

Recruitment Propaganda of the Islamic State

Recruiting Narratives in
the Islamic State's Propaganda

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I hereby declare that this thesis was written by me and in my own words, except for quotations from published and unpublished sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such.

Yours Truly
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Summary

This research tries to give information about how people living in the Western world are mobilised to join a self-proclaimed Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. In this research I studied the propaganda of the Islamic State and their most important recruiting narratives. The four most important narratives, the winners message, victimhood, religious obligation and identity are described in this paper. In the last chapter is tried to make a connection between the four narratives, their aims and existing radicalisation and recruitment theories. In this chapter was concluded that the narratives in the Islamic State's propaganda influences polarisation, providing of selective incentives, connecting personal problems to a broader conflict and providing legitimacy.

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Introduction

How is an insurgent group or terrorist organisation able to inspire and mobilize citizens of western countries to join their battle more than a thousand miles away? People leave their homes, jobs, friends, and family to join the Islamic State (IS) in countries such as Iraq and Syria or they commit violent attacks in their name. Why should a rational person risk his or her life and everything he or she has to support this group? Usually, the recruitment is not highly organised; the global terrorist organisation does not coerce each and every individual, but people are radicalising themselves by watching and reading propaganda published by terrorist organisations, among other things (Hussain & Saltman 2014, 75). The way this organisation uses media is extremely structured and organised. The Islamic State is creating a huge amount of propaganda on social media and through movies and glossy online magazines. In this paper, I will try to give insight into how IS convinces foreign fighters from the West to join the Islamic State through mobilising narratives.

The Islamic State publishes a huge amount of propaganda every day (Gartenstein-Ross, 2016; Winter, 2015). IS has many audiences, including its own recruits, the enemy, the western media, and also its potential recruits (Winter, 2015). I will focus on the narratives that reach out to this last audience only. The narratives I will research might have another influence on other audiences, but I will only examine their mobilising intentions. I will just analyse the Islamic State's four most dominant narratives; there are more narratives that try to recruit foreign fighters, but I chose to analyse the most dominant ones in a more detailed way.

Considerable research has been conducted on extracting IS narratives from their propaganda (Fernandez, 2015; Gartenstein-Ross, 2015; Winter 2015). I would like to add to this an in-depth analysis in which I not only try to discover the recruiting narratives of the Islamic State, but also on what premises they are built, how the IS legitimizes its narratives, and what actors and events are named and framed in these narratives. I think this will be a valuable contribution to the academic debate. In this research, the connection is made between Islamic State narratives and recruitment and radicalisation processes. The aim is to describe and analyse not only the narratives, but also the potential influence these narratives can have on a potential recruit.

This research not only has academic relevance but can also contribute to society and policy. Considerable effort has been put into countering the Islamic State militarily, but because IS also recruits its fighters from among our society, it is also of societal importance to know more about the way this recruitment happens. According to de Graaff, narrative analysis is necessary because narrative is the heart of the Islamic State recruitment strategy (2015, 49).

Theoretical Framework

This research is built upon the following question: How are individual foreign fighters seduced to join a battle fought miles from home? This question leads to the original question of why individuals join violent collective action. According to Mason, potential fighters almost never join the fight for ideological reasons; instead,

individuals join an insurgency group, such as the Islamic State, based on selective incentives (2004, 48). This theory is even more applicable to potential foreign recruits because these foreigners, living in relatively safe western countries, are not influenced by violent coercion and threats to their lives. These selective incentives can consist of hard benefits or soft benefits. For example, a feeling of community, security, and honour are considered soft benefits, while a monthly pay check, a house, and maybe even slaves are considered hard benefits. This research tries to find narratives that might present and promote these benefits to the potential recruits.

Presenting these benefits is not enough to convince the recruits to travel to the Islamic State or carry out terrorist attacks in their home countries. These actions have to be legitimized. This legitimisation of the existence of the organisation and the Islamic State as such, the legitimisation of joining them, or the violence carried out is the second kind of narrative expected in Islamic State propaganda. Narratives and discourse, in general, can influence individuals' actions (Autesserre, 2012; Fairclough, 2003). They make the idea of joining the conflict legitimate, and in this way, they make it possible for people to accept the incentives mentioned before (Autesserre, 2012). Built on these theories, this research will analyse the textual and visual propaganda presented by the Islamic State

Considerable research has been conducted on primary sources that examine the content presented by the Islamic State. For example, Charlie Winter (2015) conducted research on recruitment of foreign fighters. According to his theory, there are three aspects needed to fuel the process of recruitment. All these aspects are necessary to convince someone to join Jihad. These aspects are an echo chamber, propaganda, and the enlister. The echo chamber is a small group of people with whom a potential recruit can discuss the propaganda. The propaganda is all the content the person reads and watches, gradually realigning this person's moral norms. The enlister provides practical information according to traveling or weighing the risks (Winter 2015, 7).

Analytical Framework

In this paper, the mobilising narratives that dominate the Islamic State discourse will be analysed. Analysis is the breaking down of a phenomenon into its constituent parts and determining the relationship between these parts in relation to the whole. This research is based on this assumption and will contain three steps of analysis.

The propaganda of the Islamic State is not created in a vacuum; it is embedded in social life. The text is full of representation of social life, but it also tries to influence society, for example, by convincing people to join the Islamic State. Because of this, the first step will provide some context about the social climate in which this propaganda is created.

The second step is describing the narratives: What is observable, what do we see, what can be extracted from the source material? This second step uses mostly preliminary research; it is not only based on my own findings. Different authors, such as Gartenstein-Ross (2016) and Winter (2015) clearly present the most important aspects of Islamic State propaganda. I used their elements and narratives as a basis for further research.

The third step is more complicated: The explanation of the information collected in step two. To perform this analysis, I will utilize an analytical framework. This analytical framework will contain mainly elements from the critical discourse analysis theory (Fairclough 2003). After examining the mobilising narratives, theoretical elements from meaning, giving, naming, and framing processes will be added (Bhatia, 2005). This decision was made because this analysis does not focus on specific texts, but rather on the dominant narratives presented in hundreds of texts, supported by images.

To create a clear analysis, there must be a clear definition of the concepts described and analysed in this paper. I am analysing narratives extracted from the Islamic State discourse. In this case, discourse is defined as follows: A collection of examples of language in use as an element of social life interconnected with other elements (Fairclough 2003, 8). Discourse analysis does not focus primarily on texts, but rather on the representation and potential influences, as well as how it is embedded in social events and social life (Fairclough 2003, 8). In this context, narratives are defined as stories built from *fabula*, or content ordered in a specific manner. Social actors are transformed into characters, and the story is focalized in terms of a particular point of view. The actors in text and discourse are not human beings, but social representations. They are participants in the story told by the author (Fairclough 2003, 144). Narratives can shape the way we perceive the world and how we act upon this perception (Autesserre 2012, 206). *Fabula* influences people's perception of the world through frames. A narrative can be built on different frames (Autesserre 2012; Fairclough 2003).

