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No man can lead man, we have to unite - Bob Marley

This thesis is dedicated to Bob Marley, one of the great social visionaries of our time. By detecting and deconstructing negative power structures, we can learn how to create strategies of non-violent resistance, create better, universally valid, and peaceful mechanisms of mutual coordination and coexistence.

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Introduction

For, by believing passionately in something that still doesn't exist, we create it. The non-existent is whatever we haven't sufficiently desired. Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco (1965)

The information revolution is favouring non-hierarchical network forms of organization, doctrine and strategy. Arquilla and Ronfeldt, Networks and Netwars (2001)

This dissertation tries to answer the question how virtual guidance and leadership in Jihadi online communities take place. Every form of human organization has mechanisms of hierarchy, decision making, leadership and governance. For example, in the „World Wide Web“ communities are organized and self-organize by links that are created through communication processes and the exchange of information which includes “soft goods,” such as discourses, ideas and signs. Multiple hierarchies and leadership models emerge within the organizational networks of the information society. While mainstream information society rather reluctantly comes to terms with the fact that persuasive information - when systematically structured, disseminated, repeated and shared - can guide people's thinking and actions, extremists are utterly aware of this. In this sense, target-oriented communication can pervade every social structure and can be accessible at almost any place, at very low production costs. Online-extremists have adapted their net-communication and media strategies to the changed information environment of the 21st century. Within the information society they become experts in “virtual leadership;” this will be the topic of the present dissertation.

We will discuss “virtual leadership” at the example of the subculture of online jihad. Until recently, central Jihadi organizations have succeeded to present themselves as the market leaders of media jihad. But regarding the ever growing power of grassroots-collaboration in the Internet, the guiding influence of central jihad organizations and their media outlets becomes balanced, maybe even overridden by the Jihadi grassroots movement. This overturns classical hierarchies and mechanisms of leadership, at least in the Internet. Self-responsibility, participation and collaboration are central characteristics of Jihadi leadership in cyberspace. Electronic jihad is like a flexible satellite network with a multitude of planning divisions, which stimulates decentralized coordination. There are central leaders and dominant ideas in global jihad. However, the mechanisms of virtual life are different from real life. Communicative-virtual leadership is highly participative and needs consensual virtual environments in order to work. The most common way to achieve consensus are shared media

activities and integration of all participants into mutual idea-sharing and things they are trained to like. Added to this are doctrines, which in the form of commands touch psychological triggers in the minds of recipients and participants. One such example in extremist religious discourse is the exploitation of fears from God and His divine punishment in the Hereafter. Secular fear discourses suggest to participants they will lose thisworldly benefits if they won't agree. The mechanisms are very similar. But we will focus in this dissertation on extremist religious discourses of online jihad, where virtual hierarchies and communicative leadership mechanisms partly substitute for physical organizational breakups. They become visible in participative guidance through mutual media activities; authoritative Jihadi discourses; and the creation of virtual thought milieus that glorify terrorism.

In this study „jihad“ and its related ideology „Jihadism“ refer to “a fighting struggle” (*jahada*) in the sense of terrorism (*irhab*) and armed operations with a killing intention (*jihad bi-l-saif, qital*). Further elements are spiritual purification (*jihad al-nafs*), financial support (*jihad bi-l-mal*) and propaganda (*da'wah* (al-Salim 2003); *jihad bi-l-qalam* (al-Suri 2004)). The phenomenon of global jihad is often identified with „al-Qaeda“ (AQ), which signifies both a central organization, a decentralized movement as well as physical and virtual networks, in which actors of global jihad team up. This work will mainly relate to the element of “online jihad,” i.e. virtual networks and the networking and communication aspects of jihad in cyberspace.

If we can agree that all forms of intra-human organization require guidance and leadership in one way or the other, then this is valid for bureaucracies, militaries, sports clubs, markets, tribes, families, partnerships, governments, corporations, interest groups, and information networks. Information networks are modern forms of organization which develop specific leadership and guidance patterns within digital environments.¹ Since the 1970s, communication has been increasingly structured through telecommunication networks. Today we use wireless networks to connect to WWW, which is a global and interlinked network of Hypertext Protocol (HTTP) documents. WWW is merely one of the services that run on the Internet, which describes the totality of interconnected computer networks. We live in an ever networked and networking world. Semantically important is also the fact that most Arabic language online jihad discussion forums call themselves “networks,” such as *Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahidin* (Mujahidin Supporters Network). The building texture of an informational, i.e. virtual network is information. Consequently, leadership in an informational network relies on

¹ In fact, the communication in Jihadi online networks is extremely cohesive, creates and created by ideologically tight-knit communities and target-oriented discourses. We will explain how these guiding discourses function.

target-oriented communication of information, which reaches and shapes recipients' and participants' behavior. We will look at one specific informational network form, namely online jihad, especially the Arabic language forums, although similar leadership principles may be valid for other informational networks in the Internet as well. Our argument is that the virtual organizational meta-network "online jihad" shows a specific leadership form, which we will call "virtual leadership," when restricted to the Internet and "communicative leadership" when virtual and physical spheres overlap. This leadership concept is strongly inspired by Habermas' theory of *strategic action*, as an "instrumentalized form of communicative action" to steer people's behavior and interaction through communication. We will look at three main pillars of virtual leadership. These are the symbols of online jihad, i.e. the aesthetic environment and digital semiotic architecture into which online jihad is embedded; the rituals of online jihad, i.e. the interactions, which create statuses, hierarchies and discursive leaders; and the theology of online jihad, i.e. the conscience-guiding effect of theological doctrines and the religious framing of virtual leadership into supposedly divine command-structures. The authoritative iconography of signs in all three spheres is interrelated (letters, formulas, sounds, designs).

Terrorism and Counterterrorism studies, Islamic studies, Oriental studies, anthropology and linguist sciences are interwoven with policy goals and structures which transcend purely academic or research interests. If an academic discipline is subordinated under a security perspective, it is structurally impossible to maintain objectivity or rationality. An ideological abuse of the humanities, especially linguist and semiotic sciences can take place, and only the single researcher himself can reassert his responsibility. Terrorism research must be careful not to fall into the same trap as racial-anthropology (NS), Marxist-dialectics (SU), or neo-liberal counter-terrorism studies (presently dominated by the U.S., EU, Russia and Israel). The construction of the bad, the other, and the outsider are structurally similar in that they create highly ideological discourses and corpuses of pseudo-knowledge which represent cultural and political dominion. The problem is not always the irresponsibility of single academics. The problem is that pseudo-knowledge becomes institutionalized and manifested in the culture, politics, architecture and intellectual infrastructure of a society (*Lebenswelt*).

"Security reasons" trump, and thus often kill rational argumentation in the international counterterrorism debate.² It is a worrying fact that can be observed in the statements of radical

² Let us take a very drastic example to illustrate this problem. Jonathan Little describes a fictive talk between German officers and racial-anthropologists. In the ensuing officers' debate with German academics, the murderers of Hitler's regime try to "objectively ascertain" if a certain group of Jews in the Caucasian mountains are just religiously speaking, or also ethnically speaking Jews, and thus "cleared to be killed." The pro-extinction academics win with "security-based" arguments, which are essentially nonsense, over academics and officers,

Islam opponents, who influence policy and academic debates: There are structural parallels between hostility to Islam and anti-Semitism.³ That said, terrorist jihad is an immensely politicized and manipulated topic, both by Western and Muslim actors. The author would like to stress that he gives his best to discuss it with the necessary self-reflection and with an explorative academic approach in mind.⁴ Present international security policies, such as targeted assassinations, or the designation of adversaries as “illegal enemy combatants” and their bolstering by “academic” discourses should be regarded with utmost skepticism. Once they have diffused into our strategic cultures and become quasi-accepted, it is almost impossible to get rid of them.

There is an ongoing academic and security debate on the role of al-Qaeda organization versus the importance of grassroots activists of Islamic terrorism. Also the discussion on the relevance of the Internet for al-Qaeda and its followers concerns this question.⁵ Some researchers argue Internet-propaganda, virtual training and networking cannot replace traditional organizational structures and hierarchies. Others hold virtual activity has a massive influence on terrorist reality. In a preceding study on virtual leadership, the author has stressed the effects of extremist E-fatwas on online jihad participants.⁶ As in all phenomena which criss-cross between virtual-physical worlds, one should keep in mind that physical terrorist networks and organizations have by no means diminished. At the same time a

who argue with rational arguments that this group of local Jews should be spared, for they are non-ethnic, converted, well assimilated, essentially good for the local stability, etc. Jonathan Little, *Die Wohlgesinnten* (Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), 410-465.

³ Rüdiger Lohker quoted in “The Growing Threat of Islamophobia in Austria,” accessed November 17, 2012, <http://beforeitsnews.com/eu/2012/11/the-growing-threat-of-islamophobia-in-austria-2462120.html>.

⁴ This means with a clear and strong distance from a one-sided conservative security perspective.

⁵ The debate is often identified with the U.S.-American scholars Bruce Hoffman and Marc Sageman. For the Hoffman-Sageman debate see Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror networks in the Twenty-First Century*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004); Bruce Hoffman, “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama Bin Laden Still Matters.” *Foreign Affairs* (May/ June 2008); and Sageman’s answer to Hoffman’s critique “The Homegrown Young Radicals Of Next-Gen Jihad”, *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2008. See also John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, ed., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001) on the development of non-hierarchical virtual networks that have rapidly changed inter-human behavior. For many researchers, the discursive, informative and propagandist functions of the Jihadi Net stand at the centre, which, however, does not contradict the author’s claim that the Jihadi net facilitates command structures of virtual leadership, see Gabriel Weimann, “Virtual Disputes and the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Debates,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29(2006): 623-639, and Gary Bunt, *i-Muslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009); also Brynjar Lia, “Al-Qaeda Online: understanding Jihadi internet infrastructure,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 1(2006). Some researchers doubt that online recruitment can be effective, it needs physical networks. William McCants, „How Online Recruitment Works.“ *Blogentry on Jihadica.com*, accessed October 7, 2009, <http://www.jihadica.com/how-online-recruitment-works/>, argues that a long-term radicalization always relies on physical contacts. The Internet plays only a supporting role. Peter Neumann, *Joining Al-Qaeda: Jihadi Recruitment in Europe* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008) even claims that it is about time for a radical rethinking of the role of the Internet for radicalization and recruitment. Radicalization and recruitment can take place solely via the Internet.

⁶ Philipp Holtmann, “Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications and Discussion” (Herzliya: Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), 2011), accessed January 12, 2012, <http://www.herzliyaconference.org/eng/?CategoryID=456&ArticleID=2214>.

number of Jihadi plotters and attackers have been strongly connected to physical and virtual terrorist worlds in parallel.

Concepts of communicative guidance and virtual leadership have been intuitively understood by many pundits in the counterterrorism analysis field (CT). However, most experts fail to go to the bottom of it, and merely describe the symptoms of an obvious transformation of leadership and organization which affects online and offline behavior of Jihadi networks. The basic reason is that the information age drastically alters forms of communication, interaction, organization and guidance. For example, the German terrorism researcher Guido Steinberg tries to balance his rather doctrinal view that physical organizations are the most persisting and dominant terrorist structures with the fact that networked communication-structures have become just as important. Yet, Steinberg fails to call it by the name, concentrates on absolute hierarchies, and remains rather unspecific in his observations. When Steinberg speaks about AQ's use of the Internet, he claims that audio- and video messages spread via the Internet serve "to guide global followers," and that the organization morphes with the help of the Internet into an "ideological-strategic control centre."⁷ Yet, at the same time, Steinberg is a proponent of a classical CT approach, according to which al-Qaeda is first and foremost a physical organizational structure.

Similar to integrated terrorist organizations, cyber jihad has own clearly definable structures and guidance mechanisms, which in their entirety translate into virtual leadership. Yet, when terrorist attacks occur in which the interconnectedness of physical and virtual worlds is assumed, academic and media reactions often miss the point and simplify the matter.

In March 2011 at Frankfurt Airport, 21 years old Arid Uka killed two and wounded several U.S. service men. Uka was a consumer of Jihadi online propaganda. The attack was triggered by a clip on Youtube, which showed U.S. soldiers raping a Muslim woman. Uka was enraged. He took the fictional scene from a U.S. movie for real and decided to hit a U.S. military target. A German weekly then titled: "Jihad Online – A holy war without military leaders and

⁷ „Da die al-Qaida-Führung seit dem Winter 2001/2002 weitgehend isoliert in Pakistan lebte, konnte sie nur noch eingeschränkt mit anderen Teilen der Organization kommunizieren. Stattdessen verbreiteten Bin Laden und Zawahiri seit Oktober 2001 **vermehrt Audio- und Videobotschaften über arabische Fernsehsender und das Internet**. So versuchten sie, ihre Anhänger weltweit **anzuleiten**: Neben Propaganda verbreiteten sie ideologische, strategische und taktische Informationen (wie z.B. konkrete Zielvorgaben), so dass sich die al-Qaida immer mehr von einer Organization zu einer **ideologisch-strategischen Leitstelle** entwickelte. Der Einfluss der al-Qaida-Ideologie weitete sich vor allem unter jungen Muslimen in Europa aus, die nach 2001 vermehrt rekrutiert wurden und die mehrere Aufsehen erregende Anschläge verübten. Seit 2007 reisten auch vermehrt Jihadisten aus Deutschland nach Pakistan, um sich dort al-Qaida und ähnlich gesinnten Organisationen anzuschließen.“

Guido Steinberg, „Al-Qaida: Was als loser Zusammenschluss von Islamisten begann, entwickelte sich in den 1990er Jahren zur gefährlichsten Terrororganisation von Islamisten: al-Qaida,“ Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (BPB), October 20, 2011, accessed August 11, 2012, <http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/islamismus/36374/al-qaida?p=1>.

an army of lone wolves is the vision of online-Islamists.“⁸ The spectacular headline was bolstered by expert opinions and developed a dichotomist and allegedly unquestionable picture of the situation.

Neither are there leaders, nor are there non-leaders, but something in between, the report suggests. In physical terrorist networks one is used to find a clear chain of command through which orders are issued. Admittedly, the structure of terrorist cells in the post 9/11 security environment has become more complicated. Some dormant European cells seem to have been activated by orders which came from faraway central networks, such as the cells that perpetrated the Madrid attacks in March 2004 and London bombings in July 2005. Physical terrorist groups show much clearer patterns of leadership and guidance than individual attackers who are co-inspired by cyber jihad-networks (besides personal contacts to militants, psycho-biographical factors and/or traumata).

But who guides the thousands of jihad websites, discussions forums, blogs and Jihadi user-accounts? The myriad of virtual jihad presences has central discursive leaders, but relies also on a multitude of participants, who bring in their own strategic thoughts and shape the networks. This concept is central to the information age, and does not only concern Jihadi net-communication. Cohesive information and communications structures in digital environments are termed “the social net” because of the high levels of participation of actors. These structures influence that part of the human self that moves in digital reality at a given time.⁹ If we limit ourselves to digital environments, then the main question is: Who leads the communication within? Tinnes observes correctly that “since the beginning of the International War on Terrorism, the Internet has become a guidance medium for Jihadis. The use of the world-wide data-web as an information and communication medium poses for Jihadis a new form of warfare, which they regard as equally important to physical warfare on the battlefields.”¹⁰

Some CT approaches to online jihad try to establish an absolute link between physical and online realities. For example, the highly acclaimed U.S. CT analyst Marc Sageman, whose work on online jihad has influenced many other CT experts, argues the shared online Jihadi discourse represents the actual leadership of global jihad. Yet, Sageman cannot offer

⁸ Christian Denso, „Dschihad im Netz: Ein Heiliger Krieg ohne militärischen Führer und mit einer Armee aus Einzeltätern: Das ist die Vision der Internet-Islamisten,“ March 14, 2011, accessed September 22, 2012, <http://www.zeit.de/2011/11/Djihad-im-Internet>.

⁹ But digital realities are so interwoven with physical realities that their strong influence on human perception, thinking and behaviour is only a natural consequence.

¹⁰ Judith Tinnes, Jihad@Web: Eine Untersuchung der Internetnutzung von Islamisten mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von medialen Geiselnahmen. Band 2, overview, accessed January 8, 2013, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/jihad-web-band-2-judith-tinnes/1023823620>.

substantial proof for his thesis.¹¹ Norwegian researcher Hanna Rogan states on the basis of Sageman's claim: "The Internet has created a new kind of relationship between individuals through the creation of virtual communities."¹² This comes short to saying the globe has a round shape. Yet, Rogan deserves a lot of credit for her very detailed analyses of online jihad and for her insight that online jihad media "has a wider functionality than mainstream media."¹³ The special functionality of online jihad which Rogan observes includes "the creation of a virtual community of likeminded individuals,"¹⁴ which happens also because "Jihadi media groups seek to reach a wider audience, and act as agenda setters, yet sometimes promote values that are not shared by the leadership of the global Jihadi movement."¹⁵ Moreover, Rogan observes that internal communication processes strengthen online Jihadi group cohesion, yet does not specify these processes any further.

"[J]ihadist online media in times of war, similar to traditional media in times of war, promotes the goals of intimidating the enemy, legitimizing activities, and propagating support. Unlike traditional media, it also fulfills the need for education and internal communication and contributes to the creation of a virtual community of likeminded individuals."¹⁶

Khalid Abdallah al-Mashuh's approach is more articulate and conceptual, which may owe to the cultural entanglement, if not to say entrapment, of the author into the subject. Without boasting about non-existent empirical data, al-Mashuh argues virtual leadership has a participative character; he notices social-engineering and in-group processes at the cost of the exclusion of other influences; and he suggests that leadership is based on thoughts, which perpetrate individuals' minds and are disseminated via online Jihadi networks.

¹¹ Sageman's alleged data-base of hundreds of Jihadi discourses and case studies was never seen, at least not in his study. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

¹² Hanna Rogan, "JIHADISM ONLINE - A study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes," FFI, 2006, accessed August 10, 2012, <http://rapporteur.ffi.no/rapporteur/2006/00915.pdf>, 11.

¹³ Hanna Rogan, *Al-Qaeda's online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007*, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 01.12.2007, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/07-02729.pdf>, 4.

¹⁴ Hanna Rogan, *Al-Qaeda's online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007*, 4.

¹⁵ Hanna Rogan, "Dynamics of the Jihadi Online Media Campaign," paper presented at the conference "The Jihadi Phenomenon: A Social Sciences Perspective" in Menton, France, 26-28 October, 2007, accessed August 12, 2012, <https://sites.google.com/site/jihadismstudiesnet/jihadism-studies-at-ffi/jihadism-on-the-web>.

¹⁶ Hanna Rogan, *Abu Reuter and the E-Jihad: Virtual Battlefronts from Iraq to the Horn of Africa*, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, Summer/Fall 2007, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www12.georgetown.edu/sfs/publications/journal/82/rogan.pdf>.

“Al-Qa’idah organization no longer enjoys a centralized command, which gives away to the following question: who is managing these minds and discovering these deadly methods? The answer is as follows: The extremist ideas (*al-afkar al-mutatarrika*) which take the youth into a fictive world in which only a few live, converse and develop their thoughts on their own in light of their remoteness from the world which is producing more bloody ideas especially when feeling isolated, lonely and blockaded.”¹⁷

Jeffrey B. Cozzens adds an interesting idea to this discourse, stating that “Jihadi target selection, attack modes, and propaganda are all intimately linked to the attitudes, values and beliefs that these actors develop within a social (or online) context.”¹⁸ Cozzens’s approach is very relevant for the part of our discussion of virtual leadership, which treats terrorism as a form of corporate marketing. Marketing strategists have researched for decades how to exploit knowledge about psychological values and lifestyles, in order to influence consumption behaviour. Corporations are starting to exploit the Internet for communicative guidance. They reckon that, by influencing rules of conduct and central values of digital culture, they can influence behavioural patterns of actors (see the “Theoretical Framework” for a detailed discussion).

A few more words on the most prominent example of this debate, the written exchange between U.S.-American CT experts Bruce Hoffman and Marc Sageman in 2008: Sageman claimed jihad after 9/11 had become “leaderless” and was steered by a common discourse, while Hoffman heavily refuted this claim as a “myth of grass-roots terrorism.” This debate is still representative and paradigmatic for an intellectual rift that divides CT analysts and researchers on online jihad.

Marc Sageman further argues “the true leader of global jihad is the collective discourse of the half-dozen influential forums. It provides general guidance to the participants in the absence of physical command and control found in traditional terrorist organizations.”¹⁹ His key-thesis is that virtual discourses have replaced the physical leadership of global jihad. This goes too far, since physical organizations still exert considerable control over followers. The present dissertation modifies Sageman’s thesis, arguing that discourses and ritualized mutual guidance on the Internet play first of all a decisive role for the leadership of cyber jihad

¹⁷ Khalid Abdallah al-Mashuh, “*Man yaqud tanzim al-Qa’ida al-yaum[a]?*,” originally published in the Saudi Arabian daily al-Watan, January 29, 2010; accessed August 10, 2012 in the Kurdish daily al-Ittihad, <http://www.alittihad.com/paper.php?name=News&file=article&sid=69953>.

¹⁸ Jeffrey B. Cozzens, “Al-Takfir wa’l Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33 (2009), 504.

¹⁹ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror networks in the Twenty-First Century*, 118.

networks, i.e. the communicative networks of online jihad, their organization and leadership. Central physical organizations still exist and exert leadership, both on the ground and on the Internet through their media wings, which are especially authoritative agents in online jihad. There is another major weakness in Sageman's argument: He himself has not analyzed online Jihadi discourses in depth, and has not described in his books any of them. This is going to be one task of this dissertation. The extent of influence between virtual and physical realities, however, should be the focus of another study. Such a self-limitation is a good venue for research into the virtual leadership mechanisms of online jihad, i.e. those elements of communicative leadership that are restricted to leadership of actors and organization of networks in virtual strategic action environments.

Leadership in cyberspace is an effect of online discursive interactions. The discourses of online jihad have three major shapes, namely pictorial-semiotic, theological and ritualistic web-discourses.²⁰ However, the strongest element of online Jihadi discourse culture is the ritual. Sageman has overseen the ritualistic aspects of hegemonic discourses, i.e. how Jihadis on discussion forums interact with each other in ritualistic ways and thus create discursive dominion and leadership around their favourite topics. Their media activities and interactions are repeated hundreds of times and reproduce online group culture; their online rituals guarantee the transmission of Jihadi group online culture from one Net-generation to the next. Examples are ritualized mutual media activities (*ghazwat ilamiyya*), but also the ritualized virtual subordination under leadership figures (*bay'at*).

Ritualistic discourses are complemented by authoritative quasi-sacred symbolisms in Jihadi online environments and theological doctrines. Together, these communicative guidance factors form what I call "virtual leadership" (or "leadership in cyberspace;" alternatively "communicative leadership," if a clear effect of virtual activity on physical reality life can be observed). The Internet is a space of limited, if not lacking statehood. But the activists of online Jihadi subculture are giving their best to create virtual statehood and organizations. Examples are the ritualized subordination of Jihadis under virtual institutions like the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI), or under the "Free Syrian Army" (FSA),²¹ the symbolism and aesthetics

²⁰ Discourses and narratives determine what is accepted as right and wrong within a culture. Jihadi discourses, for example, legitimize "holy war" and "suicide attacks." Online jihad offers a sub-cultural narrative that strengthens the in-group cohesion of its participants and affects mainstream Muslim culture.

²¹ Even if most of the FSA actors distance themselves from Jihadi agendas, Jihadis heavily exploit the concept. FSA is an umbrella concept for militant Syrian oppositional groupings and militias. There is no cohesive "Free Syrian Army" with a central command. Some of the groups who use the label receive money, weapons and fighters from the outside. Some are local patriots guarding their neighbourhoods. Others are hardcore Jihadis, among them fighters from abroad, who use the Syrian civil war as a platform to further their own religious agendas. In fact, it is a plethora of anti-regime groups that operates on Syrian soil. In light of the rapid

applied in online Jihadi spaces, as well as the specific ways of processing theological ideas in cyberspace (*framing*).²²

A second major venue for the research of online jihad was introduced already in 2001 with the organizational social network analysis by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt. Their analysis focuses on network forms of organization, which also offers key ideas for the analysis of Jihadi discourse/discussion networks on the Internet and virtual guidance models. The organizational network approach also enjoys sympathy in “information operations” theory, which is but another approach to communicative guidance;²³ as well as in studies on Jihadi *takfiri* networks.²⁴ The present study borrows elements of the organizational network analysis with a focus on imperative communicative guidance mechanisms within virtual organizational networks. Arquilla and Ronfeldt argue

“[T]he information revolution favors the rise of network forms of organization. The network appears to be the next major form of organization – long after tribes, hierarchies and markets – to come into its own to redefine societies, and in so doing, the nature of conflict and cooperation [...] even worse is the possibility that information-age dictatorships will arise in parts of the world, based on the skillful exploitation of the new technologies for purposes of political command and control.”

Moreover, Arquilla and Ronfeldt stress the “practice of netwar is ahead of theory” and must be further developed by other researchers. Similarly, the concept of virtual leadership can be seen as a sub-element of netwar and new networking concepts, which according to the two authors are still ahead of their theoretical formulation. Arquilla and Ronfeldt associate organizational networks in cyberspace with communicational command and control mechanisms, in short new forms of leadership for new forms of organization in the 21st

developments on the ground, this report is already outdated, stemming from March. But it gives a good overview over the multiplicity of groups operating under the umbrella FSA. Joseph Holliday, “Syria’s Armed Opposition,” Institute for the Study of War, March 2012,

http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrias_Armed_Opposition.pdf.

²² Moreover, Sageman’s claim that virtual discourses have abolished leadership in terrorist organizations is farfetched. Terrorist attackers are often guided by media jihad, physical networks and recruiters in parallel. One should keep in mind that the making and guidance of an actual terrorist relies on a multitude of factors. Therefore, it is not recommendable to over-simplify the structures, models or actors involved in cyber jihad.

²³ Bryan M. Pickett and Charles M. Lingenfelter, *Influence Strategy: Principles and Levels of Analysis*, master’s thesis (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2011), accessed January 4, 2013, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/IPO/archives/11Dec_Lingenfelter_Pickett.pdf.

²⁴ Robert Allan Williams, *To Kill or not to Kill: The Global Jihadist Movement and the Doctrine of Takfir* (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews, 2009), accessed January 4, 2013, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19241832/To-Kill-or-Not-to-Kill-The-Global-Jihadi-Movement-and-the-Doctrine-of-Takfir#page=15>.

century. They do not speak about classical hierarchical forms of leadership. Their concerns are leadership-patterns in all channel networks where information flows steadily and is processed by numerous participants. The illustration below demonstrates different paradigms of networked organization. Brian Jackson has adapted the organizational network approach and holds that al-Qaeda on the Internet is like an all-channel network, in which information flows freely in a fully collaborative manner.²⁵ More correctly, one should say online jihad fulfils these conditions.²⁶ This concept is one theoretical basis for our observation-based approach to virtual leadership.

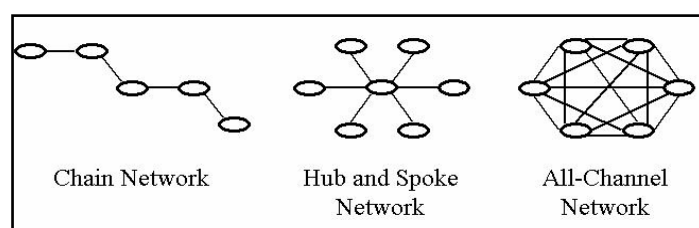


Figure 1: network structures (adopted from Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001).

Source: Jackson, Brian A. "Groups, networks, or movements: A command-and-control-driven approach to classifying terrorist organizations and its application to al-Qaeda," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 241-262.

Before we continue, let us quickly review the foregoing thoughts by pundits and observers in the CT field. Firstly, according to Arquilla and Ronfeldt, online jihad can be seen as an organizational virtual network that serves as a control centre with guidance and leadership functions. Secondly, according to Sageman, guidance and control of Jihadis are connected to discourses that take place within the milieu of online jihad and its social media, which – unlike mainstream media – foster especially cohesive virtual communities through communicative processes. Thirdly, according to Steinberg, Sageman and Rogan, terrorist communication has guiding and community-building functions, which – according to Rogan's claim – sometimes even differ from the official guidelines of established organizations. Fourthly, Mashuh observes that extremist ideas lie at the core of communicative processes that translate into guidance.

²⁵ Originally, Brian Jackson holds that al-Qaeda on the Internet is like an all-channel network, in which information flows freely in a fully collaborative manner. But more correctly, "cyber-jihad" fulfils this role. Not all activists and supporters of cyber jihad are also members or supporters of al-Qaeda.

²⁶ i.e., jihad on the Internet is like an all-channel network, in which information flows freely in a fully collaborative manner. If one node is cut off, it is quickly replaced. Every forum, blog and activist contributes in shaping and leading this network.

In order to demonstrate the different, often overlapping structures of the cyber jihad movement, its networks, and the different physical jihad organizations, the following definitions may be useful:²⁷

Organization: An organized group of people with a particular purpose.

Movement: A group of people working together to advance their shared political or social ideas.

Network: A group of people who exchange information and contacts for professional or social purpose and share a common discourse

Guidance: A set of communicative mechanisms and models within a network which are embedded in a strategic hegemonic discourse.

This entails hierarchical as well as participative, and mutual forms of discursive leadership on the micro-level in discussion groups. Guidance models and discourses can be semiotic, ritualistic, or theological doctrinaire.

A Communicative Framework of Virtual Leadership:

The exercise of dominion among shared interest groups through the entirety of interrelated guidance models that underlie a communicative strategy

When speaking about online jihad, this dissertation refers to an all-channel organizational network with numerous affiliates that promotes a global terrorist interpretation of jihad and thus inspires a movement of followers via the Internet.²⁸ Jihadism is the modern ideology and terrorist interpretation of jihad, and Jihadis are persons who hold up Jihadi principles and doctrines (see the definition of “jihad” above and the chapter “Theology of Online Jihad” for a detailed explanation). An intermediate control level by al-Qaeda and other organizations exists, and it can be illustrated with their steady output of ideas and agendas. However, there are countless other actors who exert influence on online jihad. Thus, it is preferable not to use the term “al-Qaeda” to describe online jihad and the participants in it. Most of them have nothing to do with al-Qaeda. The term al-Qaeda still implies a hierarchical organization according to traditional organizational standards. This is not the case with online jihad. Furthermore, tactical and operational control of al-Qaeda central organization and its affiliates

27 See Emma Brandsen, “Organization or Movement: A classification of al-Qaeda”, King’s College London Summer School 2010, 1st Session; Course: The Law and Politics of International Terrorism.

28 The majority of Jihadi forum visitors and discussants are “armchair Jihadis”, but a number of members of al-Qaeda organization and affiliated organizations have access to jihad forums, too. They provide the forums with Jihadi media productions.

are nowadays swaying. But the communicational power of Jihadi online networks is steadily developing.

Online jihad is a movement with a common agenda whose followers are organized in virtual networks. Al-Qaeda inspires this movement. However, the movement's shared goal is much broader than the organizational interests of al-Qaeda, which narrows down to self-legitimacy, survival, expansion and the establishment of a safe haven, which may eventually develop into an Islamic core state (a concept that was propagated by 1970s nationalist Jihadi groups and still seems to influence top-echolons of al-Qaeda central organization). The movement, in contrast, aims at disrupting the Western way of life by promoting Islamic terrorist propaganda through a physically disconnected satellite network with total flexibility and a multitude of planning divisions. Its communicational strategy aims to frighten the West and to support al-Qaeda in the media sector. The single member of the movement is a "cyber/online/or electronic Jihadi," which leans on Jihadi parlance, since Jihadis call online jihad "electronic jihad" (*al-jihad al-elektruni*), or "Jihadi media" (*al-i'lam al-Jihadi*). Moreover, cyber-Jihadis perceive themselves as autonomous actors, a fact which is demonstrated by the way how they reflect on themselves. Lengthy discussions solely turn around themselves. Although they adore al-Qaeda organization and its ideology, online Jihadis clearly differentiate between jihad organizations (such as al-Qaeda central in Pakistan and its affiliates in Muslim countries) and "media jihad." Media jihad is perceived as a separate sphere with its own logics and mechanisms.²⁹ Its participants don't die on the battlefield, but they support terrorism as a form of communication. In a leadership sense, followers of cyber jihad self-organize and guide each other by redesigning and redistributing leadership-tasks into autonomous work-groups which operate without regular supervision, yet consent to communicative hierarchies and behavioural rules, such as the rigid rules that apply to users of discussion forums or the agendas that are disseminated by Jihadi media organizations.

Accordingly, there are two major factions in cyber jihad. Established organizations with their semiofficial media-companies" have quasi-institutional power. Their blinking banners dominate Jihadi forums and make them look like advertisement tables for Jihadi organizations. However, grassroots activists often copy the concept of "media-companies" and form own media outlets. This is a sign of professionalization and also the wish to create independent authority. In between, we can detect mixed profiles of grassroots activists, semi-

²⁹ See, for example, "*Ahad a'da' al-muntadayat al-jihadiyya yunaffidh 'amaliya istishhadiyya fi bilad al-rafidayn – suratuhu ma' al-wasiya: Abu Umar al-Shami yanfur ila bilad al-rafidayn wa yunaffidh 'amaliya istishhadiyya*," Shumukh al-Islam Forum, accessed 29 February, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=97338>.

official media activists and perpetrators of attacks who are co-guided by Jihadi media on the Internet. As much as the media work of Jihadi groups is admired by grassroots activists, they also want to be understood as independent players and challenge the aspired hegemony of established groups. Members of the popular jihad form “Sanam al-Islam” (Hump of Islam [jihad]), for example, have recently established an own media company.³⁰ In addition, the forum itself calls for kidnappings, which is a form of action associated with established physical groups.³¹ In this case, virtual actors try to influence and govern the physical world.

Leadership in cyberspace can also be termed “communicative leadership on the Internet.” Historic precursors of communicative leadership in political and terrorist movements existed long before the advent of the information revolution. “Traditional” communicative leadership in political and terrorist movements can be illustrated with several examples.

Firstly, Wladimir Iljitsch Uljanow (Lenin) propagated a media-strategy based on communicative leadership. The party-newspaper “Iskra” (Spark) served during 1901-03 as “collective organizer”, whereas Stalins bank robberies secured the continuation of its publication.³² Both levels, communicative and physical, were integrated and depending upon each other. Without armed action, there had been no financing of the propaganda, and without propaganda, no justification of armed action.

Secondly, communicative leadership can already be observed in the 19th century anarchist movement.³³ In the second half of the 19th century, an impressive print-industry propagated anarchist thought the world over.³⁴ Dozens of newspapers and magazines served as the

³⁰ See the foundation communiqué of the *Sanam al-Islam* forum, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=4581>.

³¹ The media company is called “Mu’assasat al-Qabidun ‘ala al-Jamr al-I’lamiyya.” See for the announcement “*Shabakat Sanam al-Islam##: Na’lan ‘an ja’iza maliyya li man yakhtaf ra’s al-khabith Wi’am Wahhab*,” accessed March 31, 2011, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=5305>. Superficially seen, the second row of actors in cyber jihad consists of grassroots activists. If one goes deeper into Jihadi discussions, one sees the difference between the superficial control of media companies (“blinking banners” on the headpage) and the intensive mutual control of grassroots activists. They form a world of thought by themselves, which is inspired by the agendas of “official” Jihadi media companies. Grassroots activism has until now been a challenge but also a supplement to the authority of “official” media groups by jihad organizations. With the goal to reach broader audiences and dominate the Jihadi discourse, grassroots activists may even try to rid themselves of the authority of the media groups.

³² Collective organizers are methods or carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites, rituals, or icons, platforms for networking such as Jihadi websites, but also central ideas around which the discourse of a movement develops. The concept of “collective organizers” stems from Rüdiger Lohlker, who guides the inter-disciplinary “jihadism-online”-project at the University of Vienna, <http://www.univie.ac.at/jihadism/>. Lohlker speaks about collective organizers such as Lenin’s newspaper “Iskra” and the Jihadi webmagazine “Sawt al-Jihad”. Lohlker says that the concept of “collective organizers” works for electronic media as well. Jihadi websites and e-magazines serve as collective organizers for the Jihadi movement. See Rüdiger Lohlker, Introduction to *Die Stimme des Jihad – Sawt al-Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s erstes Online-Magazin*, by Nico Prucha (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010); also interview of the author with Rüdiger Lohlker in Vienna in August 2009.

³³ This comparison refers to the revolutionary, not the evolutionary wing of the 19th ct. Anarchist movement.

³⁴ Bruce Hoffman, *Terrorismus, der unerklärte Krieg* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2006).

intellectual incubators for anarchist terrorism and had a steering influence on anarchists, who relied on the intellectual guidance to justify their attacks, which in turn were publicized and turned again into propaganda ("Propaganda of the Deed").³⁵ The decade from the late 19th to the early 20th century witnessed more than thousand individual attacks, and was therefore also called "the decade of the bomb." Inspired by the propaganda of central ideologues, anarchists self-responsibly either killed high-value targets (such as the assassination of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria by the Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni in 1898; the assassination of U.S. president William McKinley by Leon Czolgosz in 1901), or indiscriminately killed civilians (such as the Spanish anarchist Santiago Salvador's bombing of the opera in Barcelona in 1893; the French anarchist Émile Henry's bombing of Café Terminus in Paris in 1894). Anarchist ideologues often had no direct contact to activists, who acted more or less alone and were inspired by the violent ideology distributed through the anarchist press.³⁶ Abu Musab al-Suri's concept of individualized terrorist attacks that are steered by effective propaganda and re-translated into propaganda ("Propaganda by the Deed") is very similar.

Thirdly, since 2003 al-Qaeda has been trying to inspire followers by audio-messages on the Internet.³⁷ Some sleeper cells like in Madrid and Istanbul probably took these messages at face value as commands to attack.³⁸ Grassroots followers of al-Qaeda probably took these messages as inspirations.

In the last years, followers of al-Qaeda's ideology have started to act ever more similar to the pattern of individual anarchist attackers who were inspired by an ideological apparatus. In addition, al-Qaeda supporters have started to produce ideology by themselves and to guide each other's thinking and communicative behaviour. They spread jihad ideology all over the World Wide Web. Direct links between individuals can often not be established. However, with the explosion of networking possibilities; the abundance of Jihadi material in the Net; and the use of sympathizer platforms to publish propaganda there is a dilemma: Central actors like al-Qaeda can initiate agendas and create a framework of communicative guidance, but they cannot lead directly in cyberspace. Thousands of followers have specific ways to interpret the information they receive and to guide others with their knowledge, information

³⁵ Among these newspapers and magazines were the *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne*, *La Révolution Sociale*, *Freiheit* and the *The Alarm*. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd, 2004).

³⁶ Whitney Kassel, „Terrorism and the International Anarchist Movement of the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries,“ *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32(2009): 237-252.

³⁷ For example, "Usama Bin Ladin's Message to Iraq, Urges Muslims To Overthrow Regime," al-Jazira, February 11, 2003; "Usama Bin Ladin Urges Muslims To Launch 'Suicide Attacks' Against US," *Daily Ausaf*, April 9, 2003.

³⁸ Interview of the author with Guido Steinberg, terrorism analyst at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), February 9, 2011.

and interpretations.³⁹ This can only take place in a thought milieu where actors steadily reference each other and cluster around a guiding themes or ideology. Such dynamics lead to the emergence of “discursive leadership,” which Bruggeman, Traag and Uitermark describe as the result of power relations that are negotiated in discursive struggles (see point three of the theoretical framework in the following chapter).⁴⁰

As a principle, narcissistic manifestations of charismatic leadership are also present in the mainstream information society, its social networks and discussion groups. If we apply Goffman’s concept, then a sacred installation of the self also takes place in virtual space.⁴¹ This translates into discursive and iconic leadership in cyberspace. In extremist subcultures like online-jihad, the sacred installation of leader icons and power discourses is even easier to observe and describe than in mainstream online culture. However, mainstream cultures always feed themselves from subcultures and vice versa. Therefore the cross-influences between the latter and the former should not be taken lightly.

In online reality, it does not matter so much if an individual is alive or a post-mortem icon. Every person represented through bits and pixels has the possibility to become a sacred icon, which represents power and authority which others may aspire to emulate. There are two major ranks in Jihadi leadership culture, namely *mujahid* (fighter) and *sheikh* (elder). The ideal leader is a combination of both, the *sheikh-mujahid* (fighting elder), such as Abdallah Azzam or Usama bin Laden. A third rank is transcendental, namely *shahid* (martyr), or active martyrdom seeker, the *istishhadi* (martyrdom-seeker). This semantic classification and categorization of Islamic fighters has an unbelievable communicative power. It is imperative, in Jihadi subculture, and in online jihad, to follow figures that combine these characteristics.

As for now, two factions are the main proponents of virtual leadership, although the borders sometimes blur. One is hierarchical and represented by semiofficial media companies which are the propaganda outlets of established jihad organizations. The other faction is decentralized and comprises Jihadi grassroots actors in cyberspace.

The hierarchical faction of online jihad tries to present a clear form of authority also in the Internet. There is a clear chain of command in a communicative sense, since their propaganda

³⁹ Therefore, leadership in cyberspace has numerous leaders, because smaller actors like role-models, opinion leaders, discursive leaders and various contributors co-steer information, diversify, process and transfer it.

⁴⁰ Jeroen Bruggeman, Vincent Traag and Justus Uitermark, “Power Relations in Discursive Struggles: A network Analysis of the Dutch Debate on Minority Integration 1990-2005,” paper prepared for the annual meeting of the *American Sociological Association*, Las Vegas: August 20-23, 2011.

⁴¹ “It is therefore important to see that the self is in part a ceremonial thing, a sacred object which must be treated with proper ritual care [...] The implication is that in one sense this secular world is not so irreligious as we might think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance.” Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Middlesex, Penguin, 1967), 91-95.

goes back to integrated structures. They try to establish a hierarchical form of communicative leadership. One example is Al-Qaeda, another one the Egyptian *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*. Al-Qaeda itself features media work as a form of leadership. One of its four consultative councils is solely responsible for media matters.

The decentralized grassroots faction of cyber jihad understands leadership as a participative endeavor. Most activists think that they are self-responsible, and happily take part in the mutual leadership process. In virtual environments, where no physical coercion takes place, one cannot easily force anyone to act against his or her will. Participants and members need to think that they consent. However, it is a manipulative and strategic “construction of consent,”⁴² which relies mainly on doctrinaire information and its related discursive power.

One proponent of the hierarchical faction who has understood to solve this problem “very well” is al-Qaeda strategist Abu Musab al-Suri. From a practical perspective, networking and communicating in cyberspace seems to be utterly useful to substitute, or at least effectively complement physical organizational structures that have come under pressure. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, one of the most advanced strategic thinkers of al-Qaeda, has taught the principles of communicative leadership since the 1990s. Al-Suri argues that propaganda should guide sympathizers of global jihad and be produced by sympathizers at the same time. To incite “individual terrorist” attacks, one needs to integrate members in the decision making process and provide them with a high feeling of relevance, implies al-Suri. This is supposed to attract a mass follower movement, which will be physically un-connected to larger organizations. According to al-Suri, the ultimate chain of command is the divine contract (*'ahd*) with Allah: A believer must obey and focus on Allah as highest authority. Members are not bound into an overarching institution and do not follow the guidance of established Sunni-Muslim clerics or clerical centers. It suffices if they form a cell (in the sense of an autonomous administrative micro-structure) by themselves. An operational leader for each cell that comprises more than one individual should be chosen, suggests al-Suri. Within al-Suri's propaganda concept, Islamic theology is interpreted in such a way that “incitement” (*tahrid*) through terrorist attacks and participative propaganda becomes the supreme divine command. It shall replace direct command and control structures through Jihadi organizations. Thus, “incitement” is a form of communicative leadership, based on “divine guidance” (*hidaya*) and “participative propaganda” (*da'wa*). This Jihadi command pattern calls for the perpetration of individual

⁴² See Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1992).

terrorist attacks (*irhab fardi*) as well as the exploitation of such attacks and the participation of networked activists in propaganda activity, since it sets an example for others.⁴³

On the basis of the foregoing thoughts, virtual leadership requires an extended of leadership which is instantiated in communication processes:⁴⁴

Virtual Leadership: A steady process of trend-setting and steering communication to influence the behaviour of individuals in order to achieve a goal. This process involves the target-oriented use of forces and resources, is rendered by a computer and independent of time and space. It is based on mutual information and several inter-related guidance mechanisms, which involve semiotic, theological and discursive fields of communication.

There are clearly definable models of leadership in cyberspace among Jihadis. For example, *hierarchical leadership* takes place when “official” media-companies of Jihadi organizations impose their agendas on cyber jihad. Hierarchical leadership is also the adaption of classical Islamic election rituals to the Internet, such as the virtual “*bay'a*,” or the creation of virtual hierarchical institutions like the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which bears a halo of quasi-sacred institutional authority. In addition, *mutual leadership* takes places when grassroots participants steer each other. They often do this through shared media activities, such as virtual workshops to design propaganda, or participant media incursions into other discussion forums. Moreover, *discursive leadership* is expressed by a dominant Jihadi jargon and authoritative Jihadi-terrorist concepts – every participant is supposed to carry this discourse further and win new converts. The *discursive ritualism* on Jihadi forums is one of the most subtle manifestation of virtual leadership on the micro-level. Yet, it is one of the main mechanisms to create status and hierarchy among online Jihadi groups. Hierarchies, in turn, result into power; and power and *discursive leadership* in Jihadi web-discussions are inextricably connected.

Leadership in cyberspace is a virtual phenomenon. The information society lacks a clear perception of borders between virtual and physical worlds. With the development of Web 2.0,

⁴³ However, al-Suri neglects the fact that most individuals who participate in media jihad do not engage in terrorist activity. In addition, decentralized leadership has its own dynamics and is extremely hard to control. See Philipp Holtmann, Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, 2009).

⁴⁴ This definition of leadership is oriented at the Heeresdienstvorschrift of the German army Bundeswehr. Leadership, according to HDv 100/900 is a “ständiger Prozess des richtungsweisenden und steuernden Einwirkens auf das Verhalten anderer Menschen, um ein Ziel durchzusetzen. Er umfasst den zielgerichteten Einsatz von Kräften und Mitteln nach Raum und Zeit und lebt von wechselseitiger Information [...]“

an increasing entanglement of both spheres has taken place. Most people take virtual worlds dead serious. Nobody wants to be harmed in his or her virtual identity, i.e. to be “*netslutted*” and “*netshitted*” on Facebook, Twitter, or Youtube. Yet, people love it to be “*netflirted*” or “*netloved*”.

Technically speaking, cyberspace may be defined as “the electronic medium of computer networks, in which online communication takes place.”⁴⁵ William Gibson defined cyberspace in his 1980s science fiction work *Neuromancer* as a “consensual hallucination.”⁴⁶ Yet, media environments like virtual realities seem to be more than mere hallucinations. They impact on individuals’ imaginations and perceptions of norms and principles. Humans tend to accept incoming information as true it is sensory, networked and affirmed by others.⁴⁷ If reality is also defined as a specific way to think, then virtual activity creates ideas that translate into communicative inter-actions, sometimes even into physical actions, especially so, if the incoming information is essentially ideological.⁴⁸ Furthermore, if we understand reality also as a specific way to think, then radical ideas are a part of an individual’s mental reality and can guide his or her behaviour in Jürgen Habermas’ sense of *imperative and strategic actions* (see the theoretical framework in the next chapter for this point).

As of yet, there is an essential human conflict how to deal with cyberspace and its effects on human behaviour. Virtual phenomena thus are still being interpreted nearly as an illusion, or something that is true, but not totally. The virtual world and its effects are like a phantom to the human mind. Propaganda in the Web is “nothing but a virtual call,” can often be heard in the news. Yet, authoritarian states are shutting down Net-services as soon as their oppositions make use of them, to avoid calls for demonstrations that might endanger their existence (for example in Egypt and China). Participants in Net-agitation are being punished with long prison terms by repressive states. Therefore,

Virtual is perceived as something that has the potential to come into existence and is rendered by a computer. People tend to associate virtual with “fake”, which is connected to 18th and 19th century discussions of optics and physics.⁴⁹ Thus, everything virtual has a threshold quality, since the idea of not being totally

⁴⁵ TheFreeDictionary, accessed March 14, 2011, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/cyberspace>.

⁴⁶ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1986).

⁴⁷ Guiseppe Mantovani, “Virtual Reality as a Communication Environment: Consensual Hallucination, Fiction, and Possible Selves,” *Human Relations*, 48(6), 1995: 669-682.

⁴⁸ Robert Hassan, *The Information Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 1.

⁴⁹ Gordon Calleja, “Virtual Worlds Today: Gaming and Online Sociality,” *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet: Being Virtually Real? Virtual Worlds from a Cultural Studies’ Perspective* Vol. 03.1(2008), ed. Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, accessed September 22, 2011, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltexte/2008/8288/pdf/calleja.pdf>.

real is connected to it. Nevertheless, people tend to take virtual worlds dead-serious. “Virtual-leadership” is thus “leadership on the threshold to reality which is rendered by a computer.” In fact, we should perceive virtual as a separate reality, which exists beside physical reality. The terms virtual life and virtual reality are synonymous, as are real life and physical reality. They will be used interchangeably.

It is, of course, tempting to try to construct a direct connection between virtual and physical activity. But this ideologically-charged task will not be the focus of the present dissertation. Admittedly, there seem to be strong intersections between cyber jihad and actual terrorist attacks. Cases like the Dutch terrorist Muhammad Bouyeri demonstrate the validity of that point. Bouyeri gruesomely killed the filmmaker and political activist Theo van Gogh in November 2004 and justified his deed with a medieval theological guideline from the Internet. The theological tractate legitimized slicing the throats of those who insult the Prophet Muhammad. Yet, Bouyeri’s radicalization was co-influenced by several other factors.⁵⁰ Many other cases display similar characteristics.⁵¹ Yet, it is extremely hard to

⁵⁰ He distributed a text among his friends, which he had downloaded from a Jihadi website. The text justified slicing the throats of those who insult Allah. It co-guided Bouyeri’s deed. Bouyeri’s failure to establish a youth center caused a growing sense of alienation from Dutch society; the death of his mother from cancer made him desperate; and Bouyeri was involved in a Dutch Jihadi network, the Hofstadgroep or Hofstadnetwerk, which was influenced by a radical preacher.

Albert, Benschop, “Chronicle of a Political Murder Foretold - Jihad in the Netherlands,” <http://www.sociosite.org/>, accessed December 12, 2010, http://www.sociosite.org/jihad_nl_en.php.

⁵¹ The impact of cyber jihad becomes stronger by the day. To name just a few cases of attackers who left footprints in cyberspace: The Iraqi-born Taimour al-Abdaly detonated himself prematurely on his way to a suicide bombing in Sweden’s capital Stockholm in December 2010; The Bangladeshi Rajib Karim plotted to bomb a passenger plane in Great Britain in 2010; The Kosovar Arid Uka shot two U.S. soldiers fatally in Germany in February 2011; The Saudi Khalid Aldawsari plotted terrorist attacks in the USA and a man who is probably of Syrian descent calling himself “Omar al-Shami” in terrorist discussion websites committed a suicide bombing in Iraq. They were all influenced by a Jihadi thought milieu, which is being created via the Internet and its propaganda.⁵¹ They were tapping Jihadi networks and thoughts before their attacks and activities. One might also stress the fact that they were and are all Muslims with a migrant background, some of them well integrated and married, such as Faisal Shahzad and Taimour al-Abdaly. They did not perpetrate their attacks in their home countries. But none of them perpetrated his attack without accompanying media activities, which is the issue here.

1) Taimour al-Abdaly was born in Iraq and lived since 1992 in Sweden, later Great Britain. He blew himself up prematurely on the way to a suicide bombing in Sweden’s capital in December 2010. Al-Abdaly was entangled into the jihadionline milieu and said in his martyrdom will that he acted on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which is a virtual entity that claims to represent al-Qaeda in Iraq.

2) Rajib Karim was born in Bangladesh and lived in Great Britain, where he has been sentenced in March 2011 for supporting the media work of Jammat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and for plotting to bomb a U.S.-bound British Airways flight. Karim received direct operational orders from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s main ideologue Anwar al-Awlaqi, who since then also counts as an operative leader.

3) Arid Uka comes from Kosovo and grew up in Germany. He killed two U.S. soldiers at Frankfurt airport in March 2011. Uka radicalized via the Internet (nickname “AbuReyyan”), had no contact to terrorist organizations and is the picture book example of a lone wolf (single attacker without organizational affiliation).

determine the exact nature of the relationship between online jihad and terrorist attacks. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to establish a leadership pattern and chain of command that stretches directly from cyberspace into non-digital reality. In addition, not all online Jihadis must necessarily become terrorists. So called “armchair-Jihadis”, i.e. participants in electronic jihad may as well gain a therapeutic effect from it, similar to a release valve for frustrations and anger.⁵² This question needs further research.⁵³

Therefore, this study will focus on internal mechanisms of online jihad and virtual leadership patterns that can be clearly identified. That means communicative actions within cyber Jihadi networks. They are the key to understand how Jihadis steer and organize each other in cyberspace. It is much easier to examine the internal factors of cyber jihad than the influence of cyber jihad on reality. The major arenas of field study will be the most popular Jihadi forums and blogs, but also Jihadi user-accounts on Facebook and Youtube. Jihadi discussion forums are the epicentres of online jihad. It is important to examine the exact types of communication on these forums, where certain fixed symbols, discourses and doctrines structure the intellectual world of Jihadis on a day-to-day basis.

The research method is qualitative and orientated at the sampling of expressive examples, watching the behaviour of online-Jihadis in the fashion of participant observation. No

4) Khalid Aldawsari is a Saudi national who studied in the United States and planned to attack several high profile targets. According to Arlington Police, Aldawsari did not have any operational ties to a terrorist group, but was a “lone wolf” guided by strategic, ideological and tactical material from the Jihadi internet.

5) Abu Omar al-Shami is the avatar name of a popular cyber Jihadi, who first propagated on Jihadi forums and then allegedly blew himself up in a suicide attack in Iraq in March 2011. Al-Shami was probably a Syrian national.

⁵² See, for example, Jarret, Brachman and Alex N. Levine, “You Too Can Be Awlaki!”, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 35 (2011): 25-46.

Furthermore, rituals, in contrast to games, are candid and programmed social transactions that usually proceed in series, hence their dynamic nature. Regarding the intersection of gaming and rituals⁵², Clifford Geertz in his seminal work, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, found out that rituals are reproduced through playing and vice versa. Geertz illustrates his concept of “deep play” at the example of the Balinese cockfight. The Balinese cockfight reflects hierarchies and power relations within Balinese society. “For it is only apparently cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men.” The playful display of raw violence and anger is at the same time extremely ordered. The social structure in the Balinese cockfight is not represented realistically. The cockfight allows participants and players to live out aggression, violence and cruelty that must be subdued in daily life. However, on the ritualistic and “virtual” level, the cockfight allows participants to live fully through the dark and wild powers underneath the peaceful coexistence of societies. Thus, the ritual play allows expressing everything that is unacceptable in reality. Thus, the question is legitimate if online jihad also may have therapeutic effects on participants, channelling their real world frustrations like a release valve?

See Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412-454. Also downloadable as E-essay at the University of Michigan Server, accessed January 14, 2011, <http://rfrost.people.si.umich.edu/courses/MatCult/content/Geertz.pdf>.

Geertz’ essay is the classical example of “thick description”, i.e. the anthropologist’s method to explain human behaviour as detailed as possible. “Deep play” refers to gaming behaviour that cannot only be explained in a utilitarian sense (out of pure pleasure). Gaming also causes frustrations.

⁵³ This requires interviewing a high number of participants in order to find out about their emotions connected to electronic jihad. This dissertation presents one such interview in the chapter “Infrastructure and Work Mode of the Jihadi Net.”

quantitative data can be obtained from this approach, but the subjects can be studied in much more detail. The main questions when studying and observing cyber Jihadis are: Who are the central and participative leaders? How do they create power and truth in their discourses? Are there hierarchical virtual institutions in cyber jihad? What are the most common rituals, symbols and religious doctrines by which cyber Jihadis self-organize and steer each other?

This dissertation is structured as follows: Part One will explain “virtual leadership” from a theoretical angle, embedded into the network theory of John Arquilla and David R. Ronfeldt, and the theory of communicative theory by Jürgen Habermas. Part Two, chapter one will discuss the infrastructure and work mode of the Jihadi web. This includes a short genealogy of media jihad from the 1980s until today. We will also look at different categories of Jihadi websites, such as “official” websites, user-accounts, channels and forums and their respective functions, semiotics and aesthetics, which will be treated in detail in the main part of this dissertation (Part Three, “The Symbols of Online Jihad”). In the following, we will direct our attention to Jihadi groups and actors online, which will also include a generic description of agenda setters of online jihad – Jihadi media companies. Part Two, chapter two will explain factors that facilitate virtual leadership in Sunni Muslim culture. This concerns the lack of authority and plurality of power centres in Sunni Islam; the breakup of traditional Jihadi organizations; and the ideological cohesion and communitarian feeling of jihad supporters on the Internet. Our main witness is the al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri. Virtual characters are easy to lead, this chapter argues: The anonymous character of the Internet facilitates extremist expressions. Participants are in a threshold state, which is represented by the divide between virtual extremist selves and physical normal selves, and there is no coherent discursive authority that challenges the virtual self’s extremism. Virtual leaders and propagandists can easily exploit this gap. Moreover, actors sometimes seem to support agendas online, which they would not support offline. However, they also quarrel over the legitimacy of topics, for example, the killing of civilians. In Part Two, Chapter 3.b Jihadi media strategies will be illustrated through the lenses of the participants. We will analyse the most popular strategists of media jihad, including Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, Abu Bakr Naji, Abd al-Salim al-Rawashidi, as well as grassroots actors’ perceptions and ideas on online jihad jihad. The question will be answered how grassroots actors interpret, apply or develop own media strategies.

Part Three of this dissertation contains the main chapters. It comprises three chapters, and one sub-chapter each will be dedicated to symbolic representations of online jihad (“Symbols of Online Jihad”), rituals in Jihadi discussions (“Rituals of Online Jihad”), and the Jihadi belief

system in the Net (“Theology of Online Jihad”) to answer fundamental questions of the virtual leadership concept. The thesis argues that these are the three interrelated guiding components of virtual leadership processes in online jihad. Each chapter will be introduced by a short theoretical framework.

Let us quickly summarize the virtual leadership components, which will be discussed in Part Three. Firstly, signs and aesthetics play a crucial role for fundamentalist web propaganda. They are imperative communicative stimuli within the context of online jihad. Moreover, graphic signs and symbols help to create aesthetic virtual environments in which Jihadi discussions and doctrines are firmly anchored. In addition, participants in online jihad mutually create and re-create symbolic representations of their group culture, such as digitalized black flags, Quran-Kalashnikov adaptations, horses and riders, certain colours, arabesque ornaments, etc. To demonstrate this case for online jihad, we will do extensive field research and apply theoretical approaches on semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce, semantics by J. Lyons, fundamentalist aesthetics by Monika Witsch, et al. Digital ceremonies need a space in which to take place. Symbolic representations and cultural aesthetic expressions (also *Waffenlustkultur*) surround them. Thus, chapter one of part C will describe the space in which virtual leadership takes place, i.e. the virtual architecture of the Jihadi Net. This concerns also the semiotic structure of online Jihadi milieus. Cyber jihad is not limited to ultra-radical discussion boards, but permeates the whole Internet, which is like a “small-world network” where actors who are far away from each other, may get in touch by a simple click. In the same way, a simple click may catapult a user directly into the world of virtual jihad.

The three models of virtual leadership, which will be discussed in Part Three, chapter 2 of this dissertation, are hierarchical, mutual and discursive virtual leadership.

Firstly, hierarchical models will be demonstrated at the example of virtual oaths of allegiance. The adaption of classical Islamic rituals to the Internet is another attempt to create virtual hierarchy. The most salient example is the oath of allegiance (bay'a), which fulfils a double role: Virtual Oaths are supposed to create leaders, or to strengthen identification with role models, such as prominent members of Jihadi organizations. In addition, virtual oaths are rites of transition: Confirming an oath by writing “I pledge allegiance” is also meant to be a submersion into jihad. A thorough understanding of the actual use of these oaths, both among Jihadi groups (real life) and online activists (virtual life), their different manifestations, and the formulas connected to them will be crucial to understand the deeper dynamics of discursive leadership. Based on close participant observation, another example of discursive virtual leadership will be demonstrated by post mortem discursive leaders. Two cases studies

of suicide bombers who were active in online jihad and whose virtual identities and writings continued to function as central communication hubs after their deaths will be discussed.

Secondly, mutual virtual leadership will be discussed at the example of participative media campaigns and media activities on Jihadi forums which have a ritualized character. Examples are media incursions, media workshops and participative publications, which serve as macro-rituals for Jihadi online communities.

The chapter on discursive leadership will discuss current Jihadi expressions and their use in online interactions. Participants in the Jihadi discourses speak a certain jargon, which allocate extremist meaning to basic Islamic concepts and is often difficult to understand for outsiders. Ritualistic formulas and linguistic religious codes used in Jihadi forums discourses create status and hierarchy positions. Many of these formulas are based on verbal oaths of allegiance to God as the supreme leader; but on a more subtle level they are adapted to online discussions in order to define participants' positions within these discussion groups. That bears a strong effect upon participants, which becomes visible from their exalted reactions to Islamic idioms in online discussions. The instrumentalized and strategic use of Islamic parlance is thus an expression of discursive virtual leadership in Jihadi online environments.

It is understood that the three models of virtual leadership analyzed in the second chapter of part C are based on virtual ritualistic interactions. For that purpose, rituals will be treated from a socio-anthropological perspective, which is based on theoretical approaches by Erving Goffman, Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep, Gabriel Dorta et al. Leaning on Marc Sageman's thesis, the dissertation argues that also ritualistic discourses lead (the internal processes of) cyber jihad. It is somehow difficult to grasp the mechanisms, because they are communicative and do not agree with traditional notions of leadership in groups and networks. But we will use American sociologist Alfred Bergesen's concept of "ritual order" to explain them. According to Alfred Bergesen, the "ritual order" is the complete sum of practices that constantly reproduce social ties and symbols (which in turn represent these ties).⁵⁴ More specifically, the ritual is a form of communicative action that abolishes the difference between thinking and doing.⁵⁵ This point is important for leadership in cyberspace.

54 Albert Bergesen, "Die rituelle Ordnung", in *Ritualtheorien. Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. David J. Krieger and Andréa Belliger (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2003), 49-77. I would like to thank Felix Menzel for his help in regards to the concept of rituals. Felix Menzel "Medienrituale und politische Ikonen" (Schnellroda, Edition Antaios, 2009), 51-93. The following discussion and examples on different levels of rituals are mostly taken from Bergesen and Menzel, except for my own interpretations and examples of jihadirituals.

55 Catherine Bell, „Ritualkonstruktion“, in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Adreá Belliger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 37-48. As Emile Durkheim observed, "religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two categories lies all that separates

Cyberspace is a threshold zone that creates threshold identities. Cyber-Jihadis are threshold people who have extremist online identities, yet at the same time live quite normal lives.⁵⁶ This creates tension and a longing to fill the gap with even more extremist actions online.⁵⁷ We will use an extended definition of rituals to analyze leadership mechanisms in cyberspace:

Rituals are formal as well as informal repeated social interactions that constantly reproduce social ties and hierarchies. They use and create emotional zeal to create ideological conviction.⁵⁸ Moreover, rituals tie thoughts to actions.⁵⁹

The third chapter of Part Three will concentrate on the theological dimension of online jihad and its role in virtual leadership. The participant observation will be bolstered by a theoretical framework that owes to spadework on online jihad of Rüdiger Lohlker, and on Muslim social media by Gary Bunt, Charles Mandaville et al. The concept “framing” will be introduced into the discussion and explain how Jihadis try to anchor their doctrines into larger Sunni-Islamic contexts. The pluralisation of Muslim authority on the Internet plays a significant role in this context. Both framing and pluralisation of Islamic authority significantly enhance the possibilities for Jihadis to exploit Islamic theology for leadership purposes. Quasi sacred and transcendental command patterns are created and based on alleged injunctions of God as supreme commander. We will argue the case of theological command patterns at the example of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula’s online magazine “Muaskar al-Battar,” and the command doctrine “a book that guides and a sword that assists” (*kitab yahdi wa saif yansur*). The transliteration of Arabic letters has been done according to a simplified system. No diacritical points or marks have been added to the Latin letters to mark Arabic letters, except for the two Arabic letters “ayn” and the “hamza.” For both letters, the same diacritical mark “

thinking from doing.” See Emile Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life”. Durkheim’s idea was further developed in ritual theories of the latter 20th century, on which Catherine Bell had a decisive influence.

⁵⁶ The average “armchair-Jihadi” is caught in a liminal state between the virtual and the physical world and thus develops a *liminal persona*. The concept of liminality was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage, which have the following three-part structure: 1. Separation; 2. Liminal Period; 3. Re-Assimilation. See Arnold van Gennep, *Übergangsriten (Les rites de passage)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verlag, 2005). The U.S. anthropologist Victor Turner utilized van Gennep’s model “rites de passage” and Clifford Geertz’ concept “thick description” for his own concepts of “liminality” and “communitas.” See Victor Turner, „Liminality and Communitas,“ in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 333.

⁵⁷ See here also Jarret Brachman and Alex N. Levine, “You Too Can Be Awlaki!”

⁵⁸ This definition is orientated at John McManus, *Ritual and Human Social Cognition*, in *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis*, ed. Eugene G. D’Aquili (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 216-248.

⁵⁹ Catherine Bell, „Ritualkonstruktion“, in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Adreá Belliger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 37-48.

' ' has been used. But the dental letter “*dal*,” such as in “*dar*” (house) and the emphatic letter “*dad*,” such as in “*daruri*” (necessary), are written with the same Latin letter, which is a simple “d.” The same simplified transliteration applies to other Arabic letters, such as “*qaf*,” “*ha*,” or “*shin*,” which normally would be expressed with letters bearing diacritical marks. Anglicized Arabic words, such as “Sheikh,” “Quran,” or names, such as Abdullah, have been written in their most common anglicized form, which either appears in the Webster’s Dictionary or in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. The majority of Quran quotations are orientated at the English translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953) and taken from the websites www.sacred-texts.com and www.islam101.com. The author’s translations of Islamic traditions (*ahadith*) are based on the vast library of traditions of the website www.islamweb.net’s “*Mawsu'at al-Hadith al-Sharif*.”⁶⁰ According to the Arabic dictionary of Hans Wehr, *nisba*-endings have been transliterated with a double “yy” for adjectives, and with a single “y” for substantives.

The reader finds the key points and key-definitions of virtual leadership summarized below:

- a. Online jihad is a virtual organizational network and shows a specific leadership form, which we will call “virtual leadership,” when restricted to the Internet, and “communicative leadership” when virtual and physical spheres overlap. “**Jihad**” and its related ideology „**jihadism**“ are understood as “a fighting struggle” (*jahada*) in the sense of terrorism (*irhab*) and armed operations (*jihad bi-l-saif, qital*). Further elements are spiritual purification (*jihad al-nafs*), financial support (*jihad bi-l-mal*) and propaganda (*da'wah* (cmp. al-Salim 2003); *jihad bi-l-qalam* (cmp. al-Suri 2004)).
- b. Two major groups of actors are involved in virtual leadership on the Internet. On the one hand, terrorist organizations with their highly professional media groups and productions are trendsetters for the terrorist milieu. On the other hand, grassroots activists increasingly become autonomous actors, who do not act as puppets of the organizations, but impact themselves on the development of cyber jihad.
- c. Established organizations and their media wings try to present hierarchical chains of authority in the Internet; their propaganda goes back to integrated structures. They try to establish a hierarchical form of communicative leadership. Examples are al-Qaeda and affiliated groups with their media companies, which publish strategic and tactical commands.
- d. The decentralized grassroots faction of cyber jihad understands leadership as a participative endeavor. Every activist is self-responsible and can take part in the mutual leadership process. Their networks are organized through information-sharing and led by participative communicative

⁶⁰ <http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/index.php>.

processes. One cannot force anyone on the Internet to act against his or her will. Participants and members need to consent.

e. Jihadi propaganda can be found all over the Internet, but Jihadi discussion forums are the epicentres of Jihadi propaganda. Because of that it is so important to examine the exact types of communication that take place on these forums. They are the arenas where certain fixed linguistic codes and jargons reconstruct and reproduce the intellectual world of Jihadis on a linguistic level.

f. If we further define it, then virtual leadership is a steady process of trend-setting and steering communication to influence the behaviour of individuals in order to achieve a goal. This process involves the target-oriented use of forces and resources, is rendered by a computer and independent of time and space. It is based on mutual information through dominant discourses.

g. "Virtual" is perceived as something that has the potential to come into existence and is rendered by a computer. People tend to associate virtual with "fake", which is connected to 18th and 19th century discussions of optics and physics.⁶¹ Thus, virtual has a threshold quality, since the idea of not being totally real is connected to it. Nevertheless, people tend to take virtual worlds dead-serious. "Virtual-leadership" is thus "leadership on the threshold to reality which is rendered by a computer."

h. Rituals are formal as well as informal repeated social interactions that constantly reproduce social ties and hierarchies. They use and create emotional zeal to create ideological conviction.⁶² Moreover, rituals tie thoughts to actions.⁶³

i. Virtual leadership is based on authoritative symbolic, ritualistic and doctrinaire discourses of the online networks of jihad. These networks function, according to organizational network theory, even in absence of central leadership. Examples are leadership models of online jihad, which are largely participant-based, such as hierarchical, mutual and discursive virtual leadership, or the exploitation of the theological doctrine "a book that guides and a sword that conquers."

j. Media jihad, over the last years, has developed a momentum on its own. It hived off in the wake of the U.S.-American occupation of Iraq in 2003 and its control literally slipped out of the hands of terrorist organizations and their monopoly on interpretation and authoritative discourses. Media jihad is influenced and depends on the participation of grassroots actors as much as it depends on the media-outlets of established Jihadi organizations, which function as corporate leaders.

⁶¹ Gordon Calleja, "Virtual Worlds Today: Gaming and Online Sociality," *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet: Being Virtually Real? Virtual Worlds from a Cultural Studies' Perspective* Vol. 03.1(2008), ed. Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, accessed September 22, 2011, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltexte/2008/8288/pdf/calleja.pdf>.

⁶² John McManus, "Ritual and Human Social Cognition," in *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis*, ed. Eugene G. D'Aquili (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 216-248.

⁶³ Catherine Bell, „Ritualkonstruktion“, in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Adreá Belliger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 37-48.

Part One – Communitas and Community

1. Theoretical Framework of Virtual Leadership: Communicative Guidance Mechanisms of Online Jihad

The retreat of every single one behind the computer, and then the Interface-Glasses caused the fragmentation of society into individuals, who, with frantic attempts, tried to unite through the Net for a while, but for nothing – they stayed scattered, without collective force, and without the ability to organize their fights for goals. Assaf Gavron, Hydromania (2008)

Virtual leadership will be anchored in a conceptual framework that combines discourse analysis, organizational network and netwar theory with the strategic action concept of Jürgen Habermas. Anthropological approaches will be used to examine micro-processes of virtual leadership in online jihad.⁶⁴ The thesis is that semiotic, discursive-ritualistic and theological communicative processes (a dynamic communicative triad) are the interrelated mechanisms of virtual leadership.⁶⁵ In the neoliberal capitalist information economy, attention is the most important capital. Therefore, attention guidance through targeted, strategic communication is the *ars artium* of the information age. The single communicative guidance-mechanisms (semiotic, theological and ritualistic) are carriers of discursive power, and in their entirety, it will be argued, any shared-cause network or group can establish a communicative-networked pattern of leadership, i.e. *virtual leadership*. Ample examples⁶⁶ for the case of online jihad

⁶⁴ In this chapter, however, the theoretical macro level will be explained. The anthropological perspective integrates also evolutionary-biological, religious and semiotic concepts into the study of online jihad. In summary, it can be said that virtual leadership is a structural functionalist model. The ideology of jihad is a structural problem in Muslim societies, just as racism is in Western societies. However, both structural problems are part of the “normal” functioning of a society. The key-question remains always how to deal with it and to what extent it influences a society. Online jihad structuralizes and functionalizes Muslim subcultures on the Internet.

⁶⁵ These are the three interrelated guiding components of virtual leadership processes. For example, the importance of aesthetic virtual rooms, their symbols and icons, in short, the semiotics of online jihad, lies clear at hand: Iconic signs and sounds automatically remind a recipient of certain concept, idea, or role model. The semiotic concept of Monika Witsch on fundamentalist aesthetics in online agitation will serve as a major theoretical venture point to explore semiotic processes in online jihad.

⁶⁶ Samples were analyzed according to the following research questions: What are the virtual rooms in which actors move and what is the meaning of the symbols and semiotics displayed in these rooms? What are the ritualistic discursive processes in Jihadi online-discussions that create hierarchies and discursive leadership? What do the concepts behind authoritative online theological expressions mean for a transcendental and ultimate chain of command? Accordingly, the dissertation dedicates one chapter each to the three components “Semiotic Virtual Leadership - The Symbols and Aesthetics of Online Jihad,” “Discursive Virtual Guidance – The Rituals of Online Jihad,” and “Theological Virtual Guidance – The Theology of Online Jihad” (the Jihadi belief system in the Net) to clear up fundamental questions of a virtual leadership concept. The thesis is that these are the three interrelated guiding components of virtual leadership processes.

will be given in the following chapters on the basis of participant observation, which illustrate the functionalist structural theory of virtual leadership.

We will locate online jihad within information society and digital organizational networks, using, among others, concepts by Robert Hassan, John Arquilla and David Ronfeld (1). Having discussed broader information society and network concepts, we will apply Jürgen Habermas's communicative theory to online jihad. We will refer to Habermas' concept of *strategic action*, which describes a situation and a process of target-orientated and manipulative communication. *Virtual leadership* is a guidance mechanism in a *virtual strategic action* environment (*Lebenswelt*); i.e. online jihad. In order to understand this concept of transformation from offline to online communication better, we will also explain Habermas' ideal of *communicative action*, which is based on consensus-orientated communication processes, and describes a universally valid condition/situation of communication that can be approved by all actors (2). In the following, we will integrate the concepts of dominion and leadership into informational-networked contexts. Leadership in information networks is instantiated in communication and specifically in online Jihadi leadership contexts in discursive rituals. Bruigeman et al. Argue, for example, that online discussion networks feature distinctive models, such as *discursive leadership*. We will discuss a number of different leadership approaches based on ideas of Levin, Weber, Pavitt and Mauss to clarify the theoretical aspects of leadership in networks, which includes also the key mechanisms of virtual leadership. Michel Foucault's concepts of power, leadership and hegemonic discourses will serve here as theoretical anchor points. (3). Dense ideological environments on the Internet have action-guiding effects on information consumers and actors. That is a key insight to understand how signs and rituals within virtual leadership function. In regards to rituals in online Jihadi discourse-networks, the anthropologist Alfred Bergesen's concept of the "ritual order" will serve as an important analytic tool to explain how online communicative action of Jihadis is structured by a multi-layered interaction of rituals, which result into three levels of leadership: hierarchical, mutual and discursive leadership. According to Bergesen, the "ritual order" is the complete sum of practices that constantly reproduce social ties and symbols (which in turn represent these ties). D.J. Krieger and A. Belliger argue that rituals are autonomous *communicative actions* and have considerably authoritative effects. Krieger and Belliger also argue that the ritual abolishes the difference between thinking and doing. We will apply this argument not only to the rituals of online jihad, but also to semiotic and the theological discourses of online jihad, which are modes of *strategic action*, because they take place in an ideological communication

environment that does not offer any space for consensus orientated rational agreements. From the outside, Jihadi communicative interactions can then only be seen as expressions of strategic action. However, within the circle of its participants, online jihad is communicative, consensus-oriented action. Expressed by power discourses, be it pictorial, ritualistic or theological discourses, these interactions create virtual communicative guidance. Several communicative guidance forms, i.e. all three of these power discourses together establish virtual leadership. Leaning on É. Durkheim, C. Levi-Strauss and M. Witsch, among others, this study will understand rituals, mythological aesthetics and theological doctrines of online jihad as *strategic action* through hegemonic discourses (4). Concepts of biogenetic structuralism by C. Laughlin, J. McManus and J. Shearer as well as the evolutionary biological approach of R. Jordania will help to explain interactions on the micro-level within “online jihad” networks, which seem to be based on neuronal and instinctive socialization patterns (5). Finally, we will apply Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* and *threshold* states to learn more about the actors of online jihad. Online Jihadis are, psychologically seen, in a constant *rite of passage*. This not only concerns their belief in salvation, but also the rites and ceremonies connected to their belief in cyberspace and their effects on identity formation and socialisation (6).

Some preliminary thoughts on the topic:

The global process of interconnectedness which started with industrialization and urbanization some 200 years ago has reached its preliminary peak in the information society. The dominant socio-cultural and communicative guidance processes of the information society are organized via the Internet, which can be described as the “network of networks.” It consists of more than 20.000 sub-nets and is based on more than one million servers, or network host computers that are run by Internet Service Providers (ISP) which are knotted together at about 350 Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) around the globe. IXPs are companies, such as the German Commercial Internet Exchange (DE-CIE), which enable ISPs to link their data streams together through peering-agreements.

The Internet is co-managed by multiple organizations and institutions, such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which assigns domain-names such as google.com. ICANN also administrates the servers of the Domain Name System (DNS). Although the Internet is supposedly built on democratic, even anarchic network-structures - in the sense of “a lack of central dominion” - clear lines of hierarchy and dominion can already

be detected in the administration and organization of its meta-structure. For example, ICANN is formally a non-governmental body, whose agents include various representatives from the business-sector, civil-society organizations, and states. Its decisions are presently dominated by the U.S. Department of Commerce and thus heavily state-influenced. At the moment, the U.S. does not seem to be motivated to take up further responsibilities in the centralization, regulation and government of the Internet. But at the 2012 Dubai conference of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), other state actors, such as Russia, China and some of the most repressive regimes of the Middle East and Africa, suggested to use ITU as a platform to install a globally binding regulation and governance of the Internet.⁶⁷ Market-leading corporative leaders reject this idea, since they calculate that consumer-guidance can be much easier exercised in an Internet that is based on a “free” flow of information. Since digital culture is coined and dominated by different actors who influence in their roles as opinion leaders also online rules of conduct, market-leading corporate managers calculate that offline human behavior can be increasingly guided through the manipulation of online values and behavior. One of the reasons for their calculation is the growing interconnectedness of online and offline spheres. Their vision of consumer leadership is based on motivation, stimulus and participation principles, not on openly centralized and hierarchical control.⁶⁸ Presently, the opinion leaders of global digital culture are in descending order market-leading corporations, civil-society actors, sub-cultures and finally states. The latter, with their traditional centralized forms of governance and hierarchy, seem to have a hard time adapting to the organizational dynamics of networked digital culture.

Flat, complex and often informal hierarchies seem to have been on the rise since the advent of the information revolution. At the same time, traditional power structures with “simple” asymmetric hierarchic constellations seem to become less important.⁶⁹ Irrespective of traditional or complex hierarchies, Max Weber observed that relations of power and domination always require a certain degree of consent on the side of the ruled or dominated, without which any rule would be impossible.⁷⁰ At present, power and domination develop

⁶⁷ Philip Banse, “Wer regiert das Internet?,” [www.dradio.de](http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/hintergrundpolitik/1937779/), December 2, 2012, accessed December 5, 2012, <http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/hintergrundpolitik/1937779/>.

⁶⁸ „DIVSI Meinungsführer-Studie „Wer gestaltet das Internet?“,“ Deutsches Institut für Vertrauen und Sicherheit im Internet (DIVSI), accessed December 5, 2012, <https://www.divsi.de/divsi-meinungsführer-studie>.

⁶⁹ Konrad Paul Liessmann, Introduction to *Die Kanäle der Macht: Herrschaft und Freiheit im Medienzeitalter*, ed. Konrad Paul Liessmann (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2003) 7-14.

⁷⁰ In this sense, the early 20th century definition of power and rule by Max Weber has not lost anything of its topicality: “Power means the probability that one actor within a social relationship carries out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. Domination or rule means the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.”

Richard Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 64; 205. Translated from Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der*

increasingly within complex interdependent consent-networks, which seemingly give a growing power to the formerly powerless, the simple citizens.

The ideals of the powerless, who struggle against established and unjust elites, are often corrupted from the outset. Countless Social-revolutionary struggles in the Middle East, Africa, South-America and Asia are proof of this. They have been fought under the slogans of justice, liberation, equality and brotherhood, just to turn into bloody dictatorships themselves, once the protagonists had gained the upper hand. Friedrich Nietzsche described the treacherous nature of power in his concept “the will to power,” which means that everyone wants it, and no one is free from being corrupted by it. By the same token, the dynamics of revolutionary struggle often require the powerless to strive for gaining the exact same power, which they criticize so badly.⁷¹ Revolutionaries and extremists of all sorts frequently try to gain control over established power structures and the dominant channels of power, be it economic, social, political, medial, moral or theological. In this respect, there are identifiable power structures and channels of power in information society. A salient example to demonstrate the validity of this point is online jihad. Originally advocated by extremist fundamentalists, for whom a colourful advertisement would be tantamount to blasphemy and western cultural domination, the present protagonists of online Jihad are creators of colourful animated graphics, movies and stories that resemble a mixture of cheap, but sometimes also skilled Hollywood and B-movie charm, combined with light-porn influences (see below).

verstehenden Soziologie (1922), accessed December 15, 2012, <http://www.textlog.de/7312.html>. „Macht bedeutet jede Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht. Herrschaft soll heißen die Chance, für einen Befehl bestimmten Inhalts bei angebbaren Personen Gehorsam zu finden;“

⁷¹ Konrad Paul Liessmann, Introduction to Die Kanäle der Macht: Herrschaft und Freiheit im Medienzeitalter.

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A song that everyone gets addicted to...
 It's The Reason Behind Her Popularity!

Illustration above: Download link to a Jihadi media-file on a free file-hoster. The link was posted on an ultra-fundamentalist Jihadi discussion forum. When looking at the mixture of hedonism, sex and violence on the free-file hoster, the question immediately arises, how to understand current information age fundamentalisms.

Marketing concepts and paradise imaginations flow well together; this is especially visible in the above link to the product of an “official” Jihadi media production company. Online Jihadis tap mainstream digital culture and are obsessed with the unbelievable semiotic power of the picture, the blinking virtual banner, the immature but effective use of visual messages. If they want it or not, the marketing of their terrorist/liberation struggles is inextricably bound into the larger semiotics and discourses of the Web, which is flooded by different actors with sex, violence and consumption-thrills to gain attention profits.

The more power and domination processes are being filtered and liquified through the information channels of society, the harder it is to define who is in charge and the more consensual and participatory the leadership of communication processes becomes. It may be good to cite at this point R. Lohlker, who observes that it is tempting “to understand transnational Jihadism as a specific Islamic social movement, but Jihadism is better understood as a religiously framed subculture sharing some traits with other modern,

globalized subcultures.”⁷² Information and communication channels in the Internet create huge networks of sub-networks with topic related contents, be it entertainment, social-media, economics and business, news, politics, sports and health, sub-cultural and lifestyle topics, among them different extremist groups. One may argue that the organizational-technical meta-structure of the Internet is highly controlled: On the administrative level through companies that run Internet Exchange Points (IXPs), the state and business influenced organization that administrates the assignment of domain-names (ICANN), or the UN-body that aspires to centralize Internet authority (ITU); and on the technical level, there is product-dominion over the way users see, perceive and hit keyboards or stroke touch-screens, which is exercised through soft- and hardware giants such as Microsoft, Apple, Samsung and Co. But there is still a relative anarchy and freedom in regards to what each and every single user can choose to put online (provided they have the knowledge or money to secure and administrate the necessary data storage, which is facilitated by user-friendly software).

