RELIGIOUS LEGITIMIZATIONS OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS BY JIHADI–SALAFI MILITANTS:

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE LEGITIMIZATION OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS BY JIHADI–SALAFI MILITANTS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ BETWEEN 2010 AND 2015

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A B S T R A C T

This thesis focuses on the religious legitimization used by Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers in their statements. Five legitimizing statements of Jihadi-Salafi militants who carried out their suicide bombings between 2010 and 2015 in Syria and Iraq are analysed. The research identifies the significant religious concepts – the religious discourses – the militants use to legitimize their acts. The analysis consists of an emic approach directed to using religious terminology in the statements and an etic approach that aims attention at the academic view on the terms retrieved in the emic half of the analysis. The etic approach includes the Critical Discourse Analysis by Antonio Reyes. The religious discourses in the legitimizing statements obtained through the two-folded analysis are: martyrdom, authority of God, *jihad*, and emotions of vengeance and hate against infidels.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Over the past couple of decades, the news has been flooded by items about suicide bombings. The Database on Suicide Attacks (DSAT) by the Chicago Project on Security & Threats (CPOST) reported more than 3,000 suicide attacks from 2010 to 2015. The DSAT reported over 1,500 incidents in Syria and Iraq alone.[1] A substantial number of these suicide bombers were Islamists belonging to a Jihadi-Salafi group, and they were carrying out these suicide bombings on behalf of such Jihadi-Salafi organisations.[2] Charlie Winter would ascribe those suicide attacks in Syria and Iraq to the intensity of military threats faced by Jihadi-Salafi organisations in those countries.[3] However, this research will solely focus on the role of religion in the legitimization of these suicide bombings by the Jihadi-Salafi militants in Syria and Iraq. Therefore, the legitimization of those Jihadi-Salafi militants between 2010 and 2015 will be examined. As exhibited before, those years show an impressive number of suicide attacks in Syria and Iraq in relation to the total amount of incidents.

Winter studied the correlation between suicide attacks and the intensity of military threats, which can be understood as part of a far-stretching academic debate about the motivations of suicide bombers. Furthermore, Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman retrieved similar results from their research with the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism. Evidence displays how transnational suicide terrorists are motivated by the enforcement of international actors to withdraw their forces from the suicide terrorists' territory they occupy instead of economic estrangement or religious fundamentalism.[4] The academics Grimland, Apter, and Kerkhof, emphasize the non-physical factors when analysing suicide bombings instead of the psychological aspects. Factors such as politics, military, culture, nationality, and religion provide a more extensive explanation of these suicide bombings, because suicide bombings are

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[1] "Database on Suicide Attacks." Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST), released October 2, 2020. https://cpost.uchicago.edu/research/suicide_attacks/database_on_suicide_attacks/.

[2] Iain Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," *Action On Amed Violence (AOAV)*, May 4, 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/world/understanding-rising-cult-suicide-bomber: 1-2.

[3] Charlie Winter, "War by Suicide: A Statistical Analysis of the Islamic State's Martyrdom Industry," *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, February, 2017, https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2017/02/ICCT-Winter-War-by-Suicide-Feb2017.pdf: 13.

[4] Robert A. Pape, James K. Feldman, and Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 50.

incomparable to suicides.[5] The overarching study of Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko adds to the academic debate concerning Islamist militants' motivations for suicide bombings. McCauley and Moskalenko state that religion is not the predominant motive to carry out such bombings. For instance, suicide bomb attacks, like the attacks in the United States of September 11, 2001, are described as political radicalization by McCauley and Moskalenko.[6]

These studies in the academic debate tend only to acknowledge the motivations of suicide bombers, but neglect the own legitimization of the suicide bombers. Even the broad research on explaining suicide bombings by Riaz Hassan involves everything but the perpetrator's legitimization of the suicide bomb attacks. Hassan explains suicide bombings through three categories: individual characteristics and motivations, organizational imperative and strategic weapons, and societal conditions.[7] The academic debate lacks the legitimizations by the suicide bombers, causing a problem. The problem lies with the fact that existing publications about the motivation of suicide bombers tend to connect these suicide bombings with mainly non-religious factors, which suggests that Jihadi-Salafi militants legitimize their acts with a non-religious discourse, but this is inaccurate. To illustrate, Abu Dujanah Al Shami, affiliated with the al-Nusra front, stated the following prior to his suicide attack in Aleppo, July 2016:

> The purpose of the martyrdom operation I am carrying out today; is in the Almallah area and Allzeika block which the army [referring to the Syrian regime army] recently progresses to, there are *rawafidh* [Shias] and pigs there [...] my message to the *rawafidh* in the Almallah area, we prepared explosive cars for you to detry your shrines, we will humiliate you and turn you into pieces. My message to my brothers in *Jihad*, to be patient on the path of *jihad*. By Allah it's a hard path, but it's rewarded from Allah the lord of the world, I advise you to contemplate the martyrdom operations because it's the harshest and strongest on its enemies of the religion, and it's the closest path to Allah the almighty.[8]

Thus, as opposed to the broad academic studied motivations by suicide bombings, legitimizations suggest the importance of religion. This thesis will constitute a nuance on existing work by answering the question: "How do Jihadi-Salafi militants use religion in the legitimization of the suicide bombings there carried out in Syria and Iraq between 2010 and

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[5] M. Grimland, A. Apter, and A.J.F.M. Kerkhof, "The Phenomenon of Suicide Bombing: A Review of Psychological and Nonpsychological Factors," *Crisis* 27, no. 3 (2006): 116.
[6] Clark McCauley, and Sophia Moskalenko, "Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two-Pyramids Mode," *The American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 205-216.
[7] Riaz Hassan, *Suicide Bombings* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 35-64.
[8] Iain Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 113.

2015?" Before the main research question can be answered, the following sub-questions must be answered: "What is the theoretical framework used to answer the main research question?", "How can methods, such as the analysis on the use of religious terminology and the Critical Discourse Analysis by Antonio Reyes, contribute to answering the main research question?", "What information on suicide bombings between 2010 and 2015 gives a better insight on these actions, focussing on patterns observed by academics?", and "What religious discourses can be identified in legitimizing statements of Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers through the use of religious terminology and Critical Discourse Analysis?"

This thesis will offer insight into these suicide attacks by examining the religious discourses – the central religious concepts – used to legitimize the suicide attacks by Jihadi-Salafi militants. In turn, this will lead to a better understanding of the religious aspect of suicide bombings by Jihadi-Salafi militants from 2010 to 2015, supplying nuance to the more extensive academic debate on the motivations of those suicide attacks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & METHODS

This passage covers the theoretical framework and the methods fundamental in researching the different religious discourses used in the legitimization of suicide bombings by the Jihadi-Salafi militants themselves.

