

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN ISIS AND ITS PEOPLE: THE
ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE RECRUITMENT OF
FEMALES

By
HADIL AYMAN KHANI

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

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Title: The Marriage Between ISIS And Its People: The Role Of Social Media In The Recruitment Of Females

This study examines how ISIS used social media, specifically Tumblr, to recruit females. The project creates a connection between social media, gender studies, and images to the larger ideological framework of ISIS. Explicit attention is given to how the overarching themes in the blog posts relate to the modes of address in an effort to address women. The study relies upon a qualitative textual analysis of three accounts that appeal to women who want to join ISIS and depicts the ideological framework of ISIS.

The findings reveal that the way in which ISIS appeals to women through social media is constructed according to gender dichotomies and the scopoc regime of images. Moreover, the recurring themes and modes of address in all the Tumblr accounts adhere to the ideological framework of ISIS in their recruitment efforts that pertain to women.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

ISIS is a complex, multifaceted entity that has emerged as a result of political, social, and economic interrelations. One of the significant ways ISIS has stood out from other radical groups is in its use of social media to recruit, disseminate messages and propaganda, and circulate its ideology (Atwan, 2015).

The theoretical frameworks that can help us better understand in what ways ISIS utilized social media to recruit females include the impact of social media in the promotion of concepts and ideologies and the connection between gender and social media. In doing so, a clearer framework emerges as to how ISIS utilizes words and images on their social media platforms to create meanings, visual effects, and create connections with their overarching ideology.

Based on the analysis, we can highlight several findings on the impact of social media and its attempt to attract people, specifically women, into joining ISIS. ISIS achieves power by spreading images and texts with manipulated signifiers that fit in with their ideology. Hence, ISIS uses social media in a way that creates a reality, which concurs with their ideology. In addition, we can suggest that ISIS utilizes social media in three manners: (1) to influence their target audience (2) initiate action and (3) influence (Garrett, 2006). This is achieved by providing their target audience with resources and information, allowing for the expression of perspective, which leads to the formation of a collective identity, and creating a sense of community. Finally, we can associate the role

of gender with social media by concluding that the public/private dichotomy that ISIS endorses in the offline world is apparent in the online world as well (Ross and Byerly, 2004).

The status of the Islamic State in the region is continuously changing and extremely fluid due to drastic changes in the political sphere. The latest developments regarding ISIS include: 1) continuous expansion in territory and influence, 2) a US air bombardment, 3) the West, Iran, Russia, and Assad decided to join forces as the destruction of ISIS becomes a priority in the world security agenda, 4) sanctions have been lifted off of Iran, which led to its re-entering into the international community (Atwan, 2015).

ISIS continues to attack regional and international targets, the last one being the attack on Brussels in March 2016. In the past year, it attacked Shia mosques in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as conducting a massacre in Tunisia against British tourists (Farwell, 2014).

B. Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to identify how ISIS uses the social media platform, Tumblr, to attempt to recruit females. Since Tumblr is an interactive platform that allows its users to share both texts and images, it is important to understand the presence of codes, which add a social aspect to semiotics since codes are composed of familiar practices that abide to a cultural framework. Any signs and objects in a cultural sphere carry meanings that provide us with a schema of the underlying framework of that culture. By understanding the codes, their inter and intrarelations, and the contexts they exist in, we get a better understanding of a particular culture (Chandler, 2007). The

codes here are contracting relations with the signs by allowing the reader access into the ideology of ISIS. Moreover, by understanding the discourse used in the Tumblr accounts, we can gain a better understanding of the key themes and relate them to the larger ideological frameworks at work. Ultimately, we will be able to understand how the discourse attempts to persuade people.

C. Brief Summary of the Method

This study engages in textual analysis of three Tumblr account in order to investigate what ISIS articulates within the space of social media. In this study, each Tumblr account is analyzed in order to identify the dominant codes and preferred readings and relate them to the overarching ideology of ISIS. Each account analyzed here is unique in terms of mode of address, content, topics, and overall interests. In order to answer how ISIS utilized Tumblr to serve its interests, I investigated the modes of address used and the social and compositional modalities in several posts of each Tumblr account. In the first stage of my preliminary analysis, I occupied myself in the text and images of the accounts in order to extract the dominant themes and topics. During the second stage, I identified three dominant themes that were apparent in all the blogs, which include (1) Islamic ideology (2) planning for the trip to the lands of ISIS (3) the lifestyle expected on arrival. In the third and final stage, the analysis stage, I analyzed the intertextuality of the blogs. This stage included identifying the relationships between the signs and relating them to larger frameworks. Moreover, I was able to identify how ISIS used the text and images in an attempt to create their accounts of the social world.

Chapter II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The shift from pre-modernity to postmodernity can be traced in the significance of the visual in contemporary societies. In pre-modern societies, visual images were at a minimum. With the onset of modernity, a larger emphasis was placed on visual images, in which the scopic regime that regards seeing and knowledge as synonymous was introduced (Rose, 2012). Mitchell (1986, 1994) noted that images and language are intricately intertwined, which leads to the notion of ocularcentrism in modernity. This notion is visible in postmodernity as well, since people interact with visually constructed notions and experiences on a regular basis. In reference to the use of social media by ISIS, we can suggest that ISIS heavily depends on the use of images on its social media platforms due to the power associated with images as a source of knowledge and to fortify their ideology.

The uniting of people for a common cause is observed in social movements and can be seen in the migration practiced by ISIS mujahideen. Communication technologies are key components for social movements since they inform the initiative of collective action and ultimately influence it. According to Harlow (2012), social media enhances offline activity by providing resources to its audience and it creates a new kind of activism that advances social impact. Moreover, Garrett (2006) argues that there are three mechanisms that create a link between technology and social movements' participation: reduction of costs, promotion of collective identity, and creation of community. The reduction of costs notion emerges as a result of the low costs of

participation and engagement that are involved in the dissemination of information using the social media platforms. Therefore, through the use of Facebook, Tumblr, WhatsApp, and other platforms, messages are directed to a large number of people that convey the voice of social movements at a minimum cost. As for the promotion of collective identity notion, individuals can express their perspectives and social goals with dispersed others. Finally, the creation of a community notion is a cohesion process that is manifested in the social movement by creating the perception of a community. ISIS used social media to boost its offline activities by showcasing its slickly produced videos, battles, acquired territories, and accomplishments. It did so at an easy and fast pace due to the low costs associated with the use of social media and with the goal to promote a collective identity by creating a sense of brotherhood through the use of pictures, quotes, and sayings, and to create a sense of community by showcasing the development of the 'state' of ISIS. In addition, Laer and Aelst (2009) suggest that the Internet has altered the field of action of social movements in two ways. The first way the Internet has changed the action repertoire is by allowing more people to engage in an easier and faster way. The second way is the creation of new and adaptable tools and platforms to stimulate activism.

Gender studies suggest that the roles associated with gender are socially constructed. Scott (1988) noted that "gender is the social organization of sexual difference and it is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences (p. 2). Mitra (2001) stated that the Internet allows marginalized groups to be heard. "It is a veritable paradox of power because the traditionally powerful, based on their conventional sources of power (financial, political, etc.), are competing against those who

have been conventionally powerless but have begun to gain a sense of discursive power because they can now find a speaking space on the Internet” (p. 507).

The Internet has become one of the most dominant channels of communication, thus causing it to alter activism, political campaigns, and public discourse. Feminist groups depend on the Internet in order to circulate information, produce content, forming collective identities, and mobilizing people (Chen, 2015). The patriarchal notion, which creates the public versus private dichotomy, in which each gender is associated to a specific sphere, is apparent in both the offline and online world. Women are regarded as belonging to the private sphere of life, specifically the home, family, and private relations. Meanwhile, men are suited for the public sphere, such as corporate establishments and the overall political realm (Ross and Byerly, 2004). The women in ISIS are restricted to the private space since ISIS functions according to patriarchal and Islamic orders. We see this notion expressed in the concepts and themes discussed in the Tumblr post that are dedicated and targeted to women.