Von Braun compares the power of the media to the power of belief. Along the lines of Foucault, who was not concerned with traditional relationships of dominion between the powerful and the powerless, but with “a circulation of desires,” von Braun argues that the actors of information society share consensual relationships, which are tied up with the operation of power. Foucault’s concept of power is absolutely apt, argues von Braun, to explain the existence and creation of modern “consent,” in the sense of a global “community sense, and community of senses” via the media.⁷³ It comes to mind that Foucault, when he spoke about power, frequently mentioned networks, such as “a proliferating net of discursive relations.”⁷⁴ Thus, it seems that leadership aspects of information networks can be very well systemized with his key notions. The “manufacturing of consent” through an elitist media, which Chomsky and Herman attacked in their study in 1994,⁷⁵ has in today’s social-networking reality rapidly changed. Creating consent via the media has become more than ever a mutual endeavor.⁷⁶ The construction of consent is a form of exercising power in the

⁷² Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 71.

⁷³ Christina von Braun, “Macht ist ein ganz besonderer Saft: Die Bilder des Kollektivkörpers,” in *Die Kanäle der Macht: Herrschaft und Freiheit im Medienzeitalter*, ed. Konrad Paul Liessmann (Wien: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2003), 214-238.

⁷⁴ In Stefan Meier, (Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web (Köln: Herbert van Halem Verlag, 2008), 33.

⁷⁵ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1992).

⁷⁶ The Internet facilitates forms of mutual communicative leadership. Most importantly, it is based on the development of larger propaganda events that we have defined as macro-rituals. The “flat structure” of the Internet puts groups, individuals and nations on the same level. The main characteristics of the Internet are participative and egalitarian structures, which enables informational power-sharing among users, at least, per definition. In reality, users, states and multi-national giants like Apple are rapidly eroding this structure.

sense of engineering ideas that dominate society and make these ideas so deep-seated that they appear as common sense.⁷⁷ This conveys also a specific kind of leadership culture. In the global media-environment, virtual leadership culture is dictated by the social-media and marketing industries. The senses, lusts and passions of participants are addressed in mutually agreeable fashions: Consensual communities are created through the media, and the most prominent actors are the percipients themselves. But what appears to be grassroots is in reality an astro turf, since the perception and awareness of Internet users are heavily influenced by modern marketing, and in turn influence marketing.⁷⁸

Consensual communities are inextricably connected to a neoliberal culture of information. Their technocratic superstition makes members of information society think that they control and dominate data streams. But one could argue that these streams are not guided by central leaders. Power and dominion are rather inherent in the media machines and techniques themselves, which allow billions of users to participate and create input. The network of machines makes the human user-community itself function like a meta-machine.⁷⁹ The surface-content of information is partly irrelevant, implies Hassan, since digital information is at its roots ideological.⁸⁰ Carr argues that a meta-machine will one day be uncoupled from

Moreover, the Domain Name System (DNS), which attributes to each computer and hostname an IP-address, makes the Internet highly hierarchical and centralized. However, the Internet remains a very useful tool for networked groups with common agendas like Jihadis. Gjeltén argues that authoritarian regimes regard information dissemination as the main cyber threat to their stability, while democratic governments mostly fear hacking attacks designed to cripple their computer infrastructure. Tom Gjeltén, "Shadow Wars: Debating Cyber 'Disarmament'" *World Affairs: A Journal of Debate and Ideas* (November/December 2010); Hansel, Misha. „Neue und alte Barrieren. Herrschaft und politische Partizipation im Cyberspace.“ *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 3(2010): 357-378.

However, the massive debate around Wikileaks and the arrest of its co-founder Julian Assange sheds a new light on this situation. Also western democratic states increasingly fear the power of information dissemination as an element of cyber warfare. See also Byfield 2010 for the above argument, Ted Byfield, "DNS: A Short History and a Short Future." *First Monday – Peer-reviewed Journal on the Internet*, accessed December 20, 2010. http://outreach.lib.uic.edu/www/issues/issue4_3/byfield/index.html.

⁷⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39-63.

⁷⁸ Astroturfing is the process by which marketing agencies try to imitate or artificially create the social networking effects of grassroots movements. The term is borrowed from a U.S. brand name for artificial lawn. Corporations instruct marketing agencies to create "hypes" that look authentic like civil net-initiatives. In reality, products or ideas, which are presented in astroturfing-campaigns, are financed by lobby groups, companies or parties. For example, a video is carefully seeded, linked and distributed on the Internet to create a "viral effect" among its sharers and viewers. However, it appears as if an amateur-video has just been put by chance on the Web. This raises trustfulness and authenticity of the campaign. Participants in astroturfing-campaigns are oftentimes not aware of the fact that they drive the "multiplier-effect" (a term from the social-media marketing industry).

⁷⁹ Christina von Braun, "Macht ist ein ganz besonderer Saft: Die Bilder des Kollektivkörpers, 218.

⁸⁰ "For example, the networking of society, the interconnecting of people, processes, applications, work tasks and leisure pursuits, has led to a globalized society, a 'one-world' context where causes and effects can reverberate throughout the entire system. This is a society where digital information is, at its root, ideological. That is to say, it was developed not as a neutral concept and neutral technology – but as 'an ideology that is inextricably linked to the computer' (Kumar, 1995, 7). And the computer, as we shall see in later chapters, is itself a technology that is suffused with its own political, military and industrial imperatives that evolved in the context of the Cold War era of the 1950s and 1960s." Robert Hassan, *The Information Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 1.

human input. Advanced software together with the practice of “cloud-computing”⁸¹ will lead to the emergence of a new meta-computer, called the World Wide Computer (WWC). In the long run, argues Carr, this will make personal hard drives, data carriers or computers oblique. According to Carr’s scenario, WWC will eventually connect and disseminate information self-responsibly.⁸² Google’s search-machine seems to be just an incomplete prototype of this machine. The scanning of whole libraries for “Google Books” is supposed to feed the brain of this giant computer. This dystopia sounds unrealistic, one might argue. But what if a software engineer at Google says that Google is “not scanning all of those books to be read by people [but] to be read by an AI [artificial intelligence]”?⁸³ A meta-computer, equipped with new, enhanced software, might be able to identify and categorize human desires and address them similar to today’s marketing strategists. Could a computer recognize human thoughts via a brain-chip and complete sentences or offer choices, similar to today’s smart search engines? Virtual leadership mechanisms, which are now being coordinated by humans, would then be assumed by machines.

But let us return to more feasible and less “imaginary” scenarios. In modern leadership, commands do not have to be shouted out loud like on a military parade ground in order to be obeyed, observes Liessman.⁸⁴ Underlings can as well react to the nodding of the head of superiors. Pre-emptive obedience is the most common form of servitude in a global information culture, which does not force power to become articulate by itself. Liessman recommends rethinking the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer’s concept of motivation, in order to understand contemporary mass-leadership concepts through social-networking, marketing and input-sharing: Schopenhauer’s concept of “motivating others” could be nothing else than taking a person’s will away and forcing another will upon the person.⁸⁵ In *Management by Objectives* trainings (MbO), managers are already trained to use similar incentives. They agree with their employees upon specific objectives, which the latter reach self-responsibly. Employees learn to understand leadership as a way to motivate each other and to participate in the realization of corporate objectives. This effect is created by addressing and manipulating the smallest possible margin between the actors’ intrinsic motivations and a company’s strategic goals.⁸⁶ In global information culture, a similar

⁸¹ “Cloud-computing” is the process of storing personal or business data in the Internet.

⁸² Nicholas G. Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

⁸³ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 223.

⁸⁴ Konrad Paul Liessmann, *Introduction of Die Kanäle der Macht: Herrschaft und Freiheit im Medienzeitalter*

⁸⁵ <http://www.textlog.de/23036.html>

⁸⁶ Managerial leadership defines three major motives: the affiliation, achievement and authority motif.

leadership process takes place. The corporate objective of information society is to increase consensual appeal, by addressing archaic desires and lusts through unlimited consumption of information.

Von Braun argues that the data-stream reactivates subconscious notions of the bloodstream and thus the archaic kinship community. The digital data stream, argues von Braun, is a form of “modern lifeblood,” which creates a globalized communal body. Kinship lineages are known to be among the most cohesive forms of social organization. In kinship relations, members regard it as obligatory to protect their own “blood.” Shared virtual-sensual experiences, which are created through data streams, contribute to the notion of a consensual global commune,⁸⁷ whose communication and information consumption could finally be led by an artificial intelligence, a new browser called the World Wide Computer (WWC).⁸⁸

The foregone idea requires looking at leadership processes in primitive kinship communities, i.e. tribal leadership processes.⁸⁹ It takes no wonder that the virtual leadership of online jihad reminds of an information-age adaptation to primitive and archaic, yet very progressive leadership patterns. Some tribal leadership models are rooted in egalitarian intra-group processes. Native Australian Bushmen, for example, before their culture was extinguished by European colonizers, based leadership on participation and mutual consensus to transfer authority and command to a central coordinating leader. Yet, group members remained essentially equal in power and status. These traits of power-delegation and responsibility-sharing resurface in virtual leadership processes in online Jihadi environments. “In the evening all the men gather round a fire in the middle of the camp [the campfire-metaphor is central to the understanding of virtual leadership processes/communicative authority, see our discussion of Bergesen’s ritual order in point 4], and decisions for community action emerge from their informal talk. The chief is the leader, not in the sense that he can overrule the opinion of the other men (which would be impossible since he has no means to compelling them to accept his wishes), but in the sense that he is expected to organize the activities that have been decided upon; he tells the hunters where they are to go, when they bring back meat he divides it, he leads them in their moves from one water-hole to the next and in attacks on neighboring bands, and he conducts negotiations with other bands on such matters as permission to enter his territory, or the conclusion of a marriage with one of their members, or

⁸⁷ Christina von Braun, “Macht ist ein ganz besonderer Saft: Die Bilder des Kollektivkörpers, 221; 227.

⁸⁸ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

⁸⁹ For a definition of „primitive,“ see Claude Lévi-Strauss, who refers to cultures without writing from cultures of writing. Strauss regrets that this term has become established in anthropological academia, but asserts that “primitive” should not be put equal to “backward,” “underdeveloped” or “unprogressive.” See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Strukturelle Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), 115-135.

the organization of a joint ritual.”⁹⁰ The example stems out of a completely different cultural context. However, salient elements of this tribal leadership process remind of the *mutual virtual leadership* pattern in online jihad. Metaphorically speaking, the campfire around which the men gather can also be a shared idea around which the communication of online discourse participants takes place (for so-called *meso*-rituals see point 4).⁹¹

“In an urban society, everything connects. Each person’s needs are fed by the skills of many others. Our lives are woven together in a fabric. But the connections that make society strong also make it vulnerable.”⁹² In today’s hyper-capitalist information society, each physical infrastructure is connected to a digital infrastructure, which allows accessing the Internet, and thus target-oriented information, at almost any place and time through public screens, fibre-cables and wireless-spots that connect every household and business. The down-side is that this infrastructure also allows the Net to access humans at any time. Not even in the public transport in a bigger city can a passenger’s eyes and brains rest for a moment. Digital and analogue advertisements haunt them wherever they look. The dictatorship of information is connected to the reserving of vast areas of space for machines (for example, a city’s transportation infrastructure, streets, highways, railways, airports). G. Franck observes that cities and landscapes mutate into all-out carriers for advertisements.⁹³ The function of advertisement-propaganda, which began to develop in industrial societies, namely to arouse, steer and seduce the attention of consumers, has radically intensified in contemporary information and media-society. Advertising and propaganda fulfil functions beyond merchandising, argues G. Franck.⁹⁴ The battle for attention becomes a goal in itself. The reason is that giving attention to something alters a person’s behaviour. We can compare this to radical changes that took place with the advent of industrial capitalism in the 19th century. Until the invention of electric-light, for example, members of a family used to assemble in the

⁹⁰ Marcel Mauss, “Die Gabe,” in *Soziologie und Anthropologie*, Band 2, ed. Marcel Mauss (München: Hanser, 1975). Also in Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Band 2 (TKH 2), *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 242.

⁹¹ Similar elements of neo-tribalism and intra-group processes can be found in mainstream Western net-culture as well. This will be the subject of another study.

⁹² If we look at society and social collectives from a network point of view, the opening narration of the 1984 BBC-movie “Threads” is very telling. The documentary-style movie depicts the plight of two Sheffield families during a nuclear conflict between the East and the West Blocs. The ensuing nuclear confrontation, results in total infrastructural, economic, social and political collapse, and shows boon and bane of modern interconnectedness. The opening scene shows a spider that weaves its net. Shots of electric power and telecommunication lines are cut into this sequence, which is followed by a shot of the network-style architecture of Sheffield’s industrial area that connects with urban quarters. The director (Mick Jackson) uses this metaphor to illustrate the interconnectedness of modern society. A narrator explains the thread-weaving spider. From “Threads (Nuclear War),” BBC 1984, dir. Mike Jackson, script by Bary Hines, accessed September 12, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MCbTvoNrAg&feature=youtu.be.

⁹³ The following thesis is from Georg Franck, „Mentaler Kapitalismus,“ in *Die Kanäle der Macht: Herrschaft und Freiheit im Medienzeitalter*, ed. Konrad Paul Liessmann (Wien: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2003), 37-39.

⁹⁴ Georg Franck, , „Mentaler Kapitalismus,“ 38.

evening in a central room, lit by candles or stove fire. Electric light radically changed this order and dispersed family members into different rooms, everyone being occupied with his or her own activity. Similarly, the culture of reading and writing over the last 500 years has fostered linear, logical, time-costly and structural ways of thinking. The use of the computer fosters non-linear, speedy, disintegrated and machine-dependent ways of thinking.⁹⁵ Other radical changes that are taking place right now are as important. A new form of capitalism emerges with the “attention economy,” which is guided by all-pervasive marketing and propaganda forms. The most profound changes of industrialization included the emergence of new property situations (private property), markets, an internationally binding currency system, an independent financial sector. In “new capitalism,” which Franck describes as “mental capitalism” and others as “attention-economy,”⁹⁶ a privatization of the mental goods of stimulation and sensual experience takes place (1). It is followed by the emergence of new markets on which means of exchange are not goods and money, but information and attention (2). Attention can be measured in homogenous units, such as web-page visitor statistics, likes, etc. The service providers of this new currency system are mass media and social media, which are characterized by the production of User Generated Content. Pictures, texts, blog-entries and video are produced by users themselves. (4). A handbook for social media activism observes that “links are like the seeds of the attention-economy. Shares, Likes and commentaries are the water that causes them to germ.”⁹⁷ This multiplier-effect of Jihadi media products plays also an important role in the *mutual virtual leadership* model of online Jihad, especially when actors “swarm” around around key products and topics of established Jihadi media organizations and, as an effect, produce own content. The mutual virtual leadership pattern will be discussed in Part Three of this dissertation.

(1) The network is the main organizational pattern of the 21st century.

Throughout cultural history, humans have developed different forms of organization and guidance to lead social groups and coordinate human coexistence, to institutionalize and exercise power, to safeguard communities, to establish discipline and to punish, and to

⁹⁵ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 231 ff.

⁹⁶ “Widerstand im Global Village: Von Ya Basta! und Indymedia bis Wikileaks,” in *Soziale Bewegungen und Social Media: Handbuch für den Einsatz von Web 2.0*, ed. Hans Christian Voigt and Thomas Kreiml (Wien: ÖGB Verlag, 2011), 215.

⁹⁷ Hans Christian Voigt and Thomas Kreiml (ed.), *Soziale Bewegungen und Social Media: Handbuch für den Einsatz von Web 2.0*, (Wien: ÖGB Verlag, 2011), 214-215.

organize conflicts.⁹⁸ With the advent of the information age and the massive utilization of new communication technologies since the mid 1990s, a classical organization design has gained strength in a new shape. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt argue that the network is the most dominant organizational pattern of the 21st century:

“[T]he information revolution favors the rise of network forms of organization. The network appears to be the next major form of organization – long after tribes, hierarchies and markets – to come into its own to redefine societies, and in so doing, the nature of conflict and cooperation [...]”⁹⁹

To be more precise, the *digital* network seems to be a major organizational form of the 21st century. The digital network requires a leadership pattern that is adoptable to its shape. We will demonstrate this at the example of virtual leadership in online Jihad networks.

According to Arquilla and Ronfeldt organizational network and netwar strategies will dominate future conflicts.¹⁰⁰ One of the main goals of the authors, who work closely together

⁹⁸ Consultative-tribal organization forms have existed since times immemorial and feature until today in traditional societies; hierarchical-institutionalized forms of organization have been used and are in use until today to coordinate empires, states, and armies as well as administrative and bureaucratic systems; and already for many centuries, socially controlled institutions, such as markets (oriented at profit maximization) and politics (necessary to rationalize governance) have functioned as distinct organizational forms.

⁹⁹ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, “What Next for Networks and Netwars,” in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: Rand Corporations, 2001), 311.

¹⁰⁰ The authors Arquilla and Ronfeldt have applied the terms “net-war” and “cyber-war” since 1993. Mentioned in Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 35. Relating to John Arquilla and David R. Ronfeldt, “Cyberwar is Coming!”, *Comparative Strategy* 12 (1993): 141-165. Arquilla and Ronfeldt co-edited in 2001 the collected volume “*Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*.” The book focuses on netwar-conflicts in the information age, and integrates three phenomena. Firstly, netwar refers to socio-political cyber-activism, i.e. informational and ideological campaigning as well as community networking. Secondly, the concept relates to *hacktivism*, which describes the hacking, taking over and shutting down of adversaries’ websites for ideological and political reasons. Thirdly, the concept of netwar also entails cyber-terrorism, i.e. hacking with terrorist goals. “The first category, activism, refers to normal, nondisruptive use of the Internet in support of an agenda or cause. Operations in this area includes browsing the web for information, constructing web sites and posting materials on them, transmitting electronic publications and letters through email, and using the Net to discuss issues, form coalitions, and plan and coordinate activities. The second category, hacktivism, refers to the marriage of hacking and activism. It covers operations that use hacking techniques against a target’s Internet site with the intent of disrupting normal operations but not causing serious damage. Examples are web sit-ins and virtual blockades, automated email bombs, web hacks, computer break-ins, and computer viruses and worms. The final category, cyberterrorism, refers to the convergence of cyberspace and terrorism. It covers politically motivated hacking operations intended to cause grave harm such as loss of life or severe economic damage. An example would be penetrating an air traffic control system and causing two planes to collide.” See Dorothy E. Denning, “Activism, Hacktivism and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a Tool for Influencing Foreign Policy,” Chapter Eight, in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), accessed September 4, 2012, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1382/MR1382.ch8.pdf, 241.

The modes and actors examined in the book concern the informational warfare of networked terrorists, gangs, and criminals. Furthermore, the online strategies of militant political and shared-cause groups such as anarchists,

with the U.S. government and military sector, is to stimulate a reformed U.S. military and cyber warfare strategy in defense against cyber attacks and cyber-networking. Modern militaries and politics rely more and more on computerized network organization, and accordingly present major weaknesses to possible attackers. The study of Arquilla and Ronfeldt presents numerous case studies and examples.¹⁰¹ Elements of their organizational network approach also offer themselves to examine the organizational network pattern of online jihad.

First of all, networking and netwar strategies relate to methods of informational guerilla networking for political purposes. Oppositional political movements have developed such strategies since the early 1990s; the relatively free flow of information on the Internet has been a facilitating factor. Netwar relates on the one hand to the growth of political activist groups who can network easily via long range communication tools. Furthermore, netwar relates to the possibility to establish alternative media channels, for example via the Internet. Activists who run alternative information outlets, such as websites, YouTube-channels or Facebook-accounts, can exploit the “multiplier-effect” of social-media networking. Multiple

hooligans and environmental activists are under scrutiny. In addition, online networking strategies of insurgent political and civil-society activists, such as oppositional and guerilla groups in Burma and Latin America, are presented. The authors argue that fluid networked groups have been seriously challenging the – in comparison, sclerotic - hierarchical government, law enforcement and military structures since the 1990s. The study is heavily U.S. policy oriented and tries to draw lessons from the successful netwar and networking examples of adversaries. Both editors, Arquilla and Ronfeldt, are working as consultants for U.S. military and government. They draw attention to the “networked organizational structures” of the practitioners of netwar. These practitioners are organized in networked layers, which do not concord with classical hierarchical organizational structures. Instead, many of the groups studied in the volume combine hierarchical, tribal, criminal, informal and informational network modes of organization, and thus, networked forms of leadership. An essential feature of netwars, according to the authors, is the mounting of information operations in order to influence publics, strengthen own structures and gain media attention. See David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, “Emergence and Influence of the Zapatista Social Netwar,” See chapter Six, in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), 174. The two contributors M. Zanini and S. Edwards explain, for example, that “Middle East Arab terrorists [sic] are on the cutting edge of organizational networking and stand to gain significantly from the information revolution. They can harness information technology to enable less hierarchical, more networked designs—enhancing their flexibility, responsiveness, and resilience. In turn, information technology can enhance their offensive operational capabilities for the war of ideas as well as for the war of violent acts.” See Michele Zanini and Sean J.A. Edwards, “The Networking in the Information Age,” chapter two, in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), 30.

¹⁰¹ The study demonstrates organizational and coordination strategies at the examples of the Mexican Zapatista Movement, which in the mid 1990s already heavily relied on web pages to “disseminate information, to mobilize their forces, and to coordinate joint actions;”¹⁰¹ and at the example of the the Kosovo conflict, which initially started out as a “war on the Internet”: “Government and nongovernment actors alike used the Net to disseminate information, spread propaganda, demonize opponents, and solicit support for their positions. Hackers used it to voice their objections to both Yugoslav and NATO aggression by disrupting service on government computers and taking over their web sites.” Dorothy E. Denning, “Activism, Hacktivism, and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a Tool for Influencing Foreign Policy,” 239. Furthermore, the author of chapter eight, D.E. Denning, observes that “[a]s of August 1999, it appears that virtually every terrorist group is on the web, along with a mishmash of freedom fighters, crusaders, propagandists, and mercenaries.” See Ibid, 252. Among many other examples, which the study presents, is the propagandist E-network of the Lebanese Shiite organization Hezbollah. Already in 1998, Hezbollah operated three professionally-looking websites.

members contribute to the sharing, linking and proliferation of an agenda to increase its popularity. A successful netwar strategy in addition relies on traditional media, such as newspapers, tv-channels and radio stations, which cover a movement's cause.

Immensely successful was the protest strategy of the Mexican Zapatista movement (EZLN) in 1994 against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which had been agreed between the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Since EZLN's successful netwar-strategy hurt U.S. economic interests, the scholars Arquilla and Ronfeldt took the EZLN's struggle as a key example to study netwar and networking concepts.

As for the background: Economic policies fostered through NAFTA threatened the already catastrophic existential conditions of the indigenous population in Chiapas, one of the poorest provinces in southern Mexico. According to the agreement, U.S. agricultural surplus products would be sold at rock-bottom prizes in Chiapas, which would have further eroded the local agricultural industry in a region, where at the time an estimated 15,000 people annually were dying of malnutrition and diseases. *Subcomandante* Marcos, the leader of the EZLN, reacted to the agreement with the exclamation "*Ya basta!*" He co-created an "intercontinental communications network" to counter the destructive power of the three state giants who had closed NAFTA. Marco's speeches and Zapatista communiqués were either handwritten or saved on digital carriers and smuggled through the Mexican military blockade of Chiapas to international networks of political activists and globalization critics, who helped to spread them via the Internet as well as to contacts in mainstream media. Arquilla et al. describe the campaign of EZLN as the "first social netwar." Manuel Castells in 1997 called the EZLN the "first informational guerilla movement."¹⁰²

The most striking features of the Zapatista movement were its close cooperation with international NGOs. These opened up effective communication channels and founded numerous information centers in solidarity. Mainstream media such as CNN and The New York Times quickly found an interest in the world's first "postmodern revolutionary movement" and aired its communiqués worldwide. Very effective was also EZLN's use of an Internet website to distribute communiqués, videos and information.¹⁰³ EZLN's netwar strategy was successful in terms of attention-capital: The group made its cause known and heard all over the world.

¹⁰² Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Volume II: The Power of Identity* (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 79; David Ronfeldt et al., *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1998), 1.

¹⁰³ Bethaney Turner, "Information-Age Guerrillas: The Communication Strategies of the Zapatistas," *M/C Journal* 8.2 (2005), accessed December 21, 2012, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0506/01-turner.php>.

The transnational information campaign of EZLN network inspired Jeff Perlstein, the founder of *Indymedia*, to create something similar. Five years after EZLN's campaign, the first independent global activist information network, *indymedia.org*, was created in Seattle (1998). Perlstein started to organize protest against the summit of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle and informed other activists via Emails and newsletters. This happened eight weeks before the summit. *Indymedia* launched its website just two days prior to the summit. On November 30th, 1999, the whole world looked at Seattle, where a vicious battle took place between thousands of protesters and riot police. Police violently tried to disperse the protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas. The anti-globalization movement was born.

The whistle-blowing platform *Wikileaks*, the hacker-network *Anonymous* and *We are all Khaled Said* (the Facebook page that contributed to the Egyptian revolutionary uprising) stand in the tradition of *Ya basta!* and *Indymedia*.¹⁰⁴ These networks represent basic principles how to apply netwar strategies and use digital grassroots activism and the multiplication of information for political purposes. Their campaigns contain important principles of virtual leadership, which is structured by a multi-layered interaction of communication rituals.

Yet, informational guerilla networking strategies are not only being used by legitimate social movements against illegitimate established power structures, but also inspire more radical groups, extremists and terrorists to use similar principles, such as the activists of online jihad and their guidance through communication, which is the topic of this dissertation. Moreover, the grassroots appeal of any informational guerilla network can become an astro turf (artificial lawn), if corporate marketing manages to exploit its activism by turning it into a popular lifestyle, or if states exploit it for "information operations" to manipulate grassroots agendas.

A main idea of Arquilla and Ronfeldt is that new forms of social organization always originate from malevolent and violent subgroups, if not outcasts of society. This lends, of course, to the strong ideological bias of the authors.

"Many centuries ago [...] the rise of hierarchical forms of organization, which displaced traditional, consultative, tribal forms, was initially attended, in parts of the world, by the appearance of ferocious chieftains bent on military conquest and of violent secret societies run according to rank—long before the hierarchical form matured through the institutionalization of states, empires, and professional administrative and bureaucratic systems. In like manner,

¹⁰⁴ "Widerstand im Global Village: Von Ya Basta! und Indymedia bis Wikileaks," in *Soziale Bewegungen und Social Media: Handbuch für den Einsatz von Web 2.0*, ed. Hans Christian Voigt and Thomas Kreiml (Wien: ÖGB Verlag, 2011), 267-278.

the early spread of the market form, only a few centuries ago, was accompanied by a spawn of usurers, pirates, smugglers, and monopolists, all seeking to elude state controls over their earnings and enterprises.

Why should this pattern not be repeated in an age of networks?”¹⁰⁵

In chapter 10, Arquilla and Ronfeldt lay out their networking concept in detail. They argue that networks are the most crucial designs of human organization. In their opinion, the hierarchical form of human organization is less natural, less effective and will become ever less important.¹⁰⁶ Arquilla and Ronfeldt base their argument on an influential proponent of network theory, F. Capra, who holds that “the web of life consists of networks within networks” – not hierarchies.¹⁰⁷ However, we will argue that informational and organizational networks are anything but “flat.” They feature hierarchies of communication, which are expressed by traditional, even neo-tribal behavioural patterns. The combination of networked forms of organization with hierarchical concepts of leadership resembles an “actor-network approach” of organizational theory, which puts emphasis on the role of actors in communications hierarchies as well as on functional organizational network structures.¹⁰⁸

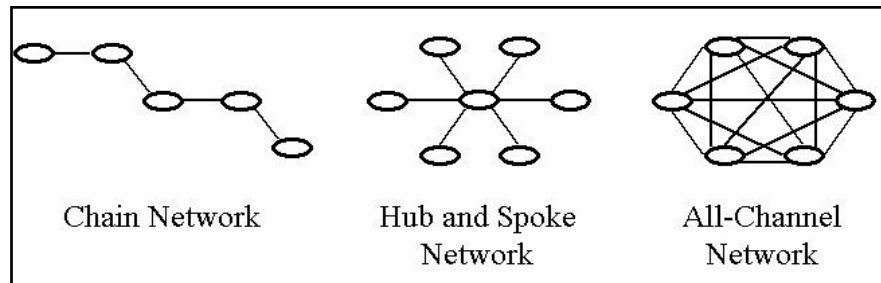


Figure 1: network structures (adopted from Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, “What next for Networks and Netwars,” 313.

¹⁰⁶ The authors argue that influential trends in social sciences since the 1970s hold this opinion. David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, “What next for Networks and Netwars,” chapter ten, in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), 311-354.

¹⁰⁷ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 35. Quoted in John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, “What next for Networks and Netwars,” chapter ten, in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), 312.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Lea, Tim O’Shea and Pat Fung, “Constructing the Networked Organization: Content and Context in the Development of Electronic Communications,” in *Shaping Organization Form: Communication, Connection, and Community*, ed. Gerardine DeSanctis and Janet Fulk (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 295-324.

Source: Jackson, Brian A. "Groups, networks, or movements: A command-and-control-driven approach to classifying terrorist organizations and its application to al-Qaeda," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 241-262.

Basic shapes and typologies of networks are "[c]hain or line networks, where the members are linked in a row and communications must flow through an adjacent actor before getting to the next; hub, star, or wheel networks, where members are tied to a central node and must go through it to communicate with each other; And all-channel or fully connected or full-matrix networks, where everyone is connected to and can communicate directly with everyone else [...]. Other shapes have also been identified (e.g., grids and lattices, as well as center/periphery networks and clique networks); so have combinations and hybrids, as in sprawling networks with myriad nodes linked in various ways that are sometimes called "spider's web" networks."¹⁰⁹

Arquilla and Ronfeldt focus in their organizational-network analysis on the "multihub spiders network" design, which features a small number of highly connected nodes that act as hubs, and has a high number of less connected nodes in parallel. The multi-hub spider's network is a "pattern that proves resilient to systemic shocks, unless a key hub is disrupted or destroyed [...]. Also, this is the kind of pattern—one or more actors as key hubs, around which are arrayed a large number of actors linked to the hubs but less so to each other, yet with frequent all-channel information-sharing across all actors—that was seen in the social networks in Seattle and in Mexico. It may also characterize some sprawling terrorist and criminal networks."¹¹⁰

The connecting lines of a network are called *threads*.¹¹¹ In online jihad, discussion-threads (discussion contributions) feature discursive hierarchies (dominant topics) and/or leaders (dominant actors). Communicative networks (discussion groups) are integrated within

¹⁰⁹ Moreover, any particular network may itself be embedded into surrounding networks." See John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "What next for Networks and Netwars," 317.

For example, the threads of a super-market chain-network are the suppliers who steadily deliver to single markets, while the single supermarkets are nodes, or hubs. The overarching supermarket-corporation would be one node in a global corporation of food-goods. Similarly, the coordination of the distribution of goods within a single supermarket is a sub-network, in which new threads emerge. The threads of a telecommunications networks are programs, transmissions and broadcasts that are emitted by the interconnected channels, which can serve as hubs. Within each channel, sub-networks and threads of coordination and communication exist, such as the power and communication cables in each building (physical), or the communication structure and hierarchy of employees within it (abstract).

¹¹⁰ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "What next for Networks and Netwars," 323.

¹¹¹ Irrespectively if one speaks about chain, line, hub, star, wheel, all-channel or full-matrix networks, threads are the basic connection and communication lines. Sub-networks within a master-network are interconnected by threads that lead to hubs, stars or wheels. Since elements of organizational hierarchy and networking overlap, we can speak of "organizational networks" (to explain Arquilla's and Ronfeldt's terminology more clearly).

informational networks (websites), which have an overarching organizational function. The threads of online jihad are the lines of communication that coordinate publication, announcements and common agendas between major websites, which act as informational hubs. If a major site is closed, its “mirror-picture” (the information contained on it), is quickly uploaded via another URL, or other sites take over its task. This is structural informational power within online jihad networks. Communication-wise, central actors, discourses, icons and doctrines within online jihad lead to steady all-channel information sharing of authoritative communication. This is communicative power within online jihad networks, which we will focus on in this study.¹¹²

Arquilla and Ronfeldt focus on two main questions: What holds an online network together? What makes it function effectively, even in the absence of a central leadership? They argue that five elements organize networks. These are the:

- Organizational level—its organizational design
- Narrative level—the story being told
- Doctrinal level—the collaborative strategies and methods
- Technological level—the information systems
- Social level—the personal ties that assure loyalty and trust¹¹³

The concept of Arquilla and Ronfeldt has inspired a number of analysts to examine Jihadi activism from an organizational network perspective.¹¹⁴ If we applied Arquilla’s and Ronfeldt’s organizational network approach one-to-one to online jihad, then the doctrinal level and the social level would be both interdependent and organized through the theology and the rituals of online jihad. The narrative level would correlate with the symbols and aesthetics of online jihad. The organizational level would be that of networked information

¹¹² Structurally, online jihad networks (excluding an analysis of the hidden “dark web”) rely on a number of primary discussion forums, on which announcements and propaganda by terrorist organizations are published for the first time. These forums serve as ideological hubs for Jihadi blogs, youtube-channels, or Twitter and Facebook accounts, which republish the propaganda and imitate the rules of conduct and discussion that characterize forum discussions.

¹¹³ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, “What next for Networks and Netwars,” 324-343.

¹¹⁴ For example, Brian A. Jackson, “Groups, networks, or movements: A command-and-control-driven approach to classifying terrorist organizations and its application to al-Qaeda,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 241-262; also Robert Allan Williams, *To Kill or Not to Kill: The Global Jihadist Movement and the Doctrine of Takfir*, M.A. thesis submitted at University of St. Andrews, 2009, accessed September 16, 2012, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19241832/To-Kill-or-Not-to-Kill-The-Global-Jihadist-Movement-and-the-Doctrine-of-Takfir>; moreover intelligence services, such as the Dutch one, see, for example, the Dutch report “Jihadism on the web, a breeding ground for jihad in the modern age,” Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands, General Intelligence and Security Service, www.aivd.nl, January 2012, accessed January 15, 2013, <https://www.aivd.nl/english/publications-press/@2873/jihadism-web/>.

via hierarchically build up websites (first and foremost the prominent Jihadi forums, which are the first publishers of “official propaganda,” and thus trendsetters in terms of discussions, narratives and symbolisms). The technological level would be that of virtual and digitalized structures which enable cyber-networking. However, for the study of virtual leadership processes in online jihad networks, the following triadic categorization is more useful. Leadership in virtual networks is based on three different carriers of power and leadership:

- semiotic level — aesthetic-pictorial discourses around shared myths and social structures that create an color- and meaningful sub-cultural environment
- ritualistic level — ritualistic discourses that create cohesion and coordinate actions and lead to the emergence of specific virtual leadership models
- doctrinal level —doctrinaire discourses on theological imperatives that establish transcendental leadership patterns

We need to clarify further salient differences in contrast to Arquilla’s and Ronfeldt’s approach to organizational networks and netwar strategies.¹¹⁵ Firstly, Arquilla’s and Ronfeldt’s observe that militant subcultures are the inventive forerunners of new organizational forms. This needs to be qualified. In fact, the fundamentalist actors of today’s Jihadi net-culture hark as much back to the past as they apply already established organizational and leadership mechanisms of the information age to guide each other. Their leadership concepts are strongly oriented at modern advertisement and management approaches which appeal to the motivation of allegedly self-actualizing actors. Online Jihadis combine these mechanisms with doctrinaire-religious concepts. Secondly, the organizational aspect of a network, i.e. if actors are consciously participating in a network, and if they are committed to the cause of a network, is for us as important as social network approaches, such as the centrality of characters, and in a further step the discursive and communicative authority of arguments within a network.¹¹⁶ We

¹¹⁵ Classical studies, explain Arquilla and Ronfeldt, deal with friendship cliques, memberships, job search and occupational mobility patterns, but also the network structures of the world economic and political system. In addition, social network analysts, may study “a primitive tribe, a hierarchical bureaucracy, or a market system” by its underlying formal and informal networks, and how these influence the work-mode of the organization or system.

¹¹⁶ Arquilla and Ronfeldt differentiate between social and organizational networks. Accordingly, they explain that scholars of social network analysis tend to interpret any set of actors with ties to a node as a network. In contrast, organizational network analysts examine if actors are consciously participating in a network, and if they are committed to the cause of a network. Further differences between the social and the organizational network approaches lie in different methodologies. The former concentrate largely on mathematical models and graphical visualizations, whereas the latter view the network as a distinct form of organization and focus more on its structural aspects. In addition, social network scholars put focus on the centrality of actors within a network, and their closeness to others, which in turn means power and prestige. However, organizational network analysts such as Arquilla and Ronfeldt also heavily draw on concepts from the social network approach.

will explain this with the concept of *discursive leadership* by Bruggeman, Traag and Uitermark (see point 3); but also at the example of Foucault's theory of power, which will be integrated into Habermas' theoretical concept of *strategic action*.¹¹⁷ Finally, the organizational networks of our study combine neo-tribal, cultic, and hierarchical organization with psychological-manipulative, divinely paternal and participative leadership elements. The information society's neo-tribal and cultic aspect is a mass-phenomenon and best visible in digital expressions of the over-individualized self. The social networking era fosters virtual environments in which the most profane becomes sacred again, and vice versa. One example is the cultic enactment and admiration of virtual selves on social networking sites, for example, through pictures and discursive self-representations. "I likes" or confirmations of statements such as "I am now going to the supermarket" are perceived as extremely important affirmations of the quasi-sacred virtual self, in the sense of Goffman's and Turner's anthropological studies on interaction rituals and group culture. As Turner observed, "every social position has some sacred characteristics,"¹¹⁸ and Goffman argued in his famous study on face-to-face behaviour that "many deities have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance."¹¹⁹ These characteristics become ever more pressing in digital extremist shared-cause networks such as those of online jihad. Jihadi online actors are bewitched and touched by the spell of their "divine struggle," in the sense that they themselves appropriate transcendental characteristics. Further examples are the iconography of martyrs, shared virtual rituals of spell-casting, and the transformation of tribal ceremonies like dancing and singing into analogous virtual actions. These elements feature strongly in virtual fundamentalist networks, as our analysis of Jihadi websites will show, where members strengthen each other ritualistically and exercise mutual guidance by replying to and clustering around agendas and topics.

The combination of networked and hierarchical concepts resembles an "actor-network approach" of organizational theory, which puts emphasis on the role of actors in internal communications hierarchies (centrality, discourses, influence). Martin Lea, Tim O'Shea and Pat Fung, "Constructing the Networked Organization: Content and Context in the Development of Electronic Communications," in *Shaping Organization Form: Communication, Connection, and Community*, ed. Gerardine DeSanctis and Janet Fulk (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 295-324.

¹¹⁷ Habermas offers a comprehensive concept of coordination through communication, and thus social organization. On the strength of Habermas, for example, we can argue that online groups are built around norm-regulating actions (*normenregulierte Handlungen*), since norms express the consent that exists in a social group. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Band 1 (TKH 1), *Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 127.

¹¹⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969), 96-7.

¹¹⁹ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 95.

(2) Discursive power mechanisms in online jihad take place in virtual strategic action environments

Jürgen Habermas argues in his *Theory of Communicative Action* that “instrumental action” can steer the actions of people, while “strategic action” can steer their thinking by using speech or any other means of communication. For example, by using certain rhetoric means, Person A can cause Person B to think and do as he wishes. Krieger and Belliger describe “strategic action” as an “instrumentalized form of communicative action.”¹²⁰ In our case, this can be best visualized with the steady process of attention-guidance through information networks. The information society’s attention-economy is largely based on strategic communication. This is the second major venue for our theoretical approach to virtual leadership.

Habermas belongs to the figureheads of post WWII German sociology and philosophy, which developed out of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Habermas, focuses on possibilities to reconstruct and recreate universally valid conditions for human agreement and social organization through rational communication.¹²¹ His rational, yet normative-optimistic critical outlook also triggered one of the great intellectual debates of the 20th century, the Foucault-Habermas debate, which continues until today. The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) developed a pragmatist critical concept, which strongly rejects the utopian approach of Habermas. Foucault focused on the deconstruction of power structures in social and institutional meta-discourses, in order for social actors to better understand, and finally change the construction and the institutions of knowledge and power.¹²² Foucault first rejected

¹²⁰ Rappaport 1998: 191-212.

¹²¹ Habermas was influenced by his early university friend Karl Otto Apel in the 1950s; especially the latter’s approach to linguistic pragmatism influenced the intellectual development of Habermas. Apel draws heavily on the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Charles Sanders Peirce. Habermas develops these ideas and relates also to works of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Freud to approach questions of truth, justice, rationalism and validity aspects of human communication. TKH first analyzes mythical worldviews, for example, through the lenses of the symbolic anthropology of Durkheim and the cultural-anthropological structuralism of Levi-Strauss. Habermas then shows the rationalization of mythical worldviews, i.e. the sacral roots of the moral authority of social norms in modern societies. The linguist analysis of Wittgenstein, the concept of communicative actions and symbolically brokered interaction by Meads, as well as the dramaturgical analysis of Goffman, are further cornerstones to foster a theory of communicative action, which is based on rational agreements and common convictions.

¹²² To prove his point, Foucault traced the history of institutions that punish and discipline (*Discipline and Punish; The Birth of the Clinic*), and deconstructed the history of knowledge and discourses that surround sexuality (*The History of Sexuality*). See also Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge: MIT, 1998), 17-46. Foucault explained in the afterword of another study the exercise of power as “a way in which certain actions modify others,” a “mode of action upon the action of others,” which “structure[s] the possible field of [their] action.” The relationship proper to power is neither violence nor consensus, but “government,” in the very broad sense of “guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome.” Viewed in this way, says Foucault, power is “coextensive with every social relationship” for “to live in society is to live in such a way that

Habermas' normative utopian view, which is influenced by the latter's interpretation of the enlightenment-rationalism and modernity (influenced by his reading of Kant) as continual progress toward the better, but finally changed his position and took a more optimistic stance towards enlightenment.¹²³ Before both scholars could settle their intellectual dispute over the meaning of social and philosophical critique, Foucault died prematurely at age fifty-seven. M. Kelly claims that "Habermas's critical theory may need to be altered in the light of Foucault's notion of power."¹²⁴ The critical deconstruction of communicative authority and guidance in the Internet is based on Habermas' concept of strategic action, but touches also the theory of power of Foucault. Meant are the governance of digital communication and the exchange of the commodity "information" through power-discourses. Recently, the claim has been made that Foucault's genealogy of power/knowledge and the critical social theory of the Frankfurt School, which influenced Habermas, share essential similarities.¹²⁵ For the purpose of our study, Habermas offers a better meta-concept to work with. Conceptual analytical tools by both scholars will be used, however, to describe virtual leadership mechanisms. On the one hand, discourse analysis allows deconstructing the functionalist leadership structure of online jihad. Yet, online jihad is not an unchangeable, unquestionable reality. The communication of religious extremists is inherently strategic, teleological and success-oriented. This should raise our awareness of mutual agreement based possibilities of communication. If we allow ourselves to treat Habermas' utopian concept not as an abstract ideal, but as a pragmatic possibility to change communication,¹²⁶ then it should be clear that online jihad is not absolute in itself, but can be de-constructed and reconstructed.¹²⁷ In the

action upon other actions is possible and in fact ongoing." Quoted and summarized in Thomas McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, 263. McCarthy refers to Foucault's afterword "The Subject and Power," in Hubert Dreyfuss and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: Harvester Press, 1982), 222. Foucault's main argument was that "power and ideology can be framed by the construction of 'discourses' or modes of communication that are specifically structured through language." Robert Hassan, *The Information Society*, 77. A. Honneth terms Foucault's methodology "a historically guided functionalism." Alex Honneth, "Foucault's Theory of Society: A Systems-Theoretic Dissolution of the Dialectic of Enlightenment," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, 163.

¹²³ Jürgen Habermas, „Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's *What is Enlightenment*,“ in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly, 149-156, especially 153 ff.

¹²⁴ Michael Kelly, "Introduction," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly, 5.

¹²⁵ Thomas McCarthy, „The Critique of Impure Reason; Foucault and the Frankfurt School,“ in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly, 243-282.

¹²⁶ Hans Joas, „Die unglückliche Ehe von Hermeneutik und Funktionalismus,“ in *Kommunikatives Handeln: Beiträge zu Jürgen Habermas' »Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns«*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 146.

¹²⁷ In that sense, the author's frequent references to socio-anthropological studies on so-called "primitive" societies, and the examples of tribal behaviour, shall not strengthen a western discourse of domination. Anthropologists such as M. Mauss, É. Durkheim and M. Fortes were deeply interested in explaining their own modern societies through the lenses of less developed societies. Scholars can continue this approach and imbed

long run, a venue may open up to create the anti-thesis of Islamic violent struggle (*qital; irhab*), namely peaceful reconciliation (*sulh*). For example, Muslim scholars and actors could apply a normative communicative approach to popularize a modern theory of jihad in the sense of “peaceful Islamic struggle,” i.e. for a social order, which shows the possibilities for mutual agreements within Muslim cultures and between Muslim and non-Muslim cultures.¹²⁸ Elements of Habermas’ *communicative theory* can thus be integrated into the theoretical framework of *virtual leadership*. Habermas envisions the reconstruction and coordination of social groups through universally valid rational and agreement based *communicative action*. Habermas differentiates between universally valid and normative aspects of intra-group coordination, and manipulative forms of social action. Habermas uses for this differentiation the triad *instrumentelles*, *strategisches* and *kommunikatives Handeln*.¹²⁹ There are *instrumental action* (for example, building a house) and *social action* (for example, the coordination among the construction workers).¹³⁰ *Social action*, according to Habermas, divides into *strategic action* and *communicative action*. In Habermas view, however, only communicative action is social action (Foucault, from his sceptical viewpoint, tended to equate social action with strategic interaction).¹³¹ Communication and speech are only mechanisms to coordinate social action, and not social action itself.¹³² Social action can as well become manifested in deep lying social structures, traditions, texts, goods, institutions, systems.¹³³

Communicative action, according to Habermas, is built on consent between actors who can agree or disagree. Furthermore, *communicative action* is the outcome of interactions which

post-structuralism, critical social theory, mergers of both, concepts by Pierre Bourdieu, Gilles Deleuze or contemporary key-concepts of the humanities.

¹²⁸ Several contemporary scholars employ key-thoughts of both scholars in their discourse and semiotic analyses. One only has to look at studies on (online-) topics, which are relevant for virtual leadership, and have also referred to Habermas’ communicative theory, and were at the same time inspired by key-thoughts of Foucault, for example Dorta’s analysis of social worlds in chat-communication, Meier’s work on pictorial web-discourses, Ursua’s and Metzner’s collective volume on Net-based communication, identity and community, Engelmann’s et al. discursive analysis of German Muslim weblogs, and Goulimi’s contribution on communicative action from a semiotic perspective.

¹²⁹ Habermas’ critical analysis of “negative” models of communication presents us also with the main tool to conceptualize *communicative guidance* and *virtual leadership*. Siehe v.a. Jürgen Habermas, TKH, Band 1, 127 ff.

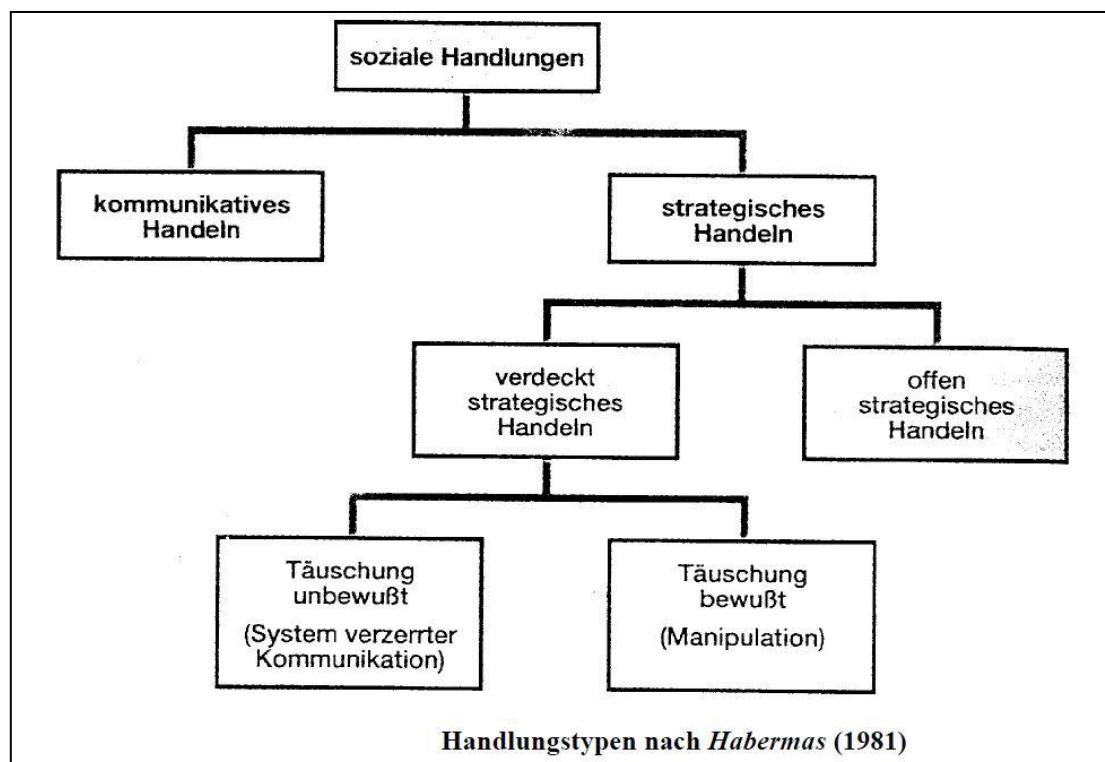
¹³⁰ Heiner Legewie, „Vorlesungen zur Qualitativen Diagnostik und Forschung,“ Lecture 5, Kommunikatives Handeln, Technische Universität Berlin, accessed September 8, 2012, http://www.ztg.tu-berlin.de/download/legewie/Dokumente/Vorlesung_5.pdf. Legewie’s insightful and understandable ideas will also flow into the following two paragraphs which summarize Habermas concept, unless Habermas himself is quoted.

¹³¹ Thomas McCarthy, The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School, in in Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate, ed. Michael Kelly, 263.

¹³² Ibid., 143; 150; 387.

¹³³ Ibid., 159. Source of the illustration: Heiner Legewie, „Vorlesungen zur Qualitativen Diagnostik und Forschung,“ Lecture 5, Kommunikatives Handeln, Technische Universität Berlin, accessed September 8, 2012, http://www.ztg.tu-berlin.de/download/legewie/Dokumente/Vorlesung_5.pdf.

can produce agreements through gestures, sounds, intonations, mimicry, written exchange or speech.¹³⁴ In contrast to *communicative action*, *strategic action* does not rely on consent or agreement between actors. It is noteworthy to point out that *strategic* and *communicative action* are not only processes, but also spaces and areas, or conditions/situations of interaction that influence actors in their environments (objective, social and subjective *Lebenswelten*). The function of speech as carrier of culture that influences thinking and behaviour is utterly important in the study of online Jihadi leadership processes, especially so on the micro-level of online Jihadi discourses.¹³⁵



Habermas explains:

“Der Begriff des teleologischen Aktors steht seit Aristoteles im Mittelpunkt der philosophischen Handlungstheorie. Der Actor verwirklicht einen Zweck bzw. Bewirkt das Eintreten eines erwünschten Zustandes, indem er die in der gegebenen Situation

¹³⁴ „Actions” in contrast to “action” involve, according to Habermas, „semantically relevant body movements“ such as finger-movements when playing a piano, movements of the vocal cords when speaking, or hand-movements when writing. Accordingly, the movements of hands and fingers to operate a computer-keyboard are also essential to interact socially in cyberspace, and can thus be defined as semantically relevant for online social interaction. Jürgen Habermas, TKH, Band 1, 144-145.

¹³⁵ Wilhelm von Humboldt was a German linguist and the brother of Alexander von Humboldt, an explorer and natural scientist with a Universalist approach and knowledge. See also the discussion of Jonathan Little, *Die Wohlgesinnten*, 410 ff, specifically 426.

erfolgsversprechenden Modelle wählt und in geeigneter Weise anwendet [...] Das teleologische Handlungsmodell wird zum strategischen Handlungsmodell erweitert, wenn in das Erfolgskalkül des Handelnden die Erwartung von Entscheidungen mindestens eines weiteren zielgerichtet handelnden Akteuren eingehen kann.“¹³⁶

A strategic actor tries to realize his goals independently from the consent of co-actors. Yet, he does not act alone, but as the member of a group, and thus tries to optimize his manipulation according to the expectations of others. For example, he acts by threatening or rewarding (open strategic action), or by allegedly acting communication-oriented (hidden strategic action). Furthermore, the strategic actor can be aware of his deception of others (intended manipulation), or he can subconsciously manipulate others. If his communication is distorted by self-deception, the strategic actor manipulates in “good intent.”¹³⁷ For example, *Ego* consciously deceives *Alter* about the validity of an extremist ideological worldview in order to influence *Alter's* thinking, and thus *Alter's* actions (*open strategic action*), or *Ego* does so, because he is convinced that this worldview is legitimate. The concept of strategic action by Habermas thus already integrates an understanding of communicative guidance, either hidden-manipulative, or openly.¹³⁸

Jihadi communicative interactions are *strategic*, since the environment of online jihad lacks any base for rational, consensus oriented communication for outsiders. *Communicative action* means that an actor can decide of his own free will. It results out of the consensual agreement of communication participants and is based on “convincing”.¹³⁹ However, K. Reich addresses some weaknesses in Habermas ideal of mutual agreement based *communicative action*. Firstly, he hints at the problem that the claim of communicative action itself may be strategic, in order to indoctrinate understanding.¹⁴⁰ Besides the great opportunities of an ideal

¹³⁶ Habermas, TKH, Band 1, 126 f.; 387.

¹³⁷ Legewie, Lecture 5, Kommunikatives Handeln.

¹³⁸ Massive influence on recipients through propaganda, or modern social media environments, for example, combines both open and hidden strategic action. Communicative action, in contrast, means that an actor can decide of his own free will. It results out of the consensual agreement of communication participants and is based on “convincing”.

¹³⁹ “Ein kommunikativ erzielt Einverständnis hat eine rationale Grundlage; es kann nämlich von keiner Seite, sei es instrumentell, durch Eingriff in Handlungssituation unmittelbar, oder strategisch, durch erfolgskalkulierte Einflußnahme auf die Entscheidungen eines Gegenspielers, *auferlegt* werden. Wohl kann ein Einverständnis objektiv erzwungen sein, aber was ersichtlich durch äußere Einwirkung oder Anwendung von Gewalt zustande kommt, kann subjektiv nicht als Einverständnis *zählen*. Einverständnis beruht auf gemeinsamen *Überzeugungen*. Der Sprechakt des einen¹³⁹ gelingt nur, wenn der andere das darin enthaltene Angebot akzeptiert, indem er (wie implizit auch immer) zu einem grundsätzlich kritisierbaren Geltungsanspruch mit Ja oder Nein Stellung nimmt. Sowohl *Ego*, der mit seiner Äußerung einen Geltungsanspruch erhebt, wie *Alter*, der diesen anerkennt oder zurückweist, stützen ihre Entscheidungen auf potentielle Gründe.“ Jürgen Habermas, TKH, Band 1, 387.

¹⁴⁰ Kersten Reich, Die Ordnung der Blicke Perspektiven des interaktionistischen Konstruktivismus, Band 1: Beobachtung und die Unschärfen der Erkenntnis (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1998), 310.

communicative action, which Habermas locates in a *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), his concept of social environment at the same time bears the danger to distort perceptions of participants. What happens, asks Reich, if all participants of a *Lebenswelt* can only accept certain ideals of understanding which are valid for their own communities? What happens if they lack the ability to differentiate between communicative and strategic action in the practices of power?¹⁴¹ Ideological communication, in our case the communication of online Jihadis, poses exactly this problem, since its proponents think that they agree on an universally valid social and belief system, and that it would be best for everyone else to agree. Thirdly, Habermas describes “virtual” as something “potential,” not real. For example, virtual participants of a discussion group, according to Habermas, would only do as if they took part, and thus become “potential” members of a group.¹⁴² However, the present study defines “virtual” as another, digital reality parallel and often complementary to physical reality (or as a fourth *Lebenswelt*, besides the objective, social and subjective *Lebenswelten* in Habermas’s concept).¹⁴³

From a non-normative perspective *virtual leadership* can as well be described as a strategic, group-internal form of *communicative action*; i.e. from a non-normative perspective on the in-group mechanisms of online jihad and its effects on proponents.¹⁴⁴ The key to such a reading of the concept lies in two explanations of *communicative action* which Habermas presents in volume two of his theory. Habermas argues at the two examples of the behavioural speech analysis of Meads; and Meyer Fortes’ observations on the effects of inter-marriages between different tribes (*exogamy*) that not only agreement based, but also socializing and integrating speech acts; as well as shared social and mythological structures among tribes, create situations of *communicative action*.¹⁴⁵ Online Jihadis are, to lean on Habermas’s structural-

¹⁴¹ Kersten Reich, *Die Ordnung der Blicke Perspektiven des interaktionistischen Konstruktivismus*, Band 1: Beobachtung und die Unschärfen der Erkenntnis, 313.

¹⁴² Jürgen Habermas, TKH 1, 165.

¹⁴³ We have defined “virtual” in the introductory chapter as “something that has the potential to come into existence and is rendered by a computer. People tend to associate virtual with “fake”, which is connected to 18th and 19th century discussions of optics and physics. Thus, everything virtual has a threshold quality, since the idea of not being totally real is connected to it. Nevertheless, people tend to take virtual worlds dead-serious. “Virtual-leadership” is thus “leadership on the threshold to reality which is rendered by a computer.” In fact, we should perceive “virtual” as a separate life, which exists beside real life. For example, J. Pacho, argues the online world is artificially created and man-made, but becomes a virtual reality which results in a virtual worldview. Julián Pacho, “Von virtueller Erfahrung zum virtuellen Weltbild? Kognitive Aspekte virtueller Realität,” in *Net-based Communication, Identity and Community*, ed. Nicanor Ursua and Andreas Metzner-Szigeth (Berlin: trafo, 2006), 123-144.

¹⁴⁴ For a further discussion see the chapter “Discursive Ritualism of Online Jihad,” subchapter “Virtual Kinship and Social Order.”

¹⁴⁵ Firstly, Habermas demonstrates this at the example of the communication theory of Meads, who combines behaviourism with speech analysis. Habermas argues on this basis that – in a situation of communicative action – speech not only serves to reach agreements, but also to coordinate target-oriented activities. Meads concentrates on target-oriented coordination functions of speech, in order to integrate and socialize actors, which Habermas accepts as communicative action. See Jürgen Habermas, TKH 2, 14. Secondly, Habermas claims on the basis of Meyer Fortes’ observations that inter-marriages between archaic tribal and clan societies (*exogamy*)

functionalist impulse, neo-tribal members of a cultic community that shares social and mythological structures. For example, kinship and amity relations among online Jihadis can be explained at the example of “the lovers of the huris” and their marriage perceptions. “The lovers of the huris” is another self-description of online Jihadis, which they give themselves in soon expectation of paradise and the expected inter-marriage with black-eyed paradise maids, and thus create quasi-transcendental kinship relations (in an idealized socio-cultural virtual *Lebenswelt*).¹⁴⁶ Moreover, online Jihadi ideological cohesion and brotherly love owes a lot to the use of target-oriented communication that is based on socializing and integrating speech acts. The argument of *communicative action* could thus – from a non-normative viewpoint - also be applied to virtual leadership (see the chapter “Transcendental Kinship and Virtual Social Order” in this dissertation). Within their belief system, Jihadi communication is agreement based. However, from a critical-normative outsider perspective, an agreement based co-existence around violent values cannot be accepted as rational *communicative action*.¹⁴⁷

Paradoxically (or maybe not so paradoxically), another key-idea to integrate the mechanisms of virtual leadership¹⁴⁸ into the strategic action concept of Habermas comes from a follower of Foucault’s deconstructionist approach. S. Meier, in his analysis of pictorial web-discourses, discusses the concept of *communicative action* in regards to web-semiotics, and thus also offers an approach that is valid for key mechanisms of *strategic action* online.¹⁴⁹ Meier orientates himself at the *speech act theory* of J.L. Austin and argues that pictures have a

create bonds among them. According to these bonds relatives from different tribes are obliged to agreement-based communicative action. This does not rule out the possibility of conflict and clashes between warring tribes and relatives. But the dichotomy of *insider versus* outsider is shared by relatives and prevents strategic action among them. Thus, Habermas claims that the ideal of a collectively shared homogenous *Lebenswelt* comes closest to existence in archaic societies, which share common social and mythological structures. See Jürgen Habermas, TKH 2, 234-237.

¹⁴⁶ For a good explanation of the socio-cultural *Lebenswelt* concept in tribal society according to Habermas see Claus Henning Amman and Angelika Amman, “*Lebenswelt*,” accessed September 29, 2012, <http://www.multimedia-pflege.de/paed/soziologie/lebenswelt.html>.

¹⁴⁷ There is an obligation of cult relatives to act agreement-based with each other, be loyal, support each other, be honest, in short, show “amity.” According to Habermas, Meyer Fortes’ principle of amity is a meta-norm that obligates relatives to interact with each other and meet the conditions of *communicative action*. However, mythological worldviews also blur the divide between reality and vision, rationality and cult; they mix norms, spirituality, morality and causality with each other. Therefore, one cannot yet speak about a universally applicable situation of *communicative action* among religious-sectarian groups, whose identity is founded on a myth.

From an in-group perspective, the process of inter-marriage in a cult community creates a perfect situational context and environment for a ratio-deprived *communicative action* situation within the group. Members of the group do not apply strategic action when they communicate with each other, because their kinship and amity forbid this. Yet, this situation is perfectly *strategic* from a critical outsider perspective. The critical outsider does not share the common myth, and he thus cannot share the integrating, socializing and target-oriented common discourse, which the mystic realm of transcendental inter-marriage purports.

¹⁴⁸ i.e. symbols, rituals and theology (= belief expressions and discourses).

¹⁴⁹ Stefan Meier, (Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2008).

specific discursive function. The messages of pictures are analogous to *illocutionary* speech acts, which send communicative impulses such as requests, demands or orders.¹⁵⁰ The illocutionary act becomes strategic, if an actor tries to impose his opinion on others by threat, manipulation, or extremist views.¹⁵¹ The same process takes place in semiotics through signification, argues Meier. He adapts *speech-act theory* to visual online communication, and refers to the pictorial pragmatic approach of Sachs-Hornbach, who argues that all pictures have an “illocutionary basic-function.”¹⁵² Similarly, online Jihadi semiotics, have an illocutionary-strategic function that interrelates with the conditioning of prior-knowledge (theology-ideology) as well as situational and communicative contexts (rituals of online jihad). For example, the audio-visual structure of Jihadi propaganda movies on YouTube offers itself for a semiotic discourse-analysis, which accords with Meier’s concept and method.

On the basis of the foregone explanations, we can anchor virtual leadership within a communicative framework: Virtual leadership relates to *instrumental action* (the building of authoritative semiotics, doctrines and discourses) and *strategic action* (calculating their steering character) in a virtual *Lebenswelt* (online jihad), which creates power and authority, while at the same time deviant views and statements are excluded, marginalized and prohibited (discursive leadership and dominion). The mechanisms of virtual leadership are structured around the multi-layered interaction of rituals. These are Jihadi ritualistic discourses, semiotics, and the theology online jihad. The single mechanisms are communicative guidance-elements, but in their entirety and inter-connectedness establish a form of leadership, i.e. *virtual leadership*, which divides into several sub-forms, such as mutual, hierarchical and discursive virtual leadership. Jihadi strategic actors try to realize their goals by establishing imperative forms of communication, based on common myths, discourses and religious doctrines that are transported through symbols, interaction rituals and

¹⁵⁰ Meier applies a modified speech-act theory by Werner Holly that concentrates on the impulse-setting function of illocutionary-acts. Holly defines expression-, reference-, predication-, and illocutionary acts. Reference- and predication acts are propositional act which refer to a content or situation with a statement. The actual speech act is the illocutionary act, which creates demands, requests, and orders. Oftentimes, illocutions are not expressed explicitly, such as in the performative formula “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” but implicitly through a specific choice of words, style, intonation, context and situation. See Stefan Meier, (Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web, 86-87.

¹⁵¹ Also Habermas uses the concept of *illocutionary* speech acts, which was introduced by Austin in the 1960s. Jürgen Habermas, TKH 1, 389.

¹⁵² For example, Sachs-Hornbach stresses the influence of prior-knowledge as well as the situational and communicative context in the interpretation of pictures. He argues that the picture of an animal in a private photo album has a completely different pictorial function from an animal picture in a lexicon. The first picture shows an individual animal that possibly counts as member of a family, while the second picture has an illustrative function to classify animals. The picture of a dark-skinned child in rags on a poster of the world hunger relief organization has a strongly appellative function. Common to all pictures is their illustrative function, which Sachs-Hornbach calls “illocutionary basic-function.”

theological frames, which are not necessarily shared by co-actors.¹⁵³ We can observe open and hidden strategic manipulation in Jihadi discussions and in Jihadi propaganda, where actors try to act or “convince” independently from the consent of co-actors. Within virtual leadership, however, there exist also markedly strong elements of *communicative action*, i.e. “*verständigungsorientiertes Handeln*.” For many participants, online jihad takes place within a common social environment (*Lebenswelt*), i.e. online jihad culture and its e-environments (websites, discussion forums, blogs, accounts, channels). Co-actors often mutually lead each other in discussions, shared media campaigns or wall-banner and graphic design contests. Virtual leadership is in this sense *strategic action*, which combines goal-oriented manipulation with mutual agreements and communicative coordination within a virtual ideological environment and leads to a powerful “construction of consent” (Chomsky). Meant is the engineering of ideas to dominate information society or its subcultures. These ideas become so deeply seated that they appear as common sense.¹⁵⁴ In a similar sense, Belliger and Krieger describe certain rituals in offline reality as strategic action which translates into an “instrumentalized form of communicative action” (see above).

Furthermore, *communicative guidance* in online jihad can be defined as the process by which virtual and physical spheres overlap. For example, if a discussion participant is influenced online to do something offline, then a form of communicative guidance takes place which crosses the threshold between both spheres, virtual and real life, yet is connected to both. However, the border between physical and virtual reality is hard to draw. If a discussion participant or *lurker*¹⁵⁵ thinks about a topic as he is sitting in front of a computer screen, his thoughts are influenced by an online reality. If he closes the computer and keeps on thinking about the same online context, then he crosses the threshold between virtual and real life within his *thought world* (*Gedankenwelt*).¹⁵⁶ That happens steadily, i.e. if people open their mobile phones, receive a message or read news and then close the device again, while their thoughts are still occupied with processing virtual information. This also means that people frequently develop strategic or communicative actions offline, online, or in parallel, and then transfer it to real life. Therefore, one can argue that virtual leadership (online communicative leadership) almost always translates into offline communicative leadership, and vice versa.

¹⁵³ Goal: To foster Jihadi online communities, foster comprehensive Jihadi outlooks on life, and influence physical reality/real life through virtual reality/virtual life by using the threshold atmosphere between both as a bridge.

¹⁵⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39-63. Harvey’s argument leans on Noam Chomsky’s thesis of the “construction of consent.” Summarized in Robert Hassan, *The Information Society*, 67.

¹⁵⁵ A lurker is not registered in a forum, but watches and follows discussions and communication.

¹⁵⁶ Own generic term used for the purpose of describing the cross-over of the threshold physical and virtual reality, which could be defined as a fourth *Lebenswelt*.

The condition is, of course, that a discussion participant or lurker closes the computer screen or any other digital device that connects to cyberspace, and keeps on thinking about the online context which he has on mind, and which has a mind-steering and manipulating character, to which the participant either agrees, or thinks he agrees; or does not fully understand, or is not fully aware that he agrees, despite the influence on his thinking, communication and action.

It is also from a methodological perspective fully justifiable to apply Habermas' key concepts of *communicative* and *strategic action* to the deconstruction of online jihad and its leadership mechanisms. Habermas provides us with the main conceptual tools to understand the aesthetics, rituals and theology of online jihad. These three mechanisms create strategic and communicative power. Through the interrelated use of these mechanisms, actors of online jihad establish virtual leadership. Firstly, Habermas' notion of aesthetic discourses concords with our observation that the symbols of online jihad and virtual Jihadi architectures have communication guiding functions (see the chapter "Symbols of Online Jihad"). The aesthetics of discourses can, for example, be vividly seen in what we will define as *discursive martial dancing*¹⁵⁷ in online discussions: The colourful use of ceremonial formula, big lettered Arabic slogans, reminds of tribal dancing that has been transformed into speech patterns and adapted to virtual space. Ceremonial formula in Jihadi discussions can be located at the cross-sections of discourses, rituals and aesthetics. Habermas argues that aesthetic discourses develop communicative and strategic strength, when participants perceive aesthetic works and expressions as arguments. This basically pre-empts Meier's approach of the topic (see above).¹⁵⁸ Secondly, the imperative theology of online jihad (treated in the chapter of the same title) can be reconnected to Habermas' lengthy discussion on the sacral roots of moral authority in modern societies. Habermas anchors his discussion in the *preceding authority* of the oldest sacred symbols¹⁵⁹ and the *aura* of the holy,¹⁶⁰ which has been treated by Walter Benjamin.¹⁶¹ On the basis of Durkheim's explanation of the authority of the holy, Habermas concludes that the same ambivalence of feelings exists towards the holy and the moral authority of social norms: The human subject feels at the same time fear, awe, respect, desire

¹⁵⁷ Own observation based-generic term.

¹⁵⁸ "A work validated through aesthetic experience can then in turn take the place of an argument and promote the acceptance of precisely those standards according to which it counts as an authentic work." Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 20. German version: Jürgen Habermas, TKH, Band 1, 41-42. Compare to Stefan Meier, *(Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web* (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2008).

¹⁵⁹ Habermas, TKH, Band 2, 73.

¹⁶⁰ Habermas, TKH, Band 1, 78.

¹⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 21-25.

and perceives it as an object of love.¹⁶² Here, we can integrate the concept of “*la direction de conscience*” (conscience-guidance) by M. Foucault, in regards to the theology of online jihad, which creates theological virtual leadership.¹⁶³ The ambivalence of norms and revealed injunctions can be described as piety, or in modern society, duteousness (for example, preußisches Pflichtbewusstsein). Thirdly, Habermas rejects the classification of rituals as communicative actions. Rituals, according to Habermas, serve the creation and preservation of a collective identity. They allow social collectives to switch through modes of interaction from a genetic program that is anchored in the individual organism to an inter-subjective and shared cultural program.¹⁶⁴ Habermas’ claim that rituals are only forms of instrumental or strategic action is refuted by Krieger and Belliger, who argue that rituals integrate thinking and action, and form a distinct dimension of communicative action.¹⁶⁵

(3) Leadership in Jihadi online networks is instantiated in target-oriented strategic communication and based on a high level of mutual agency and motivation.

The concrete concept of leadership in informational/organizational networks may be introduced by M. Foucault’s claim that the exercise of power is “a way in which certain actions modify others,” a “mode of action upon the action of others,” which “structure[s] the possible field of [their] action.” “The relationship proper to power is neither violence nor consensus, but ‘government,’ in the very broad sense of ‘guiding the possibility of conduct

¹⁶² Habermas, TKH, Band 2, 77-79.

¹⁶³ „Man darf nicht vergessen, dass es die Gewissensführung war, die man Jahrhundertlang in der griechischen Kirche *techné technon* und in der römischen Kirche *ars artium* nannte: Es war die Kunst, die Menschen zu regieren.“ Michel Foucault, Was ist Kritik?, trans. Walter Seitter (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1992), 10. Originally from Foucault’s lecture „*Qu’est-ce que la critique?*“, which he held in 1978 at the *Société française de philosophie*.

¹⁶⁴ Habermas, TKH, Band 2, 88.

¹⁶⁵ David J. Krieger and Andréa Belliger, Introduction to Ritualtheorien. Ein einführendes Handbuch, ed. D. J. Krieger and A. Belliger (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2003), 7-32. The function of ritualized actions is then neither specifically “religious” nor “liturgical,” but “to structure social reality in order to guarantee the continued existence of actors and their positions. Ritualized action stands for collective representations, personal, social and cultural identities, and gives them value, authority and truth.” Ibid, 27-28. The importance of aesthetic virtual rooms, their symbols and icons, in short, the semiotics of online jihad, lies clear at hand: Iconic signs and sounds automatically remind a recipient of certain concept, idea, or role model.¹⁶⁵ The semiotic concept of Monika Witsch on fundamentalist aesthetics in online agitation serves as a major theoretical venture point to explore the function of symbols in online jihad. Jihadi online rituals within online Jihadi networks, will be analyzed within American sociologist Alfred Bergesen’s concept of the “ritual order.” This will allow us to apply further anthropological concepts to explain ritualistic mechanisms of leadership in cyberspace. According to Bergesen, the “ritual order” is the complete sum of practices that constantly reproduce social ties and symbols (which in turn represent these ties), which can be integrated with Krieger’s and Belliger’s understanding of rituals as autonomous communicative actions.¹⁶⁵ Accordingly, the ritual is a communicative action that abolishes the difference between thinking and doing.¹⁶⁵ This point is tremendously important for leadership in cyberspace, which tries to elicit actions from ideas. These ideas, in turn, are theologically justified and bear an aura of the sacred. Theological interpretations are used by online Jihadis to formulate sacred imperatives. Subjects who interact with these ideas bear themselves an aura of the sacred.

and putting in order the possible outcome.”” Power is then “‘coextensive with every social relationship’ for ‘to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible and in fact ongoing.’”¹⁶⁶

Intensive field-research on online jihad networks took place over a period of three years. The conclusion is that discursive, semiotic and theological communication processes create virtual leadership and guidance. Conceptually this may be explained as follows: Information is the main fabric out of which digital information networks are woven. It has been argued that information is one of several forms by which an online movement can be organized.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, virtual leadership takes place by the targeted communication of this information. In the age of the information society, argues R. Hassan, digital information is essentially ideological. The ideological characteristic of digitally exchanged information further increases in extremist environments; a net of meaningful, strategic and imperative, but also shared communication, is spun around the central idea of jihad, for example.¹⁶⁸

The Jihadi cultural-informational net is authoritative, and authority stands for regimen, power and “truth,” but also dominion, which translates into the organization of actors. Governance, hierarchy, leadership, status positions and command lines develop along mutual indoctrination, which can be vividly observed on Jihadi discussion forums. The shared handling and management of relevant semiotics, discourses and theology of online jihad by the Jihadi actors attest to this. Members gain status on the basis of their rhetoric and discursive skills, such as their elaborated use of religious formulae, the content or support of

¹⁶⁶ Quoted and summarized in Thomas McCarthy, “The Critique of Impure Reason,” in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, 263. McCarthy refers to Foucault’s afterword “The Subject and Power,” in Hubert Dreyfuss and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: 1982), 222.

¹⁶⁷ Chuan Yang Hsu, “Internet and Social Movements: An Exploratory Study of a Taiwanese Virtual Mobilization,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the *International Communication Association*, San Diego, 2003.

¹⁶⁸ In the age of the information society, argues R. Hassan, digital information is essentially ideological. See Robert Hassan, *The Information Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 1. Furthermore, we can observe that hierarchies, status positions and command lines are created inside virtual networks. In a hitherto unique way, human behavior and culturally bound symbolic stimulus-response patterns are being manipulated through specific control modes in virtual space. Propaganda and information sharing through ritualistic interactions are here the keywords. The process of action-coordination by “strategic communicative actions” becomes clear through these three elements as we will show in the following. Netwar theory states that “[o]ne way of viewing the Internet is as a vast digital library. The web alone offers several billion pages of information, and much of the information is free. Activists may be able to locate legislative documents, official policy statements, analyses and discussions about issues, and other items related to their mission. They may be able to find names and contact information for key decision makers inside the government or governments they ultimately hope to influence.” Similar information gathering processes take place in online jihad. They often translate into “mutual virtual leadership.” For example, the “watching the watchers,” media-strategy relies on exploiting western media coverage, such as western policy failures and analytic insights on the Jihadi movement by the Counterterrorism community. This strategy is practically applied by Jihadi media activists in shared, mutual and participative processes, which we will describe in detail in the chapter “Virtual Discursive Guidance – The Rituals of Online Jihad.”

discussion topics, theological knowledge, and even the colors of their threads. Merit badges create forum-internal hierarchies, which in turn create power and discursive dominion that co-establish virtual leadership.

Although the link to leadership is not immediately clear, the following examples may explain the subject. Most classical leadership-theories stress the role of individual leaders and physical structures, such as authoritarian, charismatic and bureaucratic leadership (Weber, 1921/2). There are variations in leadership-style such as authoritarian, laissez-faire and participative-cooperative leadership-styles (Lewin et al. 1939). Participative leadership theoreticians suggest that leaders encourage the participation of group members in the decision-making process, which enhances their feeling of relevance. Leaders can allow or deny the input of members (Bass 2008).¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Jihadi forum administrators can allow, or reject contributions to discussions, elevate or expel forum members.¹⁷⁰ Yet, Jihadi forum administrators are not leaders, but rather resemble “ritual elders” who support the cohesiveness of communicative leadership processes. These processes centre on the central and shared idea of global jihad. Forum members guide each other and themselves by supporting this meta-idea in manifold shades through sub-ideas, interpretations, initiation rites, interaction behaviour and aesthetic adaptations (symbolic designs) in their discussions. Organizational and classical leadership-theorists look at leadership as the day-to-day management of subordinates. Communication has not been regarded as critical element in most classical leadership theories, even though these theories utilize communicative elements of leadership. In contrast, group-communication theorists argue that group-leadership is instantiated in communication.¹⁷¹ Their theories treat communication as an integral part of leadership (see Elis & Fischer, 1994, Frey & Barge, 1997). These researchers also argue that leadership is a behavioural pattern which “emerges through group discussion” (Pavitt, 1999). This illustrates the importance of online Jihadi discussions and within the discussions the role of rituals, such as certain interaction-phrases. These phrases signal communicative and strategic power as well as belonging to Jihadi subculture. Researchers of this strand also argue that leadership is a behavioural pattern which “emerges through group discussion.” Furthermore, “[u]nder a commitment strategy [...] authority is derived more from competence

¹⁶⁹ Bernard M. Bass and Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research and Managerial Applications*, 4th edition (New York: The Free Press, 2008)

¹⁷⁰ Jihadi forum administrators resemble participative leaders – but only at first glance. Forum administrators are the elite members of forums, who represent and elite and create a certain hierarchy. Yet, they have no actual control over the participants. They have to satisfy the demands of their audience, or members and lurkers (visitors, who are not registered), will change to another forum.

¹⁷¹ Charles Pavitt, “Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship,” in *The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research*, edited by Lawrence R. Frey et al. (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 313-334.

and experience than position; coordination and control are handled through shared philosophy and goals and lateral group interaction.”¹⁷²

Discursive and ritualized communications are best organized through commitment strategies. In the chapter on the semiotics and aesthetics of online jihad, we will be able to observe how such a commitment strategy is effectively built. Furthermore, Bruggeman, Traag and Uitermark observe that *discursive leadership* on Internet platforms is the result of power relations that are negotiated in discursive struggles.

The concepts of “discourse” and “discourse analysis” originated in the United States in the 1950s. The scholar Zelig Harris first used the term discourse in his structural grammar studies of Native American languages. Roughly speaking, two schools of discourse analysis have developed since then. One defines close to Zelig’s approach discourses as verbal and interpersonal face-to-face communication. For example, “elaborated academic debates,” or communication processes in subcultures are examined as discourses. A second approach to the study of discourses emerged from the French schools of structuralism and post-structuralism, especially the concept of M. Foucault, who explained discourses as social communication processes that structure, steer, constitute and safeguard complex social systems, in which they construct and preserve knowledge and power.¹⁷³ Semiotic-communication processes through designs and pictures, symbols and icons count as “pictorial discourses;” i.e. are also discourses. In the age of the information society, power is not so much based on knowledge, but rather, “power is informational and tied to the commodity” [the most precious commodity being information itself].¹⁷⁴ We will integrate both concepts in the research design. On the micro level, this study analyzes interpersonal communication of online discussants. Since we are interested further beyond in the construction of communicative leadership structures, we will also apply the second approach that deals with macro-discourses. Both approaches will be integrated into the communicative theory of J.

¹⁷² R.E. Walton and J.R. Hackman already in 1986 proposed two leadership strategies for “computer supported management groups”: “Under a control strategy management’s positional authority is emphasized in controlling the group via top-down communication and coordination. Under a commitment strategy, on the other hand, authority is derived more from competence and experience than position; coordination and control are handled through shared philosophy and goals and lateral group interaction.” Summarized in Michael H. Zack and James L. McKenney, “Social Context and Interaction in Ongoing Computer-Supported Management Groups,” in *Shaping Organization Form: Communication, Connection, and Community*, ed. Gerardine DeSanctis and Janet Fulk (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 257. Originally in R.E. Walton and J. R. Hackman, “Groups Under Contrasting Management Strategies,” in *Designing Effective Work Groups*, ed. P. S. Goodman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986), 168-201.

¹⁷³ See Stefan Meier, *Stefan Meier, (Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web* (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2008).

¹⁷⁴ Robert Hassan, *The Information Society*, 191.

Habermas under the aspects of *instrumental* and *strategic action*. If Bruggeman, Traag and Uitermark speak about *discursive leadership*, then they mean that

“[...] small groups with symbolic solidarity and discursive leadership can dominate larger groups with less solidarity and weaker leadership. We refer to these people as discursive leaders, who receive recognition from their cluster members and therefore figure as icons, or role models. Discursive leadership overlaps with charismatic leadership, while it differs from managerial leadership in organizations, as discursive leaders can at best win over, but not control others. Apart from identifying individual leaders, we can also measure the extent to which a cluster has leaders through the variance of discursive leadership, with low variance indicating egalitarian relationships (actors positively refer to random peers rather than leaders) and high variance indicating hierarchical relationships (actors positively refer to few discursive leaders). High variance of discursive leadership thus signals that there are leaders who speak with a great deal of support from the members of their cluster. Low variance of discursive leadership indicates that a group may have a nominal existence but that it lacks icons through which it manifests itself.”¹⁷⁵

The influence of role models and leaders in information society is measured according to their popularity in data networks. Some members of the information society are elevated to symbols and gain positions, which “the rest of us should aspire to.”¹⁷⁶ They are the “saints” of information society. In this function, they become what we will term *virtual leaders*, such as the likes of Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia), Larry Page and Sergej Brin (Google), or the “techno-utopian intellectual” George Gilder, whose Gilder-Report had an immense influence on the NASDAQ high-tech stock market in the late 1990s. The heroic individuals of information society are seen as the “embodiment of ‘indomitable force.’”¹⁷⁷

Such role-models are directly connected to discursive ritualism and discursive leadership in online discussion networks. This concept can again be connected to Foucault’s theory of

¹⁷⁵ Jeroen Bruggeman, Vincent Traag and Justus Uitermark, “Power Relations in Discursive Struggles: A network Analysis of the Dutch Debate on Minority Integration 1990-2005,” paper prepared for the annual meeting of the *American Sociological Association*, Las Vegas: August 20-23, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹⁷⁷ Hassan argues that in the late 1990s, Gilder already took the role of a neoliberal, “heroic-utopian” economic, and in our sense virtual business leader; what Gilder said was weighted in Gold (the “Gilder-effect”), before the NASDAQ imploded in 2000: “‘Listen to Gilder,’ chanted the rest of the world, logging on to his website on the day a new issue was scheduled to appear and desperately buying shares in whatever company the great man had touted. By the year 2000, financial journalists were discussing the ‘Gilder effect,’ the massive and immediate movement in a company’s share price that the ideologue was capable of setting in motion with even the most indirect pronouncements.” From Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York: Secker and Warburg, 2001), 355-6; quoted in Robert Hassan, *The Network Society*, 87.

dominion and leadership.¹⁷⁸ According to Foucault, dominion – and its effect, leadership through discursive control mechanisms – is not the outcome of material inequalities, or motivated by the distortion of power-free rational public discourses. Leadership is a conglomerate of uncountable and decentralised effects of power in socially constructed discourse praxes. Foucault describes this as the “microphysics of power,” which is not dominated by classical top-down lines of control, but by a proliferating net of discursive relations, which creates power through procedures of exclusion, among them prohibition, marginalization, ascertainment/determination of right and wrong, or the absolute will to truth. These procedures are closely related to institutions such as justice, psychiatry, the academic life, and publishing, which serve as instruments for the exclusionary process – in our case the virtual discursive master frame “online jihad.” Institutions also constrain discourses and create frames to prevent it from slipping out of control, lest the discourse be governed by uncontrollable factors such as desires, events and chance. Regulation and hierarchical structuring are a second set of procedures, which complement discursive mechanisms of leadership. A crucial procedural tool for this, indeed of vital importance, is the commentary. The commentary picks up something that has been said or written in a discourse, i.e. a pretext, and thus creates hierarchy and structure; at the same time the commentary abolishes randomness and eventfulness. The commentary, then, lays the cornerstone for what may, or may not be said in the discourse, what is being further discussed and what not; and what is ignored. In Jihadi online discourses and discussions, the commentary is often a ritualistic confirmation of a discussion topic. This can be clearly demonstrated by our analysis of the models of discursive ritualism (see the chapter by the same name). In that sense, tightly rule-controlled discussions forums seem to lead to the emergence of such streamlined commentaries, through which discursive dominion is further expanded. This way, certain statements become hegemonic in the Jihadi discourse, while others are marginalized. The questioning and qualifying of the hegemonic discourse is often countered by sanctions.¹⁷⁹ Jihadi forum rules provide the sanctioning mechanisms, which prepare the ground for the functioning of Jihadi discourses. The emerging discourses are so ritualistic that they can be called “discursive-ritualism.”