1.1. KEY TERMS

Firstly, it is crucial to define some of the key terms in this research. This thesis is centred around the phenomenon of suicide bombings. Riaz Hassan refers to suicide bombings as the "use of life as a weapon".[9] Several reports repeatedly describe these explosives as SIEDs (Suicide Improvised Explosive Device), which indicates that these explosives are devices placed or made in an improvised manner, including deadly or at least destructive chemicals created "to destroy, incapacitate, harass or distract".[10]

The perpetrators, which will be the focus of this research, are Jihadi-Salafi militants who carried out these suicide bombings on behalf of Jihadi-Salafi organisations in Syria and Iraq. Jihadi-Salafi organisations are radical offshoot movements rooted in a broader Sunni Islamist trend known as Salafism.[11] Farhad Khosrokhavar and David Macey display how these militants are unjustly labelled as marginalized, excluded, failed to integrate into society, and having personality problems. By contrast, Khosrokhavar and Macey exhibit in their research that the vast majority of these Islamist militants, who are members of Jihadi-Salafi networks, cannot be categorised this way.[12] These militants are often from middle-class families, and they have no significant issues in integrating. Hassan also describes in his research that several studies[13] have incorrectly "tried to explain the motivation of suicide attacks through the attacker's psychopathology, poverty and lack of education, or individual motives, such as religious

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[9] Riaz Hassan, *Life as a Weapon: The Global Rise of Suicide Bombings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014): 1.
[10] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 2.
[11] Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 62-63.
[12] Farhad Khosrokhavar and David Macey, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 2-3.
[13] Lester, Yang, and Lindsay, "Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible?"; Berko, *The Path to Paradise;* Ganor, "Defining Terrorism".

indoctrination".[14] Hassan adds that the decision to carry out a suicide bombing is rooted in "the bombers' internalised social identities, their exposure to asymmetric conflict and facilitating organisations, and their membership of a larger community in which martyrdom has high symbolic significance".[15] Thus, the underlying motivations of these militants are much more complex than imagined. Additionally, Simon Perry and Badi Hasisi argue in their article regarding the Rational Choice Theory that suicide bombers expect religious, personal, and social gains for their self-sacrificing behaviour, resulting in suicide attacks as rational choice.[16]

1.2. RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

The studies by Khosrokhavar and Macey, Hassan, and Perry and Hasisi add to the extensive academic debate on the motivations of Islamist suicide bombers, as described in the Introduction. However, this thesis will focus on the religious discourses in legitimizing the suicide bombings by the Jihadi-Salafi militants themselves. The sole focus on religion in this thesis is supported by the findings of Perry and Hasisi, which suggest that Islamist militant groups tactically use their existing struggle as part of the Islamic tradition of *jihad* and martyrdom. According to their study, this strategy emphasizes "the extensive socialisation and indoctrination mechanisms that promote and breed suicide bombers by building incentives and utilizing ceremonies and rituals for such choices".[17] To better understand suicide attacks carried out by Jihadi-Salafi militants, we must realize that whether or not the promises and rewards about paradise and martyrdom are true, the suicide bomber's belief in these phenomena is fundamental.[18] Thus, since studies on suicide bombers' motivations show an array of different factors, the focus will be on the belief of the Jihadi-Salafis when legitimizing their actions. According to Antonio Reyes, "legitimization refers to the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behaviour".[19] In this respect, this research will be centred around the religious accrediting or licensing of the suicide bombings by the Jihadi-Salafi militants.

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[14] Hassan, *Life as a Weapon,*1.

[15] Ibid., 1-2.

[16] Simon Perry, and Badi Hasisi, "Rational Choice Rewards and the Jihadist Suicide Bomber," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 2 (2015): 58.

[17] Ibid., 72.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Antonio Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions," *Discourse & Society* 22, no.6 (2011): 782.

1.3. EMIC AND ETIC PERSPECTIVE

The religious discourses in the legitimization of suicide bombings by Jihadi-Salafis in 2010 to 2015 in Syria and Iraq can be witnessed and explained through the emic and etic approach. The emic perspective in research on social behaviour offers an inside perspective on this distinct behaviour. Behaviour is explained from the natives' point of view. On the contrary, the etic perspective when studying social behaviour provides an outside perspective, including a scholarly and broader outlook on the matter.[20] This thesis will analyse the Jihadi-Salafi militants' statements based on an extensive analysis derived from terminology in the statements – the emic perspective – and an academic view on those terms retrieved – the etic perspective – including the Critical Discourse Analysis by Antonio Reyes. The emic and etic views will be combined to present a detailed view of the religious discourses in legitimization. Although this seems like an unusual research approach, because of the ongoing differences between etic and emic researchers about culture, this research method offers a broader insight due to the combination of the emic and etic.[21]

This two-folded analysis, consisting of religious terminology alongside an academic perspective and Critical Discourse Analysis, is executed using legitimizing statements of Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers. These legitimizing statements are derived from the research report "Understanding the Rising Cult of the Suicide Bomber" by Iain Overton et al. as part of the research and advocacy by Action on Armed Violence (AOAV). This research report quoted the so-called "content of will" of suicide bombers, received through smuggled entry forms on memory sticks and death videos on the internet.[22] This report focuses on why Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers carried out their attacks in different "threat zones" worldwide.[23] Overton et al. focus on different motivations behind suicide bombings. However, in the legitimizing statements, religion plays a significant role. Notably, the legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers, which can be found in the Appendixes, are literal duplicates (including errors) of those in the research report by Iain Overton et al.[24]

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[20] Michael W. Morris, Kwok Leung, Daniel Ames, and Brian Lickel, "Views from inside and Outside: Integrating Emic and Etic Insights about Culture and Justice Judgment," *The Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 4 (1999): 781.
[21] Ibid., 782.
[22] Iain Overton, *The Price of Paradise*, trans. René van Veen (Amsterdam: Volt, 2019), 273-274.
[23] Iain Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber."
[24] Ibid.

1.3.1. USE OF RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY

The first part of the analysis utilizes the emic approach to research how the suicide bombers use religious terminology as discourses in their legitimizing statements. Identifying religious terms used by the Jihadi-Salafi militants in the statements seems relatively straightforward. Religious-oriented words such as "God" or "Allah", "heaven", "monotheists", "believers", "religion", "martyr", and so on, are abundant. However, the question remains: How can religious terms be distinguished from political terminology? Both suggest ideology and extreme and polarizing words. In reality, the difference between the religious and the political discourse is hardly recognizable. Therefore, the essence of this research is religious, meaning the legitimizing statements are seen through the lens of religion. When focusing on the political discourse, terms like "*jihad*" may also be interpreted as political. For the sake of homogeneity, words are only interpreted and identified as religious.

1.3.2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

According to Titus Hjelm, discourse is constitutive, meaning it constructs social identities of "subject positions" and social relationships. Additionally, discourse also constructs systems of knowledge and belief.[25] Critical Discourse Analysis mainly focuses on power and ideology in discourse and acknowledges a physical and social reality outside of discourse recreated and altered.[26]

Critical Discourse Analysis will be applied to the legitimizing statements in the following way. Hjelm indicates that applying the Critical Discourse Analysis to the statements by Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers is based on power and ideology and creating another reality. Antonio Reyes distinguishes five discursive strategies which social actors employ in discourse to legitimize their ideological positioning and actions.[27] These strategies used by social actors to legitimize their social practices are emotions, a hypothetical future, rationality, voices of expertise, and altruism.[28] Each case will be thoroughly analysed through these five discursive strategies to identify religious discourses. Each religious discourse emanating from a specific religious theme will be elaborated more in-depth as the thesis progresses.