To conclude, all of the above theoretical frameworks can be applied to the concept of *hijra* that is practiced by ISIS members and its manifestation is visible on social media platforms, specifically Tumblr, which will be discussed in later chapters of my study. The dissemination of information by ISIS on various social media platforms is not an irrational, groundless affair. Instead, various elements come into play when deciding what information to share with the public, the underlying ideology that justifies the content or image, and what the ultimate goal is. The role of the patriarchal order and the governing logics that function in accordance with power and authority strictly

implement their rules and regulations on the type of content and images used by ISIS on social media outlets as well.

Chapter III

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. History Of ISIS

The origin of ISIS can be traced back to Iraq and Syria. During Saddam's reign, Iraq had a robust economy in which the Iraqi citizens were provided with adequate education and health care systems. People of different religious backgrounds, mainly Sunni, Kurds, and Shia, lived peacefully together. Until the 1980's, the US supported Iraq in its war against Iran. Saddam was recognized as an ally in the region's balance of power. Following the war, Saddam's army was extremely strong and skilled, which posed a threat to the security of Israel, especially since Saddam had possession of chemical weapons (Al-Ibrahim, 2015).

The US reassessed their ties with Saddam and began to view him as a threat. It waged a war on Iraq, which destroyed its infrastructure and created intense hate for the US in the hearts of the Iraqis in addition to causing 1.4 million deaths. Saddam's support of the Palestinians through financial and political means, in addition to his use of oil as a weapon against Israel, all led to the West's invasion of Iraq. The publicly stated rationales for invading Iraq were two fold: Saddam's supposed possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction and his supposed affiliation with Al-Qaida (Al-Ibrahim, 2015).

Following Saddam's fall, chaos and sectarianism between Sunnis and Shiites grew. This laid the groundwork for the growth of radicalism, which allowed ISIS to prosper due to the Sunni minority who wanted to belong to any group that would offer salvation since they became marginalized. The insurgency was composed of several

military groups, which fell under the Jaish Ansar al-Sunnah umbrella, a group that ISIS would emerge from. They all aimed to establish an Islamic State in Iraq. Iraq became the training ground for jihadists and the insurgency began recruiting foreign fighters to join the group (Atwan, 2015)

The rebirth of Al Qaeda in Iraq and its evolution into ISIS was built on the sectarian jihadist doctrine of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's, Al Qaeda in Iraq's late leader. It called for a Sunni regional caliphate that was cleansed of all other religions and sects (Celso, 2015). Al Zarqawi's strategy planted the seeds for the formation of ISIS and he was regarded as their first emir. He believed that creating sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia would allow the entity to expand and gain power. By recruiting fighters from neighboring countries, which were primarily Sunni, the entity flourished. He exercised a form of psychological warfare by posting gruesome videos of public executions and beheadings. Following Al Zarqawi's death, the name of Jaish Ansar al Sunnah was changed to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The group's aim was to develop an Islamic caliphate in Iraq. However, ISI did not prosper due to its weak infrastructure, loss of multiple major cities, and declining number of foreign jihadists (Celso, 2015). After the US's withdrawal from Iraq, ISI reemerged with American-trained Sunni soldiers who were not allowed to participate in the Iraqi government. In 2013, ISI rebranded itself to become ISIS due to the joining of Syrian jihadist groups (Atwan, 2015).

ISIS also created sectarian tensions and political chaos in Syria as it did in Iraq. What began as peaceful protests against the Bashar Al-Assad regime later turned into a full-blown civil war, which caused both regional and international powers to align

themselves with either entity. Prior to Bashar Al-Assad, his father, Hafez Al-Assad knew that the Islamic groups posed a large threat to his security. He exercised full force against revolts that were led by Islamist groups. The most prominent one was the Hama massacre of 1982, which put an end to any Islamist movement for nearly two decades (Atwan, 2015).

The civil war in Syria erupted with the Syrian army, Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, and China on one side, and Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the West, and ISIS on the other side. Qatar and Saudi Arabia armed the rebel groups with weapons, such as rockets, rifles, and machine guns, while Iran and Russia supplied the Assad army with anti-tank missiles, and rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. The Arab League contributed to the escalation of the crisis by stopping any form of diplomatic solutions and arming the jihadist groups. Moreover, sectarianism contributed to the success of the Islamic State in Syria (Atwan, 2015).

B. The Organizational Structure of ISIS

The caliphate of ISIS seeks to legitimize what they do by promoting an ideology that their practices are based on Quranic and historical practices that dictate the administrative and decision-making heuristics; hence, a version of Islamic law strictly commands life in the Islamic state. The authority is given to the caliphate, in the case of ISIS, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. The entity is semi-centralized, yet disciplined, especially since they have control of a large geographical area. Baghdadi and deputies Abu Muslim al-Turkmani and Abu Ali al-Anbari create the objectives and goals of the group, and transmit them to the lower stages in the hierarchy. The manners in which the goals are

carried out are left to the freedom of the local commanders and administrators. This system allows for effective operations from a geographical and political sense and provides individuals with autonomous power in military terms (Al-Ibrahim, 2015).

The state's income comes from multiple outlets. The main ones include "oil fields and refineries, looting, gun-running, bank robberies, slave trading, fees from supportive governments, and ransoms for kidnapped victims" (Atwan, 2015, p. 140). It abides by the process of diversification in which multiple revenue streams that involve both local and international partners are implemented. Moreover, it controls over 11 oil fields in both Iraq and Syria, in addition to refineries. ISIS also looted antiquities, which are abundant in Iraq and Syria since they are filled with ancient sites that date back 6000 years. They justify their actions by claiming that the shrines and tombs require cleansing since they go against Islamic teachings. Prior to destroying them, they extract all the valuable assets, which include "figurines, gold and silver coins, mosaics, jewelry, and cylinder seals and tablets," (Atwan, 2015, p. 146) and sell them at profitable prices to the West.

The success of the Islamic State is due to networks that have been created a long time ago in addition to the transnational support it receives. Foreign jihadist fighters have created "intricate, mutually supportive networks" (Atwan, 2015, p. 43) that have contributed to the strength of the entity decades ago (Atwan, 2015). Moreover, Western countries have empowered radical Islam in an effort to serve their own interests in foreign policy. The US and Britain have previously supported and armed Islamist groups, which has reciprocally contributed to the development and growth of ISIS (Atwan, 2015).

In addition, Salafist teachings, a religious-political ideology, dominate a strong player in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia, which has funded and continues to fund extremist groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. The teachings of Salafism urge Muslims to revert back to what it considers to be the origins of Islam: the Quran and the Sunnah. ‘True faith’ is composed of takfir, or condemning Muslims as deserters, and jihad against the infidels or *kufar*. The formation of a caliph, who would be recognized as the ruler of all Muslims, is critical in Salafi ideology. “The increasingly transnational nature of jihad is due to a number of factors: the enthusiastic export of Salafism throughout the Muslim world by the Saudi establishment, and the resultant expansion of extremist mosques, schools and universities that posit jihad as a religious obligation; a large number of Islamic charities that offer funding and help with the logistics of travel to people recruited in mosques; finally, the explosion in the online recruitment of foreign fighters achieved by ISIS” (Al-Ibrahim, 2015, p. 161). With that being said, the Saudi export of Salafism does not primarily affect my current research site per se.