¹⁷⁸ Summary of Foucault’s theory of dominion by Stefan Meier, (Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web (Köln: Herbert van Halem Verlag, 2008), 32-34.

¹⁷⁹ Sanctioning measures includes all mechanisms of exclusion directed against subjects. The participation in established discourses is conditional and often status dependent (money, prestige, power, charisma, style). Meeting these conditions decides if a subject is admitted to certain discourse-, or doctrine-groups, which can isolate themselves from the outside-world by the adaption of certain speech-rituals and privileged discourses. Power is directly exerted by admitting, rejecting or excluding deviant members.

One of the reasons for the functioning of discursive ritualism is that participants in online Jihadi discussion networks comply with rigid forum rules. It is forbidden to disturb the dynamics of Jihadi discussions and criticize each other, which is the basis of any free and open discussion. Jihadi discussants are under constant surveillance by co-discussants and survey themselves. “Deviant behavior” is supposed to be reported to higher ranking forum members who are especially assigned to this task (*muraqibun*, *mushrifun*). The group leadership-process is thus based on shared panoptical supervision. The panoptical design symbolizes power that is at the same time visible, but unverifiable, and which serves as a principle for all-pervasive surveillance and control.

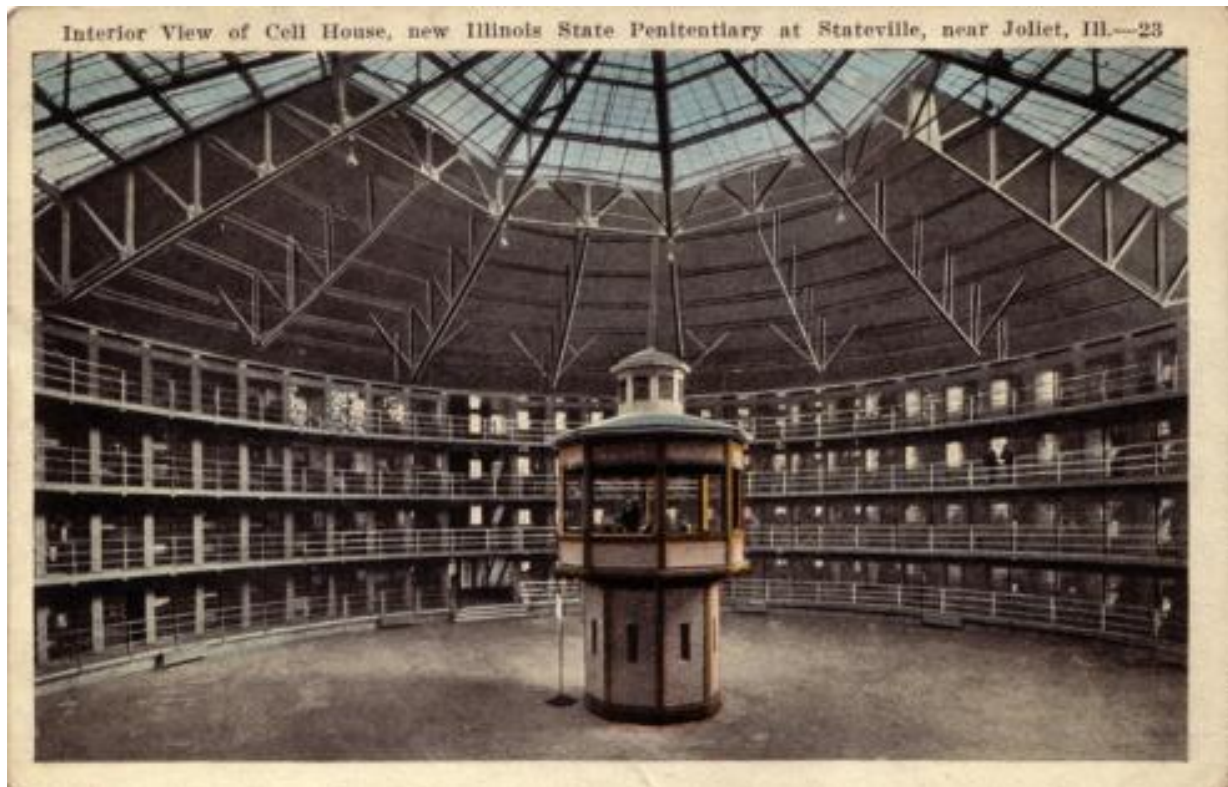
The *Panopticon* stands for an almost perfected principle of exercising power, and leadership. It is the name of a utopian 18th century prison design developed by Charles Bentham, with cells around a circular observation tower, from where a watcher could observe everything, yet himself remained hidden (see the picture below).¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ “If it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power. [...]

Underlying disciplinary projects the image of the plague stands for all forms of confusion and disorder; just as the image of the leper, cut off from all human contact, underlies projects of exclusion.

[...]

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.“ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Chapter 3 Discipline, subchapter 3, Panopticism (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).



Source: Foucault.info. Accessed November 18, 2012,
<http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineAndPunish/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism.html>.

Michele Foucault explains panoptical surveillance mechanism as follows: “Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.”¹⁸¹ Foucault’s “idea of the *Panopticon* serves as a metaphor [...] for a continuous, anonymous and all pervading power and surveillance operating at all levels of social organization.”¹⁸²

The imaginary intensity of the panoptical design, argues Foucault, has given rise to countless variations over the last 200 years. “The celebrated, transparent, circular cage, with its high towers powerful and knowing, may have been for Bentham a project of perfect disciplinary institution; but he also set out to show how one may ‘unlock’ the disciplines and get them to function in a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body.”

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Moreover, from the 15th century onward, practices of discursive leadership and conscience-guidance started to be not solely confined to the sacral sphere.¹⁸¹ The establishment of corpuses of knowledge during the renaissance and enlightenment periods, (medicine, philosophy, physics), together with rationalization, nationalism, secularization and industrialization, to name major processes of modernity until the 20th century, led also to the emergence of highly specialized discourses of power and dominion in the scientific, political and economic fields, as well as unprecedented levels of information, propaganda and surveillance (i.e. a state’s or corporation’s control of information and social supervision). Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹⁸² Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2005), 92

Bentham's dream was to transform the panoptic design into a "network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert, running through society without interruption in space or in time."¹⁸³

If we agree with Foucault's theoretical approach, then complex panoptical power and leadership mechanisms can be easily detected in the networks of information society. The panoptical design also helps to explain important theoretical aspects of visible, but seemingly unverifiable models of leadership. This can be demonstrated firstly at managerial, and in a further step, at the example of virtual leadership. In the panoptical design, the controlled become "caught up in a power situation, of which they are themselves the bearers," observes Foucault.¹⁸⁴ "Leaderless" managerial leadership models and marketing propaganda (see

¹⁸³ Ibid. Foucault argues that the panoptic schema provides an easily modifiable formula to program "the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms,"¹⁸³ such as systems of prison and punishment, vocational training, military training, or standardized learning and education. All of these systems are categorized and structured into supervisors, overseers and trainers as well as trained and supervised, who are categorized according to grades, rules and schedules, where achievements, faults and failures can be measured against the standardized and allegedly "sane" role-models.

¹⁸⁴ In the original prison design, the unverifiable control of prisoners should induce a state of permanent awareness of their own visibility "that assures the automatic functioning of power." The inmate would not be aware if someone was watching him or not. He would perceive surveillance as a permanent situation. This "perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary [...] the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers." Ibid.

"The fact that it should have given rise, even in our own time, to so many variations, projected or realized, is evidence of the imaginary intensity that it has possessed for almost two hundred years. But the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of [...] power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use.

It is polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used. It is - necessary modifications apart - applicable 'to all establishments whatsoever, in which, within a space not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspection' (Bentham, 40; although Bentham takes the penitentiary house as his prime example, it is because it has many different functions to fulfil - safe custody, confinement, solitude, forced labour and instruction).

In each of its applications, it makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. It does this in several ways: because it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised. Because it is possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed. Because, in these conditions, its strength is that it never intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise, it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow from one another. Because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of mind over mind'. The panoptic schema makes any apparatus of power more intense: it assures its economy (in material, in personnel, in time); it assures its efficacy by its preventative character, its continuous functioning and its automatic mechanisms. It is a way of obtaining from power 'in hitherto unexampled quantity', 'a great and new instrument of government . . .; its great excellence consists in the great strength it is capable of giving to any institution it may be thought proper to apply it to' (Bentham, 66)

[...]

The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function [The Panopticon] has a role of

further below) go one step further and turn the perception of surveillance into a desire to survey and be surveyed. Similarly, the “network-effect” described by Hassan, attests to the effectiveness of *panopticism* in the information society.¹⁸⁵ One can observe a total amplification of the individual, which drowns in a sea of seemingly unrestricted individualism. The so-called “social Net” is therefore driven by the same rationale which underlies the mechanisms of panoptical control that were observed by Foucault, namely the increase and multiplication of social forces by the participative, almost compliant replication of those control mechanisms by their bearers.

Some aspects of virtual leadership resemble capitalist propaganda strategies, which refers here to consumer-guidance through marketing as well as to corporative-managerial leadership models. The goal of the former type is to condition “self-expressive individualist” consumers through marketing and advertisement to buy goods they do not need out of fear of missing out on something; the latter type aims at creating employees who over-identify with and sacrifice themselves and others “willingly” for the benefit of their companies. The corporate benefit of their actions is statistically measured, while they themselves watch and judge the productive actions of other employees. In a similar way, consumers are guided to gain personal salvation in terms of rewards, benefits and happiness by being part of a specific lifestyle group, by being a patriotic citizen, or a promoted employee.¹⁸⁶

There is a clear trend towards new models of corporative-leadership in information society, which also affects extremist online networks. Corporations understand that the border between offline- and online realities increasingly blurs. As an effect, they try to guide offline behavior by manipulating digital culture. The industry itself writes down these rules one-to-one. As subjects and consumers of modern global marketing, Jihadis have been pre-conditioned to follow these rules. Their propaganda and leadership mechanisms in digital environments are heavily influenced by modern informational principles, such as social networking marketing.

amplification; although it arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and more effective, it does so not for power itself, nor for the immediate salvation of a threatened society: its aim is to strengthen the social forces - to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply.”

¹⁸⁵ The “network effect” is an increasingly strong compulsion to be part of the information society because of “the needs of a [postmodern] neo-liberal society that demands connectedness.” It forces “people to be more efficient and flexible, to compulsorily require them to synchronize with an increasingly accelerated way of life, and to develop an obsession for computers.” Robert Hassan, *The Information Society*, 2. Furthermore, it is justified to argue that contemporary information society features networks of control and surveillance mechanisms that are all-pervasive, without any limitation in space or in time. Social networking is based on panoptic designs which penetrate information society so deeply and effectively with communication ideology, tools and mechanisms that it is almost impossible to escape.

¹⁸⁶ See Adam Curtis, *The Century of the Self*, BBC documentary series, April 29 – May 2, 2002.

There is ample proof that “unverifiable” leadership principles in digital mass culture are exploited consciously by market-leading corporations. A study by the German Institute for Trust and Security on the Internet (DIVSI) asked 40 opinion-leaders from the business and economy sectors “Who designs and organizes the Internet?” Successful business managers agreed on the following:

No-one is offline anymore. Online and offline-spheres permeate each other increasingly. Even individuals who do not get online are surrounded and influenced by the Internet. Digital trenches between users and non-users “will automatically disappear, since everyday actions are guided online anyhow.” Secondly, the interviewed opinion leaders regard an overall responsibility for the Internet as structurally impossible and unwished. Their solution is to delegate responsibility in large parts to users (an integral element of “participative leadership”). Thirdly, the power will still remain in the hands of the makers, which are the market-leading corporations. They coin the rules of conduct in the Internet [Rules of conduct become thus integral elements of socially-engineered and communicative mass-leadership patterns (see the chapter discursive ritualism in this dissertation)]. Fourthly, the future task of corporations should be to gain definitional power over central values of a digital culture.¹⁸⁷

The DIVSI-study was prepared by the German Sinus-Institute for marketing and social research. Sinus is a typical mind-guidance expert that counsels corporate leaders in the tradition of SRI’s psychological values program (see below). The company counsels corporations and policy makers with a mixed social-science and psychological approach. It observes social groups and their cultures, defines changing values, and then formulates strategies how to influence target groups, trends and markets.¹⁸⁸

This idea is not new to ideologues and policy makers. For example, Ronald Reagan (and afterwards Margaret Thatcher) successfully utilized the notion of “leaderless” participative leadership in his presidential campaign in 1980: “I vision leadership in taking government of your backs and turning your loose to do what you can do so well.”¹⁸⁹ Reagan’s leadership approach was probably influenced by key findings on consumer guidance of the marketing industry at that time, with Stanford Research Institute’s (SRI) “Psychological Values

¹⁸⁷ „DIVSI Meinungsführer-Studie „Wer gestaltet das Internet?“,“ Deutsches Institut für Vertrauen und Sicherheit im Internet (DIVSI), accessed December 5, 2012, <https://www.divsi.de/divsi-meinungsführer-studie>.

¹⁸⁸ The institute says about itself that it “develops expertise and strategies for corporations and institutions in the consumption, ecological, cultural and political fields, with a special focus on value change, *Lebenswelten* (Sinus-Milieus®) [sic], everyday life aesthetics as well as socio-cultural trends and future-scenarios.” „DIVSI Milieu-Studie Internet in Auftrag gegeben“, accessed December 4, 2012, <https://www.divsi.de/aktivitaeten/divsi-milieu-studie-internet>.

¹⁸⁹ Another leadership motto of Reagan was: “In this present crisis government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.” Adam Curtis, *The Century of the Self*, BBC documentary series, April 29 – May 2, 2002, part 2, 47-52 min.

Research” leading the way. In the 1970s and 1980s, SRI conducted behavioral research for U.S. corporations how to create and control and guide consumers through marketing.¹⁹⁰ SRI found out that so-called “inner-directed and self-actualizing” consumer would start buying in the conditioned ways, if marketing strategists read their inner desires and addressed them with target-orientated communication (advertisement, marketing) which claimed to fulfill these desires. To this goal, SRI sent out long questionnaires to U.S. citizens about their values and lifestyles and categorized them into according groups. The *ars artium* of SRI’s approach was based on the insight that the ever growing trend of individualization in modern capitalist societies required companies to address value and lifestyle groups instead of social classes. Products were successful if they pretended to bring salvation through unique happiness and wellbeing. Consumption guidance was portrayed as an act of mutual understanding.

The psychology of consumption/election and reward is the essential rationale behind *psychological-values-based guidance* models. The motivational aspect, i.e. to attain salvation and fulfillment, appeals to deeply religious and primordial human desires under the clad of modern and secular slogans.

Models of managerial leadership continue and build on similar principles.¹⁹¹ Examples are *sovereign self-management* and *management by objectives* (MbO). One of the key-questions is how to address actors’ emotional and rational needs at the same time. These needs are allegorized by “belly” and “head,” respectively. The goal is to increase the “intrinsic motivation” of actors and cause an emotional flow state during which the performance of tasks becomes a pleasant and enjoyable experience. Examples of intrinsic motivation without strategic goals are cheerfully playing kids, or adults who perform spontaneous pleasure-oriented activities, and enjoy these activities without thinking about time or objectives. Motif and goal of an action become one. As soon as an actor receives a reward for a pleasure-oriented action, however, the rationale behind it becomes strategic, and the danger arises that the intrinsic motivation is lost.¹⁹² In such a case, extrinsic motivation dominates; an action

¹⁹⁰ SRI found out that “at the top of the hierarchy [of 1980s U.S. society] were a large and growing group that cut across all social classes. The SRI team called them the *inner-directeds*: These were people who felt that they were not defined by their place in society, but by the choices they made themselves. But what SRI discovered was that these people could be defined by the different patterns of behavior through which they chose to express themselves. Self-expression was not infinite. It fell into identifiable types. The SRI team invented a new term for it. Lifestyles [...] they called their system values and lifestyles. [...] If only a product expressed a group’s particular values, it would be bought by them. This is what made the values and lifestyles system so powerful: Its ability to predict what new products self-actualizers would choose [...] it could predict not just the new products they would buy, but the politicians they were going to choose to elect.” See Adam Curtis, *The Century of the Self*.

¹⁹¹ For the following summary see Hugo M. Kehr, *Souveränes Selbstmanagement: Ein wirksames Konzept zur Förderung von Motivation und Willensstärke*, „Kapitel 6: Intrinsische Motivation steigern“ (Basel: Beltz Verlag, 2002), 136-159.

¹⁹² An *overjustification-effect* takes place if an extrinsic motivation impairs an intrinsic motivation.

takes place strategically in order to reach an external goal, for example, a promotion or a pay rise. Managerial leadership researchers have found out that sometimes extrinsic motivation can reinforce an intrinsic, flow-state connected motivation, if leaders succeed not to destroy, but to enlarge the accordance between emotional motives and strategic goals of inferiors. Figuratively speaking, this means to place the reward in such a way that it falls exactly into the intersection between both, and is motif- as well as goal-related. For example, pupils who like going to history classes are stimulated by the promise to visit the places of battles and murders pictured in the history books, if they write good grades.¹⁹³ In *Management by Objectives* trainings (MbO), managers are trained to use similar incentives and to agree with their employees upon specific objectives, which the latter reach self-responsibly. The goal of MbO trainings is not to get to know employees better and establish good relations (*affiliation motif*), nor to train managers to realize ambitious goals (*achievement motif*), but to teach managers how to influence employees to the benefit of the corporate objectives (*power motif*). Employees learn to understand leadership as a way to influence each other to benefit corporate objectives.¹⁹⁴ Leaders who aim at power are most likely to visit MbO trainings.

In Online jihad, the self-management doctrine of individualized terrorism (*irhab fardi*) and incitement (*tahrid*) resembles MbO leadership style. The central al-Qaeda organization has repeatedly issued the central doctrines to followers. In doing so, the organization behaves like a central manager that delegates tasks to self-responsible employees, who work towards a shared goal.¹⁹⁵ Decentralized operatives are called upon to realize specific objectives self-responsibly. It is justified to assume that prominent activists and ideological leaders, who participate in online jihad and foster this doctrine without finally sacrificing their lives for it, do aim at power and authority as extrinsic motivations (*power motif*). They guide and compete with each other, with their theological doctrines, strategic analyses, jurisprudential opinions and ideological tractates, to benefit the “corporate objectives” of jihad. As for the online Jihadi rank and file, their intrinsic motivation lies in the community feeling, which is strengthened by excitement and incitement (*tahrid*), which comprises the complete realm of Jihadi propaganda activity (*al-i'lam al-Jihadi*). There are some similarities to *propaganda of the deed*, which is originally a 19th century revolutionary concept (Carlo Pisacane; Mikhail Bakunin) that is in use until today by different terrorist and revolutionary groupings.¹⁹⁶ Extrinsic motivations, the strategic part of online jihad, lure with promotions within (online)

¹⁹³ See Kehr, *Souveränes Selbstmanagement: Ein wirksames Konzept zur Förderung von Motivation und Willensstärke*, 140.

¹⁹⁴ Managerial leadership defines three major motives: the affiliation, achievement and authority motif.

¹⁹⁵ *Al-Sahab*, “*La tukallaf illa nafsak*,” accessed January 14, 2013, http://archive.org/details/osod_09a.

¹⁹⁶ Tinnes article on RAF

Jihadi communities, a rise in status and hierarchy, or an advanced role in physical organizations, as well as financial gains. Martyrdom (*shahada*; *istishhad*)¹⁹⁷ and promised entry into paradise are placed as rewards exactly in between the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and thus increase the accordance between both. In return for the media activists' efforts to realize "religiously commendable aims," they are promised salvation. The comparison of this concept's closeness to managerial-corporate leadership is not odd, since central actors of online jihad themselves describe jihad as "terrorism industry" (*sina'at al-irhab*).¹⁹⁸

Another important factor of Jihadi propaganda, and in a deeper sense of virtual leadership, is the theological dimension. We can speak about the construction of paternal transcendental leadership patterns. In Jihadi theological discourses, God is the omnipresent supreme leader, who sees, hears and knows everything, thereby commanding jihad. Draconic punishments are announced against those who disobey (hellfire). Strategic discourses around allegedly divine imperatives are fed with religious fear scenarios that are supposed to discipline and thus train obedient followers. Virtual leadership addresses religious desires of participants to be part of a specific salvation group (*al-firqa al-najiyya*), as well as feelings of honour and shame of Muslim audiences. Participants who comply can rise within discursive network hierarchies. In addition, the administrators of Jihadi forums strategically modify the communication of members through rigid rules of admittance and discussion. In extremist digital information networks, control and power can be better understood

"as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ This refers to passive martyrdom by getting killed (*shahada*), as well as active martyrdom by killing oneself (*istishhadiya*), i.e. *talab al-shahada*.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, the prominent Jihadi Media Production and Distribution Centre *Markaz al-Fajr li-l-I'lam* with its production *Barnamij sina'at al-irhab* by Abu 'Ubayda Abdullah al-'Adam, accessed November 14, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/Sena3at-Al-Erhab>.

¹⁹⁹ Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 98.

Moreover, information-gathering and distribution processes through ritualistic interactions in online ceremonies (the allegorical “camp-fire”) are essential virtual leadership mechanisms. A ceremony represents a macro-ritual. However, such a macro-ritual can, according to Bergesen, only be established on the basis of preceding micro-rituals (shared discourse patterns and interaction-codes) and meso-rituals (the identification with a common idea). We will discuss this in more detail in the chapter “Discursive Virtual Guidance - Rituals of Online Jihad.”

(4) A central idea is like a camp-fire; a group gathers around it and recreates its ties and its existence.

A central idea is metaphorically like a camp-fire; a group gathers around it and recreates its myths, ties and existence.²⁰⁰ The campfire represents a shared cause and can be compared to a *meso*-ritual, which connects between micro- and macro rituals. Micro-rituals would include wood-collecting, igniting the fire, the sitting positions of participants, the order, hierarchy and style of speech among them. The macro ritual would be the ceremony itself. Online jihad can be compared to a digital campfire that draws extremists.

Ideas and symbols can work like action-leading mental viruses. They are highly resilient and contagious. The black flag and on it in white letters the Islamic credo is a central symbol of Jihadi subculture. At the same time, it is an action leading iconic stimulus. It stimulates the idea and discussion, often performance of jihad. Interactions are supported by ideas and signs, as much as ideas and signs stimulate interactions. If one understands these dynamics, then it would be timely to turn towards a reformed understanding of communication, organization and leadership in the information age.

Virtual leadership is then about the power of ideas, which draw attention and are transported in a sacred package through belief expressions, rituals and symbols in online networks. This touches a fundamental sociological debate that involves key thoughts of the principal architects of social science. The German sociologist Max Weber held that *ideas* worked like switchmen for human action and culture, while Émile Durkheim argued that *symbols* [such as

²⁰⁰ We will demonstrate this with the ritual order of Albert Bergesen in the chapter “rituals of online jihad.” There is still a clear agreement in major sociological schools on the role and power of ideas for human interactions. For example, Max Weber held that ideas work like switchmen for human action and culture. See Weber 1946: 323–359. See also Knoblauch 1999. In contrast, Emile Durkheim argued that symbols [such as iconic representations] and shared socio-communicative processes [such as rituals] are “collective representations” that constitute group life (i.e. culture). For example, the totem-symbol constitutes the Aboriginal-clan and makes it a society. However, Durkheim’s approach was highly problematic; since the clan is was not the main social structure in Australia, where Durkheim researched. Furthermore, not all Aborigines practice an intensive totem cult. Durkheim 2008.

iconic representations] and *shared socio-communicative processes* [such as rituals] were “collective representations” that constituted group life (i.e. culture). For example, Durkheim argued that the totem-symbol constituted the Australian Aboriginal-clan and made it a society.²⁰¹ In Weber’s view, modern societies became rationalized by the disenchantment of mystical worldviews (“*Entzauberung der Welt*”).²⁰² In contrast, Durkheim stressed the sacral roots of moral authority and social norms in modern societies, or in other words, the continued presence of underlying religious-magic beliefs in modern, allegedly secular, social processes.²⁰³ The sociological debate on the role of representations versus ideas, and on the role of secularism versus religion in the process of socialization is important in the information society. For example, key ideas are represented by symbols, and vice versa. These semiotic-semantic interrelations have a deep influence on people within their respective cultural environments. Also speech is a symbolic form of expression (*symbolisch vermittelte Interaktion*), as much as symbols have a discursive function which is similar to speech-acts (*pictorial discourses*).²⁰⁴ A shared discourse is a conglomerate of sound-sign symbolisms and ideas, which circle around each other, produce new meanings, and have a coordinating function.

Applying a synthesis of Durkheim’s and Weber’s concepts of socialization to contemporary extremist Net-cultures allows the conclusion that virtual ideas or interactions are supported by symbols, as much as symbols stimulate ideas and interactions. In the age of the “Third Modernity,” actors seem to develop into electronic tribes, which muster all possibilities of modern social media to define themselves and cherish digitalized totem cults and neo-pagan veneration of saints.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ See Max Weber, Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions. in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford: University Press, 1946), 323–359. See also Hubert Knoblauch, *Religionssoziologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999). In contrast, Durkheim’s approach was highly problematic; since the clan is was not the main social structure in Australia, where Durkheim researched. Furthermore, not all Aborigines practice an intensive totem cult. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: University Press, 2001).

²⁰² „Die zunehmende Intellektualisierung und Rationalisierung bedeutet also nicht eine zunehmende allgemeine Kenntnis der Lebensbedingungen, unter denen man steht. Sondern sie bedeutet etwas anderes: das Wissen davon oder den Glauben daran: daß man, wenn man nur wollte, es jederzeit erfahren könnte, daß es also prinzipiell keine geheimnisvollen unberechenbaren Mächte gebe, die da hineinspielen, daß man vielmehr alle Dinge – im Prinzip – durch Berechnen beherrschen könne. Das aber bedeutet: die Entzauberung der Welt. Nicht mehr, wie der Wilde, für den es solche Mächte gab, muss man zu magischen Mitteln greifen, um die Geister zu beherrschen oder zu erbitten. Sondern technische Mittel und Berechnung leisten das. Dies vor allem bedeutet die Intellektualisierung als solche.“ Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (1919) (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 86–87.

²⁰³ See Durkheim on the origins of religion and rites in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; also his lecture in 1906 in front of the *Société française de philosophie* titled “*La détermination du fait moral*”; Furthermore Habermas on Durkheim in TKH 2, 75–86.

²⁰⁴ Jürgen Habermas, TKH 1, 144. This refers to the communication-medium speech, i.e. speech action.

²⁰⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2003). See on Giddens’s concept of neo-paganism also Sian Lee Reid and Shelly Tsivia Rabinovitch, “Witches,

Furthermore, Durkheim observed that “religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two categories lies all that separates thinking from doing.”²⁰⁶ Rites contain rituals, as much as games are based on rules. This explains the importance of rituals for virtual leadership theory. Durkheim’s idea was further developed in ritual theories of the latter 20th century. Catherine Bell, for example, observed in her pioneering study “Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice” that “ritual” means something similar in all related theories: The ritual is a form of communicative action that abolishes the difference between thinking and doing. The ritual reconciles and reintegrates thinking and doing.²⁰⁷ The U.S. anthropologist Clifford Geertz even claims in his seminal work “The Interpretation of Cultures” that the ritual causes a “melting” of imagined and lived worlds into a system of symbolic forms.²⁰⁸ Geertz also claims that the inter-transposability of models for and models of symbolic formulation is the distinctive characteristic of our mentality.²⁰⁹ The foregoing key thoughts of structural anthropology lead us straight to our last conceptual model, which integrates biogenetic structuralism with evolutionary biology into the concept of virtual leadership.

(5) Concepts of biogenetic structuralism and evolutionary biology considerably enhance an understanding of virtual leadership processes in online jihad networks.

Biogenetic structuralism, which was co-developed by J. Laughlin and E.D. d’Aquili, deals with neurobiological aspects of human socialization. Conceptually, it is based on a merger between Levi-Strauss anthropological structuralism and neurosciences. Laughlin, McManus, d’Aquili and other main proponents apply biogenetic structuralism to explain, among others, altered states of consciousness during rituals and the role of related myths. At this place we will refer to an article on the function of dreaming from a biogenetic structural perspective by J. McManus, C. D. Laughlin and J. Shearer. The authors argue that “Dreaming is an integral part of the cyclical structure of cognized reality. It is as essential to cognition as thinking

Wiccans and Neo-Pagans: A Review of Current Academic Treatments of Neo-Paganism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 528.

²⁰⁶ Emile Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life”.

²⁰⁷ Catherine Bell, „Ritualkonstruktion“, in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Adreá Belliger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 37-48.

²⁰⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 112-113.

²⁰⁹ Geertz defines religion as “a system of symbols which acts to ... establish powerful pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by ... formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and ... clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that ... the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” Clifford Geertz, „Religion as a Cultural System”, in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 57-76.

itself. Dreaming is part of the infrastructure of the edifice of thought - so much so that in order to understand the function of dreaming we must develop a broader understanding about the organization and operation of consciousness and the brain,” which works at the same time neurobiological and symbolic.²¹⁰ The authors explicate that “Both the external world and the self, as we know them, are essentially symbolic models [...] We come to understand ourselves and our world in a symbolic way. We construct models of each through a complex process of neurological transformation. Models are organizations of neural tissue that grow and become more mature and ramified in their functioning. From an enormously complex system of such models we erect a cognized environment.”²¹¹ The threshold reality cyberspace resembles dreamscapes in some way. Online reality is a highly symbolic thought world, both in output and input. The interplay between virtual and physical worlds seems to be as important as the interrelation between dreaming and thinking. The online experience causes processes of neurological transformation through the exploration of and adaption of the brain to E-environments, for example, by body-movements, information intake and outtake, emotional perception of symbols and colors, as well as the net-related modes of interaction through chat and discussion.

The symbolic cognitive environment of online jihad is a mixture between dreamscape and reality, and it surely causes something in perceivers. There is a threshold between actual physical and virtual reality, at which the human mind experiences a frustration. Neither physical, nor virtual acts match each other completely. Yet, they call for reconciliation in the minds of the actors. This also concerns innate and instinctive human behavior. A group in real life, speaking about an extreme environment such as Jihadi subculture, will develop specific intra-group and out-group processes, for example cohesion fostering through threat display, because these processes are genetically and behaviorally anchored and pre-programmed in the human mind. In a virtual environment, such processes need to be adapted to different forms of expression than in real life. Keith W. Faulkner argues that virtual objects influence our perception, because they create instinctive drives that become stuck in “bound expectations.” Wished-for-objects then “compel, or drive, an active synthesis with an equivalent actual object.”²¹² Such instinctive drives become visible in our object of study as well, the

²¹⁰ John McManus, Charles D. Laughlin and Jon Shearer, “The Function of Dreaming in the Cycles of Cognition: A Biogenetic Structural Account,” in *The Functions of Dreaming*, ed. Alan Moffit, Milton Kramer, and Robert Hoffman (New York: State University Press, 1993), 21.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-23.

²¹² See Keith W. Faulkner, *Deleuze and the Three Syntheses of Time* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 65-67. Sigmund Freud explained in an attempt to switch from psycho-analysis to neurology that large accumulations of energy blocked psi-neurons in the brain sometimes lack an outlet for perceptions. When this tension bursts through a pathway, it can create a hallucination in the human mind. This idea is closely related to S. Freud’s

communication processes of online jihad, where instinctive evolutionary-biological behavior is adapted to virtual space.

Actors instinctively adapt innate and primordial social behavior to cognized environments. Evolutionary biologists claim that highly differentiated modes of interaction in modern societies can be traced back to basic patterns of social behavior in primordial groups. For example, Ralph Jordania, argues that music and art developed millions of years ago, when primordial humans entered open grasslands in Africa and had to defend themselves against larger predators. They developed rituals such as common rhythmic stomping of the feet, basing dancing rituals, throwing of things, body-painting with mud, basic forms of artist-aesthetic expression, to deter enemies. These rituals and interactions enabled primordial humans to switch from an individual to a collective awareness, by inducing an altered state of consciousness, which Jordania calls *battle trance*. Jordania argues that the basis of modern art, music, dancing and other artistic emotional expressions can be traced back to *battle trance*. However, in modern societies, collective ceremonial behavior and ritualistic interactions are highly differentiated. At first glance, they have become detached from instinctive survival mechanisms, and are now integrated into cultural, social, religious and political spheres of interaction. If Jordania's claim is correct, then characteristic elements of online behavior and interaction, which have become mass phenomena over the last years, can also be traced back to instinctive patterns of socialization. The differentiation of instinctive social behavior in virtual worlds is, at first glance, even stronger. Digital means of communication now add to multiple layers of culture and socialization in space and time. What catches the eye, though, in Jihadi online discussions is the, *prima facie*, simplicity of slogans, large size of letters and multitude of colors. Yet, evolutionary speaking one can detect the behavioral traces of a primordial group that finds itself in a threatening environment and open wilderness which lacks hiding places, and where attacks from everywhere can occur at any time. The same happens on the Internet, where a small, cultic and radical group enjoys

concepts of "wishful activation" and "primary processes" which generate hallucinations. Freud called this phenomenon *psi-primary processes*, which "are daily presented to us during sleep" however, they also occurred during waking life. Modern psychiatry, however, refutes Freud's thesis as speculation, "as Freud's attempt to explain mind by brain, rather than sticking to his original project to explain mind by mind, has led him down a number of blind alleys. His speculative physiology of the nervous system could fairly be dubbed [as] "Freud's grand neuronal fantasia."²¹²

However, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze took Freud's idea as an impulse, to explain the rise of instincts from endogenous excitations. "This [Freudian] synthesis of diurnal and nocturnal states allows Deleuze to maintain the duality between actual and virtual objects." Deleuze claims that similar processes can activate a virtual object, before an actual object can appear. Moreover, Keith W. Faulkner argues that virtual objects influence our perception, because they create instinctive drives that become stuck in "bound expectations." Wished-for-objects then "compel, or drive, an active synthesis with an equivalent actual object." Such instinctive drives becomes visible in our object of study as well, the communication processes of online jihad.

the wideness –in terms of gathering and hunting- of virtual space and feels threatened by it at the same time, for example by adversaries, or enemies who watch and want to destroy their web-presence, or disrupt their discourses. What happens next is an instinctive adaption to primordial group ceremonies, such as loud shouting, warning-colors and war-dancing to deter possible enemies. In virtual space this translates into big-lettered colorful slogans, which address possible members, unite a discussion group and at the same time intimidate adversaries. The term *martial discursive dancing* might describe this mode of communication best, where rituals to induce *battle trance* states of consciousness are adapted to virtual space and expressed by symbols, icons, colors and speech patterns.

(6) Finally, let us define the percipients and actors of virtual leadership.

Let us first turn to some general observations which concern users of the Internet. The “dialectics of the information age” witness the paradoxical effect that many actors of the information society, who are the “us,” feel in charge, subordinated and liberated at the same time. The “amazing” amount of time we spend in front of digital screens and the increasing speed with which we can coordinate our businesses, consumption, education, social lives, telecommunications, entertainment and contacts, enhances at the same time the feeling that the information society is like a mutually coordinated digital *Panopticon*.²¹³ However, information society is not only an elitist *Panopticon* through “big brothers” like Google, but based on mutual supervision; metaphorically speaking, the links of information society provide many little watch-towers which are inter-connected. Every member of information society is a watcher, but also becomes more transparent and is being watched by others. To speak with Foucault, “visibility is a trap.” This influences also offline behaviour. Every extraordinary scene, a fight between couples or a breakdown in public, possibly becomes a “youtube-moment” for the entertainment of others, which has been recorded by someone with the inbuilt camera of a mobile phone. Many of us “like” it to “google” or “wiki” ourselves and to present ourselves on Facebook, Tumblr, or Pheed (a multi-optional social network for “text-photo-video-audio-voice-broadcast”); yet we find it at the same time frightening that

²¹³ The design of the Panopticon (which itself was never built but nevertheless has been applied until today as a principle to establish surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms in societies) was originally formulated by the 18th century social philosopher Jeremy Bentham and was intensively discussed by the French 20th century philosopher Michel Foucault (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Clinic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-228). The concept of panoptical supervision, with which Foucault tried to demonstrate his argument that power and knowledge are inextricably connected, heavily informed the Foucault/Habermas Debate, which continues until today.

substantial amounts of our personal data are saved at places we cannot access (the panoptical effect).

Our entanglement in the online world is thus all pervasive, its discourses often too self-referential to be challenged, and it lacks any objective distance. Oftentimes, the information we receive and send cannot be factually verified, but the discourse and message, the how and why, is the essential point. Let us take a look at a business-oriented website, for example, which shows a screenshot of the title page of the most popular German tabloid, the “Bild.” The title page features a polemic article on Greek protests against German fiscal policy. Further down on the title-page, a smaller article says that 569,000 Germans are “addicted to the Internet.”²¹⁴ However, this is not the main article of the webpage. We merely receive the incoming information about Internet-addiction as an informational background noise. Nevertheless, our brains take an interest in it. In a technocratic world, numbers and information govern our perception of reality. This headline could either inform us about a “fact,” or it could prepare us within the context of a power-discourse to accept a pathological condition, namely that Internet-addiction is a “normal” state in information society. And, of course, it does so, because on the same site we are bombarded with messages that further this “addiction”: The title page that informs about Internet-addiction carries at the same time an advertisement for the online-payment of products and calls everyone “crazy, who shops without it.” The site, on which the screenshot is posted, features itself an advertisement banner for Facebook, an email-newsletter for the “business-insider,” the newest rates of the NASDAQ high-tech stock market, links to an article “how consumers are shopping with their phones,” and how to make “mobile payments work,” a link to an online job fair, as well as links to all major social network services, such as Twitter, Facebook, Buzz, Digg, StumbleUpon, Reddit, and LinkedIn. On this website, the amount of target oriented-information which the consumer perceives can be measured against the value of information in the actual article that is featured (“Greek protests against German fiscal policy”); and the latter just creates a side noise.

To add another dimension, which concerns the constant advertisement of major social network platforms, virtual identities are quasi-sacred.²¹⁵ As Victor Turner observed, “every

²¹⁴ “Germany’s reactions to Greek Protesters Dressed Like Nazis,” BusinessInsider, October 10, 2012, accessed October 10, 2012, www.businessinsider.com/bild-cover-on-greek-protesters-dressed-like-nazis-2012-10.

²¹⁵ Also secular industrialized society and its members are much more religious-spiritual than they introspect. In fact, each member of secular industrialized capitalist society – and nowadays the neo-liberal consumer of the information society – perceives himself as if he is his own God, with a sacred sphere of invulnerability around him, which is ritually reproduced through behavioral patterns of interaction. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Middlesex, Penguin, 1967), 91-95.

social position has some sacred characteristics.”²¹⁶ But the cultic reenactment and admiration of virtual selves on social networking sites augments this. Neo-liberal marketing-propaganda exploits this phenomenon (which started with Stanford Research Institute’s psychological values research program)²¹⁷ and peer pressure forces many participants into line. Information society members are trained and train each-other to become self-centred hedonists, who “willingly” use similar informational technological advices, software and social networking platforms, and quickly comply with user and data rules. On some mainstream platforms (Youtube, Facebook, et al.), the user (blogger, social network account holder, forum member, owner of a channel) perceives his or her virtual identity as quasi-sacred, as an authoritative symbol that can be measured by statistics, such as the “likes” of pictures users have shared. For example, the virtual Facebook tries to simulate face-to-face interactions. The single actor can become a discursive social network leader, if he gains attention represented by significations “I like,” referential posts, and self-representations which attract reactions. Even though the Internet with its major social networking platforms allows people to organize opposition, for example against corporation politics or repressive regimes, it also enhances the possibilities of massive brain washing, as well as its manipulation by extremist subcultures, such as online-Jihadis, of information and communication processes.

The activity in a threshold zone like virtual space creates threshold identities. Much has been written on this phenomenon in socio-anthropological literature. Threshold states cause strong emotional bonds and a feeling of brotherly/sisterly love among people who belong to the same group or experience the same transition. This feeling cuts across the distinctions of normal society. Victor Turner, who elaborated on van Gennep’s work on *liminal* states in *rites of passage* and used Geertz’ technique of *thick description*, coined this emotion *communitas*.

“It is as though there are here two major “models” for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” and “less”. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, *community*, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.

²¹⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969), 96-7.

²¹⁷ Stanford Research Institute’s *psychological values research program* in the late 1970s used Freudian methods of psychoanalysis to measure the desires of individuals and direct them towards buying certain products which were tailored to fit the values and lifestyles of certain consumer groups.

I prefer the Latin term “*communitas*” to “community,” to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an “area of common living.” The distinction between structure and *communitas* is not simply the familiar one between “secular” and “sacred,” or that, for example, between politics and religion. Certain fixed offices in tribal societies have *many* sacred attributes; indeed, every social position as *some* sacred characteristics. But this “sacred” component is acquired by the incumbents of positions during the *rites of passage*, through which they changed positions.”²¹⁸

Communitas can be typically observed among members of Jihadi forums who exaltedly and ritualistically laud each other. Cyber-Jihadis are *threshold people* by virtue of having extremist online identities, yet at the same time living quite normal lives. The average “armchair-Jihadi” is caught in a liminal state between the virtual and the physical world and thus develops a *liminal persona*.²¹⁹ This can create a tension and a longing to fill the gap between thought and action.²²⁰ The threshold feeling is strengthened by a religious worldview, which postulates that Jihadis are “strangers”, who are merely passing through this world.²²¹ Similar to fundamentalist Christians, Jihadis are, psychologically seen, in a constant *rite of passage*.²²² This not only concerns their belief in salvation, which is a typical fundamentalist trait, but also the rites connected to this belief in cyberspace and their effects on identity formation and socialisation. The modes of action by “virtual communities” by no means automatically lead to social integration, but can accelerate social fragmentation considerably.²²³ From a Jihadi lifestyle point of view, the crowning logical step of the belief in *passage* is to escape life altogether; but this perception of *passage* generally applies to the

²¹⁸ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 96-97.

²¹⁹ The concept of liminality was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage, which have the following three-part structure: 1. Separation; 2. Liminal Period; 3. Re-Assimilation. See van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). The U.S. anthropologist Victor Turner utilized van Gennep’s model “rites de passage” and Clifford Geertz’ concept “thick description” for his own concepts of “liminality” and “*communitas*.” See Victor Turner, „Liminality and *Communitas*,“ in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 326-340.

²²⁰ Jarret Brachman and Alex N. Levine, “You Too Can Be Awlaki!”, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 35(2011): 25-46.

²²¹ This is encapsulated in the Prophetic saying “Islam began alien and it will again be alien like it began – May the strangers be blessed.” In Arabic: *Bada'a al-Islam ghariban wa saya'ud ghariban kama bada'a fa tawba li-l-ghuraba'*. In Abu Musab al-Suri, *Da'wat al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-'alamiyya* (Global Islamic Resistance Call), (Internet: 2004).

²²² Fundamentalist Christians can be described as liminal figures because they believe that they are only temporary residents of the world. They are merely passing through this world; therefore “threshold qualities” may be maintained indefinitely. See Turner 2008: 333.

²²³ Gerhard Banse, „(Kulturelle) Identität, Gemeinschaft und netzbasierte Kommunikation. Anmerkungen zur Diskussion,“ in *Net-based Communication, Identity and Community*, ed. Nicanor Ursua and Andreas Metzner-Szigeth (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2006), 32.

most radical religious sects, ascetics and monastery orders.²²⁴ Threshold and *liminal* states are essential features of individuals' *rites of passage* and their development in mass society, for example, when adolescents leave their childhood phase and enter adulthood.

In closed virtual spaces like jihad forums, members seem to develop very strong cyber-bonds. They form virtual intentional communities, which rely on a much more intense teamwork than mass societies.²²⁵ Their members believe in common social, political, religious and spiritual myths and goals. An intentional community gathers around its shared emotions (*communitas*) like around a camp-fire.²²⁶ *Communitas* is a feeling of brotherly/sisterly love that can be typically observed among members of a group who are in a similar *liminal* state. This appears to be the case of Jihadi forum members who exaltedly and ritualistically laud each other. But a camp-fire is likely to burn down after a short while and the same goes for emotions. Emotions are fleeting and best suited for short term psychological states such as rites of passage, initiation rituals and revolutionary uprisings. They are short-lived and difficult to sustain.²²⁷

Yet, emotional states seems to last longer in virtual networks. Many concepts of traditional group behaviour do not apply to online-networks.²²⁸ The highly fluent and participative structures of virtual networks seem to allow a sustained level of emotional bonds. In some Nazi online-groups, extremism and therefore group feelings grow with involvement in online networks.²²⁹ Moreover, computer mediated interactions have a dis-inhibiting effect, which allows to foster highly emotional and psychological states.²³⁰ Dis-inhibited communications like "netslutting" and "nethating" others while "netloving" each other recreate the US versus THEM divide that is crucial for in-group cohesion. In turn, high in-group cohesion creates

²²⁴ Compare to Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life," 41.

²²⁵ See Susan Love Brown (ed.), *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002).

²²⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 94-131.

²²⁷ Lucy Jayne Kamau, "Liminality, Communitas, Charisma, and Community", in *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Susan Love Brown (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 24.

²²⁸ We know very little about membership, hierarchies and boundaries of online Jihadis. Members are frequently leaving and entering online-groups. Many are lurkers and not registered members. For example, Jihadi A and B may interact online on specific issues, but Jihadi B may also interact offline with person/Jihadi C. Other factors are largely unknown, such as growth, diversity, heterogeneity, homogeneity, density, or how virtual networks affect behaviour.

²²⁹ The major difference between radical environmentalists and Nazi online activists is that the extremism and false consensus of radical environmentalists is less influenced by their online participation. See Magdalena Wojcieszak, "False Consensus Goes Online: Impact of Ideologically Homogenous Groups on False Consensus," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72 (2008): 781-791.

²³⁰ Albert, Benschop, "Chronicle of a Political Murder Foretold - Jihad in the Netherlands," <http://www.sociosite.org/>, accessed December 12, 2010, http://www.sociosite.org/jihad_nl_en.php.

out-group aggression.²³¹ If we can agree that a fundamentalist mindset in a threshold zone facilitates a state which we might call a constant *rite of passage*, then these characteristics of Net-communication are also crucial for the cohesion of online Jihadis. Especially if online Jihadis are not in physical contact with a jihad milieu, they need to be able to draw a clear line between in-group members and non-Jihadis. Online Jihadis reach this goal by establishing shared signs and codes through rituals and theological doctrines. They strengthen their ideological cohesion and extremist thought world with target-oriented networked information. In a theory of virtual leadership, field observations thus support the idea that symbols and belief expressions guide individuals, and that virtual rituals reconcile thoughts with actions. Online Jihadis form intentional communities on the Internet, which share a strong symbolic solidarity and discursive leadership patterns. Interaction strongly relies on discursive rituals, which strengthen common myths, protect the social centre and reproduce the collective identity. Shared moral values determine what is right and wrong. Jihadis perform macro-rituals to reach this goal. For example, online activists gather around discussion topics and start participative propaganda campaigns on the Internet. This use of macro rituals as an essential feature of mutual virtual leadership must not necessarily take place face to face. A. Bergesen's concept of the ritual order also works in cyber space in online networks. Discursive leadership relies on a mind-architecture of shared obsessions and ideas, which structure a symbolically produced thought world. For example, Jihadis regard themselves as chosen elite that has to fight itself through the traps of a bewildered, hostile and infidel surrounding. They reproduce this central myth endlessly; gather around central authoritative ideas, use certain sentences, participate without criticism in discussions, and celebrate their central icons.²³² The strength of a central myth can be action guiding. R. Kapuściński argues this case in his observation on Tutsi people from Rwanda, who took refuge from Hutu aggressors in surrounding countries. In the Tutsi case, the myth is built on the identification with the lost cattle, whose possession symbolize power, prestige, sacredness, manhood and belonging to the highest Rwandan social caste. As a Tutsi refugee looks back towards the

²³¹ Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 194-199.

²³² Similar processes take place in modern civil societies as well. However, in civil societies the ideological and cultic influence of media-rituals and political icons is more difficult to see, because one may lose sight of the wood for the trees. See Felix Menzel, *Medienritual und politische Ikonen* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2009). "Simple" ideological rituals and icons are easier to discern. German National Socialists, for example, believed in the common central myth that the German race was omnipotent and racially superior. Behaviorally, the myth was supported with micro-rituals such as the Hitler salute, meso-rituals such as the glorification of the Hitler-figure and macro-rituals such as mass-speeches and a collective hysteria that was carefully planned by the Nazi propaganda machine. In addition, icons in the sense of collectively identifying symbols, such as Celtic runes, the swastika, and oversized portraits of Hitler supported the propagandistic myth. The major icon was, of course, Hitler himself, who was treated as a role model with whom people identified strongly (meso-ritual).

mountains of Rwanda from “[...] the refugee camp, these herds, which he does not possess anymore and which were for him basis and ratio of being, take on gigantic dimensions, become myths and legends in his imagination, become dreams, ideals and obsessions.”²³³ By the same token, the imagined grandeur and unity of a former Islamic community, lost lands in which milk and honey flow, lost riches, prides and ideals may be symbolized by Muhammad’s scimitar or by bits and pixels which form a digitalized image of a black jihad flag. The same goes for a key that once belonged to a Palestinian house in today’s Israel. It represents a myth of community that is stronger than any rational argument. The myth itself gains the authority and legitimacy of an argument, and stands irrefutably strong between an imagined communal world and the responsible self.

²³³ Ryszard Kapuściński, *Afrikanisches Fieber: Erfahrungen aus vierzig Jahren* (Piper: München, 2011), 170.

Part Two – E-Environments and Jihadi Media Strategies

2. Infrastructure and Work Mode of the Jihadi Web

The Internet is “the network of networks” and thus the biggest communication and information tool worldwide with around 1,966,500,000 users and a growth rate of almost 450 per cent between 2000 and 2010.²³⁴ Around ten percent of Arabic Websites have a “decidedly Islamic orientation”, showing a “uniquely Muslim confluence of culture and religion even in the virtual universe of the Internet.”²³⁵ For example, Islam Online.Net with broadly branched topics of Islam and culture ranks number 29 in the most popular websites in the Middle East.²³⁶

According to expert estimates, there are 5.000 to 50,000 terrorist websites.²³⁷ The exact extent of the jihad sites in the terrorist Web remains unclear due to the dynamic nature of the Net, where sites are frequently hacked, closed, shut down and uploaded anew. Many sites distribute and discuss Jihadi content, but do not exclusively serve jihad, which leads to high results in computer-generated searches like those of the “Dark Web Terrorism Research”-Project of the University of Arizona. Probably, there are “only” several dozen jihad websites in the full sense of the word, i.e. they focus on Jihadi social rituals, distribute propaganda, lead ideological and strategic debates and offer virtual tactical training. But the sheer number of websites is not the key factor in the strategic strength of virtual jihad. It is the multiplier-effect that inflates media jihad to its grotesque proportions and presents to us a distorted mirror picture of the phenomenon. Online-sympathizers play a major role in keeping the online structure of global jihad alive as well as the multiplier-effect running, which allows reproducing Jihadi media products endlessly. There are an estimated several hundred ideologues and thousands of media activists and supporters. Yet, the number of virtual jihad supporters among the overall number of Muslim Internet-users should not be overestimated. A study by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University mapped the

²³⁴ These data are for June 2010 from “Internet World Statistics”, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>.

²³⁵ Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 140.

²³⁶ The Data is from Alexa.com, a website which provides information and statistics on the most popular websites worldwide. http://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/Top/Regional/Middle_East, accessed October 12, 2011.

²³⁷ There are 5,000 terrorist websites as suggested by the Israeli researcher Gabriel Weimann and 50.000 terrorist websites according according to the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of the University of Arizona (Project “Dark Web Terrorism Research”), see <http://ai.arizona.edu/research/terror/>, accessed January 18, 2011.

Arab blogosphere in 2009 and found out that only one percent of more than 4,000 blogs (predominantly Muslim) supported terror activity.²³⁸

The main function of online jihad is Propaganda, which often overlaps with psychological warfare and recruitment purposes.²³⁹ Virtual training plays a marginal role in online jihad. Discussions on training added up to less than four percent of all discussions on jihad forums in 2006 (building bombs and explosive belts, etc.)²⁴⁰ A study by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) on 800 Jihadi videos mentioned only 27 films with instructive character.²⁴¹ Also the production of chemical-biological weapons is not yet being discussed seriously among Jihadis in the Web.²⁴² A further, until now marginal function of Internet-jihad is hacktivism. Hacktivism describes ideologically motivated hacking. So far, the targets of Jihadi hackers are mainly to protect jihad websites and to hack hostile websites, i.e. not to attack public transport, information or supply systems.²⁴³ A few cases run out of line, but it is unclear to which degree Jihadis and/or government agents were involved in the hacks.²⁴⁴ This may change in the years to come. Hacking in combination with social engineering techniques are mainstream trends and may become more important for Jihadis as well.

Since the late 1990s, al-Qaeda has been running and supporting websites. The impulse came probably from the Chechnyan jihad scene, which already in the mid-1990s operated own websites; as well as from Jihadis in London like Ahmad Babar, who was redistributing

²³⁸ Bruce Etling et al, "Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture and Dissent," Harvard University: The Berkman Center for Internet and Society, 16, June 2011, accessed June 25, 2011, http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2009/Mapping_the_Arabic_Blogosphere.

²³⁹ Judith Tinnes, *Internetnutzung islamistischer Terror- und Insurgentengruppen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von medialen Geiselnahmen im Irak, Afghanistan, Pakistan und Saudi-Arabien* (PhD diss., University of the Saarland, 2010), 207 ff. Also Hanna Rogan, „Al-Qaeda's online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007," (Kjeller: Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI), 2007). One can as well distinguish between internal and external communication, which, respectively, addresses existing followers and potential sympathizers. During the last few years, the number of Jihadi videos and statements increased that address western populations directly. In these products, al-Qaeda assumes a reconciliatory tone. Should western populations show reason and exert a direct influence on the foreign policies of their states, al-Qaeda will refrain from further attacks. See Schuck, Christoph. „Die Feder mit dem Degen tauschen – oder umgekehrt? Zur Dialektik der neueren transnationalen Kommunikation al-Qaidas.“ In *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, 2 (2009): 455-474.

²⁴⁰ Anne Stenersen and Truls H Tonnessen, "Jihadism Online" (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2006).

²⁴¹ Cecilie Finsnes, "What is audio-visual propaganda? – An overview of the content of FFI's Jihadi video database" (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2010).

Of the high-quality instructive videos many were produced in Lebanon. The Lebanese productions excel in quality. From a technical viewpoint they are better than many other videos.

²⁴² Anne Stenersen, „Chem-bio cyber-class – Assessing Jihadi chemical and biological manuals," *Janes Intelligence Review*, September 2007; Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses," in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013).

²⁴³ A prominent example of Jihadi hacktivism is the Webseite www.al-jinan.org, founded in 2006 and hacked in 2007. Jinan.org propagated the goal and know-how to shut-down websites hostile to Islam and jihad. A similar website is still online; i.e. „Ansarhackers": <http://www.al-ansar.virtue.nu/>.

²⁴⁴ Kevin Mitnick and William L. Simon, *The Art of Intrusion: The Real Stories Behind the Exploits of Hackers, Intruders and Deceivers* (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, 2005), 23-48.

Chechnyan, Afghan and Bosnian jihad material via one of the first jihad websites in the mid-1990s. Since the start of the U.S.-led Iraq war in 2003 the output of jihad media on the Internet has not only exponentially risen, but literally exploded.

One of the key models of today's media jihad is Abdullah 'Azzam's Jihadi media campaign in the 1980s, which started when Soviet forces occupied Afghanistan (1979-1989). Azzam (1941-1989) joined the Afghan Jihad in and steadily rose in the ranks of Jihadi hierarchy due to his relentless propaganda work, oratory skills and charisma. He founded the Office of Services for Mujahidin (*Maktab al-Khidmat*) in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1984 and took its chair in 1987. 'Azzam called upon all Muslims to participate in the Afghan struggle against Soviet occupation. 'Azzam published a jihad-magazine (*Majallat al-Jihad*),²⁴⁵ books, and numerous videos, gave interviews and held lectures in the Muslim and in the Western world. His deputy and associate was the Egyptian 'Umar 'Abd al-Rahman. Following the Afghanistan Jihad, hundreds, if not thousands of veterans went back to their Muslim home countries, or migrated to the West, especially Europe. The 1990s saw the development of new Jihadi scenes based on the Afghan propaganda model and its networks. Networks of propagandists and activists established themselves in London ("Londonistan"), or in Belgium, such as the Salafi Group for Predication and Combat (GSCP), which operated, logistics, propaganda and training cells in Belgium. A particularly important new aspect was the use of the nascent electronic media for Jihadi propaganda. Early forerunners of Internet-based jihad were the websites Azzam.com and qoqaz.co. In 1996, the British citizen Ahmed Babar founded the website Azzam.com, on which he published texts of the Jihadi ideologue 'Abdallah 'Azzam and propaganda from the Afghan, Bosnian and Chechnyan jihads. Babar's website also showed the strong mutual influence between London-based and Chechnyan media activists in the mid-1990s, who already had their own internet-sites.²⁴⁶ The range of publications reached from instructions like "how can I train for jihad?" to reports from the jihads in Bosnia, Chenya and Afghanistan like "Stories of foreign mujahidin killed in jihad." The killed fighters were put in scene as Muslim role models. Their iconic depiction was supposed to strengthen collective identification and imitation by young sympathizers, as well as to attract financing. Jihadi media in the 1990s largely relied on audio- and videotapes, since the Internet was still in its infancy. For example, audiotapes like "In the hearts of the green birds" and "Under the shades of the swords" were distributed among Muslim Diaspora youth and in Islamic centres

²⁴⁵ For a cover-page of the old magazine and some background info on Azzam and his doctrine see this post. "Nammar," "Abdullah 'Azzam (*al-mujahid al-kabir*)," April 28, 2012, accessed January 25, 2013, <http://www.wesaltv.net/vb/showthread.php?t=23628>.

²⁴⁶ I would like to thank Dr. Asiem el-Difraoui for sharing his intellectual expertise on the development of media jihad.

to foster mythological discourses around modern martyr figures, to glorify Muslim civil war theatres and to draw recruits to Bosnia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Algeria, and Somalia. Main semantic codes, semiotic aesthetics and discourses of propaganda jihad developed in the 1990s and continue to be used until today. For example, “green birds” refer to Islamic paradise birds, in which the souls of martyrs live on. This miraculous martyrdom myth is still very much alive in Jihadi subcultures. For example, in 2009 German and Uzbek Jihadis in Waziristan produced the video “Die Vorzüge des Jihad” (The Merits of Jihad), which explicitly refers to “green birds” when speaking about martyrs. Also online videos of suicide attacks frequently make use of chirping sounds to create the image of green paradise birds and paradise imaginations in the minds of viewers. The chirping sound is used as an “acoustic icon” that automatically reminds of martyrdom.

The activities of online-Jihadis since the mid-1990s also made an impression on al-Qaeda, which carefully observed and supported the development of the virtual Jihadi movement. The Syrian Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, one of the most important strategists of al-Qaeda, who was arrested in Pakistan in 2005 and released in Syria in 2012, recommended autonomous activists to support global jihad „by means of the Internet and the translation of jihad topics into all languages of the world.“²⁴⁷ After the 9/11 attacks, Bin Laden wrote a letter to Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, in which he assumed that future terrorism would rely to 90 percent on successful media propaganda.²⁴⁸ Since the turn of the millennium, autonomous jihad ideologues regard it as „good reputation“ to run their own websites. A very prominent example is *Minbar al-Tawhed wa-l-Jihad* (Pulpit of Monotheism and Jihad) of the Jordanian Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, which until today is the ultimate online library for Jihadi theology. In 2003, the leaders of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda, Yusuf al-'Uyayri (1967-2003) und 'Abd al-'Aziz Muqrin (1971-2004), published the e-magazines *Sawt al-Jihad* (“Voice of Jihad”) and *Mu'askar al-Battar* (“Camp of the Sword”). They laid the cornerstone for a vigorously growing number of jihad magazines on the Internet.²⁴⁹ Around 70 different Jihadi magazines have so far been published on the Internet.²⁵⁰ But 2003 was also in other

²⁴⁷ Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, “Da'wat al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-'alamiyya“ (Global Islamic Resistance Call), 2. Teil, Kapitel 8, Unterkapitel 5, „nazzariat al-tanzim wa nizam al-'amal fi saraya al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-'alamiyya“. Siehe auch Philipp Holtmann, Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept, (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Centre, 2009), 114. Al-Suri founded already in 1996 in London the „Islamic Conflict Studies Bureau“, in order to distribute Jihadi propaganda internationally with the help of the Internet and satellite television.

²⁴⁸ Akil N. Awan, „The Virtual Jihad: An Increasingly Legitimate Form of Warfare“, Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint - CTC Sentinel 5 (2010): 10-12, accessed October 22, 2010, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol3Iss5.pdf>.

²⁴⁹ Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Jihad: Al-Qa'idas erstes Online Magazin* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010).

²⁵⁰ An online activist lists up more than 60 publications in a post on a blog in 2009. The activist grossly exaggerates the number of publications speaking about 351 – maybe referring to the total number of issues that have been published by all magazines together. But alone from 2009 to 2012, at least five new publications have

respects a landmark year for internet jihad. After the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in May 2003, Jihadi media on the Internet explosively grew. The Internet became like an “Open University for Jihad Studies” with Bin Laden as its dean.²⁵¹ A speaker of al-Qaeda announced virtual courses in media-jihad, hacktivism, theology, financing of terrorism and tactical training, including studies in suicide-attacks.²⁵² All “students” should be able to learn jihad through long-distance learning. This reflected al-Qaedas strategic dream of a self-radicalizing global jihad movement.²⁵³ In the following years Jihadis started to conceive the “University of Global Jihad” as a participative endeavour, less centred on al-Qaeda central organization, but on sympathizers, who further developed central agendas.²⁵⁴ The strengthened role of sympathizers is also connected to the fact that official websites of Jihadi organizations were frequently shut down. Since 2003, al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations started to adapt themselves to the frequent shutdown of sites and network-structure of sympathizers. Central organizations started publishing their propaganda mainly on grassroots-controlled jihad discussion forums. Thus, discussion forums have become the epicentre of online-jihad. Furthermore, Jihadi media-companies serve as intersections between Jihadi organizations and the sympathizer movement, since the media companies produce content and agendas and put links to their publications and productions on Jihadi forums.

Today, Jihadi conflicts and subcultures in countries such as Germany, Great Britain, France, USA, Syria, Turkey, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, the Chinese Uigur province, Singapore, Indonesia and Uzbekistan have led to the emergence of ever more multilingual websites, besides the major and most influential Arabic websites. These aim at broad Muslim audiences. Jihadi websites appear in German, English, Russian, Turkish, French, Pashtu, Dari, Urdu, Indonesian, Uzbek and other languages. Many local groups have nationalist, ethnic, or separatist goals on their own. But their ideologies often overlap with that of al-Qaeda, since “al-Qaeda” is a franchise name that attracts attention. Distinct Jihadi

appeared. “ALGIHADYA,” “*Jami al-majallat al-jihadiyya – 351 majalla – asbahat bayna yadayka alan*,” December 28, 2009, accessed January 25, 2013, <http://slafya.maktoobblog.com/2006/-351-الجهاديات-المجلات-الجهادية-351-مجلة-أصبحت-بي>.

²⁵¹ Reuven Paz, “Debates within the Family – Jihadi-Salafi Debates on Strategy, Takfir, Extremism, Suicide-Bombings, and the Sense of the Apocalypse”, in *globalsalafism – Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijr, (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 268.

²⁵² *Iftitah jami'at al-Qa'ida li-l-'ulum al-jihadiyya* (Opening of al-Qaeda’s university for jihad studies). The respective announcement was issued by an al-Qaeda speaker via the Islamic Media Center (Markaz al-I’lam al-Islami). This is one of the oldest and most respected Jihadi media companies that has been issuing since the early 1990s. For a summary, see the Palestine E-paper *alwatanvoice.com*, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2003/11/20/1096.html>.

²⁵³ See Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Fursan tahta rayat al-nabiy* (Knights under the banner of the Prophet), accessed December 15, 2010, www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=forsan00.

²⁵⁴ According to the prominent Jihadi forum member “*Mufakkirat al-Falluja*” (“female thinker of Falluja forum”) and her analysis of a text by the forum-administrator and suicide attacker Humam al-Balawi, accessed January 25, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=99249>.

media networks can be found in almost any European country, but by the nature of information technology, they transcend national borders. For example, in Germany the main media jihad network for a while was [salafimedia.de](#) (Muhammad Mahmud), which subordinated itself to the U.K network [salafimedia.uk](#) (Anchem Choudary), and was influenced in its decisions by authoritative figures from the Jihadi scene who reside in Lebanon (Omar Bakri Muhammad). The lingual diversification of online-jihad also bears an effect on the growing social diversity, transnational character and size of the virtual Jihadi movement. There are thousands of sympathizers. While they have very different profiles, at least their online-behaviour gives us important insights into their thinking and self-organization.

Every active Jihadi activist, supporter or sympathizer understands that fighting and propaganda go hand in hand. Whenever actual fighting is absent, there is still ample possibility to strengthen common convictions. Propaganda requires nowadays only little individual efforts and can be initiated on the web wherever the possibility arises. Software-engineering, social-engineering and computer skills have a relatively long tradition also among Jihadis. A Turkish Jihadi in Chechnya gave computer lessons to fellow fighters already in the 1990s.²⁵⁵

2.a Categories of Jihadi Websites (without Dark and Hidden-Web²⁵⁶)

Since the mid-1990s, the Jihadi web has steadily developed. Forerunners and thus early models for today's global jihad sites were Qoqaz.org, which distributed Chechnyan jihad propaganda, the nationalist-Jihadi websites of Hizballah and Hamas, the website of the Afghan Taliban and Azzam.com, which was operated in the 1990s from Great Britain by a grassroots hacker and supporter (Babar Ahmad). These sites fulfilled the tasks of propaganda, incitement, recruitment and financing of various jihad agendas. Nowadays, the comprehensive Jihadi media industry in the WWW also fulfills the role of virtual leadership for decentralized organizational networks of followers. The idea of virtual leadership flows out of the idea that Islamic symbolism and text are authoritative. One of the main theo-strategic doctrines of virtual leadership (authoritative use of modern media and mobilization of single attackers) is incitement (tahrid), laid down in the Quran, Sunni tradition (*sunna*) and Jihadi theology. In

²⁵⁵ See Rüdiger Lohlker and Andrea Nowak, „Das islamische Paradies als Zeichen: Zwischen Märtyrerkult und Garten“, Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 99 (2009), 199-225.

²⁵⁶ This refers to “hidden” channels of communication on the discussion forums, or via paltalk, skype, google-chat and other platforms. These platforms require invitations from activists. It is likely that via such platforms also operations and plans are being discussed and developed.

2001 al-Qaeda launched its first websites al-Neda (The Call [for jihad]). After 2001 and especially since the start of the Iraq war in 2003, the global Jihadi web has developed in an explosive manner. Various new sites appeared, and in 2005 the Norwegian scholar Brynjar Lia classified Jihadi sites into five categories: Web forums (most important and authoritative sources); directories with links to external websites, mailing lists and message boards; non-interactive homepages of sympathizers; and “producers,” i.e. Jihadi media groups and online libraries.²⁵⁷ In the last few years, this structure has basically been maintained by different Jihadi web activists. Forums still seem to be the most important category. Yet, in terms of layout and the presentation of subgroup-culture, one may speak of three categories of websites (see the chapter “Symbols and Semiotics of Online Jihad”):

Roughly speaking, three different kinds of Jihadi websites can be distinguished.

- Firstly, person-centered sites of theological authorities appear most formal in their layout, since they are structured vertically and colored in a monochromatic manner, which dominates the front page.
- Secondly, Jihadi publication and discussion forums combine the vertical structure of hierarchical authority with the horizontal structure of participation and membership outreach. Vertical frames in the upper sections which stand for hierarchical authority carry the banners of Jihadi organizations and link to their products on free file hosting services. Horizontal frames which represent the principle of participation in the lower half serve as gateways to different discussion platforms. The geometry of hierarchy (vertical frames) is mixed with the layout of participation (horizontal frames and links to the different subforums), which starts in the lower half of these websites. This also bears a clear message in terms of group coordination and hierarchy, since the principle of participation is stressed only underneath authoritative messages by Jihadi organizations.
- Thirdly, individual Youtube accounts and blog sites display Jihadi symbolism intensively, but seem to be subordinate under ideologico-semiotic guidance of mother pages which set the tone. The suggestions of authoritative symbols and colors found on popular Jihadi websites seem to influence and guide the individual interpretations. The lower the hierarchy gets, the more intensive becomes the semiotic reproduction of Jihadi ideology in terms of colors and symbols. Thus, Jihadi aesthetics and community building in the Net display clear chains of authority. Semi-official and person-centred webpages tend to appear in a formalistic layout. They lack the playfulness, which enhances in supporter administrated forums and peaks in supporter-designed youtube accounts and blogs. Yet, also accounts are being used by

²⁵⁷ Brynjar Lia, “Al-Qaeda online: understanding Jihadi internet infrastructure,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 2006.

authorities in the Jihadi scene to gain followers. This owes to their grassroots character which stands for trustworthiness (See the chapter “The Symbols and Aesthetics of Online Jihad”)

2.b Jihadi Groups and Actors Online

Online Jihadis can be roughly divided into three groups. Biographies, backgrounds and motivations of Jihadis are so diverse that one should not artificially construct profiles that do not exist. A rough categorization is more flexible and useful. Until today, every individual Jihadi is taught and teaches that fighting (*qital*) and propagation (*da'wa*) must go hand in hand. Whenever actual fighting is absent, there is still ample possibility to strengthen the common conviction. Partaking in propaganda requires individual efforts and initiatives are to be taken whenever the possibility arises, say numerous Jihadi media strategy guidelines (see chapter “Jihadi Media Strategy”). When looking through relevant existing data, the following categories of online Jihadis emerge:

Firstly, numerous Jihadis are media-activists and active terrorists/fighters in parallel. Role model Jihadis are fighters and media operators in parallel, which goes back to the Afghan jihad in the 1980s. Influential propagandists, for example, the Palestinian Abdallah Azzam, his right hand Tamim al-Adnani, and the Egyptian Abu Walid al-Masri propagated the concept of “Jihadi front journalism.” Every Jihadi fighter was called upon to carry a gun to fight and a camera to document his operations.²⁵⁸ The same concept continued to have a strong influence on Islamist fronts throughout the 1990s and until today. As the means of communication developed during the 1990s, also the propaganda possibilities changed. Instead of using a photo-camera or video-camera, a Turkish Jihadi in Chechnya started giving computer lessons to fellow fighters in the mid-1990s. His goal was to introduce the Internet into the Jihadi community.²⁵⁹ Instead of photo-cameras, in the 1990s hand-held Sony cams came into use to document operations in Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia, Chechnya and Algeria, as well as laptops, handy cameras and digital cameras since the early 2000s. The highest respect in this category earns the “struggling, i.e. fighting sheikh” (*sheikh mujahid*). Another story demonstrates the importance of both aspects in Jihadi reality. For example, the biography of the German Jihadi of Turkish origin, Abu Musa al-Almani,²⁶⁰ who died in the

²⁵⁸ Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 110 ff.

²⁵⁹ Rüdiger Lohlker and Andrea Nowak, „Das islamische Paradies als Zeichen: Zwischen Märtyrerkult und Garten“, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 99 (2009): 199-225.

²⁶⁰ This was the *nom de guerre* of the fighter. In Muslim culture a *nom de guerre* is often derived from a *kunya*. A *kunya* is a traditional form of name-giving that describes a man as the father of his firstborn son (lit.: “Father of ...”). In this case, the *kunya* could signify that the German fighter was father to a firstborn named Mus'ab and

Bosnian civil war in 1995, sheds a light on the connection between media jihad and physical jihad in the 1990s. Al-Almani was a fighter and reporter at the same time, for he filmed his battles and until his death at the age of 22 was an active propagandist. His goal was to “inform other Muslims about their duty.” In addition, his death was exploited in Jihadi propaganda videos. His biography seems like a “condensate of dramatic motives to find oneself”, says Stefan Reichmuth.²⁶¹

The biography of Abu Mus'ab al-Almani (*nom de guerre*) certainly sheds light on the connection between media jihad and physical jihad in the 1990s. His story tells how, to what extent and in what combination Jihadi media affected his life as an activist and fighter. In the case of al-Almani, his very difficult childhood certainly played a role for his path to jihad. He was sold by his actual parents to foster parents, grew up as a non-Muslim, got to know his real background during a quarrel with the foster mother, converted to Islam, went back to his real parents, learned about jihad and decided to go to the Bosnian civil war to fight on the side of the Muslims. His audacious operations against Serbs and his final death probably influenced other Diaspora youth in Europa.

Many Jihadi leaders, who rose to international prominence after 2001, have closely stuck to the concept that was first introduced during the Afghan jihad in the 1980s, namely to be media activist and fighter in parallel. Yusuf al-'Uyayri (1967-2003), the former leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi-Arabia, administrated the first Website of al-Qaeda central Organization.²⁶² Moreover, the Website of the Afghan Taliban was administrated from the 1990s until 2001 by al-Qaeda's quasi-chief theologian, the Libyan Abu Yahya al-Libi, who today is one of the highest religious authorities of al-Qaeda central organization.²⁶³

The second category of online Jihadis is first active in the Net and then looks for training camps or plans/perpetrates terrorist attacks, while continuing to be active online. Such a process can take place quickly, within a few months. In parallel, members of this category may find an obsessive pleasure in online jihad. For example, the murderer of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, Muhammad Bouyeri, posted hundreds of extremist

the he was a German, which was signified by “al-Almani.” However, it is more likely (since the young fighter does not seem to have had a child) that he kunya was given to him during his personal rite of passage from a civilian to a Jihadi. This form of name-giving has a unifying, islamizing effect, anonymizes fighters for security reasons and detaches them from their past civilian identities.

²⁶¹ Stefan Reichmuth, “Jihad-Muslime und die Option der Gewalt in Religion und Staat”, in *Islamverherrlichung: Wenn die Kritik zum Tabu wird*, ed. Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 185-198.

²⁶² Brynjar Lia, “Jihad Web Media Production”, Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI), accessed November 2010, [http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/english/start/research/Analysis_Division/_TERRA/Publications/Reports/](http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/english/start/research/Analysis_Division/_TERRA/Publications/Reports/,), Seite 3.

²⁶³ Reuven Paz, *Debates within the Family*, 276.

contributions on the forum marokko.nl prior to the attack.²⁶⁴ Moreover, Bouyeri re-published a Jihadi theological guideline that is based on a medieval Islamic juridical argument to kill those who insult the Prophet Muhammad. Bouyeri also sent this doctrinal guideline to several of his friends.²⁶⁵ Rami M. is a German Jihadi with Syrian background who left Germany in spring of 2009 and was arrested in Pakistan in June 2010. According to a police testimony Rami M. radicalized substantially and quickly within approximately one year. An important part of his radicalization took place via the Internet by watching jihad videos, which belonged to his “new beginning”, i.e. the period during which he found back to Islamic faith, before he actually joined a militant network in Pakistan. Also in M.’s case his radicalization was preceded by a search for religious, social and national identity. M. was born to a Syrian father and in his youth had severe problems finding a job, goal or interest in German society, neither was he really connected to Syrian society. In M.’s case propaganda was a communicative vehicle that steered his decision to join a militant training camp.²⁶⁶

In another case, the two German “suitcase-bombers,” Muhammad al-Hajdib and Jihad Hama, tried to blow-up two German regional trains in the summer of 2006 after they had watched extremist propaganda in the Internet. They found the same theological justification to kill those who insult the Prophet, which Bouyeri had put to use to legitimize his attack Islamic legally, and they were guided by this doctrine to realize their attack plans. The plan of the two Lebanese students was triggered by the debate around the Muhammad caricatures. However, their first process of radicalization took place in their mother country Lebanon, where they allegedly moved from early childhood on in the milieu of *Hizb al-Tahrir*.

Aleem Nasir, who was sentenced to eight years in prison in July 2009, was an important logistic and money provider for al-Qaeda in Pakistan as well as a lock-keeper of young German Jihadis to training camps. Nasir himself is an engineering draftsman and mechanical engineer of Pakistani origin and came to Germany in 1987. He obtained a large part of his information on jihad from the Internet. His computers contained more than 231 Jihadi videos, among them 59 assassinations, 10 executions and 162 videos on fighting and propaganda.

²⁶⁴ Albert Benschop, “Chronicle of a Political Murder Foretold - Jihad in the Netherlands”, accessed December 16, 2010, http://www.sociosite.org/jihad_nl_en.php#ontremming. Benschop is an expert on the influence of virtual networks on terrorists and teaches at the University of Amsterdam.

²⁶⁵ Philipp Holtmann, “No threat at first sight: Invisible terrorist environments on Facebook and Youtube.” Vienna: Jihadism Online Project 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, <http://www.univie.ac.at/jihadism/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Philipp-Holtmann-No-threat-at-first-sight-Invisible-terrorist-environments-on-Facebook-and-Youtube.pdf/>.

²⁶⁶ The information is from a BKA interrogation protocol of Rami M., who is imprisoned in the German jail “Weiterstadt” in Hessen. The German TV-magazine “Report Mainz” (SWR) obtained the protocol in November 2010. The author was allowed to analyse the document. See Report Mainz of 22 November, 2010, „Wie deutsche Islamisten in den heiligen Krieg ziehen“, accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.swr.de/report/-/id=233454/did=7198346/pv=video/nid=233454/1n4t4xa/index.html>.

Moreover, he had stored a high number of terrorist handbooks and jihad-encyclopaedias on his computers. In the 1990s, he also visited training camps in Pakistan and went to the civil war area in former Yugoslavia and took a strong interest in the Kashmir Konflikt.²⁶⁷ A further example that fits into this category are the members of the German Sauerland cell that planned large-scale attacks in Germany in 2007, but were arrested before. They were strongly co-influenced by Internet propaganda. For example, Attila Selek, who was born to Turkish parents in Germany, co-radicalized via the Internet. The other factor of his radicalization where frequent visits in an Islamic cultural centre where he was influenced by the milieu of jihad supporters. Selek took a strong interest in the Chechnyan jihad via websites like kavkazcenter.com and the Turkish forum mucadele.com and downloaded large amounts of video material. Watching the material together with a Muslim friend motivated him to plan to go to Chechnya and to take up physical training. At about the same time Selek prepared for the traditional Hajj to Saudi Arabia together with his mother.²⁶⁸ Selek's story shows the physical and virtual elements merging with each other, they are strongly connected, embedded into a mix of Islamic cultural rebirth, within a Jihadi sub-cultural frame, and a pathological militancy. The virtual radicalization was as important as his network of friends. Selek stated that the internet was the place where he came into contact with hardcore-Jihadi propaganda for the first time. Extremist videos and language have a dis-inhibiting effect, states Aaron Weissburd.²⁶⁹ The strongly radicalizing character of online propaganda was also visible in other members of the Sauerland-cell. The alleged leader, Fritz Gelowicz, who received a 12 years sentence in March 2010, stated during his trial that he repeatedly had warned his wife Filiz Gelowicz not to visit Islamist forums any more.²⁷⁰ However, his wife Filiz continued to figure as a major media operative for the German Taliban Mujahidin, a group of German militants based in the Pakistani Tribal region. Filiz was arrested in February 2010 and sentenced in March 2011 to a two and a half years prison sentence. Gelowicz was released on probation in early 2012, but may face a new sentence due to her alleged ongoing involvement in Jihadi scenes. She started online jihad by passively consuming content and ended up uploading and distributing more than 1000 videos and texts in the Internet, many of

²⁶⁷ Der Generalbundesanwalt, Anklageschrift gegen Aleem Nasir, geboren am 15. März 1962 in Lahore/Pakistan, zuletzt wohnhaft in Germersheim, im Oberwald, Karlsruhe, den 19. August 2008, page 29, source: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Hamburg.

²⁶⁸ Sachakte Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Fritz Martin Gelowicz und andere wegen Verdachts der Mitgliedschaft in einer terroristischen Vereinigung gemäß § 129a StGB u.a. Straftaten, III.4 Personen Angeklagter Attila Selek *28.02.1985 in Ulm, III.4.8.4, Vernehmung des Angeklagten im Rahmen der Hauptverhandlung, page 18, Quelle: Mitarbeiter des Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Baden Württemberg.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Aaron Weissburd, February 18, 2011.

²⁷⁰ "Sauerland Prozess: Angeklagte sagen sich vom Terror los", N24.de, February 23, 2010, accessed February 9, 2011, http://www.n24.de/news/newsitem_5873673.html.

them supporting suicide attacks.²⁷¹ A further example of mixed radicalization from the U.S. is Nidal Malik Hassan, the attacker of Fort Hood in November 2009. Hassan was a U.S.-Army psychiatrist of Palestinian-Muslim origin who ran amok and killed more than ten persons, before he was severely wounded. He was obviously influenced by the Jihadi web and asked the al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaqi for spiritual guidance. Yet, another central factor for his radicalization is barely mentioned, i.e. he was in contact with and heard gruesome stories by U.S.-veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Another example from the U.S. Jihadi scene demonstrates the influence of Internet-based radicalization. U.S. citizen Tarek Mehanna was convicted in December 2011 by a U.S. court for terrorism related charges. Among the charges was Mehanna's "translation and dissemination of Jihadi propaganda online."²⁷² Mehanna was member of a circle of Jihadi chatters. "Prosecutors focused on hundreds of online chats on Mehanna's computer in which they said he and his friends talked about their desire to participate in jihad, or holy war. Several of those friends were called by prosecutors to testify against Mehanna, including one man who said that he, Mehanna and a third friend tried to get terrorism training in Yemen so they could fight American soldiers in Iraq." The court indictment claims that the "defendant and some of his co-conspirators self radicalized themselves, and attempted to and successfully radicalized others. This was accomplished in part through the use of the internet and the translation and distribution of radical Jihadi texts, as well as the speeches and teaching and discussions of the exploits of leaders of al Qa'ida and other 'martyrs.'"²⁷³ Internet-facilitated radicalization may also take several years, i.e. to switch from virtual to physical jihad. The British citizen Ahmad Khan started to visit Jihadi websites like Azzam.com und Qoqaz.org at the age of 12 in 1997. Within a period of eight years, Khan ascended as a leader of an international Jihadi Online-network that spread over Europe, Canada and the United States. He went to a terrorist training camp in Pakistan in 2005, which was part of a plan of the network to perpetrate coordinated attacks in Europe, Canada and the USA („Operation Praline“).²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Hubert Gude et al, „DEUTSCHLAND: »Ich würde es machen“, Focus Magazin 40 (2010), October 4, 2010, accessed February 9, 2011, http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/deutschland-ich-wuerde-es-machen_aid_558573.html.

