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Cubs of the Caliphate
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"Cubs of the Caliphate": ISIS's Spectacle of Violence
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Abstract

Throughout history and across different cultures, militant groups have used children as spies, informants, soldiers and for various other propaganda purposes. (Honwana 2011) Not much has changed with the passage of time. The use of children by ISIS is a modern-day continuation of these trends. However, what sets ISIS apart from other terrorist groups (e.g. the Taliban, Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and Al Qaeda) is the fact that ISIS has not only been training children at a large scale, but has also used children extensively for its propaganda campaign. This paper analyses ISIS videos featuring children through the analytical framework of the *"spectacle of violence"* literature and illustrates that depiction of children as actors and performers of ultra-violence in a theatrical scene, is a visual rhetoric of humiliation and a counter-narrative that juxtaposes the inversion of roles of children and adults.

Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of children are used for military purposes either in active combat or support roles. (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict 2017) Child soldiers[1] have been serving with groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army of Uganda (Huynh, D'Costa, and Lee-Koo 2015, 27), the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, the Benghazi

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[1] This paper applies UNICEF's definition of child soldier, which is "any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes." (UNICEF 2007, 7)

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Revolutionaries Shura Council, Tahrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan (TTP) (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict 2017), Boko Haram, the Afghan Taliban, Asad's regime, and ISIS to name the most prominent groups. (Brannen 2014) For example, Boko Haram has reportedly been training thousands of children as young as 5 years old to handle assault rifles and march through the woods in flip-flops. (Hinshaw and Parkinson 2016) ISIS has been using children for a wide range of military purposes such as whipping prisoners, executing prisoners, suicide operations, donating blood to injured fighters and spying. (van der Heide and Geenen 2017) Similarly, the Afghan Taliban has used children for a range of activities including suicide missions. (Azami 2014)

Depicting children as the main character of the imagery production goes far beyond the historical patterns of children as soldiers and militants. Children performing graphic violence, while being depicted as heroes in a movie with advanced cinematographic techniques and special effects is the signature of ISIS. Compared to its contemporaries, ISIS is unique since it has used child soldiers— to whom the group refers to "cubs of the caliphate"—as the central piece of its imagery production for a highly specialised public relations campaign.   The question remains of what role do children play in the visual rhetoric of ISIS?

"We live in a visual age" and the presence of images everywhere is nothing short of political, emphasises Bleiker. (2018, 1) Visual politics have long attracted attention of scholars in various fields such as history, media, cultural and communication studies. Jacque Ranciere (2011, 103) writes that images of art "do not supply weapons for battle. They help skitch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought, and consequently, a new landscape of the possible." Given the importance of visuals and imagery in terrorism, it is not surprising to see children appear in both moving and still images of various terrorist groups. Bleiker (2018, 4) highlights that "our understanding of terrorism is intertwined with how images dramatically depict the events in question, how these images circulate worldwide, and how politicians and the public respond to these visual impressions". It is within this realm—the visual politics—that our study analyses the role of children in the visual rhetoric of violent extremist groups. Our primary concern is analysing how these videos work, who is their audience and how they aim to sow terror.

This research analyses 11 videos of children produced by ISIS through the prism of spectacle of violence (SoV) literature. Subsequently, five elements of the spectacle namely, "aesthetics" "memorability", "visibility", "competitiveness" and "novelty" are discussed in terms of their analytical significance in studying the role of ultra-violence in ISIS rhetoric. The findings illustrate that depicting children performing ultra-violence gives the videos novelty and visibility while simultaneously making the videos more competitive and potentially memorable. Analysing the videos through this frame also allows to bring into light the mechanism through which the videos aim at emotional evocation; that is to exhort and provoke the audience by causing emotions such as fear, humiliation, uneasiness and ambiguity. Although this study does not directly measure these emotional evocations, they are referred to throughout the analysis of the videos.