The following is an example:

- The *fabula*: The armies of different countries are bombarding Syria and Iraq in order to stop the Islamic State and thereby harming humans.
- The Islamic State narrative: The crusaders are bombarding civilians in Syria and Iraq, attacking Sunni-Muslims and wounding women and children.
- Frame: The western world is in a brutal war against the Islam and the Islamic community.

The analytical framework is based on the following four research questions:

1. What are the underlying assumptions?
2. Who are the actors, and how are they named and framed?
3. What is the potential influence on the radicalisation of the audience?
4. How do these narratives relate to each other?

The first research question concerns the assumptions underlying the narrative. A distinction will be made between existential assumptions (about what exists), propositional assumptions (about what is or can be the case) and value assumptions (about what is good and desirable) (Fairclough, 2003). The underlying assumptions will give insight into the premises upon which the Islamic State argumentation is based.

The second research question focuses on the actors in the narratives of the Islamic State: What names are used for them, and how do these names contribute to a certain frame? Names are extremely important in conflict situations. By naming a group, one will not only identify and frame that group, but also legitimize certain actions (Bhatia, 2006).

In the third component of my analytical framework, I will try to answer what the Islamic State aims to influence by this narrative. Which aspects of radicalisation and mobilisation processes do they trigger? How do they try to influence the individuals, and how do they represent aspects of social life in order to do so? It is important in this respect to examine which elements, events, or actors are represented and prominently visible. Is this representation abstract or more concrete? (Fairclough 2003, 12). How does this representation possibly influence the potential recruits?

The fourth question will try to translate the propaganda into the real world. How could these narratives potentially influence individuals? Could it fuel polarisation, legitimize actions, or present incentives? These are all important elements in mobilisation or radicalisation theories (Mason 2004; Schmid 2013). How do these four narratives relate to each other? Are they interconnected, maybe some more than others? This will also be answered in the fourth research question. A diagram of the dominant narratives and their relationships to each other will be included.

Sources

A multitude of sources were used to extract dominant narratives. Because of the huge amount of propaganda, a selection was made. The first criterion is language. Because this research focuses on the mobilisation of potential recruits from western countries, I decided to only study content in English or with English subtitles. The second criterion demarcates a time period: Only content from July 2014 to July 2016 was used. This time period was chosen because, in July 2014, the Caliphate was declared (Lister 2015, 128). Since this declaration, the organisation has tried to convince people to join the caliphate. In order to achieve this, the amount of propaganda drastically increased (Winter 2015, 12). The end date of July 2016 is based on the publication of the latest edition of *Dabiq*. After this date, they published another magazine with a different name. The new magazine, *Rumiyah*, is not the same magazine carrying a different name; it seems to be the beginning of a new message.

The propaganda researched and examined contains 15 editions of *Dabiq*, the organisations glossy magazine, and a plethora of video material and images. The videos and pictures were retrieved from the website Jihadology, a project of Aaron Y. Zelin of the Washington Institute for Near East policy.

Chapter 1: The rise of the Islamic State

Since the texts and images that will be analysed are neither created nor perceived in a vacuum, it is important to give context and background information about the social environment, historical context, and the main actors. This information will be given in the following section, by first describing the rise of the Islamic State. The second part will describe the Islamic State from 2014 until now. In this section information will be given about the organisational structure, its propaganda machine, its ideology, and the role of foreign fighters in this group.

The Rise of the Islamic State

The rise of the Islamic State can be traced back to the radicalisation of al-Zarqawi, born in 1966 in Zarqa, Jordan. After he radicalised in prison, where he was held between 1985 and 1988 for sexual assault and drug-possession, he travelled to Afghanistan to join the fight against the Soviets, who invaded the country in 1979. He arrived in Afghanistan after the Soviets had begun their withdrawal. Subsequently, al-Zarqawi was part of a small terrorist group in Jordan, but he was imprisoned when discovered by the Hashemite regime. After his release from prison in 1999, he travelled to Afghanistan again where al-Qaeda provided funds to let him set up his own training camp (Kirdar 2011, 2). During this period, al-Zarqawi founded the organisation Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, a different group than that active in Jordan. This group was active in Iraq and Jordan. The main mission of the group was to topple apostate regimes in the region (Zelin 2014, 2). The US invaded Afghanistan in search of Osama bin Laden because he was held responsible for the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001. As a response to the US invading Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi and his group moved through Iran to Iraq. In Iraq, they started recruiting Iraqis for their organisation (Corera 2005, 11). Better prepared than in Afghanistan, they played an active role in the insurgency fighting the U.S invasion in Iraq in 2003.

Al-Zarqawi's group pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2004 (Pool 2004, 9). After this pledge, they changed their name into Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, often simplified in to AQI or al-Qaeda in Iraq (Lister 2014, 8). From 2004 to 2006, they showed their presence in Iraq, fighting the American-led military coalition and the country's interim regime, as well as targeting Shia mosques and shrines (Zelin 2014, 2). Although the group was affiliated with al-Qaeda, they had many differences. AQI, for example, focussed more on local battles, while al-Qaeda had its focus on distance enemies, especially the United States and other western countries. Also, ideologues in al-Qaeda thought that al-Zarqawi used excessive violence, accepting Sunni Muslims as collateral damage in his attacks and targeting popular Sunni leaders (Corera 2005, 11). Because of the great impact AQI had in Iraq, the group was able to unite other Sunni groups and militias under a larger organisation. This organisation was called the Mujahidin Shura Council (Lister 2014, 8). After al-Zarqawi died in an American airstrike in 2006, the new leader of AQI, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, pledged allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq, created by the Mujahidin Shura Council. This pledge of allegiance to an organisation other than al-Qaeda influenced the break between AQI and al-Qaeda later (Lister 2014, 9).

Between 2007 and 2009, the newly established Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) suffered significantly; ISI was fought because of its absolutist view on the Sharia and their widespread use of violence. *Sahwa* or Awakening councils, backed up by U.S. support, fought the organisation (Lister 2014, 9). After the death of the last leaders of ISI, Omar al-Baghdadi and Ayyub al-Masri, in 2010 in an airstrike, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi gained control. The group stayed weak until the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Iraq in 2011 (Lister 2014, 10).