²⁷² Jennifer Rowland, "The LWOT: Tarek Mehanna convicted on all charges," www.foreignpolicy.com, accessed March 16, 2012," http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/01/03/the_lwot_tarek_mehanna_convicted_on_all_charges.

²⁷³ "UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS - UNITED STATES OF AMERICA - V.) Cr. No. 09-10017-GAO -TAREK MEHANNA -GOVERNMENT'S PROFFER AND MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF DETENTION," accessed January 3, 2013, <http://www.findthatpdf.com/search-3234742-hPDF/download-documents-terrorproffer.pdf.htm>.

²⁷⁴ Evan F. Kohlmann, „Anatomy of a Modern Homegrown Terrorcell“, NEFA-Foundation, accessed September 24, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefaaabidkhan0908.pdf>.

The third category, which seems to comprise the majority of online Jihadis, is mainly active in the Internet. Some want to contribute to jihad, but are unwilling to risk too much. Their goal is not to sacrifice themselves, but to raise their self-esteem through online communities which define themselves vis-a-vis a perceivably arrogant and humiliating West, which takes bold inroads into Muslim countries and culture. Others expose themselves and try to become opinion and discursive leaders in the Jihadi community. They do not contend themselves with participation, but want to lead virtually and develop online jihad. However, online jihad discussants demand from discursive leaders that they eventually take jihad to reality and perpetrate an attack (see the chapter “Discursive and Post Mortem Virtual Leaders”).

Jarret Brachman calls them “jihobbyists,” i.e. armchair warriors who limit their participation in jihad to the Web. This third category of online-Jihadis spans a broad spectrum of activists. Some are influential agitators on Jihadi forums such as Louis Atiyat Allah, an anonymous contributor of texts who is adored in the Jihadi online world. Others contend themselves with the distribution of Jihadi propaganda on popular platforms. They can be divided into two categories, sympathizers and supporters. Sympathizers only read, sometimes contribute a post on a forum, or website. Supporters are active contributors. In November, 2009, for example, the district court of Stuttgart in southern Germany sentenced a generally inconspicuous 25-year old to six months in prison because he had uploaded an al-Qaeda threat-video against Germany on YouTube, where it was watched more than 4,000 times before he removed it.²⁷⁵

However, in another German case, an agent-provocateur of the German Federal Police may have instigated a convert to Islam from Kamerun, who put three videos on the Internet in October 2010. Kevin S., whose face cannot be seen in the videos, demanded the release from jail of German terrorist Daniel Schneider, who was convicted to 12 years in prison in March 2010 for the planning and preparing of a terrorist attack. Kevin S. threatened in the video that a cell of “German Taliban Mujahideen would strike” in Germany, if the demands were not fulfilled.²⁷⁶

An example from the U.S. shows the speedy radicalization paradigm of a “jihadobbyist” in combination with a strong wish to influence the Jihadi web and become a virtual leader in the Jihadi online community, who finally influences real-life events. After watching jihad websites and forums for some time, U.S. citizen Zachary Adam Chesser decided to build up his own Internet-based support network for al-Qaeda. “Chesser told federal agents in 2009

²⁷⁵ Holger Schmidt, „Ein Sessel Jihadi“, accessed November 20, 2009, <http://www.swr.de/blog/sauerland-verfahren/?p=1253#more-1253>.

²⁷⁶ „Deutsche Mujahiden, botschaft : Daniel Schneider entlassen oder Bomben Anschlag auf Deutschland,“ www.youtube.com, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1EFfTLAV1g>.

that he was ‘watching online videos, discussions and debates, and over-the-counter CDs almost obsessively,’ according to an FBI affidavit.²⁷⁷ Chesser was not only a hobby Jihadi, but developed into an important media strategist, who followed the concept of actively **“watching the watchers”**. For this reason, Chesser even contacted U.S. terrorism analyst Jarret Brachman and had lengthy “pen-friendship” correspondences with him via his blog. According to Brachman, Chesser “was trying to make al Qaeda's radical ideology more accessible to Americans -- and thus inspire more people like the Times Square bomber to take up the jihad at home.”²⁷⁸

Al-Qaeda central seems to have adapted its communicative leadership approach to the growing number of jihobbyists over the last years. It is relevant to keep the propaganda machinery running on a participatory level. Bin Ladh (killed in May 2011) and other al-Qaeda cadres seem to have realized that most media activists are not willing to sacrifice themselves. But they are ready to participate in the discourse if they are given agency and can participate in broader conceptual models of media jihad, such as employing a “jijitsu approach” and leveling the enemy’s own media against it by collecting and republishing western media coverage on jihad. Al-Qaeda has also started to exploit broader issues like climate-change and pollution in order to present itself as a viable solution for these global problems.

“Bin Laden himself seems to have signed up, perhaps recognizing that although most jihobbyists were not willing to leave their jobs or their families to die for al Qaeda, they would certainly be willing to conduct research or create propaganda on its behalf. Whatever the rationale, he has significantly changed the nature and tone of his public pronouncements in the last couple years. Today, he sounds much less like a bloodthirsty terrorist and more like a Jihadi journalist, an itinerant truth-teller seeking to expose the ugliness of today's world. Open calls for unrestrained killing like his 2003 command to his followers to "kill Americans and Jews with a bullet, a knife, or a stone" have been replaced with more reasoned appeals to be smarter, not necessarily more lethal: "In order to avoid the failures that prevented the liberation of Palestine over the past decades, the present generation should study the reasons

²⁷⁷ Tara Bahrapour, “Internet helped Muslim convert from Northern Virginia embrace extremism at warp speed”, Washington Post, November 2, 2010; accessed January 19, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/01/AR2010110106394_pf.html.

²⁷⁸ Jarret Brachman, “My Pen Pal, the Jihadi”, Foreign Policy July 2010, accessed January 19, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/07/29/my_pen_pal_the_Jihadi.

for the failure and take lessons from them. I will participate with you in that," he counseled in 2008."²⁷⁹

In their online environments, Jihadis of all categories form virtual intentional communities. Their grade of in-group cohesion is much higher than in average civil communities. Generally, in-group cohesion in "intentional communities" like congregational sects and alternative groups is much stronger than in mainstream society.²⁸⁰ In intentional communities, neophytes are subordinate to ritual elders and have to obey them unconditionally, until they become adepts themselves. Among each other, neophytes develop strong bonds, comradeship and egalitarianism. The new identity is sometimes symbolized by the adoption of a common dress-code or costume.²⁸¹ In online worlds it is mainly signalled by the adoption of a common discourse and aesthetics, which may be framed into authoritative religious interpretations (framing²⁸²). The discourse then reflects *communitas*, i.e. the high level of emotional bonds between members. When they leave the orderly, but unemotional structure of society, neophytes enter an "anti-structure".²⁸³

However, a high level of *communitas* and emotional involvement may be maintained if group members never reach the third state, i.e. re-integrate. The advent of modern media, especially the Internet, has made this possible. Conceptually, also doctrinal aspects may be exploited to create this effect. However, after the digital revolution, a borderline state is pre-programmed.

²⁷⁹ Jarret Brachman, "Watching the Watchers", Foreign Policy, November 2010, accessed January 19, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/11/watching_the_watchers?page=full.

²⁸⁰ Victor Turner, who formulated the concepts of **liminality** and **communitas**, argued that *liminal* personae (threshold people) divide into ritual elders and neophytes. Turner utilized Clifford Geertz' concept of *thick description* and integrated it with Arnold van Gennep's model of *rites of passage*. See David Waldron and Janice Newton University of Ballarat, course HX504 Urban Anthropology, accessed July 24, 2012, [velorum.ballarat.edu.au/~dwaldron/documents/lectures/lecture8.doc](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/~dwaldron/documents/lectures/lecture8.doc).

Victor W. Turner, *Liminality and Communitas*, in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 326-239.

²⁸¹ Lucy Jayne Kamau, "Liminality, Communitas, Charisma and Community", in *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002) 21.

²⁸² See for this concept Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses," in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013).

²⁸³ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1969). *Liminality* is the state between structure and anti-structure, in which boundaries become fluid, the normal is reversed and social classifications do not apply anymore. In short, an individual is in a borderline state, undergoing a rite of passage: The individual separates from a given social structure, demonstrating the segregation symbolically. In the middle phase exists the *liminal* period of transition; which Turner - on the basis of Van Gennep's spadework on rites of passage - also calls the "threshold phase", or the "space in between" (i.e. *liminality*), the individual is caught in an ambiguous state, not exactly knowing where he belongs to (between structure and anti-structure/*communitas*). In the last phase, the individual re-assimilates ritually and symbolically with a new status into society. The idea of liminality was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage, which have the following three-part structure: 1. Separation; 2. Liminal Period; 3. Re-Assimilation. See Arnold van Gannep, *Übergangsriten (Les rites de passage)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verlag, 2005).

Medially, this effect is strengthened by the low effort it takes to radicalize virtually, and the possibility to divide life into physical and virtual realities.

As Turner demonstrates, conceptual “threshold qualities” may be maintained indefinitely. For example, Christians are *liminal* figures because they believe that they are only temporary residents of the world. They are merely passing through this world: “‘The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveller, with no place to rest his head.’ Transition has here become a permanent condition.”²⁸⁴ This kind of state allows also extremist and millenarian interpretations of faith, argues Durkheim. Monasticism (monks can be compared to neophytes) “artificially organizes a milieu that is apart from, outside of, and closed to the natural milieu where ordinary men live a secular life, and that tends almost to be its antagonist. From thence as well comes mystic asceticism, which seeks to uproot all that may remain of man’s attachment to the world. Finally, from thence come all forms of religious suicide, the crowning logical step of this asceticism, since the only means of escaping profane life is fully and finally escaping life altogether.”²⁸⁵

Now, this idea can be fully applied to Jihadis as well. Their mental and intellectual asceticism is especially strongly expressed by their core myth. Similar to fundamentalist Christians, Jihadis also see themselves as “strangers”, as a strange elite, encapsulated in the Prophetic saying “Islam began alien and it will again be alien like it began – May the strangers be blessed.”²⁸⁶ Conceptually, the Protestant concept of strangeness and pilgrimage is strikingly similar to the Islamic notion of *hijra* (emigration): A group of dissidents escapes from a hostile environment and builds up a proto-community. Then, it carries its zeal back to the outside world, with a messianic sense of mission and willingness to usher in doomsday. The actual transition is a permanent state and is nurtured by the longing for death for the sake of religion. This point is very important for the creation of a cohesive and action leading ideology that springs out of a state of *liminality*. As Durkheim observed on what we may call *ascetic communitas* [connected to *liminal* states] “The two worlds are conceived of not only as separate but also as hostile and jealous rivals.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Turner, *Liminality and Communitas*.

²⁸⁵ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 41.

²⁸⁶ *Bada'a al-Islam ghariban wa saya'ud ghariban kama bada'a fa tawba li-l-ghuraba'*. In Abu Musab al-Suri, *Global Islamic Resistance Call (Da'wat al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-'alamiyya)*, *Fasl fi al-ghurba wa-l-ghuraba' wa-l-zahirin 'ala -l-haqq* (Chapter on the exile and the strangers and those who will come to know righteousness).

²⁸⁷ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 41.

A culture of martyrdom is constructed on the basis of *communitas* and *liminality*, as well as transcendental lineage perceptions (after-life marriage to paradise maidens).²⁸⁸ Both factors are also essential for the effectiveness of communicative guidance and virtual leadership. Online Jihadis are in a state of *liminality*, because they live in the virtual and physical worlds at the same time. Their cyber identities are in an extreme borderline state, while their physical lives seem orderly and unaffected. This creates tension and the wish to cover the gap.²⁸⁹

Moreover, *communitas* and *liminality* in virtual networking groups are strong for structural reasons. As I have argued, *communitas* describes strong emotional bonds between members of an intentional community, i.e. a feeling of brotherly/sisterly love, which is egalitarian, spontaneous and cutting across the distinctions of normal society. This kind of communion can be a powerful experience and is one of the most important factors to keep intentional communities together. Due to internal schisms and the fleeting nature of emotions, *communitas* is often hard to sustain. “Emotions are fleeting” and best suited for short term psychological states such as initiation rituals and revolutionary uprisings.²⁹⁰

However, *communitas* seems to work better in virtual networks. Traditional concepts of control, decision-making, authority and *communitas* do not apply to online-networks. We know very little about membership, hierarchies and boundaries of online Jihadis. Members are frequently leaving and entering online-groups. Many are lurkers and not registered. For example, Jihadi A and B may interact online on specific issues, but Jihadi B may also interact offline with person/Jihadi C.²⁹¹ Thus, virtual Jihadis are prone to a sustained level of *communitas* due to the highly fluent and participative structures of the Jihadi net. Moreover, computer mediated interactions have a dis-inhibiting effect, which steadily allows to reproduce emotional and psychological states that strengthen *communitas*.

A further question that needs to be asked in this context is if online jihad activism and consumption has just a radicalising, or maybe also a catalysing effect. Grievances and feelings of loss of sense, as well as spiritual and material deprivation may as well be lowered by online jihad. As another analogy to gaming: not all gamers who play ego-shooters on the Internet run amok. But many gamers play games that propagate indiscriminate killing. The major difference between gamers and Jihadis is, however, that the online-communication of Jihadis is strongly influenced by real terrorists and framed in an authoritative belief set. Thus, online

²⁸⁸ See the chapter in this dissertation “Transcendental Kinship and Social Order” (Afterlife Marriage Perceptions)

²⁸⁹ Brachman and Levine; You Too Can Be Awlaki”.

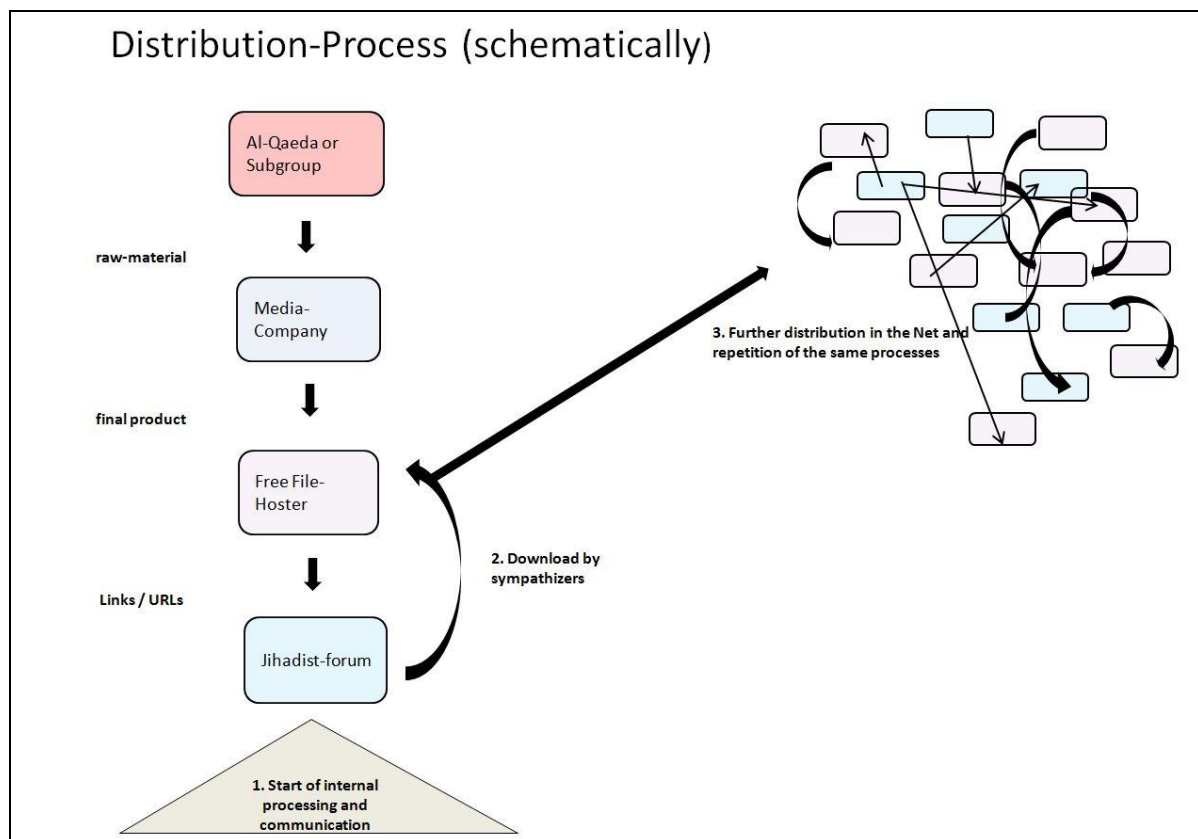
²⁹⁰ Lucy Jayne Kamau, “Liminality, Communitas, Charisma, and Community“, in *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Susan Love Brown (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 24.

²⁹¹ Other factors are largely unknown, such as growth, diversity, heterogeneity, homogeneity, density, or how virtual networks affect behaviour.

jihad takes place in a culture that results out of actual violence and murderous attacks. Further research is needed to find out about the effects on online-radicalization.

2.c Agenda Setters of Jihad – Jihadi Media Companies

Metaphorically speaking, the distribution of Jihadi propaganda resembles thousands of ping-pong balls that fly chaotically lengthwise and crosswise through virtual space. The process is initiated by Jihadi media companies, which are the media producers and distributors of Jihadi organizations. This seemingly anarchic mode of distribution lies in the nature of the Net, which is de-centrally organized and does not have a principal computer. Instead, it is a flat network divided into sub-networks lacking a centre and hierarchy.²⁹²

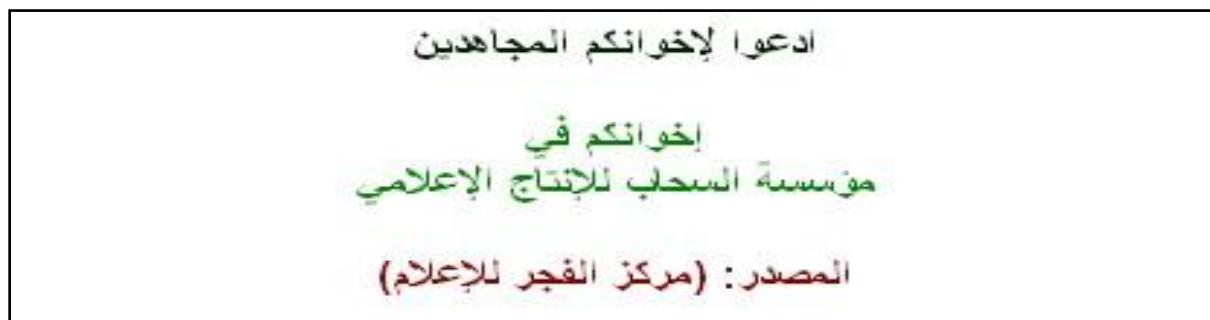


Jihadi media companies play an essential role in aligning forum members behind jihad in general and certain topics in particular.²⁹³ According to a study by the Norwegian Defence

²⁹² Manuel R. Torres Soriano, “Maintaining the Message: How Jihadists Have Adapted to Web Disruptions,” *Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint – CTC Sentinel* 2:11(2009): 22-23.

²⁹³ The central al-Qaeda and its regional subgroups have own media wings. Among the subgroups are al-Qaeda in Iraq (founded 2004), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (founded 2007), the merger of Saudi-Arabian and Yemenite al-Qaeda (founded 2009). Also other regional terrorist and Jihadi groups have their own media wings, for example the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban and the Shabaab movement in Somalia.

Research Establishment (FFI), there are at least 28 media-arms which are producing and distributing for more than 30 different Jihadi organizations.²⁹⁴ The most prominent producer is *al-Sahab Media* with exclusive rights on the messages of al-Qaeda central organization. The most trusted distributor company is *al-Fajr*, which verifies products of other media-groups with its seal.²⁹⁵ This kind of branding creates authenticity, identity and cohesion among Jihadis.



3. Example of an authenticity-seal underneath a video published on the Net: produced by *al-Sahab* and distributed by *al-Fajr*-media-center.

Media companies are agenda setters which provoke discussions and determine topics.²⁹⁶ When a group publishes a video or statement on a jihad forum, the material is picked up by sympathizers and further distributed. In parallel, heated ideological and strategic discussions on the topic emerge. The discussions and the accompanying propaganda output by sympathizers often exceed the content of the original message. Therefore, media groups are essential to steer the activities of sympathizers into a certain direction. But they have no direct control over online Jihadis. Sympathizers introspect themselves increasingly as autonomous agents, which is reflected in their discussions: “You are not different from the mujahidin in the physical war!”²⁹⁷ Moreover, ideas change shape and content when being processed. Moreover, media companies are the intersections between terrorist organizations and online-sympathizers. They convert raw material into final products. Some members are directly involved in terrorist groups, others are supporters. Often, there is a division of labour between

²⁹⁴ Cecilie Finsnes, “What is audio-visual propaganda? – An overview of the content of FFI’s Jihadi video database” (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2010).

²⁹⁵ Producers commonly are called “foundation” (*mu’assasa*), while distributors are called “center” (*markaz*).

²⁹⁶ Hanna Rogan, „Al-Qaeda’s online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007,” (Kjeller: Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI), 2007).

²⁹⁷ From the Jihadi forum discussion „*Abu Dujana al-Khorasani wa tanabbu’at Nostradamus*,“ al-Falluja forum, accessed 25 January 2010, <http://alfaloja1.info/vb/showthread.php?p=706509>.

activists who record, edit and upload the final product. A handful of activists, even single people may form a media company.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Participants can often be hardly traced because many use software that allows hiding IP-addresses.

Production- and Distribution Companies	Affiliation
Production Companies (<i>mu'assasat</i>)	
<i>Al-Sahab</i>	central Al-Qaeda (sometimes also leading Taliban)
<i>Al-Furqan</i>	Islamic State Iraq (ISI)
<i>Al-Ansar</i>	Ansar al-Sunna in Northern-Iraq (ASI)
<i>Al-Malahim</i>	Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)
<i>Al-Boraq</i>	Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI)
<i>Al-Andalus</i>	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)
<i>Al-Ma'sada</i>	<i>Shumukh al-Islam</i> Forum
<i>Al-Qabidun</i>	<i>Sanam al-Islam</i> Forum
<i>Al-Kataib</i>	<i>al-Shabab al-Mujahidin</i> (Somalia)
<i>Kata'ib Abdallah Azzam</i>	Palestinian group with global jihad agenda
<i>Islam Awazi</i>	Islamic Party of Turkistan (TIP)
<i>Elif Medya</i>	Foreign groups in Waziristan (predominantly German, but also Turks, Uzbeks, among them Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), Deutsche Taliban Mujahidin (DTM), Taifatul Mansura)
<i>Jundullah Media</i>	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)
<i>Al-Somood und Hijra Studios</i>	Taliban (Afghanistan)
<i>Tora Bora Studio</i>	Taliban, Tora Bora Jihadi Mahaz
<i>Umar Studio</i>	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)
<i>Badr al-Tawhid</i>	Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)
<i>Labayk</i>	Taliban (shows also al-Qaeda cadres, partly cooperation mit <i>al-Sahab</i>)
<i>Manba al-Jihad</i>	Taliban (Afghanistan)
<i>Al-Emarah Jihadi Studio</i>	Taliban (Taliban Afghanistan)
<i>Ummat Studios</i>	Islamist Guerilla and Terrorists in Waziristan (among them TTP and al-Qaeda)
Distribution Centres (<i>marakiz</i>)	
<i>Markaz al-Fajr</i>	Highly respected distributor for productions of central al-Qaeda, ISI, TTP and their production-companies <i>al-Sahab</i> , <i>al-Furqan</i> , <i>Labayk</i>
<i>Markaz al-Yaqin al-I'lami</i>	Distributor of products by al-Qaeda und her sub-organizations, publishes also the e-magazine „ <i>al-Qadaya al-Jihadiyya</i> “
<i>Markaz Sada al-Jihad li-l-I'lam</i>	Distributes products of the Somali <i>Shabab al-Mujahidin Movement</i>
<i>Markaz al-Balagh</i>	Distributor for Iraqi (ISI) and Algerian (AQIM) groups and their media companies, produces also together with <i>Shumukh-Forum</i> activists
Further important distributor and translation groups (<i>jabhat, nukhab, kata'ib, majmu'at</i>)	
<i>GIMF</i>	Distributor, service provider, translator for media companies of groups, which are close to al-Qaeda (among them also <i>al-Shabab</i>)
<i>Nukhbat al-I'lam al-Jihadi</i>	Meanwhile very popular due to transcripts

	(<i>tafrigh</i>) of videos and translations of al-Qaeda products; own website
<i>Katibat al-Jihad al-I'lamī (Jihad Media Battalion)</i>	Newsletter, service provider for al-Qaeda and Iraqi groups (for example, <i>Ansar al-Islam</i>)
<i>Majmu'at Ansar al-Baridiyya (Ansar Mailing List)</i>	Newsletter and videos from different regions, books, article, propaganda for small groups and larger organizations
<i>Wikalat Madad al-Ikhbariyya</i>	<i>Ansar al-Sharia</i> affiliated to al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

New products are being uploaded by media groups on the websites of free file-hosting companies like RapidShare, Megaupload, Fileflyer and GettyFile.²⁹⁹ Then, media groups publish dozens of links to the material on discussion forums.³⁰⁰ Clicking on a link leads forum users to the file-hosting website, where they enter the password and can download the material. The distribution of propaganda videos and other material is nearly uncontrollable. The material is being sent forth- and back between websites, forums, mailing-lists and blogs, or it is republished on free file-hosting websites. Some activists republish productions, such as those of *al-Malahim*, the media-wing of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula“, on YouTube and other popular platforms. It is not only the material itself, but also the discussions around it that are scattered all over the Net and have lasting effects on activists, supporters and sympathizers.

²⁹⁹ These sites allow storing massive amounts of data in the Internet, which helps to overcome data restrictions of the host servers of Jihadi forums and websites.

³⁰⁰ The links display as URLs, for example, <http://gettyfile.ru/620367/>, and are often accompanied by a password. In addition, they carry neutral names to avoid elimination by the free file-hosting services. Some URLs also appear as „https“. Basically, http and https are identical, but there “are some primary differences between http and https, relating to the default port, which is 80 for http and 443 for https. Https transmit normal http interactions through an encrypted system, so that in theory, the information cannot be accessed by any party other than the client and end server. The two common types of encryption layers are: Transport Layer Security (TLS) and Secure Sockets Layer (SSL). Both encode the exchanged data. See for more information the following website, accessed October 2010: <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-difference-between-http-and-https.htm>.

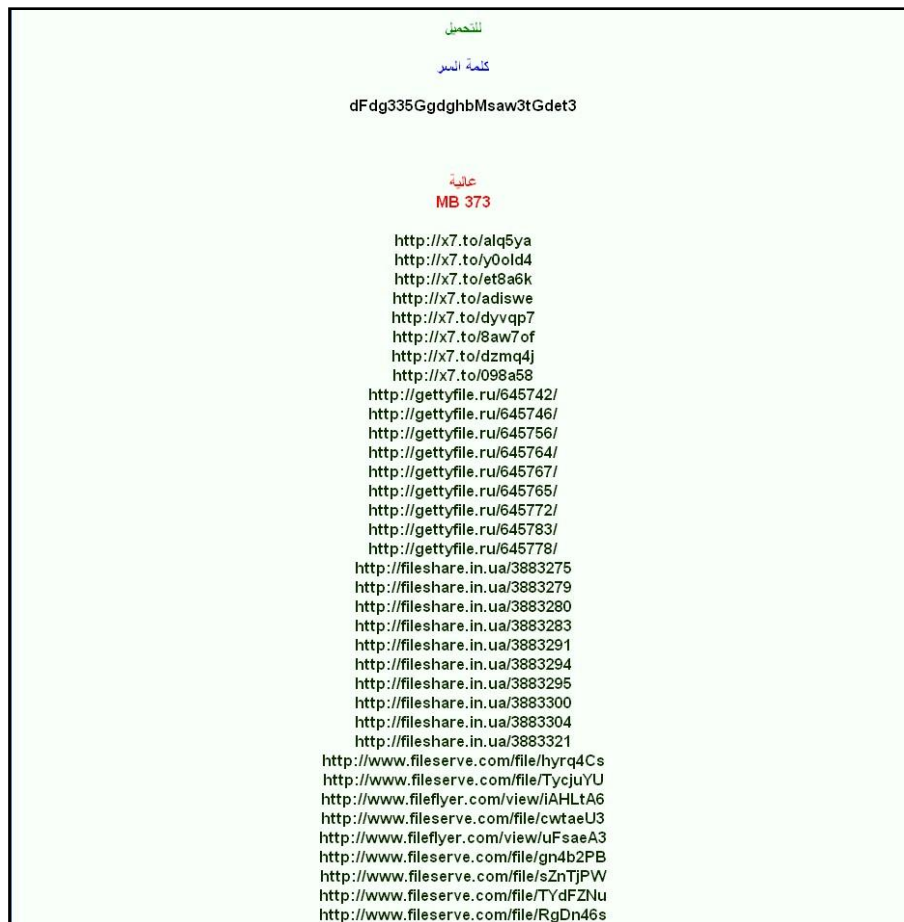


Illustration above: Password and links to a free file-hoster, Shabakat al-Mujahidin al-Elektroniyya Forum, November 11, 2010

2.d “Collective Organizers”³⁰¹ of Online Jihad - Jihadi Discussion Forums

The Jihadi Web and its social processes are highly participative. The basis is a network of volunteers, who discuss and distribute material published by Jihadi media-groups. Jihad websites, discussion forums, but also social service providers serve as collective organizers for the virtual jihad movement.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Collective organizers are methods or carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites, rituals, or icons. The concept is based on the idea of “collective organizers” by Vladimir Lenin, “Where to Begin?,” *Iskra*, No. 4, May 1901, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/may/04.htm>. According to Lenin, the “role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer (referring to Lenin’s newspaper “*Iskra*).”

In a practical sense, one can use the same concept for Jihadi websites and e-magazines like “*Sawt al-Jihad*”. See also Lohlker, introduction Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Jihad: Al-Qa’idas erstes Online Magazin* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010).

Furthermore, one can apply the concept in a broader and more abstract sense as narratives, myths and ideas.

³⁰² Thus, I speak about two sorts of collective organizers. Firstly, there are collective organizers in the sense of central ideas and myths. Secondly, collective organizers are also central publications, organs or platforms that facilitate information-sharing and networking.

For example, the Website „Tawhid“ by the Jordanian Jihadi ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi serves as intellectual incubator for Jihadi thought. The online library contains all major works on jihad in the past and presence.³⁰³ Among them are theologic-ideological texts like „Terrorism is part of Islam“ (al-Irhab min al-Islam) by the Egyptian 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (Dr. Fadl), but also classics by Muslim Brotherhood figure heads Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The section „The new Crusader-war“ (al-hamla al-salibiyya al-jadida) concentrates exclusively on ideological matters.³⁰⁴



6. Section: „The new Crusader war“ containing numerous ideological-theological texts, on Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's website „Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad“, Oktober 2010

But even more important as collective organizers are virtual social networks and milieus. When more than ten individuals gather virtually around a terrorist interpretation of jihad (for example, via a Youtube account that glorifies jihad), such an environment has been created. Barry Wellman argues that virtual networks have important implications for actual behaviour.³⁰⁵ Assaf Moghadam holds that the spread of suicide attacks is related to the spread of Jihadi ideology, especially its culture of martyrdom.³⁰⁶ This can only be seen in connection with the growth of Jihadi networking on the Internet and the inherently ideological nature of information in the *information age*.³⁰⁷

Radicalization in a growing number of cases takes place virtually as much as it does physically. Thus, virtual activity seems to have a strong influence on the actual behaviour of a

³⁰³ Rüdiger Lohker, „Eine 'Bibliothek des Dschihad': *Minbar at-tauhid wa-l-gihad*,“ in Von Chatforen bis Cyberjihad. Muslimische Internetnutzung in lokaler und globaler Perspektive, edited by Johanna Pink and Mathias Bruckner (Würzburg: Frank und Timme, 2009), 155-167.

³⁰⁴ At the same time, the site is an authoritative source for strategic and theological literature inextricably linked Jihadi ideology. Standard works are being downloaded thousands of times from the Website, such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's „Religious community of Abraham“ (Millat Ibrahim), which propagates a dichotomist Jihadi worldview.

³⁰⁵ Barry Wellman, „An Electronic Group is a Virtual Social network.“ In Culture of the Internet, ed. Sarah Kiesler (Malwah: Lawrence Elbaum ass., 1997), 179-208.

³⁰⁶ Assaf Moghadam, „Motives for Martyrdom – Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks,“ International Security 33(2008/09): 46–78, also Moghadam, Assaf, „Shifting Trends in Suicide Attacks,“ Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint - CTC Sentinel 2(2009): 11-13.

³⁰⁷ Robert Hassan, The Information Society (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 1.

significant number of terrorists.³⁰⁸ In terms of virtual networking, Jihadi discussion forums play up to now the most decisive role. However, cyber jihad is highly flexible and adaptable. Its infrastructure may change, when extremists decide to utilize mainstream social services on the Internet, instead of propagating within encapsulated extremist environments.

About ten Arabic language forums are at present the epicentre of cyber-jihad.³⁰⁹ They are called “primary forums,” because they are the first publishers of propaganda and statements by al-Qaeda and affiliated groups. Sympathizers grant a lot authority to these forums, some of which have tens of thousands of visitors every day. They have 4,000 to 18,000 active members, which includes employees of security agencies who observe and manipulate discussions. Presently, these are *Sanam al-Islam*, *Shumukh al-Islam*, *al-Hanin and al-Tahaddi*, *'Ushshaq al-Hur al-Islamiyya*, *al-Minbar al-I'lam al-Jihadi* as well as *Medad al-Suyuf*, *al-Luyuth al-Islamiyya*, *Ansar al-Mujahidin*, *al-Mujahidin al-Elektruniyya*, and *al-Ma'arik al-Salafiyya*. But also the salafist-wahhabist forums *al-Haqq*, *al-Hisba* and *Jazeerataalk* are very popular communication hubs among Jihadis.³¹⁰ Forums frequently raise and fall within the highly dynamic communicative hierarchy of global jihad.³¹¹ New forums emerge and older forums disappear.

³⁰⁸ All European Jihadis that planned or executed attacks in the last years watched jihadipropaganda movies. According to Peter Nesser, quoted in Abdelassem El Difraoui, *Al Qaida par l'image ou la prophétie du martyr: Une analyse politique de la propagande audiovisuelle du jihad global*. PhD diss., Universités à l'IEP de Paris, 2010, 17.

³⁰⁹ The change from organizational websites to grassroots-run forums as main publishers and distributors of Jihadi propaganda took place after the former were constantly shut down. For example, al-Qaeda's pioneering website *al-Neda* (“The Call”), established in the late 1990s, was constantly hacked after 9/11. Finally, its administrators took it offline. In general, websites of Jihadi organizations suffered from constant hacking-attacks by individuals as well as government agencies. Using forums and a network of sympathizers became more practical. In the late 1990s, Jihadis discussed and propagated no popular political forums, but also neo-wahhabist discussion forums.³⁰⁹ In 2003, the *al-Ansar* forum marked a quantum leap for cyber jihad, since it was the first forum exclusively dedicated to jihad and the publication of Jihadi propaganda from the Iraqi jihad, which caused the explosive development of the Jihadi Net. *Al-Ansar* forum was shut-down in 2004 after it released the beheading-video of the U.S. hostage Nicholas Berg. The quadriga of the forums *al-Ikhlās al-Hesbah*, *al-Firdaws* and *al-Boraq* replaced it in 2005. The described themselves as “organizationally independent” publishing the propaganda of all jihad groups. All four were knocked offline in September 2008. But ever new top-forums are emerging on the Net, plus activists are increasingly utilizing social service providers like Facebook and video-sharing sites like Youtube.

³¹⁰ See Mohammed Ali Musawi, “Cheering for Osama – How Jihadists Use Internet Discussion Forums” (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2010). See also the analysis of the popular, allegedly female, online Jihadi Mufakkirat al-Falluja (Female Thinker of the Falluja-Forum), „*Rihanat al-Jihad – Al-Shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, rahimahu Allah*“(The scent of jihad – The martyr Abu Dujana al-Korāsani, may Allah have mercy with him), *al-Falluja* Forum, accessed January 10, 2010, <http://alfalaja.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=99249>.

³¹¹ If primary forums are knocked offline, others can quickly replace them and fill the vacuum. Some Jihadi forums, which formerly had narrower organizational or regional agendas, may ascend within the hierarchy. For example, the very popular Jihadi al-Falluja forum originated from a quarrel between nationalist versus jihadistsupporters of of the Iraqi insurgency in 2007. Initially, both wings were discussing and issueing propaganda on the same forum (*al-Boraq*). After the quarrel, nationalist supporters represented by the Islamic Army of Iraq (*al-Jaish al-Islami fi al-'Iraq*) kept issueing and propagating on the Boraq forum. The Jihadi wing aligned with al-Qaeda and represented by the Islamic State of Iraq (*Daulat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya*), a coalition of doctrinaire Jihadi groups, founded *al-Falluja* forum. After the shut-down of *al-Ikhlās* and other primary forums in 2008, *al-Falluja* quickly became very popular among the globally oriented jihad forums. *Falluja*-forum was shut down in summer 2010, and *Shumukh al-Islam* as well as *Sinam al-Islam* seem to have taken its place for

The popularity of the jihad forums depends on organizations and media groups that post on them, as well as on prominent members. Al-Hesba forum, for example, which has been shut down since 2008, „gave birth“ to one of the most effective terrorists from the Jihadi Web. The Jordanian physician Humam al-Balawi was an administrator of *al-Hesba* forum and perpetrated a suicide attack in December 2009 in Afghanistan, where he killed several CIA-officers.³¹²

Most jihad forums have similar layouts. Many use the forum software vBulletin, which allows a limited degree of personalization. Main topics and general contents do not vary considerably. The upper sections of jihad forums contain the newest releases of Jihadi organizations. The visitor can scroll down and is greeted by a – oftentimes confusing – multitude of colourful, blinking and interactive banners (arranged one after the other, see figure 4). Clicking on one banner leads to its discussion thread within the forum and to links from which the material can be downloaded. Often the forums share similar head-topics. However, this may vary according to the personal choice of the administrators.

The lower sections contain several horizontal frames, one for each sub-forum. The first and most popular sub-forum on all Jihadi forums is “General Issues of the Islamic Community (*umma*)”, followed by the “Islamic State of Iraq”, “Publications of the Jihadi Media Foundations and Centers” and “News from the Mujahidin”.

9,243	2,564	 الشيخ د هاني السباعي: الدكتور... بواسطة مفكرة المجاهدين منذ ساعة واحدة	منتدى الحدث والأخبار (قضايا الأمة العربية والإسلامية) الأقسام الفرعية "الداخلية":  أرشيف المواضيع المتميزة,  منتدى الشهداء والأوسر,  نخبة كتاب شبكة المجاهدين,  أرشيف إصدارات شبكة المجاهدين (خاص)	
672	177	10-15 دولة العراق الإسلامية... بواسطة ابو المقداد النجدي منذ 18 ساعات	منتدى بيانات وإصدارات دولة العراق الإسلامية الأقسام الفرعية "الداخلية":  أرشيف بيانات وتقارير دولة العراق الإسلامية,  أرشيف إصدارات (مؤسسة الفرقان الإعلامية)	
1,853	652	 مركز اليقين الإعلامي : أمير... بواسطة أبو رضوان منذ يوم مضى	منتدى المؤسسات والمراكز الإعلامية الجهادية الأقسام الفرعية "الداخلية":  أرشيف مركز الفجر للإعلام,  أرشيف مؤسسة السحاب للإنتاج الإعلامي,  أرشيف الجبهة الإعلامية الإسلامية العالمية,  أرشيف مؤسسة المجاهدين الإعلامية,  أرشيف مؤسسة الأنصار الإعلامية,  أرشيف كتبية الجهاد الإعلامي,  أرشيف مركز البلاغ للإعلام,  أرشيف بصرية الصمود الإعلامية,  أرشيف نخبة الإعلام الجهادي,  أرشيف مجموعة الأنصار البريدية,  أرشيف المؤسسات والمراكز الإعلامية	
4,003	1,366	 مؤسسة الأندلس التقرير... بواسطة محمد الجزائري منذ 46 دقيقة	منتدى بيانات وإصدارات المجاهدين الأقسام الفرعية "الداخلية":  أرشيف المجاهدين في بلاد الشام والشيخات,  أرشيف تنظيم القاعدة العامة,  أرشيف تنظيم القاعدة في جزيرة العرب,  أرشيف تنظيم القاعدة في بلاد المغرب الإسلامي,  أرشيف حركة الشباب المجاهدين (الصومال),  أرشيف المجاهدين جماعة أنصار الإسلام,  أرشيف بيانات وإصدارات صوت الإسلام,  أرشيف بيانات وتقارير الأمانة الإسلامية,  أرشيف البيانات والتقارير القديمة,  أرشيف إصدارات الجماعات الجهادية المجاهدة	

1. Screenshot of main categories (sub-forums) on the Mujahidin al-Elektruniyya Forum, Oktober 2010.

now. There are about ten other forums with a very similar layout which publish similar propaganda and lead similar discussions.

³¹² Holtmann, Philipp. “Virtueller Dschihad: Eine reale Gefahr,” Research Paper 48:2010 (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2010).

Concerning their social structure, jihad forums display clear hierarchies and mechanisms of dominion which are based on regulation, sanctioning, inclusion and exclusion (prohibition, marginalization), as well as tight control of admittance, and the competition for status.³¹³ Participation and function-based ranking systems are common to most Web-forums. Many include categories like “beginner”, “elite member” and “administrator”. Members are classified according to the frequency and quality of their contributions, and according to their functions. They are controlled by administrators and can ascend in the hierarchy, if they participate well. Titles reward special contributions. Members gain reputation and administrative rights, when they are promoted. For example, the Jordanian suicide bomber Humam al-Balawi was promoted as a forum administrator due to the quality of his posts.³¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of regulation, sanctioning, inclusion and exclusion processes, see the chapter “Discursive Ritualism on Jihadi Forums.”

³¹³ Soriano holds that roster-programs automatically categorize members of Web-forums and are largely responsible for internal hierarchies: “Administering the Web forums can be carried out simultaneously by a limitless number of users, who can participate in the administration anonymously. In fact, many site administrators have no connection to actual members of jihadigroups and achieved their positions by being ‘promoted’ through the Web forum’s roster.” However, administrators may as well have actual contact to terrorists. Furthermore, promotion is not always an automated process, especially when members are promoted on basis of the quality of their posts. In this case, not programs, but administrators decide collectively about the promotion of members. For example, Humam al-Balawi, who perpetrated a suicide attack in December 2010, was raised in rank by administrators of al-Hesba forum. Roster-programs can automatically categorize and classify members. See Manuel R. Torres Soriano, “Maintaining the Message: How Jihadists Have Adapted to Web Disruptions,” *Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint – CTC Sentinel* 2:11(2009): 22-23; see also “*Rhumud yaluff shakhsyat Abu Dujana al-Khorasani: La tubaddiduhu siratuhu ... tabiban urduniyyan*” (Mysteriousness surrounds the personality of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani: his biography does not dispel it ... [he was] a Jordanian doctor”), *al-Hayat*, January 17, 2010, 16.

³¹⁴ - In more detail, the primary jihad forum “Shumukh al-Islam” (Glory of Islam) ranks:
 - new members; 0-100 posts (*shamikh jadid*);
 - active and inciting members, 100-1000 posts (*shamikh nashit* and *shamikh muharrid*);
 - special members; up to 3000 posts (*shamikh mumayyiz*);
 - golden members; 3,000 posts and more (*shamikh dhahabi*).

For example, *Beiraq al-Tauhid* (Banner of Monotheism) of *Shumukh* is classified as an “active member” (written underneath the name in the headline). He participated with 945 posts (written to the far left side of the headline). Excellent contributions are credited with additional sub-titles, defining a member’s qualities in more detail. *Ramh al-shumukh* (spear of shumukh) and *qalam al-shumukh* (pen of shumukh) indicate special merits in propaganda and writing. “special exertion in continuing topics” is a sub-title for members who followed up on important discussions. The golden member *Hamza al-Najdi* of *Shumukh* with 3,706 post is distinguished by this sub-title. This motivates other members with fewer posts to compete.

The Arabic section of Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, which is issued in several languages, has ranks such as:

- reader (*qari*)
- beginner (*ansari*)
- diligent (*ansari mujtahid*)
- shining (*anasari muta’aliq*)

3. Jihadi Media Strategy

„I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media.“ Ayman al-Zawahiri in a letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2005)

3.a The Breakup of Traditional Organizational Structures: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri

International security campaigns following the 9/11 attacks have made it increasingly difficult for Jihadis to sustain physical organizations and networks. This impedes traditional organizational structures and personal guidance within groups. It has created the need to search for new leadership models. Jihadis have recognized that they cannot keep on fighting guerrilla struggles, especially not against the superior military and especially aerial power of western states, first and foremost the U.S. Thus, Jihadis try to re-organize al-Qaeda's movement virtually and to recruit new members online.³¹⁵ The period of shelters is over. That means the lack of safe refugees in allied countries already ended with the fall of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s. But safe territories for retreat are a condition *sine qua non* for successful guerilla campaigns. During the Cold War, Islamist terrorists profited from such shelters in secular and Muslim states on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Nowadays, they cannot even maintain secure bases in most Muslim countries which cooperate with western powers. In addition, since 9/11, many domestic jihad networks in Muslim countries have been smashed, or "pacified", which takes away another possibility for retreat. This concerns the Islamic Group in Egypt, as well as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, for example, which however, after the fall of Qadhafi has established new bases in Libya. Nor can Jihadis safely rely anymore on networks abroad, for example in Europe. However, new jihad fronts in Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan allow the rebuilding of guerilla fronts on a geographically limited scale. Since the 1990s there has been a growing awareness of vulnerability and lack of allies and shelters. This has led to intensive self-critique by Jihadi thinkers. The literary output that originated from this trend has been coined "Jihadi strategic studies."³¹⁶ Jihadis have formulated new strategic guidelines for the third generation of Jihadi

³¹⁵ A participant of the forum Islamonline.Net defines the tasks of jihad forums as: inciting discussions, "exchange views" on suicide-attacks, killing bystanders and foreigners, deposing Muslim rulers, stigmatizing Muslims who befriend non-Muslims and especially, provide possibilities to recruit new Jihadis, which is proven by the high number of individuals who self-recruited via the forums, simply by reading persuasive propaganda material. Jihad forums and websites are a viable alternative for the successful recruitment of fighters and suicide-attackers against U.S.-forces, for example. Numerous analyses, the Islamist continues, show that Web-recruiting is an alternative to direct contact with Jihadi cadres. See Sayyid Zayid, „*Al-Muntadayat al-jihadiyya*," accessed April 15, 2011, <http://www.lojainiat.com/index.cfm?do=cms.con&contentid=3764>.

³¹⁶ The genre of "strategic Jihadi literature" has increased since the start of the Iraq-War in 2003 and treats theological and ideological questions only marginally. See Thomas Hegghammer and Brynjar Lia, "Jihadi

activists (following the first of the 1960-70s and second of the 1980-90s). This includes the fragmentation of organizational structures and individualization of action, yet globalization of common ideology. Jihadi thinkers have been discussing these problems and are constantly devising new strategies how to use the media field. Our main witness is al-Qaeda thinker Abu Musab al-Suri, who is one of the most advanced strategic thinkers of al-Qaeda until his arrest in Pakistan in 2005 and his alleged release from a Syrian jail in early 2012.

The leaderless resistance doctrine of al-Qaeda strategist Abu Musab al-Suri stands as an epitome for cyber terrorist networking and netwar-concepts. It also seems that lone wolf-style attackers are heavily influenced by virtual organizational networks. In such cases, the threshold zone between virtual and physical lives is crossed, which falls into the category of communicative guidance.

This requires a short excursion through the nature of leadership and traditional organizational structures of Jihadi groups. The 1970s and 1980s had not yet witnessed the explosive revolution of information which took place with the start of the Internet as a mass user medium since the mid-1990s. Therefore, hand-written orders on slips of paper, mouth to mouth commands and personal meetings defined decision making in hierarchical Jihadi organizations in the Arab world. In the Sunni Jihadi scene, cases in point were the organizations *Tanzim al-Jihad* and *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* in Egypt, *al-Tali'a al-Muqatila* in Syria, *Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin* in occupied Palestine, and *Jama'at al-Harakiyya in Libya*. Furthermore, during the Afghanistan jihad in the 1980s and the Islamist conflicts in Algeria, Bosnia and Chechnya in the 1990s, Jihadi groups established contacts to larger international Islamist networks, therefore also increasingly using long-range communication tools such as telephone, fax and early computers. Moreover, in traditional hierarchic organization structures and clandestine cells, members gathered around an emir, who was oftentimes subordinate to a superior emir. Counsel-boards (*shura*) of the umbrella organization were responsible for the planning of attacks, military matters, financing, information-gathering and public relations of an organization.

The 1990s witnessed a reform trend in the global Jihadi movement and the development of new command and control strategies. Communicational strategies such as Internet propaganda and extremist chat culture to enhance online group-identity became important elements in the direct and indirect guidance of followers. Direct guidance would take place by

Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaeda Policy Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27(2004): 355-375.

communication between individuals. Indirect guidance has become manifested in the build-up of pervasive propagandistic Internet culture.

One of the most influential proponents of this trend, the Jihadi strategist Abu Musab al-Suri, started revising classical command structures on the basis of a matriculate analysis of their strengths and weaknesses in the early 1990s. He advocates a system of independent cells, which are totally isolated from each other. They merge under a common ideology instead of an umbrella-organization. Incitement-concepts (*tahrid*) are the basis of al-Suri's communicative leadership model. Absolute instruction and direct orders are replaced with the more effective and emotive idea of global jihad via propaganda, which is supposed to radicalize and carry supporters away. It is a model of covered leadership through propagandistic processes, which strongly rely on the establishment of role-models, who motivate followers. Within the propagandist process, virtual leadership takes place. This is the more refined communicational level of interaction between activists through signs, rituals and semi-theological discourses (mixed with simple speech, integrating topics of a wide range). It seems that the strategic figureheads of al-Qaeda central organization have largely adopted this strategic paradigm, which can be demonstrated with the video "*La tukallaf illa nafsaka*."³¹⁷

From the early 1990s on until the publication of his magnum opus, the "Global Islamic Resistance Call," al-Suri made "incitement" (*tahrid*) the key-motto of his concept of individual terrorism. Within his system of global terrorism, al-Suri envisions "Special Propaganda Units" which have the task to propagate and incite so effectively that individuals and small independently join and form disconnected small terrorist cells.³¹⁸ Thus, the creation of virtual authority structures, among them the conceptual transition from virtual activist to actual terrorist, owes to al-Suri's spadework. He was a member of the Syrian Fighting Vanguard (*al-Tali'a al-Muqatila*) and after the failed Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in Hama in Syria in 1982, al-Suri joined the international jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In the 1990s, al-Suri ran his own training camp *Mu'askar al-Ghuraba'* (Strangers' Camp) under the Taliban. Al-Suri has gained strategic and tactical experience since the 1980s, among them close combat training, special operations tactics, and tests with chemical agents. Following his marriage to a Spanish woman in the 1980s, al-Suri has held a Spanish citizenship. This way he could easily move and agitate between Europe and the Middle East. He was arrested in Quetta in Pakistan in 2005. The U.S. military extradited him to Syria, where he was incarcerated. Al-Suri was released from Syrian jail in February

³¹⁷ *Al-Sahab*, "*La tukallaf illa nafsak*," accessed January 14, 2013, http://archive.org/details/osod_09a.

³¹⁸ Abu Musab al-Suri, *Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya* (Global Islamic Resistance Call), 1559-1560.

2012.³¹⁹ His role as a new Jihadi leader may be bolstered by the fact that many of al-Qaeda's old guard such as bin Laden, Mustapha Abu al-Yazid, Atiyatallah al-Libi and Anwar al-Awlaqi have either been captured or killed (if he succeeds to build himself a new base in Syria).

Al-Suri's reformed leadership concept that advises a direct contract with God (*'ahd*), added by the doctrine of incitement (*tahrid*) to "inspire" self-responsible attacks - a Jihadi version of Propaganda by the Deed adapted to the information society –borrows from the Quran. For al-Suri, two verses explicate the role of incitement in battle in its entirety. "*Then fight in Allah's cause - Thou art held responsible only for thyself - and incite the believers (wa harrid al-mu'minin). It may be that Allah will restrain the fury of the Unbelievers; for Allah is the strongest in might and in punishment.*" Moreover, "*O Messenger, rouse the Believers to the fight (ya ayyuha al-nabiy harrid al-mu'minin). If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding.*"³²⁰ The incitement-concept has been actively developed by Jihadis since the 1980s. Ample proof can be found in the texts of Abdallah Azzam, organizer and chief-ideologue of the Afghan-Arab mujahidin movement. Nowadays, its clearest manifestations are the jihaid e-magazine "Inspire" by *al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula*, whose name is borrowed from the second Koran verse above that contains the Arabic word for "incitement" (*tahrid*).

Especially al-Suri's call for media jihad carried the idea of virtual leadership forward. Al-Suri early recognized the importance of the Internet and its potential for alternative leadership structures. As the title of al-Suri's jihad encyclopaedia already says, propaganda jihad (*jihad al-da'wa*) has a guiding nature. This means that followers of global jihad shall not join organisations, but shall act autonomously on the ground and participative in propaganda teams. If everyone acts accordingly, propaganda becomes a form of communicative leadership. Guidance is thus mainly based on the common ideology and strategy, a concept that al-Suri calls "System, not organization" (*Nizam, la tanzim!*) (See table 1). Activists are advised not to swear a traditional oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to a leader of a conventional jihad group or overarching organization, but to close a contract (*'ahd*) with Allah. This obliges them to obey only God, who commands them to fight jihad, and the respective leader of their cell,

³¹⁹ Al-Suri was arrested in Quetta in Pakistan in 2005, handed over into U.S. custody, then handed over to Syria, and allegedly released from a Syrian prison in early 2012. Bill Roggio, "Abu Musab al Suri released from Syrian custody: report," The Long War Journal, February 6, 2012, accessed January 19, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/02/abu_musab_al_suri_re.php.

³²⁰ Quran *Surat al-Nisa'* 4:84 and *Surat al-Anfal* 8:65, www.islam101.com, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/4.htm>;
<http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/8.htm>.

if they belong to one at all. How activists realize this concept is up to them. Al-Suri radically breaks with hierarchical organizations and advocates individualized terrorism (*irhab fardi*). This way, al-Suri tries to substitute for physical leadership structures that have come under pressure with communicational guidance and decentralized organizational concepts (small disconnected physical networks; larger virtually connected informational networks). Much of his strategy is based on Marxist guerrilla warfare and social liberation literature, which al-Suri recommends should be read and reformulated in Islamist terms. It seems that central precepts of al-Suri's strategy are being put into effect on jihad forums. It does not necessarily mean that all online Jihadis take al-Suri's words literally. But it certainly attests to al-Suri's excellent foresight regarding the communicational leadership elements of jihad in the information age. But from a conceptual perspective, al-Suri's novel organizational idea is not that new at all.³²¹

³²¹ After all, we can discern similar doctrines and concepts among fringe groups of all three monotheistic religions; and thus there are similar potentials for violence or reform. The idea of a direct relationship through a covenant with good, the denial of established clerical power, self-responsible leadership and the uncompromising reliance on the text for guidance, in this case the Bible, can already be found in the cultic, yet also pragmatic theology of 17th century Puritan Protestants. Groups of Puritans fled from England, regathered in the Netherlands and sailed off to the "Promised Land" of Northern America (such as the *Mayflower Pilgrims*, 1621). Upon their arrival at Cape Cod, Puritans and other passengers of the ship closed a civil covenant. The *Mayflower Pact* delimited basic rules of democratic governance among the settlers. The covenant gives also utter proof how cultic, sectarian groups can accommodate to political pragmatism. Salafis and Jihadis feel constantly under attack as well; they regard themselves as refugees from worldly injustice. Salafis and Jihadis also migrate from their points of origins in order to create safe-havens, training-camps or alternative communities (the *hijra*-paradigm). The Puritans mentioned above rejected the Church, formed their own congregations and sealed a divine covenant with God; in their view, the "only biblically sanctioned organizational unit was the individual congregation." See Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 8-9. For Puritan Protestants, congregations were not only gatherings for worship, but also autonomous administrative structures, which directly challenged the authority of the Churches. True believers did not require guidance from anyone else but God. Within Puritan congregations, a minister-leader would be chosen. The Sheikh and the Emir in Jihadi groups fulfil similar functions. Puritans introspected themselves as ultra-pious elite of believers, who possible might gain redemption and not suffer from perpetual damnation as a result of the Original Sin. Salafis and Jihadis think as well that they belong to a chosen "surviving sect," which will not perish in the Hereafter. The ultra-literal Puritanism of those days shares a lot of concepts with today's Salafism, which is the modern protest culture of Sunni Islam; Salafis can be described as Sunni Puritans. Salafi-Jihadis are violent Sunni Puritans (For a further comparison see chapter 6.c "On the Nature and Genesis of Jihadism: A Comparison to Doctrines of Other Monotheistic Sects"). Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 8-9.

Al-Suri's Comparison between Traditional Jihad Groups and the System of Global Islamic Resistance Cells (GIR: Al-Muqawamah al-'Alamiyya al-Islamiyya)

Feature	Traditional Organizations	System of GIR Squadrons
Size	up to several thousands	1–10
Objective	overthrow of the government and formation of an Islamic regime in a specific state	resistance against occupiers and their allies wherever possible
Program	Jihad organization	Global Islamic Resistance Call
Leadership	central emir and leadership	general informational guidance for squadrons globally and a specific emir for each squadron
Financing	often interest-bound financing from abroad, donations	primarily self-financing, donations; at a later stage distribution of foreign assets and treasuries of overthrown regimes
Allegiance	pledge of allegiance (<i>bay'a</i>) to a central emir	unmediated contract (<i>'ahd</i>) with Allah and contract of obedience to a squadron's emir

Source: Al-Suri, *Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya*, Chapter 8, Subsection 5

Interestingly, al-Suri has formulated an explicit work mode for virtual leadership through instrumentalized communicative action, which becomes clear in his organizational theory in chapter eight of his massive encyclopaedia. Al-Suri stresses that belief (*iman*) is the main starter of action (*'amal*). That means, words ignite deeds and should substitute organizational guidance. “Secret incitement cells” play an essential role in his concept. Three to four people shall look for ways to publish and propagate, for example through mailing lists. They redistribute propaganda of guidance centres (media companies), or translate texts and statements into other languages. They must be flexible and innovative, for not always are the conditions in their favour. Muslims only “need to believe in the idea” – “Incitement is the twin brother of jihad and its impulse”, says al-Suri, which relates to a classical concept, namely that of *jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan* (jihad by the pen and the statement) and *jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan* (jihad by the sword and the spear).

According to al-Suri, certain factors determine the success of propaganda. There must be a central authority that issues agendas and topics. Moreover, successful propaganda relies on the voluntary participation of the masses. Every individual, according to his or her ability can

form a “general propaganda cell”. Resistance and propaganda takes place on all levels of society. Muslims should not eat fast food, buy foreign cars, spray propagandistic graffiti, use the Internet, incite friends and kin, etc. They are linked by a common name, method and goal. Old and sick people, normally exempt from jihad, must also participate in incitement and propaganda. After all, “resistance is the battle of a nation, not the struggle of elite!”³²² Thus, Jihadi propaganda must dominate the Islamic discourse, claims al-Suri.

Al-Suri also devises how to exploit fears and complexes that concern Muslims. The “fear from hell-fire” should be hammered into Muslim minds, i.e. that they will roast in hell, if they do not participate in the jihad. **The manipulation of transcendental fears from divine punishment is a major feature of the theological aspect of communicative guidance within Jihadi communities.**³²³ Since medieval times, jihad propaganda has “relied on every form of promise and threat through poetry, prose and rhetoric.”



Subforum “School of the Sheikh Abu Musab al-Suri (may Allah grant him freedom)” on the popular jihad forum al-Shumukh, November 2010. This section contains texts and discussions around al-Suri’s jihad concept.



... however, the al-Suri sub-forum is password protected!

³²² Youth, intellectuals, politicians, clerics, workers and all classes of society are supposed to take part in jihad, argues al-Suri. In parallel, they should be addressed in their entirety, as well as individually and according to their education and classes, i.e. according to their respective cultural, intellectual and social backgrounds.

³²³ See Philipp Holtmann,, “The Concept of Deterrence in Arab and Muslim Thought - Classical Islamic Paradigms of Deterrence and their Expression in Modern Islamist Thought,” working paper, Interdisciplinary Centre Herzliya (IDC), June 2012.

3.b Other Jihadi Strategists and their Media Jihad Concepts

In regards to media and propaganda, many Jihadi thinkers argue similar to al-Suri. Prominent media strategists like Abu Bakr Naji, Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, Anwar al-Awlaqi, Abu Jandal al-Azdi, Abu Jihad al-Masri, Abu Ubayd al-Quraishi and Ayman al-Zawahiri have developed strategic guidelines how to lead psychological warfare and exploit the modern media for this purpose. Anonymous thinkers like Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim and Abd al-Rahman Salum al-Rawashidi have described practical and participative ways to use discussion forums for propaganda. Grassroot activists like the U.S. citizen Zacharia Adam Chesser have further developed central media precepts. In summary, Jihadi media strategists have for the last years been stressing that propaganda is more effective than bombs and that a “newscast will be a more lethal weapon than several armored brigades” (al-Qurashi).³²⁴

Especially when the western media is turned against the enemy it becomes effective, they reason. Until a few years ago, online supporters were rebuked as layabouts. But today, online jihad has the same status as physical jihad. The underlying idea is that virtual activity creates terrorist reality.

3.b.i Abu Jandal al-Azdi and the Concept to Exploit U.S. Psychology

Several Jihadi key-thinkers argue similar to al-Suri in regards to the role of media propaganda and decentralized jihad. Yet, none of them has developed the depth, holistic understand and pragmatism that al-Suri shows. He is an intellectual forerunner. The Saudi scholar Fares Ahmad al-Shuwayl al-Zahrani better known by his nom de guerre Abu Jandal al-Azdi in March 2004 published an article titled “The Al-Qaeda Organization and the Asymmetric War”, which was supposed to be part of a longer and continuing series. Al-Azdi was a member of the media triumvirate of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia together with the Jihadi media icons and organizational leaders Abd al-Aziz bin Muqrin (k.2004) and Yusuf al-'Uyairi (k.2003). He was arrested in 2004. Al-Azdi describes how al-Qaeda successfully exploits the American psychology:

“The United States reacts in a manner of a cowboy’s revenge, instead of taking the time to study the problem before retaliation. Al-Qaeda managed following the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania to make the huge American machinery serve it as a company for public

³²⁴ See Jarret Brachman, “Watching the Watchers“, Foreign Policy, February 17, 2010, accessed February 17, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/11/watching_the_watchers.

relations. As well as following the September 11 attacks, it managed to make the United States look like it was waging a global war against Islam, and hence it managed to recruit the Islamic world against America.”³²⁵

Jihadi strategists exert great efforts to devise new leadership structures based on communication. People can be motivated and guided without central authorities, they reason. Virtual jihad plays a central role for this concept. A few years ago, online supporters were rebuked as layabouts. But today, online jihad has the same status as physical jihad. The underlying idea is that virtual activity creates terrorist reality. This is rooted in the classical concept of *jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan* (jihad by the pen) that served like a collective mobilizer for *jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan* (jihad by the sword) in classical Islam.

Al-Suri believes that only prolonged indoctrination leads to affirmative action. “Incitement is the twin brother of jihad and its impulse”, he says. Al-Azdi balances the role of the pen versus the sword. He draws on a theological interpretation by the mediaeval Islamic scholar Zayn al-Din 'Umar ibn al-Wirdi (d. 749 Hijri). “A debate between the sword and the pen” was interpreted by al-Azdi and translated and published by the Jihadi media company “Tibyan Publications”.³²⁶ Al-Azdi comments:

“The sword and the pen are instruments of action and speech. They are the support of nations; any nation bereaved of them will lack in strength. They are the pillars of authority that declare who shall be lowered and who shall be raised [in status] ... so I convened a court gathering to judge between them, wherein I [...] vocalized their inner state.

... whoever raises the pen without the sword becomes lowly, and whoever who raises the sword without the pen goes astray and makes mistakes, but the one who raises them both together will be guided and reach his destination. My Allah have mercy on Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah for he said, “The religion will only be established by a guiding book and an assisting sword (**kitab yahdi wa saif yansur**), and your Lord suffices for you as a Guide and Helper.”

³²⁵ In 2003, al-Azdi succeeded the Yussuf al-'Uyairi, leader of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, who until then had been the leading ideologue of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and who was killed on May 31, 2003 by Saudi security forces. Al-Azdi was imprisoned by Saudi authorities in November 2004 and could not finish his media project as planned. The article was supposed to be the first in a series of publications. See Reuven Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD: Between Martyrdom and Mass Destruction,” in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology 2* (2005), ed. Hillel Fradkin et al. (Washington: The Hudson Institute in Washington D.C., 2005), 74-86.

³²⁶ Abu Dujanah, “A debate between the sword and the pen: Abu Jandal al-Azdi”, November 4, 2005, accessed November 2010, <http://talk.islamicnetwork.com/showthread.php?t=3223>.

The *Kitab yahdi, saif yansur*-doctrine is a central theological element of communicative guidance. The text above shows that the pen-versus-sword jihad discourse (*jihad bi-l-qalam; jihad bi-l-saif*) is merely another variation of the doctrine. The doctrine and the discourses around it are important virtual guidance patterns. These patterns are expressed in three communicative areas of online jihad: The semiotic-aesthetic, ritualistic and theological areas of online jihad, i.e. through pictures, songs, discussions and Islamic juridical opinions. The “guiding book and a conquering sword” doctrine resurfaces in the writing of other Jihadi media and military strategists as well, one prominent example being the *Mu'askar al-Battar* magazine by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, which was published between 2001 and 2004.³²⁷ But also analogies to this concept blossom in virtual space, which are tailored to fit enthusiastic supporters and audiences, who can better understand and apply this doctrine if it is integrated into their perception of media and conflict, as the next example shows.

3.b.ii Hamid Bin Abdullah al-'Ali and the “Marriage between Kalashnikov and Keyboard”

A similar concept to the one discussed above is reflected in the “Dialogue between the keyboard and the Kalashnikov”, which are both modern icons of jihad.³²⁸ They serve as allegories for physical jihad and media jihad, or the “guiding book” and the “conquering sword” respectively.³²⁹ The author, a Kuwaiti Jihad Ideologue named Hamid Bin Abdallah al-Ali, tells Jihadi propaganda through poems and magic stories. The author seems to fulfil a distinguished virtual leadership role. He has been described as “the bridge between ideology and action”.³³⁰ In al-Ali’s popular tale, a tired fighter, who also is an “E-correspondent” (*murasil*) of a Jihadi organization, returns to his trench.

³²⁷ Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia published between January and October 2004 an unbelievable number of 22 issues of this online-magazine. In parallel, they also published the ideologically guiding magazine *Saut al-Jihad*. Main media activists were Yusuf al-'Uyairi, Abd al-'Aziz bin Muqrin and Abu Jandal al-Azdi. All issues of *Muaskar al-Battar* (Camp of the Cutting [Sword of the Prophet]), accessed July 28, 2012, <http://battarpages.atspace.com/>.

³²⁸ Hamid Bin Abdallah al-Ali, *Hiwar al-Kalashnikov wa lauhat al-mafatih*, December 7, 2006, accessed December 15, 2010, http://www.h-alali.cc/m_open.php?id=4ccf36fc-d728-1029-a62a-0010dc91cf69. Due to the dynamic distribution process we can find the tale as well on Islamic mainstream websites for youth and children (such as www.fanateq.com and <http://krmchat.com>), but also on al-Tawhed-Website of the Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. The “**Kalashnikov and Keyboard**” interpretation of media jihad is very popular among Jihadi sympathizers.

³²⁹ A central theological command doctrine that is attributed to medieval Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya, for further discussions see below.

³³⁰ Chris Heffelfinger, “Kuwaiti Cleric Hamid al-Ali: The Bridge Between Ideology and Action,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5 (2007), April 26, 2007, accessed November 2010, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4112](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4112).

There is a small hut in the trench, which contains a camp-bed, a single light bulb and a small table. On the table are a computer-screen, a keyboard, and a notebook. The fighter puts his Kalashnikov on the table, too.³³¹ Then he falls asleep to the sound of the rain. While the fighter sleeps, a conversation between the keyboard and the Kalashnikov develops. There is an erotic component in their relationship, for the Kalashnikov at a certain point proposes to the keyboard. Thus, physical jihad falls in love with media jihad.

“Kalashnikov: You are most gracious. I want to engage you. Will you accept me?

Keyboard (with a shy but youthful voice): You are irresistible. But what is my dowry?

Kalashnikov: Your dowry are ten infidel crusaders...”

The trench suddenly comes under enemy fire. The fighter kills ten enemies with the gun, then returns to the little shelter in the trench. The Kalashnikov informs the fighter about its marriage-plans, earns his admiration, and the fighter marries both of them (*fa ‘aqada al-nikah bainahu wa baina lauhath al-mafatih*). “*Nikah*” means marriage ceremony. As a result,

“they create a son whom they name “might of Islam” (‘Izz al-Islam). Thus, the jihad reconciled with the propaganda; the weapon hugged the awakened spirit of jihad, trouble and sorrow were removed, the ordeal of the Umma passed, the discord stopped, there was complete unity in this fusion.”³³²

The goal of the story is to create identification with the “keyboard” and the “Kalashnikov”. In socio-anthropological terms this could be interpreted as a narrative *meso-ritual* (following Bergesen’s concept) that is supported by iconic figures (integrating Peirce’s semiotic approach). The goal is to build up a para-social relationship that draws the recipient right into the story, which has been widely circulated on youth forums. The circulation is itself an immensely important aspect. As an activity, it relies on the participation and ritualistic interaction of sympathizers, who exert what I have called mutual leadership. Jihadi forums play a major role in the distribution process. Al-Suri has called such groups “secret inciters”. Ritualistic, religious-transcendental and aesthetic aspects of virtual guidance come to the fore,

³³¹ The author al-Hilali further describes the environment in a very dichotomist way: The trench lies in an ancient neighbourhood of the Iraqi city Fallujah that witnessed the glorious Islamic civilization, but now it is plagued by infidel crusaders [U.S. troops]. Fortunately, there is the Internet, which is the only possible media to distribute the message of Islam and jihad. In contrast, the western crusading media is judaized and contaminated by lies and anti-Islamic propaganda, which tells us a lot about his personal awareness, but also about popular Muslim resentments of western media, which he uses and echoes in this story.

³³² Al-Hilali, *Hiwar al-Kalashnikov wa lauhath al-mafatih*.

when secret inciters orientate themselves at the popular “Kalashnikov and Keyboard” interpretation of media jihad. Activists ritualistically storm discussion forums and try to dominate discussions. They orientate themselves at the quasi-sacred guiding doctrine. They create iconic representations of jihad such as wallpapers, graphics and gifs.

3.b.iii Anwar al-Awlaqi and Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim on Secret Incitement Cells and Media Activism

Other strategists like Anwar al-Awlaki and Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim have developed concepts that concern ritualistic communicative command.³³³ This includes specific virtual Jihadi interaction-rituals and Jihadi discourses on online discussion forums. Examples are discursive Jihadi codes that are used on Internet discussion forums which we will discuss in detail in the chapter “rituals of online jihad.” The anonymous Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim in “39 ways to serve jihad and to participate in it” details the formation of “media-teams” and “media-campaigns” on jihad forums. Al-Salim suggests small groups of three to four people that unite and infiltrate discussion forums. These groups should become active on popular Islamic and non-Islamic forums to publish material and incite discussions around jihad. Every member adopts a fake virtual name. The discussion topics are incitement to jihad; refuting critics of jihad; strengthening jihad-awareness; and rooting jihad-theology in the minds; Secondly, individuals should become active as hackers to attack and destroy hostile sites. For al-Salim, “Electronic Jihad” is a “blessed field” with two areas, namely the discussion and incitement on forums and the hacking of hostile sites and systems.³³⁴

The U.S.-Yemenite cleric Anwar al-Awlaqi copies al-Salim’s main ideas how to support “WWW-Jihad”:³³⁵

“The internet has become a great medium for spreading the call of Jihad and following the news of the mujahideen. Some ways in which the brothers and sisters could be ‘internet mujahideen’ is by contributing in one or more of the following ways: Establishing discussion forums that offer a free, uncensored medium for posting information relating to Jihad; Establishing email lists to share information with interested brothers and sisters; Posting or

³³³ Siehe, zum Beispiel, “Abu Turab al-Sa’idi,” “*The lone wolf...al-dhi'b al-fardi...al-khatr al-kabir ala America, silsila ra'i'a*,” May 14, 2011, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=39276..>

³³⁴ Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim, „39 wasila li khidmat al-jihad wa-l-musharaka fihi,” published 2003, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=39>.

³³⁵ Anwar al-Awlaki, „44 Ways of Supporting Jihad“, 2009, accessed December 20, 2012, <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?p=161674>.

emailing Jihad literature and news; Setting up websites to cover specific areas of Jihad, such as: mujahideen news, Muslim POWs, and Jihad literature.”

3.b.iv Abu al-Harith al-Ansari: Bleeding Out the West through Successful Media Warfare

Regarding psychological warfare, other Jihadi strategists have developed interesting approaches. Abu Bakr Naji, Abd al-Rahman Salum al-Rawashidi and especially Abu al-Harith al-Ansari witness to this. The media strategists Naji and al-Ansari have understood that western superpowers surround themselves with a „deceptive media halo“ of invincibility. Therefore, Jihadis should create themselves an „aura“ of undefeatable power by intensive propagation.³³⁶ William McCants argues that the theology has an imperative effect on Jihadis such as al-Ansari, “who act strictly according to the Quran and the Sunna.” At the example of al-Ansari’s theology-based military strategy McCants argues that “Islamic scripture determines Jihadi behaviour.”³³⁷ In his book “*Irshad al-sa’ul ila hurub al-rasul*” al-Ansari analyzes different forms of warfare (economic, military, secret) according to the examples of the Islamic ancestors and describes media warfare (*al-harb al-i’lamiyya*) as an important Islamic war form. Theologically, media-warfare is rooted in classical Islam and sanctioned by the Prophet Muhammad. Strategically, al-Ansari observes and learns from Western examples of propaganda and intimidation, but differentiates western “bad” and Jihadi “good” intentions. By definition, media-warfare is the art of winning war without fighting. It is based on intimidation of the enemy, justification of the own goals, the liquefaction of terms such as “extremism” and “terrorism”, pretending successes and lying about losses, “as if the war had already ended and the [enemy] troops had surrendered, but in reality is has not even started”. In addition, media-warfare aims to [key-words highlighted].³³⁸

³³⁶ Siehe Abu Bakr Naji, “*Idarat al-tawahhush*,” 2005. Also available in an English translation by William McCants: The Management of Savagery, Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint, <http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/naji.asp>; see also Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, *Irshad al-sa’ul ila hurub al-rasul*, 2008, available on the Internet at different websites and forums. Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim, „39 wasila li khidmat al-jihad wa-l-musharaka fihi“ (“39 Ways to serve jihad and participate in it,” published in 2003 on a website close to al-Qaeda, named *al-Farouq*); Anwar al-Awlaki, „44 Ways of Supporting Jihad“, 2009, also available on the Internet at www.nefafoundation.org. For a detailed analysis of the media strategy of Naji see Abdelasiem El Difraoui, *Al Qaida par l’image ou la prophétie du martyre: Une analyse politique de la propagande audiovisuelle du jihad global* (PhD diss., *Universités à l’IEP de Paris*, 2010).

³³⁷ William McCants, „Prophetic Precedents for Various Types of Warfare“, *Jihadica Blog*, August 5, 2008, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.jihadica.com/prophetic-precedents-for-various-types-of-warfare/>.

³³⁸ Al-Ansari, *Irshad al-sa’ul ila hurub al-rasul*, 12.

“**gain control** over the hearts and minds of the enemy (*al-saitara 'ala 'aql wa qalb al-khasm*) of the opponent by creating a fogginess in his understanding and imagination and an aura before his eyes, which disables his ability to estimate the force of his enemy. The aiming side can thus **control the mentality and spirituality** (*al-saitara al-'aqaliyya wa-l-ruhiyya*) of the aimed-at side. . . Truly too, the media-warfare in summary is based on lies, deception and camouflage. But in Islamic theory ... it relies on very tangible truths. And even if some understandings such as “war is deception” enter the Islamic concept of media-warfare, then it is in the narrowest sense and only in order to arrive at truth.”

In a second book, “*Al-Usul al-jihadiyya*,” authored in 2008, al-Ansari confirms McCant’s thesis that doctrines distilled from Islamic scripture determine Jihadi behaviour.³³⁹ However, this claim needs some specification. Al-Ansari propagates communicational guidance and a linkage between media warfare and physical operations. In this sense, Quran verse 4:84 crowns his book, just as this verse crowns al-Suri’s *magnum opus*. The verse stands for nothing else than al-Qaeda’s participative Management by Objectives leadership style, namely communicative leadership by mutual and participative propaganda activities; the desired fragmentation of larger organizational structures into smallest cells; and the operational principle of individualized terrorism.

*“Then fight in God's cause—Thou art held responsible Only for thyself—And rouse the Believers. It may be that God Will restrain the fury Of the Unbelievers; For God is the strongest In might and in punishment.”*³⁴⁰

From al-Ansari’s point of view, which represents “mainstream” salafi-Jihadi doctrine, the verse epitomizes the following: It is imperative to engage individually in armed operations under God’s command. This motivates followers. The best way to motivate followers is to engage in media jihad, document, and praise and announce operations. Moreover, the strategic doctrine epitomized by this verse is that single perpetrators or disconnected small cells are supposed to perpetrate terrorist operations and be guided by a common ideological umbrella through Jihadi media. By failing to fulfill these stipulations, however, Muslims become guilty of disobedience to God, according to Jihadi doctrine. Proceeding this way – and applying other strategic concepts of major proponents of Jihadi strategy, such as Abu

³³⁹ Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, *Al-Usul al-jihadiyya*, published on the Internet in July 2008; archive of the Online Jihad project of the University of Vienna.

³⁴⁰ *Surat al-Nisa'* 4:84, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00411.htm>.

Bakr Naji, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin, Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi – will demoralize the enemy. Strategists and ideologues thus become major communicative leaders. The second piece of evidence for the inextricable linkage between communicative actions and jihad that is perceived by al-Ansari can be found in the introduction of his book “*Al-Usul al-jihadiyya*.” Al-Ansari dedicates the book to, from his view, ten major proponents of militant Islamic struggle. The list is structured hierarchically, starting with the central Jihadi organizations and their leaders. The list includes further down on the hierarchy especially praiseworthy media activists, which proves two points: Firstly, media activists are not perceived as layabouts. Secondly, they are part of the chain of hierarchy and command of global jihad.

3.b.v Abu Bakr Naji: Destroying the West’s “Deceptive Media Halo”

The conceptual outline for an international Islamic revolution by the anonymous Jihadi strategist Abu Bakr Naji, which he presents in his book *Idarat al-tawahhush – Akhtar marhala satamurr al-umma*, contains long discussions on media warfare and leadership issues.³⁴¹ The book is written in a clear analytical tone that integrates Islamic formulas and doctrines where necessary to create a Jihadi frame. The main argument of Naji’s strategy is that the enemy’s „deceptive media halo“ (*hala i'lamiyya kadhiba*) must be destroyed, the enemy must be forced to overstretch himself militarily, Jihadi leadership must be reformed, Jihadi groups should occupy the badly controlled geographical spaces, which result from the West’s military over-expansion, and then start to administrate these regions of chaos (management of savagery).³⁴² This requires following basic principles, as Naji puts forward in the introduction of his 113-pages geo-strategic analysis. For all their gigantic military and political power, the two poles USA and Russia could not impose their rule on faraway (Muslim) countries without a “deceptive media halo” that portrays them as invincible, as able to reach every place on earth with their politics or militaries, and it makes them believe that they are invested with god-like supernatural powers. Apostate and tyrannical Muslim leaders

³⁴¹ The following analysis of the Abu Bakr Naji’s media strategy is based on the Arabic text and the English translation. It will be referred to “Naji, English translation by McCants,” the page numbers will refer to McCant’s very good translation. Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarat al-tawahhush: Akhtar marhala satamurr biha al-umma*, accessed July 31, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr>, and Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The most critical stage through which the Umma will pass*, English translation by William McCants, accessed July 31, 2012, <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/olin/images/Management%20of%20Savagery%20-%2005-23-2006.pdf>.

³⁴² See also Mark Stout, “Where are the New Salafi Jihadi Military Thinkers?,” January 7, 2010, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://onwarandwords.wordpress.com/2010/01/07/where-are-the-new-salafi-jihadi-military-thinkers/>.

of satellite states have succumbed to the “central powers,” especially in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries. However, the central powers, first and foremost USA, have fallen prey to own false media deception, i.e. that they can exert worldwide rule by interventions, proxies and alliances. As an effect, they have overstretched themselves strategically, economically politically and militarily, which will lead to their downfall, argues Naji. Naji quotes here the U.S. American author Paul Kennedy on the effects of U.S. military over-expansion.³⁴³ Due to the superpowers’ “media fraud” (*dajl i'lami*) many people worldwide do not only fear their all-encompassing power, but also love it and believe in slogans of freedom, equality and justice. However, people will soon find out that there is nothing but moral and social decay behind these slogans, and that this decay will greatly contribute to the internal downfall of the superpowers. By attacking economic targets directly, causing economic crisis mixed with social and moral misery, the downfall of central powers and satellite states can be accelerated, and within this chaos, Jihadis must be able to effectively deal with the “management of savagery,” which resembles the situation in Medina on the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century, when Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. Medina at that time was governed by two pagan tribes (*Banu al-Khazraj* and *Banu 'Aws*), who supported the Muslims and later became known as “The Helpers” (*al-Ansar*) of Muhammad. Naji argues that the rule of these two tribes also resembled a pagan “management of savagery,” which, however, benefited Muhammad greatly to develop his power and overturn their rule from within with a mixed political propagandistic and military strategy. In modern times, Jihadi elites must be prepared to repeat this example, argues Naji, by fighting and propagating effectively. Accordingly, Naji dedicates his book to “two groups: the group of those who specialize in the arts which the study discusses and the group of the leaders located in the regions of the management of savagery.”³⁴⁴ In contrast to al-Suri, also Naji proves to be a defender of Jihadi elitism. The popular-participative leadership element through self-responsibility is missing in his approach. Efficient and trustworthy leaders should manage, propagate and fight in parallel, Naji states.³⁴⁵ Naji’s analysis, with its brilliant English translation by William McCants from 2006, is especially relevant in the light of late developments in Syria, Libanon, Egypt, Bahrain and other Arab states (as of July 2012).

“When savagery (*tawahhush*) happens in several regions—whether we administer them or they are neighboring regions or further away—a spontaneous kind of polarization begins to

³⁴³ Naji, English translation by McCants, 18.

³⁴⁴ Naji, English translation by McCants, 10.