Analytical Framework: Visual Politics and the Spectacle of Violence (SoV)
In the words of arts and English scholar, WJT Mitchell (2018, 230), "we live in a global culture of images, a society of the spectacle, a world of semblances and simulacra". From the battlefield violence, to torture and death, images have depicted various aspects of war and violence. Visual representation of the battlefield has always been a crucial component of the war machine. As observed by Paul Virilio, the ocular and direct vision have given way to "optical or opto-electronic". The "watching machine", therefore, has been providing soldiers with a visual perspective on the military action under way and has led to the need for "ever more accurate sighting, ever greater magnification, for *filming*

the war and photographically reconstructing the battlefield". (Virilio 1989, 69–70)
Hence, this militaristic way of seeing has entered the culture and turned citizens into
areal observers of operational planning. (Virilio 1989, 70) Visuality especially in the form
of moving images" plays a "central role in graphically presenting the human side of
conflict to US audiences". (Lee-Koo 2018, 48) This can lead to public's reaction and
potentially influence policy decisions. For example, Vis and Goriunova (2015)
demonstrate that the photograph of a three-year-old Syrian refugee, Alan Kurdi, found on
a beach in Turkey changed people's attitudes toward refugees in Europe. The image,
which reached 20 million screens in 12 hours, influenced the Willkommenskultur, a
culture of welcoming refugees, in Germany (See e.g. Bleiker [2018, 19] & Vis and
Goriunova [2015]). Likewise, Hansen (2015, 264–66) illustrates that the images of
torture at Abu Ghraib prison provoked a public outcry against the war on terror.

On the other hand, widely distributed and extensively visible visuals depicting
violence can lead to political reaction in the home state of victims.   One of the few
studies, that explores the relationship between the images of violence and foreign policy
intervention is Friis' (2015) empirical study of ISIS beheading videos. The author
illustrates how the visibility of visual imagery shapes what is perceived as the "realities
and facts" of war, and thereby influencing the perception of sensible and legitimate
political responses (Friis 2015, 727). In fact, terrorists responsible for the spectacles of
beheading hope that the system will overreact leading to "an excess of reality", that can
in turn, undermine the very foundation of that system and lead to its collapse.
(Baudrillard 2003, 18)

Whether tailored to instigate public and policy reactions, or to encourage
recruitment, visuality plays a crucial role in political rhetoric of violent extremist groups.
For example, Wignell, Tan, and O'Halloran's (2017a) study illustrates that images in the
textual publication of the self-proclaimed Islamic State play the role of "bonding icons"—
constructed from a combination of artefacts—to reinforce its message and world views
(See also Wignell, Tan, and O'Halloran [2017b] & O'Halloran et al. [2016]). Likewise,
research by Winkler et al. (2018) underlines that different images of death are
strategically used by ISIS to influence targeted groups. The visual mode of violence is
also aimed at instigating and provoking emotions. Graphic violence, such as staging
executions are, in fact, political rhetoric serving as "enactments of retaliatory
humiliation", asserts Euben (2017).

The visual culture of shock and awe has become ubiquitous by the intensified
and expanding presence of the internet and the 24-hour cable news. (Giroux 2014, 3)
Arguably, terrorism has provided the most widely circulated spectacles of violence in
recent times. According to the HBO film, *In Memoriam,* September 11 is the "most
documented event in the history". (Kellner 2004, 44) Digital technologies facilitating fast-
spreading news and visuals, have led to shrinking temporality necessary to pause and
process the images before reacting to them. Consequently, this has led to the
heightened affective power of images and the habituated sensibility characterized by
thinking less and feeling more (Euben 2017). Instigating emotions, is an integral aspect
of the terror spectacle.

This analysis raises the question: what aspect of staged acts of violence such as
beheadings, make these visuals gain visibility and influence public's opinion? While a
number of studies describe terrorism as a spectacle, (e.g. , Evans and Giroux 2015;
Cowen 2006; Kellner 2004; Baudrillard 2003; Jenkins 1975) what constitutes a
spectacle is not as rigorously investigated. Only a handful of studies tangentially discuss
various elements of the spectacle. A common theme among these studies is the
"aesthetic" aspect of the spectacle, its "novelty", "memorability" (Cowen 2006, 233),

"visibility" and "competitiveness" (Friis, 2015; Jürgen Martschukat and Niedermeier, 2013).

