison theme is extremely lively and expressed online by colorful pictures, whereas any female prisoner is automatically potentially subjugated to rape and ‘dishonoring’. Imprisoned men, however, have pledged their fight on the path of God and are now subsequently trialed and tested to remain steadfast (*thibat*), showing no weakness or even recanting (*taraju’a*) the jihadist declared fundamentals of belief. The al-Ruways prison in Jeddah is prominent in the mainstream jihadist literature due to the interview by Abu ‘I-Layth al-Qasimi for *al-Fajr Magazine* (number 40, rabi’ al-awwal 1419), picturing his escape. Abu ‘I-Layth al-Qasimi. “Al-Firar min sijn al-Ruways,” accessed May 28, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=zaheed27>.

126 The written statement reads: “if not, we will approach God by *his* [Johnson’s] blood.” *Alj* is again used in the sense for the individual non-Muslim occupier.

was named “na7rboul.rm”.¹²⁷ The video starts again with the *Sawt al-Jihad* logo and the roar of a lion, consecutively followed by a *nasheed*.¹²⁸

“blow them up wherever you find them and slaughter them (*anhuruhum*) / get them all out of the beautiful place of the *masra*¹²⁹ and expect them in battle / Grant¹³⁰ them grave problems on the path of the enemies, thus forgiving them by fighting them / drive them out, complicate their lives and wait for them in battle.”¹³¹

Immediately after the logo with the *nasheed*, a sequence of an Apache helicopter is shown – with a high-tech camera moving in the nose of the aircraft, implying this as the ultimate tool of profanity. Used to spy on the Muslims, violating the Islamic principle of *hurma* and the jihadist definition of *awra*, thus the viewer sees for a blink a sequence taken by a surveillance camera at night from above

127 “7” corresponds to the Arabic *h*, thus the file translates to “slaughtering” (*nahr*) of “Paul” (*boul*).

128 I thank Professor Jamal El Freji for his help and insight into the deeper understanding of the poetic *anasheed*.

129 Referring to Mecca and the *isra*’, where Muhammad was asleep and wakened by Gabriel to embark on Buraq, the riding animal, for his night journey to al-Quds (Jerusalem). In Jerusalem, Muhammad met Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets and returned to Mecca. For further reading: Gernot Rotter, trans. Ibn Ishaq, *Das Leben des Propheten – Al-Sira al-nabawiyya* (Kandern: Spohr, 1999), 80 – 85.

130 In the visual imagination of pouring, giving out, water (*uskabu*), filling empty cups.

131 Again, this is merely the beginning of a lengthier – and significant popular – *nasheed*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qisrbVnlB88>. The clip was uploaded on April 30, 2008. The YouTube clip is entitled “Blow them up... dedicated to the Americans and Zionists.” *Fajiruhum*, “blow them up” is also to be perceived in the sense of “incinerate them” and is a reference to improvised explosive devices as well as to RPG’s. It has nearly 100.000 views – with scenes of the movie “Black Hawk Down” depicting US-troops under fire in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in 1993. The original movie sounds of gunfire and explosions are audible. The most liked comment (31 likes) by user “steinmannmann” vows: “I swear by God, I am longing for the liberation of Jerusalem by my blood on the path of God for the Palestinians. Bestow upon my the *shahada* on the path of the raising the words, there is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God, as the highest.” According to his profile, his avatar shows a hooded man bearing “Soldier of Allah – Kishko”, steinmannmann is a 25-year old Egyptian. Another comment, by YouTube member 9anhat, states: “Kill the Zionist-Crusader occupants, stomp the apostate agents into the ground and strike anyone who stands against the Muslims by improvised explosive devices.” With close to 130.000 views, this *nasheed* was uploaded by “basel7koma” on February 3, 2009 and starts with angry voices questioning, “where are the Arabs?” in response to atrocities committed against Muslims. The voice seems to be of Khalid al-Rashid, a Saudi cleric who was arrested when leading a demonstration against the Danish embassy in the wakes of the Muhammad cartoon scandals. The voice of Ayman al-Zawahiri follows, criticizing the violence and the occupation in Palestine before the *nasheed*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNjm-BRoNas>. The second most liked comment (45 likes, by aboHamoud111) states: “All praise be God!! America incinerates and attacks Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and no one says or does anything. But Osama bin Laden – may God have mercy on him – assaults the Americans by all means and becomes a terrorist. Applaud terrorism if it is for the defense of the religion and the countries.”

showing what seems like a field in a remote desert area. Army, police and armed surveillance helicopters used in general by the intelligence services are perhaps the gravest threat to jihadist operations that would in the coming years be intensified by the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones. A later *Sawt al-Jihad* statement that claims responsibility for burning three such helicopters in Saudi Arabia's al-Qasim province expresses the threat posed by armed surveillance helicopters. Not only are these helicopters used to hunt and annihilate *Mujahideen*, such as slain AQAP leader and master-ideologue Yusuf al-'Uyairi, but are the ultimate weapon to systematically destroy mosques in the quest of killing the "friends of God", those who assume themselves¹³² in proximity to God and thus bestowed by God with special attributes and deeds in this world (*awliya' Allah*).¹³³ Furthermore, and this notion has in parallel intensified with the growing frequency of unmanned drone attacks in the following years, the aerial armed reconnaissance techniques are a direct "violation of the honor of Muslims, penetrating their houses, invading their privacy (*'awra*)."¹³⁴ In sum, Johnson was sentenced to death for his contribution to the espionage against Muslims, being a non-Muslim on the Arab Peninsula, a 'soldier' and active occupying crusader responsible for the death of Muslims while the Saudi government did not even react to the demands.

The video is dominated by the visualization of legitimizing Johnson's death, by showing sequences of destroyed civilian houses, with body parts seen in the debris being salvaged by – as subtly suggested – family members.

The series of sequences starts with Paul Marshall Johnson saying "Apache helicopter; I work on Apache helicopter", showing him in his Guantánamo styled overall, blindfolded.

The following sequences are overlapped to emphasize the deadly effect of the AH-64:

1. An approaching fleet of Apache helicopters overlapped with destroyed houses and three men digging out a body;
2. As the helicopters fly by, U.S. soldiers march towards a transport aircraft –

132 A classical description of the 'jihadi-self', elevating oneself as the only 'true' believer, who is in closest proximity to God, defining oneself as the "friends" (*awliya'*) of God in contrast to any other life form. For the *awliya'* special attributes and miracles (*karamat*) are accredited to, in life as well as for the celestial body remaining in this world after the departure, the pouring of the soul (*fadat ruh*) for the afterlife emanating the physical remains.

133 Eli Alshech, "Egoistic Martyrdom and Hamas' Success in the 2005 Municipal Elections: A Study of Hamas Martyrs' Ethical Wills, Biographies and Eulogies" (*Die Welt des Islams* 48 2008), 23 – 49. Nico Prucha, *Online Territories of Terror – Utilizing the Internet for Jihadist Endeavors* (ORIENT IV/2011), 43 – 47.

134 "Statement regarding the operation of the martyr Sa'ud al-Utaybi brigade", *Sawt al-Jihad* (not published in the magazines), 13.05.2005.

- suggesting new ‘crusader’ forces are on the verge of rampaging and dishonoring Islamic territories.
3. The night vision view of the pilot on a target; opposed by a sequence of Muslim men cleaning up the debris of a destroyed house in broad daylight, the aftermath of a nightly air force bombing run;
 4. The sequence fades into the firing of a missile by an Apache helicopter; pictures of a crowd of civilians, residential zones, and the helicopters maneuvering follow – suggesting the deliberate and sole purpose of the attack helicopters to tyrannize and suppress Muslim civilians.
 5. An explosion that is immediately followed by Johnson being beheaded, suggestion the retaliatory punishment for Jonson’s partaking in the war efforts against Muslims.

With at least 2 men holding Johnson down, one man (allegedly al-Muqrin) cuts his throat open with a relatively huge knife. Lying on a white plastic canvas, the contrast is strengthened by the large blood pool gushing out. Combined with the beheading scene, verses of the Quran are played, for a wholesome *shari’a-law* legality based on divine words:

“Fight them: God will punish them at your hands, He will disgrace them, He will help you to conquer them, He will heal the believers’ feelings and remove the rage from their hearts. God turns to whoever He will in His mercy; God is all knowing and wise.” (9:14 – 15)



Illustration 12: The beheading of Paul Marshall Johnson

The punishment by the hands of the believers consists of “killing, humiliating them [the idolaters] by captivity, defeat, and degradation” according to the *tafsir*

of 9:14 by the Quranic Dictionary by al-Zuhayli et al.¹³⁵ Following the beheading video-genre ‘guideline’, or the jihadist ‘beheading video corporate identity’, the head is placed as a trophy and held as proof directly into the camera for the audience. The head is finally shown up close, with the tool of decapitation in place.

The video, however, ends with a ‘special bulleting’, an advertisement “of our publications...” (*min isdaratina*), showing the cover of Yusuf al-‘Uyairi’s book “Guidance for the Perplexed in the Permissibility of Executing Prisoners” shortly prior to the *Sawt al-Jihad* logo entering. As usual, the slogan “expel the *mushrikeen* from the Arab Peninsula” blends in, ending the video.



Illustration 13: Covers

The cover of al-‘Uyairi’s book, a revised post-hum edition commemorating the *shaykh*, visualizes a pair of handcuffs that are used on a smaller scale for the cover of the 19th edition of the *Sawt al-Jihad*. The strong resemblance the cover bears to the *Sawt al-Jihad* cover is perhaps intended to provide the coherence and legitimacy of the Johnson killing, despite criticism.¹³⁶ Above the first bar (right picture), the justification in divine words is accredited to the kidnapping operation of Paul Johnson, stating verse 57 of the sura al-Tawba (8):

“make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them” (*fa-sharrid bi-him man khalafahum*).

135 Wahba al-Zuhili et al., *Al-Mawsu’a al-Quraniyya al-Muyassara* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2009), 190.

136 Fu’ad Ibrahim, *Al-Salafiyyat al-jihadiyya fi l-sa’udiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi), 153.

The written “14th memorandum regarding the slaughtering of the American prisoner Paul Marshall” starts with the exact same verse, stating it in full:

“If you meet them in battle, make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them, so that they may take heed” (8:57).

Naturally, in the jihadists’ notion and standards, the verse applies and legalizes the kidnapping and punishment of those that are defined as being allies, collaborators or somehow connected to the main enemies, such as occupying armies or war faring states. *Fa-sharriid bi-him man khalafahum* is the divine commandment, among others set by ideologues in this context and serve as an example of exercising *shari’a-law*. In late 2005, for example, Abu Maysara al-Iraqi of the “media branch of the al-Qaeda organization in Iraq” issued a “statement of the *sharia* council in regard of the ruling on the captives of the Moroccan embassy” justifying their execution by repeating this exact phrase. Without any reference, the part of the verse is used in present tense, “we make a fearsome example of it, to those who come after them”, referencing the *murtaddin* – and worse the Shiites, in jihadist wording *al-rawafid* – that have been empowered in the aftermath of the US-invasion of Iraq as well as to the apostate Moroccan government in general.¹³⁷

The Fundamentals of Death:

Yusuf al-‘Uyairi’s Guiding the Perplexed in regard of the Permissibility to Kill Prisoners

Al-‘Uyairi’s work, defined as a “study” (*mabhath*)¹³⁸ was originally written in 2000 but regained prominence when it was used to justify the beheading in 2004 of US-citizen Paul Marshall Johnson in Saudi Arabia. The “study” was written after an inquiry by jihadists in Chechnya who had captured nine Russian special police members of the notorious OMON unit. The *Mujahideen* demanded of the Russian government to hand over Yuri Budanov in exchange for the nine police members. Budanov was sentenced in 2003 for the abduction and murder of Elza Kungaeva,¹³⁹ a Chechen teenage girl. She had been kidnapped and killed by Budanov, at that time a highly decorated Russian officer and a tank commander

137 Abu Maysarat al-Iraqi. “*Bayan min al-hi’at al-shari’a hawla hukm al-mu’taqallin min safarat al-hukuma al-maghrebiyya.*” Accessed 04. 12. 2005. <http://al-farouq.com/vb/showthread.php?t=3921> (link defunct).

138 Defining ideological writings as *mabhath*, “studies” or in a broader sense “findings” that exercise authoritative function are a typical description for jihadist works.