C. The Power of Social Media

Social media is a medium through which people can build common identities and networks of solidarity and trust. It allows culturally diverse and spatially dispersed individuals to mobilize for a common cause. It became a channel for the concentration of emotions and passions that are transformed into action for a unified cause in scenarios such as the Egyptian uprisings, the ‘indignados’ in Spain, and the Occupy movements in the US. Hence, it can act as a form of collective aggregation that allowed diverse people to unite along with other predisposed frustrations and social networks. With the ease of

social media and its collective action, connections are developed at a faster rate, which reciprocally accelerates the speed of their actions. It directs people towards specific events, provides them with instructions on how to act, and composes an emotional account to trigger the movement (Gerbaudo, 2012).

A participatory culture that allows the end-user to create content is an integral component of social media, which altered the hierarchy of the communication process. The term ‘self mass-communication’ emerged, which describes the power given to people since they can now disseminate information to a large group of people in autonomy. However, despite such egalitarian ideologies, there still exists a hierarchal distribution in which a group of people controls the communication process and takes advantage of people’s emotionality. Ultimately, social media acts as a tool for leaders to exercise their control in a concealed manner, in order to maintain a sense of freedom in users (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Prior to Web 2.0 technology, people were limited to web pages that provided their end-users with minimal interactivity and participation. With the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media, a new sphere that provided people with flexibility, connectivity, creativity, and user-generated content surfaced. It provided people with new channels of communication, restructured social perceptions, and founded collective interests and organizations. With the presence and emergence of social media, a multitude of cultural representations and identities appeared that underwent “reimaginings, magnifications, deletions, translations, revisionings, and remakings” (Coleman, 2010, p. 491), which facilitated the rise of new collectivities. Ultimately, social media has become a major venue for people to articulate their ideologies, beliefs, and practices (Coleman, 2010).

Some of the most prominent social movements that had a large impact around the world all have a common feature: the use of social media as a mobilization and informative tool.

In November 2004, Ukraine witnessed the peaceful protesting of activists against the fraud that took place in the elections, which proclaimed Victor Yanukovich as a winner. After days of protests and people mobilizations for the 2004 Orange Revolution, Victor Yushenko, the heavily backed candidate, won the elections. The people that were involved in the protests were 30 years old or younger and used their mobile phones and online resources to spread their messages (Goldstein, 2007).

On January 4, 2008, Oscar Morales, initiated a Facebook group “Un million de voces contra las FARC” (One million voices against FARC) to protest against the kidnapping of people by guerrilla fighters. The social media campaign was extremely successful, which caused it to accelerate and progress in Colombia until it received traditional media support, civic society actions, and private support. Moreover, around ten million people in Colombia and 45 million people in cities around the world protested in a month following the initiative; hence, causing the protest to achieve high impact in the world’s public opinion (La Rosa, 2014).

In Moldova, people protested against the reelection of the Communist Party who was notorious for its corrupt parliamentary elections in April 6, 2009. A customized hashtag, #pman, was used by thousands of people in unity with the protest. The social media platforms used included Live Journal, Facebook, and blogs. It assimilated the participation of 15,000 people in a few hours. The protest was named the Twitter

Revolution and received attention at an international scale (Mingui-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009).

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia that began in December 2010 witnessed protests against the government and focused on unemployment and corruption issues. The protests witnessed magnitude attention, which led to the resignation of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Moreover, it was noted that social media and its ability to spread the idea, coordinate social actions, and showcase videos of the protest, along with international mass media and human mobilizations all contributed to the success of the protests in Tunisia (Van Niekerk, Pillay, and Maharaj, 2011).

Therefore, social media is a tool that can be used to activate social movements; however, one cannot neglect the importance of social, political, and communicational conditions as well. Moreover, the use of social media does not guarantee the same impact and success in all social movements. Finally, social movements that depend on social media should pay close attention to the time span between the planning phase and implementation phase, since third parties usually interfere in an attempt to prevent them from being launched.

ISIS is analogous to the social movements because of their similarities. Both have a specific goal and use social media as a tool to achieve that goal. However, they also have several differences since social movements adhere to a specific timeframe, entice people to gather in a specific place, and usually stop once they achieve their proclaimed goal. By comparing the similarities between social movements and the migration of women to the Islamic State, we can utilize the similarities in order to understand the impact of social media.

D. ISIS and Social Media

The primary attempt by jihadists to take advantage of the Internet occurred with the establishment of Azzam, a media organization that disseminates information about Jihad and Mujahideens. In accordance with the progression of technology, jihadists then turned to the use of emails to transmit their uncensored ideologies and messages, while targeting their audience to maximize their exposure. Thus, the Internet permitted jihadists to spread their ideas with minimal censorship or filtering. The jihadi presence remained minimal up until the early 2000s; however, they created a framework for future, more sophisticated uses of the Internet. With the popular rise of the Internet, jihadists increased their participation in such fields, which reciprocally increased their popularity (Farwell, 2014). Following the 9/11 events, online surveillance peaked in order to limit terrorist activity online. However, a 2005 study concluded that there existed over 4300 active jihadists forums online (Weimann, 2006).

Since jihadi websites were continuously being disrupted and shut down by governments, they made a transition to online forums in an effort to avoid such mishaps. In addition, the security paradigms on websites as a result of the September 11 attacks forced jihadists to shift away from the use of websites. “In an effort to counter the systemic disruption or removal of important jihadists websites, the transition was made from traditional websites to online forums in a conscious effort to delegate responsibility to a suitable large and diffused body of anonymous web users” (Awan and Al-Lam, 2009, p. 57-58). Despite this shift, the jihadi hierarchy continued to dominate in a strict and organized manner. Finally, the archetype shifted once again to include social media platforms, which allowed social networking and user-generated content to thrive

(Veilleux-Lepage, 2014). ISIS is not the first entity to utilize social media as a means to disseminate its messages. In September 2013, Al-Shabaab used Twitter to flaunt its attack in Nairobi and Lashkar-e-Taiba turned to Google Earth in an effort to gather information during its attack on Mumbai in November 2008 (Farwell, 2014).

The rise of ISIS and its complex use of social media as a platform for interactions and recruitment strategies is an integral point to consider. Hoyle et al., (2015) analyzed the sophisticated propaganda machine ISIS uses in its recruitment efforts. They noted that ISIS developed an aggressive strategy that uses social media platforms to try to reach, influence, and recruit its supporters. It employed supporters that spread propaganda and provided a voice that supported their ideology. Its members also shared intimate details about their experiences and narratives that convinced others to join them. It also provided a safe-haven for people who have embraced extreme ideologies to express their thoughts and philosophies and receive validation and support in return (Hoyle et al., 2015).

In order to promote its propaganda, ISIS turned to the Internet to “recruit fighters and intimidate enemies” (Farwell, 2014, p. 52). It has recognized the importance of media, and more specifically social media, in the recruitment process of foreign participants (Peresin and Cervone, 2015). “ISIS’s use of global media plays a significant role in the process of individual participation in jihad, of both women and men from the West, by fulfilling three functions: radicalization, recruitment, and identity formation” (Peresin and Cervone, 2015, p. 499) The manner in which ISIS uses and understands social media exceeds other militant groups. A big component of its stated aim is to convince Sunni Muslims that it is their religious duty to restore the Islamic caliphate and migrate to the

lands of ISIS (Farwell, 2014). “The group’s narrative portrays ISIS as an agent of change, the true apostle of a sovereign faith, a champion of its own perverse notions of social justice, and a collection of avengers bent on settling accounts for the perceived sufferings of others” (Farwell, 2014, p. 52) Moreover, ISIS maintains the Islamic ideology in its content and often embellishes its posts with verses from the Quran as a mode of address. A dominant thread is the desire for martyrdom, which is celebrated and cast as extremely desirable. Furthermore, it created its own Facebook, called Muslimbook, which is heavily secured and is an outlet for jihadists to converse with potential recruits. It also launched a mobile phone application called “Dawn of Glad Tidings” in English that provides its users with the latest news and uses their Twitter accounts to automatically spread information. Hence, ISIS uses social media in order to keep their followers engaged and interested as well as to counter the propaganda efforts of their enemies (Atwan, 2015).

