

ISIS's Euro-American Fighters: Western Failures and the Narratives of Denial

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Abstract

This article centers on the influx of Western fighters joining ISIS and locates its root causes in systemic and structural forms of alienation, discrimination, and Islamophobia. In Western discourse, understanding this phenomenon is characterized by a sense of denial that limits the interpretive paradigms to one of two approaches: either a racial discourse that confines the debate to antagonistic minoritized citizens with ambiguous loyalties and an inherent vulnerability for radicalism, or the powerful “glamour” of ISIS’s propagandist spectacles that western media cannot dispel. This article suggests a third approach by examining recruits as pathologized individuals, essentially the product of their own troubled environments and failed experiences in the West with subordinate and second-class citizens’ status. Deprived of sharing the perks of western identity, they start fantasizing about ISIS as an ideal alternative. The purpose is to explain how the West responds to its failure by immediately mobilizing media and politics to project it on the other. By relying on the insights of current theories on alienation, radicalism, and discrimination, the article engages with the way recruits remain so grounded in their identity and upbringing while venting out their frustration with lack of commodities, cultural collisions, and disappointment with life in Raqqa.

I noticed that these jihadists have little to do with the local culture - Arab or Muslim culture - they are children of our societies. They speak our language, they have the same cultural references we do. They watch the same movies as us, play the same video games our children play. They are products of our culture, our world. They watched everything [...] from the Teletubbies to Game of Thrones.”¹

Introduction

This is how French hostage journalist Nicolas Hénin described his ISIS jailors after almost a year in captivity. At least three of them were British citizens in their early to mid-twenties and “part of a group of British Islamists that were nicknamed John, Paul and Ringo, after members of the Beatles.”² There is certainly a contrast between the pedagogy of socialization that Tinky Winky and his friends bring to the

¹ Lucy Williamson, “Islamic State ex-hostage Hénin: Asking for pity is stupid,” BBC.com, March 9, 2015, accessed September 30, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31806085>

² Tanveer Mann, “Jihadi John’s British ‘associate’ nicknamed after The Beatles is detained in Turkey,” Metro.co.uk. November 13, 2015, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://metro.co.uk/2015/11/13/jihadi-johns-british-associate-nicknamed-after-the-beatles-is-detained-in-turkey-5500043/#ixzz3zAJluOwX>

peaceful world of children and the entanglement of asymmetrical power relations, conspiracies, class stratification, and racial conflicts in the fictional kingdom of Westeros. Metaphorically, the jailors grew up in this very familiar place that Hénin locates between the fantasy world of Teletubbyland and the tales of harsher modern conditions that scare children. In the former, children learn cultural norms and language skills as they are initiated into the culture, and in the latter they witness the brutality of modernity with all its contradictions in scenes like the wrongful execution of the chivalrous and loyal but naïve knight Ned Stark, beheaded precisely because of his naiveté. Or the hateful discourse against “wildlings” as immigrants in general and specifically the “Dothrakis” as colored people who must be subdued and kept behind the wall. Despite being great and honorable warriors, compared to the other tribes of the Seven Kingdoms, they are represented as dark, senselessly violent, and uncivilized. Having survived the horrific ordeal of being executed by these Dothraki-looking jailors, Hénin’s statement is in no way meant to humanize them but rather to admit that he felt trapped by his own people; people like “us”.

In January 2015, out of the impoverished 19th arrondissement of Paris came Cherif and Saïd Kouachi, the French brothers who led the deadly *Charlie Hebdo* attack. In November 2015, the Anderlecht native Abdelhamid Abaaoud and his associates orchestrated a much deadlier assault on Parisians in multiple sites simultaneously. In December 2015, the terrible mass shooting in San Bernardino was carried out by a married couple Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik. In late March 2016, the Belgian Bakraoui brothers blew themselves up in Brussels. Adding more strength to the soundness of this analysis, only hours before the publication of the article, the Pulse Orlando Nightclub attack took place on June 12, 2016; American-born Omar Mateen went on a shooting rampage killing 49 people and injuring 53. All were ISIS’s secret admirers and like Napoleon’s patriot soldiers, the first modern citizens’ army, “who killed for a cause, inspired by national sentiment,”³ the kind of soldier that Hegel describes as “willing to die for a cause of greater value to him than life itself,”⁴ to build and preserve the modern nation. Western ISIS recruits are killing for the same purpose. Their nation is the imagined Caliphate.

Before them there was the Taliban and al Qaeda sympathizer, what a *New York Times* article calls “the lonely young American,”⁵ he or she is often secluded, curious, strongly dissatisfied with their social environment and government, and struggling to belong. For example, 20-year-old California native John Walker-Lindh known as the Taliban American accused of being a member of al Qaeda and the young Californian convert Adam Yahye Gadahn who served as one of the main al Qaeda spokesmen. In 2008, 29-year old New Yorker trained by al Qaeda, Bryant Neal Vinas, also a new Muslim convert turned jihadi, was arrested for plotting “to set off bombs inside a Wal-Mart store and aboard the Long Island Railroad that serviced the suburban New York community where he grew up.”⁶ A year later, the author of “How to build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom,” and self-declared al Qaeda propagandist 25-year-old New Yorker Samir Khan traveled to Yemen and joined al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslims, Bad Muslims* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Rukmini Callumachi, “ISIS and the Lonely Young American,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2015, accessed December 12, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/world/americas/isis-online-recruiting-american.html?_r=0

⁶ Phil Hirschorn, “Homegrown terrorist Bryant Neal Vinas shows his face in Brooklyn,” CBS.com, April 25, 2012, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/homegrown-terrorist-bryant-neal-vinas-shows-his-face-in-brooklyn/>

This article contends that these cases are all failures of the West and a product of the lapses of modernity; they are “individuals who feel trapped and imprisoned in their societies of origin”⁷ and began looking for alternatives elsewhere way before ISIS. Fareed Zakaria in a recent article argues that these individuals were actually radicalized before claiming to become religious; he sees them as rebels “against their more traditional, devout immigrant parents. They are unsure of their identity, rooted in neither the old country nor the new. They face discrimination and exclusion. And in this context, they choose a life of rebellion, crime and, then, the ultimate forbidden adventure, jihad.”⁸ Their pathologies may be linked to different sources: The bankrupt project of multiculturalism seen by many as “a coded subtext for Islamophobia, prompted by fears of Jihadist terrorism, [and] hatred of Islamized Muslims,”⁹ political and social marginalization, state-sanctioned aggression, alienation, poverty, and racial persecution. The shocking increase in radicalized Western born Muslims and suicide attacks dictate the need “to think through the full implications of victims becoming killers.”¹⁰ In a harsh but sober criticism of French society, former Prime Minister Manuel Valls brought up again the threat of discrimination and renewed his call for the elimination of French ghettos stating:

Relegation of some to the suburbs, ghettos, things I was already talking about in 2005, a geographic, social, ethnic apartheid which has developed in our country. Social misery, added to daily discrimination... because someone doesn't have a good family name, the right skin color, or because she's a woman. It is by no means, and you know me, about looking for excuses, but we also have to look at the reality of our country.¹¹

The French ghetto as a space of hopelessness for many French generations of immigrant origin has become the breeding ground where minoritized citizens are often radicalized. The Prime Minister's statement of course speaks to a dominant belief in Europe that explains in simplistic terms the ghetto as the product of Muslims' inability to assimilate. In a different interpretation, this article intends to examine these pathologized cases as a western problem that has been systematically denied by the West as early as the founding of al Qaeda. But, in representing the phenomenon, the article argues, it is constantly the Islamization that dominates the debate and not the radicalization of Western individuals, which in all recent cases precedes the claim to this new religious persona or the act of conversion; “they almost never have a history of piety and religious practice,” explains French scholar and former director of the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) Oliver Roy; citing this now familiar rhetoric that appears often, he says: “after each attack, the journalists' narratives are surprisingly similar: “We do not understand, he was a nice guy (or a simple petty criminal), he was not a practicing Muslim, he used to

⁷ Saad Khan, “The Paris Attacks and the New Paradigm of Terrorism,” *Public Policy & Governance Review*, November 17, 2015, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://ppgreview.ca/2015/11/17/the-paris-attacks-and-the-new-paradigm-of-terrorism/>

⁸ Fareed Zakaria, “Today's new terrorists were radical before they were religious,” *WashingtonPost.com* March 31, 2016, accessed April 4, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/todays-new-terrorists-were-radical-before-they-were-religious/2016/03/31/9cb8e916-f762-11e5-9804-537defcc3cf6_story.html

⁹ Augie Fleras, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Multicultural Governance in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 197.

¹⁰ Mamdani, 9.

¹¹ Alasdair Sandford, “‘Ethnic Apartheid’ exists in France, says PM Manuel Valls,” *Euronews.com*, January 28, 2015, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.euronews.com/2015/01/20/ethnic-apartheid-exists-in-france-says-pm-manuel-valls/>

drink alcohol, he used to smoke hash, he used to frequent girls ... Oh yes, it is true that a few months ago he oddly changed, he let his beard grow and began to overwhelm us with talk on religion.”¹²

But embedded in the language of this narration is a simplistic and misleading assumption that this familiarity makes the phenomenon self-evident framing European behavior as nice in so many different contexts until the transformation occurs. These kinds of interpretations show how the West responds to its failures by projecting them onto this supposedly amorphous Muslim enemy who is so unpredictable, so invisible, and virtually impossible to track. The issue here is not so much how Muslims are misrepresented but how these misrepresentations provide a solid rationale to subject them collectively to Islamophobic bias and government surveillance; Western perception of Muslims essentially as outsiders because of their assumed fragmented loyalties with a faith based elsewhere, family ties in the Middle East, anti-war position, and what Talal Asad describes as the necessary but impossible concession that Muslims have to make to exist in the West:

The idea that people’s historical experience is essential to them, that it can be shed at will, makes it possible to argue more strongly for the enlightenment’s claim to universality. Muslims, as members of the abstract category ‘humans’, can be assimilated – or as some recent theorists have put it, can be ‘translated’ into global (‘European’) civilization once they have divested themselves of what many of them (mistakenly) regard as essential to themselves. The belief that human beings can be separated from their histories and traditions makes it possible to urge a Europeanisation of the Islamic world. And by the same logic, it underlies the belief that the *assimilation* to Europe’s civilization of Muslim immigrants who are – for good or for ill – already in European states, is both necessary and desirable.¹³

This is precisely what makes Muslims “unrepresentable” and therefore excluded from the larger body of the nation. Unable to belong in the original country or in the new one complicates their understanding of citizenship and the way they may conceive of welcoming places outside of Western nations. For this reason, ISIS capitalizes on the exclusion by placing race at the center of its propagandist media campaign, organizing its recruiting videos and narratives entirely on dissolving images of race. Many of their videos promote this ideal place where color and ethnicity are no longer relevant to prosperity, status, or privilege; the very objective that the West has failed to offer its citizens. In this context, the first part of the article introduces a few theoretical frameworks to examine the way exclusion masks the link between the flaws of ideological, economic, and social structures and the grievances that many ISIS sympathizers harbor over a period of time. The article considers these grievances a strong indication of what Žižek calls the growing “clashes within civilizations”¹⁴ which create a new kind of warfare and suicidal warriors, “a new kind of terrorist, one who is less drawn into terrorism through religion but rather who has chosen the path of terror as the ultimate act of rebellion against the modern world — and who then finds an ideology that can justify his desires”¹⁵ and not necessarily a religion he understands. In reality, the majority of ISIS

¹² Oliver Roy, “The Islamization of Radicalism,” Mada Masr, Independent, Progressive Media. January 11, 2016, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/islamization-radicalism>

¹³ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (New York: Verso, 2002), 41.