When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011 after protests that were violently beaten down by the regime, ISI became active in Syria. In April 2012, the ISI, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, officially announced its expansion to Syria. Thereby, the organisation renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. In June 2012, ISIS showed its presence and gained control of various Syrian cities. (Lister, 2015, p. 242) ISIS killing leaders of competing Jihadist movements, particularly in Syria, was the direct cause of the official split between ISIS and al-Qaeda (Lister 2014, 10).

In June 2014, ISIS published a statement declaring the establishment of a caliphate, changing its name one last time to al-Dawla al-Islamiyya or the Islamic State (Pizzi, 2014). Around the declaration of the Caliphate, the group also started its media campaign, documenting the capturing of Mosul. After the declaration of its caliphate, the Islamic State issued a series of media releases, among them an audio tape of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declaring the Caliphate, videos called *Breaking the Borders* and *The End of Sykes Picot*, and the first edition of its glossy magazine, *Dabiq* (Lister 2014, 10).

Organisation

In the previous section, I discussed the growth of the Islamic state from a group founded in an al-Qaeda-funded training camp in Afghanistan to a self-declared caliphate stretching across territory in Syria and Iraq (Lister 2014). Since the declaration of the caliphate, academics and politicians have been debating whether the Islamic State is a terrorist organisation, an insurgency movement, or a state that has not been officially acknowledged. In a speech, the United States president, Obama, claimed that the group simply is a terrorist organisation (Cronin 2015). Others argue that the Islamic State is not a terrorist organisation, but rather an insurgency group because the support it gained from with the local community, its primarily local focus, and its will to gain territory (Cronin 2015). According to Duyvesteyn and Fumerton, the aim of a terrorist organisation is to gain awareness for its own goals by performing terrorist acts, not to claim and govern territory (2009, 28). It is also possible for an insurgency group to use terrorist acts to reach its goal. In that case, terrorist attacks are part of a war strategy, not a definition for a group (Fumerton & Duyvesteyn 2009, 31).

It is difficult to give one simple definition of the group; it is important to realise that the fact the group calls itself a state is important for the legitimacy it has in the eyes of its potential recruits (Cronin, 2015). The way the group is named by its enemies, for example, the president of the United States, is equally important. Naming a group may help to legitimize certain actions against it (Bhatia 2006, 9). Now, in 2016, the organisation is a partly function state: It has ministries, tries to maintain control over its territory, and has at least a few social services, like education and healthcare (Cronin 2015; Lister 2014). This image is partly provided by the Islamic State itself

through propaganda. It is doubtful how much of this information is true and how well the state really functions because of the lack of government expertise, among other things (Sly 2014).

Ideology

The Islamic State can be identified as part of a movement called Jihadi-Salafism. This movement can be placed in a broader segment of Islamic political thought. There is an audio message in which the Islamic State calls to all young men of Jihadi-Salafism (Bunzel 2015, 7). Groups that fit the Jihadi-Salafism movement are strictly replicating the model of the Prophet Muhammad, which they take seriously and follow a literal interpretation of the texts (Wicktorowicz 2006, 208). Not all people involved in Salafism are willing to fight for it, however. For example, politico-Salafi's are willing to influence politics through official political channels. (Wicktorowicz 2006, 208).

Important aspects of IS's ideology are, for example, the willingness to denounce other Muslims as non-Muslims, or *takfirism*. The term takfirism has its fundamentals in the term *kafir*, which means non-believer. In addition to takfirism, the elimination of all that is *shirk* (idolatry) and affirming the fact that God is one, *tawhid*, is important in this ideology (Bunzel 2015, 8).

Propaganda

Although the Islamic State has produced propaganda since the declaration of its caliphate, its number of publications has strongly increased since then. Since the announcement of the caliphate, a great amount of propaganda has been created every day. The exact number is difficult to measure because of the great amount. Estimates have been made of the production of 38 individual publications per day (Winter 2015,3). These publications are on websites and in IS's own magazines. They are available in different languages, including Arabic, English, French, Turkish, Russian, and German. Before the declaration of the Caliphate, less material was published in languages other than Arabic. This increase, together with the first edition of its English magazine *Dabiq*, suggests that IS was willing to put more effort into recruiting foreign fighters (Winter 2015, 38). The propaganda is spread by different local media departments, which all have responsibilities for different regions and kinds of propaganda. The publications are often professional, and all seem highly organised.

Foreign Fighters

An estimated 25,000 foreign fighters have travelled to fight with the Islamic State in 2011 to 2016. (Schmid 2015, 3). According to Gartenstein-Ross, these foreign recruits are of viable importance to the Islamic State. In the short-term, the foreign recruits can fill the ranks and help to retain and expand the Islamic State's territory. However, in the long- and medium-terms, the foreign fighters joining increase the group's legitimacy. The group promotes the religious obligation all Muslims in the world have. The foreign fighters traveling to the caliphate confirm this claim by setting an example and living up to the obligation (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 9). One of the analysed narratives in this paper describes this religious obligation story.

Chapter 2: The Narratives

How does one analyse the narratives extracted from more than one hundred videos, articles, and speeches? I had to find a structure, categories in which I could place the messages of the Islamic State. The focus of this paper is on recruiting narratives, which means I had to make a selection of narratives that appeal most to their potential recruits for the purpose of convincing people to join IS. The propaganda of the Islamic State has more potential audiences than just the potential recruits. IS also tries to reach out to its enemies and the inhabitants of the Islamic State (Winter 2015, 7). This research, however, concentrates only on the narratives used by the Islamic State to try to influence potential recruits to join it.

With this audience in mind, four dominant narratives were selected. These four narratives contain different elements that, together, form the whole narrative. In this chapter, those four dominant narratives and their elements are explained. The four most important recruiting narratives are the winner's message, political grievance, religious obligation, and identity narrative. These narratives are highly inter-related and are able to legitimize or support each other. The relationships between the narratives will be explained primarily in the next chapter and therefore will not be addressed in Chapter 2. The process of selecting the narratives is mainly based on previous research by other authors. First, these authors' research will be described. Afterward, the four narratives will be explained in detail.

Previous Studies

Before this research, many authors tried to categorize and thematise the key elements, or main narratives, of the Islamic State propaganda (El-Badawy et al 2015; Fernandez, 2015; Gartenstein-Ross 2015; Winter 2015). Categorization is important because of the huge amount of propaganda the Islamic State creates every day. Every author has made his or her own selection and a few of these selections are discussed in this paper to provide good examples of different categorization choices regarding the Islamic State propaganda. The categories of three authors will be explained, and my selection of the four most dominant narratives is mainly based on one of these authors' categories. After explaining the selection of the three authors, the four narratives used in this research paper will be described.