The strategy ISIS utilizes in their media campaign is two-fold: they aim to incite both fear and love. By showing brutal images of decapitated heads and public tortures, they aim to frighten their enemies. On the other hand, they also aim to recruit sympathizers by depicting an ideal lifestyle in the caliphate (Peresin and Cervone, 2015). The images used by ISIS on social media platforms are both powerful and emotional because they include signs and codes that pertain to certain ideologies in an abstract form. They are used to build a customized target audience as well as to create fear among their enemies. Their choice to include beheadings and executions are meant to intimidate their “enemies”. On the other hand, portraying warmer images that show the daily lives

of people aim to communicate the message that ISIS indorses the welfare of their people under Islamic law (Farwell, 2014).

Their strategy is unlike any other due to their online conducts, involvement of Westerners in their appeals, and having a timely and dominant presence 24 hours a day (Peresin and Cervone, 2015). They mirror their target audience's online patterns in an effort to recruit and disseminate their propaganda. They also have full autonomous control over their own media outlets. Messages are then retweeted/ reblogged/ reposted by using trending hashtags in an effort to attract the largest audience possible (Farwell, 2014).

ISIS uses several social media platforms during the recruitment process that occurs online. After initial contact is made, Whatsapp and Kik are used to intensify the conversation and build stronger relationships. Skype is also used for 'real time' conversations and reporting. Twitter and Facebook are used to "cyber stalk" as well as to find potential recruits. The messages dispersed are meant to create an ideal image of life in ISIS and create an emotional as well as religious appeal to attract potential recruits (Atwan, 2015).

E. Gender and Social Media

At face value, social media is often regarded as a democratic sphere that allows equal participation. It can be shaped and molded by users; hence, causing diversity and discussions to become leading factors in its formation. However, it actually reflects hegemonic discourses and traditional power relations in society in terms of patriarchal and political contexts ((Ross and Byerly, 2004). The gender attributions that are apparent

offline and that are part of the ideological structure of ISIS are translated to the online world through the hegemonic discourse.

Demirhan& Çakır-Demirhan (2015) regarded Twitter as a social media platform that has encouraged the opposition to hegemony; therefore, attuning power relations. Since Twitter allows for the dissemination of different perspectives, the discourses generated ultimately serve both the dominant powers and the opponent struggles. Their study noted that tweets contribute to the patriarchal discourse of women by confirming preconceived notions on the roles a woman should abide to. Moreover, the low opposition level confirms that opposing discourses are not apparent (Demirhan and Çakır-Demirhan, 2015).

Consalvo and Paasonen (2002) found that women's voices were muted online as they were in the offline public discourse despite their increasing numbers. Some thought that online communication would allow equanimity, especially since the web allows for one's identity to remain anonymous; however, the web actually heightened sexism by adopting the patriarchal hegemonic norms of society to the online world (Pedersen and Macafee, 2007) Women have been marginalized to terms constricting and relegating them to an online domestic sphere, which ultimately reiterate male dominated norms (Chen, 2013).

Harp and Tremayne (2006) studied the gender equality in political blogosphere. They found that women's voices are marginalized, which relates to the notion of women and men's places in a private or public realm. Hence, patterns of power reiterate themselves in the unequal representation of women. Therefore, as Ross and Byerly (2004) discusses, the negative social and political aspects of the real world transpire into the virtual world.

F. Women and ISIS

The emergence of ISIS has superseded all geographic boundaries. In an effort to develop a caliphate, they believe that it is critical for women to serve as support systems and form communities that would keep the fighters engaged in the realm (Archetti, 2012). The presence of women is seen as a fundamental component to the development and sustainability of ISIS (Atwan, 2015). The prescribed role of women in ISIS mainly includes supporting their husbands, recruiting female *mujahideens*, practicing medicine, and glorifying the ideology of ISIS and its collaterals on social media (Peresin and Cervone, 2015). Moreover, in order for men to be able to fight, ISIS believe that they must have women by their sides that offer reproductive capabilities, offer a sense of belonging, and serve as a strong morale for them to keep going, which would offer a sense of community and strengthen their formation of an entity and ultimately establish a rigid, fortified presence in the world.

Large efforts have been placed on recruiting women primarily through social media (Hoyle et al., 2015). ISIS created a special media campaign that is especially targeted to Western women. It posts information that explains to them the ideology of ISIS, encourages them to make the *hijra*, highlights the items they would need to make the trip, and elaborates on an idealized concept of marriage and expected living conditions. They portray a sociable atmosphere in a positive light that is embellished with technology, friendship, and love. ISIS also aims to dominate the social media sphere through repetition and transmission, in an effort to erode all other competing voices. On their social media accounts, writers predominantly focused on the concept of tradition, which discussed the familial roles of women as mothers and wives in addition

to generic concepts such as values, morals, and religion. The strategy appears to be that by forming friendly communities, it will become easier for recruits to join or support ISIS (Hoyle et al., 2015). In the summer of 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi launched a social media campaign that showed the ‘soft’ side of life in the Islamic State. It featured images of women in schools, men surrounded by kittens, shopping outlets, and endless food and chocolates. Some women arrive to the Islamic State having developed a relationship with a fighter they wish to marry. The single women are placed with other unmarried women in a house, until they are married off to the fighters. If a match is successful, the fighters call the girl’s parents asking for permission. Women are encouraged to push their husbands to martyrdom and celebrate when their husbands get killed in battle. They are given the title “martyr’s widow” which holds great significance and respect (Atwan, 2015).

Despite not having available data on the number of female Western migrants, it is estimated that women constitute approximately 10 percent of the ISIS population (Atwan, 2015). The majority of Muslim women who have migrated to Syria and Iraq are second-generation Muslim immigrants or Western converts. They are from the United Kingdom, followed by Germany, Austria, and Belgium. The ages of the girls range between 16 and 24; however, there have been reports of girls as young as 13 that have joined the militant group (Peresin and Cervone, 2015).

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

A. Unit of Analysis

The meanings, or representations, people make of the world around them are interpretations of their culture, which structures the way they behave, act, think, and feel. Therefore, what people see and how they see it are all culturally constructed. Culture plays a significant role in the interpretation of texts and images. Seeing or looking at an image or text always takes place in a certain social context, which reciprocally impacts the analysis of the image. The meaning of a visual image can be created on various sites; however, the one that is of significance in the current study is the image site. The modalities, or aspects, of the image site that are of significance in the current study are the social and compositional details (Rose, 2012).

One way to understand visual culture is by considering that the qualities of an image make us understand and shape its compositional and social modalities. The compositional modalities of an image are the visual details of an image, such as “content, color, and spatial organization” (Rose, 2012, p. 28). Images are usually grouped according to genres, or “a specific set of meaningful objects and ways of showing them” (Rose, 2012, p. 28). The social modalities of an image are the political and sociocultural relations that surround an image and affect how it is used and seen (Rose, 2012).

In order to study how ISIS uses the social media platform, Tumblr, to recruit females, textual analysis will be conducted on three blogs. Since the blogs include words and

images, textual analysis will answer my question regarding how meaning is constructed on these blogs. Textual analysis functions by looking at all the details of an image and relating them to broader systems of meaning. Hence, its main concern is to analyze and understand meaning-making processes that are socially significant (Rose, 2012).

Ideology is a main component of textual analysis and its relation to semiotics. It is a form of knowledge, or a worldview, that normalizes unequal social relations. Therefore, ideology represents the interests of those in power by legitimizing social inequalities. It is important to identify how these blogs represent social difference, what they are representing and the values associated with the entity that dispersed them as well as their strategy in creating that association. Thus, my methodology focuses on the social construction of meaning and the ideological connotations and codes (Rose, 2012). To conduct the analysis, I identified the significance and interrelation of written text and analyzed their connections to the wider ideological frameworks (Rose, 2012), specifically those related to gender.