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[25] Titus Hjelm, "Discourse Analysis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Engler Steven (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 135-136.
[26] Ibid., 140.
[27] Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse," 788.
[28] Ibid., 804.

The strategies by Reyes will form the framework of a significant part of the etic research. Therefore, it is of great importance that these five strategies are explained well. A clarification of these strategies follows here: Legitimization can be achieved through appealing to emotions, which causes the listener to agree with the actions by deliberately activating feelings such as fear, sadness, and anger. Legitimization can be accomplished through a hypothetical future, because this idea of a future can be portrayed as unfavourable for the coming generations if actions are not taken immediately. Legitimization can be attained through rationality as social actors present their actions as rational and therefore as part of a thoughtful and measured process. Legitimization can be constituted through voices of expertise because social actors mention people who are widely admired or people with authority. These voices of expertise allow these social actors to validate their actions by associating themselves with these voices. Legitimization can lastly be reached through altruism, which implies that specific actions are beneficial for others – especially the innocent and unprotected – and these are therefore generating approval.[29]

It must be noted that Reyes interprets legitimization as approving the actions of social actors by interlocutors, the receivers of the message. Notwithstanding, this thesis will focus solely on the legitimization of the actions by the social actors – the Jihadi-Salafi militants – themselves, leaving the aspect of legitimization by the receivers for the most part unmentioned.

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[29] Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse," 804.

INFORMATION ON JIHADI–SALAFI SUICIDE BOMBINGS

This section presents information on suicide bombings by Jihadi-Salafi militants in general, alongside patterns observed by academics when examining these perpetrators. A better understanding of Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombings is crucial with regard to analysing their legitimizing statements in the following chapters.

2.1. JIHADI–SALAFI SUICIDE BOMBINGS

Before 2000, there were no more than 22 suicide attacks per year worldwide. In 2015 alone, there were at least 600 suicide bombings across the globe. A substantial number of these suicide bombers were international Islamists belonging to and carrying out these suicide bombings on behalf of Jihadi-Salafi organisations.[30] As mentioned before, these organisations are radical offshoot movements rooted in a broader Sunni Islamist trend known as Salafism. Salafis believe that the *salaf* (the Prophet and the first three generations of his companions) were the greatest Muslims ever. In this sense, ordinary Salafis and the Jihadi-Salafis agree with each other. However, they differ concerning the following: Salafis believe that the word of God should be spread only by *da'wa* (the nonviolent call to Islam by proselytizing), whereas Jihadi-Salafis adopt waging violent *jihad* to overthrow so-called "apostate" regimes in the Muslim world.[31] Assaf Moghadam expresses that "Jihadi-Salafis elevate *jihad* to the same level as the five pillars of the Islam: they engage in *takfir* [the process of labelling fellow Muslims and *kufr* [sic] [infidels]], thus justifying violence against them; they condone the targeting of civilians; and they support the use of suicide operations".[32] Ineke Roex states that Salafism is based on "the restoration of 'pure' Islam […] They [Salafis] seek to form a moral community of true believers and claim to be the representatives of the only legitimate Islam."[33]

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[30] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 1-2.
[31] Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom," 62-63.
[32] Ibid., 63.
[33] Ineke Roex, "Should We Be Scared of all Salafists in Europe? A Dutch Case Study," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 3 (2014): 53.

Suicide bombings against "infidels" and "apostates" serve as the ultimate form of devotion to God, making it the optimal deed to wage *jihad*.[34] In the eyes of Jihadi-Salafis, suicide bombings present a very effective means to an end. Iain Overton exhibits in his report that suicide bombings "cause far more damage than any comparable weapon, and civilians are disproportionally the victims".[35] The data of Action On Armed Violence (AOAV) from 2011 to 2015 shows that the average suicide bombing killed 34 people, out of which 27 were civilians. In comparison, an average attack with another weapon killed 13 people, out of which ten were civilians. Thus, suicide bombings contribute to more than double the number of casualties.[36] These very effective suicide bombings can be carried out through a series of different means: vehicle-borne, air-borne, water-borne, animal-borne, personal-borne, and proxy-borne. As the terms imply, this refers to how the explosive devices are delivered or concealed.[37]

2.2. PATTERNS OBSERVED BY ACADEMICS

When studying these suicide bombings by Jihadi-Salafi militants, several patterns can be distinguished by academics. This section considers the patterns of justification and unfairness judgements. The pattern of unfairness judgements can be regarded as a motivation for suicide bombings by Jihadi-Salafi militants. Nevertheless, this pattern is worth mentioning, because it provides a better insight into religious aspects in motivations studied by academics, which this thesis will nuance and complement.

We must point out that Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombings are mainly targeted at co-religionists, resulting in a challenge when Jihadi-Salafis legitimise their violence. Islam established explicit prohibitions, among which: do not kill yourself, do not kill fellow Muslims, and do not kill civilians.[38] Mohammed Hafez notes that some Jihadi-Salafis "rely on religious justifications presumably rooted in classical texts and rulings concerning *jihad* and martyrdom".[39] Following this reasoning, Hafez focuses on three arguments uses by Jihadi-Salafis to justify their actions. Firstly, Hafez underlines the role of human intentionality in evaluating conduct. Suicide

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[34] Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom," 63.
[35] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 16.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 12-13.
[38] Mohammed, M. Hafez, "The Alchemy of Martyrdom: Jihadi Salafism and Debates Over Suicide Bombings in the Muslim World," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, no. 3 (2010): 376.
[39] Ibid., 377.

bombing is justified as long as the intention "is to fight and die in the path of God as opposed to killing himself out of personal desperation and depression".[40] Secondly, he addresses the meaning of piety and apostasy in Islam. In this sense, Jihadi-Salafis are allowed to kill their co-religionists, because those they kill are merely Muslims. These Muslims are not true believers, because they take infidels as allies against the believers, violating their oath to Islam. These "apostates" place themselves outside the protective umbrella of Islam.[41] Moghadam emphasizes in his work that Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers die primarily for the sake of God, but also for the greater good of the *umma* (Muslim community).[42] Following this line of argumentation, the future of the Muslim community can be a justified motivation for suicide bombings. Thirdly, Hafez stresses the specific rulings regarding the appropriateness of indiscriminate tactics during warfare by medieval scholars.[43]

The second pattern observed is that of unfairness judgements by Kees van den Bos, concerning the motivations of suicide bombers. Van den Bos explains in his study that perceptions of unfairness are of significant importance in many forms of radicalization, therefore causing suicide bombings. According to him, "these unfairness perceptions include judgements of unfair treatment, horizontal group deprivation, vertical group deprivation, inequity of outcome distributions, perceived immortality, and general impressions that things are not right and that the world is not a just place".[44] The article of Michael Horowitz agrees with this statement by Van den Bos. Horowitz argues that socioeconomic status, regime type, and social networks contribute to the establishment of suicide bombers. Diving deeper into the topic of socioeconomic status, Horowitz shows that suicide bombers might arise more likely among less well-off individuals and societies.[45]

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[40] Hafez, "The Alchemy of Martyrdom," 377.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom," 63.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Kees P. van den Bos, *Why People Radicalize: How Unfairness Judgements Are Used to Fuel Radical Beliefs, Extremist Behaviors, and Terrorism Beliefs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 234.
[45] Michael C Horowitz, "The Rise and Spread of Suicide Bombing," *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 79-80.