139 Further information is available on the Facebook-page in support of Elza Kungaeva: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Elza-Kungayeva/116770111703898?rf=138941312799847>.

in the second Chechen war. Budanov was murdered on a street in Moscow in June 2011 after serving eight years in prison of his ten years sentence.¹⁴⁰ The difficulty for the *Mujahideen* in Chechnya arose after the execution of the police officers and the demand to exchange the prisoners for Yuri Budanov, for some questioned the *shari'a-law* approval of both the execution as well as the ransoming attempt for Budanov. In accordance, al-'Uyairi responded to the criticism and attempts the de-authorization of the critiques by – following a classical Islamic scholar style – providing *shari'a-law* proof based on Quran and *Sunna* and by interpreting the verses of the Quran used by the critiques within the jihadists' frame of reference. The “study” serves as a precedent for the abduction, ransom attempt and subsequent execution in 2004 and is part of the essential ideological framework for jihadists worldwide to kidnap, extort and subsequently execute hostages termed mostly as prisoners.

While the original document was published in 2000, an English translation was published in 2004 by “Abu Rawdha”¹⁴¹ to justify the killing of Nicholas Berg and Paul Marshall Johnson.¹⁴² “Abu Rawdha” published his translation on Qoqaz.net claiming that al-'Uyairi's “research paper was produced after the Mujahideen in Chechnya slaughtered seven¹⁴³ captured Russian soldiers. Thereafter Khattab (Saamir as-Swaylim) contacted Shaykh Yoosuf requesting a paper to conclude disputes and clarify the matter.” While this claim cannot be verified, it can be assumed that the inquiry was made via personal contacts at first, and was then addressed accordingly on the – at the time – Chechen English-language *jihad* website Qoqaz.net showing the photographs and the identity papers of the “OMON prisoners”:

140 Russia Today: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFjSlBqqu9Y>, prepared and uploaded unto YouTube by Chechencenter.info. BBC, 17 June 2011, *Russia and Chechnya: The Killing of Budanov*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13778837>.

141 The name appears, although in differing transliteration (Abu Raudha) as translator for another first generation AQAP work regarding the 2003 martyrdom-operation attacks of western compounds in Saudi Arabia, *The Operation of 11 Rabi al-Awwal: The East Riyadh Operation & Our War with the United States and its Agents*. The translation can be obtained here: www.tawhed.net/dl.php?i=1705101e.

142 For example the member “Joe”, who states the necessity that “after the recent incident concerning the slaughter of the Jew, Nick Berg, and the subsequent escalation in the questioning of the permissibility of killing, I sought to summarise (sic) and translate parts of Hidaayat al-Hayaaraa fi Jawaaz Qatl il-Asaaraa for the Mujaahid Scholar Yoosuf bin Saalih al-'Uyayri, may Allah enclose him in his wide mercy.” Accessed June 2, 2012. <http://www.aussiemuslims.com/forums/showthread.php?1280-On-the-Permissibility-of-Killing-the-Prisoners>.

143 Nine Russian police members had been executed. The number is coherently referenced throughout the Arabic versions of the document. The foreword to the English translation by Abu Rawdha includes several links (all defunct in the meantime) with one source having shown pictures of seven beheaded OMON members. This may be the reason for confusing the total number of executed hostages.

“Photographs of Nine OMON Prisoners Executed 0500 GMT 05 April 2000 (Added 05 April 2000)

The following OMON Special Police troops (five officers and four soldiers) were executed at 0500 GMT on 05 April 2000 after the Russian Government ignored a Mujahideen deadline to exchange them for the Russian War Prisoner, Colonel Yuri Budanov, who carried out the rape-murder of a 18-year old Chechen Muslim girl, then drove a tank over her body in full view of his troops. The Mujahideen gave a series of warnings to the Russian Government to this effect, but all of these warnings were ignored. The Mujahideen Command have repeated that they will continue to execute more Russian Prisoners of War until the War Criminal Yuri Budanov is handed over to the Mujahideen so that the Islamic punishment can be carried out on him.

Coming soon insha-Allah... The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Executing Prisoners of War

Photographs may take a few moments to load...”¹⁴⁴

The Islamic Ruling refers to al-‘Uyairi’s study in this regard, that was published in Arabic shortly after.

The cover of the English version by “Abu Rawdha” shows a screenshot of the beheading video of Russian diplomats, executed by al-Zarqawi’s group in Iraq in 2006.

Two masked men are standing in a room behind a blindfolded and shackled Russian diplomat, with one man grabbing his hair with a knife set on the hostage’s neck.¹⁴⁵ Six years after the disputed beheading of the OMON members the cover implies *shari’a-law* and ideological coherence by re-enacting the – at first disputed – execution of the Russians in 2000 in Chechnya by the jihadists under al-Zarqawi’s command in 2006 in Iraq. Three of the four hostages had been beheaded while one was shot in the head in a courtyard.

Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, whose work had been hailed by Osama bin Laden in a *al-Sahab* video produced to commemorate the martyrs of the first generation Saudi based AQ organization¹⁴⁶ has greatly inspired Abu Yahya al-Libi on two accounts on the topic of *shari’a-law* definitions and conditions of hostages (*rahin*) and prisoners (*asara*). Al-Libi¹⁴⁷ indirectly references al-‘Uyairi’s work in his 2007

144 <http://www.qoqaz.net.my/html/chechnyaphotos.htm> (offline) and retrieved by the *Way-back Machine*, accessed June 15, 2012. <http://web.archive.org/web/20000409002243/http://www.qoqaz.net.my/html/chechnyaphotos.htm#omon9b>.

145 *Tanfidh hukm allah fi l-diplomasiin al-Rus*, broadcast by al-Zarqawi’s *Majlis al-shura al-Mujahideen fi l-Iraq* (Media Council), dated June 13, 2006. The screenshot on the cover of the English version does not show the logo.

146 Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Dschihad* “Sawt al-gihad”: al-Qaeda’s erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010), 112 – 113.

147 Muhammad Hasan Qa’id, a Libyan born in 1963 and announced killed in a US-drone strike

published writing by the GIMF to justify the release of South Korean hostages despite the demands online in the jihadist forums to execute them. In an attempt to quell potential criticism of the hostage release, al-Libi cites the same *hadith* and follows the line of arguing as al-‘Uyairi in his study, emphasizing the prophet’s conduct on swapping a prisoner for a Muslim prisoner, thus serving the greater good for the Muslims while not excluding the likewise *shari’a-law* position of executing the hostages.¹⁴⁸

Abu Yahya al-Libi expanded the issue of Muslim prisoners accused of espionage for non-Muslims in 2009 in his work *The Instructor in regard of Ruling upon the Muslim Spy*.¹⁴⁹ Following al-‘Uyairi’s style, al-Libi provides the *shari’a-law* basis for the killing of spies disguised as Muslims, incorporating verses (*ayyat*) of the Quran into his framework backed by cherry-picked citations of historical scholars and *hadith*, justifying the execution of accused “agents” (*umala’*) and spies (*jasus*), thus being apostates and deviants, being declared as infidels (*takfir*). This writing is also a contemporary response to the modern warfare of unmanned drones that rely on a network of human intelligence networks to designate targets. Paradoxically by drawing an analogy to a companion of Muhammad, Hatib bin Abi Balta’a.¹⁵⁰ Balta’a attempted to send military graded information to the Quraysh, and was finally pardoned by the prophet. This account, however, grants al-Libi the reasoning to sanction the killing of Muslims allegedly working as spies or for Arab or western intelligence services by contemporary jihadist groups, as only the prophet is able to pardon Muslims indicted for espionage and rule whether or not they are firm believers at heart. Al-Libi refers, as stated in the critique by Abu Sarah regarding the beheading of Berg, refers to the demand by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, to behead Balta’a.¹⁵¹

Yusuf al-‘Uyairi’s importance, as both an ideologue and a leader, was re-emphasized in a reference by al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a speech in May 2012, when he eulogizes al-‘Uyairi together with Osama bin Laden, Khattab,

on 4 June 2012 by the US-government. As of writing, no AQ statement has confirmed his death, however, two al-Sahab videos featuring al-Libi suggest to the jihadist virtual audience that he is well and alive.

148 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Daf’a al-rayn ‘an asri asabat al-kureen: Mabhath mukhtasar hawl al-kureen al-ladhina ukhtadifuhum al-mujahidun fi Afghanistan* (Global Islamic Media Front, 2007). Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?247969>, 10 – 13.

149 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *al-Mu’alim fi hukm al-jasus al-Muslim* (al-Fajr: 2009), accessed March 3, 2012. <http://tawhed.ws/dl/?i=y34deswq>.

150 As noted in the subchapter “*An Opinion Regarding the Slaughtering of the American Prisoner*” – Abu Sarah criticizes Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi.

151 His work has had an impact for AQ in general, whereas the confessions of spies among the *Mujahideen* also emphasized that their work consisted of placing tracking devices on vehicles and houses, to mark these targets for drone attacks.

Anwar al-Awlaki and ‘Abdallah al-Rushud as being an outstanding hero of the Arab Peninsula, the jihadists’ reference to Saudi Arabia.¹⁵²

Thee need to justify the execution of the nine OMON members is outlined in the introduction to al-‘Uyairi’s “study”:

“We have indeed carried out – all praise is God’s – what we had promised, executing the nine prisoners should the Russian government not respond to our demand. We demanded the handing-over of one of their vile war criminals [Colonel Yuri Budanov]. But it saddened us when the government was not willing to hand him to us so that we can put him to death.”¹⁵³

The true nature of the jihadists’ mindset, however, springs up in the following sentence, responding to the criticism of the execution by “some of the Muslims”:

“Our hearts were most upset when we received letters by some of the Muslims disapproving our deed, addressing us with inappropriate comments while demanding us to abide to verses they have snatched of the book of God. They do not understand the meaning of the verses. They are, the speech of God: “later you can release them as a grace or for ransom” (47:4). And the speech of God, exalted is He: “No burdened soul will bear the burden of another” (35:18).

The execution of the nine individuals was further denoted that as members of the OMON unit, they nevertheless are war criminals themselves – when Budanov was not handed over to the *Mujahideen*.

Fulfilling his role as an ideologue, al-‘Uyairi addresses the readers to have written “this clarification to issue our *shari’a* proof allowing us our actions in regard of those prisoners”, dividing the clarification into “two studies:

1. Refuting those who say the killing of prisoners based on God’s speech “later you can release them as a grace or for ransom” is forbidden (*haram*).”

This first part is dedicated to the permissibility and legality of executing prisoners and provides historical examples on the treatment and exchange of captives. Al-‘Uyairi, responding to criticism after the execution of the Russians, emphasizes the validity and *shari’a-law* sanctioning by interpreting two parts of verses of the Quran, namely 47:4 and 35:18, that would later be used to sanctify the Nicholas Berg and Paul Johnson beheading and is as such quoted in the statements that were disseminated electronically.

152 Ayman al-Zawahiri, *li-ahlina fi manzal al-wahi wa-mahad al-Islam*, al-Sahab, May 16, 2012.

153 The original document was published in 2000.

All references to Yusuf al-‘Uyairi’s *Hidaya al-hiyyara fi jawaz qutl al-asara* are to the most recent revised Arabic version of his writing, as published by the *Sawt al-Jihad / Markaz al-dirasa wa-l-buhuth al-Islamiyya* after the execution of Paul Marshall Johnson in 2004, showing the handcuffs on the cover.

Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, “*Hidaya al-hiyyara fi jawaz qutl al-asara*” (Markaz al-dirasa wa-l-buhuth al-Islamiyya), 5.

2. “Refuting those who say that we must abide to international laws and agreements that forbid the killing of prisoners and that we must respect human rights.”

The second part is a modern reaction to contemporary cases based on the findings of the first part. This consists of a reasoning following an ‘eye-for-an-eye’ logic. Massacres in Bosnia, the killings of Iraqi prisoners by American forces in 1991 and the death of Muslims by the Israeli forces after the 1973 October War serve as comparison for al-‘Uyairi to the “defensive” actions of jihadist groups worldwide and as a due cause for contemporary operations.