The first example tries to extract the ideology of the Islamic State, and other jihadist movements, from the dominant narratives in its propaganda. The themes provide information about the group's objectives, values, identity, and conduct. The narratives like "establishing the caliphate" and "end of days" are connected to one of these themes (El-Badawy et al 2015, 5). These themes are useful when trying to make a connection to identifying the group's ideology, but because the focus in this paper lies purely on the narratives about recruitment, the categories in this example cannot be used.

In his paper "The Virtual Caliphate", Charlie Winter selected strong key elements from the Islamic State propaganda (2015). The key elements he presents are comprehensive and provide good insight into the narratives included in the Islamic State propaganda flood (Winter 2015, 8). The elements are too comprehensive to use

all of them for this research; however, Winter does not just deal with the narratives able to influence recruitment, but also with those important for branding the Islamic State and the content that influences the enemy (2015). The Islamic State brand also has a certain influence on recruitment: Recruits want to be part of that brand. However, because of the limited time and capacity of this research, it was not possible to analyse all of them. Therefore, only the elements selected by Charlie Winter that focus on recruitment were used (2015).

The dominant narratives selected for this research are mainly based on the work of Gartenstein-Ross in his testimony, he selected the most important narratives that have to be countered to prevent people from joining the Islamic State army (2016). Gartenstein-Ross described the four main narratives on recruitment (2015, 6). In a research paper presented later, the number of narratives was expanded to nine (Gartenstein-Ross 2016). However, these were not the most important for recruitment. Thus, the original four themes mentioned by Gartenstein-Ross were used as a starting point for this research: Winner's message, religious obligation, a sense of adventure, and political grievance (2015, 6). These themes were used as a starting point for this research. Using these categories, I started reading the Islamic State's propaganda. During the research, I changed these categories slightly. The category a sense of adventure was changed in the identity narrative. In my opinion, this part of propaganda focusses not only on adventure, but also on belonging, brotherhood, and honour. Why I choose to change the name of this category will be explained in the section describing this narrative. This chapter will continue by explaining the four most dominant narratives and key elements of the Islamic State's recruitment message.

Winner's Message

The first narrative extracted from the Islamic State's propaganda is the winner's message narrative. According to Charlie Winter the elements brought together in this narrative are presented in half of the Islamic State's propaganda (2015, 17). The elements of this narrative are obviously present. They contain the elements brutality, mercy, battlefield success, and utopia. These elements together form the winner's message narrative. The main aim of this narrative is to show the world that they are strong enough to stand a chance. To convince people to travel a thousand miles to join a self-proclaimed state, that state has to demonstrate its power (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 15). They simply aim to say, "we are here, strong, and fighting. We are on the verge of winning". This message contains different components, which will be explained separately.

Brutality

The first component of this narrative is the brutality component. Maybe the most famous component in Islamic State propaganda. Fragments of videos containing violent acts and beheadings are shared around social media used on the television news. By showing videos of beheadings and mass executions, IS actually shows its supremacy and power (Winter 2015, 21). It shows that the Islamic State is capable of punishing the enemy and imposing its will on local populations (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 16). This message can be discerned through videos of executions and beheadings,

often supported by an article in *Dabiq* explaining and legitimizing these violent acts. The case of James Foley is an example of the legitimization of violent acts. This American journalist was abducted by the Islamic State and beheaded in August 2014 (Carter 2014). A few months after a video of his beheading was shown, the Islamic State published an article blaming president Obama for the death of James Foley (*Dabiq* 3 2014, 3-4)

Mercy

The mercy component is highly intertwined with the brutality component. Different videos are available in which prisoners or members of the Iraqi police are granted mercy whenever they convert to Islam and pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi (Winter 2015, 18). The main aim of the mercy component is the same as with the brutality component: the Islamic State is in control and not only able to make decisions but also to process them. The message to the foreign fighters is mainly that if one is willing to travel to the Islamic State and support it, all prior sins will be forgiven (Winter 2015, 18). This connection between traveling to the Islamic State and mercy is explained in the article "*Hijrah and Forgiveness*". This article explains that when one travels to the Islamic State all one's sins are forgiven. The message in the article is supported by citations from both the Quran and Hadith. An example is the following citation:

"The Prophet responded, 'are you not aware that Islam wipes out all previous sin and that Hijrah wipes out all previous sins? And that Hajj wipes out all previous sins?'" (*Dabiq* 3 2014, 23).

By granting forgiveness to others who try to convert and join the Islamic State, they are backing up this message.

Battlefield Success

The Islamic State "war machine" is one way the organisation tries to brand itself. This branding mainly happens through propaganda that displays military parades, frontline scenes in videos, and detailed reports about its military progress (Winter 2015, 25). The organisation puts enormous effort into sending cameras with its soldiers on the battlefield and maybe even more effort into editing these videos into professional war movies.

This message is not only shared in videos. Every edition of *Dabiq* contains a reports section. In these articles, the major missions and successes on the battlefield are described. In the sixth edition of *Dabiq*, an article about the "liberation" of Biji appears. In this article, the battle to conquer this city in Iraq is described and displayed. Figure 1 is a picture from this article. In the picture, a soldier can be seen "gunning down" the enemy with a machine gun.

Through this narrative, the Islamic States wants to show its supremacy on a military level. It wants everyone in the world, including its potential recruits to believe that it is winning and making military progress (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 5). This is incredibly important because there are not many people who leave their safe environment to join a losing team. Videos and content of battlefield scenes can also influence the identity narrative; this will be explained later in this chapter.



Figure 1. Dabiq 6, 2015, 14

Islamic State as Utopia

The last component of the winner's message narrative is the role of statehood and the Islamic State as a successful functioning state. In the propaganda in which this component is presented, the territory of the Islamic State is displayed as an organised state, including healthcare, law and order, and educational opportunities for children. It displays IS's territory as hosting a functional state and the only state in the world where a pure form of the Islamic Sharia law is in practice (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 9). This component is displayed in videos, photographs, and scripted stories of people living in the Caliphate taking part in everyday life. There are pictures of a fruit market, elderly care, and road building. Scenes of children playing and laughing at a seasonal fair, including carousels and rollercoasters, are displayed in multiple movies. One of the most famous examples is the video *Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah*. In this movie, different scenes of playing children and praying adults are shown. People are telling the camera how wonderful life is in the caliphate. (al-Hayat media 2014)

This narrative not only invites people to join the Islamic State's wonderful place, but also builds on its legitimacy. Its organisation is not just a terrorist organisation, but is a legitimate functional state, protecting its people and territory.

Political Grievances or Muslim Victimhood

The second narrative dominating the Islamic State discourse is the Muslim victimhood narrative. This narrative connects political grievances in foreign fighters' home countries to an everlasting struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 82). It also displays innocent victims who are under attack in Syria in Iraq. Defending these victims is one of the reasons people should join the caliphate. This narrative contains three different components. The first component consists of the war victims that have to be defended. The second concerns the political grievances, discrimination, and dishonouring of Muslims living in countries where western culture is dominant. These two components contribute to a timeless theme in jihadist and Islamist propaganda: That of a global war on Islam (Winter 2015, 23).