　　　The production of the spectacle is highly costly whether it is the act of violence itself or capturing the spectacle in still or moving imagery. Consequently, terrorist groups aim to produce "aesthetic spectacles" in order to maintain terrorism as an ongoing concern. (Cowen 2006, 233) The aesthetic aspect of the spectacle of violence is an important input for motivating terrorists, who may be excited about the prospect of committing both murder and suicide. (Cowen 2006) Describing terrorism as an aesthetic spectacle has led to criticising scholars such as Giroux, Kellner and Boudrillard for legitimising and glorifying terrorism.[2] A critical discussion of these debates is beyond the scope of this paper. Herein, our focus is mainly on the aesthetic aspect of videos as staged acts of violence and as visual products of terrorism.[3]

　　　Despite the importance of novelty in capturing attention and making videos competitive and visible, very little scholarly attention has been paid to this aspect of the spectacle. Film studies and marketing literature are enlightening in this regard. Novelty in films can generates higher "memorability" and can intensify either positive or negative feelings. (Ang, Lee, and Leong 2007) Studies in marketing show that novelty might not be effective in gaining attention and reinforcing attitudes unless it is meaningful and connects with the target audience. (Ang, Lee, and Leong, 2007) Hence, in this study, the novelty aspect of the SoV will be explored across the cast and story lines in relation to their meaning and connection to the audience.

　　　The "visibility" component of the spectacle is more frequently discussed. In the phenomenological sense of the term, visibility means "being-visible". Studies of visibility normally focus on how political and social implications of various forms of violence are made visible and through what forms of media. (Martschukat and Niedermeier 2013; Casper and Moore 2009) Understanding visibility also requires investigating why certain types and acts of violence come into view while others do not. (Martschukat and Niedermeier, 2013, 5) For example, ISIS beheadings videos "are made exceedingly visible across media platforms, whereas other similarly gruesome acts of violence, including beheadings carried by other warring factions are reduced to more marginal visual sites". (Friis 2015, 744) Hence, visibility in this study will be discussed in both its phenomenological sense and in terms of views, shares, likes, and comments.

　　　A spectacle is effective when it is "memorable". Dictatorships often stage public executions to provide their citizens with a "memorable story". (Cowen 2006, 235) The relevant notion of spectacle must involve a performance or event and this performance becomes memorable when it is out of the ordinary along some dimensions. (Cowen 2006, 235) Public executions and tortures have historically been used to leave a lasting impression on the public's memory: a reminder of what awaits them should they disobey the law. Acts of torture require some level of creativity to make it memorable. Foucault's description of Damien's public torture and execution, in the *Discipline and Punish*, is a good illustrative example of this point. In film studies, memorability relies on elements such as the cast, construction of a scene, showing versus telling, pacing, dramatic ending, mood of the scene, and conflict. (Trottier 2014)

　　　Novelty, aesthetics, memorability and visibility give the spectacle a competitive edge over other videos of violence circulating online. Although these elements of the spectacle are interconnected, they each signify an aspect of the spectacle that is important in and of itself. Competition is critical in the survival of jihadi groups. Research

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[2] However, in his defence, Boudillard writes: "Terrorism is not a contemporary form of revolution against oppression and capitalism. No ideology, no struggle for an objective, not even Islamic fundamentalism, can explain it."

[3] Please refer to the methodology section for more details on operationalization of this element.

shows that competing terrorist groups tend to escalate violence in order to project strength and primacy to both supporters and competitors in violence. (Bloom 2007) Jihadi extremist groups try to differentiate themselves from other groups with similar objectives and narratives. For example, according to Bloom (2004, 73) suicide bombing became the basis of mobilisation, over which both Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement compete with each other to capture Palestinian imagination and subsequently the leadership. In fact, with the advent of the 9/11 spectacle of violence, Al Qaeda set the bars rather high. Al Qaeda's 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre gave more visibility and media coverage than any other terrorist group. (Matusitz 2014, 47) Terrorists are well aware that not every beheading video uploaded on the internet gains equal importance or social status, and only very few attract the attention of political leaders, the mainstream media or the general public. (Friis 2015, 743)

The challenge facing terrorist groups is how to stand out in a very competitive environment. For ISIS, using children as the central element of SoV appears to aim at getting a competitive edge. Furthermore, analysing videos of children through the lens of SoV allows us to discuss the affective power of the videos. However, prior to presenting the findings, the next section focuses on research methods.