The importance of this study for jihadist operational implementation is underlined by the guidelines and guidance set to which most groups responded in their filmed output of exhibiting hostages, their confessions and the subsequent execution. At least two revised versions of al-‘Uyairi’s document exist, the most recent version, published in 2009, also entitles al-‘Uyairi’s *Markaz al-dirasat wal-buhuth al-Islamiyya*¹⁵⁴ as publisher. The 2004 version is available on the *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l Jihad*¹⁵⁵ website and sometimes referenced in the pertaining *fatwa* forum as a guideline to the *shari’a-law* sanctioning of executing prisoners or captives in general. The foreword to the most recent revised study starts by responding the criticism to the killing of Paul Marshall Johnson by the led “astray *‘ulama*”. “They claimed that [the execution] has no valid Islamic credential whatsoever and regarding the kidnapped they may have to read the biography of the prophet (*al-sira al-nabawiyya*) and other sources to cover up their loyalty (*al-wala*) to the enemies and their dissociation (*al-bara*) to the *Mujahideen*.”¹⁵⁶ The fundamental sentiment is derived of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara*, the loyalty to God and the absolute dissociation to anything contrasting the true belief (*iman*), religious methodology (*manhaj*) and conduct of creed (*‘aqida*) as defined by jihadist scholars such as al-‘Uyairi. As only the jihadists’ files, to summarize the vast quantity of electronic sources, are credible and authoritative, contradicting the ‘state-owned’ *‘ulama*’ and challenge to guide the youth of Islam (*shabab al-Islam*). Therefore, al-‘Uyairi’s study is presented as an unbiased interpretation of divine and prophetic acts and commandments, determined as being “guidance for the Islamic *umma* into the truth (*haqq*) by *shari’a-law* reasoning based on Qur’an and *Sunna*.”

154 Yusuf al-‘Uyairi was an online pioneer and the main driving force to establish al-Qaeda’s first exclusively electronic magazine, the *Sawt al-Jihad* that would be developed in full by his successor Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin. After al-‘Uyairi’s death the military sister magazine *Mu’askar al-Battar* was published to commemorate him. Al-Sayf al-Battar, the sharp sword, was al-‘Uyairi’s nom de guerre, as noted by Rüdiger Lohlker in his contribution in this volume.

155 <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=dkayuhe4>.

156 *Hidaya al-hiyyara fi jawaz qatl al-asara*, revised version 2009, 3.

The first – theological and historical – study deals with the parameters of prisoners (*asara*) that are equals to the modern term hostage (*rahin*) as Islam is at war and therefore hostages are considered – in most cases – prisoners of war. The principles, however, include also the possibility to ransom prisoners or to exchange these for Muslim prisoners. Other jihadist works on the issue expand the proposed *shari'a-law* sanctioning of using prisoners as human shields (*hukm al-tatarrus*) or the permissibility to attack enemy forces should they use Muslim prisoners as human shields.¹⁵⁷ Al-'Uyairi's work was yet a pioneer work that would set the precedence for later ideologues and their electronic publications, ironically assuming the same arbitrarily lack of knowledge that jihadists accredit to those who criticize their actions.

Four cases make up the first study and are based on historical scholars' rulings and writings. Al-'Uyairi thrives in this part as here he enforces his interpretation of specific verses of the Quran to justify jihadi group actions:

1. "Regarding the statement allowing the execution of the prisoner and a reaction to those, who disavow our deeds by the speech of God", stating Quran 47:4 and 35:18 as furthermore detailed.
2. "The permissibility of ransoming (*al-fida*) Muslims in exchange for our prisoners of the disbelievers.
3. In regard of the permissibility to exchange the cadavers of the disbelievers for Muslim prisoners or their bodies.
4. In regard of the permissibility of transferring the corpses of the disbelievers or their decapitated heads."

The second part consists of responses or refutations to geopolitical circumstances of the time of al-'Uyairi's writing from which he draws his reasoning following the logic 'an eye for an eye':

"To those who raised their objections against us, who said we are obliged to abide to international treaties (such as the Geneva convention for prisoners) and must respect human rights."

He states three cases on which his argumentations are elaborated:

1. "The massacre of Muslims which occurred in Bosnia [1991 – 93];
2. Another example is what happened to the Iraqi prisoners during the invasion of Kuwait by US-forces [1991];
3. The actions of the Israeli forces after the end of the "1973 October" war."

157 Ibn Taymiyya, "Qaeda fi l-inghimas al-'adu wa-hal yubah?" Riyadh: Adwa' al-salaf, 2002. Abu Yahya al-Libi, "al-Tatarrus fi l-jihad al-mu'asir. Accessed June 1. <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=vjs5vkiw>. Nico Prucha, A Look at Jihadists Suicide Fatwas – The Case of Algeria. Accessed 01.06.2012. <http://www.rieas.gr/images/prucha.pdf>.

For the first part (pp. 6–13), al-‘Uyairi seeks to re-enact an Islamic scholarly tradition by dividing the “permissibility of killing the prisoner” into five arguments by historical legal scholars, however, remaining vague in using few citations. This is a direct response to Muslim critiques who emphasized the execution of prisoners is a violation of the *shari’a* by quoting the Quran. Al-‘Uyairi incorporates and emphasizes the quoted verses, as referenced in the introduction, to declare the divine sanctioning of such acts and to counter any possible future criticism. The main criticism was addressed as the execution of the OMON members and later the killing of Paul Marshall Johnson was in contradiction to the Quran (47:4):

“When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the neck, and once they are defeated, bind any captives firmly – later you can release them as a grace (*manna*) or for ransom (*fida*) – until the toils of war have ended.”

Al-‘Uyairi only focuses on “later you can release them as a grace or for ransom” in a selective reading of the Quran, by establishing his arguments to other out-of-context citations in the “five opinions by scholars regarding the prisoner.”¹⁵⁸

Fragments of verses are the fundament, interpreted by al-‘Uyairi with fragments abrogated by other fragments, enforcing the alleged legality of killing non-Muslim prisoners:

“The first opinion: Regarding those who say that the *mushrik* prisoner must be killed under all circumstances, not deeming it permissible to ransom (*yufada* – *fida*) or to release them as a grace (*yumannu* – *manna*). The permissibility to release them as a grace or to ransom them by the speech of God, exalted is He: “later you can release them as a grace or for ransom” (47:4) is abrogated (*nasikh*) by His saying: “it is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has conquered the battlefield” (8:67) as well as His speech: “When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you encounter the idolaters [*mushrikeen*], kill them (*fa aqtulu*)” (9:5); and “make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them, so that they may take heed” (8:57).”¹⁵⁹

Al-‘Uyairi refers to Kufi scholars to underline the legality of abrogating 9:5 as the final valid position. “‘Abd al-Karim al-Jazri said that Abu Bakr [al-Sadiq] was informed about one prisoner [by the *Mujahideen*], as they asked to release him for a ransom of such-and-such. [Abu Bakr] said: “kill him” (*aqtuluhu*), for killing men of the *mushrikeen* is more desirable than [a ransom of] such-and-such.” Even as this statement of al-Jaziri “does not correspond to the [acts] of the messenger of God.” This, al-‘Uyairi emphasizes, will be outlined in the fifth and

158 Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, “*Hadayya al-hiyyara fi jawaz qatl al-asara*” (Markaz al-dirasa wa-l-buhuth al-Islamiyya), 6–7.

159 This is a prime example of the jihadists’ selective reading of verses of the Quran, dropping the first part of the verse that confines this to “if you meet them in battle”, referring to classical combatants.

most valid opinion. The last stated fragment of 8:57, “make a fearsome of them to those who come after them, so that they may take heed” (*fa sharrid bi-him man khalafahum*) is an apologist fashion when kidnapping and executing individuals, claiming that the individual is tied to a greater, collective action or foreign policy.

“The second opinion: It is not permissible to ransom any of the disbelievers, *mushrikeen* as well as Jews and Christians, or to grant them grace, rather, they must be killed. The verse grants release and ransom, “later you can release them as a grace or for ransom” is indeed abrogated for the *mushrikeen* and Jews and Christians, seconding the position of the first opinion (...). The scholars state that the captured *mushrik* is neither released nor ransomed for he would return to his people [continuing his hostility against Muslims]. It is not permissible to ransom the prisoner to them, except for women, for they are not combatants. The abrogation is set by “wherever you encounter the idolaters [*mushrikeen*], kill them” (...) Therefore, it is obligatory to kill every *mushrik*, except women and children and those, who pay the *jizya*.” Al-‘Uyairi states Hanafi scholars¹⁶⁰ who abrogate 47:4 by 8:57 and 9:5 as the last valid opinion, thus sanctioning the killing of “*mushrikeen* wherever you find them.” Naturally, this declares anyone as a potential target with the term *mushrik* loosely applied to non-Muslims by jihadists.

“The third opinion: That the prisoner may not be executed but must be ransomed or released, as based on God’s speech “later you can release them as a grace or for ransom.”” The question here is, which verse has the final authority and thus abrogates other verses that clearly demand the killing. Al-‘Uyairi cites various scholars debating the topic, noting “al-Hasan who stated: “therefore strike them in the neck until the toils of war have ended”, referencing parts of 47:4. Al-Hasan then said: “bind any captives firmly.”” However, al-‘Uyairi rejects releasing the prisoner as based on 47:4, arguing that this “is contrary to the prophets deeds after this verse was revealed”, arguing that “the toils of war have not ended.” Drawing a direct analogy of the early Muslims under the prophet’s guidance to contemporary circumstances, al-‘Uyairi defines the Islamic *umma* in a state of war, not only in Chechnya (Russian occupation), but also elsewhere, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia at the time of al-‘Uyairi’s writing...

“The fourth opinion: States that no prisoner may be taken or ransomed, only after the conquest of the battlefield and the victory by the sword. As God, exalted is He, says: “It is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has conquered the battlefield” (8:67). For if prisoners are taken afterwards, the *imam* may judge accordingly.” As Abu Sarah argued in his response to the beheading of Nicholas Berg, this is a core verse in the justification of executing prisoners for the war has

160 Qatada and Mujahid.

not ended, whereas the circumstances on when or how the war shall be deemed as over is not detailed.

“The fifth opinion: This grants the *imam*, or those legally deputized by him, to chose one of four options for prisoners: (1) execution, (2) release, (3) ransom, (4) keep them in bondage.” Al-‘Uyairi refers this opinion to most Islamic legal schools and the “majority of the *ulama*’, for this is the opinion on which accordingly actions are based upon.” Subsequently, al-‘Uyairi bases his account and abrogation of the relevant verses and those used by the critics, elaborating that “so bind them firmly” (8:67) and “wherever you encounter the idolaters [*mushrikeen*], kill them” (9:5) as the proof of the *Mujahideen*’s decision to execute prisoners, not violating *shari’a*-law. To underline this, he cites al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi and Ibn Taymiyya among other historical Quran scholars, al-‘Uyairi literally throws into the mix in an attempt to fashion his ‘degree’ in scholarly style. The decision to execute is also an re-enactment of the prophet, for

“the permission to kill is given in the verse 9:5 [abrogating all other verses]. Furthermore, as the prophet acted when prisoners of war came before him, for he killed some, ransomed some, and showed some mercy.”

As Abu Sarah noted, al-‘Uyairi exemplifies Muhammad’s dealing with the prisoners after the battle of Badr. Interpreting the fragment of 47:4 “until the toils of war have ended”, al-‘Uyairi seeks further proof of the actions of the *Mujahideen*, by citing al-Tabari’s *tafsir*:

“For if you meet those who disbelief in battle, strike them in the neck and take them prisoners, as described upon you, until the toils of war have ended.”

Building his line of arguments further by citation, al-‘Uyairi cites “*shaykh al-Islam*, Ibn Taymiyya” to elaborate the contemporary jihadists’ reasoning that could be seen as a loophole for militant freedom of actions. “Ibn Taymiyya stated in his *Majmu’ al-fatawa* (34/116): “For the *imam* [the leader of the *Mujahideen*, independent of time and space in al-‘Uyairi’s mindset] has to chose between execution or bondage, between ransoming or release. The *imam*’s decision has to benefit of the Muslims. For it would be not beneficial if he would not base his decision on the *rule of God* and he would receive double reward.”

Thomas Riegler

Jihad according to Hollywood

The depiction of Islamist terrorism in American Movies and TV Series

Background: Radical Islamist Terrorism

Radical Islamist terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon. Put into context, it constitutes the most recent “wave” in the history of political violence. Mainly formed in radical opposition against “corrupt” Arab regimes and greatly inspired by the Iranian Revolution (1979) and the Afghan resistance against the Red Army in the 1980s, radical Islamist groups have been aiming to establish true Muslim states based on the laws of the Quran. Their followers mostly derive from the “Salafi”, a traditionalist branch of Islam, which emerged as a reaction to Western colonialism in 18th century Saudi-Arabia and was politically ideologized in the 1960s. While the overwhelming majority of the Salafi reject violence and advocate a peaceful transformation of society, small groups follow the path of a violent “jihad” against the “near enemy” (corrupt elites at home) and against the “far enemy” (meaning mainly the United States, but also the West in general). In the 1990s, jihad had been mostly directed against the “near enemy”, in theatres like Egypt, Chechnya, Kashmir, or Bosnia. But since these local struggles failed to rally the Muslim world, it was the strategic decision of Al Qaeda to refocus on the “far enemy” and target the US with terrorist violence in 1998, 1999, and 2001.