³⁴⁵ Naji, English translation by McCants, 85.

happen among the people who live in the region of chaos. The people, seeking security, rally around the great personages of the country or a party organization or a Jihadi organization or a military organization composed of the remainders of the army or the police of the regimes of apostasy. In this situation, the first step of polarizing these groups begins so that they may enter into mutual professions of loyalty with the people of truth by establishing administrative groups that are subordinate to us in the understanding of how to manage the regions which are under their control, along with undertaking **proper media propaganda** concerning the situation of our regions with respect to the degree of security, justice by means of implementing the sharia, solidarity, preparation, training, and advancement.”³⁴⁶

Naji argues that physical and media jihad are inextricably connected. Naji’s reformed leadership concept deserves mentioning, since we have already understood that physical mechanisms of leadership correlate with virtual ones, i.e. media jihad and its communicative and virtual leadership paradigms. This starts with very basic principles, where Naji argues for God’s supreme position (*'amr Allah*) in the communicational-transcendental command and control line. He integrates earthly and divine guidance (*qiyada* and *hidaya*) with mythological themes of salvation.³⁴⁷ Despite his stronger focus on Jihadi elites, Naji continues in the style of al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri regarding the severe self-critique of the Jihadi movement’s past leadership approaches at the example of the fractions within the Egyptian Islamic Group in the 1990s. Naji’s suggestion of new behavioral and organizational patterns is his genuine contribution to the Jihadi strategic discourse.³⁴⁸ Naji argues that psychological guidance through propaganda together with prolonged terrorist, guerilla and military strategies, will influence recipients and make them obedient to the Jihadi propagandist religious call (*da'wa*). In parallel, this will help to destroy the West’s “deceptive media halo.” The concepts proposed by Naji entail the sophisticated linkage between communicational

³⁴⁶ Naji, English translation by McCants, 110.

³⁴⁷ “Following the time-tested principles of military combat will shorten for us the long years in which we might suffer the corrupting influences of rigidity and random behavior. Truly, abandoning random behavior and adopting intellectual, academic methods and experimental military principles and actually implementing them and applying military science will facilitate our achievement of the goals without complication and enable us to develop and improve the execution (of our plans), by the permission of God.

In a previous essay, I wrote about the substantive preparations undertaken by that group of Islamic activists whom I consider to be carrying out the command of God (*qa'iman bi amr Allah*) in this age – that group which, with God’s permission, will be granted victory. The essay touched on the program that the group advocates for extricating the Umma from the degradation that afflicts it, so that the Umma may once again steer humanity toward the path of divine guidance (*li qiyadat al-bashariya li-l-hadaya*) and salvation.” Naji, English translation by McCants, 6.

³⁴⁸ Naji continues: “The teaching of these principles to individuals opens a wide vista before their eyes for creativity and perhaps extraordinary leaders will emerge from among them who will write their theories in books of modern history, especially since the books of this art in our time ignore the fact that most of its fundamental principles were taken from the ways of our forefathers.” Naji, English translation by McCants, 64-65.

control modes and actual warfare, and will become more refined in upcoming studies, as he promises [important elements highlighted]:

“**Prolonging the length of the conflict** and creating a power capable of **directing strong strikes** inclines the enemy toward reconciliation; naturally, from his side only. Directing strikes against his economic interests and threatening the interests, the economy, and the luxuries of those who support him—**using a good media justification**, as we set forth in our detailed study—makes the enemy pullback (to protect) the interests which he possesses. This **deterrent force** also makes his troops think that fighting under the banner of their leaders will not ensure their survival and that they will die for the sake of nothing. The stage of thinking about leaving begins or, at the very least, there is a consideration of flight and awaiting an overturn of the balances (of power). Thus, we find that the people that are most hostile to this **missionary call** later become sincere soldiers for it, offering up their spirits in its path.”³⁴⁹

3.b.vi 'Abd al-Rahman Salum al-Rawashidi: The Destructive Effects of Media Jihad at the Iraqi Example

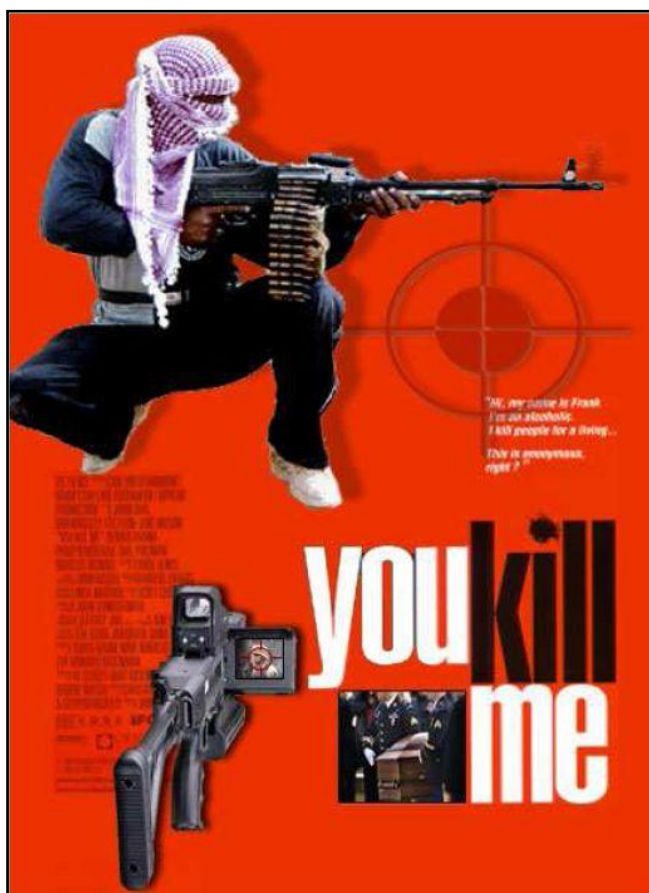
Abd al-Rahman Salum al-Rawashidi, who has adopted central pillars of al-Suri's media strategy, has written a 221 pages study on media-jihad in Iraq.³⁵⁰ However, al-Rawashidi—like Abu Bakr Naji's - seems to focus more on elites than al-Suri, who tries to integrate the rank and file of Jihadi supporters into a decentralized individualized terrorist strategy. Instead, al-Rawashidi advises to reform the existent leadership structures in the field and in the media sector. The Iraqi example, argues al-Rawashidi, has proven the effectiveness of Jihadi media warfare. Al-Rawashidi argues that media jihad is more destructive than bombs. The U.S.-appropriation of media should therefore be carefully studied; a new Islamic awareness of media jihad should be raised, he says. Propaganda and media-warfare are essential to the successful outcome of battles. An important learning is that media-campaigns precede actual campaigns, actually produce them.³⁵¹ Similar concepts are already being taught and practised on Jihadi forums. Therefore, al-Rawashid does not propose a novel strategy, but seems to refine existing patterns on the basis of his observations. Many discussion participants on

³⁴⁹ Naji, English translation by McCants, 197.

³⁵⁰ Abd al-Rahman Salum al-Rawashidi, *Al-Jihad al-I'lami ... ta'sil wa taf'il*, October 30, 2008, accessed July 31, 2012, <http://www.haqnews.net/news.aspx?id=19530>. Al-Rawashidi puts more emphasis on elite-propaganda than al-Suri, who argues for a bottom-up approach. Yet, the central idea as well as his writing style strongly remind of al-Suri's tenets.

³⁵¹ Al-Rawashidi, *Al-I'lam al-Jihadi*, 6.

Jihadi forums already stress the mutually guiding character of media-campaigns, and have in fact done so, before al-Rawashidi's book was published online. In fact, the media-influence in the U.S., such as of Hollywood movies and their marketing, has been the focus of prolonged discussions and design competitions.³⁵² The activists who dedicate themselves to the realization of this strategy call themselves „media-jihad-development-units“ (*wahdat tatwir al-i'lam al-Jihadi*).



Design from a competition to create Jihadi images that are similar to Hollywood-Posters.

Mulim.Net Forum, accessed December 15, 2010,

<http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=254096>.

Al-Rawashidi mentions in his book, like numerous other media strategists,³⁵³ the twin pillars of guidance through theology at the one hand, and armed struggle and terrorist operations on

³⁵² This concerns the „media-jihad-development-units“ (*wahdat tatwir al-i'lam al-Jihadi*) on muslm.net forum, which have been active for years. Concerning the **appropriation of Hollywood advertisement strategies**, see the competition on muslm.net to design Jihadi propaganda poster based on hollywood-movie posters and by muslm.net's "media jihad battaillon". "Al-Battar al-Iraqi," "Al-Mawdu': Katibat al-jihad al-i'lami/ahdath posterat aflam Hollywood," October 23, 2009, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=254096>.

³⁵³

the other. Translated into the information age al-Rawashidi argues that “divine” communication (i.e. verses on warfare from the Quran and Islamic theology in new social media) guide people to action and are central to building up quasi-transcendental leadership structures and command and control mechanisms. Armed actions on the other hand strengthen the effectiveness of propaganda, which is clad in sacred stipulations, and retranslate into divinely inspired leadership. God is regarded as the ultimate leader, whose commands are encapsulated in a selective reading and interpretation of the Quran, Islamic tradition and law. An especially strong epitome of the concept of alternative and autonomous communicational guidance is the doctrine “**a book guides and a sword conquers**,”³⁵⁴ which al-Rawashidi fully integrates into a specific Jihadi sub-frame:

“Religious order will not be established but by these two mighty pillars [“book,” i.e. the Quran, represents media jihad, and “sword” stands for armed operations]. Not one of them will be suspended or marginalized at the cost of the other, but they go along in parallel. The ultimate goal is to enable (*tamkin*) the qualified and great Islamic Community (*umma*) to guide the world (*qiyadat al-'alam*). God, may he be glorified and exalted, chose to extricate the servants from serving under servants, and instead to serve the Lord of servants and to allow them to exit from the oppression of religious orders towards the justice of Islam, and from the narrowness of this world towards the hereafter.”³⁵⁵

The command-doctrine “a book that guides and sword that conquers” is central to an understanding of the theological pillar of virtual leadership, which then enables us to understand further –less visible, but inherently existent- guiding doctrines of online salafi-jihadism. Islamic authority in the information age, as we will argue in the third main chapter, is characterized by functional, spatial and mediative pluralizations of Muslim authority. This refers to changes in the social purposes and ends of religious knowledge seeking; changes of spaces in which Muslims seek authority; and changes of textual forms, figures and icons through which Muslims seek authority.³⁵⁶ These changes of Muslim authority, naturally, facilitate the build-up of communicative guidance structures within extremist virtual networks that are built around doctrinal-theological information nodes (i.e. popular theological doctrines and religious-doctrinal clusters in the Jihadi web, besides the inter-related symbolic

³⁵⁴ Originally, a doctrine by the medieval Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya.

³⁵⁵ Al-Rawashidi, *Al-I'lam al-Jihadi*, 118.

³⁵⁶ Peter Mandaville, “Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 24(2007): 101-115.

and ritualistic nodes). A side note on the analytical procedure: We will discuss the theological aspect of communicative guidance at the example of the doctrine “a book which guides and a sword that conquers” in detail in the chapter “Theology of Online Jihad.” The main source will be al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia’s online magazine *Mu’askar al-Battar*, which was published between January and October 2004 (22 issues). Each issue contained an chapter titled “a book that guides and a sword that conquers.”

3.b.vii Abu 'Ubayd al-Qurashi. Drawing on the Works of Revolutionaries and Military Strategists

Al-Qurashi argues in his short treatise that revolutionary struggle has five dimensions, which are political; military; socio-economic; cultural-ideological; psychological; and international. Successful revolutionaries must address all these dimensions in theory and practice. Al-Qurashi recommends reading a wide range of authors ranging from Clausewitz, Regis Debray, Che Guevara and Mao Zedong to Carlos Marighella. Although he orientates himself strongly at social-revolutionary wars and literature of the 20th century, al-Qurashi says that he intends to write a future study on past social-revolutionary mistakes and successes in comparison to present Jihadi struggles. The military strategy that al-Qurashi proposes is quite old-fashioned in terms of the changed geopolitical, ideological and security landscape of the 21st century in comparison to the late 20th century. It is divided into three stages. Firstly “the stage of planning and conspiracy”: This includes the build-up of a clandestine revolutionary organization together with small scale attacks against the system. Secondly, “the stage of search for balance [of power]”: The organization is divided into a cellular system, which slightly reminds of an “individualized terrorism,” while ongoing attacks shall weaken the enemy and provoke reprisal attacks. Thirdly, “the stage of strategic counter-attack (*al-hujum al-madad al-istratiji*)”: During this stage the revolutionary army is supposed to be transformed into an organized army which is capable of counter-attacking the system on all levels. In the cultural dimension, al-Qurashi orientates himself at the Cuban example. The goal is to gain the upper hand in the cultural struggle, and thus popularity. “The revolutionaries in Cuba did the same thing. They used every available media to win the cultural-ideological battle. The goal was to present the revolutionaries as friends of a shared cause – and their enemies as having nothing in their hands.”³⁵⁷ Furthermore, al-Qurashi orientates himself at modern U.S. military doctrine. “For instance, citing an October 1989

³⁵⁷ Abu 'Ubayd al-Qurashi, *Al-Hurub al-thawriyya*, accessed August 6, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=kfjxiygb>.

article published in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, [al-] Qurashi explained to al Qaeda the notion of “fourth generation,” or asymmetric, warfare: “The military targets will not be confined to the destruction of regular armies but will involve the destruction of popular support for fighters within the enemy community.” He cited approvingly the authors' prediction that the ‘newscast will be a more lethal weapon than several armored brigades.’”³⁵⁸

Al-Qurashi recommends psychological warfare basics by the 1970s Brazilian urban guerilla strategist Carlos Marighella. “In order to win the psychological battle it is imperative to have an effective strategy. There are many examples which the researcher can look at, in different specialized books on guerilla warfare. For example, Marighella concentrates on the activation of a climate of collapse and failure (*ajwa' al-inhiyar*) as an essential goal of military operations. Such a climate causes the slow and gradual decline of the psychology of the militaries and the civilians who support the government. This again causes a paralysis, which the revolutionary movement can exploit.”³⁵⁹

3.b.viii Muhammad Khalil al-Hukayma aka Abu Jihad al-Masri: The Myth of Delusion and How to Learn about Communicative Guidance from CIA

Muhammad Khalil al-Hukayma aka Abu Jihad al-Masri (allegedly k. in 2008) is a former member of the Egyptian *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*. Because of his relevant role in the development of media jihad, a few more words may be said about his biography. Al-Hukayma was arrested for his alleged involvement in the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat in 1981, but was later released and in 1987 went via Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan to participate in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets. Shortly afterwards, al-Hukayma founded together with Abu Talal al-Qasimi *al-Gama'a's* media committee in Afghanistan, which published the - among Arab fighters of several factions - popular magazine “*al-Murabitun*” (in fact, the mouthpiece of *al-Gama'a*). Furthermore, he was a staunch proponent of Jihadi frontline journalism, which influences Jihadi propaganda strategy until today, and shot and edited several Jihadi documentaries during his time. A brief stay in Europe was followed by his incarceration in Great Britain in the 1990s, before al-Hukayma went back to Afghanistan after 2001. In 2006, al-Hukayma formally joined al-Qaeda central

³⁵⁸ Jarret Brachman, “Watching the Watchers,” *Foreign Policy* November 2010, accessed August 7, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/11/watching_the_watchers?page=full.

³⁵⁹ Abu 'Ubayd al-Qurashi, *Al-Hurub al-thawriyya*.

organization in Afghanistan.³⁶⁰ In the same year, he responded in an interview to al-Sahab in 2006 on the numerous revisions of in Egypt incarcerated *al-Gama'a* members, which has been taking place since the 1990s. Al-Hukayma, however, did not excommunicate his former colleagues and authored the interview himself. This may indicate his high ranking position in al-Sahab and al-Qaeda's media apparatus at that time; as well as an integrative approach toward revisionists of jihad.³⁶¹ The interview shortly preceded the revision of Jihadi ideology by Dr. Fadl alias Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz in 2007. At the time of the interview the high ranking former *al-Gama'a* ideologue Dr. Fadl was already writing on a refutation of Egyptian and global terrorist jihad from inside an Egyptian jail.³⁶² As for al-Hukayma, he was allegedly killed in a U.S. airstrike (i.e. murdered in "a targeted assassination") in 2008, which, however, has not been confirmed by al-Qaeda. Al-Hukayma probably was or is a chief operative in al-Qaeda central's media and propagation committee, with its media production wing "al-Sahab." Al-Hukayma has authored several books on military and media strategy. Conforming to al-Qaeda's overarching military strategy since 9/11, al-Hukayma advocates small scale individual terrorist operations. In terms of media strategy, al-Hukayma focuses on information and communication operations by Western intelligence services. This approach is strongly visible in his book *Usturat al-wahm: Kashf al-qina'a 'an al-istikbarat al-amrikiyya*, allegedly authored on "September 11, 2001," which has been translated by Jihadis into English ("The Myth of Delusion: Exposing the American Intelligence") and is widely distributed on Jihadi websites.³⁶³ It becomes clear to any reader of the opening passages of his book that al-Hukayma is very aware of (what we describe in this dissertation as) "communicative leadership," or alternatively "virtual leadership" (when leadership through target-oriented communication only in the online-sphere is concerned).

"The only thing that bothered the CIA was **how to use the media** inside and outside the United States **in order to affect, direct and manipulate public opinion** [al-Hukayma continues to explain how many news outlets CIA owns or finances] The integration between the media and the Intelligence Services was planned with the objective of misleading other countries and directing them toward supporting the American policy. This, at the same time,

³⁶⁰ See al-Hukayma's biography, *Malaff Muhammad Khalil al-Hukayma*, accessed August 7, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=dn77me4q>.

³⁶¹ Al-Hukayma did not excommunicate his former brothers in arms, but merely describes them as revisionary brothers (*al-ikhwa al-mutaraji'in*). *Hiwar al-sheikh Muhammad al-Hukayma ma'a mu'assasat al-Sahab* – 1427, accessed August 7, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=zu6guaai>.

³⁶² The refutation was published in 2007 (Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and in the World).

³⁶³ Muhammad Khalil al-Hukayma, *Usturat al-wahm: Al-Kashf al-qina'a 'an al-istikbarat al-amrikiyya*, accessed August 7, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=xswa4zev>.

helps in controlling the domestic and foreign public opinion and directing it toward what the United States requires.”³⁶⁴

A high ranking and influential counterterrorism analyst, a discursive leader of the western research community so to speak, describes al-Hukayma’s work as conspiracy theory, inaccurate, and too conceptual to be understood by his tactically oriented peers.³⁶⁵ But this estimation must probably also be seen in the light of the author’s background, who is himself a frequent adviser to U.S. intelligence. Al-Hukayma is anything but a theoretical lightweight. An effective communicative strategy relies on misinformation, lies and manipulation. Thus, the question if al-Hukayma fabricates his facts is irrelevant. Eventually, he uses them to bolster his conceptual framework for Jihadi counter-media campaigns and heavily plays into the sphere of communicative guidance.

“Al Qaeda's military campaign against America could be bolstered by an intense media campaign, Abu Jihad counseled, one that would turn the U.S. government's own reports, news, and research back against it. In Abu Jihad's thinking, who is better positioned to assess America's strategies, strengths, and vulnerabilities than America's government intelligence agencies, national media, and academic researchers? All al Qaeda needed to do was begin reading their works and putting those lessons into practice. "From the words of your mouth," he sneered in the book's introduction, 'I condemn you.'”³⁶⁶

Similar to the U.S. citizen Zachary Adam Chesser, who is serving a lengthy sentence for charges of material support and Jihadi propaganda, al-Hukayma advises counter-counterterrorism concepts which are based on the “watching the watchers”-concept by Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Hukayma lays with this approach further conceptual cornerstones for Jihadi communicative leadership approaches, and it seems that Jihadi media activists are already refining his guidelines in a practical and applicable ways.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Bill Roggio, The Myth of Delusion, The Long War Journal, October 16, 2006, accessed January 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/10/the_myth_of_delusion.php.

³⁶⁶ Jarret Brachman, “Watching the Watchers”, Foreign Policy, November 2010, accessed January 19, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/11/watching_the_watchers?page=full.

³⁶⁷ See below the discussion on grassroots forum members’ applications of media strategies.

3.b.ix Ayman al-Zawahiri: The “Watching the Watchers”-Concept

As we have observed already, numerous Jihadi media theorists in one way or another apply the “watching the watchers” concept. We will also encounter the practical application of this concept quite often, especially when discussing different mutual communicative guidance patterns, for example, through participative media campaigns or virtual pledges of allegiance on Jihadi discussion forums. When online activists, especially on discussion forums, reproduce propaganda collectively, it is called mutual virtual leadership (there are other forms of mutual virtual leadership as well, such as the grouping around discussion topics and common interaction rituals, such as the virtual *bay'a*). The formulation “watching the watchers” stems from Jarret Brachman and describes Ayman al-Zawahiri’s (presently No.1 in al-Qaeda central organization)³⁶⁸ strategy of levelling Western media coverage against the West and profiting from Jihadi analysis of Western analysis on jihad. The “watching the watchers” strategy, according to Brachman, was first presented in a book by al-Zawahiri, then more user-friendly refined in a video titled the “Power of Truth.” In the meanwhile, this strategy has become widely accepted in Jihadi media circles, and has been frequently propagated, for example, by Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula’s in its online magazine “Inspire” since 2009. Brachman says that the main goal is “Patrolling the net for exploitable tidbits” to lever against the United States.

“Zawahiri had already test-fired a similar video approach in a September 2006 documentary titled *Knowledge Is for Acting Upon*. But that video was still too earnest. Zawahiri needed something more Michael Moore-ish, an exposé that would hold the attention of his viewers. He found it with *The Power of Truth*.

[...]

The importance of *The Power of Truth* was affirmed one year later when it made the "must-see al Qaeda videos" shortlist in a massively popular online Jihadi book, *A Course in the Art of Recruitment*.³⁶⁹

A typical example of the „watching the watchers“ concept can be found on the popular Jihadi-friendly discussion forum www.muslm.net. A contributor quotes Western reports on the book of Abu 'Umru al-Qa'idi, “A course in the art of recruitment – A practical serial program how

³⁶⁸ As of August 2012.

³⁶⁹ Jarret Brachman, “Watching the watchers,” accessed August 3, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/11/watching_the_watchers?page=full.

to recruit persons using the method of individual propagation” (*dawra fi fann al-tajnid* [...]).³⁷⁰ As we can see in the Jihadi forum posts below, western coverage becomes the actual promotion of the book. That reminds of the development that followed William McCants publication of an English translation of Abu Bakr Naji’s book “The Management of Savagery,” which then again became widely circulated in Jihadi online circles.³⁷¹

#1
 تاريخ التسجيل: Jun 2006
 المشاركات: 1,121

PM 11:35, 2008 12 05





مراكز وصحف عالمية تدرس كتاب (دورة في فن التجنيد) للأخ أبو عمرو القاعدي

A 51-page document explaining how to recruit for militant groups has been posted on [al-Ekhlaas](#) website today.

The manual, which was compiled and prepared by someone using the name [Abu Amr al Qaedi](#), describes the ideal profile of would-be jihadists, specifying categories of most vulnerable people.

It also indicates which people to avoid. It also includes details about how to determine the readiness of the potential recruit, how to assess them and what stages to put them through in order the guarantee their adherence to the jihadi ideology.

.The document includes tables and forms designed to help with the evaluation process

فيما يحدّ تصرا جديدا لاتصار الجهاد على شبكة الانترنت

أخطر مؤسسة لدراسة الارهاب (جيمس تاون) تدرس كتيب كتبه أحد الاخوة في الاخلاص قبل اغلاقه يسمى (أبو عمرو القاعدي) abu amr al-qaedi والكتاب اسمه (دورة في فن التجنيد) .

حيث قام أحد المتخصصين في هذا المركز بدراسته دراسة تفصيلية .

كما قامت العديد من المؤسسات ومراكز الدفاع القومي بدراسة الكتاب والتحذير منه , وعذته بعض الصحف والمجلات العالمية الاسلوب المتبع لدي تنظيم القاعدة في تجنيد الارهابيين

فلو كتبت اسم abu amr al-qaedi في محرك البحث العالمي جوجل , سيظهر لك عشرات الصفحات كلها تتكلم عن نفس الموضوع , وتحذر من الكتاب , وذلك تحت عنوان .

Jihadis Publish Online Recruitment Manual

وسنجد عناويننا متشابهة بالالمانية وبالاندلسية وغيرها .

Accessed 7 July 2011, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=320869>.

³⁷⁰ “Saif Mudhni,” “*Marakiz wa suhuf ‘alamiyya tadrus kitab dawra fi fann al-tajnid li-l-akh Abu ‘Umr al-Qa’idi*,” May 12, 2005, accessed 7 July 2011, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=320869>.

³⁷¹ Mark Stout, “Where are the New Salafi Jihadi Military Thinkers?”



Accessed 7 July 2011, <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=320869>.

3.b.x Abu Amr al-Qa'idi - "A Course in the Art of Recruitment"

Putting the "watching the watchers" media-strategy into practice, Jihadis have frequently re-published Western media coverage on al-Qa'idi's book in the Internet. Al-Qa'idi himself is worth being discussed in terms of Jihadi media strategy. It is perhaps one of the most revealing statements of al-Qa'idi that he was strongly inspired by the godfather of Jihadi strategy, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. "Everything one needs to know is written in al-Suri's *Da'wat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya*," states al-Qa'idi. Key thoughts of al-Suri's 1600 pages *magnum opus* must be distilled and simplified to meet conditions on the ground and be practically applicable, al-Qa'idi argues. Al-Qa'idi waters down some concepts, and this has been described as "terrorism for dummies."³⁷² Yet, one should also not underestimate the effectiveness of al-Qa'idi's simplicity who addresses Jihadi online audiences. The majority of

³⁷²Timothy Noa, "Jihad Lite: Al-Qaida's dumbed-down recruitment manual," March 24, 2009, accessed August 7, 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/chatterbox/2009/03/jihad_lite.html.

any target audience and recipients of marketing, advertising and propaganda campaigns cannot be expected to be interested in the intricate details and mechanics of a product. Audiences are mostly caught by simple, easy to understand guidelines which allow them to start quickly participating into the process that it advertised. Recruitment works, if fears are turned into anger and incitement (*tahrid*) and Muslims stand united, states al-Qa'idi. "One should really be convinced that this can happen and envision what is possible and what may come true. This is the way I was convinced. First I was one of the opponents of jihad in my country. The best thing that convinces one of this is the book *Global Islamic Resistance Call* [by al-Suri. It also convinced me] Because I was not convinced in the beginning."³⁷³ Al-Qa'idi, like other Jihadi military strategists, regards media jihad and its activists as co-leaders in the networked command and control structure of global jihad. There are specific leaders of Jihadi fronts and emirates. Moreover, in the media sector there are other hierarchies. These are not explicitly mentioned, nor understood. But the dedication (*hida'*) at the beginning of the book mentions media Jihadis, emirs and leaders of physical organizations altogether. This points into the direction that al-Qa'idi perceives a complementary communicational command and control line of jihad, which is shared by online and offline actors.

3.b.xi Zacharia Adam Chesser – “Counter-Counter Terrorism” by “Watching the Watchers”

At age 22, in February 2011, Zachary Adam Chesser was sentenced to 25 years in prison.³⁷⁴ In a blog, which he publishes from inside prison, Chesser claims that the verdict was fabricated and based on an FBI-trap.³⁷⁵ In line with his earlier work, yet this time from inside prison, Chesser suggests a communicative counterstrategy [within the limits of his right of expression according to the First Amendment to the American Constitution]. The most

³⁷³ Abu Amr al-Qa'idi, "*Dawra fi fann al-tajnid: Barnamij 'amali mutasalsil li tajnid ashkhas bi istikhdam al-da'wa al-fardiyya*," accessed May 15, 2011, archive.org/details/tagneed-Jhaaad0.

³⁷⁴ Chesser pleaded guilty to charges of death threats against the makers of the U.S. cartoon series Southpark, the provision of material support to the Somali Shabab al-Mujahidin Movement, and the publication of terrorist strategic guidelines on his website ("themujahidblog"). Chesser combined an extremely high analytic intelligence with a short radicalization span. His radicalization took place within two years. He married a young woman from Uganda, which was suggested to him by U.S.-Yemenite preacher Anwar al-Awlaqi (k.) via the Internet and turned from a socially active and intellectual high school kid (studying four years of Japanese and being member of his High School's break dance team) to an obsessive supporter of salafi-Jihadi thoughts and actions. See U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs 2012, Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism, accessed August 7, 2012,

<http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/CHESSER%20FINAL%20REPORT%281%29.pdf>.

³⁷⁵ Zachary Adam Chesser, "Victims of the American Inquisition," February 20, 2012, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://aseerun.org/2012/02/20/victims-of-the-american-inquisition/#more-2998>.

interesting part of Chesser's media strategy, before he was arrested, convicted and incarcerated, remains a series titled "Counter-Counter Terrorism." Chesser developed the above discussed "Watching the Watchers" concept one step further and tried to re-analyse developments inside the counter-terrorism community, in order to manipulate its discourses, fracture the community and deprive it of trust (both internally and externally). Chesser even contacted U.S. counterterrorism expert Jarret Brachman. The exchange between both of them took at times absurd forms, when Brachman and Chesser communicated with each other, then analyzed and battled each other again online. U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs observed in 2012 that Chesser's "engagement with counterterrorism experts was boosting his notoriety, Chesser's Counter Counter Terrorism #8, entitled Fomenting Disunity in the Counter Terrorism Movement, focused on the need to encourage dissent among counterterrorism experts in order to use those disagreements to advance the violent Islamist extremist cause."³⁷⁶ One focus of Chesser's attacks was the conceptual term "Jihobbyism"³⁷⁷ by Jarret Brachman, which describes online Jihadis who do not perpetrate actual attacks, but engage in online jihad as a hobby, pressure valve and identification means. Chesser argued that

Many people in the CT field are worried that this term causes people to underestimate the threat of domestic attacks. References to this word in postings when a domestic attack does occur could cause people to blame Jarret Brachman for any shortfalls in attention being payed [sic] to domestic threats. It does not matter if Brachman has clarified his stance toward 'Jihobbyism,' because the damage has been done already and it is clear who popularized this term.³⁷⁸

A short while later, Brachman reversed his argumentative line and put more focus on the possible dangers of online radicalization, which argued that online radicalization caused a tension between virtual and physical self, eventually calling for action.³⁷⁹ This change of stance may have been influenced by Chesser's explication on counter-counterterrorism strategy that:

³⁷⁶ U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs 2012, Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism.

³⁷⁷ A nominal composite of "jihad" and "hobbyist."

³⁷⁸ Zachary Chesser, "Counter Counter Terrorism #8 - Fomenting Disunity in the Counter Terrorism Movement," May 11, 2010, themujahidblog.com (disabled). See also Jarret Brachman, "Blog "Buddy" Abu Talhah al-Amrikee Gets Nabbed," The Jarret Brachman Blog, July 22, 2010, accessed August 7, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=764>.

³⁷⁹ See for example, Jarret Brachman and Alex Levine, "You Too Can Be Awlaqi!", The Jarret Brachman Blog, posted January 24, 2011, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=1157>.

We should use this term [Jihobbyist; Jihobbyism] in our public postings for two reasons:

1. It draws a clear distinction between real mujahideen and people like me, which creates a feeling of inadequacy, and feelings of inadequacy drive people to eliminate that feeling through actions.
2. It turns any blogger who does anything remotely close to action into a failure by Brachman, and even if people are reading this post right now, then they will not be able to stop their feelings of Brachman's failure in this matter from coming to light. Even if Brachman's opinions have a positive result for the CT movement, it will be destroyed by the emphasis on this word by members of the Jihadi community.”³⁸⁰

Chesser opened another line of attack against Brachman and the counter-terrorism community, when he advised al-Qaeda how create further fractions by exploiting ongoing quarrels and conflicting estimations:

“Brachman has an unusual obsession with Abu Yahya Al-Libi, hafidhuhullah, and this can be exploited as a fringe opinion which could eventually divide the CT field into two camps. One camp thinking he is the next Shaykh Usama, and the other thinking he is insignificant. If this was to occur, then Al-Qa’ida would likely begin releasing videos which clearly played him up to be a major leader, and then keep him out of the spotlight for a while. This would divide CT officials, because there would be two sets of evidence which contradict each other. Naturally the movement would fall into two camps overtime.”³⁸¹

Brachman responded that the “approach that he [Chesser] uses in his counter-counterterrorism series was actually the conceptual backbone of the “Stealing AQ’s Playbook,” article that I co-authored in 2006, which has been cited now several times by Ayman al-Zawahiri specifically because of how it turns his own words against him.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Zachary Chesser, “Counter Counter Terrorism #8 - Fomenting Disunity in the Counter Terrorism Movement.”

³⁸¹ Jarret Brachman, “‘Blog ‘Buddy’ Abu Talhah al-Amrikee Gets Nabbed,” July 22, 2010. See also “abu~Adil as Somali,” “Re: Must watch...very interesting about the salafiya...,” September 16, 2010, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f18/must-watch-very-intresting-about-the-salafiya-38412/>.

³⁸² Jarret Brachman, “Engaging Jihadis Head-On: My Response to Abu Talhah al-Amrikee,” The Jarret Brachman Blog, April 23, 2012, accessed August 7, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=658>. Brachman refers to the article “Stealing Al Qaeda's Playbook” which he co-authored with William F. McCants in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006):309–321.

Chesser's peculiar approach of deception and ambiguous information campaigns points towards a highly developed understanding of communicative guidance and propaganda. Instead of only guiding the own Jihadi community through targeted propagandistic information, he advised to infiltrate the communicative psychology of U.S. CT community.³⁸³ However, it was a lessons-learned approach from the counter-terrorism industry itself. We should remember approaches such as the one developed by McCants and Brachman in "Stealing al-Qaeda's Playbook" on information operations that help to level out Jihadi narratives from within, in parallel supporting mainstream Muslim perceptions through especially tailored media campaigns. Chesser proved that media Jihadis do not sit idle and are trying to re-lever these approaches. The outcome can be an uncontrollable communicative wildfire. The example of the Chesser-Brachman exchange of verbal punches shows already Kafkaesque inter-relationships between "terrorism experts" and "terrorists."³⁸⁴ The case of Chesser, i.e. that of an online supporter ("jihobbyist") who rises to the role of a strategic and discursive leader is not so singular. One only has to remember Younis Tsouli, the young Britain, who, with his online strategic analyses, propaganda activity and hacking skills became notoriously known in the Jihadi online scene under the nickname "Irhabi 007." Tsouli "was a loner who came to London and studied information technology. He quickly began using his computer skills to surf the web for propaganda and became radicalized by what he saw, including videos from Iraq which he believed showed the U.S. attacking innocent civilians."³⁸⁵ In the case of Tsouli's radicalization process the concept of watching the watchers closed full circle. Tsouli applied the concept then by himself to influence others.

³⁸³ In another blog post Chesser stated that: "We should read the works of people who are influential in the policy sphere, but we should never bother dialoguing with them at all, even in areas of mutual benefit. These people have no effect on America's understanding of the current war. However, CT officials who appear on television do have an effect on this, and they can be used. However, we should treat them like bombs. A bomb can help you if you use it correctly, or it can kill you if you use it wrong or somebody else is using it." Chesser's statement strongly reminds of al-Rawashidi's and al-Quraishi's comparisons between the roles of media, newscasts, bombs and armored brigades. Jarret Brachman, "Abu Talhah al-Amrikee's Response to My Response to Abu al-Qa'qa Mujahid," The Jarret Brachman Blog, May 14, 2010, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=698>.

³⁸⁴ Propagandistic discourses around terrorism, counterterrorism and counter-counterterrorism are accompanied by military and terrorist operations. U.S. foreign policy is already dominated by this scheme: Discursive-semantic interrelations between "terrorism", counterterrorism, and "security," led by neo-conservative state actors and academics, transport into the media the logic that "rational, objective, factual" studies underlie military policies. The same "logic" helps to legitimize state funding for military industrial complexes worldwide. The imminent danger is that "counterterrorism" (a euphemizing nominal-composite to justify state-terrorism) becomes readily accepted by populations of states which think that they have the right to exercise a morally superior form of counterterrorism (psychological, propagandistic and military operations in order to realize political goals under the umbrella of a security policies that are supposed to safeguard democracies and their citizens).

³⁸⁵ Gordon Corera, "Terrorism and the Media: Information War," in *Spinning Intelligence: Why Intelligence needs the Media, Why the Media needs Intelligence*, ed. Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman (New York: Columbia University Press), 57-70.

Evan Kohlmann, an online jihad expert with doubtful credentials and a neo-conservative agenda, yet strong influence in the CT community, testified as an expert witness at Tsouli's trial and described his leadership characteristics as follows: "007 came at this [online jihad] with a Western perspective. He had a flair for marketing, and he had the technical knowledge and skills to be able to place this stuff in areas on the net where it wouldn't be easily erased, where lots of people could download it, view it and save it."³⁸⁶

3.b.xii Discussions on Jihad Forums on Media and Battle Strategies

The need to revise media strategies requires grassroots-followers to take matters into their own hands and to assume more authority by themselves. Thus, online Jihadi rank and file as well deal with media and military strategy on the Internet. Two hypotheses may be stated in this context. Firstly, online Jihadi rank and file orientate themselves at the precepts of well known Jihadi strategists and established organizations. Secondly, elements of Jihadi media strategy witness a trickle-down-effect on sympathizers inasmuch as that they apply precepts into practice, then influence high ranking strategists, and thus reverse communicational hierarchy by bearing bear a strong bottom-up influence on the development of media jihad. Concerning the first hypothesis, our evidence is an article by the anonymous online Jihadi supporter "Yaman Mukhaddab," on al-Hesba jihad forum in 2006, which discusses the possible implications of a U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq. Nico Prucha wrote an excellent analysis of this piece, in which he stressed the importance of online forums for participative developments of Jihadi military strategy paired with a broad availability of such concepts via the Internet.³⁸⁷ Accordingly, Mukhaddab was a frequent contributor on al-Hesba forum and wrote at the same time on numerous other forums. Mukhaddab directly addresses the heads of al-Qaeda central organization, Usama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. He stresses their hierarchical superiority, by asking for their answer within 15 days to his "proposal," which marks the date of U.S. congress elections on November 2, 2006: Al-Qaeda is supposed to address populations of hostile states with its attacks and messages directly, in order to achieve internal political change in its favor (such as the Spanish troop withdrawal from Iraq after the 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid). This argumentation reflects a broader trend in Jihadi strategy, namely to argue on the strength of a dialectic of "democratic discourse."

³⁸⁶ Gordon Corera, "Terrorism and the Media: Information War," 64.

³⁸⁷ The following discussion on Mukhaddab is based on Nico Prucha's article, „Praktische Erfahrungen aus dem Online-Dschihad. Anwendungsbeispiel der Online-Welten der „al-Qa'ida“: Yaman Mukhaddab, ein Online-Sympathisant,“ published 2007, accessed August 8, 2012, http://www.oaip.ac.at/fileadmin/Unterlagen/Dateien/Publikationen/Online_Dschihad.pdf.

Accordingly, terrorist threats are clad into a language of “You have the choice!” addressing electorates of countries who are involved in military foreign policies in the Muslim world.³⁸⁸ Another point in case is the threat of the German speaking wing of the Global Islamic Media Front GIMF under Muhammad Mahmud in 2007 (at present, after his release from jail, emir of the German speaking Jihadi online nexus salafimedia.de, and thus an influential virtual leader), which threatened Austria and Germany with attacks if they would not withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. This al-Qaeda strategy of addressing the populations of hostile states directly became in fact established around 2006. The fact that Mukhaddab as a sympathizer/supporter follows this line proves once again that there is a trickling-down-effect of central strategic command into Jihadi forums, which then turns into individualized and participative planning, coordination activities through refinement of information from above. Communicative control dissolves and restructures on Jihadi forum level, and leadership tasks are re-distributed among activists according to the quality and frequency of their participation. Concerning our second hypothesis, let us show how the “watching the watchers” concept trickles down until the rank and file level of Jihadi online forums. This effect strongly informs autonomous participative activities. For example, one Jihadi forum member has written a 100 page Arabic translation of RAND’s “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” which he uploaded on al-Faluja forum, stating:

“Read read read do not begrudge yourself my brother especially when such studies have a lot of the enemies methods and ways of defeating the “rebels” as they allegedly claim...could you imagine my dear brother... Read my brother, you may get the grant of Nafir [joining the Jihad] from God and then you will have a good awareness of the enemies methods and do not forget the translator dear brother in your prayers for him and for his parents and for the Mujahedeen as well.”³⁸⁹

Let us turn towards another illustrative example of the “watching the watchers” concept put into practice by grassroots activists. A forum member translates and discusses an article from the German weekly *Die Zeit*³⁹⁰ in the context of the German parliamentary elections in autumn 2009. The article discusses Jihadi terrorist threats that were published on the Internet

³⁸⁸ Christoph Schuck, “Die Feder mit dem Degen tauschen – oder umgekehrt? Zur Dialektik der neueren transnationalen Kommunikation al-Qaedas,” *Zeitschrift für Außen und Sicherheitspolitik* 4(2009): 455-474.

³⁸⁹ Jarret Brachman, “Mining Our Business: AQ’s Love-Hate Relationship with Western CT Research, RAND, et al.,” The Jarret Brachman Blog, February 4, 2010, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=471>. Furthermore, a pdf-screenshot of the original post at The Jarret Brachman Blog, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://jarretbrachman.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/falaja-rand.pdf>.

³⁹⁰ See the original article here: Christian Denso, “Al-Qaeda: Terror schaffen ohne Waffen,” *Die Zeit*, October 30, 2009, accessed August 10, 2012, <http://www.zeit.de/2009/41/01-al-Qaida>.

in the run-up to the elections and mainly addressed Germany's civilian population, which was held responsible for electing a government that participated in ISAF's military operation in Afghanistan (on the dialectic use of a "democratic discourse" by terrorists, see the example of Mukhaddab above). As an effect of the threats and testimonies obtained by German and U.S. authorities from terrorist suspects that pointed to a possible attack, a high level nationwide security alert was issued in Germany. The Arabic translation of the newspaper article by a forum member leaves out some derogatory expressions, which we will add in brackets (The translation was published on a forum at the time of the German nationwide security alert). As for the title of the published article, *nomen est omen*: "Al-Qaeda: Creating terror without weapons: New threats witness effect in Germany." The text starts: "Communication is as important as the actual [inhuman] crime for terrorists. At the moment we see this principle impressively being put into practice by Islamists and their messages to Germany. Some online video clips show us [pictures of] the train station in Hamburg, or the cathedral in Cologne, or the Oktoberfest [in Munich]. These pictures are accompanied by threats of a "bad awakening."³⁹¹ Afterwards, the author of the post goes on to translate online readers' reactions to the article from the website of *Die Zeit*. Thus, the translated comments by German readers appear now on the Arabic website. Arab readers start interacting with these comments. They leave their own comments on the Arabic discussion forum. This sort of communication can be categorized as virtual interaction ritual, in which the presence of both inter-actors is not a necessary prerequisite. Instead, threads by actors that were written in a different virtual time and space are integrated into new space-time contexts without losing their stimulating function for new interactions in their absence.

A similar interactional dynamic exists when we speak about post-mortem virtual leaders (treated in more detail in the chapter by the same name).³⁹² The veneration of dead Jihadi leaders is supposed to create and exercise authority in online discourses even after their deaths; by the sheer power of communication nodes, rituals, iconographic aesthetics and discourses that turn around them. Essentially, the whole online jihad martyr discourse, often in the form of biographies, quotes of slain activists, or anecdotes on them, serves this goal. Post mortem-virtual leaders are iconic conscience-guiders. Habermas' theory of communicative action, and his thoughts on the role of strategic communication in the coordination of actions, is a very apt tool to understand and explain this phenomenon (see the

³⁹¹ Mujtaheda 03, *Maqal 'an al-Qa'eda 'an saḥifat Die Zeit al-'usbu'yya al-almaniyya*," December 1, 2009, accessed August 10, 2012, <http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/ar/posts/list/693.page>. The post was published on numerous other Jihadi and Jihadi-friendly forums.

³⁹² 5.c Discursive Virtual Leadership and Post-Mortem Virtual Leaders.

chapter “Theoretical Framework”). According to Jürgen Habermas, strategic action (strategisches Handeln), i.e. the manipulation of others through communication to realize one’s goals, takes place in a specific Lebenswelt. Culture (any trend in any culture) feeds itself from subculture. In our case the online Jihadi Lebenswelt is defined by being virtual, colourful, participative-interactive, iconic, aesthetic, neo-tribal, ritualistic and propagandistic, by mirroring an envisioned Jihadi reality, for example, through high resolution propaganda videos, a luring rhetoric and semiotics. Post-mortem virtual leaders of online jihad are physically absent, yet, in the online Jihadi Lebenswelt, they exist, and their words exercise an imperative-guiding role. The guiding character of central discursive leaders can be described as an instrumentalized form of communicative action. In online jihad, strategic manipulation and consensus among co-actors go hand in hand. The centeredness on dead iconic figures and their ideas coordinates communicative actions of interaction-participants in online discussions.

A key example of a post-mortem virtual leader is the Jordanian physicist Humam al-Balawi aka Abu Dujana al-Khorasani. Al-Khorasani serves as a Jihadi role model, since he was an online activist who actually perpetrated an attack (he committed a suicide attack on CIA in Afghanistan in December 2009). Al-Khorasani’s influence thus concerns both physical and virtual reality.³⁹³ As a jihad forum administrator and frequent writer, he was a virtual and a discursive leader; after his death, he became a post-mortem virtual leader; His writings still trigger online interactions and have a guiding effect on online Jihadi discussants. In this sense, al-Khorasani is the epitome of a virtual leader from a Jihadi perspective.

Al-Khorasani extensively wrote on media strategy. Best known is his precept that media jihad should be a direct channel to actual terrorist operations (which he realized by himself, i.e. that online radicalization is followed by a lone-wolf type/network supported terrorist attack); lesser known are al-Khorasani’s about 40 strategic writings and posts which he published before his death. The following post was republished by Jihadis in January 2010, only one month after al-Khorasani’s death in a suicide attack. The post explicates a “viral-thought” media strategy.

Al-Khorasani’s forum post is titled “The Club of the friends of Usama [bin Laden], subscribe all here!” It starts out as a laudation on al-Qaeda and Usama bin Laden. Al-Khorasani views al-Qaeda not only as an organization, but as a comprehensive media strategy, which transports viral thoughts against which there is no remedy or antidote. Al-Khorasani purposefully uses an

³⁹³ He passed the “threshold” between virtual and physical. His rite of passage was the development from online-Jihadi to martyr via his attack.

analogy between ideas and cells. He therefore uses a bio-chemistry vocabulary, including the terms “viruses” and “vaccinates” to make his point:

Western media outlets like Fox news, CNN, CBS, as well as the U.S. owned Arabic channel al-Arabiyya are far less effective than Jihadi media, boasts al-Khorasani. He praises the media strategy of Jihadi organizations to use forums for the publication, and file-sharing sites like *Rapidshare* to spread their propaganda material. This enables Jihadis to propagate effectively. As a result a financially and technically superior West is losing the information war, due to inefficiency and ideological inferiority. Al-Khorasani rationalizes his claim by arguing that the same process can be observed in bio-chemistry.

“There is an experiment which is conducted in laboratories. One inducts a colony of small organisms [into a Petri dish] and exposes it to a deadly antibiotic. After a while, all small organisms die, but one remains. This single organism that remains was able to resist the antibiotic. Its cell bears a message that refuses to surrender, even if it stands alone. Thus, the microorganism lives on. Once more, life defeats death. Analogically, Usama is like a micro organism which resists deadly enemies and steadfastly continues the colony. He and his folks are the “grandfathers” of the dynasty of *The Victorious Sect* who ever defeat the strongest political, sociological, mind and military weapons of our age.”³⁹⁴

Moreover, to transport the, from his point of view, viral and victorious idea of al-Qaeda, al-Khorasani applies a participative mutual virtual leadership approach (discussed in detail in the chapter “Mutual Virtual Leadership”): He summons readers not to sit idle and not to leave media jihad to others, but to subscribe underneath the post to an al-Qaeda style activism. Bin Laden, al-Khorasani says, gave up on his wealth and family and put himself into greatest danger by challenging the U.S. (“the mightiest military power on earth”). Every true Muslim should do it like him and subscribe with his name to this.³⁹⁵

Online discussants frequently try to contribute to the actual military strategy of Jihadi groups. For example, by monitoring and analysing Youtube video clips of the ongoing conflict, a member of al-Jihad al-'Alami forum advised Syrian Islamist fighters how to improve their military strategy (August 2012).³⁹⁶ He based his counsel on video footage of Syrian rebel attacks, which were published on the Internet. In his view, Jihadi offensive tactics are weak

³⁹⁴ Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, „*Jama'iyat ahab Usama – di' taqi'uka huna*,” accessed January 27, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=73224>.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ “Alfarooq,” “*Khutwa hamma yajib 'ala jabhat al-nusra al-qiyam biha*,” August 9, 2012, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=21875>.

and ineffective. The fighters waste light ammunition against armoured vehicles, and do not attack enough police, security or strategic state targets; they should instead execute more guerrilla-style ambushes, use more improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against Syrian government troops, attack critical supply lines, power centres, gas stations and electrical grids. In addition, fighters should unite under a central Jihadi command and elect an emir for all fighters in Syria, to whom they should give a pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*). To this purpose, “al-Nusra Front for the Support of the People of Greater Syria” (*Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl al-Sham*), a Syrian rebel group which was formed in late 2011 and is suspected of affiliations to al-Qaeda,³⁹⁷ should unite with Islamist fighters in Syria, advised the forum member. In a second step, all fighters should unite under a Mujahidin Shura Council formed and headed by al-Nusra Front. The advice of the forum member reminds us of the formation of the Mujahidin Shura Council (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*) by al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2006, which was shortly led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006), and which, after al-Zarqawi’s death in the same year, was renamed by his successor, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, into the Islamic State of Iraq (*Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya*; ISI). The discussed forum post evidences the effort of online activists to influence, and thus contribute to the leadership of developments on the ground. Media-strategy on the Internet, “watching the watchers,” here transforms into a “watching and improving yourselves” approach, and rapidly transcends into actual battle strategy. This behaviour is not only propaganda-wise, but also tactically important, which makes it an integral element of virtual and communicative leadership.

Sometimes western media reports raise the doubts of forum members about the legitimacy of Jihadi operations. These doubts are whisked off by other discussants with a double-standard view on Jihadi media strategy. For example, a member of *al-Hanin* forum expressed shock about a western report, that Afghani Taliban had beheaded 17 Muslim civilians. “Other Web surfers asked him not to rely on such reports, which constitute a psychological warfare more powerful than warfare with weapons.”³⁹⁸ Yet, as we know, Jihadi media strategists stress at

³⁹⁷ Justin Vela and Liz Sly, “In Syria, group suspected of al-Qaeda links gaining prominence in war to topple Assad,” Washington Post, August 20, 2011.

In February 2012, Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of al-Qaeda central organization, addressed Syrians to struggle against the regime under a Jihadi agenda. See Ayman al-Zawahiri, “*Ila al-amam ya usud al-sham – kalimat tahridiyya*,” accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C2GFX8xanc>.

A Jihadi forum discussion took place shortly afterwards on February 13, 2012, on www.muslm.net. A discussant wrote that “the responsible for al-Nusra Front,” Abu Muhammad al-Julani, gave a speech in which he supported al-Zawahiri’s incitement. The forum member then asked: “What is the connection between *Jabhat Nusrat al-Sham* [sic] under al-Julani and al-Qaeda Organization under al-Zawahiri – Are they one team?” Another forum member answered affirmatively, “Yes, they belong to one team.” See “*Ayman al-Zawahiri wa Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham*,” accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?470626>.

³⁹⁸ International Institute for Counterterrorism (ICT), ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, September 2012, accessed October 31, 2012,

the same time the need to use deception and lies in psychological warfare, and to exploit the idea that propaganda is more effective than bombs. In the end, news can be a more lethal weapon than several armored brigades, claims, for example, Abu 'Ubayd al-Qurashi.³⁹⁹

<http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/JihadiWebsitesMonitoring/JWMGPeriodicalReviews/tabid/344/Articleid/1118/currentpage/1/Default.aspx>, 30.

The original post can be found on the *Hanin*-Forum: Accessed October 31, 2012, <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=297625>.

³⁹⁹ Abu 'Ubayd al-Qurashi, *Al-Hurub al-thawriyya*, accessed August 6, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=kfjxiygb>.

Part Three – Virtual Leadership and Guidance Models

4. Semiotic Virtual Leadership - The Symbols and Aesthetics of Online Jihad

The following chapter deals with the virtual architecture of Jihadi websites from a semiotic anthropological perspective. The reader will be introduced to an aesthetic-semiotic Analysis of Jihadi web-propaganda and its central myths.⁴⁰⁰ Communicative guidance and virtual leadership are about the power of ideas and their aesthetic packaging. The main research question is how Jihadis use key signs, such as symbols, colors and icons in virtual propaganda to profoundly influence each other and win followers.⁴⁰¹ Synchronic and collective symbolic systems are based on meaningful interrelated pictures and metaphors. These systems create powerful pictorial discourses, which bear a close inter-relationship with verbal discourses, sharing ideational and mythological concepts.⁴⁰² The aesthetic signs of extremist online propaganda mainly reflect fundamentalist myths of community; conspiracy; and salvation.⁴⁰³ Monika Witsch' aesthetic analysis of fundamentalist web agitation will be integrated with Maurice Godelier's concept of the myth, according to which

“‘[The myth] builds a huge mirror picture, in which the mutual vision of man and of the world is reflected to infinity. It splits and reassembles in the prism of relations between nature and culture continually ... By analogy the world makes sense, everything is significant and can be signified within a symbolic order, which integrates all positive knowledge with the fullness of its details. ’”⁴⁰⁴

The symbolic order of online jihad is expressed in its virtual architecture and in the aesthetics of its websites. The social world of online Jihadis bears a direct correlation to a regulative-normative and imperative-motivating use of speech and signs. This agrees with Habermas

⁴⁰⁰ Research foci are the semiotics and aesthetics of Muslim extremist sub-culture on the Internet.

⁴⁰¹ The goal is to strengthen in-group cohesion, raise out-group aggression, raise conformity, radicalize members, and “inspire” to terrorist attacks.

⁴⁰² Stefan Meier, (Bild-)Diskurse im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web (Köln: Halem, 2008), 47.

⁴⁰³ Monika Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2003). Such a categorization and approach offer apt tools for researchers of online fundamentalisms to develop their own methods of research.

⁴⁰⁴ “[Der Mythos] baut ein riesiges Spiegelbild auf, in welchem das gegenseitige Bild vom Menschen und der Welt sich bis ins Unendliche widerspiegelt und sich im Prisma der Beziehungen von Natur und Kultur fortwährend spaltet und wieder zusammensetzt...Durch die Analogie gewinnt die Welt einen Sinn, wird alles bezeichnend und kann alles bezeichnet werden innerhalb einer symbolischen Ordnung, in die alle...positiven Kenntnisse sich in der ganzen Fülle ihrer Einzelheiten einfügen.“ Maurice Godelier, „Mythos und Geschichte,“ in Die Entstehung von Klassengesellschaften (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 301-329; quoted in Jürgen Habermas, Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns 1, 76. Habermas discusses mythical and modern worldviews in *ibid.*, 72-113.

claim that manipulative strategic actions through speech acts or equivalent non-verbal expressions coordinate and steer the buildup of interactions.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, to put the symbols of online jihad into a categorical framework has an obvious reason, since aesthetics itself relies on categories. As Theodor W. Adorno observes in his aesthetic theory:

“Hegel puts the aesthetic dialectics at a standstill, when he defines beauty in a static way as the sensual glowing of the idea. Just as beauty cannot be defined, one cannot give up on its definition, in the sense of a strict antinomy. Without categories, aesthetics would just be mollusc-like, and an attempted historic-relativistic description of the meaning of beauty in different societies and styles; a resulting measuring unit for aesthetics would inevitably become a parody, which would be smashed by the next best singled out aesthetic object. However, the fatal universality of the notion of beauty is not contingent.”⁴⁰⁶

Thus, we can agree that there is no universally valid definition of aestheticism and beauty, especially so in modern societies. Also terrorist culture can be perceived as highly aesthetic by its adherents. It draws on popular concepts and drains that which has been nearly forgotten in terms of deep meaning from the soil of its mother culture in order to prosper. Its beauty lies less in the eye of the outsider observer, but in the perception of the insider, who experiences strong emotions, which Victor Turner calls *communitas*, when surrounded by its signs.⁴⁰⁷ Culture must be aesthetic to work for its participants.

For example, Susan Sonntag argues that fascist art represents a utopian aestheticism of physical perfection.⁴⁰⁸ For a similar reason, Walter Benjamin tried to develop a new terminology for the discussion of arts and aesthetics, such as the concept of “aura,” that could not be used by fascist fundamentalists.⁴⁰⁹ Benjamin observed that the oldest artworks were created for ritualistic purposes; first magical and then religious ones. The mass-reproduction

⁴⁰⁵ Jürgen Habermas, TKH, Band 2, 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, “Ästhetische Theorie,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 7, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2006), 3851, alternatively online, accessed April 26, 2012, <http://www.revalvaatio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/adorno-%EF%BF%BDhetische-theorie.pdf>, 125. The German original quote goes: „Hegel stellt die ästhetische Dialektik still durch die statische Definition des Schönen als des sinnlichen Scheinens der Idee. So wenig ist das Schöne zu definieren wie auf seinen Begriff zu verzichten, eine strikte Antinomie. Ohne Kategorie wäre Ästhetik molluskenhaft, historisch-relativistische Beschreibung dessen, was hier und dort, in verschiedenen Gesellschaften etwa oder verschiedenen Stilen, mit Schönheit gemeint gewesen sei; eine daraus destillierte Merkmaleinheit würde unweigerlich zur Parodie und ginge am nächsten besten konkret Herausgegriffenen zuschanden. Die fatale Allgemeinheit des Begriffs des Schönen ist jedoch nicht kontingent.“

⁴⁰⁷ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

⁴⁰⁸ Susan Sonntag, „Faszinierender Faschismus,” in *Im Zeichen des Saturn: Essays*, ed. Susan Sonntag (München: Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1981), 112. The relation between aestheticism and politics became especially clear during the Nazi era.

⁴⁰⁹ Fascists are fundamentalists according to the definition that

of art in industrialist-capitalist societies fostered its politicization and its detachment from cult and ritual.⁴¹⁰ If one applies Benjamin's thesis to today's neoliberal capitalist information society, one can see a reconciliation of the quasi-cultic, neo-pagan and ritualistic use of "artworks" with the profane, which takes place on social networking sites. According to Benjamin, the photographic portrait is the only mass produced artwork that retains an aura of the cultic ritual.⁴¹¹ Pictures of users of social networking sites have idol value; the cultic and exhibition value go hand in hand with the product. Fundamentalists also profit strongly from the characteristics of signs which are processed through social media since they try to reconcile the aura of religious aestheticism with the marketing of ideology. A new trend in evolutionary biology theory states that very basic concepts of aestheticism and art developed out of conflict and survival mechanisms. Primordial human beings were in need to defend themselves against stronger predators, when they first entered the open grasslands and Savannah in Africa several thousand years ago, and therefore developed social mechanisms to build groups. The use of body colors, rhythmic stomping of feet, singing and throwing objects, in short, the ritualistic and aesthetic display of fearless behavior became an effective defense mechanism and at the same time a powerful tool of socialization. This behavior induced an altered state of consciousness called "battle trance" and intimidated enemies by collective threat display [tactical deterrence by denial]. At the same time it enabled primordial beings to build groups, and thus to switch from an individual to a collective identity, which was strongly connected to simple rituals and use of basic aesthetics.⁴¹² Frequently, human ceremonial rituals witness paradoxical effects in that the rise of in-group cohesion correlates with heightened out-group aggression.⁴¹³ Some of the behavior on Jihadi forums is a transformation of primordial socialization and ceremonial rituals into virtual space. This transformation is not a direct one, but happens via multiple cultural and technological layers in time and space. The use of colorful big lettered religious slogans by Jihadis in their online discussions is a virtual substitute for ritualistic tribal threat display like dancing, singing,

⁴¹⁰ For example, the cultic function of antique statues for Greeks. Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 21-25. The work was first published in French translation in the „Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung“ in 1936.

Aura, according to Benjamin, is an "‘einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag‘, [und] stellt nichts anderes dar als die Formulierung des Kultwerts des Kunstwerks in Kategorien der raumzeitlichen Wahrnehmung. Ferne ist das Gegenteil von Nähe. Das wesentlich Ferne ist das Unnabbare. In der Tat ist Unnabbarkeit eine Hauptqualität des Kultbildes. Es bleibt seiner Natur nach ‚Fern so nah es sein mag‘. Die Nähe, die man seiner Materie abzugewinnen vermag, tut der Ferne nicht Abbruch, die es nach seiner Erscheinung bewahrt."

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 31.

⁴¹² Joseph Jordania, *Why Do People Sing: Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: Logos, 2011).

⁴¹³ Eugene G. D'Aquili, "Human Ceremonial Ritual and the Modulation of Aggression," *Zygon – Journal of Religion and Science*, 20 (1985): 21-30.

stomping and allegiance rituals to induce the altered state of consciousness called “battle trance.” At the same time, this online behavior successfully re-creates an “aura” of the “sacred” around myths and reconciles cultic visions with the utterly modern use of propaganda and mass-reproduction of images. Morbid examples are the ceremonial depiction of beheadings (see Nico Prucha on this phenomenon, as well as Judith Tinnies),⁴¹⁴ the idolization of figureheads through pictures, or the ample use of Jihadi symbols in online environments to foster central and guiding myths within virtual social networks and the attempt to “frame” jihadism in Islamic mainstream culture (see for the concept of “cultural framing” an excellent article by Rüdiger Lohlker).⁴¹⁵ Also movies and songs play an utterly important role for the reproduction of (fundamentalist) aesthetics on the Internet. Jihadi audio-visual “art” has the power to express “the fairylike, miraculous, supernatural,” which Benjamin attributes to the classical cult-object.⁴¹⁶

Jihadi net-culture seems at first glance to be a marginal and obscure phenomenon. But also Jihadi websites shape global fluid society which presents itself through the rapid and efficient exchange of ideas and products at low cost and high speed. Therefore, terrorist aesthetics can be described as an integral part of global world culture and as co-representative of global trends of visual communication. Extremist net-cultures are thus a shadow phenomenon of fluid global society, and at the same time a measuring instrument for its general development. With the help of modern communications, Jihadis have attributed to painting an overly distorted picture of Islam, similar to the reflection given by a concave mirror, which is readily being taken up by many Western media. Yet, extremist culture is also an intensification of mainstream culture and its expressions and conflicts; Extremism works like a magnifying glass on culture. Therefore, looking at the perceived reality of extremists offers a lot to learn from, assumed that there is a willingness to understand and readiness to differentiate them from non-violent adherents of their meta-culture. Moreover, extremist fundamentalism is a cross-cultural phenomenon. For example, interested readers can compare concepts of this study to the ideology of the self-proclaimed “Justiciar Knight” Andreas Behring Breivik, who perpetrated two terrorist attacks in Norway in July 2011. There are clear similarities between the propagandist aesthetics of the Christian fundamentalist Breivik and Jihadi web-agitation: They share the glorification of the knight’s character, the figure of the horse, the conspiracy

⁴¹⁴ Nico Prucha. „Kangaroo Trials. Justice in the Name of God,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press), 141-206.

⁴¹⁵ Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press), 65-88.

⁴¹⁶ Leaning on Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, 36.

theory, the uplifting music and the concept of individual terrorism.⁴¹⁷ Breivik and Jihadis have more in common than they think. Key patterns of their ideology are connected.

“Fundamentalism” derives its name from the Latin word *fundamentum* (foundation or basis) and is often perceived as something utterly back-warded and past-oriented. But fundamentalism can also be described as an utterly modern phenomenon. Fundamentalists are “innovative world-builders who act as well as react, who see a world that fails to meet their standards and who then organize and marshal resources in order to create an alternative world for their followers to inhabit and vivify.”⁴¹⁸ This research focuses on the construction of extremist fundamentalism, which often is connected to the justification of and support for terrorism. “Terrorism” is violence by non state-actors for political and/or ideological reasons. The victims of terrorism often merely serve to communicate a message by terrorists to a third party, i.e. the strategic-communicative target group. “Jihadis” describes in this chapter Muslim extremist-fundamentalists, who propagate a terrorist ideology.

As we have mentioned above, the present chapter is strongly oriented at the theoretical framework of Monika Witsch’ “Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet” (The aesthetics of fundamentalist agitation on the Internet).⁴¹⁹ Witsch takes a “hypothetical fundamentalist reader” by the hand in order to analyze which signs appeal to him and create identification with the own group and hate for outsiders (at the example of Scientology and Neo-Nazi websites). Methodically, Witsches draws on the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and the aesthetics-concept of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998).⁴²⁰

Similarly, the author undertakes to analyze the aesthetic and semiotic content of Jihadi websites. These sites bare their own aestheticism and artistic depiction of a culture of violence, which aims at triggering highly emotional reactions in percipients to activate a certain thinking, feeling and behavior. Culture, according to the American sociologist Clifford Geertz, is “a web of signification spun by meaningful actions, objects and expressions,” i.e. signs.⁴²¹ A sign is “the smallest unit of meaning; anything that can be used to communicate

⁴¹⁷ Anders Behring Breivik, “2083 – A European Declaration of Independence,” De Laude Novae Militiae Productions, accessed January 8, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xk3ioe_video-by-anders-behring-breivik_news.

⁴¹⁸ Martin E. Marty and Scott Appleby, *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 182. “Fundamentalists” does not only describe religious groups, but also political groups, such as Neo-Nazis with their glorification of Germanic mythology, or Neo-Conservatives who adhere to literal Protestantism. In another sense, capitalism may be described as a fundamentalism on its own, based on creating ideal worlds of consumption and the assumption that the exploitation of non-renewable sources will never end.

⁴¹⁹ Monika Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2003).

⁴²⁰ Her synthesis can be described as an aesthetic analysis of fundamentalist use of signs.

⁴²¹ Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures. Social Theory and Mass Communication* (London: Sage, 1995), 77.

(or to tell a lie).”⁴²² Signs are words, sounds, gestures, pictures and their combinations in contexts, which in combination create audio-visual languages that help us to understand something.⁴²³

Culture can be described as an ever evolving and never static net of sensual experiences which is created with the help of signs. According to Schütz and Luckmann, participants perceive cultural realities like the “world of science,” “the world of religious experiences,” “phantasm-worlds” and “dream-worlds” like closed sensual areas. The coherence of a sensual area derives from its characteristic style of experience, which is connected to a specific psychological tension, a “consciousness tension.” The transition from one sensual area to another takes place through a radical change of this tension, which culminates in a change of “life stance” (“attention à la vie,” borrowed from Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, 1907).⁴²⁴

Jihadi websites are webs of signification spun around the idea of global jihad by means of propaganda. Furthermore, in order to understand a sub-culture and its extremist community, one needs to go to the heart of what really matters to it. This understanding is “not governed by the author’s cleverness, but by his or her ability to take the reader to the ‘Heart’ of the symbolically produced common meanings.”⁴²⁵ Fan-cultures are best understood, if one finds out how they see themselves. Similarly, this applies to the “fans of jihad” on the Internet.⁴²⁶

Around 25 websites from the Jihadi milieu form the backbone of this chapter’s source material (“standard” websites, forums, YouTube-channels and BlogSpot-accounts). Some of the sites’ influence has been acknowledged by Jihadis and researchers at the same time. Other Jihadi websites were chosen by the author due to their obvious depiction of Jihadi aesthetics. The aesthetic-semiotic viewing and selection was oriented at Witsches three categories of key signs that seem to influence recipients of fundamentalist propaganda on the Internet: These

⁴²² “Semiotic Terminology,” University of Vermont, accessed January 21, 2012, http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html.

⁴²³ Mark Boulton, “Icons, Symbols and a Semiotic Web,” accessed January 21, 2012, <http://www.markboulton.co.uk/journal/comments/icons-symbols-and-a-semiotic-web>

⁴²⁴ Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 47-49. Also discussed in Gabriel Dorta, *Soziale Welten in der Chat-Kommunikation* (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2005), 46; 69 ff.

⁴²⁵ Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, 77. According to the American sociologist Clifford Geertz, culture cannot be studied objectively. Empiricist quantitative schools claim that hard objective data are the only reliable sources for social sciences. But this claim is dismissed by Geertz. A socio-anthropologist needs to observe salient characteristics to develop a good understanding of the bigger picture. The author shares this opinion. The question is, therefore, what the concepts of Islam and jihad mean and signify for Jihadis on the Internet and how this meaning is produced by using objects, signs and interpretations on Jihadi websites.

⁴²⁶ Clifford Geertz, *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984), 292.

are signs which are loaded up with the mythic meanings of *community*, *conspiracy*, and *salvation*.

Harold Lasswell, a key thinker of 2nd World War U.S. information operations, described propaganda as a technique to influence human behavior by manipulating symbols and the meaning behind them.⁴²⁷ Propaganda can also be understood as the “the art of steering the thoughts and imaginations of a group of people and therefore their actions.”⁴²⁸ Propaganda aims to signify certain politico-religious concepts with ideological meaning and thereby create stimuli, which guide followers’ thinking and ultimately actions.

The content of propaganda is ideology, which consists of “codes that reinforce or are congruent with structures of power. Ideology works largely by creating forms of ‘common sense,’ of the taken-for-granted in everyday life.” The French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) described ideology as imaginary relationships of individuals towards their real-life conditions. According to Althusser, ideology causes individuals to think that they are self-determined, whereas in reality they are subjects of a collective and constructed identity, which is formed through linguistic and psychic processes.⁴²⁹

These processes have been investigated in the field of semiotics, i.e. the study of signs. A sign is the smallest unit of meaning. A signifier is any material thing that signifies, i.e. words on a page, a facial expression, a page, an object, symbol, sounds and combinations. The signified is the concept that a signifier refers to.⁴³⁰ The process of signification (or semiosis) describes how meaning is created in the human mind by using signs. Signification is therefore the process by which a sign causes an effect on an interpreter.⁴³¹

The concept of signification draws on two major theoreticians. Firstly, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is regarded as the founder of linguistics and structuralism. De Saussure claimed that “meaning” does not describe how things are, but how they are signified. Saussure model on signs is static, dyadic and structural. According to Saussure, the meaning of a thing is fixed and arbitrary, since it relies on agreed upon relations between signifiers and signified things.⁴³² The basic model of Saussure argues that “a sign always has two parts: the signifier

⁴²⁷ Stefan Kreml, *Krieg und Internet: Ausweg aus der Propaganda?* (Hannover: Heise Zeitschriften Verlag, 2004), 110.

⁴²⁸ Definition by the author

⁴²⁹ Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, 37.

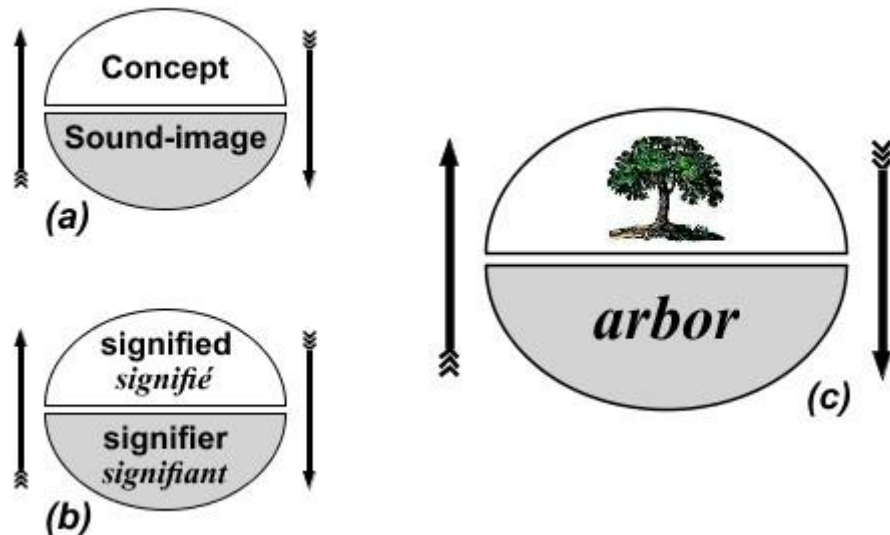
⁴³⁰ “Semiotic Terminology,” University of Vermont, accessed January 21, 2012, http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html.

⁴³¹ Rainer Schützeichel, *Soziologische Kommunikationstheorien* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004), 35. Communication is one form of the semiotic process, states Schützeichel.

⁴³² The letters T-R-E-E resonate in the human mind of an English speaker as an image of a wooden trunk, branches and on it green leaves. According to Saussure, “convention” causes speakers of the same language to learn and agree that certain letters or sounds evoke specific images.

and the signified. We could not say that ARBOR [tree] itself is a sign if the word does not elicit any mental concept in the beholder's mind."⁴³³

Illustration 1: Saussure's dyadic model of signification⁴³⁴



Yet, every person seems to see a different mind-picture of “tree” when hearing its sound-image, which is connected to his or her feelings. Fundamentalist ideology heavily draws on emotional good-bad dichotomies. Meaning is created in dynamic, not static processes of communication and exchange,⁴³⁵ which in the Jihadi-subculture aim at the radicalization of percipients. Thus a third element can be added to the process of signification, which is called the “interpretant.” The interpretant is not a person, but the mental concept elicited in somebody's mind, when he or she perceives a sign.⁴³⁶

This leads to the second conceptual model of signification, namely that of the American logician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Peirce took the dynamic nature of signification as well as its cognitive-emotional element into account. According to Peirce's triadic model of signification (“sign-interpretant-object”), a sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.”⁴³⁷ The Chicago School of Media Theory states

⁴³³ „Semiotics“, The Chicago School of Media Theory, The University of Chicago, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/semiotics/>.

⁴³⁴ “Relations of Translations between Actants”, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/category/semiotics/>.

⁴³⁵ “Framework for using representations in the classroom,” University of Queensland, accessed December 29, 2011, <http://www.usq.edu.au/course/material/EDU8432/use.html>.

⁴³⁶ „Semiotics“, The Chicago School of Media Theory, The University of Chicago, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/semiotics/>.

⁴³⁷ Charles S. Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 99.

that “the dynamic relations between sign, interpretant, and object [...] lead to the process of signification, or semiosis... How meaning is generated therefore puts emphases on three aspects: the sign itself, the code or the systems into which signs are organized, and the context/culture into which these codes and signs operate.”⁴³⁸ Furthermore, Mertz observes in her review of semiotic anthropological literature that

“Peirce’s framework for studying how signs carry meaning, then, opens the door for an analysis that includes but moves beyond language. Rather than focusing on language per se, Peirce asks us to consider the varieties of ways in which meaning can be conveyed through the sign: ‘a sign. . .is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity’ (Peirce 1974). We begin with the “sign vehicle” (or “representamen”), the signal doing the communicating—whether it be the wave of a hand, an architect’s design, or a spoken word. This sign vehicle communicates something by virtue of creating a connection between an object (whatever the sign stands for) and an interpretant (the idea or mental representation now created in our minds).

For example, imagine that a friend has left a clue to her whereabouts by drawing a triangle. A pyramid is nearby. When you look at the drawing of the triangle (the sign vehicle), a connection is formed between the actual pyramid (object) and an idea in your head (your “mental representation” of a pyramid). There are many ways that sign vehicles can create this relationship. In this case, the drawing (triangle) creates a connection with the object (pyramid) by virtue of an inherent similarity. Peirce calls this kind of connection iconic. [Lyons (1977) notes that written signs tend to be iconic as to shape, whereas spoken signs create iconic connections more through sound—and in both cases we find somewhat varying conventions across different cultures.]”⁴³⁹

Subcultures tend to display strongly ritualistic behaviour that is supported by iconic stimuli. For example, Roland Girtler’s brilliant socio-anthropological study on street prostitution in

⁴³⁸ „Semiotics“, The Chicago School of Media Theory, The University of Chicago, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/semiotics/>. The Chicago School of Media Theory comes out of the tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology, which since the 1920s has developed qualitative-interpretative approaches for the research of sociological phenomena. Most prominently, the sociological theory of *symbolic interactionism* and its approach *grounded theory* developed out of the Chicago School. They are based on methods of field research and on the premise that reality originates in a steady process of human micro-scale interaction with the environment, which takes place by symbols and communication. The Columbia School of Sociology, in contrast, traditionally relies on quantitative and critical rational approaches in the research of social phenomena. The induction of massive amounts of data is used to deduct sociological theories.

⁴³⁹ Elizabeth Mertz, “Semiotic Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36 (2007): 338. Downloaded from arjournals.annualreviews.org, accessed August 22, 2012, <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.anthro.36.081406.094417?journalCode=anthro>.

Vienna describes how blinking red lights and the aura of the milieu stimulate certain interaction rituals between punters, whores and pimps.⁴⁴⁰ By the same token, the icon of a Jihadi media company stimulates a certain excitement in Jihadi sympathisers; blinking, colourful environments stimulate similar excitement in any other online activists or gamer who may stumble over it, or move consciously within in. The same goes for certain sentences by suicide attackers, which are permanently lauded and repeated in Jihadi internet discussions. These sentences thus serve as “discursive icons.”

Icons and symbols of jihad are representations of ideas which are important for communicative guidance and virtual leadership. Iconic signs and sounds automatically remind a recipient of certain concept, idea, or role model.⁴⁴¹ For example, in online jihad the ritualistic over-identification with martyrs is supported by acoustic icons such as the chirping of “green paradise-birds” in Jihadi propaganda videos.⁴⁴² “Green birds” refer to paradise birds, in which the souls of the martyrs allegedly live on. The concept is very popular in Jihadi subcultures.⁴⁴³ There are countless other acoustic and discursive icons, i.e. expressions and sounds, which create zeal and an emotional interaction between picture and viewer, sound and listener, text and reader.⁴⁴⁴ In addition, Jihadis use central icons to reproduce their collective identities.⁴⁴⁵ However, icons can take many different forms in the Jihadi web. So-

⁴⁴⁰ Roland Girtler, *Der Strich – Soziologie eines Milieus* (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2004).

⁴⁴¹ In semiotics and linguistics, i.e. the science of symbols and study of speech and language, icons are signs that are designated a similarity to another object. The similarity can be created visually, by sound, or any other means, but it must not be arbitrary. Often images and motives that resemble real objects such as portraits are counted as icons. In a wider sense, icons can also be ideas and sounds. But the word icon also designates a small graphic symbol which symbolizes a program or file in a graphical user interface (computers). One might argue that This transports the ancient cultural meaning, i.e. icons as triggers of a deep feeling of deep respect, into virtual worlds. In the Orthodox Church, however, icons are consecrated representations of Christ and/or the Virgin Mary. Such representations are typically characterized by a frontal view. The classical “icon” comes from the Greek word image (εἰκόνα) and stands in stark contrast to the idol, or illusory image (εἰδωλο).

⁴⁴² Already in the 1990s, Jihadi media made use of an effective iconography. For example, the audiotapes “in the hearts of the green birds” and “under the shades of the swords” were used to create an ritualistic, iconic and mythic discourse around modern martyrs. Stefan Reichmuth, “Jihad-Muslime und die Option der Gewalt in Religion und Staat” in *Islamverherrlichung: Wenn die Kritik zum Tabu wird*, ed. Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), 185-198.

⁴⁴³ For example, German and Uzbek Jihadis in Waziristan produced in 2009 the video “Die Vorzüge des Jihad” (the merits of jihad) and explicitly referred to “green birds”. Videos on suicide operations often make use of the chirping sound of small birds to recreate the iconic image of green paradise birds in the imagination of their viewers. The chirping sound is used like an “acoustic icon” that automatically strengthens common identification and calls for martyrdom. The Iraqi born Swede Taimour al-Abdaly, who prematurely blew himself up in Stockholm in December 2010 on his way to a suicide attack, had an obsession for green canary birds. On his youtube account, he had collected dozens of videos of green canary birds. For al-Abdaly, see Aaron Weissburd, <http://internet-hagana.com>, accessed February 17, 2011, <http://internet-haganah.com/harchives/007107.html>.

⁴⁴⁴ Menzel 2009: 66.

⁴⁴⁵ Iconic signs and sounds automatically remind a recipient of certain concept, idea, or role model in the Jihadi web. So-called Jihadi media companies have clickable interactive banners that remind of icons. In semiotics and linguistics, i.e. the science of symbols and study of speech and language, icons are signs that are designated a similarity to another object. The similarity can be created visually, by sound, or any other means, but it must not be arbitrary. Often images and motives that resemble real objects such as portraits are counted as icons. In a wider sense, icons can also be ideas and sounds. But the word icon also designates a small graphic symbol which

called “media companies” have clickable interactive banners that remind of icons and at the same time fulfill the technical role of icons in computer technology. Moreover, martyr-posters combine the icon as classical devotional picture with modern superstar images. Martyrs have become role models in the Jihadi subculture, themselves being iconic figures. Martyr-posters thus help to define the Jihadi community and to glorify its role models. Icons and iconic representations (sound, smell, picture, and communicative actions) support all forms of rituals. Common ideas must be symbolically loaded. Ritualistic and theological discourses would be weaker without iconographic representations and aesthetic virtual architectures.

Icons and iconic representations (sound, smell, picture, action) also support all forms of rituals and ritualistic interactions which we can observe on Jihadi forums. Common ideas must be symbolically loaded in order to create a stable and “comfortable” ideological-semiotic environment in cyberspace. The discourse alone would be much weaker without its iconographic representations.

Modern mass media has facilitated the creation of millions of new signifiers. Also Jihadi ideologues who frequently appear on TV or on the Internet “signify” the concept “jihad.” Within the triadic model of signification, the master task of a propagandist is to influence the “interpretant” of a percipient, i.e. his emotional interpretation through a manipulation of “signs” that suggests an interpretational sovereignty over “objects.” This creates a specific picture of the “outside world” in the inner world of a percipient.

Rules of convention and rituals in Chat-rooms such as virtual grooming, net-flirting, net-flaming, and the avoidance of “net-shitting” develop in a steady interplay of communicational processes, which underlie certain codes of behavior (“Chatiquette”). They are steadily being applied and negotiated.⁴⁴⁶ Based on Peirce’s theory, Witsch describes every mouse-click and each movement on the keyboard as a form of communication with the machine (*man-machine-man communication*). This form of communication allows interaction, integration, partaking and active sharing of fundamentalist concepts via the Internet.⁴⁴⁷

symbolizes a program or file in a graphical user interface (computers). One might argue that this transports the ancient cultural meaning, i.e. icons as triggers of a feeling of deep respect, into virtual worlds.

⁴⁴⁶ Gabriel Dorta, *Soziale Welten in der Chat-Kommunikation* (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2005), 15.

⁴⁴⁷ Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*, 100.

Illustration 2: Peirce's triadic model of signification⁴⁴⁸

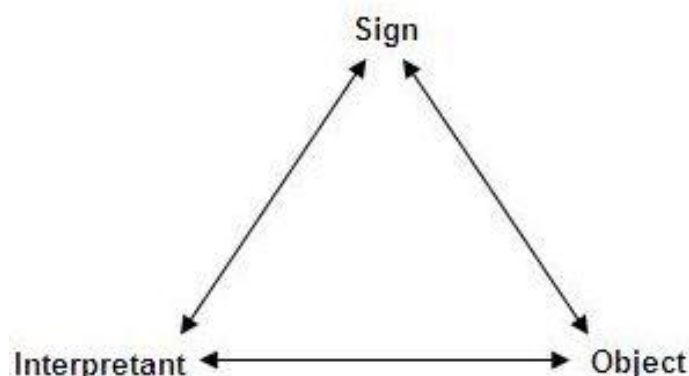
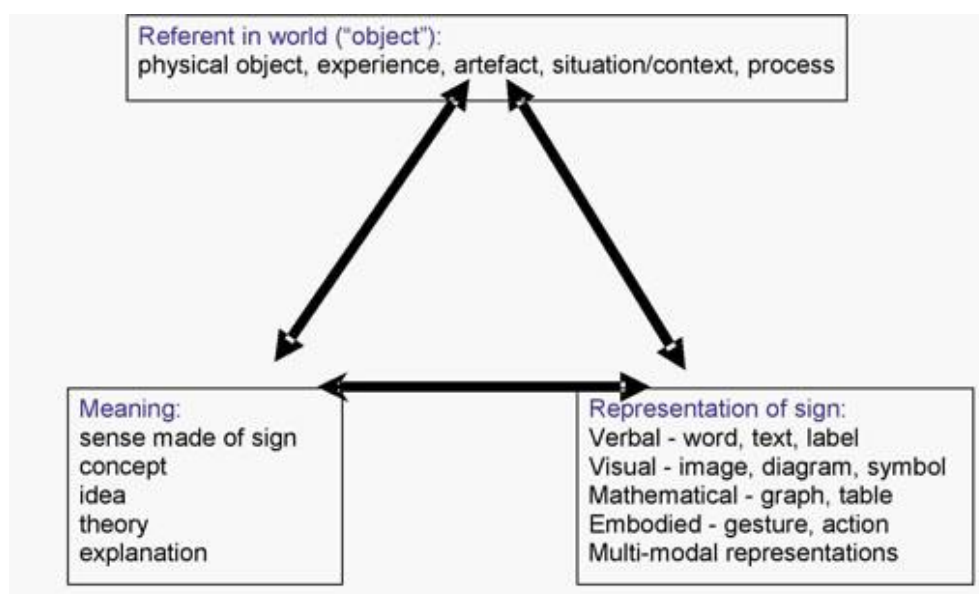


Illustration 3: Extended triadic model⁴⁴⁹



If we orientate ourselves at Peirce's model, the abstract object "jihad" bears numerous meanings in Islamic culture. "Jihad" can be applied to public cleanliness, fighting one's own ego, helping the poor, striving for high standards of piety, or bombing a congregation of civilians. In Jihadi Netculture, i.e. that subculture, which believes in a martial/terrorist interpretation of jihad, a symbolical and communicational construction of martial jihad takes place by the interaction of its followers. Signs such as "qualisigns", i.e. propagandistic "reporting" and "studies" (*taqarir wa abhath*) signify jihad. Symbolic colors of Islam and aesthetic depictions are attributed to jihad. "Icons" such as Jihadi logos with their quasi

⁴⁴⁸ "Semiotics", The Chicago School of Media Theory.