M A R T Y R D O M

The current chapter concentrates on the first religious theme, "martyrdom", as detected in the several legitimizing statements through the two-folded analysis. Martyrdom has a strong presence in the legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers, which will be elaborated on in this section. Firstly, the use of words related to martyrdom will be analysed by an emic approach. Moreover, the etic examination on martyrdom in the statements will be continued by an overall academic etic approach, including the Critical Discourse Analysis by Antonio Reyes.

First and foremost, the definition of "martyrdom" must be addressed appropriately. In most religions, martyrdom is viewed as the ultimate act of devotion to God to the extent of suffering death. While martyrdom in the monotheistic religions originated from Judaism and early Christianity, in recent decades, martyrdom is strongly associated in the media and the public debate with suicide attacks executed by Islamist militants.[46] "Martyrdom (*istishhad*) and martyrs (*shahid*, pl. *shudada'*) have become majors objects of glorification by Islamist movements and by some sectors of Muslim society."[47]

3.1. E M I C   A N A L Y S I S

Apart from the literal words "martyr" and "martyrdom", other religious terms linked to martyrdom can be recognized too in the legitimizing statements.

First, the term "heaven" can be noticed several times in the legitimizing statements. For instance, the suicide bomber Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V) stated: "I would tell my parents not to be sad as I am going to heaven as wide as the skies and earth, […]." Furthermore, the case of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I) also suggests ascending to heaven plays a role in their legitimization. Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi declared that "[…] Allah […] gather us with you in Heaven […]". Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V) also expressed: "[…] I ask Allah to accept me […] amongst the martyrs." The case of Abu Islam al Shami (Appendix II)

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[46] Meir Hatina and Meir Litvak, *Martyrdom and Sacrifice in Islam: Theological, Political and Social Contexts* (London: Tauris, 2015), 2.
[47] Ibid., 1.

exhibits the belief in the promise of Paradise as he said: "[…] I am eager to meet Allah and certain of his promise." Thus, the ultimate reward of martyrdom is related to the expectation that Allah will gratify them.[48]

This reward by Allah is expressed through the promise of rich heavenly pleasures when a martyr reaches Paradise. The case of Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V) confirms the belief that these pleasures of heaven serve as a reward for martyrdom: "And to gather me […] in the heavens of bliss […]." Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V) declared that "this is the path to the *Houria,* ten meter from here, 72 *Houria*". Heavenly *houris* or *houria* (maidens or virgins) will accompany those who will attend Paradise. However, an exact number of *houris* is not given in the Qur'an, and those *houris* are not just accessible for martyrs, but all Muslims in Paradise.[49]

The following demonstrates the pleasures promised when martyrs would reach Qur'anic Paradise in Qur'an 56:10-26 *Al-Waqi'ah*:

> And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones: they are the ones brought near [to Allah], [who will reside] in the gardens of bliss. A multitude from the former [generations] and a few from the latter ones. On brocaded couches reclining on them, face to face. They will be waited upon by immortal youths, with goblets and ewers and a cup of clear wine, which neither causes them headache nor stupefaction, and such fruits as they prefer and such fresh of fowls as they desire, and big-eyes *houris* like guarded pearls, a reward for what they used to do. They will not hear therein any vain talk of sinful speech, but only the watchword, 'Peace!' 'Peace!'[50]

The second noticeable term in the legitimizing statement of Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV) is "martyrdom operation". Alqa'aqa Al Shamali expressed: 'The martyrdom operation is the best way to spite the religion's enemy, it puts fear in their hearts." Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I) referred to his suicide bombing as: "[…] this is the first revenge operation and *Inshallah* there will be an operation after the other."

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[48] Dominik C. Güss, Ma Teresa Tuason, and Vanessa B. Teixeira, "A Cultural-Psychological Theory of Contemporary Islamic Martyrdom," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37, no. 4 (2007): 430.
[49] William E. Shephard, *Introducing Islam* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 45.
[50] The Qur'an 56:10-26. https://al-quran.info/#56.

3.2. ETIC ANALYSIS

The cases of Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V), Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I), and Abu Islam al Shami (Appendix II) show how their acts are connected to martyrdom and the associated reward of ascending Paradise. Direct access to Paradise is assumed to be guaranteed when a successful suicide attack has been executed, but even more the killing of enemies. Additionally, according to some interpretations, ascending to Paradise is also guaranteed for 70 people the martyr wishes to save.[51] Thus, the promise of ascending to Paradise, including the heavenly rewards, forms a religious legitimization to carry out a suicide bombing and become a martyr. However, relying on the number of Qur'anic verses in which Paradise is referred, the prospects of salvation, in general, are less straightforward.[52]

Paul Middleton specifies in his article that martyrdom is a contested phenomenon that cannot be defined. According to Middleton, "martyrdom is a narrative that creates or maintains group identity, by holding up an ideal representative of the community, who chose to or is made to die for its values".[53] In this sense, martyrdom cannot be categorized as just an individualistic act. It instead has significant social, political, and cultural consequences.[54] The latter can be explained through a visible shift in the type of martyr. Unlike in earlier centuries, when most Muslim martyrs were soldiers in Muslim armies, martyrs now are mainly members of substate groups and movements for whom the act of self-sacrifice has become the embodiment of their battle for Islam and a criterion of true faith.[55]

William E. Shepard distinguishes several reasons to defend such martyrdom operations. According to Shephard, these martyrdom operations are a warning to the West, including Muslims who allied with the West, therefore referred to as apostates. "Suicide operations are revenge for what the West and the apostates have done and thus tend to restore the honour of the *umma*."[56] This can be observed in the statement of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I). Following the argumentation of Shepard, martyrdom operations seem like an effective manner to seek revenge. Besides, using the term "martyrdom operation" instead of labelling such operations as "suicide attacks" involving self-destruction shows how the militant

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[51] Güss, Tuason, and Teixeira, "A Cultural-Psychological Theory," 431.
[52] Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38.
[53] Paul Middleton, "What is Martyrdom?," *Mortality* 19, no. 2 (2014): 130.
[54] Hatina and Litvak, *Martyrdom and Sacrifice in Islam*, 2.
[55] Ibid., 1.
[56] Shephard, *Introducing Islam*, 330.

justifies his actions.[57] As earlier mentioned, the act of killing oneself is strictly prohibited in Islam. In this sense, Hafez justly questions: "Given that God commands fighting and recognizes and elevated the status of martyrs, how does one elevate the permissibility of suicide operations?"[58] Hafez himself answers this question with the notion of human intentionality.[59] According to the Jihadi-Salafis, there is a significant "difference between the intentions of a person committing suicide to kill oneself and one committing suicide to kill 'enemies of Islam and Muslims".[60] In this light, the labelling of suicide bomb attacks as "martyrdom operations" immediately clarifies the perpetrator's intentions while avoiding the prohibition of not killing oneself.