Research Methods
ISIS has produced a number of videos showing children engaging in non-violent activities (e.g. learning Islamic teachings in a mosque or in classrooms) and children depicted at the training camps, where they are taught a range of military activities such as shooting, conducting search operations, or engaging in intense physical activities. For the purpose of this research, which focuses on the spectacle of violence by children, the videos had to meet the following criteria:
1) Extreme acts of violence performed by children
   a. beheading
   b. shooting of victims
   c. detonating explosive devices to kill victims
   d. mutilation of prisoners

In total, 11 videos meet the above criteria. The first video of ISIS depicting children as perpetrators of ultra-violence appeared in January 2015. This study has covered all the videos that depict children released by ISIS, between the periods Jan. 2015- April 2018. The following table provides a list of these videos, release dates and sources.[4]

Table One

No	Title/description of the Video	Release Date:	As of April 28, 2018, available at
1	Knights of Paradise #1 - Wilayat Shamal Baghdad	06/03/15	Jihadology.com
2	Isis child soldiers filmed executing prisoners after video game-style maze race	08/12/15	liveleak.com
3	Children execute Kurdish prisoners	28/08/16	claironproject.org
4	Prisoner Execution	21/11/16	claironproject.org

[4] The URL addresses have been intentionally left out and can be provided upon request.

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5	Video title: "He Made Me Alive with His Blood"	09/01/17	claironproject.org
6	Young ISIS children carry out attack	11/07/17	claironproject.org
7	ISIS children chop off arms and execute spies	24/11/17	gfycat.com
8	ISIS video features children witnessing beheadings, and participating in executions of men accused of spying in Mosul	18/09/16	Video taken down
9	ISIS video documents suicide bombing carried out by teenager	18/02/16	Video taken down
10	Video shows children shooting and beheading	03/12/15	Video taken down
11	Video shows execution of "FSS agents" by a boy	13/01/15	The video was retrieved from liveleak.com in 2017, but it has been taken down

Videos were searched for using engines such as Google and were cross-referenced by searching websites such as MEMRI, "jihadology.com", and "clarionproject.com" to ensure that a comprehensive list is collected. However, there may exist videos that we could not find through open sources described above.

Analysis: In this research, we follow the tradition of visual semiotics based on the works of Roland Barthes (e.g. Barthes 1978) and iconographical method of visual analysis, which was developed by art historians such as Edgar Wind and Meyer Schapiro. (Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001) This approach is based on the premises of "layered meaning" which consist of a layer of "denotative meaning" that is to describe what and who is depicted in the images. (Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001) The second layer is that of a "connotative or symbolic meaning", which essentially addresses the question of what does it all mean. (Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). To capture the first layer of meaning, a number of variables were developed that analyse various descriptive aspects of the videos. Table Two provides a detailed list of these variables.

Table Two: (Investigating Denotative Meaning)

Categories	*Subcategories*	*Descriptions*
Video descriptions	Characters	Age, sex, race, etc
	Character depiction	Positive, negative
	Temporal settings	Time of the day
	Geographic location	Country, city, scenes etc
	Language	
	Music	Anashid utilization, Quranic recitations, live recitations, vocalization
	Voice over	Synchronized, non-synchronized with images
	Background sound	e.g. battle sounds
	Anashid themes	Bushra/wa'du Allah, Tamkin, Tarhib, Tahrid
Analysis of text on screen	Text on Screen	Sub-titles, messages, graphic usage, translations
Techniques	Cinematography	Moving camera, stationary camera, zooming,
	Viewer position	Low angle, straight angle, high angle, tilt, panoramic

	Subject Position	Subject centred, subject off-centre
Visual Quality	Professional, amateur	Professional editing, transition, film techniques, layers of media, poor quality and transition techniques, video is often blurry
Visual and Audio content themes	War and military operations	e.g. Battle ground footage, fighters as role models
	Religion, gouvernance, social processes etc	e.g. showing/talking about administrative affairs

A second level of abstraction, which essentially addresses "what does it all mean", can be achieved through contextualising the multimodal analysis process. Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) suggest visual communications should be analysed in their socially specific and multi-modal contexts. Analysing artefacts by linking "mode" with "sensory" modalities implies that modalities under investigation are "unproblematic and self-evident since visual, auditory, tactile, information is evidently distinct." (Bateman and Schmidt 2013, 77–78) The context through which the videos are analysed is the SoV. In this study, videos were analysed in relations to the elements of spectacle and the content. Table Two gives a snapshot of the operationalization of different elements of the spectacle:

Table Two: Operationalisation of different elements of the Spectacle

Categories	*Subcategories*	*Descriptions*
Aesthetics	- Audio and visual qualities - Good performance	- technical qualities of audios and videos such as sound quality, visual qualities, cinematography techniques - quality of acting
Novelty	-storyline, cast, - Out-of-ordinary performance with ritualised elements	- Is the story new? - Who is the cast of the videos?
Memorability	Construction of a scene, showing versus telling, pacing, dramatic ending, conflict and graphic violence	Graphic violence, such as displays of extreme bodily violence, brutal rape, dismembering of body and graphic scenes of torture
Visibility	Likes, shares, views, comments	Were the videos shared widely, how many views they had? Were the videos commented on?
Competitiveness	Combination of all elements of the spectacle (i.e. aesthetics, novelty, memorability/visibility)	This is mainly analysed through qualitative and quantitative comparison of the selected videos against other videos which lack those elements

These categories and codes are not mutually exclusive, and they should be viewed as complementary to each other. For example, while a dramatic ending can influence memorability, it can also be part of the aesthetic element of the spectacle. The first two categories, namely aesthetics and novelty of the videos, are more descriptive and are "inherent" in nature, such that they require no or little interaction from the viewers. On the other hand, memorability, visibility and competitiveness aspects are interactive and

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relational in that they are the product of involvement and interaction with the audience and are analysed in relation to other products and materials (i.e. their competitiveness).

Coding Process: The videos were coded manually using NVivo software. Originally, two coders coded the 5 videos based on the above-mentioned codebooks to establish inter-coder reliability. Kappa coefficient value was calculated, which in this case, indicates 95% agreement between the coders. Following this process and after discussions on further refinement and clarification of codes, the rest of the data was coded by one coder.

Finding and Analysis

Aesthetic of the Spectacle:

The aesthetic aspect of the SoV has been analysed in terms of videos' quality, and the performances. Progressively, ISIS's videos have become more graphic, novel in their narratives and have incorporated advanced and complex cinematographic and visual techniques. The scenes appear to be well rehearsed and shot in a controlled environment and the actors follow scripted lines.

The first video of execution act performed by children, circulated widely illustrates these points:

Scene One:

> This video contains lengthy interviews with two prisoners who confess to being Russian Federal Security Services (FSS) agents. The prisoners state that they have committed crimes against the Caliphate. After their confessions, a child named Abdullah is shown in an outdoor setting, where he stands close to another jihadi militant. Following an introduction by the narrator, Abdullah walks towards the prisoners who have kneeled on the ground. Abdullah's walk and pose have the air of a movie star. He is wearing a black sweater with sleeves slightly pulled up above the wrists. He gently shakes his head to flip his long hair out of his face as he confidently walks towards the prisoners. Then, he raises the pistol held in both hands and shoots the two prisoners in the head.

When it comes to actors' performance, a clear improvement is observed in this video compared to an earlier video of Abdullah released in late November 2014. The first video shows Abdullah at a training camp for children where he explains that he is learning Arabic and is undergoing various military skills. Comparing these two videos—in both of which Abdullah plays the central role—points to Abdullah's evolution as a performer in the spectacle. In the second video, the execution is clearly staged. Victims are serene and make no significant move. The staged spectacle has to be under control and prescribed with no line or act that is off-script. Why is it important to produce high quality videos with high-quality performances?

Spectacle of violence is indeed a "symbolic act" that embodies the transformation of an image into a "weapon". (Eckstein, 1980) These videos are also a symbolic presentation of ISIS's absolute control and mighty power, where grown men powerlessly submit to being executed at the hands of children. Had Abdullah's hands trembled, and the gun had gone off missing the target the video would have fallen short of portraying symbolic power of a child over an adult enemy. Another symbolic message of the videos is humiliating the adversary. As observed by Euben (2017), ISIS's execution videos are "much more than just a record of a violent death. They are performances of violence deliberately scripted to humiliate the victim." And the victims, are not just

victims, they are also "body politic" that represent the adversary. (Euben, 2017) According to the author, terrorists inscribe "retaliatory humiliation" on their victims in a staged act that indicates an inversion of dominance and power. (Euben, 2017) The author asserts that the power relation is inverted in execution videos of American citizens. In other words, the American dominance not only doesn't exist in the scene, it is also acted upon and "humiliated" in retaliation. Applying the same logic to the analysis of videos of children as executioners, it can be observed that inversion of power relations not only happens along the ethnicity/nationality lines, but also along the age lines. Decapitation and execution at the hands of children is even a stronger invocation of retaliatory humiliation. For example, the footage of two men in jumpsuits who kneel in a posture of submission at the feet of Abdullah—a child who is much younger than them and smaller in physical size—illustrates this humiliation. In other words, execution of grown men and soldiers—who embody masculinity and power—by children, makes these men appear passive and emasculated.