The reason Tumblr was chosen as the social media platform to decipher the messages in the accounts is because the posts are regarded as “dialogues” (Hall, 2006), which demonstrate contextualized content as opposed to monologues, which are usually written according to certain constraints and limits. Marquart (2010) explained that Tumblr is a social media platform that provides “micro-blogging” multimedia services, which include text, videos, and picture integrations. It allows the end-user to “reblog” or “share” content from other Tumblr posts, and send and receive public and private messages. Despite the fact that the Tumblr Community Guidelines forbids any form of terrorism, incitement, and hateful and speech and is equipped with a staff of 318

members, the 200 million blog posts sometimes fall under the radar, which allows ISIS accounts to flourish and remain active. The demographics of Tumblr account are primarily young, female individuals who choose to represent and identify themselves through blogs, images, and videos (Marquart, 2010).

I selected three blogs for the current study after looking at eleven different blogs that share similar ideologies and topics and chose the three most distinctive blogs in terms of their writing style, content, and ideologies.

The list of Tumblr accounts include:

1. <http://bintkhaled.tumblr.com/> Umm Usama (Umm Haritha)
2. <http://diaryofmuhajirah.tumblr.com/> Diary of a Muhajirah
3. <http://ummubaydah.tumblr.com/> Umm Uthman

These three accounts were chosen because (1) they were written with an attempt to recruit females into ISIS and (2) they tackle overlapping themes and utilize similar modes of address.

B. Analysis Plan

In order to understand how ISIS uses Tumblr accounts to recruit females, I identified their topic choice and modes of address. As Stuart Hall (1975) noted, the process of analyzing texts requires three stages. The first stage involves “preliminarily [soaking] into the text, which allows the analyst to focus on particular issue while preserving the big picture” (Hall, 1975, p. 15). The second stage requires “a close reading of the chosen text and preliminary identification of discursive strategies and themes” (Hall, 1975, p.

15). Finally, the third stage requires “the interpretation of the findings within the larger framework of the study” (Hall, 1975, p. 15).

In order to conduct the first stage of my analysis, I wanted to immerse myself in the blog posts in order to identify the dominant topics or methods of appeal used by the bloggers. In order to do so, I carefully read the blogs several times independently. Following that, I read the blogs simultaneously and noted the similarities and differences between them. In doing so, I was able to extract the dominant themes and topics used in the blogs. I also selected the most powerful sections of the text (sentences, paragraphs, and images) and analyzed them in detail.

For the second stage of my analysis, I identified key themes and made connections between key words and key images. I analyzed each blog separately using the three themes I identified in my preliminary analysis, which include (1) Islamic ideology (2) planning for the trip to the lands of ISIS (3) the expected lifestyle. These themes were the most dominant appeals used by the bloggers. At least two of the three themes overlapped in each of the blogs. I defined the theme “Islamic ideology” as any reference to the Sunnah of the Prophet and Quranic verses that discuss the importance of Jihad. The “planning for the trip” theme encompasses all the details corresponding to the details related to taking the voyage, and finally “the expected lifestyle” theme discusses the expected routine of women living under ISIS.

In order to better understand *how* they discuss Islamic ideology, the journey, and the lifestyle, I analyzed the modes of address they used to disseminate their messages. Most of them used more than one mode of address; hence, adopting a discursive style of writing. The modes of address include but are not limited to: (1) use of humor (2) use of

generic quotes (3) use of Quranic verses and Sunnah of the Prophet Mohamed. By identifying these modes of address, I was able to better understand how they iterated their messages in an attempt to influence and persuade their followers. Those who use humor as their mode of address included subtle jokes in an effort to lessen the hardship and sacrifices associated with joining ISIS, while those who used Quranic verses did so in an effort to persuade and signify the importance of joining the jihad. Finally, those who used generic quotes about love and peace did so as a breathing space in comparison to all the other heavy content. I also examined the representation of bodies in images, which includes the age, gender, race, and looks, the representations of manner, which includes the form of expression, eye contact, and pose, the representations of activity, which include touch, body movement, and positional communication, and finally the props and settings of the images. Moreover, in order to better understand the fluid relationship between the signifier and the signified, I examined the iconic, indexical, and symbolic relationships (Rose, 2012).

In the third and final stage, I analyzed the intertextuality of the blog posts. This stage, the interpretation stage, involves identifying the relationships between the different components of the signs in the text and interpreting them within a larger social, cultural and political framework (Rose, 2012). Hall (1980) identified how codes allow access to the ideologies of a society since they “refer to the orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology” and “contract relations for the sign with the wider universe of ideologies in a society” (p. 134). Moreover, Hall (1996) argues, “if ideology is effective, it is because it works at both the rudimentary levels of psychic identity and the drives and at the level of the discursive formation and practices which constitute the

social field” (p. 7). Therefore, the connotative signs, which include both the metonymic and synecdochal relationships, are of significance. Moreover, signs are polysemic since they can have more than one meaning, a preferred meaning is agreed on, which “retains the institutional, political, and ideological order imprinted on them” (Hall, 1980, p. 134)

C. Limitations of the Research Design

Several limitations are apparent in this study, which I hope will be addressed in future studies. The first limitation is the method of sampling. Purposeful sampling of only English blog posts directed the units of analysis since the majority of the posts are written in English in order to appeal to an international audience. Another limitation of the study includes the examination of blog posts by only three accounts, due to the security enforcements taken by Tumblr. Therefore, my findings are not generalizable to all ISIS blog posts. In addition, Tumblr is regarded as a micro blogging platform that allows the formation of a non-reciprocal social network; hence, mutual confirmations are not required. Moreover, Tumblr does not have limitations in terms of length and allows the posting of multimedia content. It is regarded as one of the most popular microblogging social media platform that has captured the attention of 166.4 million users and witnessed 73.4 billion posts as of January 2014 (Chang, Tang, Inagaki, Liu, 2014). Despite Tumblr’s prominence as a social media platform that allows for social exchanges, I can’t interpret the validity and representativeness of the posts since no one can identify the real profile of the users because the only information required to register for Tumblr are an email and password (Chang, Tang, Inagaki, Liu, 2014). In addition, I didn’t identify how people engage and interact with the posts since my study didn’t take into consideration

the comments, tags, and the reposts of each post. Ultimately, solving the above issues will answer to many of the limitations of the current study.

Chapter V

ANALYSIS OF BLOGS

This chapter is divided into three sections, each dedicated to a Tumblr account. In each section, I examine the blogs according to the three themes previously discussed in the methodology section. I also analyze the content by addressing the modes of address used by each blogger, examining the intertextuality of the blogs, and interpreting them within a larger social, cultural and political framework. The modes of address that were analyzed in the blog posts include (1) use of Quranic and Sunnah references (2) use of humor and (3) use of generic/lifestyle quotes. All the modes of address are used to create an emotional and powerful appeal. While it might seem like their insertion is haphazard, they actually relate to larger ideological frameworks and are associated with concrete motives.

The use of social media in social movements can be applied to the migration of mujahideens to ISIS. Social media enhances the offline activities of ISIS by first informing their target audience about their mission, initiating action, and ultimately influencing it. It also provides its audience with resources; thus, advancing social impact. For example, through social media, ISIS provides its users with information on what to pack, how to pass the borders, and the expected lifestyle. In doing so, they are providing an initiative for collective action. Moreover, social media allows for reduction of costs, promotion of collective identity, and the creation of community in social movements (Garrett, 2006). The same mechanisms are seen on the strategy ISIS uses to recruit members via social media. Since the costs to disseminate information and propaganda on

social media are at a minimum, ISIS took full advantage of the opportunity and used several platforms in order to appeal to all audiences. Moreover, it allowed for the expression of perspectives, experiences, and goals (only those that adhere with their ideology) in order to promote a collective identity. Finally, they created a sense of community on their social media platforms, especially through their modes of address, as being one entity where everyone is treated equally and everyone is considered a “brother” or “sister”.