⁴⁴⁹ „Framework for using representations in the classroom,“ University of Southern Queensland-course material, accessed December 30, 2011, <http://www.usq.edu.au/course/material/EDU8432/use.html>.

marketing-oriented branding rationalize the concept of jihad. Theological arguments validate the concept of “jihad,” while the chatting around jihad strengthens group identification. Recipients and activists of the Jihadi subculture take and add to the concept of jihad their own interpretations and meanings. Yet, a guiding semiotic umbrella is created by administrators of popular Jihadi websites. Regarding the ambiguousness of Jihadi ideology, Peirce’s dynamic model should be favored over Saussure’s static one. Saussure’s idea is not wrong. Many concepts derive their meaning through a dual process. A “bread” is still a “bread” (The signifier “bread” still relates to the signified “bread”). But Jihadis use very flexible abstract and popular concepts (Islam *per se*, piousness, prayer, righteousness, calligraphy, Quran, colors) and try to occupy them with the meaning of “terrorist jihad.” The divide between sub-cultural and mainstream interpretations shows that abstract concepts such as Islam and jihad cannot be interpreted simply by agreed upon conventions. They are culturally and contextually dependent. While one Muslim interprets Islam and its referential symbols in a peaceful way, followers of Jihadi ideology construct around the meta-concepts of Islam and jihad a web of terrorist interpretations. Similarly, the web-propaganda of Neo-Nazis and Scientology - presented in Witsches study – wants to occupy popular concepts. For example, concepts such as racial and national identity (Neo-Nazis), or transcendental concepts such as the question how to attain happiness in postmodern capitalist societies (Scientology), are being discharged of their broader sense and re-loaded with the meaning of fundamentalist ideology.

Jihadi propaganda, thus, hijacks popular Islamic concepts. The double-purpose is to preserve the own radical subculture and at the same time to invite mainstream Muslims. Regarding the construction of Jihadi subculture on the Internet, the question is how Jihadi websites try to create feelings of community, enmity and salvation among followers under the umbrella of global jihad. Semiotic processes are set in pace by the propagandist use of sound-picture-script combinations, uplifting music and videos. The iconography of Jihadi subculture uses semiotic tools such as steady repetitions of pictorial, scriptural, visual and audio patterns to create authoritative representations of itself.

Klaus Theweleit claims that outside influences by new media, especially the listening of music, heavily influence neuronal systems in the the human brain and body. The human body works itself like a hollow chamber, claims Theweleit. It does not forget the enervations caused by music, but seems to store them in its muscles and nervous system to imitate the music’s characteristics in small and big movements. The brain reacts to music by pouring out endorphins. Listening to music causes a state of euphoria and ecstasy, which “blurs the

borders of our existence [...] and allows us to immerse in a sea of emotions.”⁴⁵⁰ Accordingly, one can argue that the sounds, symbols and visual messages of constant marketing and propaganda influence imitation and re-enactment among percipients. Leaning on Theweleit’s thesis, the consumption of propaganda can cause deep alterations in a person’s awareness. We can substitute the element “music” by listening, viewing and processing digitalized extremist content. “Beyond that, I store something in the body, in the whole sensomotoric system, which as a result of the impact with music lives its own live inside of me. For me, the decisive factor is that certain cell-structures of my body have changed after consuming certain music.”⁴⁵¹

Fundamentalists create their online-environments by using signs connected to three inter-related myths, which they present by way of propaganda. Witsch suggests a triadic categorization of myths, which bind fundamentalist online groups together:

1. Firstly, fundamentalists construct a COMMUNITY MYTH for the sake of IDENTIFICATION and MOBILIZATION.
2. Secondly, they construct a CONSPIRACY MYTH in order to ACTIVATE followers to struggle towards an end goal.
3. Thirdly, the end goal is based on a MYTH OF SALVATION in order to present a possibility of SALVATION, which can be seen as a reward for the ideological rigidity claimed from members of fundamentalist-extremist groups.⁴⁵²

It seems that adherents of ideology can only accept brute extremism and violence, if they are offered a justification and reward for it. Violence is then not a means per se, but justified with political, humanist, idealist and/or transcendental goals based on shared *Weltbilder* or myths. Accordingly, if we research fundamentalist and extremist websites in terms of in-group identity, out-group alienation and goals, we have to look for three categories of mythological signs. These are 1) signs of community and identification 2) signs of conspiracy 3) signs of salvation and reward for actions. Witsch concludes that the central sign tool to present and produce fundamentalist online culture is the picture.⁴⁵³ It crowns over all other signs that are being used by extremists (and also marketing experts). The sign “picture,” claims Monika Witsch, is the major aesthetic and semiotic tool of fundamentalist agitation. Fundamentalist agitation in the Internet, according to Witsch, takes mainly place via photos, photomontages,

⁴⁵⁰ Klaus Theweleit, „Übertragung. Gegenübertragung. Dritter Körper: Zur Gehirnveränderung durch die Medien,“ in International Flusser Lecture, ed. Marcel René et al. (Köln: Buchhandlung Walter König, 2007).

⁴⁵¹ Klaus Theweleit, „Übertragung. Gegenübertragung. Dritter Körper. Zur Gehirnveränderung durch die Medien“ (Köln: Künstler, Autoren, Institution und Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther, 2007)

⁴⁵² Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 57-61.

⁴⁵³ Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 129.

symbols, or text-picture combinations. The author would like to modify this assessment. Since Islam is a text-culture, the importance of script and ideas through letters should not be underestimated. In another study, the author will focus on the emblematic meaning of theological texts in Jihadi net-cultures. Furthermore, propagandist repeats the same illustrations time and again to prepare and support real rituals. Therefore, the term “ritualistic aesthetics” might be applied to pictorial semiotics as well. To get a better understanding of the concept, we will start by discussing categories, general layout and the arrangement of information of Jihadi websites.

4.a Entrances Pages of Jihadi Websites

Entrance pages of Jihadi websites serve the goal to attract followers and construct a first sense of community. They are essential first platforms on which identification with Jihadi group ideology is created. The construction of virtual ideological worlds can only be understood in the light of topographic and semiotic authority on extremist websites; as well as the hierarchies of information on these websites. Let us therefore turn towards the very basic aspects of their layout and the effects, which they create in a hypothetical viewer. On the following pages, we will discuss the meaning of colors used by these sites, the layout and semiotic arrangement of information, i.e. hierarchies of information, and the use of pictorial script (mixing script and picture) for propagandist purposes. Afterwards we will turn to the semiotic content analysis, which includes signs of community, conspiracy and salvation.

4.b A Short Recourse: Categories of Jihadi websites

Jihadi entrance pages concord by the use of core symbols like the black flag, the horseman, Quran and Kalashnikov, or scimitar and neo-classical Islamic calligraphy in their logos. In terms of coloring and structure, however, the sites vary considerably. This not only owes to the different graphic-programs used to create them, but also to the visions of their creators. Roughly speaking, three different kinds of sites can be distinguished.

Firstly, person-centered sites of theological authorities appear most formal in their layout, since they are structured vertically and colored in a monochromatic manner, which dominates the front page.

Secondly, Jihadi publication and discussion forums combine the vertical structure of hierarchical authority with the horizontal structure of participation and membership outreach.

Vertical frames in the upper sections which stand for hierarchical authority carry the banners of Jihadi organizations and link to their products on free file hosting services. Horizontal frames which represent the principle of participation in the lower half serve as gateways to different discussion platforms. The geometry of hierarchy (vertical frames) is mixed with the layout of participation (horizontal frames and links to the different subforums), which starts in the lower half of these websites. This also bears a clear message in terms of group coordination and hierarchy, since the principle of participation is stressed only underneath authoritative messages by Jihadi organizations.

Thirdly, individual Youtube accounts and blog sites display Jihadi symbolism intensively, but seem to be subordinate under ideologico-semiotic guidance of mother pages which set the tone. The suggestions of authoritative symbols and colors found on popular Jihadi websites seem to influence and guide the individual interpretations. The lower the hierarchy gets, the more intensive becomes the semiotic reproduction of Jihadi ideology. Thus, Jihadi aesthetics and community building in the Net display clear chains of authority. Semi-official and person-centred webpages tend to appear in a formalistic layout. They lack the playfulness, which enhances in supporter administrated forums and peaks in supporter-designed youtube accounts and blogs. Yet, also accounts are being used by authorities in the Jihadi scene to gain followers. This owes to their grassroots character which stands for trustworthiness. In summary:

A. “Official” Jihadi-Information sites serve the representation of organizations and persons, as well as the publication and archiving of propaganda, but offer little possibility for participation. These sites want to appear formal and trustworthy and to reflect authority. They achieve this by arranging Information vertically and using white and grey shades of colors (white represents in Islam order, statehood and theological trustworthiness). Not breaking consent, but integrating extremist and popular Islamic culture is the goal.

B. Forums publish the latest products of Jihadi organizations and offer possibilities for discussion and gaining prestige in these discussions. Forums strongly influence virtual group-processes (identification with and strengthening of in-group culture). They are at the same time extremist and inviting. Jihadi symbols together with popular Islamic colors like green (Prophet and Islam), blue (paradise imaginations), brown (conquest), and red (triumph and violence) dominate the forums. There is no break of consent. The hierarchical arrangement of information stands for authority (announcements by Jihadi media companies); horizontal levels stand for participation (discussion rooms).

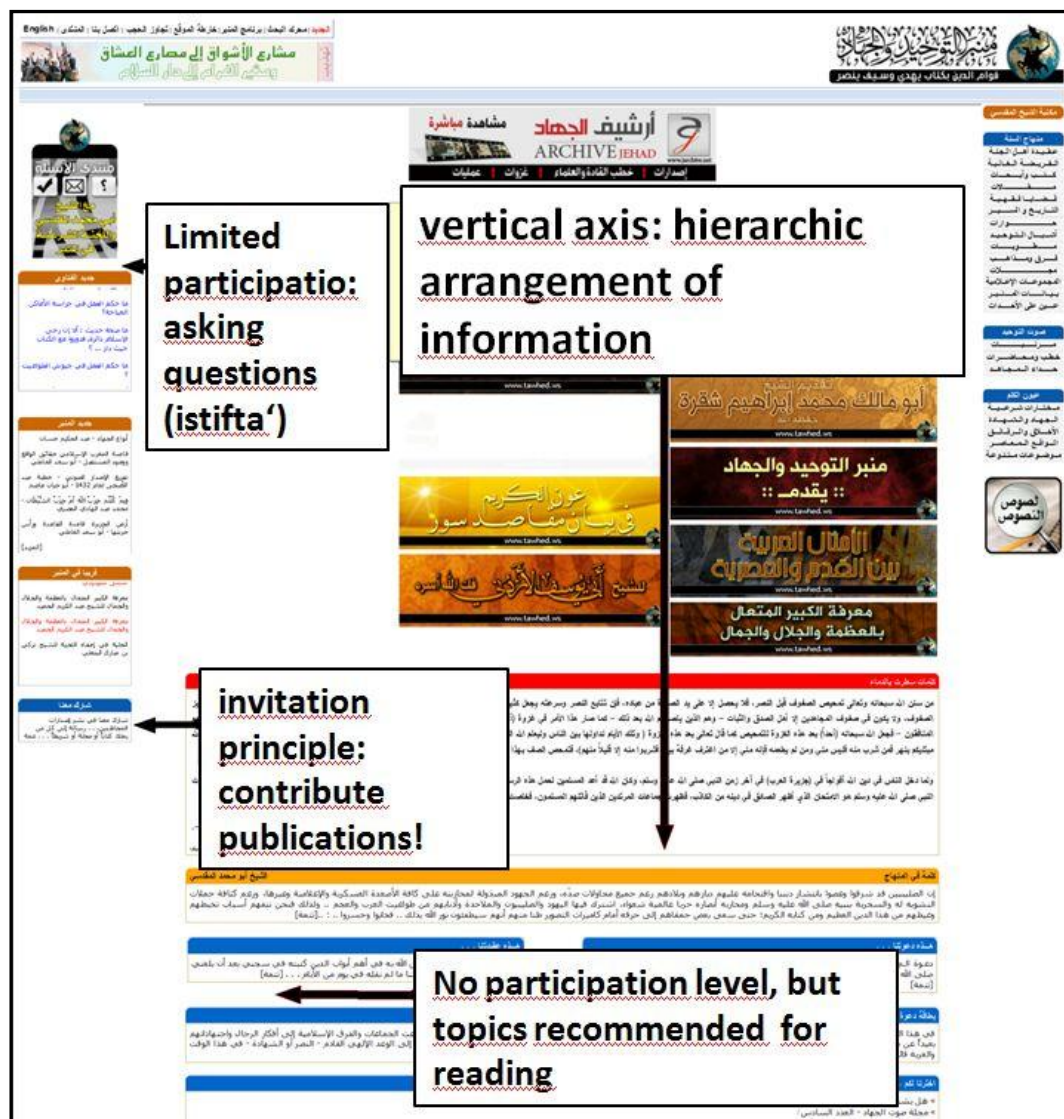
C. User accounts and blogs are grassroots-trendsetter, who republish, imitate and simplify Jihadi messages. In addition, they build wide-branched networks of “friends” and “subscribers.” Characteristically, they display a strong exaggeration of Jihadi symbols and colors. Their goal is to address target audiences that are already radicalized and find themselves in a radical anti-culture. Some imitate authoritative sites in order to address Jihadis as well as Muslims in general. However, they do not predominantly display the dissonant aesthetics of “extremist consent” (such as information sites and forums), but favor layouts of “rebellion” and non-consent. Increasingly, important ideologues and media outlets of organizations are starting to use YouTube and BlogSpot accounts as well.

4.c Semiotic Authority and Information Structures on Jihadi Websites

“Official sites” represent organizations or persons. Another purpose of “official sites” is the publication and archiving of propaganda. However, these Jihadi sites offer little possibilities for participation in the propaganda process or for the build-up of online-groups. In the above illustration, the site tawheed.ws by the Jordanian cleric Muhammad al-Maqdisi shows how information is arranged. The main frame of orientation is vertical, when scrolling from the top to the bottom of the site this structure creates a clear hierarchy of information. Participation possibilities are very limited, users can ask for theological counsel (istifta’), or contribute publications if these are good enough. The tawheed-webpage is person-centered because it represents the prominent Jordanian Salafi-Jihadi Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who has been jailed for the most time since the mid-1990s. It thus retains salient characteristics of the iconography of a Jihadi jurisperit’s self portrayal in terms of information structuring and coloring (see below). Over the last two years, the site has adapted its layout to the prominent Jihadi forums, which play the key role in the distribution process of the productions of Jihadi media companies.⁴⁵⁴ It displays now advertisement banners for Jihadi productions on the first page.

⁴⁵⁴ They post banners in their headpages with links to the newest Jihadi productions, which can be downloaded from free file-hosting websites.

Illustration 4: dominant vertical arrangement of information on www.tawhed.ws



Tawhed.ws is so important because it is one of the most extensive online libraries for jihad texts, a platform for extremist virtual consultation (*istifta'*), with its own Sharia-council, and strives to act as a virtual organizer of Salafi-Jihadist movements in different Arab countries. Since the outbreak of the “Arab Spring” in Tunisia in late 2010, the site is directly addressing protesters and Salafi-Jihadi movements in Arab countries, such as in Libya, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia.⁴⁵⁵

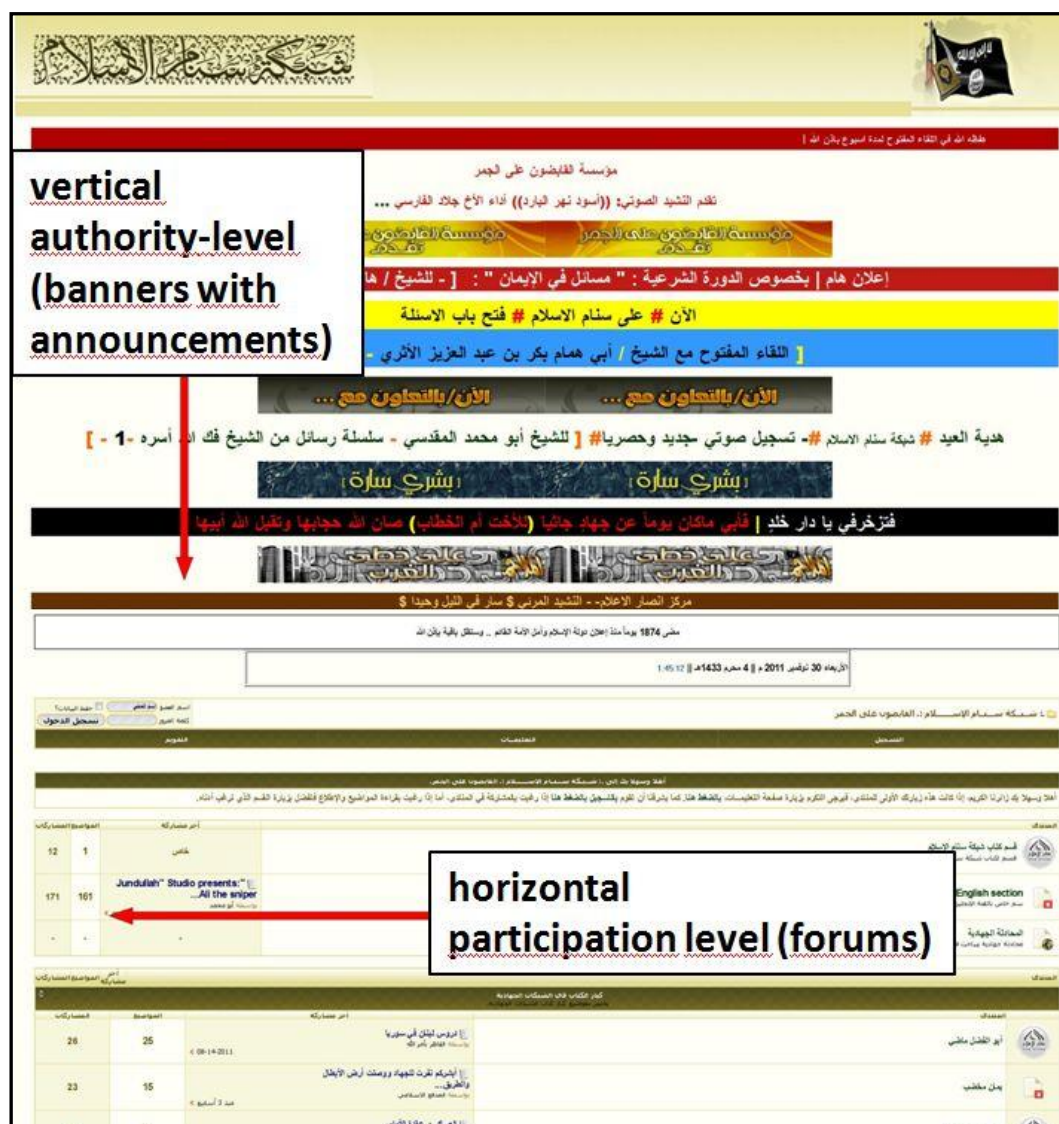
“Official” websites like tawhed.ws want to guide users towards a Jihadi interpretation of Islam. Users are supposed to consume and download propaganda. These sites are often held in white or grayish colors, which we will explain in detail below. Maqdisi’s and other “official” Jihadi web presences show clear similarities in the layout and information structures.

⁴⁵⁵ Siege grafik “tawheed_september_libya”

Examples are the website of the Afghan Taliban www.alemara1.com/, the website of the prominent media-jihad group “Jihadi Media Elite“ (nukhbat al-I’lam al-jihad) www.nokbah.com/, the “Jihad-Archiv” by the same group and “shamilonline” www.shamilonline.org of the Chechnyan jihad, which is probably run by Turkish supporters and was set up in tribute to the popular Islamist leader Shamil Besayev (1965-2006).⁴⁵⁶ These sites have different agendas, but bear similar formal and aesthetic characteristics, which are typical of person-centered and official Jihadi information sites. The composition of news items related to jihad, is strongly focused on single praiseworthy individuals, but at the same time the viewer finds symbols of jihad spotted all over the sites to reconfirm Jihadi subculture. The background colors are very light, some use a bright grey playing into white. Gray letters on grayish background that barely distinguish themselves are a typical fascist trait. Yet the grey also points into the direction of theological authority, purity, order and trustworthiness in the Islamic use of colors.

⁴⁵⁶ Turkish volunteers have since the 1990s been the biggest group of foreign fighters in Chechnya (as well as in this decade Waziristan). The website is registered under the name “Muhittin Kaspersky”, the first name being a Turkish male forename which means “the one who strengthens religion.” The accommodation address is in Moscow, Petrovka St. 38, which is probably a ridicule of Russian authorities who are the main enemy of Jihadi groups in the Caucasus. Yet, the IP-address is located Berlin and the URL-extension stands for Turkey (tr). On the top left, for example, the “seal of the Prophet” can be seen, white on black background. On the top right the word jihad is written with a scimitar underneath it, the main horizontal top box being of different kinds of red presents the slogan “The Islamic Emirate of Caucasus” then a thin long white arrow towards the right and the sentence “...chooses a new jihad generation.”

Illustration 5: Transition from vertical centralized structure to horizontal lay out on Jihadi forum <http://snam-s.net/vb/>

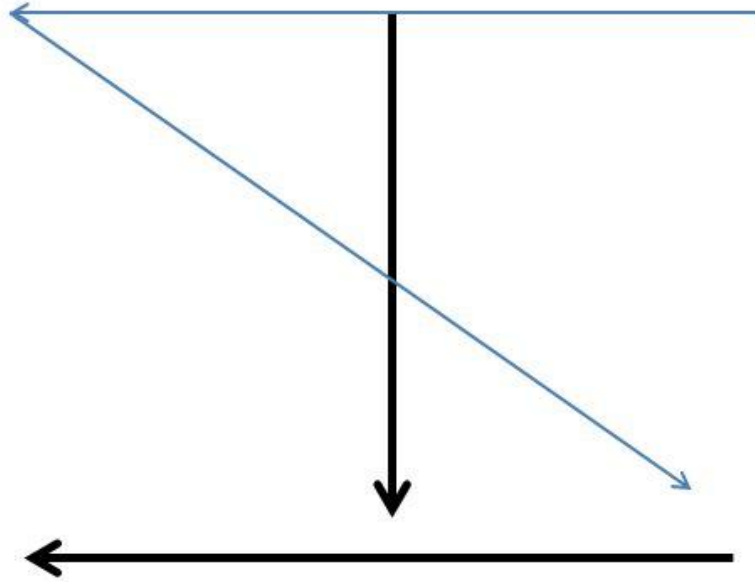


Another category of web-presences are Jihadi forums, which display a characteristic division between upper and lower half layouts and information arrangement. The visitor first has to scroll through the upper half, which vertically aligns authoritative Jihadi advertisement banners. This is a purposely created chain of information-authority and thus command of ideology within the geometry of the forums. The arrangement of information is authoritative, especially in the light of the fact that information-sharing is not voluntary, but contains strictly ideological commands. In contrast, the lower half of the site has a horizontal geometry that represents the principle of participation. While the upper half contains centrally aligned advertisement banners, the forum pages below follow the idea of mobilization through action. Suddenly the mouse-scroll direction changes from up-down, to a flat level where the forum member has to decide for himself which gateway for discussion he may enter. Once he has

taken the decision, he clicks on the graphical user interface (GUI) of his choice. Inside forums, different topics related to jihad are offered and new hierarchies emerge according to the number of posts and ranks a member earns. In the above illustration, the transition from vertical to horizontal frames is visible. This layout structure (vertical authoritative and horizontal participative frames) distinguishes leadership from followers. The upper order suggests certainness and unquestionableness with the possibility in the lower order to participate and follow up on suggested topics. The goal of these sites is to offer a counter-narrative that converges with popular Muslim culture. They do not to break with conventional Islamic perceptions, but rather use Islamic symbols to occupy them with the meaning of jihad. This way, forums as well as official sites try to prevent a gap between extremist thinking and broader Islamic culture (in contrast to single user accounts on youtube and blogspot which appear much more radical in their layout). The layout mix of extremist content and classical Islamic aesthetics thus creates virtual rooms of authority, with a tension between rebellion and convention. The goal is to create a counter-world that still aims at agreement and therefore forms a consensual counter-world. This tension stimulates emotion and therefore serves propagandistic and mobilizing purposes. However, one needs to keep in mind that Jihadis rely on existing layouts provided by website software such as “Vbulletin.” Existing software already offers marketing oriented information and layout hierarchies, which can be well used for propagandist purposes.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁷ Software for websites is planned by designer teams that pre-construct semiotic hierarchies for consumers, who want to present their agendas. If the agenda is “cooking,” for example, a consumer can use the existing basic frames of v-bulletin software to build a discussion forum. Adding emblems and a logo and arranging information according to the given horizontal or vertical frames, creates hierarchies of information on recipes, ingredients, discussions, etc. Jihadi-fundamentalists use the same possibilities to create hierarchies and rule of information. The geometric and semiotic elements of control are much more visible now, then they are in non-ideological topic sites.

Illustration 6: Jihadi information hierarchy through semiotic symbiosis and geometric alignment



The thinner blue arrows represent the reading direction of text and viewing direction of pictures. The larger black arrows represent the main information alignment of websites. On forums, the verticality of the upper half of the website, which the visitor scrolls down, breaks the reading direction as well as the viewing direction of advertisement banners with script and pictures that are posted on it. In the lower half of the website, a change to horizontal forum sections indicates that the level of participation starts. The participation level is clearly aligned underneath the authority level with its advertisement banners which is reserved for messages by Jihadi media, ideologues and leaders. The semiotics of Jihadi virtual worlds are carefully constructed according to authority, power and invitations to participate.

Illustration 7: three levels of information on youtube account “AbuUsamaAlGharib” (<http://www.youtube.com/user/>)



Youtube and blog accounts are perfectly fit to be used for propagandistic and ideological purposes. Three levels of information arrangement allow users to present their agendas, to build communities by attracting “friends” and “subscribers.” There are ample possibilities for participation and communication in the “commentary-section” of YouTube accounts. The example of the YouTube account of the Austrian Jihadi propagandist Mohammed Mahmoud aka Abu Usama al-Gharib illustrates this. In terms of authority in the Jihadi netsphere, blogs and YouTube accounts appear to be at the end of the hierarchy line. Yet, they gain importance since they are easy to create and administrate. Thus, these sites continue ideological

production and are becoming trendsetters in Jihadi media.⁴⁵⁸ Individual accounts offer a lot of simple means for animation, personalization and design. They oftentimes look more impressive than the “mother pages” (i.e. person centered sites and forums). The reason is that key signs and colors are intensified by individual activists. Their semiotic expression is that of simplification, radicalization and selection. Individual user characteristically repeat key symbols in an exaggerated manner, for example, the seal of the prophet, the credo, the black banner, and the determined single horse-rider who is followed by an envisioned Muslim army. Many user accounts pick up well known signs of prominent Jihadi websites. For example, the Jihadi blogspot account <http://islamenmelilla.blogspot.com/> uses the head-frame and logo of the website of the Afghan Taliban (<http://www.alemara1.com/>). It uses the white flag (liwa’) adopted by the Taliban, instead of the black war banner (raya), which is more typical for salafi-Jihadis. Green dominates as monochrome background color, which reminds of the Jihadi forum Shumukh al-Islam (Heights of Islam). The blog’s background is not dominated by the repetition of key-symbols, but remains plain and creates space for hundreds of links to other Jihadi websites. The visitor can endlessly scroll down along the links and click on the Jihadi propaganda of his choice. The account owner re-enacts the semiotic layout and thus the communicative authority of prominent Jihadi-forums.

4.d Propagandist Semiotics of Online Jihad

4.d.i Pictorial Script

“Pictorial script” is an important tool for propaganda and marketing. It can be defined as a) the arrangement of pictures like letters and b) the combination of pictures and script. Pictorial script induces the rationalization of emotional concepts into a consumer’s mind. On Jihadi websites, we can find it in three forms. These are, firstly, repetition of iconic pictures in a script-like form, secondly, the combination of propagandist pictures with text items, and thirdly, the propagandistic use of Arabic calligraphy.

In her conceptualization of pictorial script, Monika Witsch argues that the combination of picture and text enhances the rationalization of myths among fundamentalist readers. The way in which information is signified and ordered on websites plays an important role in the first stages of the propagandistic process, which aims at mobilization and the building up group-cohesion. Witsch illustrates this with an analysis of logos and emblems on Nazi-extremist and

⁴⁵⁸ If one looks at the different categories of Jihadi sites, it appears that Jihadi forums function like a link between individual user accounts and “official” authoritative sites. The forums combine both the principles of authority and individual participation with each other.

Scientology pages.⁴⁵⁹ Jihadi websites combine picture and text similarly. While there are cultural differences in the reading direction according to different languages, the eye movements when looking at pictures are independent of culture and determined by a sensory process. The eye tends to examine interesting elements within a picture from left top to right bottom. Advertisers, for example, are recommended to place key parts of a picture on the right side. The brain perceives letters in written script differently from pictures. The brain does not read a sentence as a whole, but the eyes jump from one word to the next.⁴⁶⁰ In English, the script reading direction is from left to right, while in Arabic it is from right to left. This brings us back to what Witsch calls pictorial script (“bildhafte Schriftform”), i.e. pictures that are arranged like letters and letters that are presented like pictures. Arabic calligraphy is unique for combining sacred emblematic script with aesthetic pictorial expression. According to Witsch, the combination of the rational category “reading” with the emotional category “viewing” is typical for fundamentalist web-agitation; it gives a rational meaning to myth and represents a mediation between emotional and rational concepts.

Firstly, let us illustrate how the combination of viewing and reading signs creates a link between myth and ratio on Jihadi websites. As we have explained above, reading script is a rational act, while viewing pictures is an emotional act. This way pictorial script rationalizes the myth and makes it more trustable. Below, this technique is illustrated by the repeated alignment of face of a martyr and of a Jihadi leader. The repeated arranging of their faces from right to left makes the messages which they represent (“martyrdom”, “leadership”) more readable and therefore more plausible.

Illustration 8: Constructing Jihadi martyrdom ideology on the basis of popular Muslim aestheticism with pictorial script; Shumukh al-Islam forum⁴⁶¹



⁴⁵⁹ Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 68-73.

⁴⁶⁰ <http://www-is.informatik.uni-oldenburg.de/~dibo/teaching/mm/buch/node22.html>

⁴⁶¹ Advertisement banner of al-Qaeda's media company *al-Sahab* for the video „*Yaumiyyat mujahid*“, part three, accessed October 31, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=134859>.

One popular definition of beauty in Arab-Muslim culture says that there are three things that appeal to the eye, “water, green and beautiful human features” (*al-ma' wa-l-khudra wa-l-wajh al-hasan*).⁴⁶² This perception of beauty is re-constructed, for example, in Shumukh’s virtual environment through the iconic representation of a martyr’s face who smiles in front of a green background, symbolizing Islam. There seems to be a tension at first sight between the happiness, reflected by the moving banners, which invite the viewer, and the cruelty, represented by the death image, which transports the ideology of militant jihad into the mind of the viewer. Yet, this is no contradiction since in Jihadi ideology the pleasures of paradise require torturous efforts with the final goal of absolute happiness. The pictures of the martyr and the preparation for his attack are aligned in a pictorial script form. Below the feature of al-Qaeda’s leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is aligned similarly in an announcement-banner by the Jihadi Media Elite for a collection containing “all of his Messages and Studies.”⁴⁶³

Illustration 9: Alignment of al-Zawihiri’s face in pictorial script form; www.nokbah.com



Similarly, we can find a repeated alignment of pictorial patterns in the background of Jihadi YouTube channels and BlogSpot accounts. A script tells us something, it is rationally understood. Thus, the perception of martial symbols, which are aligned like script, changes from an aesthetic viewing into a quasi-rational understanding. It is a sensory-psychological process that rings in the change because the eyes jump from picture to picture, start rationalizing them and thus add to the right-brain dominated emotional picture viewing

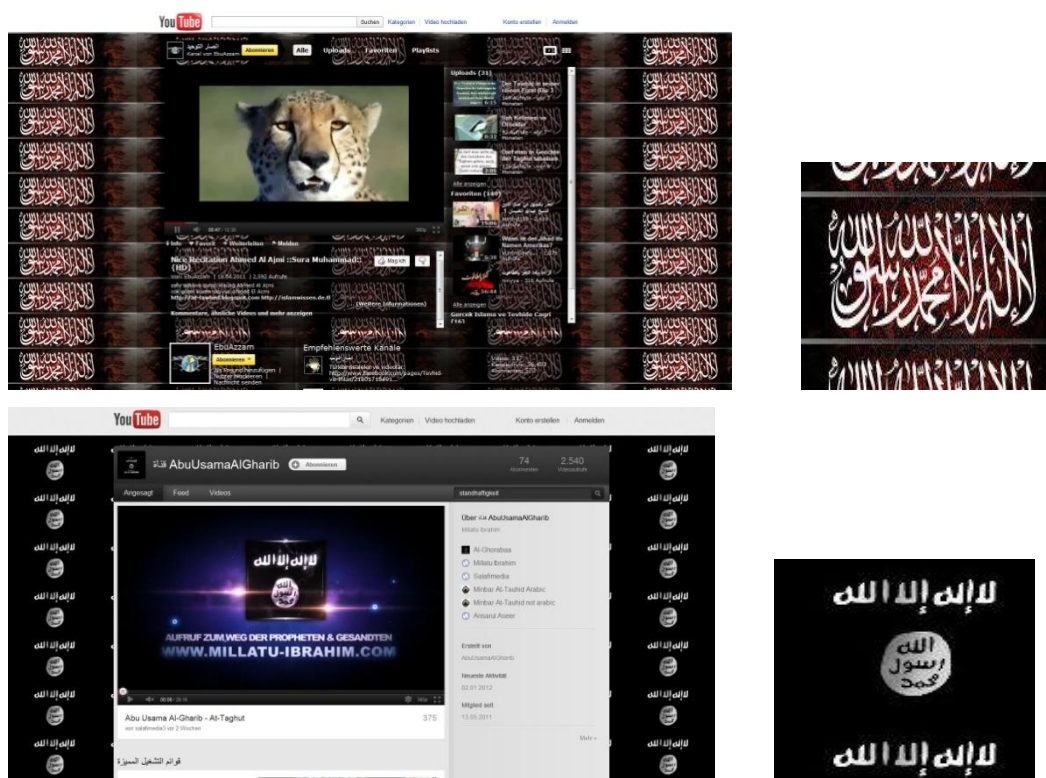
⁴⁶² The popular proverb goes back to a *hadith* and is frequently being discussed on popular Arabic and Islamic discussion forums, here on www.tawwat.com, accessed October 3, 2011, <http://forum.tawwat.com/showthread.php?t=9426>. Different geographical and cultural interpretations of the *hadith* are mentioned in the threat. The original *hadith* can also be found on www.islamweb.net, in the collection of the medieval Islamic scholar al-Suyuti (1445-1505), accessed October 3, 2011, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=1002&hid=226&pid=0.
In Arabic:

مرفوعا " :ثَلَاثٌ يُزِدْنَ فِي قُوَّةِ الْبَصَرِ : النَّظَرُ إِلَى الْخُصْرَةِ ، وَإِلَى الْمَاءِ الْجَارِي ، وَإِلَى الْوَجْهِ الْحَسَنِ "

⁴⁶³ “*Majmu' rasa'il wa abhath al-sheikh al-mujahid Ayman al-Zawahiri hafizahu Allah*” (All messages and studies of the fighting sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may Allah protect him), accessed December 15, 2011, <http://www.nokbah.com/mn.htm>.

(approximately from top-left to bottom right) the textual rational viewing (from sign to sign according to script direction). Below the Islamic credo (*shahadah*) “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger” is being used as repeated background pattern. Jihadis have appropriated it as a central Symbol of their sub-culture (meaning “only jihad is truly Islamic”). Likewise, the “seal of the Prophet” is a meta-sign of Jihadi subculture and stands for the exclusiveness of Islam and Muhammad, who has “sealed” the message of monotheism as last Prophet. This arrangement of signs rationalizes the claim that Jihadis may carry forward the monotheistic message of Islam by violent means.⁴⁶⁴

Illustration 10: Pictorial script as aesthetic background pattern



Secondly, the combination of propagandist pictures with text items is a form of pictorial script. In the illustration below, the logo of the www.tawhed.ws online library of jihad, the motto is skillfully combined with a meta-symbol of jihad: namely the contours of a scimitar swinging horse rider with a black standard in front of a globe, which creates a guiding rationalization of Jihadi myth by combining the pictorial emblem with the emblematic theological sentence. The calligraphy of the logo reads “Pulpit for Monotheism and Jihad”. It

⁴⁶⁴ Both examples are Youtube taken from Youtube channels. The first one is a German Jihadi grassroots supporter of Turkish origin, Ebu Ezzam, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/user/EbuAzzam>. The second example is the Youtube channel of the prominent Austrian Jihadi propagandist “Abu Usama al-Gharib,” who is the emir of the [salamedia.de](http://www.salamedia.de), accessed January 2, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/user/AbuUsamaAlGharib>.

rationalizes the horse rider who wants to install the global dominance of Islam. Underneath the logo the text reads: “*Qawam al-din kitab yahdi wa saif yansur* - The base of religion is [built on] a book that guides [the right way] and a sword that assists.” It is a quote by the Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328 AD). Encapsulated within the quote is the principle of communicative guidance through religious propaganda. This means in plain words that one must fight in order to do justice to God’s commands. In a more abstract sense, authoritative text and its reproduction by followers guide physical combat.⁴⁶⁵ Reproduction means any use of signs that support the Jihadi message. Virtual leadership can also be understood as “guidance” by incitement that flows out of emblematic semiotics. However, it needs to be presented in a consumer-friendly and effective way. The concept of “a book that guides” and “a sword that assists” was also used prominently by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. All 22 issues of their online magazine “*Mu’askar al-Battar*” (Training-Camp of the Cutting Sword), which was issued between 2003 and 2004, used this concept. The online magazine focused on military training. Each magazine-issue contained a section called “a book that guides.” This section provided the Islamic legal and strategic underpinning of paramilitary training, which was afterwards presented in a magazine-section called “a sword that conquers.”⁴⁶⁶ The latter section discussed different tactics, weapons and their use in terrorist operations. In today’s Jihadi net-culture, the concept of guidance by text and its application by weapon is very well-known. It comes to use strongly for the build-up of virtual groups, the strengthening of their cohesion, and the motivation of terrorist attacks; and it is used in combination with the “incitement-paradigm” (*tahrid*) that propagates individual terrorism (*irhab fardi*). In Jihadi net-environments, virtual institutions such as caliphate, emirate and statehood are created to give quasi-institutional power to doctrinaire commands (see for example, the virtual Islamic State of Iraq ISI, or the “emirate” of al-Qaeda).⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ The website www.tawhed.ws interprets Ibn Taymiyya’s quote as a command to fight, since one needs to hit with the “sword” in order to do justice to the “book.” The website attributes the quote to Ibn Taymiyya’s work *al-Siyasa al-Shar’iyya* (Shariatic Policy), without citing the page number or volume. “*Hatmiyat al-muwajaha*” (The Necessity of Confrontation), accessed October 26, 2011, <http://www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=3441>.

⁴⁶⁶ „*Majmu’ nasharat Mu’askar al-Battar*,“ accessed January 3, 2011 www.battarpages.atSPACE.com. The editors of the magazine were the chief propagandist Abu Jandal al-Azdi (aka Faris al-Shuwayl, arrested 2004) and the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda leader Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin (killed 2004), who succeeded Yusuf al-Uyairi after the Saudi regime killed him in May 2003 (Al-Uyairi also administrated the first website of al-Qaeda central, al-Neda.com, between 2001 and 2003).

⁴⁶⁷ See as an example “*Bayan bi-sha’n khilafat al-sheikh Usama bin Laden fi imarat jamaat qaidat al-jihad*,” accessed June 2, 2012, <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?445261>.

Illustration 11: Pictorial script to signify the divine virtual guidance concept in the logo of www.tawhed.ws



The illustration below depicts another online Jihadi-adaption of the “a book leads and a sword assists” theme, which stands for divine leadership (*hidaya*). In this example, the book is analogized to the computer, which functions a carrier of the divine injunctions in the Quran and leads toward armed struggle. The “assisting sword” is placed right over the computer to illustrate this function. The picture of a martyr is put on the computer’s screen. This way, a direct link between fighting and martyrdom is established, which fosters the cultic and excessive veneration of martyrdom in Jihadi subculture.⁴⁶⁸



⁴⁶⁸ Source: Shumukh al-Islam forum, design section, accessed June 12, 2012.

The next illustration is a further aesthetic adaption of the divine virtual guidance, which is based on the divine leadership concept (*hidaya*) “a book leads, and a sword assists” In this example, the aesthetic and symbolic focus lies on the light blue color. Light blue is the color of the immensely popular online social networking service Twitter, and it symbolizes Twitter’s communication function. “A book leading [the right way]” is here analogized with the communicative function of Twitter and its use by the “media warrior on Twitter” (al-mujahid al-ilami fi Twitter). The Kalashnikov, which he holds, stands for a modern revolutionary adaption of “an assisting sword,” i.e. Jihadi struggle.⁴⁶⁹



Also the last example is an aesthetic-semiotic adaption of the leadership doctrine “a book leads and a sword assists,” which will be discussed in detail in the chapter “Divine Virtual Guidance: The Theology of Online Jihad.” In this example, an online activist portrays himself as a warrior, whose communication is as effective as a bomb, which blows up among enemies. In this case, “a leading book” is represented by the computer screen which features the entrance page of Shumukh al-Islam forum. “An assisting sword” is both represented by

⁴⁶⁹ Source: Shumukh al-Islam forum, design section

the stylized bomb on the right side, and the Kalashnikov bearing fighter on the left side, who is probably the aspired alter-ego of the activist who designed this e-poster.⁴⁷⁰



Thirdly, calligraphy sui generis is a form of pictorial script, a mixture of picture and text. Calligraphies enjoy enthusiastic appreciation by art collectors, even if they do not command the respective languages. Similar to Chinese calligraphy, Latin art scripts, or the Japanese *Sho*, Arabic is an aesthetic picture-text mixture and has traditionally been used for the iconic depiction of culture and transcendental concepts. Arabic calligraphy is today widely used in modern media, for graffiti and news-ads. But in a traditional sense, it stands for divine authority, strength and transcendental significance.⁴⁷¹ The Quran was written down in Arabic and represents the revealed word of God to Muhammad. From the perspective of a devout Muslim, Arabic calligraphy embodies the Quran.⁴⁷² The sacral meaning of Arabic script is also stressed in the Quran itself.⁴⁷³

In order to prevent polytheist idolatry, figural art has been avoided in many parts of the Islamic world, which has led to the development of Arabic calligraphy as an art form. “Many

⁴⁷⁰ Source: Shumukh al-Islam forum, design section.

⁴⁷¹ Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978)

⁴⁷² Helen Boyle, “Embodiment as a conceptual Framework for Describing The Practice of Quranic Memorization,” in *Recapturing the Personal: Essays on Education and Embodied Knowledge in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Irving Epstein (Charlotte: IAP, 2007), 121.

⁴⁷³ 96:3-5: “3. Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,- 4. He Who taught (the use of) the pen,- 5. Taught man that which he knew not.” The Holy Quran, Yusuf Ali Translation, accessed October 24, 2011, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/09601.htm>.

religions have made use of figural images to convey their core convictions. Islam has instead used the shapes and sizes of words or letters. Because Islamic leaders saw in figural arts a possible implication of idolatry, Islam's early theocracy looked to the artistry of calligraphy for religious expression. In Islamic and Arabic cultures, calligraphy became highly respected as an art — the art of writing.⁴⁷⁴

In addition, the “primacy of the word in Islam is reflected in the virtually universal application of calligraphy. Writing is given pride of place on all kinds of objects – objects of everyday use as well as entire wall surfaces, mosques furniture, the interior and exterior of mosques, tombs, and al-Ka'ba, the sanctuary of Islam.”⁴⁷⁵ Also “new buildings, monuments and even private homes have Quranic verses etched deeply into their structures”⁴⁷⁶ Calligraphic art beautifies not only tangible objects of everyday use, but also virtual surroundings such as Jihadi websites, their advertisement banners, logos, captions and e-book titles. In such environments, focus is put on the representation of power. Being the script of the divine message of the Quran “endowed it with extraordinary strength and transcendent significance: from this world's manifold possibilities, Allah had chosen it, and the Arabic language it initially expressed, as the vehicle for his final revelation.”⁴⁷⁷ Of course, there are varying degrees to which this concept of authoritativeness and holiness is understood by different Islamic cultures. While mainstream Muslim cultures focus on the broader religio-aesthetic aspects of calligraphy, Jihadis stress the literal meaning and authoritativeness of script. Important for their fundamentalist interpretation is also that Arabic calligraphy points back to the Golden Age of Islam. It reminds of piety and right guidance of the “true” original Islam between the 7th and 10th centuries.⁴⁷⁸ By these characteristics, Arabic calligraphy lends itself perfectly for propagandist purposes.

Jihadi calligraphy is neither traditional, nor does it follow strict rules of the art of writing and symbolism in ancient Islam. The Islamic world is in a period of transition. This also influences stylistic experiments with calligraphic designs and fonts. “These range from personal formal experiments to representations of vernacular street art, cartoons and comic

⁴⁷⁴ “Arabic Calligraphy,” Imam Reza Network, accessed October 24, 2001, <http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=4202>.

⁴⁷⁵ Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 129.

⁴⁷⁶ Helen Boyle, “Embodiment as a conceptual Framework for Describing The Practice of Quranic Memorization,” 121.

⁴⁷⁷ Anthony Welch, *Calligraphy in the arts of the Muslim world* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 23 (referring to Yasin Hamid Safadi: *Islamic Calligraphy*, London 1978)

⁴⁷⁸ Among the classical calligraphic scripts frequently used on Jihadi forums are Thuluth, Eastern Kufi, old Kufi, Muhaqqaq, Naskhi, Nastaliq and Riq'a. See Jonathan Figel, “Radical Islamic Internet Propaganda: Concepts, Idioms and Visual Motifs”, in *Intermedia Seduction for Terrorist Recruiting*, ed. Boaz Ganor et al. (Amsterdam: IOS, 2007), 34-38.

strips. The challenge, however, remains in testing the limits of legibility.”⁴⁷⁹ Like designers, political activists or graffiti artists in the Islamic world, Jihadis also test aesthetic limits. Their websites overflow with figurative illustrations and modern Arabic script fonts. This use reflects an acceptance of “taking creative risks that challenge the rules of the old establishment; of recognizing present realities of contemporary design and visual branding [...],” observes a recently published book on Arabic graffiti, which promises to become a standard work of reference on modern Arabic calligraphy.⁴⁸⁰ Jihadi script is embedded into backgrounds with aesthetic calligraphic themes of dots and diacritical points, which animate the logos and give them depth. “When written without dots and diacritical points, Arabic script can look flat and barren. But when the dots and diacritical points are added, the script comes to life like a garden in spring.”⁴⁸¹ Jihadi websites use pre-developed calligraphic fonts in emblems and logos – often, design fonts that combine classical Dewani and Thuluth scripts. Deewani has beautifying curved elements, while Thuluth with its diacritical marks and horizontal alignment gives depth and organizes.

The head-section of the Ansar al-Mujahidin forum (script logo and pictorial emblem)⁴⁸² illustrates this use of Arabic calligraphy. When looking at its layout, the script automatically animates the eye, which continues with the reading direction of the logo (Arabic is read from right to left) towards the left and then meets the emblem on the far left side. The emblem is an explicit pictorial representation of the abstract concept “jihad.” Jihad is represented by a Quran, a Kalashnikov and a black flag embedded into a background of repeated arabesque and floral patterns. The black flag carries again the credo and the “Seal of the Prophets,” which creates a black-white, wrong-right dichotomy in the mind of the viewer. However, this does not break the aesthetic symmetry of the headframe. The emblem combines script (Arabic), symbolized script (the picture of the Quran, containing Allah’s revealed words), and symbols of warfare (Kalashnikov and black banner). The transcendental emblematic power of this arrangement on a radicalized viewer must not be underestimated. The eye follows first the logo-script direction from the right to the left, stops at the emblem, examines it and bounces back towards the right, where the logo attracts it again. An emotional and dynamic tension exists between the logo and the emblem, which is made pleasant to the eye by the balanced use of saturated earth and light colors in the background. The arabesque decoration patterns, which are typical elements of Islamic decoration, remind of the precious art of the Abbasid

⁴⁷⁹ Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès, “Brief History of the Arabic Script,” in *Arabic Graffiti*, ed. Pascal Zoghbi and Stone AKA Don Karl (Berlin: From Here to Fame Publishing, 2011), 21-22.

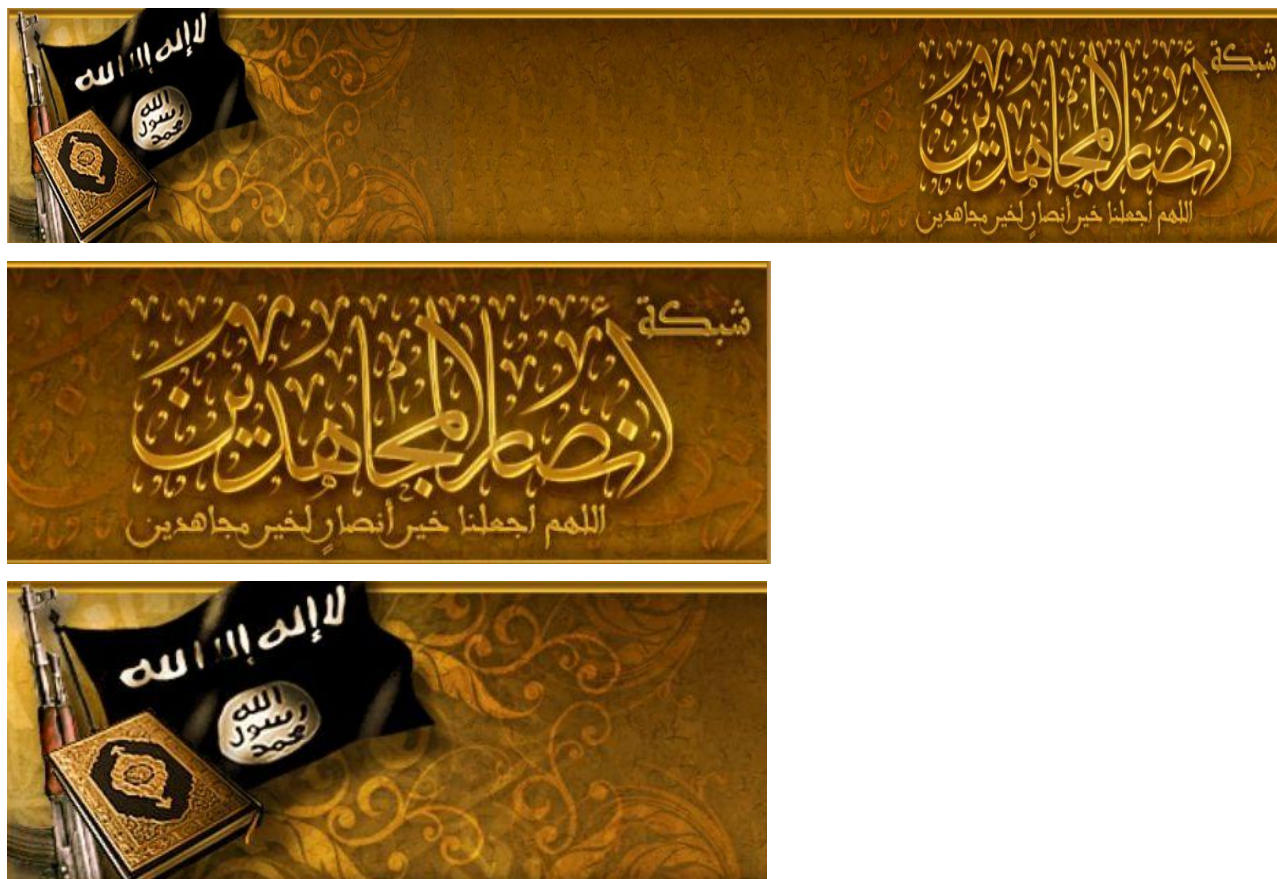
⁴⁸⁰ Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès, “Brief History of the Arabic Script,” 22.

⁴⁸¹ „Arabic Calligraphy,” www.imamreza.net.

⁴⁸² <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/>, accessed January 10, 2012.

caliphate (the last “Arab”-caliphate before Turk-people took power), but also of Ottoman document decorations, which stand for authority.⁴⁸³

Illustration 12: head-frame the Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, logo and emblem separately below.



4.d.ii Colors

Colors play an immensely important role for Jihadi aesthetics and semiotics. The psychological meaning of colors has been exploited by marketing and advertisement strategists for decades. Yet, Jihadis use colors not only for their trans-cultural psychological meaning. Certain colors bear a deeply rooted theological meaning in Islamic culture. It is not a coincidence that Jihadi leaders and street preachers present themselves in white and black clothes in front of audiences and cameras. The meaning of colors described is not only

⁴⁸³ Another example of pictorial script on Jihadi websites displaying similar aesthetic tools are advertisement banners of Jihadi media companies which are created with the help of moving *Graphic Interchange Formats* (gifs). These are graphic-formats with a very good image compression yet little color depth (until 256 colors pro single picture), which enable users to save several pictures on one file. The files are represented like animations by web-browsers. The different pictures appear, disappear and move.

important for Jihadi web-propaganda, but also for their real-life use by Jihadis. For example, al-Qaeda's top theologian Abu Yahya al-Libi sometimes wears a white linen shirt and a black cap in video speeches. The street preacher Abu Izzadeen can be seen on demonstrations in Great Britain wearing black cloth and a white cap. This means that al-Libi puts focus on his theological authority - with dominant white clothes. The smaller black head-cloth stands for Jihadi ideology. Vice versa, Abu Izzadeen puts stress on his Jihadi credibility – with dominant black clothes. The smaller white head-cloth stands for religious trustworthiness.⁴⁸⁴ This significance of colors in Jihadi subculture will be explained in the following at the example of Jihadi websites.

Jihadi websites are defined by very strong and vivid colors. The polychromic nature of Jihadi websites is at times overwhelming and does not remind of terrorism at all. Yet, there is a very intricate propagandist twist to it. This polychromasia – in the colors sense - stands for paradise imaginations and jihad. Red can mean blood in a single graphic, but in the overall picture of different colored graphics appearing one after the other, it is one element in a composition of lustful and rewarding abundance. Such a composition includes elements of transcendental, martial and popular aestheticisms and is supposed to appeal to non-Jihadi as well as to Jihadi audiences. One perceives not only a propagandistic use of stark colors like red, which stands for blood and conflict, or black as representation of a counter-world and rebellious narrative, but an overall chromaticity that appears very energetic, but innocent, which the administrators of the sites try to link to broader Islamic culture by combining pictorial symbols of violence such as the Kalashnikov with metasigns of Islam such as the Quran. In a deeper sense, the colorfulness of Jihadi websites can be understood in terms of hopes of redemption and ideals of salvation that are connected to an imaginary overflow of riches in paradise. Without Understanding this deeply rooted vision of salvation in Jihadi ideology, it is impossible to get behind the deeper meaning of the layout of their websites. Moreover, self-perceptions of Jihadis as a Muslim vanguard and war concepts are expressed by the choice of colors. Since at the same time colors on Jihadi websites are connected to broader Muslim aestheticism, as we have argued before, the goal is to create a counter-world that is anchored in consent. This dissonance stimulates emotions and serves propaganda purposes such as the mobilization of followers.

⁴⁸⁴ Speech by Abu Yahya al-Libi, „Libya, madha yurad laha“ (What is wished for Libya), al-Sahab media company, accessed December 11, 2011, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=14119>; Speech by Abu Izzadeen, „Es ist ein Krieg gegen den Islam – Abu Izzadeen“, Youtube-channel „Rashidunarmy,“ accessed January 3, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/user/Rashidunarmy#p/search/0/vk9Q_HO3Ozk.

There is no uniformity in the choice of colors on Jihadi websites. Forums, which until now are the most important websites in the Jihadi Net, illustrate this. Although there are clear aesthetic and semiotic similarities on Jihadi forums - all share the same symbolisms and symmetry of logo and emblem - the base colors and background themes are different, ranging from white to greenish to brownish, or red and deep blue base-colors on white or light backgrounds, on which again polychromatic media banners (gifs) of Jihadi organizations float and blink.⁴⁸⁵

From a western perspective, the layout may seem confusing, immature and pubertal, because the simplicity of the message and its illustrations are at times overwhelming. Yet, it should be very clear that the pre-potency of Western perception of culture has nothing to lose in our research. Let us describe the coloring of two prominent Jihadi websites to illustrate their use of colors.

The use of white is very well illustrated in the online library www.tawhed.ws of the Jordanian Jihadi cleric Muhammad al-Maqdisi. When entering the website, a wide range of colors draws the eyes to different directions and creates unrest in the mind. The blinking and movement of the banners is created by animated Graphic Interchange Formats (gifs), consisting of moving layers of pictures, which lack color depth and exhaust the human eye quickly, but are simple to design. This is an emotional element, standing for the urgency of the Jihadi message and signaling that there is no time to waste. Everything must be clicked on immediately; everything is supposed to be consumed. From the Jihadi viewpoint, the Islamic Community (*umma*) has new input, and therefore waits for its consumers to devour the messages and emotionally participate in the plight of its victims and the victories of its warriors.

The basic background color of the site is white. Cross-culturally, white is perceived as the color of purity, peace and innocence. In Islam, white additionally stands for goodness, honour and theological purity.⁴⁸⁶ Most importantly in the context of the website, white represents

⁴⁸⁵ Polychromasia together with a very similar build-up can be seen in the following forums: Greenish base colors define the Arabic language Al-Jahafal forum ("The Huge Armies," <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/>), the Turkish and Arabic language Hakka Davet Forumu ("Call to Justice Forum," <http://www.davetulhaq.com>) and the Somali language Qimmat al-Islam forum ("The Peak of Islam," <http://alqimmah.net/>), but also the Arabic language Forum Sanam al-Islam, The Hump of Islam (<http://snam-s.net/vb/>). Brownish base colors are used by the prominent forum Ansar al-Mujahidin "Supporters of the Fighters," <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/>), Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya ("The Islamic Network of Sacrifice," <http://alfidaa.org/vb/>), Shabakat al-Tahaddi al-Islamiyya ("The Islamic Network of Confrontation," <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/>) and Shabakat Hanin ("The Network of Longing (for martyrdom)," <http://www.hanein.info/vb/>), which are all Arabic language top forums in virtual Jihadi media. The Persian language forum Rah al-Jihad ("Way of Jihad," <http://www.rahejihad.com/index.php>), however, as well as the Arabic top forum al-Shabakat Jihad al-Alami ("Global Jihad Network," <http://www.aljahad.com/vb/>) display martial red and deep blue respectively as base colors of their sites.

⁴⁸⁶ Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, "The philosophy of colours in the Holy Quran," accessed January 4, 2011, <http://www.muslim.org/islam/colours.htm>. Wearing white clothes is recommended by different Islamic traditions as a sign of purity. Muslim dead who die of a natural death are supposed to be shrouded in white sheets: "Wear your white clothes, because they are the best and shroud your dead in them." (martyrs, however, are according to

distinguished Islamic scholars (*'ulama'*). Therefore, many scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi wear white in their television shows. Also salafi-fundamentalist (*da'wa* and *mu'tadili* strand) love to wear white linen clothes that reach until their ankles (following the tradition of Muhammad). The salafi-Jihadi scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi is an icon figure of Jihadi theology. He has probably chosen the background color of his website on purpose.

The Quran likens scholars to streaks (*thamrat*) of water in the mountains (*jibal*), and within these mountains there are white, red and black streaks. White streaks are likened to learned people (*'ulama'*), i.e. the most trustworthy scholars.⁴⁸⁷ Muslim scholars are thus allegorically likened to colors and grouped into three different categories, which represent their value and worth. Continuing the allegory, another verse from the Quran is applied in Islamic theology to liken the white-category of *'ulama'* to rocks “from which rivers and streams of knowledge flow, and springs and fountains of truths rise up.”⁴⁸⁸ In this context, “white is the colour of peace, harmony, goodness and honour, red denotes danger and war, and black is the colour of evil and ignorance. The colours in this verse also refer to three types of **religious leaders**.”⁴⁸⁹ The non-color black is excluded from other colors and stands for stark destruction and mischief. However, in contrast to Vidyarthi’s negative explanation of black, Jihadis love black. It is one of their most prominent colors. black has its own historic significance in Islam, since the war flag of Muhammad is said to have been solid black with an eagle on it (“*rayat al-'uqab*”). Therefore, black is associated in Islam with “war” and “conquest.” Furthermore, black stands for Jihadi messianic visions of the Day of Judgment (*yaum al-qiyamah*, see below). Individual Jihadi media activists (Youtube channels, BlogSpot accounts) tend to use stark colors, especially black, disproportionately. Black is the color of underworld and death. It expresses protest against conventions, stands for non-adaption and revolution against the established, corrupted orders and poses a counter-model to the accepted world. It is a color

some traditions supposed to be buried unwashed in their battle-stained clothes). Masnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, No. 2137, *Mausu'at al-Hadith*, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=2137&pid=672350.

⁴⁸⁷ Quran Surat al-Mala'ika/al-Fatir 35:27-28 explicetely says: 27. Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky? With it We then bring out produce of various colours. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of colour, and black intense in hue. 28. And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colours. **Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge ['ulama']:** for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving. Accessed October 14, 2011, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/03504.htm>.

⁴⁸⁸ Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, “The philosophy of colours in the Holy Quran.” This refers to Surat al-Baqara 2:74: For among rocks there are some from which rivers gush forth; others there are which when split asunder send forth water; and others which sink for fear of Allah. Accessed October 14, 2011, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00209.htm>. Surat al-Baqara 74 offers a further analogy to ulama, similar to that given in Surat Fatir, where learned people are associated with white (i.e. clear) streams of water that run down the mountains. Henceforth, the color white is seen as the color of the learned religious people.

⁴⁸⁹ Religious leaders refers here again to *'ulama'*, learned Muslims, i.e. jurists. See Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, “The philosophy of colours in the Holy Quran,” accessed October 20, 2011, <http://www.muslim.org/islam/colours.htm>.

that creates fear of the unknown. In Jihadi culture, black stands for the fright that is supposed to enter the hearts of enemies.

Let us take a closer look at the use of the color “green” by the Shumukh al-Islam forum (<http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>).⁴⁹⁰ *Shumukh al-Islam* (Heights of Islam) is one of the most prominent Jihadi forums. The name of the forum, “Heights of Islam,” is a metaphor for jihad (in the sense of fighting (*qital*)). Unlike the tawheed.ws website, Shumukh is dominated by the color green, especially in the head-frame, which is vivid and fresh. In Islamic cultural perceptions, green is regarded as the color of the Prophet. Muhammad is said to have worn green garments, when sitting in the shade of the Ka'ba in Mecca.⁴⁹¹ Thus green is perceived as the color of Islam. It is also perceived as the color of Muhammad and the first Muslim community, which Jihadis envision to emulate. In addition, green in Arab cultural perception has for centuries reminded of abundance. It stands in stark contrast to the scarcity of Arab reality on the Arabian Peninsula from which the Islamic message sprang. Green is like an oasis within the vast, sandy desert. Green thus also symbolizes hope, wealth and redemption in Islamic culture (which is similar to the trans-cultural meaning of the color green). Finally, the Arabic word for Paradise is “Garden” (*al-jannah*). When thinking of a garden, green stands for a saturated flora. First of all, a garden is associated with the green of its plants. But there are also flowers, wells, fruits, silver decorations, and virgins with white complexions and black eyes said to be in the heavenly garden.⁴⁹² Paradise is a garden full of pleasures so plentiful that they escape human imagination. In addition, the Quran, Surat al-Dahr (Age)/al-Insan (Man) 76:21 says that Muslims will wear garments of fine green silk in the hereafter.⁴⁹³ The colorful description of paradise in the Quran and Sunna adds additional coloring possibilities, which are amply exploited by propagandists of the Shumukh forum. The forum displays an abundance of colors including yellow, pink, purple, blue and red in its advertisement banners and animated graphics.

⁴⁹⁰ As discussed above, Jihadi forums combine hierarchic authority (represented by the dominant alignment of Jihadi media products from so-called media-institutions “mu’assasat” and distribution centers “marakiz”) with participative elements, i.e. discussion forums. Jihadi forums are not only platforms for ideologues and organizations – like the person-centered website tawheed.ws -, but also pools for sympathizers. They are mostly run by media activists who have contact with the media outlets of Jihadi organizations via the websites. Members can communicate with each other and leave comments on different platforms of the forums. The communication is strictly ritualistic and happens along agreed upon patterns of behavior and salafi-Jihadi “Chatiquette.” If we apply the definition of ideology by Althusser, then members of these forums think they are self-determined participants, whereas in reality their discussions are strictly governed by ideological rules.

⁴⁹¹ Masnad Ibn Hanbal, No. 17158, *Mausu’at al-Hadith*, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=17158&pid=672793

⁴⁹² See the paradise descriptions in Surat al-Dahr (76) and in Surat al-Fath (48).

⁴⁹³ Surat al-Dahr (Age)/al-Insan (Man) 76:21, accessed October 14, 2011, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/07601.htm>.

The Meaning of Colors on Jihadi Websites: A Summary⁴⁹⁴

Jihadi visual culture uses colors intensively. Many colors found on Jihadi websites, for example, yellow and pink are happy, can be seen in religious decorations and calligraphy all over the Islamic world. Their broader cultural use is exploited by Jihadi websites to make the concept of martyrdom attractive. Brown, light-brown and yellow also remind of earth and sand and transport a “grounded” message. Sand covers also a lot of the ground of the Arabian Peninsula, the cradle of Islam. In addition, yellow stands for light. The propagandistic message is thus transported by shining rays. In short, polychromatic mixing of colors on Jihadi websites appeals to Muslim aestheticism. It expresses popular aesthetics, paradise imaginations and Jihadi martyrdom-ideology in parallel. Yet, some colors have very distinctive meanings in Islam and Jihadi subculture. Each description will go from the general Islamic to the more specific Jihadi meaning. Finally, some cross-cultural characteristics are mentioned.

White: Stands for truth, purity, piety, religious authority and Islamic order. Muhammad is said to have entered Mekka after its submission in 630 AD with a white flag (*liwa'*). The flag of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate Afghanistan is white (since 1996 it additionally bears a black *shahada*). In Jihadi propaganda, white transfers its qualities on the object or person attributed to it. Psychologically, white represents the beginning of all possibilities and at the same time the running-away from the consequences. As the color of light, it stands in stark contrast to the non-color black and mixing both colors triggers archetypical symbolic categories in the brain. White stands for absolute “yes.” In combination with black it creates the perception of absolute order and starkly dichotomist divisions (black-white, good-bad, etc.). In addition, the pure and untouched state of white is emblematic for truth.

Black: Is the color of jihad. Muhammad's war banner (*raya*) is said to have been black and the Abbasid caliphate was represented by black as well. Black also stands for the advent of the Mahdi at the end of times and the final universal battle. Black is thus the color of jihad, the caliphate and the apocalypse. In Jihadi subculture it evokes a historical sense of the concepts jihad, conquest and caliphate, as well as a doctrinaire vision of salvation. Black stimulates looking back and forward at the same time. It creates the wish to emulate glorious

⁴⁹⁴ This summary is based on observations of the author, the Islamic Imagery Project of the United States Military Academy and the color-analyst Harald Braem. For the last two sources see The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda (Westpoint: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006), accessed January 4, 2012, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Islamic-Imagery-Project.pdf>; Harald Braem, *Die Macht der Farben: Bedeutung und Symbolik* (München: Wissenschaftsverlag LangenMüllerHerbig, 2009).

military campaigns in the Islamic past and to establish a caliphate in the present. In addition, the color stimulates the radicalized viewer to usher in the Day of Resurrection (*Yaum al-Qiyamah*). Psychologically, black stands for the struggle between light and darkness, good and bad, death and life. Contrasts are always dependent on each other and cannot sustain themselves alone. According to the color-theoretician Max Lüscher, black represents the will to destroy the existing and conventional order. It is a color of opposition and authoritarian coercion against other opinions and life-styles.

Red: Has positive as well as negative connotations in Jihadi imagery. Most basically, it stands for blood and danger, battle and violence. As a color of violence it has both positive pro-Jihadi and negative anti-Jihadi meanings. It stands positively for Jihadi triumphs and successes, and the dangerousness of Jihadi forces. In a negative sense, it evokes the concepts of tyranny, torture and oppression by the Jihadis' enemies. Emotionally, red is the oldest and until today one of the most popular colors among cultures. It is an ambiguous color that represents fire, health, energy and optimism, but also aggression, danger, injury and violence. The Jihadi adaption of red on websites is similar to its cross-cultural meaning.

Green: Is the color of the Prophet Muhammad and thus symbolizes Islam. Green stands for piety and basic Islamic principles laid down by Muhammad. Many Muslims identify green as an especially Islamic color and use it to decorate items of faith. Green in popular Islamic culture as the color of Islam has a significant influence on Jihadi propaganda. Jihadis use green to create a link between their cause and popular Muslim perceptions of piety. When used on Jihadi websites, the color green indicates that the colored object is Islamic and belongs to Islam (such as green colored countries on a map, green backgrounds of martyr pictures). In parallel, green evokes imaginations of the afterlife, superfluous riches and paradise imaginations. Psychologically and cross-culturally, green stands for life, health and plants. Throughout history, green has been the symbol of hope for different peoples who suffered under scarce life conditions. The Vikings, for example, hoped to establish a saturated dwelling place amidst the ice of "Greenland." Muhammad identified a hopeful meaning with green; it contrasted the sandy vastness of the Arabian Desert. Green is perceived like the glimpse of an oasis in the desert.

Blue: In Jihadi imagery as well as in broader Muslim culture blue stands for hope. Especially in Jihadi images it represents the hope placed in jihad and martyrdom, awakening visions of superfluous water provided in paradise. Thus, blue is strongly connected to paradise imaginations and these visions are strengthened by an interplay of blue, green, yellow and red

colors on Jihadi websites. Emotionally, blue is a meditative color and reminds of water, sky and heaven.

Brown: Some Muslims say that brown stands for Islamic conquests, since it signifies earth that was conquered. Many websites use brown in different shades and this explanation seems reasonable. In Islamic dream interpretation, brown represents dignity, nobility, power and wealth. But it can also stand for hardships.⁴⁹⁵ Maybe Jihadis interpret the color similarly. Maybe they combine popular-cultural Muslim aesthetics, which are Sufi-influenced, with a mystical reading of Jihad (even though they would strictly deny this). Emotionally and trans-culturally, brown stands for stability and security (ground underneath the feet).

4.d.iii Signs of Identification; Conspiracy and Salvation on Jihadi Websites

The development of media jihad and its symbolisms goes back to the 1980s (Afghan jihad), was further developed and strongly influenced in the Bosnian, Algerian and Chechnyan Islamic struggles as well as by the global Jihadi scenes in “Londonistan,” Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi-Arabia during the 1990s. It has clearly peaked during the last ten years, which is strongly connected to Islamic terrorism being trump on the international security agenda, the popularity of Jihadi topics and growth of Jihadi subcultures connected to this, growing Internet-use and enhanced user-friendliness of web 2.0. Already in the 1980s, prominent media activists experimented with Jihadi media and symbolism. Some of them subordinated themselves under the deans of global jihad, Abdallah Azzam (1944-1989) and Umar 'Abd al-Rahman (arrested 1993 in the U.S. for his involvement in the first WTC bombings). Tamim al-Adnani, Azzam’s right hand, Abu al-Walid al-Masri, an influential mentor of the school of “jihad front journalism”⁴⁹⁶ as well as Azzam’s jihad magazine “Majallat al-Jihad” strongly influenced marketing and branding of Jihadi media products.⁴⁹⁷ The symbols and logos on Jihadi websites and in contemporary Jihadi videos are continuations of the earlier product logos, core symbols and identifying signs in 1980s and 1990s Jihadi propaganda. For example, the propagandist use of black flag and “The seal of the Prophets” go back to the 1980s media jihad. In terms of acoustic signs, for example, the

⁴⁹⁵ „Seeing brown color in your dream in Islam..”, [www.myislamicdream.com](http://www.myislamicdream.com/brown_colour.html), accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.myislamicdream.com/brown_colour.html.

⁴⁹⁶ “Front journalism” means that Jihadi fighters, starting in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), were called upon to document their operations with video and photo-cameras. The raw-footage would then be turned into propaganda material and distributed internationally or in the home-lands of the fighters.

⁴⁹⁷ Jihadi video database of the Jihadism Online Project; see also Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

“chirping of green paradise birds” can already be found in 1990s videos from the Bosnian jihad. Also the ample use of Anashid (vocal singing without instruments) already belonged to the semiotic repertoire of jihad propaganda 30 years ago. The Internet is merely a new and better transport medium for the message. But according to Marshall McLuhan, the Medium is the message and thus strongly influences the output and way information is distributed.⁴⁹⁸ If information is power then media jihad is as important as actual battle fields. Assassinations by the U.S. of top al-Qaeda media operators such as Samir Khan, Anwar al-Awlaqi and Ibrahim al-Banna (all 2011 in Yemen, Khan and al-Awlaqi were U.S. citizens) testify to this.

“Signs of community”, “signs of conspiracy” and “signs of salvation” stand for semiotic-psychic processes of identification, exclusion and reward. Firstly, “signs of community” are identifiers for the Jihadi community and teach us how Jihadi online groups see themselves. Furthermore, a dualistic counter-picture is needed to distinguish “we” (i.e. Jihadis) from “them” (i.e. enemies). Witsch observes that the dichotomic construction of enemies relies on “signs of conspiracy.”⁴⁹⁹ Societies and groups tend to identify themselves by labeling outsiders with unwished characteristics such as “criminal”, “crazy.”⁵⁰⁰ The exclusion of outsiders for the sake of community building is also a typical trait of mass societies.⁵⁰¹ It becomes even more important for subcultures. In extremist and fundamentalist subcultures, signs of conspiracy reproduce hostile myths. These are sub-summarized by Jihadis under the myth of the Judeo-Christian Neo-Crusader alliance that leads a war against Islam and the Muslims, which is supported by Muslim apostates (*murtadun*). “Signs of identification” and “signs of conspiracy” need to be complemented with “signs of salvation,” which refer to the essential promises of reward in fundamentalist ideology. Without a reward, the ideology would lack a goal. In Jihadi terms, signs of salvation are based on selective interpretations of the rewards for jihad, which can be found in Islamic sources and theology, plus own signifiers that are invented by the Jihadi community. This triad of key signs is ever repeated in Jihadi propaganda, may it be in the layout of Jihadi websites, Jihadi movies, internet discussions, or advertisements for Jihadi products. Understanding these symbols and depictions enables the sociologist and anthropologist to enter deeper into the subculture of jihad and to understand processes of communicative guidance through ideology.

⁴⁹⁸ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Random House, 1967).

⁴⁹⁹ Witsch, *Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*, 57-58, 113-121.

⁵⁰⁰ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 102.

⁵⁰¹ According to the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), “We not only hate the evil because the harm us, but because they are evil.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emil oder Über die Erziehung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), 302.

4.d.iii.1 Signs of Identification and Community

Symbols, emblems and slogans are not only the most important identifying signs on Jihadi websites, but also in Jihadi reality. The way in which Jihadis surround themselves with symbols of jihad in videos, such as black flags and horses testifies to this. Symbols “play a fundamental role in the process of creating identity;” and in the way groups build “cultural boundaries, self-protection and organize relations with the outside world.”⁵⁰² Jihadists perceive a state of war with all out-groups. This refers to non-Muslims such as secularists, to Christians, Jews, and maybe most importantly to relations with Muslims who do not follow the Jihadi interpretation of Islam. Jihadis try to strengthen the perception that they are the chosen elite of Islam. They compare themselves to the proto-Muslim community around Muhammad (the “sahaba”). It is their task to fight all unbelievers around them. Identifying symbols on Jihadi websites plays a crucial role in teaching members the core message of messianic mythology in a simple and understandable way. Only a glimpse shall suffice to awaken to live in a percipient apocalyptic visions and concepts of victoriousness. For example, the contours of a black horse rider with a black standard shall create emotions connected to the concept of individual “heroism” and dedication. The strength of such semiotics goes at the cost on non-martial interpretations of Islam. Especially so, since a worldwide counter-terrorism policies focus on phenomena related to jihad and give ever more updraft to the phenomenon.

The repetition of certain illustrations and pictorial patterns can be called “ritualizing aesthetics.” The reason is that repetition of similar aesthetics and iconography represents and prepares for real rituals. One of the most prominent symbols of Jihadi identification is the black flag (*al-rayah*). In virtual space, it is a cluster of bits and pixels compressed into a bitmapped image that stands for jihad. As an emblem it can be found in variations on all Jihadi websites. One variation of the black standard in Muhammad’s time is said to have borne an eagle. Therefore, it is also referred to as *rayat al-‘uqab*, or simply *al-‘uqab*. The Jihadi forum “al-Uqab” has even chosen its name after it (www.alokab.com/). The most basic variation of the Muslim war banner is *al-rawa al-sauda’* (black standard), which refers to a solid black piece of cloth. The black banner (*al-rawa*) served the Muslim army as war banner and therefore represents war, conquest and destruction of the enemy. It is being hoisted in the “*dar al-harb*” (abode of war), where Infidels rule. In addition, there is a white banner that carries the credo in black letters. According to Muslim tradition the white banner

⁵⁰² Zsdislav Mach, *Symbols, conflict and identity: Essays in political anthropology* (New York: State University Press, 1993), X (Preface).

(called “*al-liwa*”) stands for Islamic statehood (caliphate, emirate) and government. It is being raised in the “*dar al-salam/al-Islam*” (abode of peace)⁵⁰³, where the Islamic sharia is applied.⁵⁰⁴ Sometimes, both flags, standing for Islamic jihad and statehood, can be found on Jihadi websites.⁵⁰⁵ However, the black flag dominates Jihadi websites.

Illustration 13: Jihadi adaption of Muhammad’s war banner (al-*raya*) with the Islamic credo



For Jihadis, the black standard (*raya*) is a sign of the past, presence and future. It stands for the war-banner of Muhammad; the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI - a coalition of Jihadi groups under the umbrella of al-Qaeda since 2006) and global jihad; as well as the advent of the Mahdi. The modern Jihadi adaption of the black standard carries the Islamic credo “There is not God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger” in white letters on it. Oftentimes, the “Seal of the Prophets” is added underneath it.

Firstly and in a historical sense, the black standard awakens the concept of famous battles under Muhammad to live. Badr in 624 AD is the paradigm of asymmetric victoriousness, when a small group of Muslims defeated an overwhelming enemy. The Battle of Uhud in 625 AD stands for steadfastness in the face of a superior enemy. The Muslim army was severely

⁵⁰³ In the cultural use, “Dar al-Salam” is being used synonymously for “Dar al-Islam” which is actually the correct theological term for “the abode of peace.” The division between “dar al-harb” and “dar al-Islam” goes back to Abu Hanifa (699-767), the founder of the Hanafi juridical school in Islam.

⁵⁰⁴ Muhammad is said to have entered Mecca after the conquest in 630 AD with a white standard. On Jihadi websites, the white banner indicates support for the Afghan Taliban and represents the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban used a plain white flag between 1996-97 and a white flag with the Islamic credo in black letters from 1997 on until today.

⁵⁰⁵ See the head-frames of the Persian Jihadi website www.rahejehad.com and the entrance page of the Turkish/Arabic website www.davetulhaq.com.

weakened and practically defeated at Uhud, but still not overrun by its enemies, the Quraish from Mecca. Both battles complement each other and are analogized to present events to illustrate the Jihadi elite concept. The Saudi Arabian Jihadi scholar Nasir al-Fahd analogizes that the quick victory at Badr drew a lot of hypocrites into the Muslims's rows and the hard battle at Uhud cleaned the Muslim battle lines again. Just the elite remained.⁵⁰⁶

Secondly, the black flag represents a successful Jihadi insurgency in the present. It stands for the coalition of al-Qaeda aligned groups under the organizational umbrella of the Islamic State of Iraq (since 2006). Before its merger with al-Qaeda in 2004, the chief-group of this coalition led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (killed 2006) was called *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad Group). Its name was inscribed in yellow letters on the black standard.

Thirdly, the black flag stands for an army of apocalyptic horse riders. This eschatology of the the black flag concept plays a tremendously important role in Jihadi subculture. The end of times approaches, when riders with black flags will approach from the historic region of Khorasan towards Palestine.⁵⁰⁷ The messianic interpretation of the black flag, which is also attributed to the color black, dominates Jihadi thinking. The messianic signification of the black flag has been fostered in Jihadi propaganda since the 1980s. A propaganda movie from the 1990s by the "Islamic Media Center of the Black Flags" (*Markaz al-rayat al-saud li-l-i'lam al-islami*) states: "If you see the black flags approaching from Khorasan so come towards them, even if you have to crawl on ice, for they are the sign of the coming of the Caliphate of the Mahdi."⁵⁰⁸ Furthermore, the interpretation is known in popular Islamic mythology as well, according to which an army of horse riders with black flags will arrive in Palestine to "fight against Kuffar Alliances in the Final War of Armageddon."⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ Nasir al-Fahd, "Kalimat sutirat bi-l-dima'," (Words written by blood), www.tawhed.ws, entry No. 101, accessed January 8, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/q>.

⁵⁰⁷ "Khorasan" refers to northern parts of Pakistan, the central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and a part of Iran.

⁵⁰⁸ "The Lovers of Martyrdom" (*'Ushaq al-shahada*), by "The Islamic Media Center of the Black Flags" (*Markaz al-rayat al-saud li-l-i'lam al-islami*), produced in the mid-1990s. The video uses the following hadith, from the collection of the 14th century Damascene Hanbali scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya: "*al-Manar al-munif fi al-sahih wa al-da'if li ibn Qayyim*" (The lofty light-tower of correct and weak [ahadith] by ibn Qayyim), www.islamweb.net/hadith, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=948&hid=25&pid=231661.

The movie was probably distributed thousands of times in the streets of Arab countries during the 1990s. It plays with similar polychromatic color-aesthetics and symbolisms, which we have been discussing on the previous pages in the context of 21st century web-propaganda.

⁵⁰⁹ "Black flags from Khorasan," blackflags1.blogspot.com, accessed January 6, 2012, <http://blackflags1.blogspot.com/>.

