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MA Design Research

The Visual Culture of the Islamic State
(title too general - make it more specific)

option 1: The Affect Technique Used by the Islamic State in Photographs of Self-Representation for the Purposes of Mobilisation of Sound Adults

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

they are not photos of self represen- tation

You read them as such!

The famous quote "one picture is worth ten thousand words," first published in the American trade magazine, Printer's Ink of March 10, 1927, by Fred Barnard, the national advertising manager of Street Railways Advertising (Safire 1996), summarizes the effect of visuals and how we communicate. Creating visuals is one of the defining characteristics of humans from the very beginning of the human culture (Morriss-Kay 2009) depicting history, religion, cultural experiences, collective memory, rituals, and traditions. To do this, in these narratives, people use motifs as symbolism representing their culture to furthermore give meaning to these visuals in order for specific people to relate. While the Islamic State (IS) is certainly not the first jihadi group using visual imagery including motifs as symbolism to communicate its ideology and propaganda, it nevertheless has the most sophisticated jihadi imagery ever yet with the intention of evoking emotions to achieve a specific objective such as recruiting fighters (DO THEY? Do I need to write a source to confirm this? or is it considered an obvious fact). Having said this brings attention to rhetoric, which, since the antique period, has been viewed "as the art of making persuasive speech" with the use of emotion "in order to pursue its aim of intentional effectiveness" (Joost & Scheuermann, 3 & 9). In its turn, rhetorical communication is the intentional production of effective impact on the target public (Joost & Scheuermann, 5). To add, in order to have the desired impact on the audience at focus, it is crucial that all factors surrounding the final deliverable are taken into consideration (Joost & Scheuermann, 5). This means that each element in the visual delivered to the target audience has been intentionally thought of by the designer in order to affect the viewer. This begs to question what affect techniques the Islamic State uses in its visuals, specifically photographs of self-representation, to communicate with its audience, and particularly to mobilize young adult men. The "affect technique" in its turn means the intentionality of elements used while aiming to communicate a certain message through a certain medium to reinforce a certain emotion in the target audience or to persuade the latter (Joost & Scheuermann, 9 & 10). Understanding affect techniques could assist in better understanding the organization's sociological propaganda, which could help advance counter-narratives. Moreover, in terms of medium, this research focuses on the IS's portrait photographs published in the English-version of their online magazine, *Rumiyah*, the Arabic name for the city of Rome. *Rumiyah*, which is also available in several languages such as French, German, Indonesian, and Uyghur (Basnett & Ghosh 2017, 16). This approximately monthly (Grinnell et al 2018, 3) magazine conveys teachings of Islam, stories, strategies, news and interviews with fighters of the IS. It was first published in September 2016 as a successor to *Dabiq*, which was discontinued in July 2016 (Basnett & Ghosh 2017, 16). This research analyzes the narratives of the Islamic States' portraits, which include affect techniques used, reasons why they represent themselves the way they do, the motifs, the material legacy, and the ideological message behind them. It is

important to note that due to the accessibility of the Internet and social media and their effortless communication ability, accessibility to wrong information is also made highly possible; if the target audience such as a marginalized youths lack proper religious knowledge and education, then manipulation is materialized (André et al. 2015, 307-308). Moreover, in the Western hemisphere, where second-generation immigrant youths might feel disconnection between their religion and the country they live in due to lack of proper Islamic knowledge, which also plays a role in joining groups such as the IS. These youths interpret Islamic texts literally rather than practicing inward-oriented Islam, which allows interpretation of Islamic texts instead of literal comprehension.

The analysis of the IS's portrait photographs employs methodological triangulation. The first research method is the Panofsky method of analysis, which is a qualitative analysis through the understanding and interpretation of meaning in visual representation. According to Panofsky, the study of art objects and photographs can be separated into three levels. The first level is pre-iconographic analysis, which is the formal, natural and factual descriptions of what is seen such as the colours, the content, and the format seen without any speculations. Consequently, as the first research step, I applied the pre-iconographic analysis by implementing a quantitative analysis of the portrait photographs of the IS in *Rumiyah* (issues 1 to 13) by recording quantitative data through keywords. To discuss in details, first, I added keywords for each portrait in terms of elements seen and photo composition techniques, and second, I added them in an alphabetical order in an Excel sheet and tagged the photos in Adobe Bridge to facilitate searching for specific keywords and identifying the frequency of each. Subsequently, the second level of the Panofsky method is iconography, which is the decoding of the content by questioning the meaning of the elements in each photo taking in consideration the context, history, audiences, framework of society. Therefore, I reflect on the findings of this analysis through the decoding of the elements in the portraits and the techniques of photography used.

Moreover, I will re-employ the pre-iconographic analysis for the IS's discontinued magazines such as *Dar al-Islam* (French language), *Constantinople* (Turkish language), and *Istok* (Russian language) to compare with *Rumiyah*. Depending on the findings, I will decide whether to analyze all the magazines or not. Afterwards, I will move from the IS portraits to its rival magazines such as *al-Qaeda's Inspire* English magazine; again, the findings of each magazine analysis will dictate whether I analyze other magazines.

The final step of the Panofsky method that I will employ in this research is iconology, the gathering of information and solidifying knowledge about the society in which the artifact under analysis, such as a photograph by and of the IS, was produced in while possibly comparing it to other photographs and posters from popular culture. For example, some photographs are inspired by comic books cultivating armed heroes such as a jihadist photograph adapted from a Marvel Universe drawing of The Punisher, which is a popular character and famous for his violent vigilante campaign against organized crimes. In this case, the designer/the photographer resorts to the familiar symbolism of the comic character to reimagine a jihadist as a hero in a menacing and an unmistakable way to be relatable and attractive to young men engaged in popular culture on the Internet (Ostovar 2017, 98). Moreover, possible questions to ask in this level could be: "What might the role of this photograph have been in society? How is it situated in society? What does this photograph tell us about the society this picture has been made in?" It is noteworthy to mention that this step communicates characteristics that the producer of the photograph may not have consciously been thinking about. And through the knowledge of the world and the connection of elements and cultural codes in the photograph, this level allows to reveal underlying "basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work" (Panofsky 1972, 7). For Panofsky, this level or step is the "ultimate goal of iconology" (Panofsky 1972, 9).

The second research method is the Visual Rhetorics analysis method, which is the qualitative analysis of visuals from the perspective of persuasion methods that aim to have an effect on the target audience to understand the affect techniques used by the Islamic State. In "Rhetoric in the Visual Arts," Enchelmayer (2009) states that in a rhetorical sense, the designer of specific visuals of rhetoric must have specific goals, message, and ideas to transmit (61). Nevertheless, through this method, I will attempt to find unintended elements in the portraits that contradict the Islamic State's narratives.

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