¹⁵ Zakaria,

recruits have very little understanding of Islam, Arab culture, Iraq or Syria. As Sedgwick explains “more than half of Islamic State’s recruits are foreigners, and they’ve got one thing in common. They don’t know much about Islam.”¹⁶

The second part entails an analysis of the recruits’ identities, tweets, and confessions on social media which have added significant details about their maladjustment as they settle in the de-facto ISIS capital Raqqa. More importantly, and despite their fight against their nations, embedded layers of meaning in their narratives reveal that they are deeply anchored in their Western identity and its claim on civilization. Not only do their stories confirm Western biases against Arabs and Muslims, they become themselves willing participants in the extension and production of neo-orientalist assumptions about life and people in the Middle East. The third part identifies similar aspects between European and ISIS media spectacles and modes of production targeting Western audiences. The relevance of this parallel lies in the way ISIS’s executioners reinstated the brutality of “colonial wars,” defined by Mamdani as a “method of war considered fit for use only against uncivilized adversaries”¹⁷ that Hitler used against the Russians in the Second World War. Citing Fanon, Mamdani interestingly indicates how the European bourgeois cannot forgive Hitler for “the fact that he applied to Europe the colonial practices that had previously been applied only to the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India and the Negroes of Africa.”¹⁸ As if mimicking colonial forms of violence, ISIS executed European and American hostages on camera; its sympathizers subjected civilians in European cities to similar assaults. This is exactly what Massad tried to emphasize in the behavior of Cherif and Saïd Kouachi as excellent examples of the “French Muslim members of ISIS [who] assimilated French Catholic culture far too well, especially as relates to intolerance and decapitation.”¹⁹

Theoretical Approach

To better understand the projection of Western failure on the other, it is necessary to place it within the process of exclusion from what Asad calls “the myth of Europe” and specifically the way European Muslims are permanently represented as foreign. Historically, argues Asad, Europe grounded its roots in its geographical space and ancient Christian identity. Constructing the myth as a sanitized “narration of an identity many still derive from European (or ‘Western civilization’) - a narrative that seeks to represent homogenous space and linear time,”²⁰ hence giving Europeans a narrow understanding of themselves that overlooks aspects of diversity and its changing ethnic composition. Even when racial markers, ethnic, and cultural differences collapse, based on this definition, the Muslim is still located on its margins. Asad gives the example of Bosnian Muslims who “may be *in* Europe but are not of *it*. Even though they may not have migrated to Europe from Asia (indeed, they are not racially distinguishable from other whites in Europe), and may have adjusted to secular political institutions (in so far as this can be said of Balkan societies), they cannot claim a Europeanness – as the inhabitants of Christian Europe can.”²¹

¹⁶ Shannon Sedgwick, “What Happens When Western Recruits Apply and Enter IS,” Newscom Au. June 2, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.news.com.au/national/what-happens-when-western-recruits-apply-and-enter-is/news-story/12c7c1bd3989a528ebdb561a27325e3e>

¹⁷ Mamdani, 7.

¹⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹⁹ Joseph Massad, “Assimilating French Muslims,” *The Electronic Intifada*, January 22, 2015, accessed January 3, 2016, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/assimilating-french-muslims/14205>

²⁰ Asad, 16.

²¹ Asad, 14.

Lately, the frequency of attacks in Europe, biased media coverage, and the Islamophobic tone of US political rhetoric have emboldened this sense of exclusion further alienating younger citizens with immigrant heritage. The ludicrous call by xenophobe and Islamophobe Donald Trump for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States”²² shows that racism against Muslims is reaching a staggering level. A *New York Times* editorial reports that today “the ignorance is being inflamed by know-nothing in the political sphere — by Republican presidential candidates calling for American Muslims to be registered and monitored, and for mosques to be spied on or shut down.”²³ This unusual willingness to suspend fundamental rights of Muslims collectively in the United States and less openly in Europe might be producing radical individuals and turning people like Ibrahim and Khalid Bakraoui into human bombs. Being devout or connected to their heritage is not necessarily what motivated them but rather the desire to reverse the power of such oppressive conditions. The French social theorist Baudrillard’s perspective on the intersections of power, media spectacles, and the rise of marginal groups who resist that power, he calls “singularities” is helpful in placing terror suspects within the oppressive conditions of the larger context of globalization. His hypothesis applies to the transnational composition of ISIS as a multinational entity and “conceives of terrorism, beyond its spectacular violence, beyond Islam and America, as the emergence of a radical antagonism at the very heart of the process of globalization, of a force irreducible to this integral technical and mental realization of the world, irreducible to this inexorable movement towards a completed global order.”²⁴ ISIS and its recruits are the strongest manifestation of this force that is simultaneously a pathological aspect of modernity and dialectically part of the modern condition where the nuances of race disappear and the distinction between terrorism and resistance is no longer discernable. So far, as a leading brutal force of this “radical antagonism,” ISIS has used successful recruiting strategies across race, ethnicity, and nationalities; its transnational military cadre seems to plan, coordinate, execute, seize new territories, and capitalize on every possible asset including racial nuances.

White recruits are a great asset for ISIS; they carry significant cultural and linguistic capital particularly useful to the validation of violent discourses produced by the organization. When possible, ISIS also deploys its recruits’ “whiteness” as propagandist faces for the organization. For example Canadian André Poulin who appeared in many promotional videos a year after his death;²⁵ Melbourne teenager Jake Bilardi, or white-looking individuals such as Sydney’s apprentice butcher, 17-year-old red-head Abdullah Elmir, nicknamed the “Ginger Jihadi,” and brand them in several videos to target Westerners. Elmir was exceptionally sensational in delivering threatening messages to world leaders, “terror against terror” to

²² Charlie Savage, “Donald Trump’s Plan to Bar Foreign Muslims Might Survive a Lawsuit.” *New York Times*.com, December 9, 2015, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/09/us/politics/donald-trumps-plan-to-bar-foreign-muslims-might-survive-a-lawsuit.html?ribbon-idx=3&rref=politics&module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=Politics&action=swipe®ion=FixedRight&pgtype=article>

²³ “Fear Ignorance, Not Muslims,” *The New York Times* Editorial Board *New York Times*.com. December 5, 2015, accessed January 1, 2016, http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/opinion/fear-ignorance-not-muslims.html?_r=1

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *L’Esprit du terrorisme*. Translated by Donovan Hohn. *Harper’s Magazine*, 2012, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://harpers.org/archive/2002/02/0079058>

²⁵ Justin Li, “Boy, man with British accents latest westerners to appear in ISIS videos,” *CBS.com*, January 2016, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/western-isis-video-1.3390029?cmp=rss>

borrow Baudrillard's words suggesting a clash between competing forces, a confrontation between the power of the global order and resistance that arises of its own oppressive impact:

This is no longer an ideological notion. We have gone well beyond ideology and politics. The energy that nourishes terror, no ideology, no cause, not even an Islamic one, can explain. The terrorists are not aiming simply to transform the world. Like the heretics of previous times, they aim to radicalize the world through sacrifice, whereas the system aims to convert it into money through force.²⁶

What Baudrillard means here is that these "singularities" seek to resist the absolute tyranny of a global market economy and a culture that impoverished the majority, destabilize it and fight it, and eventually switch places by occupying with force the position of power. Following the logic of his opinion, ISIS recruits seem to embark on such journeys of self-annihilation seeking adventure, money, women and an opportunity for being full-fledged participants in and profiteers from a newer world order within which they become active players "driven more by a lust for notoriety than religious fervor."²⁷ In alarming numbers, they flocked to Syria hoping to start building this imaginary world that Helen Lewis calls in the *New Statesman* "an *idealistic Caliphate*,"²⁸ at least hypothetically, founded on the illusion of equality, justice, and fairness as opposed to a racist and exclusionary West where they remain members of a suspect, marginalized, and monitored community.