3.2.1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

When applying the Critical Discourse Analysis (including the five discursive strategies by Antonio Reyes) to the five legitimizing statements, we can distinguish various ways in which martyrdom is implicitly utilized to legitimize the suicide bombings by the Jihadi-Salafi perpetrators themselves.

Firstly, in the case of Abu-Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV), the importance of a particular hypothetical future, as illustrated by Reyes as his second discursive strategy, can be identified. Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali stated: "The Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham survived and is expanding and persisting [...] It won't last without fatalities. Unless Muslims sacrifice themselves." The sacrificing of Muslim lives, martyrdom, is perceived as necessary for war, guided by the religious imperative directly associated with *jihad*.[61] In this sense, martyrdom linked to *jihad* contributes to the future of the Islamic State, as is shown in this case. Martyrdom can be legitimized as essential for the hypothetical future.

Secondly, altruism plays a crucial role in legitimization in the case of Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V). Reyes recognizes altruism as the first discursive strategy in legitimization, which implies that specific actions are beneficial for others and therefore generating approval. Omar

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[57] Mohammed M. Hafez, "Apologia for Suicide: Martyrdom in Contemporary Jihadi Discourse," in *Martyrdom, Self-Sacrifice, and Self-Immolation: Religious Perspectives on Suicide*, ed. Margo Kitts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 203-204.
[58] Hafez, "The Alchemy of Martyrdom," 371.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Meir Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 37.

Al Jazraw expresses that: "We can […] open the road for our brothers, […]." As Meir Hatina explains: "The heroism of martyrdom is closely associated with the notion of altruism […] The contribution of the individual who sacrifices him/herself for the collective is reflected in his/her readiness to fill a double role: as sacrificer and sacrifice."[62]

These suicide bombings are also legitimized through voices of expertise, as described by Reyes as his fourth discursive strategy. Following this reasoning, a martyr can use authorities or widely admired people to justify his deed. A martyr can authenticate his suicide attack by validating himself with these voices of expertise, as is shown in the case of Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV): "[…] the Prophet and his companions sacrificed their lives and money to raise the honour of Islam." The martyr identifies with the Prophet and his companions, and he wants to do the same as they once did. Along with this, a voice of expertise can be utilized to take away fear. This is shown in the case of Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV). He expressed: "The Prophet told us that the martyrdom [martyr] only feel [feels] an ant bite."

3.3. C O N C L U S I O N

In sum, the concept of "martyrdom" can be distinguished as the first religious discourse in the legitimizing statements of the Jihadi-Salafi militants. On the one hand, becoming a martyr and the promise of ascending to Paradise, including the supposedly heavenly pleasure, constitutes the justification of the suicide bombings for the militant. On the other hand, carrying out such an act is restoring the honour of the *umma*. So, a martyrdom operation is for the greater good of the own community, establishing a favourable future by sacrificing oneself. The use of the word "martyrdom operation" implies that intentions are right. Therefore the suicide bombings are not gathered under committing suicide by killing oneself, and these are accordingly permitted. Martyrdom is encouraged by the Prophet since the Prophet and his companions also made sacrifices for the honour of Islam.

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[62] Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 4.

AUTHORITY OF GOD

This part of the thesis considers the role of authority in the legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi militants as the second central topic. The research through both emic as well as etic analysis displays how Allah can be recognized as the central religious authority used in the statements, besides other Jihadi-Salafi authorities, which are less prominently present in the legitimizations. An honourable and grand role has been reserved for Allah in the legitimizing statements, as shown explicitly in this chapter.

As we have acknowledged in the second chapter, an exemplary role is reserved for the *salaf,* the Prophet and the first three generations of his companions, in Salafism. However, there is little to no authoritative contribution from these Salafi superiors in the legitimizing statements of the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers. Therefore, this chapter will not pay any further attention to these superiors.

4.1. EMIC ANALYSIS

The significance of God in the legitimizing statements can be revealed through the case of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I): "All the praises be to God, the Lord of the Worlds and on our prophet peace be upon him […] I ask Allah the almighty to enable me to kill them." In this specific case, Allah is being called upon to honour Him and to request a successful deed. Another case, that of Abu Islam al Shami (Appendix II), shows how Allah is appointed at the beginning of a statement: "Praise to be Allah." It must be taken into consideration that these phrases can be categorized as *du'a.* "The word *du'a* refers to the act of 'calling out' (in this case, to God), and thus it can apply to any invocation […] the word is more specifically used to designate petitionary prayer or supplication, that is, appeals for divine aid or favour."[63] In this sense, these phrases can be considered standard formulas for Muslims.

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[63] Marion Homes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Though and Practice*, Themes in Islamic History, 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29.

The different roles of God can be witnessed in the legitimizing statements. Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir (Appendix III) stated: "We are only carrying out this work to bring victory to the religion and to Allah." Abu Islam al Shami (Appendix II) expressed:

> Did you forget what Allah almighty said? If you do not go forth, He will punish you with a painful punishment and will replace you with another people and you will not harm Him at all and Allah is over all things competent.

4.2. ETIC ANALYSIS

The legitimizing statement by Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir (Appendix III) attributes a victorious role to God, as he stated that he carried out his suicide bombing to make Allah triumph. According to Mehdi Evazpour and Hamdallah Akvani, only the reign of Allah is accepted. All the other kinds of authority are rejected or encountered by armed *jihad*.[64] The victory in the legitimizing statements can be explained as a success for Allah when the opponents of the Salafi-Jihadi militants – the infidels – are defeated.

The case of Abu Islam al Shami (Appendix II) demonstrates that not only does God prove to be a "positive" incentive for carrying out suicide bombings, but God can be a "negative" incentive too. It must be noted that the words of Abu Islam al Shami are addressed to all Jihadi-Salafi believers and suggests that anyone who goes against God will be punished. In light of his legitimizing statement, executing a suicide bombing is part of worshipping God to satisfy. Thus, obeying God – performing a suicide bombing – avoids punishment. Disobeying God can be understood as apostasy. Nevertheless, the Qur'an does not mention "any punishment for apostasy to be inflicted in this world", according to S.A. Rahman.[65]

4.2.1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Using the Critical Discourse Analysis by Antonio Reyes, the etic analysis provides an academic view of God's authoritative role in the legitimizing statements. According to Reyes' five discursive strategies, legitimization can be constituted through voices of expertise. Within the

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[64] Mehdi Evazpour, and Hamdallah Akvani, "Fiqh for Action: Jihadi Salafist and Rethinking in Salafi and Jurisprudential Foundations," *Politics and Religion Journal* 13, no. 2 (2019): 65.
[65] S.A. Rahman, *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam,* 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1978), 2.

context of this chapter, these voices of expertise can be interpreted as the authority of God. The case of Abu Islam Al Shami (Appendix II) portrays how the authority of God validates his action by associating himself with these authorities.[66] Abu Islam Al Shami stated:

> Praise be to Allah who brought honour to the monotheists and humiliate [sic] [humiliated] the infidels and the polytheists, he brought honour to himself and to his prophet and to the believers, and he promised horrid torture to those who are seeking it with other than him.