Finally, one can relate the role of gender to social media in how ISIS chooses to integrate women in their platforms. By claiming that women are writing the blogs, they are providing a channel of communication that is for women and by women. However, the rhetoric adheres to the public versus private dichotomy in which all the topics are related to the role of women in the house and as a support system to her husband.

All in all, all the blogs are analyzed in relation to the role of images as a source of power, the use of social media as a tool to create cohesion and advance social impact, and finally the relationship between women and their supposed voice on social media platforms.

A. Umm Usama (Umm Haritha)

The Tumblr account, labeled Umm Haritha, discusses concepts of love, marriage, migration (hijra), and Islamic principles and ideologies. The modes of address used include humor, generic quotes, and references to the Quran and Sunnah. The themes and modes of address are in line with larger ideologies. This analysis will draw connections between this blog and my theoretical framework pertaining to gender and social media.

The posts included in the Tumblr account are in English and Arabic and are a combination of images and quotes. The first blog was posted on May 20, 2014 and the last one was on June 28, 2015. It has been inactive for approximately 9 months.

1. Discussing Core Concepts of ISIS

The Tumblr account, Umm Usama, discusses topics that highlight the ideology of ISIS. It uses several modes of address in an effort to disseminate the overarching philosophy of ISIS. The topics that will be discussed in this section include (1) love and marriage (2) dress code of women (3) brotherhood and (4) the utopic lifestyle in ISIS. These topics will help us in understanding the role of power that is associated with images, the impact of social media in the promotion of concepts and ideologies, and finally the connection between gender and social media.

One of the concepts that is tackled is the idea of love and marriage. One post explains that love is not a fundamental aspect to marriage, but that other qualities are more significant in order for a marriage to be successful. The image shows the mirage of a young man and a woman. All the details of their face and body are covered; however, they are facing each other at eye level, which suggests that they are staring into each other's eyes. The representation of their manner, specifically their pose, shows them embracing one another. The signifiers in the image are the facades of the man and the woman, while the signified is the concept of marriage. The image portrays notions of respect, communication, and love between the man and the woman due to their pose, eye contact, touch, and positional communication. The anchorage, a caption below it, is a hadith that discusses the role of love in a marriage. It discusses how love should not be

the only string holding a couple together, appreciation and loyalty also play a fundamental role. The details of this image all relate the ideology of ISIS. The words are given meaning by highlighting the key terms, loyalty and appreciation, in bold. These key terms tie to the larger framework of ISIS, and not just marriage, by noting that people should have a sense of loyalty towards Islam and ISIS as well as being appreciative to them since they offer their citizens with all the amenities they need. Therefore, one can also read this image as being a marriage between ISIS and its people. The key terms, loyalty and appreciation, are feelings people should hold towards ISIS. They should be forever loyal to it and appreciate its existence. In addition, the image intertwines love, loyalty and appreciation to one's husband with such to ISIS. The image sparks a feeling of collective identity, which ultimately leads to the creation of a community by illustrating the vision of cohesiveness and interconnectedness.

In another post, the mode of address utilized to discuss the lifestyle in ISIS is humor. In this post, the dress code, which forces women to cover their entire body, hair, and face in a black *burqa* is contextualized. It portrays a Simpsons episode that argues how covering one's body and features should not be argued, but rather choosing to show one's body, hair, and jewelry should be considered as an outlier. The synecdochal signs are apparent by using the burqaa to stand for ISIS, while the revealing clothes represent the West. By including images taken from Western media, the images construct a difference between them and the West in addition to the difference in values between them. Their strategy for doing so is cultivated by imploring the dress codes of women in the West and comparing them to the women in ISIS. The irony of this approach is their use of Western connotations, which they ultimately aim to destroy in an effort to return

back to Islamic rules. Therefore, the reliance on a Western vernacular suggests a fundamental compatibility between ISIS and the West, which they outwardly claim that they oppose. The discourse here is disciplining people on how to act and think concerning the visual representation of women (Rose, 2012). It is also reiterating the notion of women's belonging in the private sphere according to their interpretation of the Islamic ideology, by claiming that her physical appearance should be a private notion rather than a public one.

Another post shows an image of two men in a tight embrace. The portrayal of men in the outdoors concurs with the public/ private dichotomy that is associated with each gender. The men are associated with the public sphere since their roles pertain to the political realm; hence, the women are automatically placed in the private sphere (Ross and Byerly, 2004). The imagined, ideal female viewer is positioned in reference to her private sphere, which encompasses her to house duties and private relations (Ross and Byerly, 2004) since a woman's relationships are only personal and private. Their embrace signifies love and brotherhood, which are key components in the society of ISIS. This theme also ties to Garret's (2006) argument on how social media drives collective identity and promotes the creation of a community by translating these ideas to the body language of the men. Accompanying the text is a caption that states "Ya Allah bring sincerity in our hearts, make us support and join people of haqq, ya Allah bless us with traits that are mentioned in Qur'an of believers. Ya Allah unite people of haqq, there is nothing more painful then to see those fight with each other who love Islam but due to differences or supporting different groups fight each other". The text claims that the "people of haqq" are those that have joined ISIS and the men in the image are the visual

representation of the “people of haqq”. Once again, we witness the use of men rather than women to propagate the visual representation of the members of ISIS in reiteration of the public and private dichotomy. They possess all the qualities that God wants to see in his people such as sincerity, brotherhood, and love for one another. The tight embrace between the men portrays this discourse by creating a connection between their body language and their innate characteristics, which solely serve the purpose of Islam. The key terms, which include ‘unite’, ‘sincerity’, and ‘love’, are all represented by the embrace of the men. This image can be compared to the previous image of the heterosexual married couple in several ways. First, the image of the woman in the first post is not explicit, since an outline of her face and body in an illustration format is portrayed, which concurs with the private sphere of women, while the image in this post shows a real photograph of the men that clearly depicts their body gestures, facial details, and overall demeanor; hence, aligning the men with the public sphere. In addition, the image of ‘the people of haqq’ in the second post represents the ideology ISIS wants to share with the public, which is that of love, peace, and brotherhood. Hence, by depicting men, they are satisfying both their ideology and the discourse associated with gender.

Throughout the Umm Usama Tumblr account, life with ISIS is depicted by posting pictures of children laughing and playing, food being distributed, and green landscapes and scenery. The representation of activities, especially their body movement and positional communication, as well as their manners, or expressions and poses, are highly evident. The expressions of the children elude happiness, hope, and joy. Their positional communication, which is mainly them jumping around, eating, and enjoying their time in scenic landscapes and streets signify the ‘normal’ and ‘secure’ lifestyle that

is promised with ISIS. The symbolic relationship between the signifiers and signified is arbitrary in the sense that the portrayal of children represents a new dimension to ISIS, that of peace, serenity, and hope. The images of beautiful, green sceneries and landscapes signify heaven. By showing these images, ISIS is giving its followers a hint of heaven, which is the promised gift should they join ISIS. Also, by creating a vision of a utopic place, which is strengthened using words and images that confirm the availability of an alternative and better existence, ISIS is using a fundamental tool in social media that has changed the action repertoire (Cohen, 1998).