The last component is connecting these problems to action. This is the revenge component: People have to avenge their brothers and sisters killed by the Iraqi or Syrian army, as well as those harmed by bombardments of the Western Coalition.

They also have to take revenge for the humiliation and discrimination on the whole Muslim community, which is supposedly suppressed by western society (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 23).

War Victims

This component is important because it is a narrative many people can relate to, regardless of whether they are already actual supporters of the Islamic State. Pictures and videos of bombardments are shared. The victims portrayed are almost always innocent civilians and are always framed as innocent Muslims. This narrative is as important for recruitment as it is for justification. It legitimizes the existence of the organisation and its acts. Who else will protect these innocent victims? The enemies of the Islamic State are always blamed for the death of the victims. The pictures and videos almost always support blame of the crusaders or the non-believers (Winter 2015, 25).

The war victims' element aims to influence the potential recruits' emotions. People become angry because innocent civilians, woman, and children are hurt by illegitimate airstrikes. However, maybe even more importantly, this element also helps to frame the battle of the Islamic State as a defensive one. IS is trying to defend itself and the innocent people living in its territory (Winter 2015, 24).

Discrimination

The Islamic State victimhood narrative not only portrays the grievances of Muslims living in war zones, such as Syria and Iraq, but it also frames the political grievances of Muslims living in western countries. Life for Muslims in western countries is framed as problematic. Muslim inhabitants of these countries have to deal with discrimination and humiliation. They are not allowed to live their lives fully based on the rules of Sharia law and Islamic traditions. Not being able to attend ceremonies at the mosque and not being able to find a job are aspects of Muslim life in the West used to illustrate people's grievances. In the Islamic State propaganda, these grievances are connected to a broader struggle against Sunni Muslims worldwide (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 24).

The seventh edition of *Dabiq* contains an article called "Extinction of the Grayzone". In this article, the author describes the Islamic State's strategy. IS wants to fuel the polarisation between the Muslims living in the West and the non-believers, for example, through violent attacks. When the situation worsens, good Muslims who live in the West (the so-called people of the grayzone) will travel to the Islamic State (*Dabiq* 7 2015, 54).

Revenge and Defence

The war victim component and the discrimination do not complete the political grievance narrative. The last component is actively justifying and naming the struggle. The first two components try to convince the world that the western world is waging a war against Islam in general (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 23). The Islamic State tries to connect its own violent acts to this war by calling these acts revenge and defence of the victims who died because of its enemies.

In the aftermath of the attacks in Brussel in 2016, IS published an article in *Dabiq* in which the author literally stated that the time of revenge had finally come. The article describes the attacks in Brussels as the revenge that all Muslims were waiting for. IS's Muslim brothers and sisters had suffered enough. In the same article, IS also referred to changing the position of Muslims, which will cause them to finally walk with pride (*Dabiq* 14 2016, 3). This way, IS legitimizes its acts, while trying to recruit new fighters.

An even more obvious example where victimhood is used to justify IS's brutality is presented in the video and article about the burning alive of the Jordanian F-16 fighter pilot in January 2015. The pilot was imprisoned by the Islamic State after his plane was shot down. The Islamic State captured him alive, and after negotiations to trade him for other prisoners failed, it published a video of his execution (Winter 2015, 23). Before the footage of his execution appeared, the video first showed the effects of the airstrikes. In *Dabiq*, IS explained that the way the pilot was killed was the same way people died when their houses were hit by airstrikes (*Dabiq* 7 2015, 5 and al-Hayat 2015)

Religious Obligation

The third narrative embodies the religious arguments of the Islamic State. Religion is one of the most important elements in the Islamic State's media. Sometimes, it is present as a film covering other arguments, but there is also a religious-based narrative to recruit new foreign fighters. This narrative is based on the premises of religious obligation. The Islamic State promotes that it is obligatory for all Muslims to emigrate, if an Islamic State has been created anywhere in this world. (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 24) This statement was already presented in an audio message about the declaration of the caliphate in 2014.

The religious obligation narrative occurs mostly in textual form, audio messages, or articles. The narrative is often legitimized by citations from religious texts. Islamic Scholars are trying to counter this narrative, for example, in an open letter to al-Baghdadi in which they give a theological explanation why it is illegitimate to join the Islamic State (Letter to Baghdadi 2014)

In this narrative, the Islamic State explains that someone can be a good Muslim only when he or she travels toward the Islamic State. However, if this is not possible because of security forces or health issues, it is also possible to pledge allegiance from the country in which you live. (*Dabiq* 1 2014, 3)

Two elements are clearly discernible in this narrative: The religious obligation and the punishment and rewards. People are free to choose whether they want to join the Islamic State, but when one is a Muslim, he or she is obliged to do so, which makes it intertwined with the identity narrative. Accepting one's obligation to perform hijrah and wage jihad is mandatory for being part of the social identity group created by the organisation. This narrative motivates people with a simple system of rewards and punishment. When someone does what IS wants, traveling to the Islamic State to join the Caliphate, he or she is promised rewards here and in the afterlife. If that person does not, he or she will be punished, maybe now or after his or her death. In this way, the religious obligation narratives also contribute to the martyrdom aspect; people are

told that when they die as martyrs they will receive even more rewards in the afterlife. The rewards people will receive in this life are mostly rewards concerning social identity. This belongs to the fourth and last narrative.

Identity

The fourth and last dominant narrative that I extracted from the Islamic State publications is the identity narrative. Even more than the other narratives, this narrative is based on two pillars, which are related to each other and together form the identity narrative.

I distinguished two different forms of identity: Group identity, which is mainly influenced by concepts such as a strong sense of belonging and by differentiating the group from others and creating a strong “us vs. them” feeling, and a more individual social identity. The latter concentrates more on picturing the fighters of the Islamic State as heroes and creating stereotypes of strong independent and confident fighters. Group identity has been mentioned in literature about Jihadist propaganda as a way that they define their group and their ideology (El-badawy et al. 2015, 39). In this paper, I will focus less on the way IS defines itself through this propaganda strategy and more on how the identity and defining propaganda can seduce potential recruits into joining the Islamic State.