The last theoretical framework that helps explain the attacks carried out by new Western warriors is Zizek's conceptualization of what he frames as "immaterial war." Over a decade ago, he wrote about the specter of the immaterial war in the twenty first century, what he hypothesized as "the paranoid warfare" and characterized it by a virtual dimension and absence of the conventional enemy who becomes invisible and is no longer a recognizable state or a specific guerilla group. He explains that in "this new warfare, the agents assume their acts less and less publicly."²⁹ The idea applies to ISIS on so many different levels, particularly in the earlier stages of its resurgence; with its black flag, obscure power hierarchies, transnational military strategists, executioners' covered faces and concealed identities, faceless dedicated recruiters who navigate the web and entice Western youth and indoctrinate them, ISIS embodies Zizek's invisible army. But as their territory and military were getting established so was their confidence. The next section examines the controversial measures of community policing framed as state-sponsored outreach programs introduced in Europe and the United States to contain extremism but so far have been unproductive.

Systemic Discrimination and the Narratives of Denial

For more than a decade, "war on terror" policies, intelligence sharing, and cooperation between Western nations to fight the threat of terrorism produced a culture of global policing of Muslims. With surveillance

²⁶ Baudrillard, 8.

²⁷ Jason Burke, "What exactly does Al Qaeda want?" *The Guardian*, March 21, 2004, accessed December 26, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/mar/21/alqaida.terrorism>

²⁸ Helen Lewis, "The utopia of Isis: inside Islamic State's propaganda war," *The Newstatesman.com*, November 20, 2015, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2015/11/utopia-isis-inside-islamic-state-s-propaganda-war>

²⁹ Zizek, 37.

more aggressive and ambiguous social and cultural initiatives were introduced in the United States, Canada, and the UK.

Before the official launching of social and cultural programs to prevent extremism in the United States, the news came out of a massive surveillance program monitoring the Muslim community collectively in New York City since 2002. “Plainclothes officers, sometimes called ‘rakers,’ and informants, or ‘mosque crawlers,’ went anywhere that Muslims congregated. They eavesdropped on conversations in restaurants and cafes, catalogued memberships in mosques and student organizations, and, it was later said, even tried to bait people into making inflammatory statements.”³⁰ Reporters at the Associated Press broke the story in 2011. A detailed 56-page report titled “Mapping Muslims” in New York City uncovered the devastating impact of racial profiling, extensive surveillance, and acts of coercing Muslim students to work as informants. The news terrified American Muslims, made them suspicious of one another, and led many to “[suppress] religious practice, speech, political expression, and threatened to dissolve the very fabric of [an] entire community.”³¹ Six years into his tenure, the Chief of the NYPD Intelligence Division, Lt. Paul Galati admitted that the collective surveillance of American Muslims did not produce a single criminal lead. More problematic are the US government’s Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts, which were launched as early as 2002. Initially beginning with pilot programs in Los Angeles (2008), Minneapolis (2011), and Boston (2014) the stated objectives were to engage with local communities, coordinate outreach efforts to improve awareness and educate about violent extremism, identify vulnerable individuals, and have access to social service providers for parents whose children or other family members show signs of radicalism. While community members and civic leaders expressed concerns about targeting only Muslim communities and warned that these programs might turn into intelligence gathering schemes, the case of the Minneapolis seven was unfolding. Seven Somali Americans aged between 19 and 21 were arrested for planning to join ISIS. Their friend, who was a willing participant in the plot, turned FBI informant received \$41,000 from the FBI³² to record their conversations. Like in a typical case of entrapment, it is the informant who connected them with a contact in San Diego in order to receive fake passports. As Murphy states, “supporters of the young men insist they were set up and manipulated by the informant.”³³ The case has created more fear and distrust between the government and the Somali community whose leaders expressed serious concerns about the CVE program voiced by the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Minnesota, Jaylani Hussein, who said “the program could subvert their privacy and religious freedom.”³⁴

³⁰ Colin Moynihan, “New York City Settlement on Surveillance of Muslims,” *The New Yorker*, January 7, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-new-york-city-settlement-on-surveillance-of-muslims>

³¹ Nermeen Arastu and Diala Shamas, “Mapping: Surveillance and its impact on American Muslims,” *AlJazeera*, March 14, 2013, accessed December 20, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/03/2013313112318267349.html>

³² Esmā Murphy, “Trial Set For 7 Somali American Men Accused Of Trying To Join ISIS,” CBS.com, September 2, 2015, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2015/09/02/trial-set-for-7-somali-american-men-accused-of-trying-to-join-isis/>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Paul McEnroe and Abby Simmons, “Informant in Terror Case Paid \$41000,” *StarTribune.com* August 6, 2015, accessed January 3, 2016, <http://www.startribune.com/informant-in-terror-case-paid-41-000-by-fbi/320929811/>

The relatively calmer life of Muslim communities elsewhere seems to be changing as well. Across the border from the United States, Canadian sentiments and policies are also shifting dramatically regarding their Muslim citizens. Described by Sherene Razack as “an ominous sign of the structure of a racialized citizenship;”³⁵ Muslims in Canada are now placed outside the political system. In *Casting out: the Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (2008), she explains how the tyranny of “the war on terror” policies created a dividing space between citizens and less modern minoritized ones: “We have reason; they do not. We are located in modernity; they are not [...]. In doing all these things the West has often denied the benefits of modernity to those it considers to be outside of it. Evicted from the universal, and thus from civilization and progress, the non-West occupies a zone outside the law. Violence maybe directed at it with impunity.”³⁶