Novelty:
As observed by Cowen (2005), the first movers have an advantage over their competitors. Al-Qaeda, for example, became extremely visible by launching the first-large scale terror attack on the American soil (9/11 attack). A new plot in the spectacle can increase its visibility and memorability. Two primary components of the novelty in film studies are the cast and story lines. (Trottier, 2014) The novelty of ISIS videos lies in the cast of these videos (children) and the narratives (storylines). As indicated above, Abdullah's video was the first of its kind, where a child takes over the stage as an executioner. In other videos, children as young as 5-years old are trained to use AK47 guns and in some videos, children are portrayed as spectators of executions and beheadings.[5] As more videos portraying children is produced, the storylines become more developed, creative and elaborate to capture attention. In an elaborate storyline, ISIS turns execution into a game for children. The children are portrayed as competitors and heroes in a video game:

Scene Two:
> The cameras move around a group of children standing in a circle. They are introduced as competitors of a game. The camera focuses on the face of each child as he is introduced. Name, father's name, age and his origins are announced. The game is to find the "infidel" prisoners in the caves and execute them. As the game starts, the children, pistols in hands run toward an old cave. The cameras follow them while sound effects and a nashid give the video a sense of suspense and horror. In the dark corners of the cave, one by one, the children find prisoners in orange jumpsuits, whose hands are tied from behind. The prisoners are kneeling on the dusty ground and their heads are bent down. The first child shoots the first prisoner that he finds. The video depicts the act in slow motion. All details of the bleeding wound and the prisoner falling on the ground taking his last breaths are shown in slow motion. The nashid, "We Came as Soldiers for Allah" is played in the background.

The nashid, "We Came as Soldiers for Allah" is a praise of ISIS soldiers sent by God to deliver the true religion and eradicate humility and tyranny. The general theme of this nashid is Tarhib with sentiment of aggressiveness. In this video, children remain immune to the dangers of war, adversary forces, the flying bullets and the fear of dying as in a real war. They enjoy the safety of a controlled environment, that of the staged spectacle. No imminent threat is facing them. They are in control of the game and glory waits whoever wins. This misleading portrayal of the life of a child soldier with ISIS sends

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[5] Video released by ISIS on the Jihadi Forum Shumoukh Al-Islam released in September 2016

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the message to the children that they can live like heroes in a videogame. This video illustrates a stark difference from other conventional military training camps for children in other videos, where children are merely shown in classroom sittings studying religion or exercise shooting.

These videos also go against the common perception of how children are generally viewed and how children from the conflict zones are depicted by the Western media. When children from conflict zones make it to the Western news channels, they are often depicted as victims of violence and their image resonates with the common perception of the "innocent children". (Moeller 2002) Hence, images of children as perpetrators and performers of ultra-violence are out of the ordinary and shocking to the viewers and as such it can attract attention. The image of children transformed into weapons can be quite powerful. A child's image is a powerful policy tool often invoked by the Western media to attract public's attention. Children's photos have been used to influence public opinion regarding policies and to reformulate or reframe a policy issue. (Moeller 2002, 37) As stated by Moeller, "the American public may care little and know less about many regions of the world, but put a child's face on a crisis and there is an instinctive, even when abbreviated, response" (Moeller, 2002, 37). ISIS is aware of this response to the images of children and uses it to its advantage effectively. In doing so, it projects a "powerful" image of itself embodied in the acts of the least likely candidates, the children who are often perceived as powerless.

Memorability:
Graphic violence, such as displays of extreme bodily violence, brutal rape, dismembering bodies, and graphic scenes of torture have long been used in the film industry to "further audience affect" and increase "memorability" in a very competitive film market. (Rappas, 2016) Measuring memorability of these videos requires a research design that would subject respondents to viewing grave violence; needless to say, that such a research design will not be approved by any university IRB committee. Alternatively, we draw upon the literature on media psychology, marketing studies and audience responses, which investigates aspects of videos that are relevant to memorability. Research shows that certain elements of a screenplay make a movie more memorable. Story lines, construction of scenes, showing a story rather than telling it, pacing of the events, dramatic endings, graphic violence and overall mood of the scenes can increase memorability of videos. (Trottier 2014)