2. Establishing the 'Us Vs. Them' Notion

A mode of address that is heavily used by Umm Usama is the intertwining of references to acknowledged Sheikhs and Imams according to ISIS in the blogs. In one post, a quote which states “You must follow the path of the truth and do not be discouraged that so few are following it. You must beware of the path of falsehood and do not be deceived that so many are destroyed by it” (Imam In Al-Qayyim) is depicted. This quote validates the ideology of ISIS in the sense that following the righteous path, that of ISIS, is the true and right path, despite it not being the popular one. It develops a discourse and knowledge about life, which dictates how people understand it and ultimately act in it. By informing people that even though the path of the truth is followed by a few, that doesn't lessen its power since power is knowledge of the truth and is omnipresent. This post connects and overlaps with several trends found in other blogs. First, the quote suggests the promotion of a collective identity and the creation of a community (Garrett, 2006).

Furthermore, a quote that states “Ahlul-Bid’ah are like the Christians when it comes to accepting that which suits them. They read the Qur’an and Sunnah and take that which suits them and lure away from that which does not” (Shaykh Al-Albaani) is included. It is in reference to the Muslims who do not choose to join ISIS and jihad even though it is one of the main components of Islam and touches on the concept of *takfir* by creating a barrier between us versus them, the righteous people versus the corrupt ones. Semiotic analysis helps us understand how the us vs. them dichotomy functions at the level of this text by identifying polar semantic opposites (Chandler, 2007). It is a key theme because it tells people how to think about others that are not like them. It also creates an ideological framework, which categorizes people according to their Islamic practices by referring to people who do not practice Islam this way as infidels. Moreover, in relation to Garrett’s (2006) theory on social media, we witness the use of a collective identity appeal as a way to persuade their target audience. This post constructs a collective identity in order initiate collective call to action. In doing so, it creates a sense of a community through the use of the “us vs. them” notion by creating the possibility for like-minded users to gather around an imaged-outsider sensibility.

B. Diary of a Muhajirah

The Tumblr account, ‘Diary of a Muhajirah’, is another outlet used by ISIS to disseminate its messages and ideology to the public. The topics addressed in this blog include (1) the importance of engaging in Hijra (2) marrying a Jihadi and (3) matrydom. Each topic combines modes of address in order to create an emotional and powerful appeal. The blog is in English only, and is mainly composed of written texts that are

occasionally accompanied by images. The topics that are most frequently addressed in the blog are marriage and the significance of joining ISIS.

The initial Tumblr account was called “Bird Of Jannah”, but was closed several times by the Tumblr management. There are also two accounts under the name “Diary of Muhajirah”. The one in the current analysis was updated on February 2016 and includes multiple posts, while the other one has been inactive since July 2015 and only has two posts.

1. The Importance of the Hijra

A large portion of this account is dedicated to discussing the importance of making the hijra to the lands of ISIS and examines certain cases of women that wanted to return to their lands of origin or the West, *Dar al-Kufr*. It uses references to the Quran as the primary mode of address in order to create an emotional and powerful appeal such as “Do you think that you will enter the garden while Allah has not yet known those who strive hard from among you, and (He has not) known the patient” (Surah Al-Imran: 142).

By including references from the Quran and the Sunnah, the blog constructs an appeal to Muslims in an effort to convince them to join, promoting a collective identity, and creating a community. In the above example, the extraction of verses from the Quran that serve their interests are taken out of context. In doing so, it creates a reality that fortifies their ideology. Hence, ISIS uses a discourse of religion to try to convince them that returning to their lands of origin is a mistake. The claims that are made are given meaning by associating them with verses from the Quran and developing an Islamic discourse. The use of key words, such as “garden” in reference to paradise is a promise

to those who are “patient”. Those key terms are used to persuade people to join ISIS despite all the hardships they might face. Moreover, Allah is regarded as a “refuge” from all the “difficulties” one might encounter; hence, causing Islam to become a safe haven to all those who are facing problems in their lives and are living in the corruption and injustices of the infidel lands. The blog post satisfies and feeds that desire and need to escape by depicting a utopic lifestyle and space with ISIS, which is strengthened using words and images that confirm the availability of an alternative and better existence (Cohen, 1998).

The blog also shares personal stories, experiences, and hardships when undergoing the hijra. In this post, there is a large emphasis placed on the hardships one might endure upon completing the migration. However, they are immediately followed by feelings of security, peace, and gratitude. The migration is referred to as the “hijrah”, which is an Islamic reference to the journey the Prophet Mohamed undertook. In doing so, the writer is creating a connection between the paths the people who choose to join ISIS with the path the Prophet Mohamed took; therefore, injecting the Islamic ideology in an obvious manner. In addition, the use of terms such as “prayer”, “sacrifice”, “life”, and “death” to justify their feelings add to the fact that ISIS associates such terms with their Islamic ideology.

The post further explains the awards they will receive in the afterlife should they pursue the migration and join ISIS. It first explains that trading their love for the world with love for the afterlife will definitely be rewarded by God; “And those who fly for Allāh’s sake after they are oppressed, We will most certainly give them a good abode in the world, and the reward of the hereafter is certainly much greater, did they but know.

(Surah An-Nahl : 41) It then explains the glory of paradise by citing verses from the Quran, which explain the beauty of paradise: “Their reward with their Lord is gardens of perpetuity beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein for ever; Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him; that is for him who fears his Lord”. (Surah Al-Bayyinah: 8) In this post, verses from the Quran that glorify paradise are included. Descriptive phrases that explain the beauty of paradise, such as “gardens” and “rivers” are used to encourage people to join ISIS in order to ultimately go to heaven. Moreover, the people who are “oppressed” will surely enter the gates of heaven should they take the right path and join ISIS. Once again, we see the use of a discourse about Islam, a powerful motive, as a convincing tool. By including references from the Quran, an intertextual strategy, the reader is encouraged to join ISIS. This discourse is used to persuade people by claiming that they will definitely be rewarded with paradise. By creating a connection between struggle and paradise through the use of verses from the Quran, the reader is motivated despite the hardships she might face.

2. *Marrying A Jihadi*

Another section of the Tumblr account is dedicated to the act of marriage and the importance of marrying a man that seeks jihad. The argument is supported by citing a verse from the Quran that states, “Enter the garden, you and your wives; you shall be made happy.” (Surah Az-Zukhruf 70) In this post, the concept of marriage is regarded as a route to heaven. By marrying jihadists, women are promised entry to paradise. Therefore, the preferred meaning of this blog is that women who are true believers should join ISIS and marry a jihadist. Moreover, the notion of paradise is introduced again in an

effort to seduce the women. The term “garden” is used to reference “paradise”. In doing so, an immediate association is created between paradise and its everlasting beauty.

Moreover, by relating paradise to gardens, where gardens are an established and concrete notion, ISIS is using images in an attempt to persuade people and ultimately reinforce their ideology.

The post also cautions that marrying a mujahid does not guarantee entry to paradise, the woman should be righteous to God and to her husband. In order to be a mujahidah herself, she must “obey Allah in time of ease and hardship. She is a rare woman, lives like a stranger. Her beauty is for her husband. She is sealed with Hayā’. She raised her children with true Islamic teaching. Her strength is Qiyaam, her perfume is Dhikr. Her life is for none but Allāh.” In this scenario, the content is creating a connection between being an obedient wife to one’s husband and righteous to Allah with entry to paradise. The key terms that are being used include “beauty” and “husband”, which suggests that a woman’s beauty should only be shown to her husband. Moreover, the terms “Haya”, which means pure submission and reverence to God, “Qiyaam”, which means prayers, and “Dhikr” or continuous remembrance of God, are all highlighted in order to emphasize the wife’s role towards God. Ultimately, the post is equating a woman’s loyalty towards her husband to her loyalty to God, by noting that her commitment to her husband will cause her to be righteous towards God and eventually enter paradise. In this post, we witness the role of gender in relation to one’s husband and to God. Since roles that are associated with gender are socially constructed (Scott, 1988), we witness the clear identification of the roles associated with women living under ISIS, which mainly involve establishing a concrete and loyal relationship with her husband and with God.