Following the same rationale that confuses community engagement with counter-terrorism efforts and intelligence gathering, makers of these programs divert attention from the fact that the “real breeding ground for extremism stems from the treatment of immigrant groups within Europe. Racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination have driven a generation of young migrants to radical movements as a solution to an absence of job prospects, poor education, deteriorated neighborhoods, lack of respect, and repeated bouts in jail.”³⁷ At the same time, research shows that European Muslims remain one of the most marginalized minorities targeted specifically for their religion. In Britain, “Bristol University researchers found that religion mattered far more than skin color when it came to job prospects...Muslims were found to suffer the most, with men as much as 76 percent less likely to get a job offer than their Christian counterparts, while Muslim women were found to be 65 percent less likely to be employed than Christian women.”³⁸ These are hardly new practices but are part and parcel of structural and systemic forms of discrimination that target Muslim communities and sow racial, class, and religious differences within European nation-states.

Like the American Somalis, and the French marginalized ghetto dwellers, the disconnect between the British government and the Muslim community is so staggering that government officials deal with British Muslims as a hate group that has to be monitored very closely. Since April 2007, the government introduced a pilot surveillance program called “Prevent” and chose to invest hundreds of millions of pounds in the “Prevent programme [which] has come to redefine the relationship between government and around two million British citizens who are Muslim. Their hearts and minds are now the target of an elaborate structure of surveillance, mapping, engagement and propaganda. Prevent has become, in effect, the government’s ‘Islam policy’.”³⁹ Beyond community and non-profit organizations, the tentacles of Prevent have strategically penetrated educational institutions including schools, colleges, universities, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and

³⁵ Sherene Razack, *Casting out: the Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2008), 4.

³⁶ Razack, 10.

³⁷ Walden Bello, “How the Left Failed France’s Muslims,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 5, 2015, accessed December 2, 2015, <http://fpif.org/left-failed-frances-muslims/>

³⁸ Adam Taylor, “Would Muslims get better jobs if employers didn’t know they were Muslim?” *WashingtonPost.com*, October 12, 2015, accessed November 12, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/12/would-muslims-get-better-jobs-if-employers-didnt-know-they-were-muslim/>

³⁹ Arun Kundnani, “Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism,” *Institute of Race Relations*, October 2009, (8), London, accessed December 2, 2015, <http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/spooked.pdf>

the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.⁴⁰ More troubling is that officials, bureaucrats, social-service workers, counselors, and teachers are all supposed to screen for and identify signs of extremism with ambiguous guidelines that range from watching pupils' discussions on topics such as religion, war, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, being "too proud" of their ethnic origin, to their social behavior, and misogynist or homophobic attitudes. British Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced that "teachers will be expected to pass on concerns to head teachers who will take appropriate action, including calling in the police. It could include a pupil saying something homophobic."⁴¹ Just as the questionable goals of the CVE programs are unfolding and severing an already fragile relationship between Muslim communities in New York City, Minneapolis, and other American cities and agencies that are supposed to protect and serve them, Prevent is transforming schools in the UK by making them function as new surveillance units; the school is no longer a space where learning, socialization, and integration ought to be priorities.

After so many years since their implementation, neither CVE nor the Prevent program have helped "diagnose" the kind of futuristic tendencies of violent militancy or inform the foundation of a solid integration policy that could address social and economic inequities, issues of discrimination, Islamophobia, and alienation. On the contrary, criticism of such programs has consistently been articulated by government officials overseeing their details or involved in their implementation. For example, a former British senior police officer said: the "British government's flagship anti-radicalization strategy, Prevent, has become a toxic brand and is widely mistrusted, [...] which already frames Muslims as a 'suspect community' and therefore needing permanent monitoring."⁴² Other activists and community leaders have consistently warned of growing mistrust between the community and the state and expressed serious concerns about the alienating impact of surveillance.

What happens to Western recruits after escaping their oppressive and alienating environments in the pursuit of a happier life in Raqqa and the severity of culture shock they encounter are the focus of the next section. Sooner than anticipated, they are disillusioned with ISIS's methods of seduction and discover the futility of their adventure, as they become themselves the makers of a neo-orientalist discourse on Arabs and Arab culture.

There's No Place Like Home

In the last year, 150 Canadians,⁴³ 500 British citizens, the largest European supplier so far with "700 travelling from France"⁴⁴ migrated to ISIS's warzone; as of February 2015, the director of the U.S.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 12.

⁴¹ James Slack and Matt Chorley, "School gay jibes may be a sign of radicalisation, claims minister as teachers are ordered to 'spot the signs of extremism'," MailOnline.com, June 30, 2015, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3144195/Schools-told-spot-signs-pupils-grow-terrorists-amid-fears-middle-class-children-risk.html#ixzz3tvE0BFkg>

⁴² Dominic Casciani, "Islamic State: Profile of Mohammed Emwazi aka 'Jihadi John'," BBC.com, November 13, 2015, accessed December 28, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31641569>

⁴³ Alessandri Masi, "ISIS Recruiting Westerners: How The 'Islamic State' Goes After Non-Muslims And Recent Converts In The West," *International Business Times*, September 8, 2014, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-recruiting-westerners-how-islamic-state-goes-after-non-muslims-recent-converts-west-1680076>

⁴⁴ Holly Yan, "Why is ISIS so successful at luring Westerners?" CNN.com, July 10, 2014, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/07/world/isis-western-draw/>