Sense of belonging

Some call the sense of belonging narrative the most important for drawing in new foreign recruits (Winter 2015, 23). The emphasis lies not so much on brutal or heroic war scenes, but more on friendship, brotherhood, and security. Whereas the political grievance narrative convinces people that they are treated as outcasts in western society, the sense of belonging narrative gives a solution to this problem. In the Islamic State, everyone is connected by brotherhood, as long as someone belongs to the group, he or she is equal. It does not matter if that person comes from the Philippines, Sudan, or Belgium, as long as he or she joins the Islamic State, they are all brothers. For example, in this quote from *Dabiq*, the author explained everyone is welcome in the Islamic State as long as he or she is a good Sunni Muslim:

But if you were to go to the frontlines of ar-Raqqah, al-Barakah, al-Khayr, Halab, etc., you would find the soldiers and the commanders to be of different colours, languages, and lands: the Najdī, the Jordanian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Somali, the Turk, the Albanian, the Chechen, the Indonesian, the Russian, the European, the American and so on. (*Dabiq* 3, 2014, 18)

In this article, IS explains to fighters why it is honourable and imperative to travel to the Islamic State. The article explains that the diversity of its army is one of its greatest strengths.

Another way to present camaraderie and brotherhood is through different movies. There are several movies in which foreign fighters are sitting on the grass together, drinking tea and laughing while they talk about friendship and brotherhood

(Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 22). Figure 2 shows an example of this display of brotherhood in a still of one of the Islamic State propaganda videos.

Social Identity

Last, there is also the social identity component. This narrative component is related to the political grievance narrative. The Islamic State claims that Muslims are humiliated everywhere in the world (El-badawy et al. 2015, 31). People who feel marginalized and disrespected in their lives in the West will be receptive to this narrative. Feeling self-confident and proud can be a selective incentive for individual potential recruits. The Islamic State promises these feelings through the use of “types”. A type defines an individual by what he or she represents, rather than for his or her own unique qualities (Long & Wall 2012, 172).

In videos, interviews, and reports, foreign fighters are asked about their lives. In these videos, the fighters’ main goal is not to represent themselves but to represent the Islamic State as an organization. These interviews and videos seem highly scripted and often contain a conversion story: People who were not living their lives through the rules of Islam but found the right path and joined the Caliphate. These stories set an example for others to follow.

The other way IS tries to influence the social identity element is through the glorification of martyrs. After the attacks in Brussels and Paris, entire articles in *Dabiq* were devoted to the glorification of the terrorists who executed the attacks and died as martyrs ((*Dabiq* 12 2015, 3-8; *Dabiq* 14,2016, 3-7). The message is clear: If one joins the Islamic State, he will be an honourable member of the Islamic State society and if he becomes a martyr, he will be even more honourable. IS also claims if a man dies as a martyr, his wife, children, and family will be taken care of.

This social identity component is strongly connected to the narrative that Gartenstein-Ross called a sense of adventure. He mostly described the slick battlefield movies that reference war games, such as *Call of Duty*. In one of the movies, one fighter says that fighting for the Islamic State is even better than playing *Call of Duty*. The recruits want to live an adventurous and heroic life and be just as heroic as their heroes in videogames (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 22)

The adventurous and fun life is also promoted through other videos and pictures in *Dabiq*. Pictures of recruits in training camps and stories of people who joined the Islamic State and lead adventurous lives are examples of this. Together, this group identity and the more individual social identity narrative can cause people to join the Islamic State.

Chapter 3: Analysis

In this chapter, the four dominant narratives, as explained in Chapter 2, will be analysed. Through the analytical framework presented in the introduction, I tried to gain deeper understanding of these narratives, as well as the influence they could have on potential recruits and which parts of mobilisation and radicalisation theory they speak to. Now, I will examine how the narratives relate to each other. Do they all have the same purpose, or do they potentially influence people in different ways? Does one narrative legitimize the other or can they be contradictory? The second section of this chapter focusses on the bigger picture. How do the narratives fit into a broader recruitment argument?

The analytical framework is explained extensively in the methodology section of this paper. In this chapter, first, the four narratives will be analysed, examining the underlying assumptions, the actors, and their different frames. I will also try to answer how the narratives can influence radicalisation and recruitment processes. For the last question, I will examine the potential influence it can have on individuals according to recruitment and radicalisation theory and what the organisation tries to aim for with this narrative. To structure this analysis, I will use the same narratives as in chapter two, those four narratives are the winners' message narrative, the political grievance narrative, the religious obligation narrative and the identity narrative.

After analysing the narratives individually, I will try to draw a conclusion about how the four dominant recruitment narratives of the Islamic States can influence the mobilisation and radicalisation of potential recruits.

The Winners Message

In this narrative, the Islamic State portrays itself as strong and powerful (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 4). Different components, such as brutality, mercy, battlefield success, and the utopian state, try to convince the audience of IS's successes as an organisation, state, and army.

Assumptions

What are the underlying assumptions in this narrative? Assumptions can provide information about how the author interprets the world and what he believes is real or valuable (Fairclough 2003, 55).

Analysing this narrative shows that the Islamic States seems to find it important to convince people it is successful and powerful. This message can be used to scare IS's enemies, but for potential recruits, the message is different. The first assumption is that nobody joins a losing team. This assumption can be identified as a propositional assumption. The author believes that people will only join an organisation when they are convinced they are joining a winning team. Because of this assumption, it is important for the Islamic State to keep this narrative alive.

The narrative also contains value assumptions. These kinds of assumptions address what the author thinks is good or ethical (Fairclough 2003, 55). The underlying assumption in this brutality component is that indiscriminate violence is bad. However, the narrative is full of different kinds of violent acts. The Islamic State

feels the urge to legitimize and explain this. Violence should not happen randomly. In special cases, the Islamic State even tries to explain why a certain method of violence is used. For example, in Chapter 2, the case of the Jordanian F-16 pilot was discussed. The Islamic State killed him by burning him alive. In an article concerning his death, IS explained why it killed him in this manner (*Dabiq* 7 2015, 26).

Actors

This narrative consists of two actors. On one side are the good Sunni Muslims, inhabitants or sympathisers of the Islamic State. In most narratives of the Islamic State, this is the case. More interesting is the fact that the border between these two groups seems fluent in some cases. In the mercy component of this narrative, mercy is granted to people who convert to the Islam or pledge allegiance to the Islamic State's leader, al-Baghdadi. This aspect is important for recruitment because the IS does not want to exclude potential recruits, who did not previously live a pious life (Winter 2015, 22).

In this narrative, the Islamic State frames itself as a strong, powerful, and professional organisation. It is strong, winning, and has the power to show both its brutality and its mercy. Not only the content of the message, but also the professional way videos and pictures are edited, contributes to this message. The IS's glossy magazine, *Dabiq*, is a great example of the professional way its propaganda is presented.