In this statement, Allah is being honoured for his deeds, especially the humiliating and torturing of infidels and polytheists, which Abu Islam Al Islam did by executing his suicide bombing. By honouring Allah for his great deeds, the Jihadi-Salafi militant identifies himself with God, the supreme exemplary model. Therefore, he legitimizes his act by stating the exemplary authority of God, a distinctive discourse.

4.3. C O N C L U S I O N

This chapter displays how the theme "authority of God" is constructed as a religious discourse and how this discourse is used in the legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers. Since carrying out suicide bombings can be interpreted as a form of practicing Jihadi-Salafism, it ensures victory for Allah. Besides, going against Allah will be punished, according to the Jihadi-Salafi militants. Nevertheless, these punishments are not mentioned in the Qur'an. This does not take away that the Jihadi-Salafis see Allah as a voice of expertise, an example, when fighting the polytheists and the infidels – their opponents.

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[66] Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse," 804.

CHAPTER FIVE

J I H A D

This chapter considers "*jihad*" as the third observable theme in the legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers.

In the broader Islamic tradition, "*jihad*" can be understood as "struggle" or "striving" (regarding God) or as "to work for a noble cause with determination".[67] *Jihad* has been defined by classical Muslim jurists and legal scholars as "warfare with spiritual significance" since the pre-modern period.[68] However, as David Cook expresses in his book, the newest edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* states: "In law, according to general doctrine and in historical tradition, the *jihad* consists of military action, with the object of the expansion of Islam and, if need be, of its defence."[69] The concept and practice of *jihad* have a broad interpretation as it has developed from early Islamic history to the present day.[70]

5.1. E M I C A N A L Y S I S

The legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers show an array of referrals to *jihad*. For instance, it can be witnessed in the case of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I) that he calls to *jihad* by stating: "[…] and as for our *jihadi* brothers in Al Sham and all over the world, by Allah remain and persist on this path, the *jihad* path, the honourable path, do not fail." Likewise, it can be noticed in the case of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I) that *jihad* is encouraged, as he expressed:

> By Allah, the youth will bring victory to the nation, oh youth of the nation, those who are absent from *jihad*, go on to *Jihad*. And to those who are blessed with having arrived to the land of *Jihad*, persist and be patient and merciful with your brothers […].

Thus, *jihad* will lead to victory for those in the "land of *jihad*", Syria and Iraq. Victory seems like a legitimate incentive to carry out *jihad*, and personal rewards seem to be a reason to

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[67] Michael G. Knapp, "The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam," *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2003): 82.
[68] David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 1.
[69] Ibid., 2.
[70] Knapp, "The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam," 82.

legitimize *jihad*, including suicide bombings. The case of Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV) shows without any doubt the appealing personal rewards of *jihad* for Jihadi-Salafis by expressing:

> I call on my brothers to accept the *Jihad* path […] *Jihadi*s get married, they eat, they drink and live the most beautiful life. The prophet peace be upon him says: 'you should carry on *jihad*, it's one of the doors to heaven, Allah will make distress go away with this path […].' Blessed is the one who took the path of *Jihad*, the closest path to heaven. A man won't fear when he embarks on the righteous path because it puts peace and serenity in his heart.

The topic of "*jihad*" also occurs in the case of Abu Islam Al Shami (Appendix II), in which he declared:

> To the sons of the nations who are absent from *Jihad* and from bringing victory to the religion, fear Allah and help your sisters who are being raped, fear Allah in the blood that are being spilled day and night in the land of Al Sham.

5.2. ETIC ANALYSIS

The Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers give meaning to *jihad* in their legitimizing statements by referring to Al Sham (Islamic Syria or Syria) and Iraq as the land that survived because of *jihad*. One of the cases that depict the importance of *jihad* is the one of Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV), in which is stated: "The Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham survived and is expanding and persisting […]." This creates a motive for the suicide bomber to legitimize their deeds by gathering it under *jihad* in Iraq and Syria.[71]

Besides, Jihadi-Salafis "who insist that violence is a legitimate tactic in the current social and political context in which the Muslim world finds itself" can be distinguished from non-violent Salafis "who reject violence as an instrument for change".[72]

Following the definition of *jihad* in the work of Cook, *jihad* consists of an expansive and defensive nature, which can be respectfully translated into the distinction of offensive and

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[71] David Bukay, "The Religious Foundations of Suicide Bombings: Islamist Ideology," *Middle East Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2006): 27-36.

[72] Nelly Lahoud, "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women from Jihad," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (2014): 781.

defensive *jihad*. According to Nelly Lahoud, "offensive *jihad* (*jihad al-talab*) was designed to address the potential needs of a strong Islamic state to wage war against other states, while defensive *jihad* was designed to address the need of Muslims who are politically and militarily powerless after having been invaded in their own territories and without structures of authority to which they could have recourse".[73] Both characteristics of offensive and defensive *jihad* can be detected in the legitimizing statements of the Jihadi-Salafis. Offensive elements can be assigned to the legitimizing statements of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I) as well as the statement of Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali (Appendix IV), since they spoke of "nation", "expanding" and "the Islamic State". In such a manner, the statement of Abu Islam Al Shami (Appendix II) can be characterized as defensive. His statement can be interpreted as defensive since he exercised *jihad* to fight for the powerless.

5.2.1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Corresponding to the Critical Discourse Analysis of Reyes, rationality and altruism can be acknowledged as the two discursive strategies to legitimize these suicide bombings. Primarily, when focusing on the statement of Abu Islam Al Shami (Appendix II), social actors present their actions as rational and beneficiary to others – especially the innocent and the unprotected – to justify them.[74] In this manner, the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bomber promotes *jihad*, because it will bring victory to the religion and it will stop the spilling of blood of the people of Al Sham, Syria. At the same time, it will protect the unprotected girls. Therefore, the discourse of *jihad* shows that suicide bombings are rational and beneficial for the nation and its people.

5.3. CONCLUSION

The theme "*Jihad*" as religious discourse is used in the statements to justify the suicide bombings, because suicide bombings can be perceived as a way of performing *jihad*. According to the Jihadi-Salafi militants, *jihad* is necessary to maintain and expand their land. Besides, it is helpful to their fellow people.

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[73] Lahoud, "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women from Jihad," 781.
[74] Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse," 804.

CHAPTER SIX

EMOTIONS OF VENGEANCE AND HATE AGAINST INFIDELS

This chapter acknowledges feelings towards infidels, particularly "emotions of vengeance and hate against infidels", as the fourth apparent theme in the legitimizing statements by the Jihadi-Salafi militants. The central theme will be studied in the same manner as the three previous themes have been examined.

In Islamic tradition, "the other" is determined by unbelief, because Islam is constituted of those who abide by God's will. Based on religious grounds, the outsider is defined as infidel or apostate.[75] According to Jacob Neusner, Tamara Sonn, and Jonathan E. Brockopp, broad Islamic law considers those "who share the rights and responsibilities set out in our (Islamic) legal system".[76] However, Salafis label unbelievers of Salafism *kafir*, pl. *kuffar* ("infidel"), including other non-Sunni Muslims. By doing this, the schism between "us" and "the other" becomes even more prominent. This act of labelling Muslim "unbelievers" can be classified as *takfir*. Even Muslim countries can be subject to *takfir* for not applying the *shari'a* at the state level. Nevertheless, the conceptualization of faith and unbelief differs within Salafism.[77]

6.1. EMIC ANALYSIS

This section will provide an emic analysis of the feelings of vengeance and hate towards infidels. A representative quote for those emotions is that by Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir (Appendix III), in which he stated:

> To avenge Allah and his prophet and the Prophet's companions from those despiteful apostates, from those filthy *rawafidh* ["those who reject"], those who spoke ill in the honour of the prophet's companions May Allah be pleased with them. By Allah we will avenge them, we shall avenge them in a way that they shall never forget.