National Counterterrorism Center, Nick Rasmussen, told a congressional hearing that over “150 American citizens and residents are believed to have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria and join ISIS” [...] and the International Center for Radicalization (ICSR), a British research group estimated around 100 reached the battle zone.”⁴⁵ Teenage girls as young as 15 from Denver were stopped in Germany last October; three British schoolgirls age 15 and 16 were reportedly missing after taking a flight to Turkey”⁴⁶ all en route to Syria. It is possible that ISIS’s appeal to those who have experienced the abject turmoil and precariousness of identity are the illusions and hypnotic rhetoric that ISIS’s propagandists produce of an ideal state and a sense of a higher purpose claimed by al Qaeda before and polished by ISIS’s media experts now. Not too different, their methods of seduction have incorporated Western values, individual accomplishment, and a chance for glamour and stardom. Confirming the success of such methods, a CNN report states that “ISIS can appeal to young people’s religious idealism and to a desire to escape the frustrations of life in the West. ISIS provides a utopian political project, the so-called caliphate, the centralized Islamic rule, [...] ISIS provides these deluded young men and women with an adventurous trip.”⁴⁷ According to a reporter for the *Independent* “Western recruits have posted pictures of themselves posing with guns and a suicide belt, with one woman from south London living in Syria even boasting that she wanted to become the first female to behead a Western hostage.”⁴⁸ A recent manifesto uploaded by the all-female Al Khansaa Brigade’s media wing (translated from Arabic by Charlie Winter, a researcher on jihadism in Syria and Iraq at the counter extremism think-tank of the Quilliam Foundation), explains women’s role, exaggerates their participation in building the caliphate, and promises them access to equal opportunities with men. In the same way the US army uses the ideals of equality and respect to actively recruit women soldiers, ISIS is paying great attention to gender equality in its recruiting efforts. For example, the manifesto denounces what it considers Western misogynist practices against women and promises much better choices than having to “flirt here and there to get degrees and so on just so she can try to prove that her intelligence is greater than a man’s [...] women can leave the family home to work as doctors, teachers, or for Jihad [...]. Mr. Winter’s analysis adds: In a jihadist perversion of feminism, then, the importance of women is championed. She is deemed to play a central role.”⁴⁹ Many of the posts of the newly recruited Westerners in Raqqa, however, reveal a completely different reality about life in the disputed territory of the Caliphate. Disillusioned recruits seem to miss home and the privileges of living in western cities.

This article has suggested that the majority of Western recruits know little about Syria, Iraq, and Arab culture in general. The claim is confirmed here with many confessions posted in their Twitter

⁴⁵ Charlotte Alfred, “How Many Americans Have Traveled To Syria To Join ISIS?” *The Huffington Post*, February 2, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/25/american-foreign-fighters-isis_n_6753854.html

⁴⁶ Heather Saul, “Life as a woman under Isis: Document reveals for the first time what group really expects from female recruits living in Syria and Iraq,” *The Independent.com*, July 23, 2015a, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/life-as-a-woman-under-isis-document-reveals-for-the-first-time-what-group-really-expects-from-female-10025143.html>

⁴⁷ Jethro Mullen, “What is ISIS Appeal for Young People?” *CNN.com*, February 25, 2015, accessed December 28, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/25/middleeast/isis-kids-propaganda/>

⁴⁸ Heather Saul, “Life as a Woman under ISIS: document reveals for the first time what group really expects from female recruits living in Syria and Iraq,” *The Independent.com*, July 23, 2015, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/life-as-a-woman-under-isis-document-reveals-for-the-first-time-what-group-really-expects-from-female-10025143.html>

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

commentary which reflect a severe struggle with culture shock, lack of cultural adjustment, and inability to part with their needs for certain commodities. Their unhappiness with their new home and its strange customs range from disgust with Arab culinary habits and cuisine to a terrible malaise with weather conditions, heat intensity, and bad hair salons. A Belgian ISIS fighter, Abu Maria Al-Belgiki, tweeted: “When I came to the state... I ended up in Iraq... I made it very clear the first day, ‘sorry I don’t like Arab food’; they used to force me to eat something called ‘bacha’ or whatever... urgh so disgusting... it was cow/sheep bones and this and that...”⁵⁰ In the same spirit, an Australian woman who calls herself “umm seeker OFistihad,” or “mother, seeker of martyrdom,” complained about the sweltering heat in Syria with a pithy tweet: “The heat in sham [Syria] is shocking; I’m thinking to change my kunya [nickname] to Umm Sweat.”⁵¹ A third woman desperate for a Western quality hair salon, tweeted:

Aslamu alakuum sister I want to ask you are their [sic] salons. Don’t be mad at me and say u will come for Allah why u need salons but sis I know we will come for ALLAH SWT but no harm if we go to salons beauty ourselves init.” The reply was: “Wa’ Alaykum Assalam, There are salons but trust me you’re better off getting a sister here to do your hair/make-up etc, for two reasons: The style here isn’t really that nice and their makeup most of the time goes towards the clowny look. I would advise not to go because although Dawlah (the state) does da’wah [preaching] on these specific places, most of them do pluck brows for people and add hair extentions [sic] etc so I would not give my money to them, Allahu A’lam.”⁵²

These are the new hybrid militants who are unable to contain their cravings for Western delicacies. Their complaints continue to flood Twitter with a long list of unsatisfactory aspects of life in ISIS territory: bad shampoo, iPods not working, decaying homes, and bad coffee. Disappointed that there is no “Starbucks in Syria”, a Twitter user named Green Bird of Dabiq, wrote: “know it may be shirk [polytheism] but sometimes I do miss Starbucks. The coffee here is beyond wretched.”⁵³ Despite their life changing decisions to join this imagined ISIS utopia with very little hope for a way out, many of them remain attached to their Western habits and:

...have taken at least one tradition with them: airing their gripes on social media. Complaints about the life under ISIS tracked by the Middle East Media Research Institute, which analyzed social media sent from inside the so-called caliphate, focus on Western defectors’ finding a severe lack of creature comforts. [...] lousy restaurants, slow Internet and bad cellphone service are

⁵⁰ Perry Chiramonte, “No place like home: Western jihadists decry Islamic State’s lack of beauty salons, Starbucks, good food,” FoxNews.com, November 12, 2015, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/11/12/no-place-like-home-western-jihadists-decry-islamic-states-lack-beauty-salons.html>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² A. Agron, “Cracks In The Caliphate: Western ISIS Members Complain About Life In The Islamic State,” MEMRI, November 13, 2015, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://counterjihadreport.com/2015/11/13/cracks-in-the-caliphate-western-isis-members-complain-about-life-in-the-islamic-state/>

⁵³ Jen Mills, “Western ISIS jihadists complain there’s no Starbucks in Syria,” Metro.co.uk, November 13, 2015, accessed December 19, 2015, <http://metro.co.uk/2015/11/13/western-isis-jihadists-complain-theres-no-starbucks-in-syria-5498519/#ixzz3sVeRdJb2>

among the common complaints that paint life under the terrorist organization as uncomfortable, even for Westerners who signed up to live among bloodthirsty killers.”⁵⁴