The attacks of September 11th, 2001 in New York and Washington provoked an overwhelming response, but no significant popular response in the Islamic world to match it. Even worse, Al Qaeda lost its haven in Afghanistan, and many of its leaders were killed or captured. On the other hand, the “War on Terror” did not diminish radical Islamist terrorism – since the US invasion of Iraq (2003) major bombings occurred in Bali, Istanbul, Madrid, and London, and countless plots have been foiled. The threat already defines a new “era of fear”, which is increasingly perceived as an age of cultural conflict between mutually exclusive “civilisations” and value systems.

Hollywood and radical Islamist terrorism

According to *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said's classic text about how Eastern cultures were imagined by Western scholars, writers, designers, and artists, the main difference of the Orientalist from the Oriental "is that the former writes about, whereas the latter is written about."¹ Thus, it is a result of hegemony, which sets "us" vs. "them". This form of domination is achieved, conveyed, and sustained through various means; one of the most important is the sphere of cultural production. Said's focus was mainly on scholarly discourse and literature, but his thesis can also be applied to film: American productions dominate the cinematic discourse about the Middle East and Islam to a degree that makes the Orient object of Western cultural domination. Thus, what Said explains in "Culture and Imperialism" (1993) can be applied to Hollywood's hegemony in distributing images and narratives about Middle Eastern or Islamic themes to audiences worldwide: "All cultures tend to make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them. Yet not all cultures make representations of foreign cultures *and* in fact, master or control them."² Hence Hollywood can be interpreted as an ideological tool which functions to foster American hegemony, legitimising its policies in the Middle East and shaping popular attitudes towards issues like Islam, fundamentalism, and especially terrorism.³ Correspondingly, the following section provides an overview over key narratives, images and plot structures that "construct" the radical Islamist terrorist and the issue of "jihad" in Hollywood cinema and to lesser degree in TV shows.

The 1970s: Distanced perspectives on terrorism

The preoccupation with terrorism originating from a Middle Eastern or Islamic background started early on: The 1948 film serial *Federal Agents vs. the Underworld, Inc.* featured "Nila", an Egyptian "female fanatic", and probably the first Arab woman terrorist on screen, who urges her followers "to rise up against the infidels".⁴ Two years later United Artists released *Conspiracy in Teheran*, where a wealthy Persian tries to assassinate President Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁵

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1978), 308.

2 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Random House UK, 1993), 120.

3 Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East. Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (New York: IB Tauris, 2006), 166.

4 Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs. How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Roundhouse Publishing, 2001), 196.

5 Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 105.

Trunk to Cairo (1966) is yet another example of an American agent and Israeli spies sabotaging an Egyptian atomic missile project, which threatens world peace and the security of the Jewish state.

These sporadic encounters became more frequent in the 1970s, at a time when international terrorism and especially plane hijacking orchestrated by Palestinian groups made headlines throughout the Western world. Thus, the Arab gunman, who threatens innocent passengers and strikes at Western installations, became a typical Hollywood villain. Since Middle Eastern terrorism by that time had not struck against the US directly, the entertainment industry mainly looked abroad for inspiration. Major events were dramatised for the screen: William A. Graham staged the Munich hostage massacre of 1972 four years later in *21 hours at Munich*. Only five months after the real event Marvin J. Chomsky replayed the spectacular Entebbe rescue mission in the studio featuring a big star cast, including Burt Lancaster as defence minister Shimon Peres, Anthony Hopkins as Yitzhak Rabin, and Liz Taylor as a relative of a hostage (*Victory at Entebbe*).⁶ John Frankenheimer's *Black Sunday* (1977) was exceptional, because it featured a scenario of international terrorism hitting the US homeland: Palestinian terrorist Dahila Iyad (Marthe Keller) enlists an alienated Vietnam vet Michael Lander (Bruce Dern). Together they plan to detonate a Goodyear blimp loaded with scrap metal over thousands of sport fans watching the Super Bowl finale.⁷

Taken together, during the 1970s, terrorism and political violence were not primarily associated with Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East: Fitting the Cold War framework the enemy "other" was made up of European left-wingers, Third World guerrillas, as well as "home-grown" radicals and "lone wolfs". If Middle Eastern terrorists appeared, their background was primarily secular with an agenda aiming for national liberation.

The 1980s: Enter Religious Fanatics

This more or less distanced perspective on terrorism changed abruptly once the US was directly confronted, following the Iranian hostage crisis (1979), the American involvement in the Lebanese civil war, and the resulting confrontation with Shiite extremism. At the same time, terrorism rapidly acquired an extraordinary status in American public opinion. According to William J. Palmer,

6 Robert Cettl, *Terrorism in American Cinema: An Analytical Filmography, 1960–2008* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), 279–280.

7 Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2009), 25–28.

from this time on “terrorism is everywhere in eighties life. [...] In the films of the eighties, terrorism becomes the most prominent trope for the frightening loss of stability and erosion of security characteristic of life in this decade.”⁸

One of the most intriguing examples is *Delta Force* (1986): The film sets off with a portrayal of the 1985 skyjacking of TWA 847 by the Shiite Islamic Jihad. While this hostage scenario was ended after a period of negotiations, *Delta Force* gives free rein to a military solution inspired by previous Israeli “victories over terrorism”. It is as if the agonising inefficacy of the US in Reagan’s “war on terror” had to be compensated. Therefore it is no coincidence that *Delta Force* features the real-life “Desert One” incident as prelude. According to director Menachem Golan, the ill-fated rescue attempt for the Iranian hostages in 1980 was “a turning point in America’s policy on terrorism”: “The American people were furious when they realized that the US had become completely powerless against fanatics“. It resulted in eight soldiers killed and thirteen injured, and contributed to the downfall of the Carter administration. In the movie version the shameful evacuation prompts a disillusioned Captain McCoy (Chuck Norris) to complain to his superior Colonel Alexander (Lee Marvin) about the political responsibility of the fiasco: “I have spent five years in Vietnam watching them do the planning, and us the dying. As soon as we get home, I’m resigning.” Five years later McCoy gets a second chance to set the score right: He assists Alexander and his fellow soldiers when *Delta Force* is dispatched to liberate the hostages from the hijacked airliner. “This time” the Americans are allowed to go in and “get those people out of there.”⁹ This means an incursion into Beirut, where the hostages were taken and dispersed to underground dungeons. The rescuers blast their way through the city, kill scores of enemy fighters, and get the hostages to safety. McCoy himself enacts revenge on Abdul in a deliberate slow way: First he punches him senseless, then obliterates him from afar with a rocket launched from a launcher attached to the rear of his black, high tech motorcycle: “Sleep tight, sucker.”¹⁰ In reference to *Delta Force*’s fixation on gratifying pay-back, analyst Melani McAlister has described the movie as special among the post-Iran antiterrorist films, “not because it has a more sophisticated plot or more developed characterizations than other films of the genre but precisely because it does not. *Delta Force* is outstanding only in the degree to which it is animated by a virulently racist and patently militarist fantasy of rescue and revenge, which manages to place only the thinnest gloss of plot and character-

8 William Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1995), 164.

9 Eric Lichtenfeld, *Action speaks louder: Violence, spectacle, and the American action movie* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 106–108.

10 Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 158.

ization over its love affair with military hardware, body counts, and men on motorcycles.”¹¹

A similar narrative of righteous revenge is put forward by *Iron Eagle* (1986): Therein, an American teenager and Air Force-volunteer frees his captured and detained father from the clutches of the evil Colonel Nakesh (David Suchet), defence minister of the “shitty little country” Bilyad (obviously standing for Libya). The film’s soundtrack amplifies the main message – the US has to take a harder stance on terrorism: “We’re not gonna take it anymore”.¹² The theme of armed rescue is also central to *On Wings of Eagles*, a 1986 miniseries based on Ken Follett’s best-selling book. The story centres on heroic businessmen who defy the US government and decide to rescue their own imprisoned employees from Tehran. The 1989 TV thriller *The Hijacking of the Achille Lauro* recreated the hijacking of an Italian cruise liner by Palestinian gunmen, which had taken place four years ago then. The event became popular because the US undertook unilateral action to capture the hijackers after a peaceful settlement of the crisis had been negotiated by Egypt. It was one of the few so called “victories” over terrorism during the 1980s.

Most scenarios however did not address actual events, but drew ever more alarming pictures of the terrorist threat, especially in the B-movie genre: *Death before Dishonour* (1987) shows the US embassy compound in “Jemal”, a fictitious Middle Eastern country under attack by Palestinian terrorists, who are “depicted as worthless, lying scum” according to critic Janet Maslin. Led by “Abu Jihad” (Rockne Tarkington) they kidnap and torture the commanding Marine officer. From that point on it becomes a one man-rescue mission for Marine Gunnery Sergeant Jack Burns (Fred Dryer) who gets “fighting mad”. Compromise is not an option as the American Ambassador firmly reminds a young woman that “the reality is, Miss, the United States does not and will not negotiate with terrorists.”¹³ In *Hostage* (1986) Vietnam veterans led by soldier of fortune Sam Striker (Wings Hauser) liberate hostages on board of a passenger plane hijacked by “The Holy Freedom Party of Allah”, a PLO splinter group. The “mad” violence and turmoil of the Middle East has finally reached the homeland in *Terror in Beverly Hills* (1988): An ex-Green Beret and LA policeman has to fight Palestinians, who have kidnapped his wife and son, as well as the US President’s daughter.

While particular disdain was reserved for Iranian, Palestinian, and Libyan extremists, the principal enemies of the Reagan administration in the Middle

11 Melani McAlister, “Iran, Islam, and the Terrorist Threat, 1979 – 1989,” in *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*, ed. J. David Slocum (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 159.

12 Helena Vanhala, *The Depiction of Terrorists in Blockbuster Hollywood Films, 1980 – 2001: An Analytical Study* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 153 – 155.

13 Janet Maslin, “Film: ‘Death before Dishonour,’” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1987.

East, the major theatre of jihad in the 1980s got a remarkably different treatment from Hollywood. The Afghan mujahidin were represented as noble “freedom fighters” in their struggle against the Red Army. Mousa tells his American ally in *Rambo III* (1988): “This is Afghanistan... Alexander the Great try to conquer this country... then Genghis Khan, then the British. Now Russia. But Afghan people fight hard, they never be defeated.”¹⁴

The “new dangers” of the Post-Cold War era

Fitting the climate of political correctness of the post-Cold War years the movie terrorists of the 1990s are ethnically varied: European radicals (*Passenger 57*, *Die Hard I*), Irish republicans (*Blown Away*, *The Devil's Own*), corrupt Russian military figures in alliance with resentful Bosnian Serbs (*The Peacemaker*), and Latin American drug lords (*The Cartel*). But most of them were “homegrown”: disgruntled former employees of law enforcement agencies (*Speed*) and renegade soldiers (*Die Hard II*, *Operation Broken Arrow*, *The Rock*).¹⁵ Among these villains, the jihadist, meaning individuals committed to armed struggle in the name of radical Islamist ideology, is featured prominently for the first time. The appearance follows in the wake of the bombing of the World Trade Center (1993). That first act of radical Islamist terrorism on US soil was a watershed event, as “Time” reported: “Terrorism seemed like something that happened somewhere else – and somewhere else a safe distance over the horizon. And then last week, in an instant, the World Trade Center in New York City became Ground Zero.”¹⁶ No matter how destructive the Shiite terrorism of the 1980s had proven, it was linked to the power struggle in Lebanon and limited to international flights and US installations abroad. The “holy warriors”, who tried to topple the World Trade Center with a car bomb, were a different lot: Lacking a state sponsor and a predictable strategic agenda, this act of terror was all about sending a message and engaging the US in a war of ideas.