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[75] Jacob Neusner, Tamara Sonn and Jonathan E. Brockopp, *Judaism and Islam in Practice: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000), 180.
[76] Ibid., 181.
[77] Joas Wagemakers, "Salafism," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, August 5, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.255.

Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I) explicitly stated: "Today we will avenge our families in Banyas, we will cut the heads of those Alawites […]." The Alawites in Syria are a sect of Shia Islam who broke away from Shia Islam in ninth-century Iraq. The Alawites form a minority in Syria.[78] However, they form the majority of "Syria's key military units, intelligence services and ultra-loyalist militias, called *shabiha*".[79] Fighting for the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, some Alawites have committed widely condemned actions, which makes them a target for the vengeful Sunni community. When Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar al-Asad, seized power over Syria in 1970, he mandated a secular state, and Sunnis across the country protested.[80] "Seeking to end the rebellion, al-Assad massacred the Sunni population of the city (Hama), killing as many as 20.000 residents."[81] Baniyas, a city in the west of the country, has also been the victim of Alawites militias when the local Sunni population was massacred.[82]

The following statement by Abu Alqa'aqa al Shamali (Appendix IV) clarifies that these suicide bombings are targeted at those who are the "enemy of (the Jihadi-Salafi) religion", as his words were:

> […] we say to the enemy of religion in the West as well as Arabs; tyrants or Arabs and the foreigners that the Islamic state which is Islam is persisting, and we say to spiteful scholars die in your anger, IS will stay […].

6.2. ETIC ANALYSIS

Opposed to the broad Islamic tradition, Jihadi-Salafis have a strict definition of apostates or unbelievers, on which they act. Jihadi-Salafis deem other Muslims as heretics using the Salafi jurisprudence of *takfir* and excommunicate and punish those declared *kuffar* (infidels) by mass killing entire communities and groups of Muslims.[83] In the case of Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir (Appendix III), it is made clear that apostates and *rawafidh* ("those who reject" Allah, the

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[78] Leon Goldsmith, "Alawites for Assad," *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2012, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2012-04-16/alawites-assad.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ian Panell, "Syrian Activists Document Al-Bayda and Baniyas 'Massacre'," *BBC News*, May 28, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22684359.
[83] V.G. Julie Rajan, *Al Qaeda's Global Crisis: The Islamic State Takfir and the Genocide of Muslims* (London: Routledge, 2015), 4.

Prophet, and the Prophet's companions)[84] will be punished unforgettably.[85] Emotions play a significant role in this statement, as can be understood by the expressive words "avenge", "despiteful apostates" and "filthy *rawafidh*". Following this reasoning, it can be perceived as if the Jihadi-Salafi suicide bombers use the emotional expression of *takfir* in the statements, because those labelled *kuffar* did something exceedingly awful in their eyes.

In the legitimizing statement of Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi (Appendix I), Alawites are considered *kuffar*. On top of that, the widely condemned actions against the Sunni victims must be avenged by the Jihadi-Salafi militants. Therefore, it can be noticed that from the position of a Jihadi-Salafi militant, a suicide bombing on the Alawites is beyond justified.

In the statement by Abu Alqa'aqa al Shamali (Appendix IV), hate towards the religious enemy is independent of the political, geographical, and intellectual background. In this case, the suicide bombing is perceived as justified because of the grounded hate and animosity resulting from *takfir*.

6.2.1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Without a doubt, the Critical Discourse Analysis by Antonio Reyes would ascribe the appearance of revenge and hate in the legitimizing statements to the discursive strategy of emotions. According to Reyes, legitimization can be reached when the speaker raises emotions.[86] This is the case since the Jihadi-Salafis embed those strong feelings of hate and revenge in their legitimizations.

The discursive strategies of a hypothetical future and altruism are also present in the statements by the Jihadi-Salafi militants, as is shown in the statement by Omar Al Jazraw (Appendix V): "[…] we only fight to bring victory to Allah's word and establish the Sharia, to respond to the call of our retained brothers and sisters in the prisons of the tyrants." According to Reyes, fighting the infidels and apostates through suicide bombings leads to a grand victory, including establishing the *shari'a*, thus a hypothetical future. Besides, it would harm the coming generations of Jihadi-Salafis if this future would not be realized. The other half of the quote implies that the suicide bombing would avenge and support their companions whom the

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[84] In this specific case, *rawafidh* indicates the Shi Muslims, who reject the first three caliphs of Islam.
[85] Etan Kohlberg, "The Term "Rafida" in Imami Shi'i Usage," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 4 (1979): 677.
[86] Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse," 804.

unbelievers imprison. For that reason, the suicide bombing of the Jihadi-Salafi is legitimized by being beneficial for others like him.[87]

6.3. C O N C L U S I O N

To conclude, the religious discourse "emotions of vengeance and hate towards infidels" seems to be a catalyst for executing suicide bombings in the legitimizing statements. The Salafi idea of unbelief, including apostasy and the Jihadi-Salafi implementation hereof fuel these feelings. According to the Jihadi-Salafi militants, these suicide bombings appear to be the righteous thing to do when considering their strong feelings against infidels, a hypothetical future, and altruism.

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[87] Reyes, "Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse," 804.

CONCLUSION

When analysing the legitimizing statements through the two-folded analysis, the role of religion in the statements by the Jihadi-Salafi militants who carried out suicide bombings in Syria and Iraq between 2010 and 2015 is identified. This appearance of religion translates into four prominent religious discourses: martyrdom, authority of God, *jihad*, and emotions of vengeance and hate against infidels. Thus, from these findings, it can be assumed that these suicide bombings in Syria and Iraq were at least partly legitimised through the use of religion.

The religious theme "martyrdom" is used as a justification when carrying out a suicide bombing. In this sense, the militant becomes a martyr, and he believes in ascending to Paradise, including heavenly pleasures. Besides, carrying out a bomb attack and becoming a martyr ensures restoring the honour of the *umma*. Above all, martyrdom – suicide bombing – is encouraged by voices of expertise. The second noticeable religious topic, "authority of God", ensures that suicide bombings are justified, because they are seen as a form of practicing Jihadi-Salafism resulting in victory for Allah. Allah positively and negatively encourages Jihadi-Salafis to carry out a suicide bomb attack. "*Jihad*" as a theme is used in the statements since suicide bombings are seen as a form of performing *jihad*. According to the Jihadi-Salafi militants, *jihad* is necessary to maintain and expand their land. Besides, it is helpful to their companions. The final religious theme, "emotions of vengeance and hate towards infidels", ensures that these suicide bombings appear to be the righteous thing to do when considering their strong feelings combined with a hypothetical future and altruism.