Scene Three

A number of ISIS fighters are shown in military camouflage outfit. Their faces are covered in mosques. They run through half destroyed buildings, cameras capture their movements from different angles. Fighters run and jump off bridges and impediments demonstrating techniques akin to urban jumping techniques or Hollywood's highly skilled actors. They fire their guns at an invisible enemy. Children are part of the group. Then, the pace of the video changes to a slow one as the "hero" of the videos makes an appearance. He is a 13-year-old child who has left his family to join ISIS and talks about his reasons for joining ISIS. He is shown taking part in stoning a victim. He is shown grinning while throwing stones. The victims are introduced one by one sitting on a chair confessing to their crimes, which is mainly about fighting ISIS. Then the victims are taken to an amusement park, where their hands are tied and the 13-year-old fighter climbs up the execution stage with a dagger in his hand. The child stands in full attention waiting for his orders. An older ISIS fighter gives him a signal by raising and then drops his hand. The gesture is accompanied with the sound of a guillotine dropping and slashing: a sound one would hear in the movies. The

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child executes the order and the cameras capture the act from all possible angles. The final act is played in slow motion.[6]

In the above video, elaborated scenes are developed alternating between slow and fast pacing. Pacing is a technique that raises emotions in viewers for example, slow pacing represents tension and anticipation. (Hockrow, 2014) There is a slow pace in the run up to executions, these spaces are intended to give the audience time to think and to wait for the next scene to come and wonder about the possibilities and feel the tension. Focusing the cameras on victims' faces who are about to die and capturing any small movements they make, such as blinking and gazing in the cameras in total submission are intended to imprint the image of the victim on viewers' mind. Executions shown in slow motion and from different angles not only highlight the act as the apex of the movie, but also aim at increasing the affective power of the scene. Research shows that both repetition (e.g. Hintzman 2010) and affect (Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010; Winograd and Neisser 2006) influence memory and information retention. Furthermore, since children are often perceived as "innocent" (see for example, Lee-Koo [2018]; Huynh [2015]) children as perpetrators of ultra-violence has an element of surprise, which can capture attention and invoke emotional reactions. Brown and Kulik's (1977) influential model exploring the relationship between emotions and cognitive processes (i.e. memorability) illustrates that an individual will form a detailed and durable flashbulb memory to the extent that he/she experiences surprise and perceive news items to be consequential (MacKay and Ahmetzanov [2005]; Conway et al. [1994]; Brown and Kulik [1977]).

Competitiveness:
Greater exposure is necessary for getting more material support. Before the emergence of ISIS, Al-Qaeda was the front-runner in international terrorism with little competition. However, the Islamic State overtook and surpassed Al-Qaeda's lead in the jihadi market. ISIS has produced many shocking images and videos, taken from the macabre videos of beheadings and executions to putting prisoners in cages and burning them alive. Children, performing ultra-violence is a novelty even for ISIS, which makes the spectacle more visible and competitive. Jihadi groups try to attract media attention through symbolic attacks. (MacKay and Ahmetzanov 2005) As stated by Brian Jenkins, such incidents mean that a lot of people are watching, but not a lot of people are dead (Jenkins, 1975). There are relatively fewer videos of children produced by other extremist groups and even fewer videos depicting children engaging in acts of violence/ultra-violence. We searched the internet, using combinations of terms as broad as "children", "ISIS" "videos" and so forth. The following table gives a tally of these internet searches. As the table indicates, ISIS produced twice as many videos depicting children engaging in ultra-violence as videos of children in training camps. None of the groups such as Al Qaeda or Al Shabab, and Taliban, to the best of our knowledge, have produced videos in which children are shown to engage in acts of violence.

Table 3: Videos Depicting Children in Military Training or Engaging in Violence Produced between February 2013-Feb 2018*

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[6] Video released on Jan 08, 2017, released by ISIS in Al-Khayr province Syria, the video was posted on Shumoukh Al-Islam the leading Jihadi Forum.

Group	Videos depicting violence by children	Videos showing children in training settings without violence
ISIS	12	5
Al Qaeda	0	4
Al Shabab	0	2
Boko Haram	3	1

*It should be noted that this is not a comprehensive count of all the videos produced by these groups.