Hollywood reacted swiftly and introduced the jihadist in films like *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), and *The Siege* (1999) to the screen: Fanatical in his hatred against the US, displaying no regard for innocent life when enacting spectacular violence, and rejecting all possibilities for moderation. In short: A backward lunatic, a deluded zealot and a potential mass murderer, whose onslaught had to be fought by all means necessary.¹⁷ As screenwriter Steve De Souza

14 Sally Totman, *How Hollywood Projects Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 165.

15 Lichtenfeld, *Action speaks louder*, 170 – 171.

16 Richard Lacayo, “Tower Terror,” *Time*, March 8, 1993.

17 Peter Brinkemper, “Angstbekämpfung im Militainment,” *Kunstforum International* 165 (2003): 130 – 131.

(*Die Hard I & II*) told the BBC, Middle Eastern terrorists made perfect villains because they needed no explanatory context – the public immediately recognised them as a threat: “Arab terrorists became popular because ... you know ... in the news around the world you’d see them doing things and they seemed to be very loosely associated, and they required no explanation. Arab terrorists, okay, the movie proceeds, whereas if you have a worked out story simply about a murder or a love triangle or revenge, well you’ve got to know something about the people and invest some time in what makes them tick. This is easy. They’ve got a turban, we don’t have to know what’s going on under the turban, just proceed with the story.”¹⁸

Contrary to the post 9/11 movies, the jihadists of the 1990s were thoroughly constructed and did not refer to existing organizations, groups, etc. A good example is the group “Crimson Jihad” in *True Lies*: It has smuggled nuclear weapons out of former Soviet republic Kazakhstan and attempts to blackmail the US government. Terrorist ringleader Abu Aziz (Art Malik) is described in the script as a “defiant-looking Syrian with a full beard”.¹⁹ Wild-eyed, manic, and especially abusive towards women, Aziz is a prime example of the stereotypical “bad” terrorist “other” that creates fear and anxiety among innocents. Once he is characterised in staccato: “Hardcore, highly fanatical, ultra-fundamentalist. Linked to numerous car-bombings, that café bomb in Rome, and the 727 out of Lisbon last year. Major player.” Since the other groups were “too warm and fuzzy” for his taste, Aziz founded his own splinter faction: “Crimson Jihad”. Composed of mostly dark-haired and unshaven men, it is a very chaotic bunch: The terrorists handle their enormous arsenal unprofessionally, often shooting each other in the process or simply firing aimlessly in the air. “Crimson Jihad” may not be presented outright as religiously motivated, but viewers are likely to perceive the group in the familiar framework of intolerant and backward zealots attacking the American Way of Life. To demonstrate their earnestness the terrorists detonate the first bomb on an uninhabited island of the Florida Keys. The “pillar of holy fire” that rises at this place threatens a nuclear holocaust.²⁰

Spymaster Trilby (Charlton Heston) urges his troops to locate Aziz and his men before “somebody parks a car in front of the White House with a nuclear bomb in the trunk.” This job is effectively done by Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger), agent of the “Omega Sector”, a clandestine unit specialising in

18 “September 11: A warning from Hollywood,” BBC Panorama, March 24, 2002, accessed July 7, 2009, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/panorama/transcripts/transcript_24_03_02.txt.

19 Susanne McCorkle, “American Hero Meets Terrorist,” in *War and Film in America: Historical and Critical Essays*, ed. Marilyn J. Matelski and Nancy Lynch Street (Jefferson: McFarland, 2003), 169.

20 *True Lies* Script, accessed May 15, 2009, www.awesomefilm.com/script/truelies.txt.

counter-proliferation, and according to its motto “the last line of defense”. Tasker averts the next terrorist attack in downtown Miami and rescues his kidnapped wife and daughter. In the process he decimates the remaining terrorists from behind the guns of a harrier jet and kills Aziz by launching him on a missile right into a helicopter carrying the last enemy fighters: “You’re fired”.²¹ Generally, *True Lies* conceives itself as an action comedy. Art Malik, who plays Aziz, says in the video release’s introduction, “it’s fun type film, therefore I hope no one takes it too seriously.”²²

Executive Decision was more serious: It features Arabs hijacking a Boeing 747 with the intention of blowing up the plane, and smuggle enough nerve gas on board to wipe out the entire East Coast of the US. “We are the true Soldiers of Islam. Our destiny is to deliver the vengeance of Allah into the belly of the infidel“, the fanatical Naji Hassan (David Suchet), a “true believer”, calls out. Hassan is actually only second in command in an organisation led by Abu Jaffa – by focusing on the friction between these two terrorist players a sub-plot aims to show how the limited and nationalistic orientated terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s has been replaced by a breed of “new” breed of terrorism, religiously motivated and with a capacity for limitless violence. Right at the beginning, Jaffa, “once the most notorious and feared terrorist in the world, now a desperate, hunted man”, is abducted in Cyprus by unidentified mercenaries and delivered to the American authorities. Already Jaffa had started portraying himself as a moderate leader, “another Arafat”, while his subordinate Hassan still represents the hard-line, fundamentalist position. He has the Boeing 747 hijacked to put pressure on the US government to release Jaffa. Indeed the leader is released from custody, but the flight stays on course as if nothing happened. It is revealed that Hassan has actually arranged the capture of his commander so he could carry out his own mission: Targeting US directly in an act of catastrophic suicide terrorism. When Jaffa calls Hassan from a private jet, telling him he is free, his subordinate is not swayed from his plan: “In a few hours, you will see how truly glorious my victory will be...”²³ On board, Hassan promptly asserts his authority and intimidates his uneasy men to follow him on this path to certain death. When one subordinate dares to shouts out, “This has nothing to do with Islam”, he is promptly shot. Also a US senator, who happens to be on board and wants to negotiate to advance his own career interests, receives a “punishing” bullet in the head. *Executive Decision* aims straight for a climatic shoot-out: Right at the last second a group of Special Forces, who slipped into the belly of

21 Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 193.

22 McCorkle, “American Hero Meets Terrorist,” 160–173.

23 *Executive Decision* Script, accessed June 12, 2009, www.movie-page.com/scripts/ExecutiveDecision.pdf.

the plane in mid-flight via a “decompression tunnel”, intervenes and shoots all hijackers. According to publicity the film makers were adamant to produce a “realistic” portrayal of the enemy: They hired an Arabic Technical Advisor to create “authentic” characters and plausible dialogue. For research this expert even visited Sheikh Abdul Rahman, the mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing in prison.²⁴

The threat of radical Islamist terrorism in alien territories is the subject of *Rules of Engagement* (2000): When a mob, incited by the messages of the Islamic Jihad, attacks the US embassy in Yemen, the commanding Marine Colonel Nathan Childers (Samuel L. Jackson) orders his men to shoot into the crowd with great loss of life. To appease the angry Arab world the officer is put on trial, but during the proceedings, Childer’s attorney Hay Hodges (Tommy L. Jones) reveals that the “massacre was in fact a fire fight where shooting in self-defence was permissible.” The crowd of protesters is shown to be full of venomous, evil-looking “others” intent on making life miserable for innocent, businesslike Americans simply trying to do their job – marines the same as embassy staff. Filled with veiled women, the mob appears on screen as nothing more than a vehicle of hatred and destruction. Some Arabs in the mob have weapons and begin shooting; even children are presented as potential enemies. Once the firing started and a Marine got hit, Childers gave the order: “Waste the motherfuckers” – but as the conclusion of the trial explains, the civilians got only what they deserved.²⁵

The Siege (1998) concentrates on the enemy within and the reaction of the American public in the face of terrorist violence. One of the introductory shots depicts a call to prayer from a minaret in what looks like a Middle Eastern setting until the zoom reveals bit by bit the silhouette of Manhattan. The metropolis is in a state of siege: To force the US government to release their leader Sheikh Talal, who had been kidnapped by American forces, several terrorist cells undertake suicide missions. First a bus is bombed, then a theatre on Broadway, and finally the FBI headquarter. When the crisis reaches its culmination the president declares martial law. Soon an Army division patrols through Brooklyn where the majority of Arab immigrants are concentrated. To destroy the remaining terrorist cell, all able-bodied males who do not cooperate, are detained behind barbed wire in a football stadium.²⁶ Liberal FBI investigator Frank Hubbard (Denzel Washington), who managed the investigation before the army was called in, is the exact opposite of commanding General William Deveraux (Bruce Willis): While the latter uses his troops like a “broadsword” and personally

24 “September 11: A Warning from Hollywood,” BBC Panorama.

25 Boggs, Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine*, 185.

26 Prince, *Firestorm*, 57 – 60.

tortures suspects, Hubbard does it “by the book” and upholds constitutional rights. In the end he arrests not only Deveraux for murdering a prisoner but disposes the last attacker. This young Palestinian, trusted before by Hubbard and his CIA associate, exclaims both defiant and threatening: “There will never be a last cell!”²⁷ *The Siege* was criticised for stereotyping Muslims, but the film is quite balanced in its portrayal: The suicide bombers are in fact “blowback”-products of a failed CIA operation: “It’s not that we sold them out exactly. We just did not help them any more. They were slaughtered.”²⁸

After 9/11: Jihadists on TV – 24 and *Sleeper Cell*

In the immediate period after 9/11 Hollywood indeed shunned away from the subject of terrorism and focused instead on fantastical escapism, Sci-Fi, and family entertainment. One of the first films to deal with terrorism after 9/11, *The Sum of all Fears* (2002), featured the destruction of Baltimore by an atomic bomb. But overall the film was out of touch with the post-9/11 reality: In the original Tom Clancy novel the movie is based on, the responsible terrorists were comprised of German Communists, a Sioux convict, and Hamas-like Palestinian terrorists opposed to the peace process. Even before September 11th, 2001 this plot line was changed and the odd collection of bad guys was replaced by a European neonazi organization operating out of Vienna, Austria.²⁹ With terrorism more or less out of the picture, threats were depicted as extraterrestrial (*War of the Worlds*, 2005), in the form of disease (*I am Legend*, 2007) or rapid climate change (*The Day after Tomorrow*, 2004). Besides commercial considerations in regard to a weary public, both domestic and international, but also because previously considered fantastic and purely entertaining scenarios had been so “brutally realized”, the subject at hand was not addressed for some years on the movie screen. British journalist Nick Cohen was left to puzzle over why Hollywood decided to avoid the “obvious bad guys”: “Back to the Future, Executive Decision, True Lies and dozens of others, Arabs were off-the-peg bad guys. Yet after 9/11, the stereotypes weren’t fleshed out with an all-too-real psychopathic ideology, but abandoned.”³⁰

Television proved to be different: The shows *24* and *Sleeper Cell* portrayed the threat of radical Islamist terrorism in darkest terms – at a time when Hollywood

27 Lichtenfeld, *Action speaks louder*, 218–220.

28 Timo Kozłowski, “Pinochet gegen al-Qaida,” *Telepolis*, October 20, 2002, accessed March 13, 2011, www.heise.de/tp/artikel/13/13357/1.html.

29 Reihan Salam, “The Sum of all PC,” *Slate*, May 28, 2002, accessed April 2, 2011, <http://img-test.slate.com/id/2066272/>.

30 Nick Cohen, “Screen that flicker and fail to challenge,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2007.

was too uneasy to touch the subject. To begin with *24*, it is no exaggeration to claim that the FOX TV series has shaped the view on terrorism/counterterrorism more than any other pop cultural product. During eight seasons (2001 – 2010) the hero, Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland), agent of the fictional “Counterterrorism Unit” (CTU) has to fight against all kinds of nightmarish threats against US national security: The plots involve stolen nukes, chemical and biological weapons and are arranged by an ever-changing and loose coalition of jihadists, right-wing militiamen, and Latin American drug lords, while traitorous officials and powerful businessmen pull the strings. Appealing to all kinds of popular fears of post 9/11-America, *24* proved to be a huge success. *Time* declared the series the “official Cultural Product of the War on Terrorism.”³¹

24 had its debut in the last week of October 2001. Its pilot episode ended with the explosion of a bomb on an airliner mid route, killing all on board. The scene of the plane’s destruction was edited out in response to 9/11, but the subject of terrorism stayed in.³² In fact terror, fear, and paranoia became the prime ingredients of *24*, and audience did not respond negatively at all: The show achieved top ratings throughout and won numerous awards. What were the reasons for *24*’s successful stance on terrorism?