Lost in the complex layers of cross-cultural difference, these militants are trapped between their Western upbringing, sealed fate of being traitors to their nation states, and imminent death if their disloyalty to ISIS is ever revealed. The only relief left for their misery is venting out on social media. Frustration and cross-cultural conflicts were enraging to 27-year-old British fighter Omar Hussein; his ethnocentric opinion of Arabs is obvious in his criticism of his fellow jihadi companions and their poor manners. Speaking about Arabs, he complained that when serving them food he had to treat them like children. He writes:

As a whole have a unique culture, which differs dramatically from the western lifestyle,” [...] Adding: “If one is unaware of these cultural differences then it could be quite peculiar, annoying and, at times, somewhat stressful to interact and associate with them.” He proceeds to “list a few of their habits which Arabs are known for.” His subheadings include: “A lack of privacy for other’s space,” “Childish behavior,” “Stealing shoes,” “Etiquettes when eating,” “Getting angry” “Sleeping habits,” “The staring competition,” “Treating animals badly,” “Beggars,” “Driving ‘skills’,” and “Empty words.”⁵⁵

Hussein, or “Mummy’s boy” as one article called him for still living with his mother at his age, who is a member of a barbaric organization that beheads innocent civilians and makes videos of it, invokes “the clash of civilizations” discourse stating: “sometimes it may get quite hard to hold a civilized conversation with a Syrian man.”⁵⁶ He concludes one of his postings on a Tumblr page by “advising would-be jihadis to join ‘European battalions’.”⁵⁷ The racial undertone in his rants and proclivity to judge others reflect an excessive snobbishness and vanity that reaches the point of not only categorizing all Arabs as Syrians but also blaming them for their inability to understand British cultural nuances and non-verbal codes. Without a shred of doubt about his sense of belonging, Hussein writes: “[a]s Westerners, we naturally tend not to mention other people’s faults especially when it seems obvious as we believe that they would come to their senses. Usually coughing or clearing one’s throat is an indirect sign to tell others of your presence, but with Syrians, you literally need to state the obvious before they come to their senses.”⁵⁸

Regularly, new recruits have been posting their complaints about cultural collisions, gossip, difficult jobs, and demeaning manual labor like cleaning “toilets for senior leaders.”⁵⁹ With larger distribution, these confessions could eventually weaken ISIS’s recruiting schemes and media spectacle. It is also important to note that ISIS did not invent media spectacles out of the imagination of its own villain visionaries but

⁵⁴ Chiaramonte,

⁵⁵ Agron,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Mike Wendling, “What a British jihadist’s anti-Arab rant tells us about life in the so-called Islamic State?” BBC.com, September 17, 2015, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-34270771>

⁵⁸ Agron,

⁵⁹ Jonah Bennett, “Western Jihadists Complain About Poor Internet, Lack of Starbucks in Islamic State,” *Daily Caller*, November 13, 2015, accessed December 22, 2015 <http://dailycaller.com/2015/11/13/western-jihadists-complain-about-poor-internet-lack-of-starbucks-in-islamic-state/#ixzz3v9FVTdrc>

relied heavily on a rich tradition of Western cinematic productions. ISIS knew exactly the kind of images and montage needed to attract Western audiences. In what follows, the article introduces a brief history of the spectacle and explains how ISIS reinvented the European style of public executions by taking it to a ceremonial level.

Spectacles and Rock and Roll

Highlighting the earlier role of viewers in defining the meaning and impact of spectacles, Peter Spierenburg explains that “[t]he spectacle of suffering did not take place in a void. It would hardly have made sense for the magistrates to stage it if there were no audience. Spectators were indeed numerous,”⁶⁰ during acts of public executions in pre-industrial Europe. Between 1650 and 1750, Spierenburg documents 2,991 live public executions.⁶¹ “There were even some cases of an almost theatrical reproduction of the crime in the execution of the guilty man – with the same instruments, the same gestures,”⁶² observes Foucault. This penal system of mutilating the bodies of condemned individuals or convicts publicly as a form of spectacle helped edify European populations while establishing the early modern state; its ultimate goal was to teach discipline through real and severe punishment. “Decapitation was the method of execution most commonly used, except in Austria, where hanging was preferred, and it was carried out by a variety of methods, largely according to tradition: the guillotine in areas influenced by French tradition, such as the Rhineland or the south-west, the sword in conservative states such as Hanover and Bavaria, the handheld axe in east-Elbian Prussia and most of the north.”⁶³ Public display of punishment however was not always effective in producing order. With time passing and the entertaining aspect reduced, it often agitated crowds and drew carnivalesque reactions from the masses. By the end of the nineteenth century, the changing political conditions in Europe, and the territorial expansion of European empires, public punishment was abolished in many European nations except for the practice of decapitation which would persist in the colonies throughout the long period of colonial rule. As Massad states, “the French state’s “*laïc*” practice of executing criminals through decapitation by the guillotine continued until 1977, with the last person decapitated being coincidentally a French Muslim criminal.”⁶⁴

Such history of a savage European legal system and aggression against those perceived as “uncivilized adversaries” represented a central component in many radical organizations’ recruiting doctrines including al Qaeda. But al Qaeda, explains Gilles Kepel, was not able to “engineer a spectacular attack [...its recruiters] had no way to reach out to the masses. They have no charities. They do not spread the word. They had no way to deal with grass roots politics. So, they cannot mobilize,”⁶⁵ and even though al Qaeda periodically delivered VHS tapes, often of poor quality, to Al-Jazeera TV, they could not produce

⁶⁰ Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression; From a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 81.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 112.

⁶² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 45.