The enemy is the second actor and is framed in a different way; they are almost always described with names such as *kufr*, or non-believer, or *rafidah*, those who refuse. Choosing these names reduces the identity of the IS's enemies only to their faith or lack of faith. The 13th edition of *Dabiq* contains a good example of this generalization. In this edition, an article describes the *rafidah*, and different groups of Shiites are named and framed. The Islamic State does not differentiate between different kinds of religious groups. All groups not supporting the Islamic State are the enemy. The quote below shows an example of this:

The various forms of *kufr* held and practiced by the *Rafidah* are so numerous, especially as they innovate new deviances with every passing day while they simultaneously wage war against Islam and support the crusaders and apostates against the Muslims. (*Dabiq* 13 2016, 37)

All names given to the enemy in the quote are related to being or not being a Sunni-Muslim. Almost all of the names are related to other characteristics of the groups. Only the crusader term is a bit more descriptive but is also part of the Islamic State's narrative.

Radicalisation

The Islamic States aims to influence people in three different ways. The first aim has been extensively discussed: IS wants to convince people it is capable of winning the struggle. The second way it tries to influence people and its case through this narrative is through legitimising its existence and actions by claiming statehood (Winter 2015, 30). The third aim, mainly found in the brutality component, is to draw attention from

a broad audience. Videos of violence can be found shocking and repulsive but are also able to draw attention. When people are intrigued by the violent acts, they will examine other propaganda material to discover why the organisation did such things. When they read other propaganda material, the Islamic State has its opportunity to legitimize these violent acts. The normalisation of violence, and accepting violence as a legitimate way of reaching one's goal, is an important step in radicalisation (Schmid 2013, 11). By accepting this legitimation, violence becomes an acceptable solution for political problems.

The narrative also has the provision of incentives. People are convinced that, when they arrive in the Islamic State, they will arrive in a utopian state, will receive regular payments, and will live a good life (Winter 2015, 23). This perspective can be a reason for joining the organisation, especially for those who do not have them at home.

Muslim Victimhood

In the first narrative, the Islamic State shows its successes, power, and brutality to the world. The second narrative frames brutality and indiscriminate violence caused by its enemies. The Islamic State presents its own violent acts as legitimate and justified, while it frames the violence caused by its enemies as indiscriminate and barbaric. In addition to the content that displays the victims in the warzones, the narrative presents a frame that concludes that Muslims are discriminated against and dishonoured everywhere in western societies. These two elements together frame an ongoing struggle between the western world and Sunni Muslims (Winter 2015, 25). To stop this cruelty brought upon the Muslim community, recruits should join the Islamic State and fight against their oppressors.

Assumptions

Analysing these narratives reveals different value and existential assumptions. The most important two, especially in the case of recruitment, I will explain here. The first assumption that should be mentioned is that Muslims in different countries feel a connection with Muslims in other countries. By sharing images of dead and maimed children, the Islamic State tries to influence potential recruits' emotions (Winter 2015, 25). The second underlying assumption can be categorized as a value assumption about what is and is not justified (Fairclough 2003, 55). In this narrative, the Islamic State assumes that civilians and children, with an emphasis on Muslim children, should never be targeted. An underlying assumption does not necessarily represent the real situation. In this case, for example, several stories speak of the Islamic State targeting children, such as the use of children as suicide bombers and the sexual abuse of young girls (Benotman & Malik 2016, 44).

Actors

In the winner's narrative, the most important actor is the Islamic State, while in the victimhood narrative, the main focus lays on framing the enemy. In this case, enemy is extremely general, apart from a few key figures, such as US President Barack Obama. Usually, the enemy is described as the crusaders or *kuffar*. Some individuals

are mentioned by name, such as in the “In the Words of the Enemy” section in each issue of *Dabiq*. In this section, the Islamic State shows what key figures in the western world have said about the Islamic State.

The two other groups of actors are the Islamic State and the victims of bombings or discrimination. These groups are also mentioned in a general way. Individuals’ names are not important; they represent a large group of victims. The victims are “Muslims killed by airstrikes” or “Muslims in western society”. They are only framed as Muslim and victims, and all victims are framed as civilians. The last actor, the Islamic State, presents itself in a Robin Hood role. It has to protect the oppressed and harmed against the larger, meaner enemy.

Radicalisation

The most important aim of this narrative is the legitimization of violent acts. In his paper, Charlie Winter described the deep connection between the brutality and the victimhood element (2015, 24)

The second aim of this narrative is to drive a wedge between the camp of Islam and the camp of *kuffar* (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 23). The Islamic State tries to fuel a polarisation process. Group polarisation is an important factor in the radicalisation process of recruits (Schmid 2013 ,22). Personal grievance can also lead to radicalisation; in this case, this narrative can offer a broader explanation for individual problems (Schmid 2013, 21). Individuals will believe that their problems are caused by the ongoing struggle against Sunni Muslims in general.

The Islamic State also draws a connection between the war victims and the struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the following quote, from *Dabiq*, it becomes clear how the Islamic State makes a connection between the victims of bombardments and the ongoing war against Sunni Islam:

Our children have been dismembered by bombardment everywhere. The chastity of our sisters has been violated. Our lands and wealth have been stolen. Yet you do not do anything!
How do you live with these criminals, the enemies of Allah and His Messenger, while they wage war against Islam and the Muslims? (*Dabiq* 7 2015, 75)

Potential recruits in Western countries are asked how they are able to live with people who are responsible for the bombardments.

Religious Obligation

The religious obligation narrative is based on the argument that every Muslim is obliged to travel to an Islamic State when such a state is founded (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 24). By promising rewards and threatening punishment, IS uses religion to coerce Muslims to join the caliphate.

Assumptions

An important existential assumption is the foundation of this narrative. This narrative assumes that Islam is the only true religion, a God exists, the Quran is a reliable source, and consequences and promises described in the Quran are real. This is an important assumption through this narrative because when one assumes that God is not real, he could not oblige you to travel to the Islamic State. Without these premises, the narrative falls apart. This assumption is connected to the argument that every good Muslim should live in an Islamic State when such a state is founded.

Actors

The actors in this narrative are the potential recruits. The statements are made in general, directed at the whole group, "It is an obligation for all Muslims to travel to the Islamic State" or not directed at anyone in particular. In an article in the 8th issue of *Dabiq*, the author stated that migration from the land of *kufur* to the land of Islam is always obligatory (*Dabiq* 8 2015, 36) It is a theme that returns in every edition of the magazine. The Islamic State, as an organisation, is not a present actor in this narrative. Instead, the narrative concerns the individual's obligation to a higher entity, the connection between the individual to a God.