First of all the subject is presented as detached from reality and allows for a cathartic and safe experience of our worst nightmares. Aaron Thomas Nelson claims that by simulating terrorism in this way, “*24* creates a spectacle for the audience and becomes a way to both purge and revive our passion and fears. We’re able to see terrorism defeated, but not really (since it is not real terrorism Jack Bauer is fighting), and thus our fears are re-established, if not heightened. *24* immerses the viewer into a new, total reality – one where terror is everywhere – and reinvigorates our sense of moral exception in the real-world War on Terror.”³³ Additionally, this form of entertainment stresses that America will always win in the confrontation with terrorism, provided it remains vigilant, and is prepared to follow the logic of lesser evils in an age of constant danger.³⁴

In the first season, which was produced before September 11th, 2001, the enemy was not yet a jihadist, but a fictional Serbian warlord and mercenary, who leads a personal vendetta against Jack Bauer. The threat of radical Islamist terrorism appears in Season 2, which was aired between October 2002 and May

31 James Poniewozik, “The Evolution of Jack Bauer,” *Time*, January 14, 2007.

32 Ina Rae Hark, “Today is the Longest Day of My Life”: *24* as Mirror Narrative of 9/11,” in *Film and Television after 9/11*, ed. Wheeler Winston Dixon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 121.

33 Aaron Thomas Nelson, “Simulating Terror: Why Bush’s Critics Love *24* Even Though It Supports the Bush Doctrine,” in *Jack Bauer for President: Terrorism and Politics in *24**, ed. Richard Minter (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2008), 83.

34 Eric Greene, “Jack Bauer Syndrome”, in *Jack Bauer for President*, 180.

2003. A shadowy group called “Second Wave”, led by Syed Ali (Francesco Quinn), plans to detonate an atomic bomb in Los Angeles. In Season 4 (2005) terrorist mastermind Habib Marwan (Arnold Vosloo), leader of the Turkish group “Crimson Jihad“, appears and sets a chain of escalating violence in motion: A commuter train explodes, the daughter of the Secretary of Defense is kidnapped, and security breaches occur in several nuclear plants. Marwan even manages to shoot down Air Force One and gains hold of the “nuclear football”, the code collection of the President for the authorization of a missile launch. With this device at hand, Marwan targets Los Angeles, but unknown to him the stolen missile is successfully intercepted in midair. Certain of his ultimate victory, he addresses the US public in a speech that is typical in its legitimisation of terrorism as payback for past US injustices: “People of America, you wake up today to a different world. One of your own nuclear weapons has been used against you. It will be days and weeks before you can measure the damage we have caused. But as you count your dead, remember why this has happened to you. You have no concern for the causes of the people you strike down or the nations you conquer. You follow your government, unquestioning, toward your own slaughter. Today, you pay the price for that ignorance. ... Unless you renounce your policies of imperialism and interventionist activities, this attack will be followed by another... and another after that.”³⁵

Radical Islamist terrorists reappear in Season 6 (2007): Led by Abu Fayed (Adoni Maropis), they blow themselves up in subway trains, buses, and public places. Even the worst nightmare is eventually realised: the terrorists succeed to detonate a Soviet nuclear “suitcase bomb”. The following explosion destroys Valencia, a suburb Los Angeles, and kills more than 12,000 people. To avert further attacks, the government reactivates agent Bauer, who had been detained in a Chinese prison for two years. He teams up with an unlikely associate, the former terrorist Al-Assad (Alexander Siddig) who now wants to pursue his goals through political means. When a colleague questions Bauer because of Assad’s past, the answer is pragmatic: “The playing field has changed.”³⁶ Terrorists like Abu Fayed may be formidable enemies in *24*, but the threat is immediately contained, since all of these groups are revealed as mere puppets of powerful interests. “Second Wave” for example is manipulated by a network of oilmen, who want to draw America into a Middle Eastern war.³⁷ Similarly, Abu Fayed is only an instrument used by Dmitri Gredencko, a former Soviet general, who frames the terrorists in order to provoke a disastrous Middle Eastern war that would allow Russia to become the dominant power in the world. When an

35 24-Episode Guide, accessed November 13, 2006, www.fox.com/24/episodes/.

36 James Poniewozik, “The Evolution of Jack Bauer”, *Time*, January 14, 2007.

37 Kolja Mensing, “Ein amerikanischer Alptraum“, *taz*, March 8, 2004.

associate questions the loyalty of the Arab Gredenکو cuts him short: “They serve their purpose. Our country lost the Cold War because we were afraid to use these weapons against the Americans. Today we will correct that mistake, and the Arabs will take all the blame.”

Only Marwan, who was initially designed as a minor character, is acting on his own – although he receives critical help from a scientist protected by the Chinese consulate. By and large, *24* is full of treacherous characters in key government positions, inside the CTU, and in Jack Bauer’s own family. Season 5 even implicates the President himself as the sponsor of the murder of his predecessor. These hidden conspirators and their agents act out of greed for power and money. Thus, Ina Rae Hark’s verdict on the first season of *24* can also be applied to the later parts of the series: “... the politics involved, the targets of the villains, their methods and motivations are notable precisely for how much they vary from those that constituted the 9/11 attacks. Rather than being carried out by rogue terrorists who symbolically attack the United States because of its superpower status, involvement in global capitalism, and pop culture colonization of other countries, the violence in *24* has narrow personal motivations and results from the activities of competing state intelligence operatives.”³⁸

While *24* represents a classic conservative fantasy, the myth of American omnipotence, the Showtime series *Sleeper Cell* (two seasons, 2005 – 2006) offers a more challenging and differentiated portrayal, both of the inner workings of law enforcement agencies and radical Islamist terrorists. Season 1 (2005) depicts a jihadist sleeper cell in Los Angeles in the process of plotting an attack with biological agents. What its members do not realise is that their group is already infiltrated: The mole, the Afro-American FBI undercover agent Darwyn al-Sayeed (Michael Ealy), is a member of the Nation of Islam. Equipped with a criminal cover story he was introduced to Faris al-Farik (Oded Fehr), the charismatic terrorist mastermind and leader of the cell. Saudi-born Farik is an enigma hiding behind a façade of grim determination, absolute belief, and self secure professionalism. Military educated, a veteran of the Balkan wars, and stemming from the Saudi Revolutionary Guards, he is a top operator of “the base”, as Al Qaeda is called in the series.³⁹ Farik disguises himself as a successful businessman and respected member of a Jewish community, who trains the youth-team “Sinai Maccabees”. The worldly and appealing Farik differs from the rough and uncivilised Islamic villains in *True Lies* or *Executive Decision*. Journalist Alessandra Stanley has called him the “real star” of *Sleeper Cell*: “He is cool

38 Hark, “Today is the Longest Day of My Life”, 122.

39 Alessandra Standley, “Among Terrorists a Hero is lurking,” *The New York Times*, December 2, 2005.

and worldly, tougher and smarter than his captors and far more relentlessly dedicated.”⁴⁰

Farik’s subalterns, whom he commands with authoritarian power over life and death, could not be a more different lot: Illija (Henri Lubatti) is a Bosnian Muslim whose family was executed by Serb militiamen. The French convert Christian (Alex Nestic), a former skinhead, now works as a tourist guide in Hollywood, while blue-eyed Tommy (Blake Shields) is the alienated son of a liberal professor in Berkeley. All of these characters are somehow split personalities: Illija is motivated by a desire for revenge – at the same time he is a great fan of American pop music. What irritates on the part of Alex is his addiction to junk food, American Football, and Mexican telenovelas. His tearful night-time calls to his Moroccan wife, left overseas, make it hard to perceive him as “bad” outright. Tommy on the other hand remains mama’s boy despite his efforts to distance himself from this overpowering maternal figure. All in all, the cell comprises mostly of bloody amateurs, who panic easily and compromise their security by calling loved ones and relatives.⁴¹ But the authorities also come across as unprofessional: When Darwyn demands to hunt down Farik in his hideout in the Middle East, his superior immediately plays down the issue: “The State Department says that the PR war on the Arab street is going against us, badly. Iraq. Lebanon. People at the top figure that any direct action in Yemen may do us more harm than good.”⁴² Despite the fact that the infiltration marks the bureau’s first real success in counterterrorism, Darwyn is not trusted. His cover is repeatedly put at risk by his handlers and he is targeted by internal investigation because he murdered one cell member out of “humanitarian grounds”: The man was convicted to death by stoning by Faris. Rather than letting him endure the horrible misery on the hands of his “brothers”, Darwyn shoots him dead. This supposed “mercy killing” and the implying moral questions underline *Sleeper Cell’s* general tone of ambivalence.

In Season Two (“American Terror“, 2006), Darwyn yet again “embeds” himself in a cell that was formed to avenge the break-up of the initial one. It is once again compromised of unusual recruits: Iraqi-born engineer Salim (Omid Abtahi), the converted Latino gang member Benny (Kevin Alejandro), and Dutch convert Mina (Thekla Reuten), who is referred to as “Osama Bin Dutch Chick”. Their radicalism is charged by personal motives: Salim is driven by self-hatred because of his homosexuality. Mina, a former prostitute, seeks security

40 Alessandra Stanley, “Inside Terrorism’s Tangled Web,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 2006.

41 Lynn Smith, “Showtime’s *Sleeper Cell* brings terrorism home,” *The Boston Globe*, July 31, 2005.

42 Alessandra Stanley, “Inside Terrorism’s Tangled Web,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 2006.

behind the veil and wants to avenge her husband, who died a martyr's death in Iraq.⁴³ The situation soon escalates: Salim improvises a dirty bomb and plans to set it off at the Hollywood Bowl, but is killed. In Las Vegas, Mina carries out a suicide bombing at a veterans' gathering. At the same time Farik, who was captured at the end of Season One and whose interrogation was "outsourced" to Saudi-Arabia, escapes from prison. He hides with Al-Qaeda in Yemen, where Darwyn manages to track him down. The agent then coordinates a missile attack on the camp, but Farik again manages to get away. *Sleeper Cell* has an open ending since the show was cancelled in January 2007 despite critical acclaim.

According to production information, great emphasis was placed on presenting anything but stereotypical characters and action. The series was created in cooperation with technical advisors, Arabic and Islamic experts as well as consultants on counterterrorism, biological, and chemical weapons. The hero himself is a devout Muslim, who states categorically in reference to his brothers: "These guys have nothing to do with my faith."⁴⁴ This line expresses one of the core themes of *Sleeper Cell*: Religion is not responsible for the actions of the terrorists. The Quran is manipulated and bent by extremists like Faris to legitimise violence and serve their political aims. For example in the episode "scholar" (Nr. 4/Season 1) features a former terrorist convict, who now successfully convinces imprisoned radicals of the "true meaning" of jihad by teaching them to reject the violent path in favour of the "jihad of the word". The scholar almost succeeds in demonstrating the cell member Christian that he follows a misinterpretation of Islam, crafted by political ideologues to manipulate their camp.

Another stereotype put into question is the traditional image of the jihadist: In *Sleeper Cell*, the enemy comprises mostly of European converts and Americans. Other Muslim characters are mostly of Westernized type and are seen as enemy targets by the cell members. These "atypical" bad guys spend their time wandering shopping malls, bowling centers, or in well kept suburban homes. This familiarity underlines the uncanny threat that these jihadists pose: They do not plan their operations somewhere in Afghanistan, but "among ourselves" as "friends, neighbours, terrorists" (tagline). Jihad is waged between baseball training and barbecue parties. In *Sleeper Cell* practically everybody can be a terrorist and it is evident that Western societies have no clue about the enemy in their midst. "You get an eerie feeling doing this series on the streets of Los Angeles. You become aware that the people we see around us shopping, walking

43 Troy Patterson, "Uncovering the Plot," www.slate.com, December 15, 2006, accessed June 18, 2011, www.slate.com/articles/arts/television/2006/12/uncovering_the_plot.html.

44 Jacques Steinberg, "On a new Showtime Series, America's Protector is a Muslim," *The New York Times*, July 4, 2005.

around, conducting business could be terrorists undercover waiting for the right moment to act. That might happen at any moment,” actor Oed Fehr stated.⁴⁵

The environment, in which the cell operates, is no American idyll like the mundane suburbs and chic office buildings in *24: In Sleeper Cell*. Los Angeles resembles a chaotic maze of malls, 24 hour shops, and strip clubs. One time Darwyn intervenes when white teenagers abuse a Sikh in the subway because they perceive him a Muslim. Confronted with such situations, the agent seems to consider if protecting this “Way of Live” is really worth the effort. For this reason critic Alessandra Stanley has noted: “*Sleeper Cell* is the one show about terrorism that highlights the weaknesses of our system and the enemy’s inner strength. It’s make-believe entertainment, but painted in a darker, more realistic hue.”⁴⁶ Of course, some conventional elements have to be taken into account, mainly Farik’s super villain likeliness and the overall characterisation of “the base” as a unique powerful and multinational terrorist enterprise, which contrasts starkly with the marginalisation of the Al-Qaeda “core” in the years since 2001. *Sleeper Cell* repeats and reinforces popular myths about the terrorist enemy – for example when it is said about Farik that he “trusts nobody, except maybe Osama”. The show’s fixation on paranoia perfectly fits into the Bush Administration years: Like in *24*, weapons of mass destruction are constantly smuggled into the country and apocalyptic super terrorism looms – exactly the sort of threat scenario the administration was promoting when it legitimated the invasion in Iraq. In the end *Sleeper Cell* is closer to *24* than one might suspect at the first glance.