Illustration 14: Combination of black standard (*al-riya*) and white standard (*al-liwa'*) on www.davetulhaq.com/



“Strong hands” and “clenched hands” are common illustrations of community in popular Islamic web-culture. They stand for the Quran injunction “*And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves.*”⁵¹⁰ Even Arab nationalist propaganda has appropriated this originally theological concept because of its popular and socio-revolutionary touch. Such symbolism offered a welcome aesthetic-semiotic vehicle of the Arab military juntas to present themselves and their causes as those of the people (in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria). The clenched hand symbolism reminds of and goes back to early 20th century socialist propaganda and its iconography of socialist realism. Both in secular and religious ideologies, the “hand”-illustrations stand for unity, community and action. Again, Jihadis have hijacked “hands” for their claim to represent popular Islam. Hands can hold together, carry forward, write on a keyboard or fight with a weapon. The sign is loaded up with martial interpretations and the concept gains new meanings, i.e. those represented by terrorist jihad. The repeated use of the clenched hands and strong hands graphics by Jihadis is also supposed to attract mainstream Muslim percipients and to awaken their interest in jihad. Furthermore, the combination of hands and arms in combination with the globe, or with rifles, haven been use as logos of social-revolutionary groups since the 1960s. For example, the logo of the “2nd June Movement,” an anarchist revolutionary German group founded by Till Meyer, used as its logo (printed on its

⁵¹⁰ Quran, Surat al-Imran 3:103, accessed January 4, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation3.php

communiqués during and after the kidnapping of CDU politician Peter Lorenz in 1975) a globe that is surrounded by an arm whose clenched fist holds a rifle: The arm stands for international workers solidarity and the rifle for armed struggle, together “solidaric internationalism.”⁵¹¹ To understand what the aesthetic-semiotic logo stood for, it should be mentioned that the group propagated and exercised a policy of individual terrorism (independent small cell actions, circular organizational build up) with an anarchist agenda and based on a loose hierarchical organizational pattern: Firstly, illegal members, who know everything about the structure, then legal activists, who knew only a part and lastly sympathizers, who know only a few details.⁵¹² This structure, supported by semiotic-aesthetic virtual environments, repeats itself similarly in online jihad, where illegal insider-activist steer the propagandistic process, legal activists strengthen and imitate the semiotics on their own blogs and sites, and lastly sympathizers, who are largely ignorant about the communicative-semiotic process, consume and support.⁵¹³

Illustration 15: Popular Islamic and Arab variations of the concept “strong clinched hands,” which are probably orientated at the symbol of the international workers’ movement: Jihadi forum “Hanin” (upper left); Arab nationalists (upper right); two further Jihadi variations of the strong hands concept below⁵¹⁴



⁵¹¹ Till Meyer, Staatsfeind: Erinnerungen (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2008), 53.

⁵¹² Till Meyer, Staatsfeind: Erinnerungen, 299.

⁵¹³ While the structure of the Cold War with its clear borders and allies added “stability” to the global situation, the information revolution and the un-structure of communication and semiotic space add instability to today’s situation, especially in view of the incalculability of terrorist threats, dozens of safe for militants havens, the global rise of Islamist and Salafi-Jihadi ideologies, as well as failed state responses by provocative and repressive military and security policies.

⁵¹⁴ 1. Top left: One of the emblems of the Jihadi forum “Longing”, <http://hanein.info/vb/>; 2. Top right: clenched hands as representation of “national unity” (*al-wahda al-wataniya*) ,<http://lawahadiftiraadiwala6eezi.blogspot.com>, accessed January 4, 2012, http://lawahadiftiraadiwala6eezi.blogspot.com/2007/09/blog-post_10.html.; 3. Bottom left: logo of the Jihadi media company “Those who clutch the glowing coals”; 4. Bottom-right: Logo of the Jihadi Media Elite.



“The Seal of the Prophets” (*khatam al-nabiyyin*) is another major symbol of Islam. Over the last years, especially since the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006, Jihadis have increasingly been using it for their propaganda. We can find the seal in most black flags underneath the credo. Muhammad is described in Surat al-Ahzab 33:40 as the “Seal of the [monotheistic] Prophets,” which is commonly translated and understood as “the last one.”⁵¹⁵ According to Islamic tradition, the sign stems from Prophet Muhammad’s signet ring and stands for absolute authenticity.⁵¹⁶ In this sense, Jihadi web propaganda uses the sign to give a stamp of authenticity to its messages; “this is true and final,” it implies. “[T]he primary significance of the word *khātam* is that something is being shown to be authentic and uncorrupted by means of an official seal (which is often put at the end or closure of the document).”⁵¹⁷ Thus the sign is used to create semiotic power relations in virtual rooms and to strengthen the impact of ideology.

⁵¹⁵ Surat al-Ahzab 33:40: Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets: and Allah has full knowledge of all things, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation33.php.

⁵¹⁶ Encyclopaedia of Islam, electronic version, entry „Khatam, Khatim.“

⁵¹⁷ “Seal of the Prophets,” qalandaria.blogspot.com, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://qalandaria.blogspot.com/2011/08/seal-of-prophets.html>.

Illustration 16: “The seal of the Prophets,” black on white as used by Jihadis



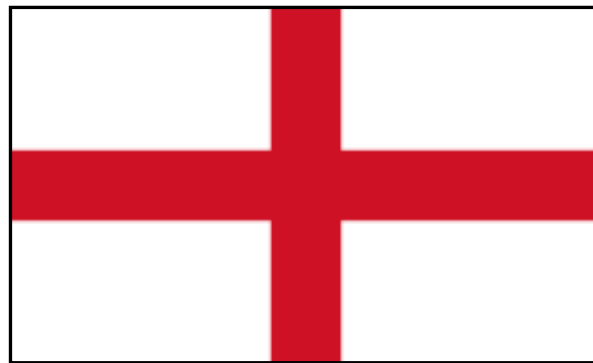
Typically, the sign is combined with other Jihadi symbols. One of the most typical combinations is the seal on a black banner, a Quran and a Kalashnikov. Instead of a Kalashnikov, a scimitar may serve, which in a fundamentalist sense directs the mythology of fight to a more backward past. Alternatively, a single rider or fighter may hold the banner with the credo and the seal on it. The Kalashnikov is a communist invention. Since the 1960s, it has become a symbol for revolutionary social-liberation movements the world over. It is the cheapest, most robust and most exported military assault rifle ever built. Jihadis display it enthusiastically. They present their cause as a timely revolutionary liberation struggle under the banner of Islam. This example again illustrates how Jihadi fundamentalism is highly-modern, acts in the present, directs its goals at the future, and takes inspiration from the past. In addition, Jihadis apply the most modern means of communicational asymmetric warfare and selectively interpret theological concepts. The combination of popular Islamic symbols with modern secular emblems draws on cross-cultural semiotics of revolutionary struggle and presents their causes in a timely way.

The iconography of the rider can be found in different cultures. In Christian mythology, for example, the most prominent rider-saint (Reiterheiliger) is St. Georg.⁵¹⁸ The St. George's

⁵¹⁸ Medieval *ars sacra* used sculpture, picture and vitreous enamel to depict St. Georg as the savior of virgins, defender of the Catholic Church and upholder of justice. St. Georg is fighting with a dragon which represents evil. He served as name-giver for medieval brotherhoods and inspired the Crusaders. During the reformation period, the royal southern-German Wittelsbacher family commissioned sculptures of St. Georg. The sculptures were held in the colors red and white to signify loyalty to the Holy Roman Empire, as well as white and blue to

cross, a red cross on a white background, is the typical Crusader symbol. During the Crusades, it was referred to as “God’s flag.” The cross is associated with St. Georg as patron saint of many Christians churches all over Europe and the Middle East and was adopted by Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Anglicans and later by Protestants. Variations of the flag have since the Middle-Ages appeared on standards, emblems, and coats of arms. Until today, variations of the cross are used as city flags, emblems of associations, countries and militaries the world over. The Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik made ample use of the iconography of the medieval Christian knight-saint St. George. His cross, knights and horses, as well as the colors red and white for the Holy Roman Empire and the Crusades characterize Breivik’s web-propaganda.⁵¹⁹

Illustration 17: The holy Saint Georg in medieval Christian mythology; “St. George’s cross,” associated with St. Georg and below the knight’s character in the propaganda of Christian terrorist Breivik⁵²⁰



symbolize the regimen of the Bavarian Wittelsbacher rulers. Ulla Stöver, Email:Kunst aus dem Feuer (München: Karl Thiemig AG, 1976), 31-34.

⁵¹⁹ The ultra-nationalist neo-Christian fundamentalist killed 77 people in June 2011 in Norway). Anders Behring Breivik, “2083 – A European Declaration of Independence,” De Laude Novae Militiae Productions, www.dailymotion.com, accessed January 8, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xk3ioe_video-by-anders-behring-breivik_news.

⁵²⁰ Saint Georg image, accessed January 19, 2012, <http://www.sanktgeorg800jahre.de/>.



The image of the horse-rider plays an important role in Jihadi iconography as well. As discussed above, Islamic tradition tells that riders with black flags will re-conquer Muslim lands and finally reach Jerusalem, which thus becomes a self-evident final goal of global Jihadi strategy. Similarly, this famous tradition also determines the meaning of the color black in Jihadi culture. Riders with black flags are signs of the coming of the Mahdi, who will be the ultimate caliph on earth.⁵²¹ Moreover, the iconic image of the horse rider stands also for conquest in the golden age of Islam.⁵²² His image is connected to a vision of Muslim elitism and stands for the classical Muslim warrior. Finally, the single rider represents the concept of “lone wolves” and individualized terrorism, which gains importance in Jihadi strategy.

⁵²¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya: “*al-Manar al-munif fi al-sahih wa al-da'if li ibn Qayyim*” (The lofty light-tower of correct and weak [ahadith] by ibn Qayyim), www.islamweb.net/hadith, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=948&hid=25&pid=231661.

Furthermore, Jalaluddin al-Suyuti's (1445-1505) hadith collection *al-Ala' al-masnu' fi al-ahadith al-maudu' li-l-Suyuti* (“The good deeds produced by the ahadith laid down by al-Suyuti”) speaks about the destination of the horse riders from Khorasan. They will tie their horses at a place between Harasta in Syria and Beit Lahya in the northern Gaza Strip in Palestine. The middle could lie somewhere near Jerusalem in today's Palestine/Israel. Hadith no. 1079, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=1002&hid=1079&pid=235753

⁵²² See also the „Islamic Imagery Project“, Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint (CTC), accessed December 16, 2010, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usma/ctc_islamic_imagery_project.pdf, 33-39.

Illustration 17: horse rider in the logo of the Arabic language discussion forum „I am a Muslim“ (<http://www.muslim.net/vb/>)



The horse rider image is thus strongly connected to Jihadi self-perception. In a fundamentalist appropriation of the past, Jihadis see themselves as the continuation of the “victorious sect” (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*), which was first represented by Muhammad’s army and is nowadays located in Jihadi camps all over the Islamic world, but especially in Pakistan’s northwestern border-region Waziristan. Waziristan is a part of the lands of “Khorasan” according to Islamic tradition. By participating in this struggle online, Waziristan becomes part of every media Jihadi’s living room. Past and future paradigms are connected because Muhammad is said to have likened the apocalyptic journey from Khorasan to Jerusalem before the Day of Judgment to his emigration with the first Muslims from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD (i.e. the hijra).⁵²³ This comparison bears a hardly imaginable agitating power, for the first Muslims established Islam and the last Muslims will participate by purifying it again in an act of unbelievable destruction – the final world war between “good” (*al-haqq*) and “evil” (*al-batil*). Thus, rider and black flag are interpreted both as past and future identifying points, merging in the present where Jihadis try to revive both elements of Islamic mythology.

The head-frame of the “Global Jihad” forum illustrates this accurately.⁵²⁴ The logo is written in a mix of richly decorated Deewani-Thuluth calligraphy, in white on a blue background. Blue represents hope and paradise imaginations, but also water, which was a precious resource in the scarcity of the Arabian Peninsula in Mohammad’s age, and said to be plentiful

⁵²³ Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, *al-Ala' al-masnu' fi al-ahadith al-maudu' li-l-Suyuti*, No. 1124, accessed January 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=1002&hid=1124&pid=235754.

⁵²⁴ <http://www.aljahad.com/vb/>, accessed January 7, 2012.

in paradise. White beams shine on the logo and touch the motto underneath it: “There is no might but in jihad for the sake of Allah.”

Illustrations 19 and 20: Logo on right side and horse rider guided by Arabic script flowing out of the Quran on left side



The motto is repeated on the left opposite side of the head-frame with an emblematic horse rider. The rider is directed westwards. He appears to the viewer from the worm’s perspective, which elevates him to the status of a hero who is surrounded by rays of light and the holiness of Quranic letters. The background comes to live and gains depth with different layers of script being integrated behind the rider. Large Arabic letters repeat the swinging and swaying of the black banner and seem to come out of the background from the schemes of a huge Quran that is barely visible. The Book is larger than life sized and seems to guide the silhouette of the rider from a dreamy, hopeful and promising blue depth. It sends its letters like guiding messengers towards the rider as if to inspire him with the spirit of jihad. This

aesthetic depiction stands for the concept of a “book that guides” and “a sword that conquers” by the medieval Hanbali theologian Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328).

In Muslim perception, the horse itself is a costly and highly admired animal. This may go back to Muhammad’s outspoken love for horses and their high esteem in ancient Arab tribal society. Thus, the reproduction of the horse’s image is a very effective form of mobilization, since it touches cultural triggers in broader Islamic culture. In the Quran, the horse appears in at least six verses and is mentioned as a precious object of love, animal for racing, farming animal, war booty, but also as a war horse.⁵²⁵ The horse and its picture play an important role in popular Muslim culture for “man by nature is infatuated by horses and takes considerable pride in the beauty, power, wealth, horsemanship and chivalry associated with them.”⁵²⁶ According to a hadith attributed to Omar ibn al-Khattab (592-644), the second rightly guided caliph, “the good is [tied] into the forelocks of the horse until Judgement Day (*al-khailu fi nawasiha al-khayr ila yaum al-qiyama*).”⁵²⁷ It is thus also a symbol for the blessings of jihad and the Day of Resurrection. Jihadi propaganda puts focus on the messianic and martial characteristics of the horse, constructing the horse as one of its major icons. It is attributed with strength, piety and conquest. Propagandist depictions of the horse address possible sympathizers and strengthen the in-group. From a sociological perspective, it is important for the phenomenon of *communitas*, which describes a feeling of brotherly love between group members who undergo a process of social transition from mainstream to subculture. Jihadi self-perception is that of re-embodying a “victorious group that remains among my Nation to fight steadfast for what is right until Judgment Day.”⁵²⁸ Horses are said to have the same characteristic. They will remain until the last day. Both group and horse stand out from among the Muslims. The vision of a horse in Jihadi propaganda evokes the deeply spiritual and emotional concept of the last battle. The horse, however, can also be a sign of misfortune, “if it has not been ridden during a battle” (*idha lam yaghzu 'alayha*), explains a propagandist

⁵²⁵ See Surat 3:14; 8:60; 16:8, 38: 31-32; 59:6; 100:1-2. The horse is beautiful, fast and strong, however, it is merely material possession and nothing against the joy in the presence of Allah, states Surat al-Imran 3:14. In Surat al-Anfal 8:60 we find a “prophylactic” war-verse that can be understood in the sense of deterring the enemy from attack. The horse appears to be one of the major instruments of deterrence to frighten the enemy: “Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah [...]”

⁵²⁶ <http://abusalmandeyauddeeneberle.wordpress.com/al-khail-horses-and-virtues-of-horses-and-the-commands-about-horses-in-islam-continuing-until-the-judgment-day/>

⁵²⁷ Herbert Eisenstein, Überlegungen zu einer Darstellung der Rolle des Pferdes in der arabisch-islamischen Kulturgeschichte (Notes on the Representation of the Role of Horse in the Arab-Muslim History of Culture), Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 86 (1996): 107-117

⁵²⁸ Masnad ibn Hanbal, No. 14425, www.islamweb.net/hadith, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=14425&pid=672359.

article and analogically asks the rhetoric question “If such a horse is miserable, so how do you view someone who is just talking nonsense and speaks about jihad?”⁵²⁹

There is a little bit of truth in every form of ridicule (*hija'*). Especially humoristic and romantic folk poetry can teach a lot about a respective society's ideas and values. Women lament in ancient Arabic poetry that husbands love their horses more than their wives. The horse enjoys a higher esteem than the woman, says a narrator, because it remains calm and reliable when under attack. While the women folk rush away from the tents, the horse calmly waits for its owner to be ridden into battle.

From Abu Tammam's (788-845) pre-Islamic poetry collection *Hamasa*, Nr. 117, verses 1-4⁵³⁰

قال الأعرج المعنّي (الطويل)	
أرى أمّ سهلٍ ما تزالُ تَفْجَعُ	تلومُ وما أدري علام توجّع
تلومُ على أن أُعطيَ الورْدَ لِقْحَةً	وما تَسْتوي والورْدَ ساعة تَفَزَعُ
إذا هي قامت حاسرا مُشْمَعَةً	نخيبَ الفؤادِ رأسها ما تُقنّعُ
و قُمتُ إليه باللّجام مُيسراً	هناك يَجْزيني الذي كنتُ أصنّعُ

Steadily I can hear Ummu Sahl, my wife's, laments
What is the reason for all those complaints?

Now she accuses me that higher than her
I put my stallion. But then again he does not err,

In times of battle, when she rushes bareheaded
And confused from the tent

I approach him and touch his bridle
Then he will surely repay my reliable care

⁵²⁹ www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=957

⁵³⁰ Wolfdietrich Fischer, “Der Schleier der Frau in der altarabischen Stammesgesellschaft,” in *Alltagsleben und materielle Kultur in der arabischen Sprache und Literatur – Festschrift für Heinz Grotzfeld zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Ulrike Stehli-Werbeck (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 180. The text of the *Hamasa* of Abu Tammam is cited according to the commentary of al-Marzuqi (Kairo 1951-1953).

The picture of the Quran is another Islamic meta-sign that has been strongly adopted by Jihadi web-propaganda. It is hard to find a website that propagates jihad on which a graphic of the Quran is missing. We have already discussed the significance of Arabic script, which embodies the Quran, which in turn contains the revealed words of God. The Quran stands for authority and knowledge and its script represent power. Politico-religious cultures have a direct approach to the icons of their faiths. In times of conflict, the Quran is an essential element of Islamic warfare – as strategic script and as a concrete tool. One such example is the first major case of inter-Muslim warfare (*fitna*). At the battle of Siffin (657 AD), the Muslim rebel commander Muawiya had his soldiers put pages from the Quran on their lances when they approached the army of then caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib to cause confusion and dissent among the latter's troops. Being the highest icon of faith in Islam, the Quran serves every Muslim as most essential a guideline for proper Islamic conduct. It also contains numerous injunctions on Islamic warfare. Jihadi propaganda tells Muslims that they must realize those injunctions of the Holy Script before all others. A pious Muslim believes that God's revealed words are untouchable, unalterable and function as divine commands. By using the graphic representation of the Quran ever and ever again in their web-propaganda, Jihadis try not only to present themselves as watchmen of Islam, but also to construct scriptural chains of authority, i.e. virtual leadership. In reality, propagandists present their target groups with selective injunctions and interpretations. Therefore, the use of the picture of the Quran on Jihadi websites is very significant. It is supposed to evoke a strong sense of obedience and service-mindedness under the "command of God." In combination with a Kalashnikov, the sign "Quran," represents the concept of jihad. It manipulates the receptiveness of perceivers and causes them to interpret Islamic meta-signs in new ways. Arabic script then "guides towards fighting," or the Quran "stands for jihad". A new visual branding takes place on the Internet, which – as a tool of mass-communication - influences global culture.

The emblem of the "Confrontation" forum, <http://www.atahadi.com/vb>, contains the black flag with a Kalashnikov as a flagpole and in front of it the Quran with a quill placed on it. The Quran itself stands for divine authority and propaganda to spread the word of God. The quill also stands for writing and propagandistic activity, at the same time for learning, since it leans on the Holy Book of Islam. The flag, typically, carries the credo and the seal of the prophets. The red-brown background reminds of dried blood, but is also an earth colour. The glow around the flag and other symbols evokes holiness and heavenly promises.

Illustration 20: Quran depiction on “The Confrontation” forum



The Heights of Islam forum, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>, displays the black standard, on it the credo and the seal of the prophets together with a Quran. The key symbols send beams of light to evoke hopeful and enthusiastic feelings about this message. There are no further martial symbols added. However, the map in the background as well as the Quran are coloured in green, which means that these elements belong to Islam. Colouring objects or symbols means that they adopt the quality of the colour, and green stands first and foremost for Islam.

Illustration 21: Quran depiction on “The Heights of Islam” forum



Semiotics of Jihadi Leaders: Mystic Iconography and Cult

Putting leaders into scene is very important for any group. Signs and themes of charismatic leadership that are centered on role-models can be (ab-)used to strengthen the identification with a shared ideology. In virtual rooms, leaders can be made omnipresent. The role of leaders in virtual spaces and their perception are much stronger than in real life. They can be installed and constructed larger than life-size. Dead leaders even bear advantages under propagandistic aspects. A typical trait of totalitarian organizations, writes Hans-Gerd Jaschke, is to exploit dead leaders for propagandist purposes after they have passed away. In their lifetimes, leaders have functioned as actual commanders. After their death, they still live on as “leading figures, figureheads, ideological fix points and spiritual autocrats with an aura of infallibility.”⁵³¹ In propaganda, dead leaders are carefully kept alive to exercise a significant level of ideological authority, command and control. The “advantage” of the dead leader by idealization and glorification through pictures and symbols is twofold. He becomes a reference-point for “proper conduct” in reality. In this sense, the targeted killing of Jihadi leaders is the best favor the U.S. does the global Jihadi movement. Moreover, any killed Jihadi leader becomes a mythic hero. The heroic depiction divides into two classes. Firstly, authorities with theological competence, which are represented by medieval scholars like Ibn Taymiyya or contemporary al-Qaeda scholars like Anwar al-Awlaqi and Atiyat Allah al-Libi. Secondly, authorities of struggle, which are presented by Usama bin Laden or Mustapha Abu al-Yazid (formerly third in command of al-Qaeda central). Past and present are reunited through the pictorial and symbolic installation of leaders in the Internet, claims Witsch. This concept of fundamentalist agitation strengthens an urgent sense of emulation among followers. In addition, a “timeless installation of leadership” and ideology takes place through writings, symbols, pictures and movies about leaders.⁵³²

In Jihadi web agitation, living and dead leaders are iconized all the same. We will put focus on dead leaders and illustrate some characteristics of their presentation. The timeless installation of dead leaders in Jihadi propaganda draws on a mix of Sunni Islamic theology, Jihadi symbolism and Sufi mysticism. These elements are united in pictorial representations, often script-picture combinations, which bear the image of the respective person. The depiction of Usama bin Laden below, who was killed in May 2011 has been taken from the logo of the Jihadi forum “Islamic Lions” (<http://66.225.155.72/~leyothin/vb/>). The

⁵³¹ Hans-Gerd Jaschke, *Fundamentalismus in Deutschland. Gottesstreiter und politische Extremisten bedrohen die Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1998), 243.

⁵³² Witsch, *Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet*, 96-98.

arrangement of light and shade appears like a halo around bin Laden's head shrouded in a white head-cloth (white stands for theological knowledge). The smoke-clouds stand for God, for God is the "mover of the clouds" (*mujri al-sahab*)⁵³³, and in the background the northern tower of the World Trade Center (WTC 1) awakens bin Laden's role in the attacks.

Illustration 23: Iconic depiction of Usama bin Laden



Bin Laden appears like a saint. His picture reminds the viewer of the iconic way a Sufi *murabit* is represented, i.e. a religious spiritual leader in a Sufi order, as a character full of mysteries. Killed Jihadi leaders are not dead, argue supporters on the basis of a Quran injunction. "Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord;" this verse is the theological underpinning for the timeless installation of leaders.⁵³⁴

Karamat ("wonders") another element in Jihadi theology that reminds of Sufi mysticism. They come to use in the iconic representation of Jihadi martyrs and dead leaders. "*Karamat*" describe the "wonders" of martyrs, i.e. the alleged smell of musk that emanates from their corpses, the intactness of their bodies, and the smiles on their faces in expectation of Paradise. This is by no means to say Sufis are militants. It only points to the fact that Jihadis appropriate mystical elements. The e-graphic below is a martyr wall-banner of the former leader of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda, Abd al-Aziz Muqrin (1971-2004). It focuses on the concept of "wonders" (*karamat*) and reads "Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin...I swore that I will not live by my power and by wonders unless they will destroy verily." The verse is from a poem that

⁵³³ See Masnad ibn Hanbal, No. 18707, www.islamweb.net/hadith, accessed January 7, 2011, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=18704&pid=673062.

⁵³⁴ Quran Surat al-Imran 3:169, www.harunyahya.com, accessed January 7, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation3.php.

mobilizes for jihad and struggle.⁵³⁵ At the same time, the smiling picture of al-Muqrin with the halo and the dove in the background picks up a popular narrative that developed after his death. Al-Muqrin's corpse was laid out in a Riyadh hospital after Saudi security forces had killed him. According to hospital workers, the smell of musk emanating from his body was so overwhelming that they refused to touch him.⁵³⁶

Illustration 24: Iconic depiction of 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin, former leader of AQSA



4.d.iii.2 Signs of Anguish, Sacrifice and Shame

Signs of anguish, sacrifice and shame serve to illustrate how Muslims are abused and mistreated by the West and its allies. They are an integral part of Jihadi community myth, yet also touch the conspiracy myth. Someone must be behind the suffering of Muslims. Regarding the concept of “suffering,” Jihadis identify with Muslims in general. Their self-depiction as elite derives out of the claim that they defend humiliated Muslims. Jihadis claim to be saviors and defenders of all oppressed Muslims (*mustad'afun*). Often, pictures of dead children exemplify the malevolence done to the own community. Children stand for innocence, defenselessness and hope. Their violent death awakens feelings of indignation and contempt across cultures. The picture-text combination below from the Ansar al-Mujahidin forum shows a killed child shrouded in white cloth, written on it the word “*majhul*”

⁵³⁵ The *qasida* is titled „Conversation between a fighter and his mother“ (*Hiwar bayn mujahid wa Ummuhu*). It can be found on hundreds of different websites. This version is from the Arabic discussion forum vb.arabseyes.com, accessed January 7, 2011, <http://vb.arabseyes.com/t52382.html>.

⁵³⁶ Psychologically, it can be interpreted as an outbreak of collective hysteria. Source: Anonymous who studied the case of al-Muqrin at length.

(unknown). The red background around the child displays a halo, which in this case is a stylistic device of Islamic martyrdom aesthetics.

Illustration 25: Picture of dead child. Headline: And you sit around! Text on white cloth: “Unknown”⁵³⁷



Often, text-picture combinations carry the message that Jihadis are steadfast in the face of Muslim humiliation. Below, an elderly Afghani man sits crouched on the ground next to a Western soldier. A Jihadi forum member comments on this picture, using the same mobilizing poem “Conversation between a mujahid and his mother” that we found above in the glorification of the slain Saudi-Arabian al-Qaeda leader al-Muqrin. The text below the picture reads: “I swore that I will not live by my power and by wonders unless they will destroy verily. I will remain a fighter in this life, and I will keep on walking on my way decisively.”⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ Source: „The Sheikh, The Mujahid, The Shaheed: Sheikh Said Abu Sa'ad (may Allah have mercy on him),” www.ansar1.info, accessed October 21, 2011, <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=20265>.

⁵³⁸ “To the nation of a billion people, with regards,” www.dd-sunnah.net, accessed January 8, 2011, <http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=105628&page=12>.

Illustration 26: Theme of humiliation (picture) and steadfastness (text)



4.d.iii.3 Signs of Resistance, Punishment and Deterrence

Signs of resistance, punishment and revenge stand for empowerment. They can be found in the marketing of suicide attacks, assassinations and executions of enemies in videos and pictures distributed on Jihadi websites. In Jihadi web-semiotics, these signs testify to the effectiveness of terrorist tactics. At the same time, they aim at mobilizing followers. Followers are supposed to re-enact terrorist acts and violence against enemies. The emotion of victoriousness against an overwhelming enemy dominates this sign-category. Examples of these signs are manifold, some very abstract and some concrete. One example shall suffice to demonstrate the concept. Below, a screenshot from a video of al-Qaeda in Iraq that was posted on Jihadi websites shows the execution-style murder of government employers of the interior ministry. The men were kidnapped, rowed up and shot in the back of their heads. The media company of al-Qaeda in Iraq, “*al-Furqan*” (Divine Inspiration), stands with its logo (visible in the upper left side of the screenshot) for ruthless and brutal killings and has strongly influenced Jihadi aesthetics of terror over the last years. Such pictures and videos exemplify the “we” versus “them” divide of Jihadi group mobilization, using the theme of punitive “resistance.”

Illustration 27: Execution of government employees by al-Qaeda in Iraq



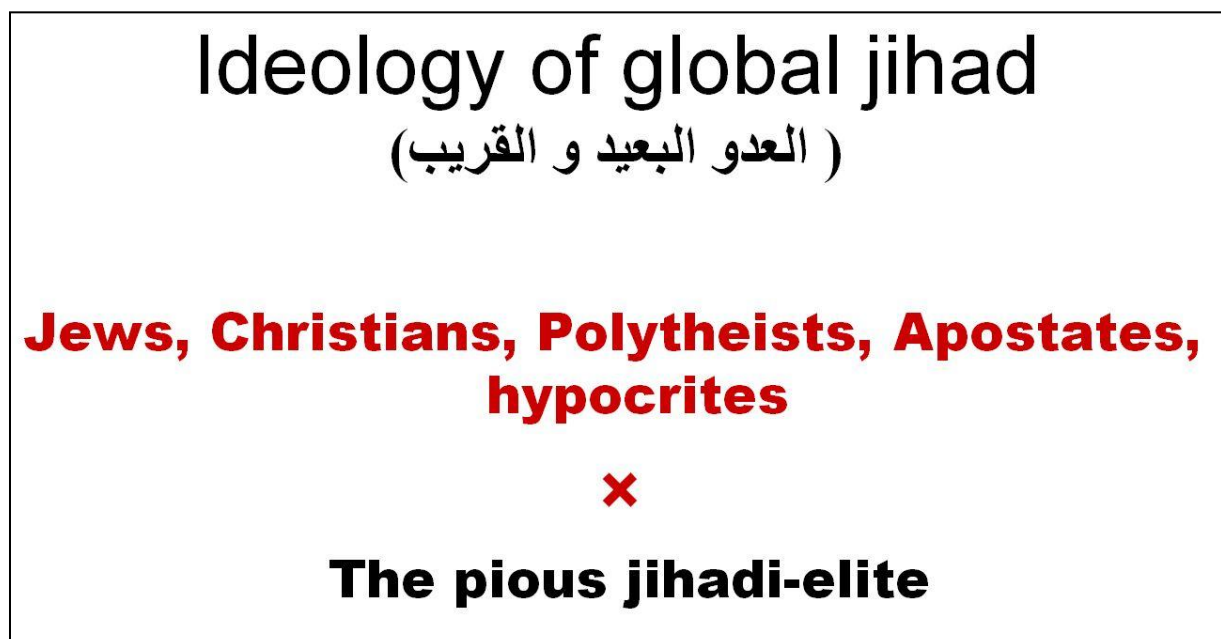
4.d.iii.4 Signs of Conspiracy

Signs of conspiracy are as essential for the mobilization and construction of community as signs of identification. Conceptually, the myth of conspiracy is diametrically opposed to the myth of community and also complements it. Moreover, the myth of conspiracy has three functions. Firstly, it represents itself. Secondly, it represents the signs of identification of the enemy's community; i.e. they are brutal mercenaries, suffer from a loss of values, kill innocents, destroy and rob property. Thirdly, it represents the reprehensible myth of salvation of the enemy, namely pure capitalist goals under the cloak of democracy, human rights and freedom.

Fundamentalist community building works multiple times better, if an enemy is identified. "Conspiracy theories" are often shrouded in pseudo-rational scientific explanations, but bear all characteristics of emotional concepts (myths and ideology) that belong to propaganda. They are age-old and can be traced back to Classical Antiquity and archaic times.

“Conspiracy theories allege that secretly acting conspirators try to realize a comprehensive scheme by dishonest practices and by deceiving the population.” At present, they seem to thrive vividly. The globalized world lacks explanation models and conspiracy theories offer possibilities to present complex relationships in a simple way. They create a semblance of order in a world full of irritating complexity.⁵³⁹ To this end, a wide range of concepts is applied. Also the fundamentalist construction of an outside threat to foster in-group identification requires a dichotomy of “good” and “bad,” which is created by conspiracy models. In Jihadi ideology, such dichotomies, and through them explicit enemy pictures, are created on religio-political grounds. The constellation of the enemies of Islam is threefold. It consists of Jews, Crusaders and apostate Muslims. Jews lead the conspiracy against Islam; the West (represented by the U.S., the NATO, the U.N, plus international allies) realize the “New Crusade against Islam”; and apostate Muslims help executing it. The roots of this conspiracy concept can be found in the 1960s writing of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb and the 1980s writings of the Palestinian-Jordanian ideologue Abdallah Azzam, who was profoundly influenced by Qutb.⁵⁴⁰ Yet, the concept only started developing effectively after the fall of the Soviet Union and throughout the 1990s. It was supported by an internationally growing trend of Islamic militancy and by more Western military interventions in Muslim countries. With the U.S. led Iraq invasion in 2003, the concept had fully developed in Jihadi thinking.

Illustration 28: Conspiracy and friend-enemy concept in Jihadi ideology (source: Holtmann)



⁵³⁹ Tobias Jaecker, Antisemitische Verschwörungstheorien nach dem 11. September: Neue Varianten eines alten Deutungsmusters (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 14-15.

⁵⁴⁰ Philipp Holtmann, Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 2009), 36.

Representative for the conspiracy concept are the writings of the al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and “al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia’s” online magazine Mu'askar al-Battar, which between 2003-2004 steadily referenced to “the Crusaders and their supporters among the Jews and the apostates (*al-salibiyun wa a'wanuhum min al-yahud wa-l-murtaddin*),” “the Crusader campaign,” (*al-hamla al-salibiyya*) and “zionized Crusaders” (*al-Sahyusalibiya*).⁵⁴¹ The illustration above shows the conspiracy concept in global Jihadi ideology. Semiotic representations of this concept accompany every mouse-click in Jihadi web-rooms.

The next illustration shows a text-picture montage by “al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula’s” online magazine “Inspire.” It contains all major signs of conspiracy discussed above, i.e. the Jews who secretly guide and the U.S., who in turn rely on apostate Muslim collaborators. The Israeli flag appears right next to U.S.-President Barak Obama and symbolizes a conspiring Jewish leadership behind the zionized Crusade against Islam. Here, “strong hands” hold the Israeli flag and signify the enemy’s community agenda (compare illustration 15). Apostates, “their agents, the treasonous rulers,” are explicitly named in the text-caption of the graphic. The U.S. dollar with a bloody handprint on it expresses the reprehensibleness of the enemy’s goal. It is pure hunger for power and wealth at the cost of Muslim children’s lives and their suffering. One Part of this pictorial discourse is expressed is the grabbing of Muslim lands, symbolized by a bulldozer. Muslim lands, according to Islamic jurisprudence may not remain under the control of infidels.

⁵⁴¹ Mu'askar al-Battar (MaB), issue 1, page 4, accessed January 8, 2012. <http://battarpages.atspace.com/Battar01-04.htm>; MaB issue 22, pages 3;8, <http://battarpages.atspace.com/Battar22-08.htm>.

Illustration 29: Signs of conspiracy in the Jihadi e-magazine “Inspire,” issue 1



The same conspiracy concept is repeated in Jihadi-videos, which are distributed digitally via websites. Therefore, videos are an integral element of Jihadi web-agitation. The screenshots below “demonstrate” that, despite the complexity of Western-Muslim relations, Islam is under constant attack by the West. However, such myths works in two ways, as Uri Avneri, the Israeli peace activist, observes: “This was proved in 1982, when Ariel Sharon attacked Lebanon, despite the fact that the Lebanese border had been absolutely quiet for 11 months. (After the war, the myth was born that it was preceded by daily shooting. Today, almost every Israeli can “remember” the shooting – an astonishing example of the power of suggestion.”⁵⁴² Very correctly, Avneri observes that myths are fostered by suggesting “facts.” Below, three screenshots taken from a propaganda video illustrate once again how suggestive Jihadi propaganda works. The first screenshot (in the background) shows a graphic animation of the exploding head of Israeli president Shimon Peres next to the Israeli flag. “Crusaders” are symbolized by a Christian cross with the inscription “democracy.” A meeting between former U.S. president George W. Bush and the present president of Afghanistan, Ahmad Karzai,

⁵⁴² Uri Avneri, „The Stolen War,“ [zope.gush-shalom.org](http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/avneri/1325859818/), accessed January 8, 2012, <http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/avneri/1325859818/>.

illustrates the alliance between apostate Muslims and Crusaders, who are secretly led by the Jews.⁵⁴³

Illustration 30: Triad of Jews-Crusaders-Apostates in Jihadi video propaganda



4.d.iii.5 Signs of Salvation

Jihadi propaganda and martyrology overflow with death-glorification. A fundamentalist community relies in its ideology on three interrelated myths, which are extremely important to build community, define enemies and justify goals. So do Jihadis. Firstly, they construct a COMMUNITY MYTH for the sake of IDENTIFICATION and MOBILIZATION. Secondly, they construct a CONSPIRACY MYTH in order to ACTIVATE followers. Thirdly, they construct a MYTH OF SALVATION to justify their end-goals. Since Jihadi ideology is lacking clear realizable concepts of statehood and government, focus is put on the rewards of martyrdom, i.e. paradise. Salvation is not only a reward, but also a command. If read selectively, then the Holy Book of Islam dictates believers to gain salvation by way of fighting: *“Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise*

⁵⁴³ „Qafilat al-fath“ (Caravan of Martyrs), “al-Hijra Media Studios” (Afghan Taliban), [www.aljihad.com/vb](http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13355), accessed January 8, 2012, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13355>.

binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Quran: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah. then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.”⁵⁴⁴

Illustration 31: E-wallpaper displaying myth of salvation and rewards of martyrdom⁵⁴⁵



It should be mentioned that Jihadi strategy also addresses realizable goals. In a concrete sense, this refers to getting rid of Western domination and setting the course for Islamic systems (*an takun shar'at [sic] Allah hiya al-mahkama wa kalimatuhu hiya al-'aliya*).⁵⁴⁶ But in an abstract messianic sense, the long term strategy is to prepare a chaotic and anarchic world order to facilitate the coming of the Mahdi and the Day of Judgment (*khalifat Allah al-mahdi wa yaum al-qiyama*). Partaking in this struggle includes rewards, the highest one being salvation by gaining entry to paradise. Jihadi semiotics of salvation borrow from these and similar shariatic

⁵⁴⁴ Quran Surat al-Tauba 9:111, www.harunyahya.com, accessed January 9, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation9.php.

⁵⁴⁵ “Surat al-shahid Abi Hafs al-Ansari min shuhada' masjid Ibn Taymiyya taqabbalahu Allah” (Picture of the martyr Abu Hafs al-Ansari who belongs to the martyrs of the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque [in Gaza]), <http://as-ansar.com/vb/>, accessed January 11, 2012, [showthread.php?t=36044](http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=36044)<http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=36044>.

⁵⁴⁶ Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti, “*Kalimat sutirat bi-l-dima*,” (Words written by blood), www.tawhed.ws, entry No. 100, , accessed January 8, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/q>.

concepts, thus concentrating on the supreme, i.e. the “aesthetics of the maximal” and “grammar of climax.”⁵⁴⁷ Understanding this concept, one can detect manifold signs of salvation on Jihadi websites. The most prominent ones are E-wallpapers and E-banners which present martyrs. More subtly, the salvation myth is expressed by colors in Jihadi propaganda as well as arabesque and floral patterns which remind of paradise. They constantly evoke the theme of salvation within the aesthetics of Jihadi ideology.

4.d.iv The Repetition of Jihadi Key-Semiotics in Music and Poems

Music and videos play an important role for Jihadi community building. They strengthen the fundamentalist myth, both past, present and future oriented. The genres music and video are strongly interconnected. Every Jihadi propaganda video uses uplifting martial music. And videos often serve as illustrative carriers of martial songs. The connection between sound, picture and text allows percipients to experience holistic propagandist experiences. However, many martial songs can also be downloaded separately from Jihadi websites as mp3 files.

It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the Jihadi music and video genres in detail. However, a number of examples may serve for a better conceptual understanding of their role in Jihadi community building. Firstly, there are hundreds if not thousands of Jihadi songs available on the Internet. These divide into *nashid* (pl. *anashid*) sung and digitally remastered by sympathizers and Jihadi organizations. Furthermore, there are *huda'*, i.e. encouraging battle songs, which are mostly recorded by actual fighters and then uploaded into the Net.

Both genres (*anashid* and *huda'*) are supposed to be hymns without instrumental accompaniment. However, in the information age also Islamic traditional music has become heavily digitally edited, using stylistic elements such as echoes and sound-pictures in the background. “The tone experience comes before the linguist experience. Insofar, a song has an expressive side that allows the listener to become a mental participant, who lives through [the message of the song].”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ Witsch, Die Ästhetik Fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 130.

⁵⁴⁸ Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 85.

Illustration 32: cd-cover for “*Huda' ul-'izza 2*” (Uplifting Song of Honour) by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula⁵⁴⁹



Klaus Theweleit claims that outside influences by new media, especially the listening of music, heavily influence neuronal systems of the human brain and body. The human body works itself like a hollow chamber, claims Theweleit. The body does not forget the enervations caused by music, but seems to store them in its muscles and nervous system to imitate the music’s characteristics in small and big movements. The brain reacts to music by pouring out endorphins. Listening to music causes a state of euphoria and ecstasy, which “blurs the borders of our existence [...] and allows us to immerse in a sea of emotions.”⁵⁵⁰ Accordingly, one could argue that the sound and visual messages of Jihadi propaganda can influence imitation and re-enactment among percipients. On top of the publication-thread to “*Huda' ul-'izza 2*” there is a strategic seven-points program on fighting, which demonstrates the border-line between immersion and strategy, or how immersion is used to market strategy. The strategic command rationalizes, while the song immerses.

⁵⁴⁹ *Huda' ul-'izza* (Uplifting song of honour), [www.shamikh1.info](http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=136912), accessed November 24, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=136912>.

⁵⁵⁰ Klaus Theweleit, „Übertragung. Gegenübertragung. Dritter Körper: Zur Gehirnveränderung durch die Medien,“ in International Flusser Lecture, ed. Marcel René et al. (Köln: Buchhandlung Walter König, 2007).

Two very popular examples of the *nashid*-genre stress the community concept of Jihadis. The songs *Ghuraba'* (Strangers) and *Qadimun al-Muslimun* (The Muslims arrive) suggest that Jihadis emulate past Muslim warriors, re-enact them in the present, and will represent them in the future.

The song *ghuraba'* has been ascribed to the members of the milieu of the Tanzim al-Jihad group, which assassinated Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat in October 1981. An Egyptian defendant sang it in the 1980s after he was trialed to death, which was recorded on camera. This made *ghuraba'* a super-hit in the Jihadi scene.⁵⁵¹ The term *ghuraba'* means "strangers" and "aliens" in a physical and in a spiritual sense, comparable to the concept "pilgrim" in Christian fundamentalism.⁵⁵² Strangeness and alienation are very important Islamic concepts and connected to the *hijra* paradigm (emigration). In the earliest Islamic period, before the emigration to Medina, the nucleus of the nascent Muslim community lived in a hostile, alienating environment in Mecca. A popular reference to this time is a prophetic, messianic hadith, which not only explains that Islam started as alien religion, but also predicts that it will return to this state before Judgment Day (*akhir al-zaman*), a time during which the remaining "real" Muslims will again be strangers: "Islam began alien and it will again be alien like it began – May the strangers be blessed."⁵⁵³ The "strangers will reform faith (din) in God if the people become corrupted." *Din* means religion in the sense of "judgment," "faith," and "law" (*sharia*).⁵⁵⁴ In this sense, *ghuraba'* is an integral part of the Jihadi elite concept (*ta'ifa mansura, zahirin 'ala al-haqq, firqa najiya*, see point 1).

⁵⁵¹ „Shabab hukima 'alayhim bi-l-i'dam wahiduhum yanshad fa qama al-muhami yabki," (Youth who were sentenced to death – one of them sings a hymn, which made the attorney cry), Youtube.com, accessed January 18, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1HsG3MSBok&feature=related>. Full Arabic text: Sahib qasidat *ghuraba'* (author of the poem "strangers"), ejabat.google.com, accessed January 17, 2012, <http://ejabat.google.com/ejabat/thread?tid=7ad7093fd870b90e>.

⁵⁵² "Pilgrim" derives from the Latin word *peregrines*, which means "stranger" (lit. someone who comes "per agrum," i.e. "via or from beyond the field" in the sense of civilized and cultivated land). Like its Arabic-Muslim counterpart, the Latin-Christian word has a variety of meanings, which can be divided mainly into the catholic or protestant understanding of it. Catholicism has traditionally supported the practice of pilgrimage to religious places like Jerusalem for spiritual reasons. Protestantism rejected, even prohibited pilgrimage, arguing against the superstitions and indulgences connected to the catholic practice. Yet, its modern use refers to Protestantism, namely the Protestant settlers, who arrived in New England with the *Mayflower* in 1621 and are called "pilgrim fathers." Conceptually, the protestant concept of pilgrimage is strikingly similar to the Islamic understanding of *hijra*. A group of dissidents escapes from a hostile environment, builds up a proto-community, and carries back its ideology with a messianic sense of mission to the point of origin and finally the rest of the world.

⁵⁵³ Al-Suri, Global Islamic Resistance Call, Introduction, *Fasl fi al-ghurbah wa-l-ghuraba' wa-l-zahirin 'ala-l-haqq* (Chapter on the exile and the strangers and those who will come to know righteousness). See also Masnad Ibn Hanbal, No. 16345, <http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/>, accessed January 17, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=16345&pid=672709.

⁵⁵⁴ Fouad L. Khuri, *Imams and Emirs: State, Religion and Sects in Islam* (London: Westbourne Grove, 1990), 34.

Partial translation of *nashidat ghuraba'*:

Strangers, for no one but God we bow our heads
Strangers and we happily chose this as a slogan for life
If you ask about us, then [better know] that we are not worried by the tyrants
We are soldiers of God forever, and we chose the path of rejection
Strangers, strangers, strangers, strangers
We are not worried about [earthly] shackles, since we continue our way towards eternal life
Let us struggle and fight anew
Strangers, they are free ones in a world of slavery
Strangers, for no one but God we bow our heads⁵⁵⁵

The very popular song *Qadimun al-Muslimun* also refers to a messianic hadith, and thus similarly acquires symbolic capital within an Islamic context. The ideological arc that stretches between the past and the future is symbolized by black flags. We have discussed the hadith on “black flags” (*al-rayat al-sud*) above in the context of emblems and logos: The appearance of riders with black flags from the lands of Khorasan will announce the end of times. The *nashid* can be found many times on Youtube and in different music-videos designed by professional activists and sympathizers. These videos often display silhouettes of horse-riders carrying black standards. The steady repetition of the verse “the Muslims arrive” cements the message in the brain, which appears again in texts, emblems, symbols and videos.⁵⁵⁶ The music-video thus contextualizes ideology once more and brings texts, picture and sound together.

Partial translation of *nashidat al-Muslimun Qadimun*:

The Muslims are coming, are coming, are coming
Protect your borders, release your soldiers, and prepare your efforts
Oh people who live in sin, oh people who live in sin

Secondly, *qasida*, pl. *qasa'id* are traditional Arabic poems that tell life's wisdoms, religious and love stories, or speak about the steadfastness and salvation of warriors. In addition

⁵⁵⁵ *Sahib qasidat ghuraba'* (author of the poem “strangers”), ejabat.google.com, accessed January 17, 2012, <http://ejabat.google.com/ejabat/thread?tid=7ad7093fd870b90e>.

⁵⁵⁶ See for example the German Jihadi version: „Anashid Qadimun al-Muslimun – Die Armee aus Khorasan werden [sic] mit Tauhid Flaggen kommen“ (The army from Khorasan will come with Tauhid (monotheism) standards), www.youtube.com, accessed January 17, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3QIggLxjOU.

classical Arabic poems in pre-Islamic Arabia were said to have had a magic spellpower on account of super-natural creatures which whispered the words of a poem into a poet's ears. In Islamic culture, especially in today's Jihadi culture, a similar sense seems to be transferred to the poem. Jihadis pray through poems and cast spells, wishing death upon enemies, victory for themselves, or freedom for jailed companions.⁵⁵⁷ In the following poem a jailed Jihadi in Gaza's *Ansar Prison* reassures the reader, that imprisoned warriors remain upbeat and in good heart, since they know that their imprisonment is merely temporary. Keeping patient and steadfast means that release and victory will come soon. The qasida reminds also of a prayer, however slightly more literary and therefore can be seen as a spiritual meditation around a certain theme.

Oh brothers and listeners
We assure you that we will remain steadfast

We stick to the path of jihad
Convinced that victory will come soon

The Most Gracious ruled in the Mother of Books
That all worlds will decay

This most excellent ruling, oh my God, with his compassion
Is what we believe in

We take shelter in God lest we will walk astray
From the proper path that refreshes us like a spring

[We take shelter in God] From weakness and feebleness
From concealing the truth that has been revealed

Asking Him for firmness towards the dead
And patient steadfastness for the strong-minded ones

⁵⁵⁷ Philipp Holtmann, "Casting Supernatural Spells and Fostering Communitas: Abu Yahya Al-Libi's Qasida Poetry," in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 90-103.

Thus protecting a slave that has ducked
And flees his religion because of brute violators

Dawn approaches for every prisoner
And a speedy victory for Muslims

Raise the flag of monotheism, so it may bring peace
And may crush [the enemy] at the same time, despite the conceit of the unbelievers!

The *qasida*'s author, al-Maqdisi (not to be mistaken with the famous Jordanian Jihadi cleric), uses several semiotic-semantic key concepts. "Prisoner" has been a key-sign and major-theme of revolutionary and resistance dialectics for decades, if not for centuries. It is also not by chance that Jihadi pictorial and verbal discourses are strongly influenced by this key-concept. The repression of Islamist scenes and thus the emergence of an Islamist prisoner-culture in Muslim countries started in the 1950s. Throughout the second half of the 20th century there have been large numbers of political prisoners in Arab and Muslim countries, who spent jail-time for their involvement in militant and/or oppositional Islamic activities. Western states have been cooperating with Muslim states in the arrest and detention of Jihadis since the 1990s, and increasingly so after the terrorist attacks of September 9/11 (even establishing postmodern concentration-style camps such as Guantanamo Bay, Baghrum Prison and numerous other "black prisons" at unknown locations in third-party states). Therefore, the prisoner topic is trump on the Jihadi conspiracy and victimization agenda. In Ayman al-Zawahiri's own words "the intention [to wage jihad] for the sake of God" (*niyat al-jihad fi sabil Allah*) divides into five semiotic fields, namely helping (*nusra*) "Islam, the oppressed, the tortured, the prisoners and the mujahidin."⁵⁵⁸ The leader of al-Qaeda quotes a Quranic injunction that treats the idea of steadfastness and patience: *Did ye think that ye Would enter Heaven Without God testing Those of you who fought hard (In His Cause) and Remained steadfast [al-sabirin]?*⁵⁵⁹ Another key concept in al-Maqdisi's poem is "patience," or "steadfastness." Finally, al-Maqdisi ends the poem with the concept of the black standard of jihad (*al-raqa*), which rings a bell in the mind of a reader who is familiar with Jihadi

⁵⁵⁸ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "*Ila al-amam ya usud al-sham*" (Forward, oh Lions of the Sham region). www.as-ansar.com/vb, accessed January 12, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?p=293793>.

⁵⁵⁹ Quran, Surat al-Imran 3:142, www.sacred-texts.com, Yusuf Ali translation, accessed February 12, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00314.htm>.

semiotics. The black flag stands for a stark dichotomy between good and bad, piety, millenarian visions, and it is raised in wartimes (see the discussion above).

Illustration 33: Jihadi-qasida „We reassure you that we are steadfast“⁵⁶⁰



⁵⁶⁰ Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi, *Nutam'inukum bi-anna sabirun* (We reassure you that we are patient), www.as-ansar.com/vb, accessed February 12, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=55731>

4.d.v Excursus: The Use and Genre of *Huda'* (Encouraging Battle Songs) versus *Anashid* (Praiseful Hymns) in Jihadi Online Propaganda and their Ritualistic Aspects

The influence of battle songs and theological music is often overlooked by researchers of Islamic martyrdom culture, in which they play a tremendously important role. Songs commemorate martyrs, reinforce group-identity, and provide spiritual incentives for “martyrdom operations” (*'amaliyat istishhadiyya*). In Jihadi propaganda, songs play a key role in ceremonies to celebrate the transition from fighters to martyrs (especially in rituals of passage, rebirth-rituals, and rituals of attachment to God). The use of songs is among other ritualistic means an essential tool to strengthen in-group-cohesiveness, in-group bias and *communitas* in Jihadi communities.

Songs also play a crucial role in operations. A video produced by the *Mujahideen Shura Council* in Iraq shows the driver of a bomb-truck shortly before he detonates himself, as he is singing an encouraging battle song. Chanting relieves the driver of some of the pressure he experiences and plays a tactical role, for without the chanting meditation, the driver would be less inclined and more fearful to sacrifice his life in the attack. Furthermore, the act of singing represents an oral ritual of rebirth. Similar videos of suicide attackers, such as the Kuwaiti Badr Mash'al al-Harbi, who chant for their audiences, help researchers to gain insight into the role of hymns and battle songs in contemporary Muslim martyrdom culture.

In Jihadi culture, the treatment of martyrs (*shuhada'*, people who die in battle) and “alter-martyrs” (*istishhadiyun*, fighters who sacrifice themselves, i.e. suicide attackers) has a strongly ceremonial character. Praiseful hymns and encouraging battle songs play a central role in the ritualistic glorification of martyrs in Jihadi propaganda. Many fighters are shown singing shortly before they attack. The ceremonial song supports a musical ritual of rebirth and attachment to God that contains psychological and spatial stages which resemble those in rites of passage. After being issued on the Internet, martyr songs are supposed to transport this feeling directly to the Jihadi target audience, which is supposed to re-experience the excitement of self-sacrifice, and finally re-enact it.

In regards to the different use and genre of *huda'* (encouraging battle songs) versus *anashid* (praiseful hymns) in Jihadi propaganda, several stylistic and genre differences come to mind.⁵⁶¹ A major distinguishing factor remains that the *huda'* is mostly improvised and originates from a concrete situation (a traditional characteristic), whereas *anashid* underlie a

⁵⁶¹ Battle songs and theological songs are inextricably connected to the spirituality of Muslim believers in the past and present. They can be found in a wide array of situations. Our concern is the utilization of Islamic songs during conflict, especially in the context of Muslim terrorist attacks.

strict choreography and describe abstract feelings of longing and spiritual relief.⁵⁶² In comparison to *anashid*, the genre *huda'* is characterized by poorer sound quality and often recorded in the field, the singers being actual warriors. The *anashid* genre, in contrast, is characterized by a high sound quality, adds digitalized sound effects and features its own “stars” in the Jihadi scene (*munshidun*).⁵⁶³

Moreover, Jihadis seem to associate the song genre *huda'* with the poetic metre *rajaz* and its characteristics and qualities. The dominating stylistic element of *rajaz* is the repetition of a main theme, a chanting meditation which makes it apt as a toil and labor song during strenuous situations. In the same way, contemporary Muslim warriors seem to interpret the *huda'* as uplifting battle chant, which is also sung before “martyrdom-operations.” Originally, the *huda'* was a camel driver’s and a workers’ song, as well as a battle song, which was chanted in the *radjaz* metre.⁵⁶⁴ In pre-Islamic times, the *radjaz*-metre (also *urdjuza*) was used for short poems, which originated from a concrete situation and were mostly improvised. Technically, *radjaz* refers to a poetic metre whose short lines have no *caesura* (unlike the *qasida*-metre in which each verse bears two symmetrical half lines). However, many contemporary Jihadi *huda'* songs are transcribed in the same metric form as *anashid*, i.e. in the *qasida* metre. In modern Jihadi parlance, *huda'* has become a sub-genre of *nasheed*.⁵⁶⁵

From a ritualistic and ceremonial perspective, both *anashid* and *huda'* fulfill common functions in Jihadi culture. They serve for rhetorical, verbal and musical rituals of rebirth. James L. Hoban states that “metamorphosis, expressed specifically in temporal, spatial and psychological changes, is the dominant image and formal principle in rhetorical rituals of rebirth. At the heart of these transformations is a marginal phase where the old and the new are ambiguously and momentarily joined.”⁵⁶⁶

Rituals of rebirth are structured similarly to *rites of passage*, which is a fundamentally important analytical concept to describe socialization within cultures that was introduced by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1908. According to van Gennep, rites of passage are significant life-transforming events that take place in the life of individuals such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. These transformations happen very similarly across cultures and

⁵⁶² *Enclopaedia of Islam* (Koninklijke Brill EV, Leiden: 1999): Henry G. Farmer, “Ghina”; W. Heinrichs, “Radjaz”; A. Shiloah, “Nashid.”

⁵⁶³ Examples are the pseudonymous “al-Sarmari” who works with the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), or the Yemenite “Abu Hajir al-Hadrami” who sings for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

⁵⁶⁴ A different theory states that the *huda'* developed out of the *bika'* (lamenting chant of women).

⁵⁶⁵ See, for example, the website “Ana Muslim,” www.muslm.net, with an advertisement for a production by the Islamic State in Iraq which is titled “The Encouraging Battle Songs of the Martyrs” (*Huda' al-shuhada'*). The advert says that this production is one of the “most beautiful *inshad*-sessions.” <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=351491>, accessed March 9, 2011.

⁵⁶⁶ James L. Hoban, “Rhetorical Rituals of Rebirth,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66(1980): 281.

in all societies. Rites of passage may be subdivided into three consecutive sub-rites, which van Gennep defined as “rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation.”⁵⁶⁷ Van Gennep observed that “such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effect. That such changes are regarded as real and important is demonstrated by the recurrence of rites, in important ceremonies among widely differing peoples, enacting death in one condition and resurrection in another. These rites [...] are rites of passage in their most dramatic form.”⁵⁶⁸

Based on the spade work of van Gennep, the anthropologist Victor W. Turner developed the concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*. Turner argued that group members who undergo a similar transition share a feeling of vibrant emotions, excitement and of brotherly and sisterly love among each other, which takes place during the *liminal* state. Turner used a structuralist-interactionist approach, which he based on an elaboration of van Gennep’s work on liminal states in rites of passage and Geertz’ technique of thick description; he coined this emotion *communitas*.⁵⁶⁹

Also sacrifice and martyrdom rites create a feeling of *communitas* among Jihadis and are then used among other ritual elements to raise group cohesiveness within their *intentional communities*, the members of which “often see themselves at odds with or needing to withdraw from the larger society.”⁵⁷⁰ Intentional communities are those groups which distinguish themselves by a high level of in-group bias, often in a period of extreme stress caused by cultural confusion. Furthermore, a martyr or alter-martyr, i.e. a self-sacrificial attacker, can only gain his status by an extreme form of a rite of passage. But also certain fixed codes of communication and written rituals in Jihadi online discussions serve the same purpose. They manifest the fact that members have already changed their status within online

⁵⁶⁷ Yet, “although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated.” Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 11. A rite of passage may appear in combination and be intertwined with other rites. It is an important analytic categorization to “call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*.” Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Van Gennep, 13. In rites of passage, individuals undergo three different stages of change. The change may be related to place, state, social position and age, or a combination of these factors. Firstly, the individual or group finds itself in a *preliminal* state of separation from the used environment, leaving the accustomed structure (the old community, for example). Then follows a *liminal* state of transition, in which the actual change occurs, and finally a *post-liminal* state of re-integration into the new environment, which stands in opposition to the old structure.

⁵⁶⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96-97

⁵⁷⁰ Susan Love Brown, introduction to *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Susan Love Brown (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 5.

groups and thus have become ritual elders. Moreover, they serve to signify that neophytes are in the transitional process of acquiring an elder-position.

The presentation of martyrs (*shuhada'*, people who die in battle) and “alter-martyrs” (*istishhadiyun*, fighters who sacrifice themselves, often suicide attackers) has a strongly ceremonial character. Theological songs play a central role in the ritual transitional processes from fighter to martyr. Many fighters are shown singing shortly before they attack. The ceremonial song supports a musical ritual of rebirth that contains psychological and spatial stages which resemble those in rites of passage. These ceremonial aspects are purposely made public and presented to wider audiences by way of Jihadi propaganda which is easily available on the Internet. In the case of chanting suicide attackers, who are filmed shortly before and during the execution of an attack, the transition is clearly visible. The old is represented by the *mujahid* who is introduced to the viewer in a pre-liminal state. Then shortly before, or while he drives his explosives laden truck towards the target, the fighter enters a *liminal* state of transition, and finally becomes re-born as a *shahid* (martyr), more specifically as an *istishhadi* (one who sacrifices himself for the sake of religion) in the post-liminal phase. The actual bomb attack may be likened to a ritual of purification, which conceptually carries elements of an evangelist baptism ceremony.

Theological and battle songs demonstrate the complex nature of transition rites, and also the complexity of “martyrdom-ceremonies.” The song arches as a transitional element over two rites, namely the rite of separation, i.e. losing the life, and the rite of incorporation and rebirth, i.e. becoming an immortal glorified martyr who is blessed with miracles (*karamat*), which are Sufi spiritual elements that have been integrated into Jihadi mythology. The song thus fills the exciting stage of *liminality*, which according to Victor W. Turner is comparable to “being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.”⁵⁷¹ After being issued on the Internet, the martyr’s song also transports this feeling directly to the Jihadi audience, which is supposed to re-experience the excitement of self-sacrifice, and finally re-enact it.

In the next analytical step, an aesthetic and semiotic anthropological approach may be taken to decipher the deeper meaning of audio-patterns in Jihadi songs. Using the observation technique “thick description” by U.S. anthropologist Clifford Geertz allows examining different layers of meaning and interpretation behind social interactions as well as the symbols and representations used in these interactions. Every battle and theological song is based on a certain theme and uses key audio-signs. The words, phrases and concepts in the

⁵⁷¹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 95.

songs carry different layers of meaning in Jihadi subculture as well as in mainstream Islamic culture.

For example, the *nashid* “Muslims are approaching [from Khorasan]” (*Qadimun Muslimun*) focuses on the key signs “horses” and “black flags.” As for the latter, the use of the key-word *al-rya* (“the black war banner”) points into three spatial and temporal directions.

Firstly, the black flag carries a past-oriented fundamentalist meaning. It was used by the Prophet Muhammad and classical Islamic armies as a war banner.

Secondly, the flag belongs to Jihadi reality, since every Jihadi group and individual has seen, touched or raised it.

Thirdly, the black flag stands for a future-oriented and apocalyptic theme. According to very popular Islamic traditions, an army of horse riders led by the Mahdi will fight the final battle against all unbelievers. They will approach from the lands of Khorasan, which according to Islamic historiography are located in Asia comprising parts of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and central Asian states. The destination of the army that carries black flags (*al-ryat al-sud*) will be Palestine, where they will tie their horses.

The *rya* is thus a key symbol of Jihadi subculture (oftentimes bearing the Islamic *credo* in white letters plus the emblem “Seal of Prophets” on it); it is a digital icon and appears on almost every website or statement issued on the Internet; and it is a sound-image transported by Jihadi songs. The *rya* in parallel touches the martyrdom myth, the salvation myth and bears strategic implications for global jihad, since tradition tells that the Mahdist army will tie its horses in historic Palestine, i.e. today’s Israel. These meanings, however, transcend the narrow Jihadi subculture. The song has been chanted and internalized by generations of Muslims all over the Islamic world.

In summary, studying Muslim battle songs reveals important aspects of martyrdom and sacrifice in contemporary Jihadi culture. From an interdisciplinary anthropological perspective, semiotic, symbolic and ritual aspects of Islamic songs in Jihadi subculture allow the researcher to go to the heart of Jihadi thinking. Therefore, researchers should focus more on the cultural semiotics, symbolic manifestations and uplifting expressions in Islamic music and its Jihadi sub-genre.

4.d.vi The Role of Propaganda Movies in Jihadi Web-Aesthetics

Jihadi video semiotics repeats the broader themes of web-propaganda. This concerns symbolisms, iconography, aesthetics, colors and mythology, which are, in the words of Abdelaslem el-Defraoui, encapsulated in the cosmology and the grand audio-visual narrative of global jihad that has been coined by al-Qaeda. The Jihadi web strongly supports the Jihadi video-industry and vice versa. This is also due to the fact that video and web are inseparable spheres. El-Defraoui has investigated the topic of audio-visual Jihadi meta-narratives and their influence on a variety of jihadi groups in a lengthy study, which illustrates how closely concepts of Jihadi media strategy and video-propaganda via the Net are inter-connected.⁵⁷² This allows the conclusion that Jihadi video-propaganda not only serves agitation in the classical sense of opinion-forming manipulation, but is also an integral part of communicative guidance which Jihadis apply to activate their movement, enlarge it and lead. Since major research on the content and presentation of Jihadi video propaganda already exists, the present research will focus stronger on conceptual ideas of video in the Jihadi net, which reiterate the myths of community, conspiracy and ultimate justification.⁵⁷³ The video is an integral part of communicative guidance. Audio-visual messages of Jihadis on the Internet can influence the thinking and behavior of percipients. Socio-cultural perceptions play an important role in this process. An important assumption from the advertisement industry is that content activates certain feelings, and can bear a high mental “infectiousness.” It may sound melodramatic, but strong conceptualizations are justified regarding the power of propagandist manipulation. Marketing strategists assume that if the content of fictual stories in advertisement propaganda “infects” the viewer, „he will never forget the stories and carry its germs with him for the rest of his life.”⁵⁷⁴ On the one hand, many jihad videos have an amateurish character. The simplicity of the audio-visual narrative, its design and the core-message are often

⁵⁷² Abdelaslem El Difraoui, *Al Qaida par l'image: La prophétie du martyr* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013).

⁵⁷³ See, for example, the indepth study of El Difraoui quoted above; also Cecilie Finsnes, “What is audio-visual propaganda? – An overview of the content of FFI’s Jihadi video database” (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2010); Hanna Rogan, *Al-Qaeda’s online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007*, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 01.12.2007, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/07-02729.pdf>; Behnam Said, “Hymns (Nasheeds): A Contribution to the Study of the Jihadist Culture,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35 (2012): 863–879; Jytte Klausen, Eliane Tschaen Barbieri, Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, and Aaron Y. Zelin, “The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun’s Propaganda Campaign,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6:1 (2012); Nicholas J. O’Shaughnessy, Queen Mary and Paul R. Baines, “Selling Terror: The Symbolisation and Positioning of Jihad,” *Marketing Theory* 9:2 (2009), 227-241.

⁵⁷⁴ Björn Bohnenkamp, „Epidemisches Erzählen. Lars von Triers Epidemic als Reflexion filmischen Erzählens“, eingesehen am 7.9.2011, http://www.marketing-centrum.de/mm/en/research/Publications_Download/bohenkamp_epi.pdf.

overwhelming and may appear immature and not appealing to the outsider's eye. Yet, technically speaking the producers become more professional by the day. They use digital processing to create animated short-films and to express their visions, which are absolutely dominated by al-Qaeda's blueprints for symbolisms, imagery and narratives.⁵⁷⁵ Background noises (martial songs, chirping of paradise-birds, sounds of water standing for paradise, and recitations from the Quran) serve similar to noise-animations in the advertisement industry and product marketing the strengthening of cognitive-emotional effects. Furthermore, Jihadi videos encourage their viewers to realize the ideology. The documentation of operations is supposed to show how ideology is actually applied. Actual terrorist attacks receive a contextualization through the video. A similar process applies to texts (claims of responsibility, statements, and theological tractates), symbols and icons of Jihadi culture. They become easier to comprehend sensually and are being systematically assigned to events in reality. Videos are thus a form of *performative rhetorics* which serves to convey an acted-out state of mind, a religious *habitus* of violence and in parallel, a guideline for action. Klaus Theweleit's essay on the effects of digital media on the brain again comes to mind. Theweleit claims that the consumption of music causes highly emotional alterations in the listener. Virtual video and audio propaganda serves the consumer with digital emotions from cyberspace, which can be described in our context as "a sphere of horror."⁵⁷⁶ If we substitute "music" with listening, viewing and processing digitalized Jihadi content, then the consumption of propaganda causes deep alterations in a person's awareness. "Beyond that, I store something in the body, in the whole sensomotoric system, which as a result of the impact with music lives its own live inside of me. For me, the decisive factor is that certain cell-structures of my body have changed after consuming certain music."⁵⁷⁷

Jihadi videos divide into three categories: Firstly, they serve the presentation of terrorist attacks and their marketing. Secondly, videos are the main platforms for the speeches of high-ranking Jihadi cadres. Thirdly, videos are extremely important for the marketing of Jihadi ideology. Most of the time, these three elements are intertwined. Only a very small part of the video propaganda serves pure instructive purposes such as the building of bombs, weapons training, close-combat instruction, tactical-operative scenarios and specific target-

⁵⁷⁵ „The Interview: Abdelaslem El Difraoui, Senior Fellow, Institute for Media and Communication Politics,” [www.france24.com](http://www.france24.com/en/20130128-interview-abdelaslem-el-difraoui-al-qaeda-media-coverage), January 29, 2013, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130128-interview-abdelaslem-el-difraoui-al-qaeda-media-coverage>.

⁵⁷⁶ Rüdiger Lohker, „Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, az-Zarqawi und zurück: Beschämung und Ehre in der muslimischen Rezeption“, *eingesehen* am 9.9.2011, http://www.aurora-magazin.at/medien_kultur/sinn_lohker_frm.htm.

⁵⁷⁷ Klaus Theweleit, „Übertragung. Gegenübertragung. Dritter Körper. Zur Gehirnveränderung durch die Medien“ (Köln: Künstler, Autoren, Institution und Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther, 2007)

guidelines.⁵⁷⁸ However, inspiration for practical re-enactment flows out of training and bomb-building scenes as well the exemplary depiction of terrorist attacks which are integrated into the videos. This way, the videos transport a very dangerous content, since it helps to unify a comprehensive theological, ideological and strategic mentality and awareness. Videos contain strategic blueprints for new forms of global terrorism. They present case-studies of terrorist attacks and feature role-models such as the “lone-wolf” individual terrorist paradigm, or the “commendable” cohesiveness of Jihadi groups. This can awaken desires in susceptible percipients to imitate not only the ideological mindscape, but finally also the actions presented in the propaganda films. Therefore, the video is another very important element in the concept of communicative guidance.

The professionalization of the video genre is pushed ahead cooperatively by central organizations’ media outlets and by decentralized E-supporters. The bad viewing quality of 1980s and 1990s Jihadi videos contrasts sharply with today’s massive release of high image quality and graphic-animated videos. The new products bear a Hollywood-jihad character. Media supporters of jihad not only partake in the marketing and distribution process, but produce their own material, creating and branding names with considerable reputation in the Jihadi scene. Examples are the prominent „Global Jihadi Media Front,“ the „Jihadi Media Elite,“ and smaller production-companies on different Jihadi Internet fora.⁵⁷⁹

Our present video analysis focuses on key-signs. Similar to the semiotics on websites – their symbolisms are not really different – a major goal of the video-genre is to strengthen group cohesion and ideological conviction, i.e. to create an ideological milieu for re-enactment. The following sequences will illustrate this point. One of the key findings is that videos by different terrorist organizations cohesively and internationally use the same symbolic language. Moreover, Jihadi symbolisms in video and on websites are very similar. The video is also a very apt tool for rationalizing terrorist myths. Technically, the video can help to make the fundamentalist narrative plausible. The video’s visual “reality” mixes with “divine” commands and specific strategic guidelines justified on theological grounds (such as suicide bombings, individualized terrorism, and assassinations). It offers a real-looking and trustable visual environment.

⁵⁷⁸ Cecilie Finsnes, “What is audio-visual propaganda? – An overview of the content of FFI’s Jihadi video database” (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2010), accessed October 7, 2011, <http://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/10-00960.pdf>. Finsnes analysis is based on 800 videos. Own findings of the Jihadism Online project in Vienna support this thesis. The project’s database contains more than 3000 Jihadi videos.

⁵⁷⁹ For example, “*Mu’assasat al-Qabidun ‘ala al-Jamr al-I’lamiyya*” „Media Foundation of those who clutch the glowing coals“ of the jihad forum Sanam al-Islam (Summit of Islam).

The semiotics in the pictorial discourses of Jihadi propaganda videos can be categorized into the following aspects:

1. In-group culture
 - a. Elite presentation and Jihadi symbolism
 - b. Oppression and violation of Muslim honour
2. Out-group culture
 - a. Conspiracy and alienation
3. Salvation
 - a. Martyrdom and paradise imaginations and related symbolisms
4. Theological indoctrination in Jihadi videos
5. Strategic-operative guidelines

4.d.vi.1. In-group culture

a. Elite presentation and Jihadi symbolism

In the first sequence of screenshots from a video by the northern Iraqi organization *Ansar al-Islam*, one can clearly detect a focus on basic Jihadi symbolism. *Ansar al-Islam* is a Kurdish-Sunni group based in northern Iraq that follows a mixed strategy of terrorist tactics and charity work to influence the local population. The organization's goal is to establish an Islamic state in the Kurdish region of Iraq. It was founded in 2001 as a radical splinter group of the *Islamic Movement of Kurdistan* and controlled north-eastern Iraq until its bases were destroyed in 2003 by cooperated U.S. aerial attacks and ground attacks by the *Patriotic Union of Kurdistan* (PUK). This triggered a spate of suicide bombings which were perpetrated by the remnants of the group. The exact relationship of *Ansar al-Islam* to *al-Qaeda in Iraq*, formerly *Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* under the Jordanian Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (k.2006), remains unclear. While the group's dominance in Northern Iraq has been crushed, it seems to retain some strongholds in the region until today. At least, the frequent dissemination of propaganda video footage allows this conclusion. Horses, the black standard (*al-raqa*), the white standard (*al-liwa'*) as well as the classical warrior image represented by the horse-rider can be seen in the video and are dominant. This fundamentalist vision harks back to the past in order to legitimize the group's present *raison d'être*. They are presented like the first community of Muslims who emigrated with Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. However, the video itself serves an utterly modern purpose, namely the documentation of *Ansar al-*

Islam's weapons workshop and home-made weapons arsenal.⁵⁸⁰ The last screenshot shows the workshop table, on it a computer screen and soldering equipment to construct the electric circuits of explosive devices. The picture paradoxically imbues the Jihadis in the clip with a sense of modern technocratism in parallel to their past-oriented fundamentalism.

Illustration 34: Sequence of screenshots from the northern Iraqi *Ansar al-Islam's* video “*Silah la yundab*”



⁵⁸⁰ “*Silah la yundab*,” *Ansar I'lamiyya* Media Foundation, <http://www.aljahad.com/vb/>, accessed November 19, 2011, <http://www.aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=12858>.



Typical examples of Jihadi aestheticism and semiotics can also be found in the videos of *Islam Awazi* – the *Turkistan Islamic Party* (TIP). The organization focuses on mobilizing Muslims in wider central-Asia and operates out of China’s Xinjiang province (which is mainly populated by Uighur Muslims). Therefore, the members of TIP are called “China’s Islamic Militants” in international security policy literature.⁵⁸¹ TIP fulfills a double-role: Under the leadership of Abdul Shakur Turkistani (as of Nov 2011) and his two late predecessors, it has pursued a regional Turk Jihadi-agenda with the goal to create an Islamic state named “Turkistan” in China’s Xinjiang province, or in the whole of central Asia. But the organization also subordinates itself under al-Qaeda’s global Jihadi agenda.

⁵⁸¹ J.Todd Reed and Diana Raschke, *The ETIM: China’s New Islamic Militants and the Global Terrorist Threat* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010).

“In this role, he [Abdul Shakoor] succeeds two prominent Uighur leaders—Abdul Haq al-Turkistani and Hahsan Mahsum—and carries on their legacy by dually holding a high-ranking position in al-Qaeda.

Like Mahsum and Abdul Haq, Abdul Shakoor and his fighters in the TIP want independence for Xinjiang Province. The province shall become an Islamic State by the name of East Turkistan. Alternatively, if all of Central Asia is ‘liberated’ from the current ‘apostate’ and ‘infidel’ governments, then Xinjiang would become part of a greater Central Asian caliphate called Turkistan, a name which refers to the Turkic ethnic groups that populate the region, including the Uighurs, Uzbeks, Karkalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Tatars.”⁵⁸²

Furthermore, “it remains unclear whether the *Turkistan Islamic Party* (TIP) is a continuation of the *East Turkistan Islamic Movement* (ETIM) or a different organization altogether that shares the same objectives. ETIM is believed to have faded into extinction shortly after Hahsan Mahsum’s death in 2003, while the TIP emerged around 2008.”⁵⁸³

The following sequence of screenshots from a TIP video demonstrates how Jihadi iconography serves agitational, organizational, ideological and strategic messages also in moving pictures.⁵⁸⁴ It does not matter if the carrier is a video or a graphical user interface on a website – the symbolisms stay the same. However, the video can combine sound-images with moving pictures, i.e. other sign combinations than the virtual room. Video is a propaganda element by itself, but also a very useful complement for the chat-room, blog-account, or user-channel.

Typical for TIP videos is a very experimental and agitating use of digitalized sound images, such as the chirping of birds, rustling of leaves, sounds of the sea, or sabre-rattling in order to evoke states of great excitement or calmth together with the linked pictures (which often are digitalized animations).

The sequence shows, firstly, a Quran that emerges from the green background, which stands for Islam. Together with the colors yellow and blue, as well as arabesque patterns, paradise imaginations are stimulated, to backup the recitation of a divine injunction in Quran 12:108 that commands monotheism: “*Say thou: This is my way: I do invite unto Allah,- on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes,- I and whoever follows me. Glory to Allah and never will I*

⁵⁸² Jacob Zenn, “Al-Qaeda’s Uighur Jihadi: A Profile of the Turkistan Islamic Party’s Abdul Shakoor Turkistani,” <http://mlm.jamestown.org/>, accessed January 26, 2011, [http://mlm.jamestown.org/feature-single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=38823&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=539&cHash=1f58f53554aa9c114daa07f07bf8419a](http://mlm.jamestown.org/feature-single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=38823&tx_ttnews[backPid]=539&cHash=1f58f53554aa9c114daa07f07bf8419a).

⁵⁸³ Jacob Zenn, “Al-Qaeda’s Uighur Jihadi: A Profile of the Turkistan Islamic Party’s Abdul Shakoor Turkistani.”

⁵⁸⁴ *Risala ila al-shaab al-sini – bi-l-lugha al-uyghuriyya wa-l-siniyya* (Message to the Chinese people – In Uyghur and Chinese), accessed January 27, 2012, <http://www.archive.org/details/rslh-sh3b-sni>.

join gods with Allah.”⁵⁸⁵ The next picture shows the late leader Abdul Haq al-Turkistani (killed in May 2010). In the background, a green flag and a black standard indicate the dual agenda; the former stands for TIP and the later for al-Qaeda. The iconography of the horse, the rider and the black and green standards appears repeatedly in the video. The next two pictures show the Jihadi rider in front of a digitalized map of the envisioned Islamic state of East Turkistan, right afterwards, the rider with the black standard symbolically represents global jihad. Focus is put on the black standard and the horse itself in the next three pictures. However, the end of the video is well rounded off again, displaying two riders carrying both standards, the green TIP and the black messianic al-Qaeda one, who charge several times with their horses towards the camera.

Illustration 35: Sequence of screenshots from TIP-video “*Risala ila al-sha'ab al-sini*”



⁵⁸⁵ Surat al-Yusuf 12:108, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/, accessed January 26, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation12.php.



b. The Oppression and Violation of Muslim Honour

The next example concerns a video that was co-produced by the supporter network *Ansar al-Mujahideen* and *al-Malahim Media* by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The video is titled “Martyrdom in Defense of our Honour” and features a speech by the military commander of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, Qasim al-Raymi aka Abu Hureira al-Sana'ani. A large scale terrorism wave that had begun in 2001 and was initiated by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (*Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Jazirat al-Arab*) had been suppressed by the Saudi government in 2005. Key figures of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda had either been killed or arrested (Yusuf al-'Uyairi (k.2003), Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin (k.2004), Abu Jandal al-Azdi (arr.2004)). As a result, the Jihadi scene in the neighboring country Yemen gained influence, which culminated in January 2009 in the merger of the Saudi Arabian and the Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda into *al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Qa'ida fi Jazirat al-Arab)*. This organization is dominated by Yemenis, supported by Saudis and has offered shelter to internationals such as Anwar al-Awlaqi, Samir Khan and Ibrahim al-Banna. The former two were U.S. citizens, the latter was an Egyptian. All were assassinated by the U.S. in autumn 2011. Its combination of successful insurgency, terrorist tactics, intensive media work plus training camps has earned

AQAP the compassionate admiration of Jihadi supporters on the Internet. The following screenshots show how *Ansar al-Mujahideen* activists (members of the web-forum by the same name)⁵⁸⁶ have combined al-Sana'ani's speech with a graphic representation of the "abused honour" theme in order to trigger emotional reactions.

The first screenshot shows a golden-colored animated interior that reminds of a sacred place, a temple. An animated 3-D logo of the Ansar al-Mujahidin networks turns in a circle. Digitally embroidered patterns on the floor and the walls remind of modern Arabesque tile-style. The second screenshot shows the portraits of the detested Saudi government figures King Abdullah, Prince Mohammed bin Naif, the vice-interior minister who is responsible for Saudi anti-terrorism measures, and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abd al-Aziz al-Shaykh. Their counterfeits crown over seven veiled Muslim women with humbly bowed heads (the same graphic being repeatedly shown in the video). The photoshopped graphic of one veiled woman is used to create the whole group. The woodcut-like representation of women reduces them to objects and things. The sign, "woman" is merely a carrier of meanings that relate to shame, honour, lack of respect and struggle. In the mid-ground appears an aerial view of the prison, in which the women were allegedly abused. An animated Jihadi war-banner melts with the yellow background and waves forth and back. On the far right side, which stands for justice, the fighters of jihad appear. They are represented by three leading figures of AQAP. Their portrait-picture appears together with a smaller black flag, which is also animated and waves around. The three portraits are those of al-Sana'ani, Abu Saber al-Abyani, the commander of the "Abyan-Aden Emirate" (killed in a March 2010 in an airstrike by the U.S. in Yemen) and a third member of the group. Al-Sana'ani's voice starts telling the miserable story of the women from the off:

"They were abducted, brought to the prisons and abused. They fooled them into riding on buses to talk to the criminal Muhammad bin Naif in order to ask him to release their imprisoned relatives. They then took them to the prisons and held them there for over ten days... What was the crime that justified the imprisonment of these free women? By Allah and how do I describe to you the scene of pain that these shameless repeated incidents have caused in the hearts of men? The scene of a chaste woman who had nothing except the pole of a street light to hold on to, so she clutched to it and grasped hold of it with both of her hands as the investigation inspectors dragged her forcefully to the detention car... we promise that

⁵⁸⁶ Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, accessed January 27, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/>.

we will avenge you...for our chasteness and your purity any hand that stretches towards you. It is obligatory to cut it down, for you are our dignity, and our purity.”

The goal of the video is to motivate for martyrdom. It uses “abused honour” and “shame” semiotics as an emotive concept. The hostile triad of state king, clergy and interior ministry is clearly defined, so are the victims: innocent Muslim women. Diametrically opposed are the Jihadi fighters, who must avenge the honour crime. This is a very common topic of propaganda movies. The abused honour of women which needs to be avenged is frequently used as justification for suicide attacks.