We also witness the public and private dichotomy in this post. The woman's role is limited to the house, her family, and private relations. Moreover, the characteristics that define her all connect with the private sphere, which include submission, beauty, and obedience.

3. The Concept of Martyrdom

Another concept discussed in the Tumblr account, *Diary Of A Muhajirah*, is martyrdom. It stresses that it should not be confused with suicide, especially since suicide is considered to be one of the biggest sins in Islam. It claims that the acts of martyrdom are being labeled as “suicide operations”; however, they are a distortion to the meaning of martyrdom in an effort to “confuse” Muslims and discourage them from engaging in such acts. In the post, the writer is bringing into awareness how the ‘enemy’ refers to the martyrdom acts and articulates the difference between martyrdom and suicide acts.

It further explains that martyrdom is an honorable act and supports the claim with a verse from the Quran “And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allāh; and Allāh is Affectionate to the servants.” (Al-Baqarah : 207) By referencing a verse from the Quran that discusses the importance of martyrdom, the social modalities of the text are brought into attention, especially the Islamic ideology, which appeals at an emotional level and acts as a driving force.

Moreover, it states those who fight for the sake of Allah and become martyrs are preferred. Their status is explained in the Hadith, “Paradise has one hundred levels which Allāh has reserved for the mujahidīn who fight in His Cause and the distance

between each of the two grades is like the distance between the heavens and the earth.” (Bukhari) This verse explains that people who have given their souls to Allah by engaging in jihad are the victors. In this post, a contrast is created between suicide and martyrdom by legitimizing the act of martyrdom in claiming that it serves and defends Islam. Such a discourse aims to instruct people on how to act and think in regards to martyrdom, which is ultimately regarded as absolute truth. Hence, ISIS’s use of martyrdom as an excuse to engage in suicidal acts towards their enemy is achieved by claiming that doing so will bring “benefit” and “protection” to their fellow Muslims, as well as receive “affection” from God.

Another post is a quote from the Emir of ISIS, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who explains the reward of Jihad in the eyes of Allah. He says “If you knew what was in Jihad; of reward, honor, loftiness, and might, in this world and the hereafter, none of you would sit back or remain behind, thereby abandoning Jihad.” In the post, a connection is created between a quote by Prophet Mohamed that was analyzed in the previous paragraph with a quote by the Emir of ISIS, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. The choice to include both quotes in a consecutive manner carries several connotations. First, it creates a link between the words of Prophet Mohamed with the words of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi; hence, placing them in the same hierarchy. Both quotes use the same emotional and highly charged appeal by discussing the importance of jihad and the promised rewards they will be granted in heaven. Moreover, they both use a call to action tone by pushing people to engage in jihad and by mentioning God’s acknowledgment of their efforts. They both also use emotional terms such as “Shuhada” “Rabb”, or God, and “Jihad” in an effort to influence people into conducting Jihad. Therefore, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi mimicked the

appeal used by the Prophet Mohamed, in order to intrigue his followers and ultimately convince them into joining ISIS. By juxtaposing a saying by the Prophet Mohamed with a quote from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, their sayings are given equal significance, which therefore justifies Al-Baghdadi's claim.

In this post, we witnessed a gendered appeal that complies with the context of politics and public discourse in the patriarchal notion that differentiates the public from the private sphere in which each is associated to a specific gender (Ross and Byerly, 2004). This appeal is heavily targeted towards men since they are suited for the public sphere, specifically engaging in jihad. Moreover, the use of men consecutively as points of reference, first by Prophet Mohamed and second by Al-Baghdadi, a connection is automatically created as to whom the appeal is made to. Since the blogs are generally targeted towards women, the above gendered appeals also contextualize the role of women and their expected duties.

C. Umm Ubaydah (Umm Uthman)

The account called Umm Ubaydah mainly revolves around topics that are targeted at women that want to join ISIS. A large portion of the blog is dedicated to giving advice on what to pack, how to avoid detection from officers in airports, and what to expect upon arrival. The blog is in English and only includes text without any images. It has been inactive for ten months.

The analysis of the blog will focus on semiotic analysis and how meaning-making processes are socially significant. In addition, the mode of address, which mainly includes humor, is identified and related to larger ideologies at work. Finally, the

analysis takes place by creating connections between the signifiers and the theoretical frameworks about images, gender, and social media.

1. Planning for the Trip

The majority of this account is about the expected lifestyle and how to prepare for the trip. The first post is a list of recommended items that a woman should bring with her. The items range from clothing, shoes, and books to makeup and lingerie. It also informs the reader about several technicalities such as carrying a handbag with their essentials, not going overboard with the weight limit of the bags, deleting any Islamic apps from their phones, and formatting their laptops in order not to raise any suspicions. Based on the items that are discussed above, we can automatically assume that the writer is mainly addressing women. As Scott noted (1988) “gender is the social organization of sexual difference and it is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences” (p. 2); hence, we can assume that the social organization of women in ISIS encompasses their physical appearance and education. We can also interpret these items as belonging to the private sphere since women can only enjoy such ‘luxuries,’ which include clothing, makeup, and lingerie, at their homes. Once again, we witness the dichotomy of the public and private sphere that is assigned to each gender.

An interesting point to note is the use of humor as a mode of address and the choice to include emoticons such as hearts and kissing faces. The humorous mode of address is articulated through the use of subtle jokes about the cold weather, the slow Internet, and the large number of men who are searching for wives. The tone of voice is very friendly and supportive as well as caring and exciting. It makes the reader feel as

though they are already one of them, a sister. In doing so, they are enforcing a collective identity and creating a sense of community (Garret, 2006). In addition, it is providing a humanistic approach by proving that the writer is real, a human with feelings, which is regarded as being more concrete and 'real'. Moreover, establishing a sense of belonging and protection is significant for women. The topic that is being discussed is of extreme sensitivity and criticalness since it revolves around leaving one's family, enduring the hardships of the trip, and embracing a new country, family, and lifestyle. The juxtaposition of the humorous mode of address with a critical subject lightens the severity of the topic by tackling it with the use of humor.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The study has examined how ISIS uses the social media platform, Tumblr, to recruit females and the overarching themes that are intertwined in their messages. The project analyzed three Tumblr accounts that addressed women in an effort to recruit them into ISIS. Each account had an ideological agenda and used a combination of various modes of address. To answer the research question: How does ISIS use the social media platform, Tumblr, to recruit females, the study relied upon a qualitative textual analysis.

The findings reveal that the scopoc regime of ISIS is established through the use of images and text in the posts, which establishes their power. Therefore, ISIS acquires power through the transmission of images and text that concur with their ideologies.

Another finding that was concluded in the study is that the offline activities of ISIS are enhanced through their social media platforms by first informing their target audience about their mission, initiating action, and ultimately influencing it. It also provides its audience with resources; thus, advancing social impact. In doing so, they are providing an initiative for collective action. Moreover, it allowed for the expression of perspectives, experiences, and goals (only those that adhere with their ideology) in order to promote a collective identity. Finally, they created a sense of community on their social media platforms, especially through their modes of address, as being one entity where everyone is treated equally and everyone is considered a “brother” or “sister”.

Finally, one can relate the role of gender to social media in how ISIS chooses to integrate women in their platforms. By claiming that women are writing the blogs, they

are providing a channel of communication that is for women and by women. However, the rhetoric adheres to the public versus private dichotomy in which all the topics are related to the role of women in the house and as a support system to her husband.

Future studies can address how women interact with the blogs? What content they choose to repost? How did their blogging cause interaction on other social media platforms? In what ways are they reassessing the role of social media and gender within the ideological framework of ISIS? As the turmoil of ISIS continues to expand, new insights into their social media strategy are essential.

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