Hollywood and Post-9/11 terrorism

In mainstream cinema, the topic of radical Islamist terrorism was again picked up in 2005: *Team America: World Police*, featuring marionettes, satirised Hollywood’s essentialism in regard to jihadists and placed its emphasis on the global implications of US counterterrorism. All of the terrorists are Bin Laden look-alikes and keep uttering terms like “Mohammed” “Jihad” and “Derka, Derka, Allah” in a supposedly “Arabic” non-language.⁴⁷ *The War Within* (2005) was one of the earliest serious examinations: It focuses on Hassan (Ayad Akhtar), a Pakistani engineer studying in Paris, who is kidnapped in broad daylight and transferred to a secret prison in his home country to be tortured brutally. It turns

45 “Sleeper Cell Quotes”, accessed July 6, 2009, www.theklareuten.nl/uploadedFiles/Sleeper_Cell_Quotes48.pdf.

46 Alessandra Stanley, “Inside Terrorism’s Tangled Web”, *The New York Times*, December 8, 2006.

47 Khatib, *Filming the Middle East*, 180.

out that Hassan was wrongly suspected of terrorist activities and he is released again. But the violent experience and the influence of a member of the Muslim Brotherhood he met in prison, transforms Hassan into a radical, who seeks revenge for the injustice done to him. He connects with a terrorist cell that is in the middle of planning an attack on the Grand Central Station in New York. To blend in as a sleeper and await the carrying out of the plot, Hassan locates the family of his childhood friend Sayeed Sayeed (Firdous Bamji) in New Jersey. But the peaceful environment in the loving middle class household leaves an impression on him: Romance draws him to Duri (Nadana Sen), the daughter of the house, and her father already issues his blessing for a possible marriage: "Ask her to marry you and become part of my family for good". Also the friendship with Sayeed's young son Ali (Varun Sriram) allows Hassan to see his convictions in a different light – for example when he is asked by the boy: "Did someone take your house?" But when the FBI captures most of his accomplices in an unforeseen development, Hassan's commitment is tested. The shadowy mastermind Khalid (Charles Daniel Sandoval) seriously questions his loyalty to the cause: "You are getting comfortable" and adds menacingly: "I know about the family." So, Hassan's logic is put under severe pressure from these contradictions and his own conflicting emotions: The war, in which he conceives himself, is fought "within" – in his mind.⁴⁸

The search for answers motivates also *Syriana*, a 2005 film that explores the political, economic, legal, and social effects of the oil business, and how its mechanisms breeds terrorism: The main character, elderly CIA agent Bob Barnes (George Clooney), is embedded in a network of power relations connecting mighty Washingtonian law firms, Texan oil firms, the US government and the corrupt elites of a Middle Eastern sheikdom. This "system" uses all means necessary to advance its political-economic interests. Disruptive factors like reformist Prince Nasir, who wants to change the status quo, are eliminated. "Your entire career you have been used", a powerful lawyer tells Barnes, who has to realize that he, the veteran of many special operations, has functioned as a pawn in a new "great game" for oil supply and geopolitical influence.⁴⁹ It is this system that produces terrorism in the form of blowback. A sub plot illustrates this on the basis of the radicalisation of two Pakistani oil workers, who simply want to improve their lives and are prevented from doing so. Suffering under poor working conditions and then getting laid off, they meet an Egyptian cleric who eventually leads them to execute a suicide attack on an oil tanker. On their way to martyrdom, they encounter also a teacher in a Quran school. This man sounds like a familiar critic of Western neoliberal excesses compared to the

48 Ned Martel, "The Path from Injustice to Jihad," The New York Times, September 30, 2005.

49 Harald Fricke, "Alle wollen funktionieren", taz, February 23, 2006.

usually mad chanting on the part of terrorist ideologues: “The divide between human nature and modern life cannot be bridged by free trade. No. It cannot be cured with deregulation, privatisation, openness or lower taxes. No. The pain of living in the modern world will never be solved by a liberal society. Liberal societies have failed. Christian theology has failed. The West has failed.”⁵⁰

In *United 93* (2006) Paul Greengrass retold the story of the hijacked flight that did not reach its intended target on 9/11. Instead it crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, supposedly because the passengers revolted against the hijackers. The director offers only a distanced portrait of the hijackers – although the first scene in the movie, a prayer ritual in the morning hours of September 11th, 2001, depicts them as devout Muslims on a mission. But since *United 93* is all about the heroic actions of the passengers and their sacrifice, the motivation and personal background of the terrorists remain totally obscure to the viewer. Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center* (2006) did not even show the planes hitting the towers, instead concentrated on a human interest story based on the miraculous rescue of two survivors from Ground Zero. With growing distance film makers focused on the War on Terror, its progress and implications, both domestic and international. A number of films were made about the War on Iraq – to avoid a direct political statement most of these films dramatised the painful “homecoming” of veterans, their traumatization and alienation from an indifferent society, as well as on the loss of “left behind”-relatives. Merely *Home of the Brave*, *Redacted* and *The Hurt Locker*, films that actually showed action on the ground from soldier’s perspectives, featured the enemy in some scenes: The Iraqi insurgents, mostly shown as fanatics, appear as exceptionally violent and brutal, with absolutely no regard for life. Obviously the practise of decapitation videos of hostages and outrageous suicide bombings in post-war Iraq has left a deep impression on Western audiences and was reflected in cinema.

Some efforts were directed to capture the War on Terror as a secret, yet morally ambivalent struggle in the shadows. In *Body of Lies* (2008), CIA agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) sets up a fictitious terror group, equips it with fake bank accounts and plants messages in fundamentalist chat rooms. A staged attack on a US Army base in Turkey aims to flush out a jealous Al Qaeda mastermind, Syrian born, American educated Al-Sameen (Alon Aboutboul). The plan works although the situation becomes desperate for the agent. He has to endure torture in the custody of Al-Sameen and is about to be executed on video when Jordanian intelligence agents burst into the room, and kill all terrorists. It turns out the Ferris principal ally, the deceptive spymaster Hani Salaam (Mark Strong), is a far more effective manipulator and makes the most of this quid pro

50 Syriana Script, accessed June 13, 2009, <http://wbads-01.vo.llnwd.net/e1/wbmovies/syriana/site/med/Syriana-Screenplay.pdf>.

quo-cooperation.⁵¹ *Body of Lies* has been called the “harshest appraisal of American foreign policy of any big-budget studio film produced during the second Bush administration”. The blame rests with the bureaucratic leadership that is waging the War on Terror from its headquarter in Langley through satellite imaginary and has effectively no understanding of what the conditions on the ground are. Cynicism and ignorance are left to mask the lack of a clear and coherent strategy.⁵²

Gavin Hood’s 2007 film *Rendition* took on a contrary perspective by depicting an Arab as the victim of unlawful US counterterrorism. Based on a true story it tells of innocent Anwar El-Ibrahimi (Omar Metwally), an Egyptian natural scientist, who is married to an American women and is caught in the traps of an overtly vigilant security apparatus. While returning from a conference in South Africa he is overpowered and kidnapped to an unnamed North African country as part of the CIA’s rendition programme. This highly covert operation was designed to extract intelligence from terrorism suspects by delivering them to interrogation “experts”, mainly from friendly intelligence services in the Middle East. In this case, El-Ibrahimi’s questioning – beatings, isolation, waterboarding – is done by local agent Abasi Fawal (Igal Naor), while CIA operative Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhall) acts as a supervisor who does not get his hands dirty. Very much like *Syriana*, *Rendition* wants to convey that everything is connected and that there are no easy solutions in weighing freedom against security. Thus, Fawal is no sadistic henchman, but has problems at home with his rebellious daughter Fatima (Zineb Oukach), who runs away with young Khalid (Moa Khouas), a suspected militant. The idealistic Freeman on the other hand drowns his bad conscience in alcohol. Already, he has lost all belief that his organisation is able to defeat terrorism. Without authorization, Freeman gets a warrant for Anwar’s eventual release and sends him back to America. He then leaks the details of the detention to the media, creating a scandal that humiliates his superiors, who are responsible for the extralegal counterterrorism measures.⁵³

The Kingdom (2007) can be read as an alternative scenario to both *Body of Lies* and *Rendition* in its depiction of successful counterterrorism as the result of cooperation between Western and Middle Eastern police forces. A team of FBI investigators works closely with the Saudi police Colonel Al Ghazi (Ashraf Barhom) to hunt down Abu Hamza, a mid-level Al Qaeda operator, who is

51 Dana Stevens, “Glossy Torture,” October 10, 2008, accessed February 16, 2011, www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2008/10/glossy_torture.html.

52 Chris Lee, “Leonardo DiCaprio battles the odds in ‘Body of Lies,’” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 2008.

53 A. O. Scott, “When a single story has a thousand sides,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 2007.

responsible for a bombing attack on an American compound in Saudi-Arabia.⁵⁴ The eventual positive outcome relies heavily on a mediator between differing lifestyles, customs, and ideals: Al Ghazi is sort of a nanny for the American “cowboys”, as they break political barriers and cultural taboos. Since chemistry between him and FBI team leader Ronald Fleury (Jamie Foxx) works, the Saudi cop and the African-American from Washington soon have a lead on the whereabouts of Abu Hamza.⁵⁵ A bomb factory is uncovered and all suspects are killed on the spot. The job seems finished at this point, but on the way to the airport one FBI agent is kidnapped by Hamza’s group. Hotly pursued by Fleury and Al Ghazi, the fleeing car leads them directly to the terrorist’s hideout. The captured colleague is freed after an intense shoot-out, but there is a price to pay. Al Ghazi is shot by a grandson of Abu Hamza. The film suggests a sort of moral equivalence: To calm down another grieving grandchild the deadly wounded terrorist leader uses the same expression like Fleury in the beginning, when he comforted a colleague over the loss of a loved one in the bombing: “Don’t fear them, my child. We are going to kill them all.”⁵⁶ The angry eyes of the boy express that a future terrorist has been created and that the fighting will go on.

Interestingly, in films like *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom* the terrorist enemy is seen as on the run: Local initiatives and mid-level operators have taken the place of the scattered Al Qaeda hardcore in Afghanistan. They rely on pin-prick attacks against US installations in the Middle East, always keen on capturing their exploits on video. Yet these “masterminds” are also downgraded. In *Body of Lies* the captured CIA agent defies Al-Sameen: “You are slaves to the Saudi oil sheiks and Walhabi oil money that funds you. And when that oil money runs out, my friend, you all fucking disappear into the ashes of history.” This statement points to the role of Islamic charities in the financing of terrorism and it makes Al-Sameen ultimately come across as a relatively minor player “at the mercy of distant power brokers with very powerful remote controls.”⁵⁷

Iron Man (2008) marks the entry of the radical Islamist terrorist into the comic and superhero genre: “Ten Rings”, a group led by Raza (Faran Tahir), kidnaps arms dealer Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) while on a promotion tour in Afghanistan. His captors pressure him to build one of his powerful Jericho missiles for them. Instead Stark designs an armoured suit, which allows him to break out of his three month captivity. He vengefully returns later as “Iron Man”

54 A. O. Scott, “FBI agents solve the terrorist problem,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 2007.

55 Michael Criphey, “The Kingdom games that entertainment can trump politics,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2007.

56 Peter Bradshaw, “The Kingdom,” *The Guardian*, October 5, 2007.

57 Scott Foudas, “Ridley Scott’s *Body of Lies* is the Post-9/11, tech-savvy terror thriller we deserve,” *The Village Voice*, October 10, 2008.