Terrorism and violence is newsworthy and receives media coverage more than any other topic such as poverty, unemployment, racial equality and so forth. (Nacos 2016, 99) Violence provides a spectacle that the media cannot turn away from. As observed by Kellner (2012, 2), spectacle of violence has become a dominant form of "breaking news" that constructs "major news cycles". Al Qaeda's 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre gave more visibility and media coverage than any other terrorist group.(Matusitz 2014, 47) As such, the competition bar has been set high. ISIS has progressively produced more gore videos and putting children at the heart of this spectacle is an attempt to set the group apart from some of its competitors and give the group visibility. When the images of Abdullah Sharrouf, the seven-year old Australian boy, holding a severed head of a Syrian official, circulated in the Western media, the then US Secretary of State Kerry, described ISIS as "so far beyond the pale with respect to any standard by which we judge even terrorist groups." (US Department of Defense 2014)

Children's Visibility:
These videos are visible for depicting children as the cast and central character of the storyline and the narrative as they are more likely to be shared, commented on and instigate reaction compared to videos depicting children in training settings. For example, video of a child (by ISIS) who is shown cutting off arms of a prisoner and then decapitating him released in November 2017, has been viewed a total of 82,230 times as of April 4, 2018. Another video by ISIS released around the same time (Nov 2015) is about to-be suicide bombers who talk about their trainings. In comparison, the latter video—although available on YouTube, which is easier to access—has only been viewed 38,507 times as of April 4, 2018.[7] This essentially indicates that a video, which contains ultra-violence, has attracted twice more attention in less than 1/3rd of the time.

As observed by Friis, the fatal injury produced in the spectacle is not for the sake of murder in itself, but for the "purpose of being reproduced and watched by an audience far larger than the one directly experiencing it." (Friis 2015, 743) Advanced cinematographic techniques employed by ISIS in the production of these videos has increased the visibility of these videos and has given ISIS an advantage over other violent videos disseminated online. As observed by Friis (2015, 743) many of videos online portray less staged scenes and scenes showing victims struggling to escape or pleading for their life, or scenes of dead bodies. This kind of videos do not attract as much attention. In fact, ISIS has grasped well that the scenes need to be set in a controlled environment and everyone, including the victims, have to follow the storyline.

Furthermore, children have a galvanising impact on global politics because they trigger emotions, reinforce "familiar narratives about liberal order and illiberal disorder". (Lee-Koo 2018, 48) The liberal idea of childhood is a passive state, which is also reinforced by "a legal framework that defines rights and responsibilities according to age", which is often 18 years of age (Lee-Koo 2018, 48). The assumption is that a child cannot to be fully informed before joining armed conflict. Hence, images (still or moving) of children as perpetrators of violence re-enforce "othering" and the notion of "us" versus

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[7] These numbers are live and changing.

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"them". (Lee-Koo 2018, 48) It is these perceptions and values that ISIS goes against in order to gain visibility. By portraying children performing ultra-violence to an audience whose perception is that children are innocent and peaceful, ISIS evokes emotions such as confusion, and ambiguity as to whether one should condemn children as perpetrators or to view them as victims. In fact, viewers comments left on some of the online platforms that allow for viewers' interaction underline these points.

Conclusion

Many terrorist groups have recruited children before and have used them for various military purposes, but none has flaunted this so audaciously as ISIS.   Like the images of beheading by ISIS, spectacle of violence by children has high visibility. This research discussed the videos within the framework of SOV while focusing on its five elements: aesthetic, novelty, memorability, competitiveness and visibility. Given the kind of violence shown in the mainstream media and online in general means that ISIS videos are neither very "exceptional nor always capable of attracting attention or inciting political outrage." (Friis 2015, 742) Hence, for ISIS to capture attention, the spectacle needs to go above and beyond what is already available online. Through the spectacle, ISIS has provided the opportunity of watching what can be described as "reality TV", where violence is allowed in real life and it inflicts real pain.   These carefully cropped images of hostages in orange-clad kneeling to be executed at the hands of children can create fear and promote recruitment among sympathisers or children who want to join the "game". The videos play dual functionality, where for one audience they create horror and fear and for a different audience they are a source of inspiration. These videos of children committing heinous acts of violence make the spectacles of violence more memorable and visible, which in turn, increases their competitiveness in terms of attracting attention.

While this research investigated a topic that has received scant scholarly attention, it is limited in scope and primarily focuses on the spectacle of violence by children. A major limitation of this study is measuring the emotional impact of these videos on the audiences. Research can benefit from a systematic study of viewers' reaction to the spectacle of violence and conduct a comparative analysis of SoV by children and adults. Although we do not promote subjecting viewers to watching and analysing ultra-violence, we encourage innovative research designs that can address these issues.

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