Radicalisation

This narrative reaches out to potential recruits in two different ways. The first way is based on social identity. The process of identity seeking can be an important factor in the radicalisation process (Schmid 2013, 25). Through this narrative, the Islamic State is implying a precondition one needs to achieve before one can join the identity group. The only way to be or become a good Muslim is to join the Islamic State. Another form of legitimacy is presented in the narrative as well: Legitimation through authority. The Islamic State makes use of a higher authority to legitimize its actions and existence (Fairclough 2003, 98).

The spiritual rewards promised by the religious obligation narrative can be identified as selective incentives. Those who live up to the obligation and join the Islamic State will receive these incentives. In this case, the selective incentives are not provided by the Islamic State but by a higher entity.

Identity

The search for identity can be an important reason for people to join an organisation or radicalise. U.S. Army Colonel Matt Venhaus described "identity seekers" as a category of people who are more likely to radicalise and join Jihadist movements (Schmid 2013, 22). The Islamic State's identity narrative tries to influence these identity seekers by promising social status and describing feelings of belonging and brotherhood.

Assumptions

By creating this narrative, the Islamic State seems to assume that feelings of brotherhood, adventure and social status are wanted by their potential recruits. In its propaganda, it creates the impression that there are strong feelings of solidarity and

brotherhood (Gartenstein-Ross 2016, 22). This can be categorised as a value assumption. In this narrative individualism is bad and community and belonging are good. In an article in the third edition of *Dabiq* it criticizes the growing individualism in societies (*Dabiq* 3 2014, 12).

Actors

The actors in this narrative are divided into two groups: people who are part of the identity group versus people who are not. The people addressed by this narrative are told that it is obligatory to join the Islamic State, and when this is not possible, carrying out attacks in its name is the best option.

In this narrative, a certain grey zone is accepted. For example, an article in *Dabiq* describes the way people should treat their parents. Even if they are not willing to join or accept the Islamic State, their parents still should be treated with respect (*Dabiq* 10 2015, 15). It is probably for the sake of potential recruits that this statement is written. If joining a group means one has to disrespect and hate his or her parents and family, this could prevent individuals from joining.

Radicalisation

The most important aim of this narrative is creating an identity group. This group should be attractive for potential recruits. This narrative is often presented in interviews and videos. In this context, foreign fighters who have joined the Islamic State talk about their experiences. In *Dabiq*, the Islamic State created a column for these interviews. In "Among the Believers Are Men", each issue has a different fighter talk about his experiences joining the Islamic State. In *Dabiq's* eighth issue, Shayk Abu-Talhah, a fighter from Afghanistan, tells his story (*Dabiq* 8 2015, 31)

The identity narrative is extremely effective in recruiting and mobilising individuals. For women, the identity phenomenon is one of the most important reasons to join the Islamic State (Saltman & Schmith 2015, 15). The strength in this narrative is not only presenting social status, identity, and belonging as incentives for those who join. It also tries to promise those things missed by recruits in their daily lives. The narrative responds to people who do not have a connection with Western society. They feel alienated, and the promise of social status can attract them (Schmid 2013, 3).

The Islamic State recruitment strategy

Through these four narratives, the Islamic States tries to recruit new foreign fighters. The narratives influence the radicalisation or mobilisation process in different ways. Some of these functions occur to lesser or greater extents in more than one narrative. The functions extracted from these narratives are the following: Promising selective incentives, providing legitimacy, connecting personal issues to a broader conflict. and influencing polarisation processes. In this section, I will explain how these functions occur in the different narratives and how the narratives relate to each other.

The recruitment strategy starts with the Muslim victimhood narrative. This narrative addresses grievances; there is a problem, and there should be a solution. The most important function of this narrative is legitimization. By framing the existence of

such problems, actions, such as the existence of the organisation, violent acts, and foreign recruits traveling to the Islamic State and joining the battle, are legitimized. It also connects potential recruits' personal issues to broader grievances, which is an important factor in mobilisation and radicalisation (Schmid 2013, 11). The narrative also has some influence on the polarisation process, by framing the enemy as indiscriminately violent and brutal.

The victimhood narrative has a strong connection with the winner's message narrative (Winter 2015, 8). The victimhood narrative legitimizes the brutality component and the declaration of the Islamic State as caliphate.

Interestingly, the declaration of the caliphate is an element from the winner's message narrative, of vital importance to the existence of the religious obligation narrative. Recruits are obliged to join the organisation and its struggle because of the existence of a pure Islamic State. The religious obligation narrative also has a legitimizing function: It legitimizes acts through a higher authority. The religious arguments work in a tandem with the identity narrative. In the identity narrative, a group is created. To become part of this brotherhood community, one first has to fulfil his or her obligation.

The identity narrative promises the most important selective incentives. Social status, adventure, and camaraderie are promised when one arrives at the Islamic State territory. Identity seeking is an important reason for foreign recruits to join a jihadist organisation. Therefore, promising these incentives could be extremely effective (Schmid, 2013, 25). By framing the existence of a strong identity group, this narrative is also able to influence the polarisation between the Islamic State and its enemy. Foreign recruits will feel connected to their brothers and sisters in the Islamic State community instead of feeling part of the society they live in.

Overall, all narratives are highly related to one another. Some of them, like the religious obligation narrative, cannot exist without elements from the other narratives. The strong connections between the narratives confirms the highly structured and organised media strategy of the Islamic State.

Conclusion

In this research, I first described the four dominant narratives; these were mainly based on previous research. The four dominant narratives are the winner's message, in which the Islamic State shows its military and organisational strength to convince people to join them; the political grievance narrative, in which the focus lies on the enemy and the ongoing war between the camp of Islam and the camp of *kufri*; the religious obligation narrative, which emphasises the religious argumentation (Gartenstein-Ross 2015, 6); and the identity narrative, which convinces people to join the Islamic State by creating a strong group identity and promising social status to those who travel to the Islamic State.

The narratives influence the recruitment and radicalisation process in promising incentives, providing legitimacy, connecting personal issues to a broader political conflict, and influencing polarisation processes. Through representation, the world is framed in a different manner through these narratives. Frames and narratives can influence the people's perceptions of the Islamic State and the rest of the world (Fairclough 2006, 8)

This research focusses on recruiting narratives only. It would be of interest to perform the same analysis on the narratives that aim for other audiences. By comparing and combining these narratives, a more comprehensive overview can be given. The separation of recruitment narratives and narratives with other purposes was one of the most difficult parts of this research. The same narratives can have different influences on different audiences, and determining whether a narrative was truly a recruitment narrative was difficult.

Further research can examine the motivations of foreign fighters or ex-foreign fighters. By interviewing these fighters, more information about their motivations could be extracted. Comparing this motivation with the narrative analysis can provide information about which recruiting narrative has the strongest influence. The influence of one of the narratives could be different at different moments in the radicalisation process.

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