– equipped with an improved high tech suit – and rescues an Afghan village from an attack by “Ten Rings” by blasting the terrorists from afar. Stark eventually discovers that his kidnapping had been a setup, secretly orchestrated by his second in command, Obadiah Stane (Jeff Bridges), who also had terrorist Raza killed, when he was of no more use in his plot. *Iron Man* avoids any mentioning of “Taliban”, “Iraq”, or domestic terrorism. But as Dana Stevens commented, the image of a potent and indestructible counterterrorist resonates in time of vulnerability, in which the US finds itself: “This is what we’d like our wars to be: a clearly defined moral crusade against a bald, glowering meanie who proclaims his Genghis Khan-like ambition to ‘dominate all of Asia.’”⁵⁸ *Iron Man* is proof that the super-villains of the Second World War and the Cold War have been replaced by the jihadist as today’s prime enemy – even in the sphere of pure fantasy.

Finally, the comedy *Postal* (2007) demonstrated that with growing distance even 9/11 is mined for laughs. The film opens with a heated discussion in the cockpit of one of the hijacked flights on 9/11: The two terrorists argue about the exact number of virgins they will be rewarded with in paradise. Since there is no agreement, they decide to call up their leader, Osama Bin Laden. When he informs them of a shortage of virgins because of so many martyrs sacrificing themselves at the moment, the terrorists promptly decide to skip their plan and reroute the flight to the Bahamas. But suddenly the passengers force their way into the cockpit and the ensuing struggle results in the plane crashing into one of the towers of the World Trade Center. *Postal*’s final shot features President Bush and Bin Laden skipping through a field together, hand-in-hand. As mushroom clouds explode on the horizon, Osama laughs and says, “Georgie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”⁵⁹ *Postal* was negatively reviewed in general and got only limited release. Yet it completes a panorama of perspectives and outlooks on radical Islamist terrorism, ranging from apocalyptic specters, to quasi-realistic Middle Eastern war scenarios, and escapist fantasies up to purely nihilistic comedy.

What makes Hollywood’s jihadists special?

When comparing the representation of terrorists in Hollywood cinema, some of these villains are depicted more understandably in their motivation and agenda than others: Irish militants receive the most sympathy. Their use of violence is

58 Dana Stevens, “Iron Man,” *Slate*, May 1, 2008, accessed September 16, 2011, www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2008/05/iron_man.html.

59 Nathan Lee, “Anarchy with a short attention span,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2008.

explained in the context of British oppression (*The Devil's Own*, 1997). If foreign terrorists appear, they operate out of revenge for lost loved ones (*The Peacemaker*, 1997), as agents of Communist subversion (*Invasion USA*, 1985), or act in the name of deranged political ideology (*The Year of the Gun*, 1991). Still, in most cases, terrorists are killing and maiming for money. They are in fact ordinary criminals hiding behind fake political ideology. For instance in *Die Hard I* (1988) the “Volksfrei”-movement, a West German left-wing terrorist group, attacks a party at the headquarters of a Japanese cooperation in Los Angeles and takes hostages. Their declared aim is to enforce the liberation of “revolutionary brothers and sisters” from prison, but in fact this is only a diversion – so that the group can rob 640 million dollars from the safes in the meantime. Similarly, in *Die Hard III* (1995) a group of former Eastern German Stasi special forces detonates bombs in the underground and other public places all over New York to keep the police occupied, while they rob the Federal Reserve Bank of \$140 billion in gold. After their mission is accomplished, they release a communiqué that states: “For too long, the West has conspired to steal the wealth of the world consigning the balance of humanity to economic starvation. Today, we will level the bay. In a few minutes, the contents of the Federal Reserve Bank, the gold your economy are built on, will be redistributed by explosives across the bottom of the Long Island side.”⁶⁰ Again it is a ploy: The Stasi agents only blow up a decoy, a shipload of scrap metal, and intend to keep the gold for themselves.

The jihadist differs from such characterisations in his complete “otherness”, as Roland Bleiker has pointed out: “The Middle East – or, rather, the Arab component of it – is the stereotypical image of the terrorist Other, the one whose identity, whose religious affinities and practices are so strange that they cannot be seen as anything other than a threat to the existing societal order.”⁶¹ The villains from *Die Hard* may be fearsome antagonists, but their purely capitalist, apolitical, and criminal stance is immediately recognisable, which makes them somehow familiar to audiences. Also, they often appear as conflicting personalities with shifting allegiances and insecure loyalty to the cause. The jihadist on the other hand is nothing more than a fanatical bigot, who is more violent and regards all non-believers as enemies. His behaviour cannot be explained in rational terms and there are no easy motives like the drive for money and power to understand his actions. The terrorist’s identity is basically presented as fixed and closed off to outside influences.⁶²

Although jihadists repeatedly lay down their agenda and accuse the US and its

60 Vanhala, *The Depiction of Terrorists in Blockbuster Hollywood Films*, 194–197.

61 Roland Bleiker, “The End of Modernity?”, in *Contending Images of World Politics*, ed. Greg Fry, Jacinta O’Hagan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 237.

62 Khatib, *Filming the Middle East*, 181–182.

foreign policy as well as Western exploitation of Middle Eastern riches, this ultimately comes across as “loony” outbursts by fanatical and wild-eyed madmen directed against innocent hostages or the public at large. This is evident, for example, in the outbursts of terrorist Abdul in *Delta Force*: “We have declared war against the US Zionists and Israel. It’s your government we fight, your White House. One day I will go there. I will drive a truck, and the truck, it will blow... Don’t think we don’t have friends in America. Don’t be surprised. One day, one day...”⁶³ Similarly, a sweaty Abu Aziz (*True Lies*) rants about the inhumanity of the US-war machine that kills non-combatants in Arab countries: “You have killed our women and children, bombed our cities from afar like cowards, and you dare to call us terrorists!” In retaliation, Aziz threatens the US-public with atomic bombs exploding in “one major US city each week” until his demands are met: A complete military pull out from the Persian Gulf area. Again, this brief insight into the motivation of the terrorists is immediately blurred by the character’s apparent irrationality and self-aggrandizement.⁶⁴ Thus, as politically motivated some of the claims sound, they are completely relativised in the process and therefore no consequences have to be drawn. The result is not a more detailed picture, but simply that the otherness of the enemy is underlined further. Consequently, the battle against such outcasts can be fought with impunity: Even in such differing movies as *Delta Force*, *Hostage*, *The Siege*, or *The Kingdom* – in the end, the audience practically longs for seeing the enemy eliminated, often by employing dirty means and the full arsenal of military, police, and espionage powers.

While most of the discussed films identify the terrorists as devout Muslims, Hollywood appears to be cautious not to equate Islam with terrorism. Therefore, up to 2001, the practise of religion or notions of conviction as a motivation for terrorism are almost non-existent. 1986’s *Death before Dishonour* is one of the few examples, where the conflict is presented in a religious context: A captured Marine hostage kisses his crucifix before dying, which evokes the image of the true Christian soldier fighting terrorist jihad.⁶⁵ Bits of jihadist rhetoric can be found in *True Lies* and *Executive Decision*, but it was 1998’s *The Siege* that showed for the first time a suicide bomber ritually purifying himself before “martyrdom” in detail and zoomed in on a suicide bombing in a New York street. According to Robert Cettl, *The Siege* is the “only terrorist film pre-9/11 to examine terrorism as the direct result of religious belief. It doesn’t examine the specifics of these beliefs but anchors terrorism in religion nonetheless.”⁶⁶ Post-9/

63 Vanhala, *The Depiction of Terrorists in Blockbuster Hollywood Films*, 164.

64 Vanhala, *The Depiction of Terrorists in Blockbuster Hollywood Films*, 238.

65 Cettl, *Terrorism in American Cinema*, 94 – 96.

66 Cettl, *Terrorism in American Cinema*, 236.

11 TV-shows (*Sleeper Cell*) and films like *Syriana*, *Body of Lies*, *Rendition*, or *The Kingdom*, do engage with the topic of radical Islamist ideology, but mostly on the sidelines of the action. It is featured as a monolithic threat against the West – obviously in reaction to its perceived growth into a political force that challenges US dominance in a post Cold War environment. American individualism and its liberal ideals of freedom and equality are set against this dogmatic and pre-modern world view. Its common goals and collectivism are not reconcilable with the American Dream and follow in the tradition of totalitarian enmity against the US. In effect, Hollywood facilitated a transfer of the West's Cold War strategic hostilities by drawing a parallel between the dangers of traditional Islam and Soviet communism. But there no further insight into the mindset of the enemy is provided, on the contrary, it seems that with growing distance to 9/11, the subject of radical Islamist terrorism is again more and more avoided in US popular culture.

In comparison, European productions like *The Hamburg Cell* (2004), *Day Night Day Night* (2006), or *Four Lions* (2010) address the subject of radical-Islamist terrorism in a more direct way with the jihadist as the centre of action. *The Hamburg Cell* explores the day-to-day activities of the 9/11 hijackers with close attention to notions of religious dedication and the ideology of martyrdom.⁶⁷ While *Day Night Day Night* follows a 19-year female old suicide bomber on its mission to blow up Times Square, *Four Lions* choose the unusual comedy genre to ridicule a cell of folly British jihadists. It shows them as products of Western societies and therefore not as something unfathomably alien. All four characters appeared as deeply confused and contradictory individuals, whose homespun mixture of religious and political ideas takes them on an ultimately disastrous journey. While on mission in an Afghan training camp, they even manage to kill Osama Bin Laden by messing around with a SAM-missile.⁶⁸ *Four Lions* is in many ways a complete counter narrative to prevailing views, because it reveals the enemy “other” as much more human, westernized, and less professional than one might expect from viewing the output of US cinema on radical Islamic terrorism.

67 Cettl, *Terrorism in American Cinema*, 140 – 141.

68 “Four Lions productions notes”, accessed August 12, 2011, <http://press.optimumreleasin-g.net/dyn/Four%20Lions%20Production%20Notes.pdf>.

Conclusion

According to cultural analysts Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, films not only have the power to entertain, but also “the potential to reinforce, to challenge, to overturn, or to crystallize religious perspectives, ideological assumptions, and fundamental values. Films bolster and challenge our society’s norms, guiding narratives, and accepted truths.”⁶⁹ Hollywood’s imperative is, of course, to entertain and not to inform or educate. But while it is easy to shrug off its products as mere distraction, the cultural influence of mass cinema’s and TV’s both easily and effectively transmitted visions should not be underestimated. According to literary critic Walter Benjamin, in the process of watching a film, the audience becomes a part of it, resulting in cinematic images overlaying and obscuring its perception of “objective reality”. Benjamin quotes French author Georges Duhamel commenting on this process: “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images.”⁷⁰

This finding can also be applied to the cinematic discourse on radical Islamism, the Middle East, and terrorism. Since the early 1980s the jihadist is often shown as more violent, narrow-minded, and fanatical than historic predecessors. The threat posed is elementary and in many ways a follow-up of older totalitarian enmity to the American Dream. The interpretation of jihadists may vary from case to case, nonetheless it affirms the political and cultural status quo from which it originates. Films and TV shows construct an imaginary space, where the hegemonic constants of discourse on radical Islamist terrorism come to life: A fantastical Middle East that seems naturally inhabited by terrorists preying on the West; sleeper cells already in place on US soil and only waiting to strike with weapons of mass destruction; an enemy “other”, who kills and maims the innocent in the name of a totalitarian ideology and with whom no moderation is possible, and so forth.

The review of relating movies has shown that Hollywood tends to essentialize radical Islamist terrorism around alleged characteristics like inhuman fanaticism, zealotry, cruelty, and totalitarian enmity towards “Western freedoms”. Crucially, depth, complexity and context are reduced to a simple dichotomy of good and evil. Because of their pervasiveness, aesthetics, and moral clarity, these imaginations and narratives are suited to shape the awareness of audiences in a similar way as put forward by Duhamel. Over the years, Hollywood has produced a sort of false consciousness that hampers the understanding of radical

69 Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder: Westview Press Inc, 1995), vii.

70 Howard Eiland, “Reception in Distraction,” in Walter Benjamin and Art, ed. Andrew E. Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2005), 6.

Islamist terrorism, in regard to its causes, intentions, and possibilities for counteraction. It reinforces already existing bias, contradicts the need for closer inspection of social and political root causes, and presents force as the most probable solution. Only in the last few years, the outlook on radical Islamist terrorism has become less ideological. There have been some notable attempts to demystify and challenge the nightmarish spectre of the jihadist that has been built up by US popular culture since the 1970s. But it remains to be seen if the cultural representation of radical Islamist terrorism can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon, instead of presenting one-dimensional narratives and stereotypes alongside existing patterns of perception.

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