In sum, the findings of this research support the study of Perry and Hasisi in which they connect the existing struggle of Islamist militant groups to Islamic tradition.[88] In this sense, the suicide bombings can be perceived as the enactment of the Islamist militant's struggle, which is proven to be connected to Islamic tradition through religious discourses in legitimization.

Considering the aim of this thesis to nuance and complement the already existing academic views on the motivation of Jihadi-Salafi militants, this research can be regarded as successful. As already indicated, those motivations lack a deepened perspective on religion, because they

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[88] Perry, and Hasisi, "Rational Choice Rewards and the Jihadist Suicide Bomber," 58.

do not study the militants' legitimizations. Therefore, this study on religious discourses can be considered an enhancement. However, this research might be interpreted as one-sided, because the five legitimizing statements can be perceived as only religious. Besides, the amount of legitimizing statements analysed can also be criticized, because contributing to an academic debate by researching only five statements might be arguable. For the sake of this thesis, it can be deemed acceptable, because only religion in legitimization is the topic of the research and the scope of a bachelor's thesis is by some means limited.

Considering the confined research area of this thesis, a suggestive topic for further research would be the personal background of the Jihadi-Salafi militants in relation to the role of religion in their legitimizations. Additionally, more profound research on the religious ideas of the militants in their legitimations correlating with the Qur'an might be interesting for future research.

APPENDIX I

Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi, a Saudi suicide bomber, carried out his attack in May 2013 in Jisr al-Shoghour, Syria. Depending on the source, Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi was either associated with the Islamic State or al-Nusra. This suicide bombing was targeted at a military barracks used by the Syrian army. The attack resulted in the destroying of the whole base and the killing of nearly a hundred soldiers.[89] In his legitimizing statement prior to his suicide bombing, Abu Dujanah Waleed Al-Ousairi declared:

> All the praises be to God, the Lord of the Worlds and on our prophet peace be upon him. Today we will avenge our families in Banyas, we will cut the heads of those Alawites, I ask Allah the almighty to enable me to kill them […] this is the first revenge operation and *Inshallah* there will be an operation after the other. I ask Allah the almighty to give us the strength to persist together, and as for our *jihadi* brothers in Al Sham[90] and all over the world, by Allah remain and persist on this path, the *jihad* path, the honourable path, do not fail. By Allah, the youth will bring victory to the nation, oh youth of the nation, those who are absent from *jihad*, go on to *Jihad*. And to those who are blessed with having arrived to the land of *Jihad*, persist and be patient and merciful with your brothers, and I ask Allah to bring you goodness with you and gather us with you in Heaven, and gather us together as beloved brothers, and bring us together on the platforms of light.[91]

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[89] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 108.
[90] "Sham" refers to the Levant, which consists of current Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian areas. However, "Sham" is generally associated with only Syria.
[91] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 108.

APPENDIX II

Abu Islam al Shami was affiliated with al-Nusra front, and he carried out his attack in August 2013. The suicide bombing was aimed at the Al Yarmouk camp[92] in Damascus, Syria.[93] Prior to his attack, Abu Islam al Shami expressed:

> Praise be to Allah who brought honour to the monotheists and humiliate the infidels and the polytheists, he brought honour to himself and to his prophet and to the believers, and he promised horrid torture to those who are seeking it with other than him. I write my will from Al Sham, the land of dignity and *jihad*. I write my will and I am eager to meet Allah and certain of his promise. To the sons of the nations who are absent from *Jihad* and from bringing victory to the religion, fear Allah and help you sisters who are being raped, fear Allah in the blood that are being spilled day and night in the land of Al Sham. Did you forget what Allah almighty said? If you do not go forth, he will punish you with a painful punishment and will replace you with another people and you will not harm Him at all And Allah is over all things competent.[94]

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[92] Al Yarmouk is unofficially a refugee camp home to a large Palestinian refugee community.
[93] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 111-112.
[94] Ibid.

APPENDIX III

Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir was affiliated with the Islamic State and carried out his suicide bombing in Al Anbar, Iraq, in December 2013.[95] Before the attack, Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir stated:

> We are only carrying out this work to bring victory to the religion and to Allah. To avenge Allah and his prophet and the Prophet's companions from those despiteful apostates, from those filthy *rawafidh* ["those who reject"], those who spoke ill in the honour of the prophet's companions May Allah be pleased with them. By Allah we will avenge them, we shall avenge them in a way that they shall never forget.[96]

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[95] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 114.
[96] Ibid.

APPENDIX IV

Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali executed his suicide bombing in July 2014 in Mosul, Iraq. He was associated with the Islamic State.[97] Before his bombing, Abu Alqa'aqa Al Shamali announced:

> I call on my brothers to accept the *Jihad* path, many people say that Jihadis live in fear and don't get married, they say *Jihad* is killing and it has no life, Jihadis get married, they eat, they drink and live the most beautiful life. The prophet peace be upon him says: 'you should carry on *jihad*, it's one of the doors to heaven, Allah will make distress go away with this path. We are all human we all fear explosions'. The prophet told us that the martyrdom [martyr] only feel [feels] an ant bite. The martyrdom operation is the best way to spite the religion's' enemies, it puts fear in their hearts. The Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham survived and is expanding and persisting, we say to the enemy of religion in the West as well as Arabs; tyrants or Arabs and the foreigners that the Islamic state which is Islam is persisting, and we say to spiteful scholars die in your anger, IS will stay, do you guess that either IS or Islam is reliant on platforms or discloses or spreading the word of Islam. It won't last without fatalities. Unless Muslims sacrifice themselves. Therefore, the prophet and his companions sacrificed their lives and money to raise the honour of Islam. Blessed is the one who took the path of *Jihad*, the closest path to heaven. A man won't fear when he embarks on the righteous path because it puts peace and serenity in his heart.[98]

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[97] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 113.
[98] Ibid.

CASE OMAR AL JAZRAW

APPENDIX V

Omar Al Jazraw was affiliated with Jund al Aqsa, a militant group based in the Idlib and Hama provinces of Syria. He carried out his suicide bombing in Hama in August 2015. The suicide attack killed more than 50 Syrian army soldiers and destroyed several vehicles and weapons.[99] Prior to his suicide bombing, Omar Al Jazraw spoke:

> This is the path to the *Houria,* ten meters from here, 72 *Houria*, pray for us so that we
> can reach them, and open the road for our brothers, praise be to Allah who blessed me
> with this path, I call to be pious to Allah in secret and in candor, by Allah persist on
> this path, be patient and don't fight among yourselves so you fail, we only fight to
> bring victory to Allah's word and establish the Sharia, to respond to the call of our
> retained brothers and sisters in the prisons of the tyrants. I would tell my parents no to
> not be sad as I am going to heaven as wide as the skies and earth, and I ask Allah to
> accept me, as well as you, amongst the martyrs. And to gather me, as well as you, in
> the heavens of bliss, and at last don't forget me from your prayers and I ask Allah to
> unite the jihadis fight on the unity word.[100]

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[99] Overton, et al., "Understanding the Rising Cult of a Suicide Bomber," 108-109.
[100] Ibid.

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