⁶³ Richard Evans, “Justice Seen, Justice Done? Abolishing Public Executions in 19th-Century Germany,” *History Today*, 104 (1996): accessed December 2, 2015, <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-evans/justice-seen-justice-done-abolishing-public-executions-19th-century-germany#sthash.2qeTWtup.dpuf>

⁶⁴ Joseph Massad, “Assimilating French Muslims,” *The Electronic Intifada*, January 22, 2015, accessed January 3, 2016, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/assimilating-french-muslims/14205>

⁶⁵ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), vii.

grotesque images but rather announced threats and assertively promised future attacks. ISIS's media experts, on the other hand, deployed unprecedented iconography of human cruelty and extreme brutality of real beheadings and barbaric executions using all aspects of media technology to maximize the horrific impact. Filming the Jordanian pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh burning alive in December 2014, they were clearly using multiple digital cameras, software programs, editing, sound techniques, and a coherence of image, text, and sound that had cinematic qualities. With strong sadistic inclinations, ISIS captured Hollywood-like scenes of death that horrified a global audience. In addition to their brutality and military capabilities, "their extraordinary command of seemingly less lethal weapons: state-of-the-art videos, ground images shot from drones and multilingual Twitter messages"⁶⁶ have proven effective in attracting global attention and dedicated new recruits. The shock effect of their messages is fortified by the sophistication of their media production skills. "But part of the modernity of Isis is its high level of media literacy. Terror is only part of the movement's communications strategy"⁶⁷ and for greater impact, ISIS stages native speakers' characters in promotional media addressing a Western audience and contextualizing their messages, as Baudrillard observes, within the gap between a rich glamorous north and impoverished war-ridden south. Most videos play like short ads vignette style and are distributed comfortably using global connectivity and easy access to social media. Multiculturalism and embracing racial differences are fundamental reoccurring themes in their propagandist productions.

A new release that came out at the end of November 2015 by Al Hayet Media Center describes "shirk" and nationalism as synonymous; while displaying photos of smiling soldiers of different races, the narrator states in English that under *Khilafah* "there is no difference between an Arab or non-Arab, a black man and a white man except through piety. This is the glory of faith that unites us"; and the following text appears: "UNITED BY ISLAM."⁶⁸ By presenting twisted interpretations of theology with great HD video production, their message targets both the repressed and the delusional, promising participation in "the daily practice of the ISIS gangs [which] includes full-scale grotesque orgies, including robberies, gang rapes, torture and murder of infidels"⁶⁹ in real life and anchor other messages in rewarding sexual fantasies with flocks of heavenly sensuous virgins and rivers of wine and honey in the hereafter.

Like a scene taken out of the Hunger Games series, "a recent video showing boys in camouflage and ISIS bandanas learning hand-to-hand combat. The militants call them the 'Cubs of the Caliphate'."⁷⁰ Speaking to the *Observer*, British Imam Alyas Kurmani, a peace activist who works with young British Muslims explains the fascination with ISIS in the following terms: "this is the new rock and roll; jihad is sexy. The kid who was not very good-looking now looks good holding a gun. He can get a bride now, he's

⁶⁶ Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, "ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media," New York Times.com, August 30, 2014, accessed November 15, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/world/middleeast/isis-displaying-a-deft-command-of-varied-media.html?_r=3

⁶⁷ Helen Lewis, "The utopia of Isis: inside Islamic State's propaganda war," The Newstatesman.com, November 20, 2015, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2015/11/utopia-isis-inside-islamic-state-s-propaganda-war>

⁶⁸ "ISIS Releases New 'No Respite' Propaganda Video in English," Liveleak.com, November 12, 2015, accessed December 2, 2015, http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=18c_1448405998

⁶⁹ Slavoj Zizek, "ISIS is a Disgrace to True Fundamentalism. Opinionator," September 3, 2014, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/isis-is-a-disgrace-to-true-fundamentalism/>

⁷⁰ Jethro Mullen, "What is ISIS Appeal for Young People?" CNN.com, February 25, 2015, accessed December 28, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/25/middleeast/isis-kids-propaganda/>

powerful. The ISIS gun is as much a penis extension as the stockbroker with his Ferrari.”⁷¹ As insightful as these interpretative efforts are at explaining what drives many of these “singularities” to embark on such journeys of self-annihilation, government officials are still not deterred from producing and seeking collective measures that treat the entire Muslim community as suspect.

Conclusion

This article has shown that the problem of Western recruits joining ISIS cannot be addressed adequately as long as the West continues to deny that it is, to a certain extent, of its own making. Projecting it onto the other further alienates already stigmatized communities and marginalized citizens who feel mistreated and rejected by their own states and fellow compatriots. With time, their grievances become overwhelming and their desire for assimilation is reduced and the search for alternatives gives birth to a destructive driving force that makes extremism seem like a viable option. While acknowledging ISIS’s effective propaganda spectacles, the article’s central thesis argues that these recruits are reacting to structural alienation and systematic exclusion at home where they are torn between having a Western identity and their inability to belong in a hateful West; nevertheless, leaving their comfortable lives behind for a deadly adventure with ISIS or plot for revenge does not make them any less Western. Perhaps this is what Hénin conveyed about his fellow jailers sounding so familiar; they were nicknamed “after members of the Beatles, because of their strong English accents.”⁷² Still many more recruits continue to express a sense of regret for leaving their homes. Reading between the lines of their Tweets, their complaints show the depth of their dilemma and the fact that they miss being home. Despite the cracks in their recruiting scheme, ISIS’s propagandists are tireless, constructing spectacles to win the hearts and minds of more alienated Westerners and capitalizing on the current wave of a right-wing Islamophobic frenzy, the defamation of Islam and Muslims by political figures, and the indictment of Muslim communities as the object of legitimate fear and hostility. A recent promotional video focuses specifically on the organization’s belief in equality between all as one of its core values. On the other hand, Western governments are still investing in spying, surveillance, and other forms of intelligence gathering proving time and again that they can relate to their Muslim communities only through anti-radicalism and counter-terrorism programs. Consequently, the mistrust growing among Western Muslims of their governments and communities leaves very little hope for meaningful possibilities of integration.

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⁷¹ Tracey McVeigh, “‘Recruiter’ of UK jihadis: I regret opening the way to Isis,” *The Observer.com* June 13, 2015, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/13/godfather-of-british-jihadists-admits-we-opened-to-way-to-join-isis>

⁷² Tanveer Mann, “Jihadi John’s British ‘associate’ nicknamed after The Beatles is detained in Turkey,” *Metro.co.uk*. November 13, 2015, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://metro.co.uk/2015/11/13/jihadi-johns-british-associate-nicknamed-after-the-beatles-is-detained-in-turkey-5500043/#ixzz3zAJluOwX>

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