Already ancient Arabic poetry connects the topic of wounded honour to the inviolability of women. The Arab poet Abu Tammam’s (788-845) collection of pre-Islamic poems, the *Hamasa*, is not only literary proof for the appreciation of women, but also for typical examples of honour-codices connected to women and shame in ancient Arab tribal society. Early Islamic culture sprang from and developed within this society, and it is justified to look at contemporary fundamentalist and mythic key-concepts by going back to their very roots in tribal society. In the poem collection *Hamasa*, Nr. 85, verses 1-2, the torn curtain (*sitr*) at a tent’s entrance stands symbolically for the tearing apart of a woman’s - and therefore her man’s - honour. Ripping the curtain of a bower-tent was a picture for the shieldlessness, which women were exposed to if being under attack. Similarly, losing the veil stood already in ancient Arabic poetry for helplessness and loss of honour. However, there were exceptions in tribal customary law that allowed a woman to throw off her veil, such as an enemy attack, lamentation of the dead, or meetings with her lover.⁵⁸⁷ A similar concept of honour is symbolized in modern Jihadi propaganda by the symbolic picture of a black *qina'* (face veil), such as in the Jihadi video “Martyrdom in Defense of our Honour.” In the video, the veil stands for honour and loss of honour, i.e. when the arrested women need to take it off and their honour is violated.

Abu Tammam, *Hamasa* Nr. 85, verses 1-2:

قال إسحاق بن خلف (البسيط)	ولم أقاس الدجى في حندس الظلم
لو لا أميمة لم أجزع من العدم	فيهتك الستر عن لحم على وضم
أحاذر الفقر يوما يلّم بها	

⁵⁸⁷ Wolfdietrich Fischer, “Der Schleier der Frau in der altarabischen Stammesgesellschaft,” in *Alltagsleben und materielle Kultur in der arabischen Sprache und Literatur – Festschrift für Heinz Grotzfeld zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed Thomas Bauer and Ulrike Stehli-Werbeck (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 2005), 173-184.

If it was not for Umaima, I would not vein scarcity
 Neither would I endure the darkest deep night to move out for business
 I fear that poverty will once struck her
 Ripping the curtain apart, leaving her bare flesh open to an attack⁵⁸⁸

Illustration 36: Sequence of screenshots from *al-Malahim* (AQAP) video “Martyrdom in Defense of our Honour”



4.d.vi.2. Out-group culture

a. Conspiracy and Alienation

In the following video sequence, alienation-themes and the “we-versus-them” divide are dichotomically constructed by showing killed fighters of the African Union Corps, who are laid out on a market place in Somalia. Sheikh Ali M. Raage, a spokesman of the Somali

⁵⁸⁸ Wolfdietrich Fischer, “Der Schleier der Frau in der altarabischen Stammesgesellschaft,” 176. The text of the Hamasa of Abu Tammam is cited according to the commentary of al-Marzuqi (Kairo 1951-1953).

Islamic Movement *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, explains in front of the dead that this is a fight between Iman (belief) and Kufr (unbelief).⁵⁸⁹

Illustration 37: Sequence of screenshots from the Shabaab al-Mujahideen video “The Brundian Bloodbath”



⁵⁸⁹ „The Brundian Bloodbath-Battle of Dayniile,“ *Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, *al-Kataeb Media Foundation*, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/>, accessed November 14, 2011, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13348>.

However, the dichotomist construction of conspiracy does not have to be based on bloody scenes only. It suffices to take news media footage on Muslim-Western political collaboration and place in a Jihadi context. It is a fact that Muslim rulers cooperate closely with the West, and Jihadi propaganda exploits this vastly, if justifiably or not remains in the eye of the beholder. The following sequence of screenshots treats the theme of conspiracy and encloses it with the theme of martyrdom. The movie “*Qafilat al-Fath*” (Caravan of Conquest) by the Afghan Taliban is a propaganda piece which presents ideology, training, target reconnaissance, preparation and execution of simultaneous suicide-attacks against Afghani government buildings in the Paktia Province. The piece focuses on five martyrs, who executed the attacks and their rewards. The lengthy treatment of the conspiracy theme serves as justification for the attacks. Therefore, the movie starts with a cloud picture. The heavenly rewards are symbolized by white clouds in the blue sky and the counterfeit of a Muslim martyr. The Quran text in the cloud picture reads “*Do they then seek after a judgment of (the days of) ignorance? But who, for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgment than Allah.*”⁵⁹⁰ The horse-rider with the white flag (al-liwa') appears afterwards and represents once again the Jihadi self-image of elite warriors. The white flag with the black *shahada* informs the viewer that the warrior belongs to the Afghan Taliban. Then a semiotic sequence of abuse, occupation and collaboration is carefully arranged. The third screenshot shows a Palestinian woman being attacked by an Israeli army-watchdog, which is perceived as a scene of oppression directed against Palestinians, but felt by all Muslims. Women are mistreated in many Muslim societies. But the Israeli context is a political, not a social one. Psychologically, the conflict with Israel serves as a scapegoat to externalize many unresolved internal social problems in Muslim societies. This exploitation of Israeli semiotics comes especially to the fore in Jihadi propaganda. The next screenshot shows a gathering of Nato-members carrying their flags, but the picture is crossed out with two big red bars. The following four screenshots display the semiotics of political, moral and cultural corruption, which are effects of the implementation of Western-style governments in the Muslim world. As examples serve two meetings between George W. Bush j. and the Afghani president Ahmed Karzai, a scene displaying members of the Afghani parliament, whose establishment is a direct outcome of these meetings, so the Jihadi narrative, and a graphic synopsis of the message that Karzai is merely a puppet installed by the colonizing neo-Crusader West: He can be seen in one line with the former Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Egyptian President Husni Mubarak, former Iraqi interim-Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. All of them were

⁵⁹⁰ Surat al-Ma'ida 5:50, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/, accessed January 27, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation5.php.

installed by the United States and their allies. The video closes with a reiteration of the martyrdom and salvation theme. The self-less martyrs (forelast screenshot Mullah Abd al-Rahman) can be seen praying.

From a conceptual angle, one can find similar arrangements of conspiracy in many other Jihadi videos. The “Balagh Media Centre” of the prominent Shumukh al-Islam forum issued a video in 2010 that focuses on the role of Jihadi media. The video displays how to work with Jihadi websites.⁵⁹¹ It takes the viewer on a journey through different web-presences, scrolling, clicking and stopping at propagandistic images. Then, the conspiracy theme sets in and treats the whole bandwidth of signs related to the U.S.-led “Neo-Crusader” campaign and its outsourcing to private security companies in the Internet-Intelligence sector. “Apostate Muslims” are displayed, such as Hamas’ political leader Ismail Haniyya, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abd al-Aziz al-Shaykh, and the late Sheikh al-Azhar Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, who is seen shaking hands with Israeli president Shimon Peres. This picture introduces also the myth of the Jewish world conspiracy against Islam. Yet, these impressions are again contrasted with scenes from Jihadi forums, the training of Jihadi fighters and the portraits of Jihadi martyrs. In the background plays a Jihadi *nasheed* and verses from the Quran are collimated into the video. A holistic spiritual, virtual and physical sensual world is created this way. Moreover, a direct line between the virtual and the physical worlds is drawn.

⁵⁹¹ Al-I’lam al-Jihadi madin fi tariqihi“ (Jihad Media is effectively on its way), Markaz al-Balagh li-l-I’lam al-Jihadi (Dissemination Center for Jihadi Media) by members of Shumukh al-Islam forum, [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org/details/Al-Balag-1), accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.archive.org/details/Al-Balag-1>.





4.d.vi.3. Salvation

a. Paradise imaginations and related symbolisms

Audio and graphic animations that display paradise imaginations have become a prominent feature of the Jihadi video-discourse. Similar to the abundance of colors on Jihadi web-forums, the video uses polychromatic graphic animations to evoke paradise imaginations. Yet, the video uses the moving picture in combination with sound images, which results into a stronger sensual immersion. The following sequence of screenshots is taken from a video by northern Iraq's Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish-Sunni group, and shows the extent to which this genre has developed.⁵⁹² The video was issued on the occasion of the Islamic Festival of Sacrifice (*'Id al-Adha*) in 2010 and shows members of Ansar al-Islam distributing food packages and presents to the local population. *'Eid al-Adha* is celebrated around two months and ten days after the end of Ramadan, and it is commemorated by Muslims worldwide to honour the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismael for God (who ultimately accepted a lamb as sacrifice). The festival is accompanied by an essential Islamic ceremony with deeply spiritual-charitable character: Meat of slaughtered, i.e. sacrificed animals is distributed among the needy and the poor. This ceremony is accompanied with the ritualistic

⁵⁹² *Ruhama' baynahum (Compassionate amongst each other)*, *Mu'assasat al-Ansar al-I'lamiyya*, part 5, www.aljahad.com/vb/, accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13259>

chanting of the *takbir* (“Allahu Akbar”) while distributing the food. The ceremony and ritual have been pictured in the video. Masked armed fighters distribute food and presents and spray graffiti with the help of stencils on walls, saying “Ansar al-Islam greets the Islamic World on the occasion of the blessed Festival of Sacrifice.” In the background, a narrator informs the viewer that “the local populace loves the Mujahidin as they love them.” The civilians in the video welcome the fighters and cheer out loud. The video is the fifth publication of a series called “compassionate amongst each other” and derives its name from Quran Surat al-Fath 48:29: “*Muhammad is the apostle of Allah. and those who are with him are strong against Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer), seeking Grace from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure.*”⁵⁹³

The beginning of the piece is striking in terms of digitalized paradise imaginations and salvation signs. The video starts with a three dimensional calligraphic depiction of the title, which crowns over a graphically animated peaceful and colorful landscape. It is accompanied by the chirping of paradise birds and the chanting of a very harmonic *nashida* repeating “listen to my words and let your heart be filled with happiness.” A deep masculine, but calm voice of a speaker adds to the sound picture, speaking the ritualistic blessing “In the name of God, the merciful, the all-compassionate” (*bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim*). An idealized paradise garden with a blue river follows; flowers and trees greet the viewer. Everything seems dreamy, blurry and excitant at the same time. The logo of the organization grows out of a bed of roses. The animation continues towards a small wooden boat that seems stranded. The title of the piece is repeated in golden letters aboard the boat. Afterwards, a documentary-style movie starts, which shows the members of Ansar al-Islam distributing presents and food.

⁵⁹³ Surat al-Fath 48:29, www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/, accessed January 29, 2012, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation48.php.



4.d.vi.4. Theological Indoctrination in Jihadi videos

The theological dimension plays a major role in Jihadi online worlds and video-discourses. It works like an “adjuvant” for the mind-alteration towards a radicalized state, which also stands for the change of psychological tension during the transition from one sensual reality to another, which then culminates in a radicalized state of mind. Schütz and Luckmann describe this as a change of “life stance” and refer to the term “attention à la vie,” which was introduced by the French philosopher Henri Bergson (*Creative Evolution*, 1907).⁵⁹⁴ The theological dimension plays a fundamental role in the change of awareness of fundamentalists, because it is an obligatory worldview, which has been commanded by God himself. Jihadis claim from within their subversive counter-culture to be responsible for the

⁵⁹⁴ Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 47-49. Also discussed in Gabriel Dorta, *Soziale Welten in der Chat-Kommunikation* (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2005), 46; 69 ff.

supervision over everything that is determined as Islamic “right” (*haqq*) and “wrong” (*batil*).⁵⁹⁵

In order to illustrate the concept of theological indoctrination in Jihadi video-propaganda a few examples may suffice. The 1995 video *Ma'arik Badr al-Bosna* (The Badr (Full Moon) Battles of Bosnia)⁵⁹⁶ was produced by the “Media Office of the Mujahidin’s Banner,” a propaganda company of foreign Jihadi fighters in Bosnia (*El Mudžahid Batallion aka Odred El Mudžahidin aka Katibat al-Mujahidin*).⁵⁹⁷ The media department was probably run by Sheikh Anwar al-Sha'ban, a born Egyptian, who had started to build up a network between Milan, Italy and Bosnia in 1992 with the goal to recruit, coordinate and train foreign Muslim fighters for the civil war; as well as to support the Bosnian Jihad with propaganda in a way similar to the Jordanian-Palestinian Abdallah Azzam in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Al-Sha'ban was killed in an ambush by Croatian forces in 1995, yet not before he had co-produced his last masterpiece, the “Full Moon Battles.” The style of the production is coined by al-Sha'ban’s own character. He was a fighter-scholar, i.e. a propagandist who actively took part in the war.⁵⁹⁸ The piece shows a very concrete form of “Jihadi front journalism,” which refers to footage that was recorded by fighters in the field and then mixed with for the time elaborate graphic animations, one of them displaying the animated graphic of a Quran that opens up, while the voice of a Quran reciter (*mujawwid*) starts to chant “*Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not.*”⁵⁹⁹ It is thus one of the first early semiotic encounters between virtual computerized animation and theology in the Jihadi video format. Understanding this verse is tantamount to grasping very deep lying dynamics of Jihadi theology. Basically, the verse implies that Muslims are peace-loving

⁵⁹⁵ Video-discourses of Jihadis at first glance do not differentiate themselves from many other political sub-discourses that have branched off the mainstream-culture in the WWW. Examples are social sub-milieus and discourse on YouTube. Such discourses display interrelationships between supervision and subversion. Many claim to oppose hegemonial mass-media with counter-narratives within their own subcultures, yet at the same try to influence public opinion. “Subversive” counter-narratives fail to realize that they themselves would like to take the lead in supervision matters. For subcultural video-discourses see also the interview with Anjali Kamat, journalist at www.democracynow.org, Elevate - Music, Arts and Political Discourse, accessed August 24, 2012, <http://2011.elevate.at/en/photo-video-2005-2010/2010/interviews/anjali-kamat/>.

⁵⁹⁶ A reference to the Battle of Badr in March 624 AD. In this battle, the nascent Muslim community gained its first decisive victory over the Quraysh Tribe from Mecca. The victory has been attributed to divine intervention on behalf of the Muslims and thus has a special significance for the Jihadi narrative, which claims that successes can only be realized by following divine guidance (*hidaya*).

⁵⁹⁷ *Al-Markaz al-I'lami, al-Qism al-Mar'i bi Liwa' al-Mujahidin*, “*Ma'arik Badr al-Bosna*,” video-archive of the Jihadism Online Project at Vienna University.

⁵⁹⁸ “Biography of Shaheed Shaykh Anwar Sha'ban, excerpt from “Under the Shade of Swords” by Azzam.com publications, <http://forums.islamicawakening.com>, accessed January 30, 2012, <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f14/biography-of-shaheed-shaykh-anwar-shaban-13/>.

⁵⁹⁹ *Surat al-Baqara* 2:216, <http://www.islam101.com>, accessed March 9, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/2.htm>.

people. Yet, “it may be” that they have to fight, which then is turned into a command by Jihadi interpreters. Reversing the understanding of this and other divine commands will be a major task for Muslim policy makers and community leaders in the near future.

Another classic video-sermon that combines the semiotics of the field with the sacred should not go unmentioned. It is the 1988 video “The Arab Helpers in Afghanistan”, which features a lengthy theological lecture by the man who would later become known as central emir of al-Qaeda, Usama bin Laden.⁶⁰⁰ In the brilliantly dramatized scene, a slim and weather-beaten Bin Laden sits somewhere in Pakistan, or Afghanistan, wearing military fatigues. The bushes and rocks around him function as semiotics of authenticity. He is in the middle of events. The rough landscape represents jihad. In addition, bin Laden holds minutes-long theological speech in a glass-clear classical Arabic. In this speech, his words function as spoken icons that are designated a similarity to the holiness of the Quran. The irony of history is that bin Laden’s speeches, his clear and calm voice, re-broadcasted thousands of times via the Arab world after September 11, 2001, brought classical Arabic (*fusha*) and High Standard Arabic back to the Arab street. Right at the beginning of his speech, Bin Laden sets in saying: “Jihad in the way of God is the peak of the hump of Islam” (*al-jihad fi sabil Allah dhirwat sinam al-Islam*). In the years that followed until the full development of electronic jihad in the early 2000s, this idiom swung like a pendulum forth and back in the sound chamber of global Jihadi discourse. The metaphor goes back to a tradition, in which Muhammad compared the nature of Islam to a camel. The camel was a precious animal and symbol of wealth in 7th century tribal Arab society on the Arabian Peninsula. According to the tradition, Muhammad reasoned that the top of the hump, i.e. analogically the summit of Islam, was jihad. Bin Laden continues his speech and plays carefully with other major theological concepts: “[jihad is]...the neglected duty (*al-farida al-gha'iba*).” In Jihadi subculture, the term “neglected duty” automatically brings to mind the manifesto of Abd al-Salam Faraj, who was executed in 1982 for his involvement in the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat. “Allah has granted us after this long time in which jihad was neglected ...that this flag (*al-raya*) is again being raised, like the Prophet used to raise it.” Of course, it is clear to the Muslim viewer to which “flag” Bin Laden refers. He speaks about the black standard (*al-raya al-sauda*) that used to be hoisted during times of war in Muhammad’s lifetime, at the same time being a key emblem of the messianic final world-battle in Jihadi subculture.⁶⁰¹ “Finally, I trust in my

⁶⁰⁰ *Al-Ansar al-'Arab fi Afghanistan* (The Arab Supporters in Afghanistan), by *Tasjilat al-Muslim* (Muslim-Recordings) Saudia Arabia, Riyadh and Jeddah, 1988, video-archive of the Jihadism Online Project at Vienna University.

⁶⁰¹ See above, the discussion of the meaning of the black standard in Jihadi subculture, chapter 4.d.iii.

brothers that they will roll up their sleeves and move out (*yanfiru*) towards the land of jihad according to God's command: 'Go ye forth [*anfiru*], (whether equipped) lightly or heavily, and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the cause of Allah. That is best for you, if ye (but) knew.'"⁶⁰² The early Bin Laden clearly identified himself as a theological pupil of the global Jihadi ideologue Abdallah Azzam, who at that time developed and propagated the *nafir*-concept, which is mentioned in the verse. Drawing on the old Hanbali jurists Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathir, Azzam revived the classical concept of "the general call to arms" (*al-nafir al-'amm*). If, according to Azzam's revival of the classical concept, the enemy entered Muslim lands, the individual religious obligation (*fard 'ayn*) for defensive jihad duty would spread in concentric circles throughout the world and command Muslims to rush towards the fronts without the permission or the order of a central authority.

Also the Jihadi theological justification for 9/11 was laid down by Bin Laden in a video message broadcasted shortly after the attacks. In the video, Bin Laden re-narrates the tradition of the boy (*hadith al-ghulam*) who is willing to die for his religion when given the choice to either be killed or deny his religion.⁶⁰³ This hadith together with other legalistic-political arguments is central to the justification of suicide attacks.⁶⁰⁴

The use of theological key signs is absolutely crucial for Jihadi propaganda and the myths which are presented in it. The video format bears several advantages; it offers a very broad range of applications for theological concepts. Firstly, different categories of signs can be put to use with the video format, such as phrases, words, pictures, sounds or symbols. Secondly, the video when being compressed to slim data formats can be distributed globally via the Internet with its multiple upload and download possibilities. Thirdly, today's media saturated and manipulated global culture accepts the moving image per se. The moving image has become like a steady background noise. It rises out of the crippling and autistic garbage heap of society's multimedia tools like mobile phones, tablet-PCs, net-books, laptops and other portable devices. "Video" thus reflects normality and is an integral part of daily life. This can decrease its effectiveness as an emotive propagandistic tool. But it can also facilitate the immersion of percipients into brute and extremist semiotic worlds, which are created by audio-visual stimulation.

⁶⁰² Surat al-Tauba 9:41, www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/, accessed January 31, 2011, http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation9.php.

⁶⁰³ *Usud bilad Khorasan 2* (Lions in the land of Khorasan part 2), *Ansar al-Mujahidin, Al-Qism al-I'lami* - Media Section, release date unknown, video-archive of the Jihadism Online Project at Vienna University.

⁶⁰⁴ Compare to David Jan Slavicek, "Deconstructing the Shariatic Justification of Suicide Bombings," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31(2008): 553-571; Philipp Holtmann, *Martyrdom, not Suicide: The Legality of Hamas' Bombings in the mid-1990s in Modern Islamic Jurisprudence* (Munich: Grin, 2009).

4.d.vi.5. Strategic-Operative Discourses and Guidelines in Jihadi Videos

Al-Qaeda regularly publishes videos with the goal to guide followers according to the organization's strategy. These video messages must not be seen as formal orders, but they are observation-based directives to Jihadi sympathizers and supporters. Very importantly, al-Qaeda markets the individual terrorism paradigm (*irhab fardi*) through its videos (See chapter on 7.b on "Identificatory leadership - Ceremonial veneration of individual terrorist attackers").

Jihadi Web Semiotics and Aesthetics: A Summary

In conclusion, neither the coordination of colors, nor the alignment of signs, or the combination of text and picture on Jihadi websites happens accidentally. The creation of semiotic rooms on Jihadi webpages underlies certain considerations by their makers. For example, the vertical arrangement of authoritative media banners goes against the viewing direction of the picture and the reading direction of text. This tension creates topographic and semiotic rule in the virtual sphere. Witsch argues "the semiotic room in the Internet is deliberately put to use as a rhetoric Interface. Worlds are constructed by the deliberate arrangement of colors, the integration of mythic pictures and symbols as well as the axiomatic of picture and text: Worlds that lessen the difference between reality and fiction are created by combining fictional dimensions (myth) with reality."⁶⁰⁵ In a similar way, Jihadi websites, especially forums, present doctrinaire agitation together with real conflicts in Muslim countries and thus reduce the space between fiction and reality.

The last step of a successful propagandist process is its adaption by followers and sympathizers, people who have been caught in the web of signification spun around the ideology and then re-enact it. The construction of a community myth requires identification with the group-ideology (mobilization) and offers for participation (communication) and partaking (action). This leads to ultimate consensus and conformity with the group.⁶⁰⁶ Nico Prucha defines re-enactment as one of the central goals of Jihadi web propaganda.⁶⁰⁷ Our last illustration shows this effect quite clearly. It is a sign of empowerment and re-enactment, and in parallel it is a fully integrated element of Jihadi web-propaganda. A sympathizer has

⁶⁰⁵ Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 107.

⁶⁰⁶ Witsch, 80.

⁶⁰⁷ Nico Prucha, Die Stimme des Dschihad: "Sawt al-gihad": al-Qa'idas erstes Online-Magazin (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač), 82-95.

published this wallpaper in the “design”-section (*tasmim*) of Shumukh al-Islam forum. The computer screen with a screen shot of the forum is connected to a bomb that carries the “Seal of the Prophets” on it. A Muslim fighter sits beside it. The picture illustrates two concepts. The creator wants to express that the propaganda flowing out of the jihad web is similar to a bomb in its effects. Furthermore, the fighter-image stands for a frequent claim in online Jihadi discourse: “You are not different from the mujahidin in the physical war!”⁶⁰⁸ The creator of the graphic also seems to adapt this motto of self-portrayal by media Jihadis. He presents himself as an active fighter on the media front and has clearly gone through a traditional rite of transition and identification, yet with the difference of time, space and information technique.⁶⁰⁹

His ceremonial self-identification is focused on the aesthetics and symbols of online jihad, which have been drained from the Islamic mother-culture in order to fit into a new extremist sub-culture whose interpretations succeed everything else. The text on top reads: “Our Islamic media is guided, resisting, so you may hoist the [black] standard.”⁶¹⁰ A few years ago, online supporters were rebuked as layabouts. But today, online jihad has the same status as physical jihad. The underlying idea is that virtual activity creates terrorist reality. This is rooted in the classical concept of *jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan* (jihad by the pen and the communiqué) that served like a collective mobilizer for *jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan* (jihad by the sword and the spear) in classical Islam. Members of Jihadi forums have perpetrated suicide attacks such as Badr Mashal al-Harbi, Abu Dujana al-Khorasani and Abu Umar al-Shami.⁶¹¹ They are icon-figures, and their glorification on forums additionally strengthens the self-confidence of Jihadi online communities.

⁶⁰⁸ From the discussion „ Abu Dujana al-Khorasani wa tanabbu’at Nostradamus“ (Abu Dujana al-Khorasani ...and the prophecies of Nostradamus), al-Falluja forum, accessed 25 January 2010, <http://alfaloja1.info/vb/showthread.php?p=706509>.

⁶⁰⁹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1960.

⁶¹⁰ Shumukh al-Islam forum, design section, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>, accessed December 5, 2012.

⁶¹¹ The Kuwaiti al-Harbi posted more than 1000 entries on Jihadi forums before he committed a suicide attack in Iraq in 2008, the Jordanian al-Khorasani was a prominent forum member before he perpetrated a suicide attack in Afghanistan for the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in December 2009, and the Syrian Abu Omar al-Shami was very active on Jihadi forums as well, before he went to Iraq where he died in a suicide attack in February 2011. Allegedly, he perpetrated the attack for the “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI).

Illustration 39: Example of re-enactment through signs of empowerment (source: <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/>)



5. Discursive Virtual Leadership - The Rituals of Online Jihad

There is no leader who can provide leadership on the basis of unsound principles – Principles are more important than men.” George Romney, qt. in Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, The Real Romney (2012)

There are concrete examples of leadership in cyberspace, which result from ritualistic discursive interactions between online Jihadis. This has clear structural and strategic reasons. Firstly, the extreme growth of social media and networking possibilities via the Internet generally fosters propagandist structures. Secondly, the international security cooperation against physical terrorist organizations shifts the focus of activists to communication-support, and specifically contributes to an extreme growth of propaganda and communication structures.⁶¹²

Creating real-time actors is the stated end goal of online communicative leadership, which is reflected in the cyber Jihadi motto “*qaul wa 'amal*” (saying and [then] deed). Numerous Jihadi attackers were deeply entrenched in extremist virtual milieus, which guided their thinking and actions. These milieus are often created on jihad-forums, where propaganda is published for the first time and then spreads all over the Net.

With the decentralization of Jihadi organizations after 2001, leaders and strategists have increasingly asked themselves how to substitute for the loss of central physical structures. At the same time, the formation of sympathizers via the Internet has resulted in new, communicative guidance mechanisms, which lay the groundwork for virtual leadership structures. The Iraq War, which started in 2003, led to the explosive increase of Jihadi media and completely changed the role of online followers. Their participation in online jihad has become a respected endeavour. Online Jihadis are not “layabouts” anymore, but highly respected participants in the Jihadi scene. Hierarchically organized Jihadi online-media networks stretch from Europe to the Middle East.

One such example is the transnational al-Muhajiroun network with its media production outlet “salafimedia,” whose boss seems to be Omar Bakri Muhammad in Lebanon. Muhammad teamed up with the local Salafi scene in the norther Lebanese town of Tripoli after he was banned from returning to Great Britain in 2005, and it seems that he still coordinates media

⁶¹² There are substantial difficulties in coming to terms with the real meaning of modern media and its influences on human behavior. The downplaying of its effects in political and public debates is ample proof of this. However, one of the best arenas to study the influence of communication in cyberspace is the Jihadi Internet and its ritualistic discursive processes. Everyone acts together, yet alone. Media jihad culture online unites with individualized terrorism offline. Both states of reality are being exploited by extremists to build the strategic pillars of contemporary global jihad.

activities from Lebanon.⁶¹³ Al-Muhajiroun network was formed already in the mid-1980s as an offshoot of Hizb al-Tahrir, officially disbanded in the UK in 2004, but it seems to remain highly active underground as a major global jihadi media hub.⁶¹⁴ A point in case is its activity in Europe in 2011, where salafimedia produced new videos every week and redefined al-Qaeda's audio-visual narrative with novel sound-picture designs. Among them was the typical "razor sharp" sound animation at the beginning of every video.

The European headquarter of al-Muhajiroun's propaganda, "salafimedia.uk," was led by the British media-emir Anjem Choudari (the deputy of Omar Bakri Muhammad), and the German sub-network "salafimedia.de" by the Austrian Muhammad Mahmud (aka Abu Usama al-Gharib) and his deputy, the German Denis Mamadou Cuspert (aka Abu Talha al-Almani aka Abu Maaleq). But after a while, this hierarchical constellation disintegrated into a multi-tier network. Mahmud and Cuspert had been under close observation by German and Austrian authorities, and fled to Egypt, where al-Gharib established a Salafi colony in August 2012.⁶¹⁵ Also Choudari's media activity was curbed by British authorities. After the British and German salafimedia websites had been shut down, the media network has spread to several youtube channels and one central website (salafimedia.com), which is hosted by the U.S. server HostMonster.⁶¹⁶

Major Arabic Jihadi discussion fora work similarly in a semi-centralized system. Fora play a key role in media jihad, which has been described as "the most important propaganda phenomenon of the beginning of the 21st century."⁶¹⁷ They cooperatively ritualize Jihadi communication and form authoritative organizational networks in E-space. Although it seems that loosely connected networks in social media (YouTube-channels, blogs, facebook and Twitter accounts) are at the moment gaining importance versus the fora in the jihadi

⁶¹³ Since British authorities refused him to return, Omar Bakri Muhammad has become even more prominent in the Lebanese Salafi scene, which is now close to the militant scene in the Syrian civil war. He still determines extremist propaganda via his role as central media leader in the al-Muhajiroun network and its media production outlet "salafimedia." Interview by the author with a German expert analyst in February 2013.

⁶¹⁴ Jytte Klausen, Eliane Tschaen Barbieri, Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, and Aaron Y. Zelin, "The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun's Propaganda Campaign," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6:1 (2012).

⁶¹⁵ Benjamin Weinthal, "The rise of a 'German Salafist colony' in Egypt," www.longwarjournal.org, August 15, 2012, accessed April 18, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/the_opening_of_a_ger.php. Mahmoud had previously spent four years in jail in Austria from 2007 until 2008 and was arrested in March 2013 in Turkey's Hattay Province, as he was trying to cross the border to Syria on a faked North-African passport. His goal was to join jihadi forces in the Syrian civil war. See "Österreichischer Islamist in der Türkei gefasst," www.welt.de, March 21, 2013, <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article114636865/Oesterreichischer-Islamist-in-der-Tuerkei-gefasst.html>.

⁶¹⁶ Jytte Klausen, Eliane Tschaen Barbieri, Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, and Aaron Y. Zelin, "The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun's Propaganda Campaign."

⁶¹⁷ Asiem El Difraoui, "The Jihad of Images: Al-Qaeda's Prophecy of Martyrdom," accessed April 20, 2013, <http://medienpolitik.eu/cms/media/pdf/The%20Jihad%20of%20Images.pdf>.

propaganda process,⁶¹⁸ a thorough understanding of the fora, through which the phenomenon of media jihad decisively developed, is still crucial if one wants to understand virtual leadership and its specific mechanisms.⁶¹⁹

On the basis of their most obvious manifestations on the Internet, we can define five ritualistic models of virtual guidance among online Jihadis (excluding the concept of virtual theological guidance, which will be discussed in the next chapter).

- A.** hierarchical virtual leadership (creating hierarchical structures based on rites of obedience)
- B.** mutual virtual leadership (grouping around dominant issues/rituals of joint-media activism)
- C.** discursive virtual leadership
 - a.** Post-mortem discursive virtual leaders
 - b.** Discursive ritualism

All three models of guidance are based on ritualistic communications, which can be clearly observed on Jihadi Internet forums. Rituals are here defined as formal as well as informal repeated social interactions, which use mighty symbols that constantly recreated social ties, hierarchies and emotional zeal with the goal to form ideological conviction.⁶²⁰ The actions described in the following are also defined as ritualistic, because they serve superior and overriding purposes with the goal to steer the mindsets of followers. A ritual is used to vivify something that is not the actual thing itself. The same happens in Jihadi propaganda, where symbolic, semiotic and discursive representations vivify the concept jihad. In addition, two more models of virtual guidance will be discussed at the end of this dissertation. The two models refer to communicative authority in a broader sense in manipulative and ideological strategic action environments in cyberspace.

- D.** Environmental guidance (second and third tier influences in virtual terrorist milieus)
- E.** Identificatory guidance (ceremonial veneration of individual terrorist attackers)

We will use the American sociologist Alfred Bergesen's concept of "the ritual order" as an overarching framework of ritual theory. According to Bergesen, the "ritual order" is the complete sum of practices that constantly reproduce social ties and symbols (which in turn

⁶¹⁸ Aaron Y. Zelin and Richard Borrow, "The State of Global Jihad Online: A Qualitative, Quantitative and Cross-Lingual Analysis," New America Foundation, January 2013.

⁶¹⁹ In plain words: It is absolutely essential to study communicative guidance processes on jihad fora, through which the phenomenon of media jihad decisively developed.

⁶²⁰ This definition is orientated at McManus 1979: 216-248.

represent these ties).⁶²¹ More specifically, the ritual is a form of communicative action that abolishes the difference between thinking and doing.⁶²² This point is important for virtual leadership in cyberspace, which tries to elicit actions from ideas and communication. Cyberspace is a threshold zone that creates threshold identities. Cyber-Jihadis are threshold people who have extremist online identities, yet at the same time live quite normal lives.⁶²³ This creates tension and a longing to fill the gap with even more extremist actions online.⁶²⁴ I will use an extended definition of rituals to analyze guidance mechanisms in cyberspace, which in their entirety translate into virtual leadership (as an imperative-communication concept).

Rituals are formal as well as informal repeated social interactions that constantly reproduce social ties and hierarchies. They use and create emotional zeal to create ideological conviction.⁶²⁵ Moreover, rituals tie thoughts to actions.⁶²⁶

Albert Bergesen distinguishes three levels of rituals, namely micro-, meso- and macrorituals. Together, they reproduce symbolically, nevertheless very effectively social structures within the smallest as well as the biggest units of society. Rituals are not understood only in terms of public mega events, but also as small scale personal interactions such as greetings, handshakes, certain phrases and celebrations. The three levels of rituals are integrated. Many

621 Albert Bergesen, "Die rituelle Ordnung", in *Ritualtheorien. Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Andréa Bellinger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2003), 49-77. I would like to thank Felix Menzel for his help in regards to the concept of rituals. Felix Menzel "Medienrituale und politische Ikonen" (Schnellroda, Edition Antaios, 2009), 51-93. The following discussion and examples on different levels of rituals are mostly taken from Bergesen and Menzel, except for my own interpretations and examples of jihadirituals.

622 Catherine Bell, „Ritualkonstruktion“, in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Adreá Bellinger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 37-48. As Emile Durkheim observed, "religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two categories lies all that separates thinking from doing." See Emile Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life". Durkheim's idea was further developed in ritual theories of the latter 20th century, on which Catherine Bell had a decisive influence.

⁶²³ The average "armchair-Jihadi" is caught in a liminal state between the virtual and the physical world and thus develops a *liminal persona*. The concept of liminality was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage, which have the following three-part structure: 1. Separation; 2. Liminal Period; 3. Re-Assimilation. See Arnold van Gannep, *Übergangsriten (Les rites de passage)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verlag, 2005). The U.S. anthropologist Victor Turner utilized van Gennep's model "rites de passage" and Clifford Geertz' concept "thick description" for his own concepts of "liminality" and "communitas." See Victor Turner, „Liminality and Communitas,“ in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 333.

624 See here also Jarret Brachman and Alex N. Levine, "You Too Can Be Awlaki!"

625 This definition is orientated at John McManus, *Ritual and Human Social Cognition*, in *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis*, ed. Eugene G. D'Aquili (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 216-248.

626 Catherine Bell, „Ritualkonstruktion“, in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Adreá Bellinger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 37-48.

micro-ritualistic actions form a meso-interaction, and many meso-interactions build a larger macro-ceremony.⁶²⁷ The micro ritual, i.e. the formal organization of linguistic elements, must be established before superior ritualistic processes such as meso-rituals and macro-rituals can take place.

The ritual order of Bergesen can be very well illustrated with a camp-fire. As we have argued before, also central ideas or myths are metaphorically like a camp-fire; a group gathers around it and recreates its ties and its existence. People, who sit around a campfire, perform all three levels of rituals. The ritual order starts on the micro level, where it is relevant to observe who grills, how people move, what their facial expressions and body movements are, as well as the tools being used. Who builds and ignites the fire, who continues bringing wood, who grills his or her meat first indicates hierarchies; how exactly is the meat grilled shows technical understanding; what is the sitting order and amount of speaking time of participants hints at authority, or the wish to be authoritative. Secondly, on a meso-level (intermediate level) it is important to observe why the idea of the ceremony is so important for a specific group. Do they long for harmony, solidarity, defend a certain cause, or plan an attack, etc? Finally, on a macro level, one can define the event and its participants. Thus, the macro ritual “camp-fire” attracts a specific group of people – i.e. is it a group of business-man, a family, or extremists? In addition, what are the possible meanings of key movements, signs and statements on their different levels; such as interpersonal, intra-group, theological, cultural and economic levels? Through a similar lens, we will look at the communicative interactions on jihad discussion forums.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁷ Albert Bergesen, „Die rituelle Ordnung,“ in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Andreá Belliger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 66.

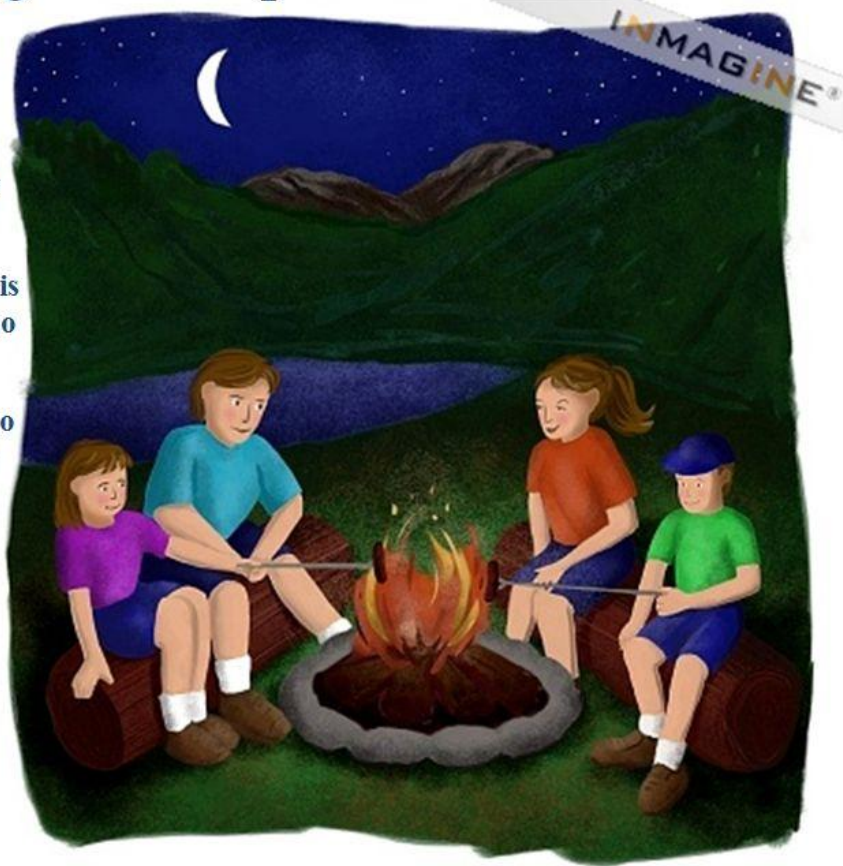
⁶²⁸ This method of observation is called “thick description” and goes back to the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. See Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412-454.

Imagine a campfire...

1. Micro: How do they grill?

2. Meso: Why is the idea of it so important?

3. Macro: Who grills Where?



Source: www.inimage.com, supplier and distributor of Royalty-Free digital stock photography, accessed February 17, 2011, <http://www.inimage.com/iz137/iz137020-photo>.

Rituals are fundamentally relevant for explaining and understanding the different models of virtual guidance.

Firstly, micro-rituals, according to Bergesen, are the basis of ritualistic interaction. They are essential symbolic reproductions of group culture, because they guarantee the cultural transmission of group culture from one generation to the next. Micro-rituals are communicative actions such as linguistic, syntactic, and lexical codes that create solidarity and hierarchy among speakers. Communicative micro-rituals can also be performed through physical acts such as handshakes. Micro-rituals are very important for virtual leadership as well, since they create solidarity and hierarchy among speakers. Only participants who share linguistic, differentiated or restrictive codes belong to a certain in-group. Others may be discriminated and separated. Especially “restrictive codes” are only understood by group members. On Jihadi forums this is exemplified by ritualistic expression and discursive icons that carry the whole weight of Jihadi thought, which I will explain in more detail. Restrictive

codes strengthen the in-group bias and in-group cohesion, which leads to heightened out-group aggression.⁶²⁹ Especially “restrictive codes,” which are only understood by in-group members, foster this process. Jihadis exemplify this on their forums by ritualistic expressions that represent Jihadi thought. Also movements and gestures may be understood as micro-rituals - yet, fulfil in parallel a meso-ritualistic function (see below). For example, the raised right index finger oftentimes displayed in jihad videos, stands for monotheism and the belief in Allah.⁶³⁰ Moreover, the micro ritual, i.e. the formal organization of semiotic and linguistic elements must be established before superior ritualistic processes such as meso-rituals and macro-rituals can take place.

Secondly, meso-rituals (intermediary rituals) are oftentimes expressions of hierarchy and authority. They regulate hierarchies through the organization of social recognition, social status and interpersonal relationships. We acknowledge such hierarchies verbally or by way of gestures. For example, if we open the door for someone, yield to somebody, or allow someone to take part in a discussion. In the moment of the ceremony, the hierarchical relationship is confirmed symbolically. Meso-rituals can be divided into rituals of avoidance (prohibitions, taboos) and rituals of performance and presentation (invitations, salutations, compliments, services).⁶³¹ Thus, meso-rituals are also expressions of authority and can be used for leadership purposes.

In the age of the modern media, meso-rituals also refer to para-social relationships between individuals and their role models.⁶³² Individuals and groups over-identify, for example, with their favourite actors in TV-soaps. Individuals start wearing the same shoes or wish to live the same lifestyle as their favourite role models. In online jihad, this process concerns especially the over-identification, iconic admiration and imitation of Jihadi role models until a point where the border between virtual and physical world blurs. This aspect is exploited for “discursive virtual leadership/guidance.” The features, sayings and characteristics of venerated suicide attackers, for example, are reproduced and copied by participants of Jihadi

⁶²⁹ Wrangham and Peterson, *Demonic Males*, 194-199. This point, however, goes for all human societies, not only Jihadis. In-groups automatically categorize and dichotomise out-groups, i.e. others, which creates an US versus THEM divide. In biological-anthropology this is called the *ingroup-outgroup bias*. Moreover, the human ceremonial ritual strengthens intra-group cohesion by reducing intra-group aggression and increasing out-group aggression. This dynamic is called *communitas* (a concept that was formulated by Victor Turner); and the ceremonial ritual plays a decisive role for it. See Eugene G. D'Aquili, “Human Ceremonial Ritual and the Modulation of Aggression,” *Zygon-Journal of Religion and Science* 20(1985): 21-30.

⁶²⁹ Automatic and pre-programmed forms of hostility can be further ignited by propaganda and ideology.

⁶³⁰ Philipp Holtmann, “Folgt der Karawane der Märtyrer.” Research Paper 58 (2010) (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2010).

⁶³¹ Goffman quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 597.

⁶³² Felix Menzel, *Medienrituale und politische Ikonen* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2009), 51-61.

forums. Certain sentences by suicide attackers are permanently lauded and repeated and serve as “discursive icons.”

Thirdly, macro-rituals are the celebration of a defined community. They are key features of interpersonal human behaviour. Group ceremonies like prayer, birthday celebrations, dinners and jubilees take place among couples, families, multinational companies as well as states. Within a nation, a company celebrates its jubilee, but within a company, a group celebrates and reproduces its collective existence at lunch. For this group, the collective lunch is a macro-ritual. Married couples perform macro-rituals by celebrating wedding anniversaries. The couple may use gestures of respect, i.e. interaction-rituals on the meso level that regulate position, hierarchy and power between them. When both partners converse according to an established lingual code, they also confirm their identities on the micro-level.⁶³³ Cyber-Jihadis perform macro-rituals when they gather around discussion topics and start participative propaganda campaigns on the Internet. This is an expression of “mutual virtual guidance.”

In the Jihadi Net, a wide range of rituals creates hierarchies, which support Jihadi hegemonic power discourses (dominion), and are utterly strategic with the twofold goal to unite online Jihadis and destroy the border between online and physical jihad. This in turn leads to the emergence of manifold guidance forms and discursive leadership figures. Besides the adaption of classical rituals to the Internet, leadership also concerns the veneration of leaders who are or were actual heads of organizations, such as Bin Laden, Shamil Basayev, Ibn al-Khattab, Yusuf al-'Uyayri and Dadullah Akhund – just as examples.⁶³⁴ These are rituals of identification and veneration of role models. Although these figures come from diverse

633 However, in civil societies the ideological and cultic influence of rituals is more difficult to see. See Felix Menzel, *Medienrituale und politische Ikonen* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2009). “Simple” ideological rituals and icons are easier to discern. German National Socialists, for example, believed in the common central myth that the German race was omnipotent and racially superior. Behaviorally, the myth was supported with micro-rituals such as the Hitler salute, meso-rituals such as the glorification of the Hitler-figure and macro-rituals such as mass-speeches and a collective hysteria that was carefully planned by the Nazi propaganda machine. In addition, icons in the sense of collectively identifying symbols, such as Celtic runes, the swastika, and oversized portraits of Hitler supported the propagandistic myth. The major icon was, of course, Hitler himself, who was treated as a role model with whom people identified strongly (meso-ritual).

⁶³⁴ Shamil Basayev (1965-2006) was the leader of the Islamist insurgency in Chechnya since the mid-1990s until his death. Basayev hosted Arab and Turkish brigades during his time as guerilla commander in Chechnya and he was closely connected to the Saudi Arabian Jihadi Ibn al-Khattab (1969-2002), a legendary Jihadi fighter, recruiter and logistics provider, who participated in the first Afghanistan Jihad in the 1980s, as well as in Islamist campaigns in central Asia and the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Berg-Karabach, Tajikistan, allegedly Bosnia and Chechnya). Both Ibn Khattab and Basayev were central figures of the International Islamic Brigade (also Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade; the Islamic Peacekeeping Army, IIPB) formed in 1998 and composed mainly by Dagestanis, but also Chechnyans, Arabs, Turks and other foreigners, numbering at times up to 1,500 militants. Dadullah Akhund (1966-2007) was a prominent Taliban leader in the Kandahar region and was appointed in the 1990s by the central Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar into the Taliban leadership council (rahbani shura), which by then consisted of 10 members. Yusuf al-'Uyayri (1967-2003), was the leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, webmaster of al-Qaeda's first webpage (www.alneda.com), as well as a path breaking media operative for his own organization, by introducing the genre of Jihadi e-magazines (*Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of the Sword) and *Mu'askar al-Battar* (Camp of the Sword)).

backgrounds and battlefields, they are all venerated under the broader umbrella of global Jihadi ideology. Surprisingly, these former leaders in the Chechnyan, Saudi Arabian and Afghani jihad theatres are all dead. But life and death play different roles in cyberspace. Therefore, they may be defined as post-mortem virtual leaders for the cause of global jihad, similar to frequently quoted theologians such as Ibn Taymiyya. They are being steadily referenced and revived in postings, designs and videos for instrumental and radicalizing purposes. Moreover, actual leaders such as Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab Abdul Wudud of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are charismatic role models who influence and inspire followers. However, they are not alone. The same role as leaders of Jihadi thinking can be attributed to prominent ideologues, such as Anwar al-Awlaqi, or media operatives such as Samir Khan, who were hiding in Yemen and were killed by a U.S. drone in September 2011. Both of them were U.S. citizens. As *post-mortem* virtual leaders, they initiate and steer debates and have a lot of influence in the jihad scene. However, the jihad scene itself has own prominent figures, who are perceived as relevant actors. Online activists increasingly perceive themselves as important contributors to global jihad. This concerns, for example, the “legendary” jihad forum member and suicide bomber Humam al-Balawi, whose role will be discussed in detail. Yet, the leaders of online jihad are not only outstanding prominent figures. Hierarchies and leadership can appear in a complex communicational structure and on very small levels; one may almost neglect obvious manifestations in Jihadi discussions. Thus, small discussion groups also develop leaders. The discourse around jihad topics leads to the emergence of small-scale hierarchies. These are reflected by the number and lengths of contributions by members, as well as the ranks and laudations members receive from other discussion participants.⁶³⁵ By a growing number of posts and “I like it”-thumbs (icons that represent consent on social service providers such as Facebook), members earn ranks and gain prestige, since it shows that they are frequent participants in cyber jihad. Also the quality of posts determines a member’s standing. In jihad forums, small-scale discursive leaders can be easily identified. They are the ones who suggest new topics and dominate discussions. High up in the hierarchy are also “strategists,” who contribute to jihad discussions with oftentimes very well thought and deep analyses (see the previous chapter “Jihadi Media Strategy”). The intention of small-scale discursive leaders is to exert influence on discussion groups. The roles of “leaders” and “strategists” are best contrasted with that of „lauders“, who praise every contribution that appeals to them, but exert only little agency as individuals. However, the role of “lauders” as a mass is essential for the creation of authority.

⁶³⁵ See Pavitt 1999: 313-334.

Lauders consent to others' contributions, legitimize them and thus help to create small-scale hierarchies by using fixed religious phrases, which they prop up with different text colors and sizes as well as individual comments. We will focus on this phenomenon as well, and describe it as *marital discursive dancing*, which reflects the adaption of primordial dancing and threat rituals to virtual space. The more laudations a contributor receives, the higher his or her standing in the forum hierarchy develops. Laudation phrases (in the form of intercessions and supplications) are also seen as a sacred art in itself. They bear poetic and aesthetic aspects, and help an aspiring member to gather contribution points, which we will discuss below in the chapters "post-mortem virtual leaders" and "discursive ritualism."

5.a Hierarchical Virtual Leadership

Firstly, there are virtual oaths of obedience (*bay'at*). The pledge of allegiance will be discussed at length. Why is this ritual so immensely important for Islamic leadership questions? The pledge is the most important administrative mechanism among Muslims to confirm and to create theologically and traditionally sanctioned organizational units; such as counsel-groups (*shura*), Jihadi groups (*jama'at*) or the caliphate (*khilafa*). We will see in the following discussion, where the traditionally and theological roots of the pledge lie and how these are interpreted by today's Jihadi theologians. Afterwards, we will see how the pledge in Jihadi subculture is applied practically. Firstly, groups on the ground in Iraq, Syria and Somalia apply the pledge, not only to install and confirm leaders, but also to raise the battle spirit before a military operation starts. Secondly, regional Jihadi groups take pledges from local tribes to establish a clear structure of hierarchy in their respective home-regions. Thirdly, regional Jihadi groups use the Internet to pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda central organization in Waziristan and thus express their ideological and strategic loyalty. Fourthly, when attacks against regional affiliates of al-Qaeda occur, the central organization claims her right on the pledge and asks other regional affiliates to retaliate. Thus, the pledge contributes to major Jihadi groups' collective sense of deterrence, which is an obligation to revenge killings of leaders of their own networks. Although Jihadis are sub-state actors, they behave on retaliation and deterrence level as a collective, or also as quasi-institutionalized players. The binding-mechanism that underlies this strongly institutionalized, organizational doctrine of subordination, retaliation and deterrence is, from an organizational network point of view, the pledge. Fifthly, we will discuss purely Internet based applications of the pledge of allegiance to a person, a cause or an act. In this discussion, we will focus on the effect of pledges within virtual discussion groups, as well as the cross-sections between virtual and physical realities that concern such pledges.

In forum discussions, the oath re-appears not in its actual sense, but as a written meta-ritual. Every eulogy and appellation of God is a renewal of the personal and authoritative relationship between the believer and God. Thus, it is justifiable to say that Jihadi power discourses are dominated by verbal *bay'a* derivatives, which can only be understood if one crucially examines the development of the *bay'a* and its transition from physical to cyberspace.

Theological Foundations and Jihadi Interpretations of the Bay'a

The *bay'a* is a classical Islamic ritual to elect a leader, or to renew faith and goes back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The ceremony includes a ritualistic oath and is very much alive and in use until today. Well known is the oath of loyalty of the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to Bin Laden in 2004. This way, al-Zarqawi formally subordinated himself and his group, which perpetrated terrorist attacks in Iraq, under the command of al-Qaeda central. The oath was directed in the form of a letter to Bin Laden. Another oath that was widely distributed via the Internet can be found in a letter of the Algerian Salafi Group for Propaganda and Fighting to Bin Laden in 2006. Shortly afterwards, the group re-named itself “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).”⁶³⁶ Such pledges of allegiance on the Internet reflect the attempt to substitute physical and hierarchical leadership structures that have come under pressure. Furthermore, online pledges reflect a growing adaption of tradition to modern social media. Sometimes it is simply safer and more convenient to pledge via the Net than to travel from northern Africa to central Asia. The pledge serves as an expression of faith, since the basic Islamic eulogies such as “God is great” and “There is no god but Allah” count as pledges. This can be clearly seen from the often cited tradition “the one who dies without a pledge in his throat, dies an ignorant death (*man mata wa laisa fi unuqihi baya mata mita jahiliyya*).”⁶³⁷

Many modern believers, including Muslims and among them Jihadis, seem to live a selective anti-modernism. They reject specific aspects of modernity and accept particular facets of religious tradition. In respect to Jihadis, this also influences their outlook on modern communication tools and modification of classical religious rituals. For example, the Jihadi use of the Internet as a propaganda tool stands in stark contrast to the ban of images in classical Islam. This shows that Jihadism is an integral part of modernity. The same goes for contemporary Sunni Islam, the source Jihadism springs from. It can be regarded on equal footing with Western rationalism, to which it is a diametrical counterpart.⁶³⁸ A selective anti-modernism is also mirrored in the virtual *bay'a*. Jihadis enter intricate Islamic legal debates to justify certain aspects of the pledge of allegiance, while they reject others.

⁶³⁶ “*Bayan wa bushra bi indimam wa mubaya'at al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Qital li-l-shaykh Abi 'Abdallah Usama bin Laden hafizahu Allah*”, *Sha'aban* 20, 1427 AH/September 13, 2006, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=xu4qtamo>.

⁶³⁷ 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Al-'Umda fi i'dad al-'udda li-l-jihad fi sabil Allah ta'ala*, accessed May 22, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=85ud42ss>, 92.

⁶³⁸ See Rüdiger Lohlker, „Islamismus und Globalisierung,“ in *Religiöser Fundamentalismus: Vom Kolonialismus zur Globalisierung*, ed. Clemens Six et al. (Wien: Studienverlag, 1998), 117-133. In this sense, fundamentalism is an integral part of Muslim modernity as much as rationalism and enlightenment are parts of Western modernity. However, is it possible to normatively judge another culture which the West has created as much as the Islamic culture helps the West to reproduce its own identity?

For years, cyber Jihadis have been trying to revive the idea of classical-Islamic election rituals through the Internet. In the wake of the Arab revolutionary uprising in Egypt in early 2011, a popular Jihadi ideologue tried to pave the way for large scale Jihadi debate around an Islamic state in Egypt. One of the key-points of his E-article was the classical pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*). Peaceful democratic change is nonsense, argues Abu al-Harith al-Ansari on the Jihadi website <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/>. The only solution is an Islamic state in Egypt according to the precepts of the Prophet's life and his companions. Only this is in line with the central "hisba"-doctrine: "Order what is right and forbid what is wrong".⁶³⁹ And this can only be achieved by militant jihad. The legitimacy of an Islamic state derives from a pledge of allegiance to its leaders (*bay'a*)

"the special *bay'a* and the general *bay'a*. From one side this requires arbitration (*tahkim*) according to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (Sunna) and the obedience to Allah, the most Pure. From the other side it requires compliance and obedience [by the populace]".⁶⁴⁰

Traditional Muslims seem to be sympathetic toward governance based on Islamic precepts, such as institutionalized and just Islamic arbitration processes. Yet, the ultra-literal and radical interpretations of Jihadis do not represent the Muslim Zeitgeist. Jihadis are trying to hijack quasi-sacred Islamic notions like the *bay'a*. If the concept of *bay'a* was indeed popular, it would elicit much more responses. But even in the Jihadi subculture, reactions are often lukewarm. A few senior members of the jihad forum lauded the above contribution, but other members kept quiet. Therefore, one should not overestimate the Jihadi influence at this epochal moment in Muslim history. The revolutions fell unexpectedly not only upon regional rulers, but also upon al-Qaeda.

According to older Islamic governance theory, the election of the ruler is based on consensus (*ijma'*) and takes place through a pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*), which is a contract of obedience between the ruler and the ruled. The includes consultation (*shura*) and proclamation (*mubaya'a*) of the newly elected leader, which is ritualized by a handshake

⁶³⁹ See the Qur'an, *Surat al-Imran* 3:110. The *hisba* is one of the most central Islamic doctrines and has its origin in the Quran. It is not only used by Jihadis to justify their goals, but also enjoys highest regard by mainstream Muslims. In no case, *hisba* may simply be identified with extremist views. See for a detailed explanation Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶⁴⁰ Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, „*Bayan bi sha'n ahdath misr*“, accessed March 4, 2011, published in January 2011 by the media company „*Mu'assasat al-Nur al-I'lamiyya*“ (Holy Light Media Foundation), <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=4685>. In February, the *Sinam al-Islam* network announced the foundation of its own media company, „*Mu'assasat al-Qabidun 'ala al-Jamr al-I'lamiyya*“ (Media Institute of the Holders of the Burning Coal [those who do not give up on jihad]).

(*musafaha*) and exercised by “the men of resolution and contract” (*ahl al-hall wa-al-'aqd*), who are those formally qualified to elect or depose a ruler (caliph or emir or sultan) on behalf of the ruled Muslim community (*umma*). In the eyes of the medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun, the ritual of shaking hands between Muslims and a newly proclaimed leader resembles the conclusion of a sales contract between a seller and a buyer.⁶⁴¹ Linguistically-etymological speaking, both words “*bay'a*” and “*mubaya'a*” are based on the same tri-consonantal verbal root *b-i-'* (*ba'a*), which means “to sell.” The same 3rd form verb added by a personal pronoun can be used by someone who pledges allegiance to somebody, as well by someone who demand[s] allegiance from somebody. Also the verb “promise; swear” can be used, the root being *wa-'ayn-dal* (*wa'ad*). Practically speaking, a sales contract means that both sides profit from it and in an ideal sense, the ruler or leader is granted loyalty, while his inferiors get protection. Even though the Saudi-Arabian reality is far away from this ideal, the Saudi Arabian Minister of Interior, Prince Turki al-Faisal, states that calling the *bay'a*-oath a ritual of allegiance “is a misnomer because allegiance is one-sided and connotes total obedience. The Bay'ah is actually [...] a contract between the ruler and the ruled whereby the ruler obliges himself to protect, promote, and enhance the lives and property of the ruled; and the ruled, in return, oblige themselves to protect, promote, and obey the ruler on everything but that which counters the teachings of God.”⁶⁴² Let us also keep in mind the relevance of the concept *shura* (consultation) in classical and contemporary Islamic governance theory. Jihadis bolster with this concept their claim of legitimate representation (for example, the Shura Council of Mujahidin by al-Qaeda in Iraq – *Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*).

The Egyptian jihad ideologue Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz distinguishes between pledges of allegiance to people (*bay'at al-nas*), which he also calls agreements of obedience (*'uhud 'ala al-ta'a*); and pledges of allegiance to the imam (*bay'at al-imam*), exercised by “people of resolution and contract”.⁶⁴³ Legitimizing *imara* (leadership by an emir) in Islamist groups is for al-Qadir based on the *bay'at al-nas*, which may be exercised by group members. Yet, the *bay'at al-nas* is less binding than the *bay'at al-imam*. The emir of a Jihadi group has no control beyond his group. Obedience to an emir is voluntary, states al-Qadir, while obedience to the imam is obligatory for all Muslims. Moreover, the time-span and validity of the former

⁶⁴¹ Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun* (Cairo: Dar al-Fajr li-l-Turath, 2004), 266. For a further analysis of the classical ritual see also Ella Landau-Tasseron, *The Religious Foundations of Political Allegiance: A Study of Bay'a in Premodern Islam*, Research Monographs on the Muslim World 2:4 (2010) (Washington: Hudson Institute, 2010).

⁶⁴² Prince Turki al Faisal, “Saudi Arabian Constitutional Evolution,” accessed April 24, 2012, <http://susris.com/articles/2006/loi/061106-turki-succession.html>.

⁶⁴³ 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Al-'Umda fi I'dad al-'Udda fi Sabil Allah*, chapter: “*Fa-hal yajuz tasmiyat al-'uhud bayn al-nas bay'a?*”, retrieved 17 March 2009 (<http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=85ud42ss>).

concept is restricted, and elections within an Islamist or Jihadi group should enable a change of leadership, argues al-Qadir. Ideally speaking, the strength of the *bay'a* for Muslim leadership and followers should be its contract character. Loyalty is given in exchange for protection and good leadership (which reminds of Prince Faisal al-Turki's understanding, who in reality, belongs to the worst enemies of Jihadis). Yet, the oath is a matter of heated dispute in Jihadi circles. Other Jihadis do not agree with such a balanced view. For them the *ba'ya* means obligation and obedience. The dominant popular and sub-cultural Muslim understanding of the *bay'a* seems to be one of allegiance and subordination. It is not an equal transaction, but a sales contract with retroactive payment: By selling their lives, believers gain access to paradise. Oftentimes, Jihadis and Muslims in times of war orientate themselves at a root-sales contract that is mentioned in the Quran. This is then the most basic contract of obedience that exists in Muslim thinking, there is no hierarchical order that supersedes it. Its influence on the myth of martyrdom and salvation is rationally not comprehensible, but supersedes western interpretational power. From an anthropological perspective, it represents a rite of closeness with God on an abstract metaphysical level. The close observer who has seen Muslim fighters go fearlessly into battle after their ritual meditation on this contract cannot uphold the nonsense argument by some western "experts" that an idea has less power than an action, or that communicative-spiritual guidance has less meaning than direct leadership through superiors, persons, etc. The Quran "verse of the pledge of jihad" is the highest of all pledges and creates a chain of command between God and the believers:⁶⁴⁴

Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant ['ahd] than Allah. then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded [bi bay'ikum aladhi baya'tum]: that is the achievement supreme.

The Jihadi strategist al-Suri interprets this verse in the sense that "the Prophet did not take a pledge (*lam yu'id*; root *wa-'ayn-dal*) from any Muslim except upon paradise [i.e. pledging upon the final reward]. He told this to the tormented persecuted [meant are the two tribes al-

⁶⁴⁴ Surat al-Tauba 9:111, www.islam101.com, accessed April 24, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/9.htm>. See for an elaboration 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Al-'Umda fi i'dad al-'udda li-l-jihad fi sabil Allah ta'ala*, www.tawhed.ws, accessed May 22, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=85ud42ss>. Abd al-Aziz quotes for his argument in this order Surat al-Tauba, 91; al-Munafiqun, 7; al-Nisa', 95; al-Anfal, 72; al-Tauba, 20; al-Hajarat, 15; al-Hadid, 10; al-Saff, 11; al-Tauba, 111, al-Saff, 11.

'Aws and al-Khazraj, who became the first supporters of Islam in Medina] ...“the pledge and bargain with Allah is upon paradise. The pledge in this world is upon the good work towards paradise”:

“Be patient, People of Yasir, your final resting place will be paradise. He said to the Ansar [consisting of representatives of the two tribes al-'Aws and al-Khazraj] at the “second Pledge of 'Aqaba” (*bay'at al-'aqaba al-thaniya* [at Mina' in today's Saudi Arabia]): I take from you a pledge upon that you protect me like your own kin. They said: What is our reward if we fulfill it? He said: Paradise.”⁶⁴⁵

The Pledge of 'Aqaba, together with promises of salvation, helped Muhammad to forge vital tribal and religious-political alliances. As a result, the tribes of al-'Aws and al-Khazraj, which originally stemmed from Yemen, but had settled in Medina, invited Muhammad to Medina. Both tribes became later known as *al-Ansar* (“The Helpers”), after the Muslim emigration from Mecca to Medina. They also were the first tribes to accept Islam.⁶⁴⁶ “They invited the messenger to visit their city [in order to mediate between them], and he accepted their invitation for many reasons, among them: He wanted a safe dwelling place to spread the message of Islam. As for the people of Yathrib [the two tribes], they profited from this political alliance because it strengthened their position against the Jews and reduced the constant in-fighting between them.”⁶⁴⁷ Furthermore, this and other pledges which focus on divine reward are important in the active martyrdom culture (*istishhadiya*) of Jihadis.

The “Bay'a of Pleasure [of God at al-Hudaybiyya]” (*Bay'at al-Ridwan [bi-l-Hudaybiyya]*), also “Bay'a of the Tree” (*Bay'at al-Shajara*) is explicitly mentioned in the Quran:

*“Certainly Allah was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [idh yubayi'unaka] under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity on them and rewarded them with a near victory.”*⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁵ Al-Suri, Global Islamic Resistance Call (GIRC), 1347. “We said, oh messenger of God, upon what do we pledge you? He said: You swear to listen and obey me when active and when idle, to spend efforts for me in good and bad times, to act upon the calculation of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and to swear by Allah that you will not mind any accusations [by unbelievers against you], upon that you will make me victorious, and upon that you will forbid me and protect me from what you are protecting and forbidding your own kin, and yours will be paradise.”

See also for this formula *Sahih ibn Hibban, Kitab al-Tarikh, Bab bad' al-khalq*, No. 6409, accessed June 24, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=454&hid=6409&pid=387854.

⁶⁴⁶ “Tribes of Aws and Khazraj,” accessed June 24, 2012, <http://www.al-islam.org/ashura/45.htm>.

⁶⁴⁷ “*Lahmat min hayat al-habib sala Allah alayhim wa salam,*” *Bay'at al-'aqaba al-ula wa al-thaniya*, accessed June 24, 2012, <http://www.islam2all.com/rasoul/index.php?get=3akaba>.

⁶⁴⁸ Quran *Surat al-Fath* 48:18, translation by Muhammad Habib Shakir, <http://www.muslimaccess.com/>, accessed Mai 4, 2012, <http://www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/translations/shakir/048.htm>.

However, every pledge of allegiance is eventually a transcendental one. The Muslim oath of loyalty, such as the credo or every eulogy, is finally directed at God. A divine chain of authority is thus created by pledging to a representative of God's will:

*“Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. The Hand of Allah is over their hands: then anyone who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and anyone who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah,- Allah will soon grant him a great Reward.”*⁶⁴⁹

But finally God himself is the supreme leader, and thus the pledge can also be closed directly with him through a pact (*'ahd*). Some Jihadi ideology-strategists argue that the pact described in Quran 9:111 (see further above) is such an example.⁶⁵⁰ The “pledge of the tree” and its procedure as understood by Jihadis are crucial for an understanding of modern virtual adaptations of the ritual to the Internet. The description in the Quran reads like a rite of personal devotion for the sake of the Muslim community (*communitas*). The oath of allegiance [to Muhammad and jihad] strengthened the collective identity of the early Muslim community. It was a ceremonial establishment of leadership and strengthened the internal desire and determination of the group to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. The allegiance ritual also strengthened feelings of fearlessness and obligation, based on customary procedure of subordination.

Regarding the background, Muhammad went with more than 1000 Muslims to Mecca in March 628 CE in order to perform the annual pilgrimage.⁶⁵¹ However, the Quraysh of Mecca denied the Muslims entry to the city. Therefore, Muhammad sent an envoy, Uthman ibn Affan, to negotiate unhindered entry into the city. When the envoy Uthman did not return, the Muslims assumed that he had been killed or taken prisoner. Muhammad assembled his followers under a tree and took a pledge of allegiance to fight for Uthman (*“kanat bay'a fi 'Uthman”*), who was later released. Muhammad's followers pledged “not to run away” (*baya'nahu an la nafirra*). Some traditions stress that “we did not pledge loyalty until death.” Other traditions, which are more in line with Jihadi ideology, narrate that Muhammad

⁶⁴⁹ Quran, *Surat al-Fath* 48:10, Yusuf Ali Translation, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/>, accessed Mai 9, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/48.htm>.

⁶⁵⁰ See Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *GIRC*; also Philipp Holtmann, *Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept* (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 2009).

⁶⁵¹ Some traditions speak about 1400, others about 1300 followers who accompanied Muhammad to Mecca in 628 CE.

demanding a pledge of loyalty “until death” (*'ala al-maut*).⁶⁵² A middle interpretation states that the Muslims pledged at the tree to remain patient and not run away, even if they were killed.⁶⁵³

Muslim historiography narrates that the “Pledge of the Tree” led to the “Treaty of Hudaibiyya,” the 10 years truce (*hudna*) between the Muslims and the Quraysh of Mecca. The Meccans were allegedly deeply impressed by the show of force and determination of the Muslim community during the ceremony. The ceremony itself could have had a deterring effect on the Quraysh.⁶⁵⁴ This allowed the Muslims from Medina to enter a truce-agreement (*sulh*) and to perform their annual pilgrimage to Mecca without hostilities from the Meccan tribe of the Quraysh. “Nevertheless, Mohammed made the journey with a thousand followers. Armed only with swords, they were in a state of *ihram*. Consequently they were subjected to the restrictions of freedom of action which this holy state imposed upon them.”⁶⁵⁵ *Ihram* signifies an Islamic spiritual state of non-violence that is achieved by cleansing and boundary-crossing rituals, as well as a ritual dress code in order to perform Islamic pilgrimages (*hajj* and *'umra*). The Muslim determination must have impressed and frightened the Quraysh tribe. They finally agreed to enter into a truce agreement that would allow the Muslims to enter Mecca on an annual basis for ten years. However, soon afterwards, in 630, Mecca fell to the Muslims anyway.

According to Islamic tradition, the followers of Muhammad as a group performed a verbal ritual and expressed their loyalty to Muhammad who was standing under a tree. Tradition narrates that the highly respected “comrades of the tree” (*ashab al-shajara*) are those who “pledged him [Muhammad] under the tree. Another tradition speaks about “the first one who pledged Muhammad” and thus indicates a queue of people who subsequently pledged.⁶⁵⁶

The formula at the “Pledge of Aqaba” was followed by a handshake.⁶⁵⁷ Basic formulas of swearing allegiance are already incorporated in the Islamic credo (*la illaha illa Allah wa*

⁶⁵² “*Tarikh Dimashq li ibn asakir*,” No. 15194, accessed May 5, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=798&hid=15194&pid=609094. Another tradition states that the second sub-pledge was to loyalty until death. Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, No. 16206, accessed May 5, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=16206&pid=672650.

⁶⁵³ ‘Abd al-Qadir bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, *Al-'Umda fi i'dad al-'udda li-l-jihad fi sabil Allah ta'ala*, 13.

⁶⁵⁴ A tradition on the revelation of *Surat al-Fath* says „when the people trusted,” i.e. indicates that the ceremony under the tree had a calming effect not only on the Muslims. It sent the believers heart-peace (*sakina*), but also had a calming effect on the unbelievers (*amn*). *Dala'il al-nabwa li-l-Bayhaqi*, No. 1537, accessed May 9, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=681&hid=1537&pid=143912.

⁶⁵⁵ Tor Andr , Mohammed: The Man and His Faith (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000), originally published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, translated from German into English by Theophil Menzel, 152.

⁶⁵⁶ “*Akhbar Mekka al-fakihi*,” No. 2876, <http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/>, accessed May 5, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=175&hid=2876&pid=43894.

⁶⁵⁷ “We said, oh messenger of God, upon what do we pledge you? He said: You swear to listen and obey me when active and when idle, to spend efforts for me in good and bad times, to act upon the calculation of

Muhammad rasul Allah), or basic eulogies such as “*Allahu Akbar*.” A distinctive feature of the “Pledge of the Tree” plays an important role for virtual pledges and their theological justification: Muhammad placed his left hand over his right hand to perform the pledge also on behalf of the missing Muslim envoy Uthman, who at that time was held captive in Mecca.⁶⁵⁸ The narrative also sets a precedent case for adaptations to E-space where physical existence, proximity and verifiability play different roles. The peculiar performance of the ritual by Muhammad lends itself to virtual adaptations.

In real life, modern Jihadis, as we will see at the example of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan below, use rhythmic ritualistic singing (*huda'*) and melodic singing (*anashid*) to induce a state of “battle trance” during allegiance ceremonies.⁶⁵⁹ In virtual life, the physical dancing and singing at allegiance ceremonies is often substituted by “discursive martial dancing” (see chapter 5.d).

Illustration below: Classical physical *bay'a*-ritual by handshake



enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and to swear by Allah that you will not mind any accusations [by unbelievers against you], upon that you will make me victorious, and upon that you will forbid me and protect me from what you are protecting and forbidding your own kin, and yours will be paradise.”

Sahih ibn Hibban, Kitab al-Tarikh, Bab bad' al-khalq, No. 6409, accessed June 24, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=454&hid=6409&pid=387854.

⁶⁵⁸ Ahmad bin Hanbal, “*Fada'il al-Sahaba*,” <http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/>, accessed May 4, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=118&hid=624&pid=27531; also “*al-Nabi yubayi' an 'Uthman fi bay'at al-shajara*,”

www.alrad.net, accessed April 27, 2013, <http://www.alrad.net/hiwar/othman/2.htm>.

⁶⁵⁹ Joseph Jordania, *Why Do People Sing: Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: Logos, 2011).

Classical and modern political as well as Jihadi interpretations of the *bay'a* are strongly orientated at precedence cases in the Quran and the traditions connected to them. These interpretations vary in their focus on specific topics, the interests of the interpreters and thus reveal very dynamic concepts of the pledge. Elie Podeh states that “the *bay'a* evolved into an elastic term politically used in a variety of ways by different Arab regimes.”⁶⁶⁰ Furthermore, the use of the traditional ritual in sub-cultures, as an act of investiture or oath of allegiance, which is enacted either individually or collectively, offers further varieties. The main characteristic is the common orientation at the Quran and prophetic tradition as root sources. Some scholars state that a *bay'a*-contract can be sworn to a person, institution or to an idea. This point bares great importance. With the possibility of a pledge of loyalty to an abstract concept one can also understand how Jihadis sometimes swear allegiance to fighting or defensive interpretations of Islam (in physical and in virtual reality). One example is the “Pledge of Allegiance to Jihad” (*al-bay'a ala al-jihad*). The phenomenon exists offline and online. There are also Jihadi pledges of allegiance to virtual states. For example, oaths of loyalty have been sworn to the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which represents al-Qaeda in Iraq and exists mainly online. The basis for these modern interpretations goes again back to classical sources, for example, the 15th century classical scholar al-Suyuti, whose writings are influential until today, speaks about “the pledge of jihad” (*bay'at al-jihad*), which was taken by Muhammad from his followers after the conquest of Mecca.⁶⁶¹ Around 500 years later, a modern jihad scholar argues similarly that the pledge must not necessarily be given to a person, but can be applied to every sort of obedience and worship of matters related to Islam, such as a pledge to Islam itself, which is a pledge to God himself in the end. An oath can be taken to emigration, to prayer, to jihad and to other central doctrines of Salafi-Jihad. The Jihadi scholar also argues that the pledge of allegiance may be given to jihad (*al-bay'a 'ala al-jihad*), and he quotes the same tradition that al-Suyuti mentions: After the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have sworn in Muslims from the concept of *hijra* (in the sense of emigration away from an hostile environment) to the notion of jihad (in the sense of fighting to further spread the message of Islam).⁶⁶² Several classical Muslim sources state that Muslims gave Muhammad a secondary sub-pledge at this occasion. This was the

⁶⁶⁰ Elie Podeh, “The bay'a: Modern Political Uses of Islamic Ritual in the Arab World,” *Die Welt des Islam* 50 (2010): 117-152; Quote taken from the abstract of the article, accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/brill/dwi/2010/00000050/00000001/art00004>.

⁶⁶¹ Jalal al-Din bin Abd al-Rahman bin Abi Bakr al-Suyuti, *Sharh al-Suyuti li sunan al-nisa'i (Dar al-Basha'ir al-Islamiyya*, 1986), No. 4160, accessed April 24, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?idfrom=5009&idto=5012&bk_no=57&ID=1946.

⁶⁶² Abd al-Hakim Husan, “*Al-Bay'a: Suwaruha wa wujub al-wafa' biha*,” www.tawhed.ws, accessed April 24, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=6458&x=dhu0avpz>.

pledge to fight until death - in addition to the “jihad-pledge.” Modern Jihadi interpretations strongly focus on this feature and even exaggerate it, calling it “the oath of loyalty to remain steadfast until death” (*al-bay'a 'ala al-thabat hata al-maut*).⁶⁶³ On the Internet, such an oath to death offers itself to incite followers and guide them communication-wise: A strong feeling of agency and obligations that raises virtual group cohesion and battle trance is connected to such interpretations.

In fact, contracts of loyalty with God to a fighting interpretation of Islam or to symbols and leaders of jihad have been strongly developed on the Internet. The online ceremony is a modification the physical one, since it suffices to write on the Internet: “I close a contract [with the leader or idea]” (*ana uba'iyu*).⁶⁶⁴ The micro-ritual “handshake” and verbal formula are exchanged with writing a formula of agreement. The virtual *bay'a* is thus a neo-traditional verbal, respectively written ritual. An older Muslim concept has become applied to modern digital technology. The most literal reading of the older concept refers to allegiance until death. However, the majority of modern Muslims cannot come to stakes with such a literal interpretation, which often causes dispute, even among Jihadis themselves.

The oath of allegiance fulfills several roles: The oath is supposed to create leaders and chains of hierarchy. In addition, it is a rite of transition to strengthen collective identity and fearlessness, as well as to enhance group cohesion or even to build groups from the scratch. The oath is supposed to ritually reduce the fear of death and create the altered state of consciousness that is called battle-trance.⁶⁶⁵ Confirming an oath by writing “I pledge allegiance” is also meant to be a full submersion into (online-) jihad. Finally, the oath ceremony has been used as ritualistic show of force to deter enemies from attack.

Before we detail its online-application, we will look at the “real life,” i.e. physical use of the *bay'a* among Jihadi groups. Some Jihadi groups apply it both physically and then put it online to manage leadership mechanisms. In contrast, grass-roots Jihadis apply it first in virtual life and then try to transpose online organizational units into real life.

In Jihadi or Muslim civil war reality, the oath of loyalty is still an incredibly important ritual, which is part of war-preparation ceremonies. For outsiders it is hard to imagine the emotional and spiritual strength of the ritual. For example, members of a group perform the *bay'a* in front of a camera. While group members shortly afterwards go into real battle, the camera images remain untouched by their brutal reality. They are put on the Internet and enter

⁶⁶³ Abd al-Hakim Husan, “*Al-Bay'a: Suwaruha wa wujub al-wafa' biha*.”

⁶⁶⁴ Jihadis often quote the example of the Ethiopian king al-Najashi, who expressed his loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad by writing a letter to him. A more detailed study by the author of this topic and its appropriation by Jihadis is under way.

⁶⁶⁵ Joseph Jordania, *Why do Humans Sing? Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: Logos, 2011).

online reality. The overlapping of physical and virtual spheres is also strikingly visible in organizational mergers: Some groups use oaths of allegiance via the Internet to subordinate themselves under another group that is geographically far away.

Practically, the *bay'a* translates into a tight and personal knitting together of a group and strong relationships between followers and leaders. Jihadis have frequently used the *bay'a* to elect an ordinary person as a group's military leader (emir). While the *bay'a* ritual is a mere formality in most Sunni Muslim states to confirm the election of a secular ruler, it plays an important role in Jihadi groups.⁶⁶⁶ An emir has much less power than a classical *imam* or sultan. His authority is limited to the group and does not expand to the Islamic Community (*umma*). A major question among Jihadi thinkers has been, if a *bay'a* may be pledged under such circumstances (see also Abd al-Qadir above on the rules of election in Jihadi groups).

Yet, the oath of allegiance bares multiple problems, which range from personal discontent about elections, over organizational, strategic and political quarrels, until abuse and mismanagement within Jihadi groups. Al-Qaeda strategist al-Suri, for example, has discouraged traditional hierarchical structures and investiture mechanisms. Several difficulties are connected to the *bay'a* in Jihadi groups. Early experiments with virtual, i.e. indirect leadership in clandestine Islamist movements failed, claims al-Suri. In the 1980s, the leadership of the Syrian Muslim Brothers, for example, established itself in Baghdad and Amman, and issued unsuitable encoded military and political directives to the local leadership in Syria. The local leadership obeyed to the written orders because it needed the money that came with the orders and felt bound by the pledge of allegiance, which in al-Suri's view was contestable given the mismanagement by the exiles, who had lost touch with reality. In reality, however, Jihadi strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri observed this as very problematic: The rights and duties of the emir, or the relationship between the emir and the members in Jihadi organizations have often been unclear and were abused. At times, different jihad organizations in the same country fought each other over the pledge of allegiance. If a member wants to leave an organization, he may be excommunicated. In addition, the emir or

⁶⁶⁶ In modern Sunni Islam, the pledge of allegiance is often just a formal issue, the task being to confirm a newly "elected" leader. Neither the clerics nor the broad population do determine the outcome of elections. For example, the Saudi Bay'a Council is made up of sons and senior grandsons of the Kingdom's founder. (<http://susris.com/articles/2006/ioi/061106-turki-succession.html> and <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2006/ioi/061106-turki-succession.html>). Also the political impacts of other institutions that seem to give weight to religious authority are questionable, such as the Saudi Shura Council, for example. Nagi observes: "In the early 1990s, Saudi Arabia began a program of political reform, establishing the appointed Majlis al-Shura, Consultative Council. Nevertheless, this step did not lead to a significant shift in authority or more democratic institutions. In 2005, half of the council's seats were open for election, and the other half was appointed by the monarchy". See Farouk S. Nagi, "The Rising Conflict For Democracy in the Arab World" (honors thesis, University of Colorado, 2008), accessed April 4, 2010, <http://ojs.uccs.edu/index.php/urj/article/viewFile/1/3>.

a consultative council (*shura*) can also expel a member. Leaders of traditional jihad organizations have altogether too much power.⁶⁶⁷

Thinkers of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, for example, interpret the ritual less literally, but in a more liberal sense. It is a commitment to Islam and jihad, not necessarily jihad in the sense of “fighting,” but “struggle towards a commendable goal,” i.e. the political strategy of the Muslim Brothers. Also the interpretation of the oath as unconditional expression of loyalty to a leader until death has left some traumatic scars among the Muslim Brothers. They learned from experience, namely violations of the pledge and dilemmas of loyalty. On the one hand, their first charismatic leader Hassan al-Banna did not invoke the sacredness of the *bay'a* when he was challenged by dissidents in the 1940s. The dissidents were led by Mahmud Abu Zayd 'Uthman (*Jama'at Shabab Muhammad*). They rejected the Brothers' openness to secular politics and called for a stricter application of the sharia.⁶⁶⁸ But openness and development belonged to al-Banna's principles. He did not apply, for example, the traditional ritual of Islamic decision taking (*shura*) among the Brothers. Moreover, violations of the pledge were used to expel members from the Muslim Brotherhood already in the 1950s, but especially in the 1980s in times of turmoil between rivaling factions of the movement.⁶⁶⁹ Difficulties connected to the oath of allegiance may also be illustrated with an example from the Jihadi scene. The former leader of al-Qaeda central organization Usama Bin Laden seems to have had a very ambiguous relationship to the ritual. This was probably influenced by ideological and intra-group politics. Bin Laden demanded new recruits of al-Qaeda to pledge allegiance to him exclusively, and thus to al-Qaeda organization. But he felt extremely uneasy to pledge allegiance to his host in Afghanistan, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar, under whose patronage he stayed from 1996 to 2001. Instead, Bin Laden sent the prominent Jihadi propagandist Abu al-Walid al-Masri as a deputy to pledge allegiance on his behalf to Mullah Omar. Al-Masri himself, however, had not pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and was not a formal member of al-Qaeda. He could not really act as a legitimate deputy. The episode sounds like a stratagem

⁶⁶⁷ Al-Suri says that he experienced this first-hand as member of the Syrian al-Tali'a al-Muqatila (Fighting Vanguard). He claims that exiled leaderships lose touch with the local reality. Al-Suri, GIRC, Part 1, Chapter 7, “Structural Mistakes” (*Akhta' fi-al-bunya wa-al-haykal*).

⁶⁶⁸ Abd al-Manam Munib, *Kharitat al-harakat al-islamiyya fi misr* (Internet: March 2009). *Al-Bab al-thani: Jama'at Shabab Muhammad*, accessed January 25, 2013, <http://www.anhri.net/reports/islamic-map/map/07.shtml>.

⁶⁶⁹ See Ella Landau Tasserou, *Leadership and Allegiance in the Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Research Monographs on the Muslim World 2:5 (2010) (Washington: Hudson Institute, 2010), 16 ff.

of Bin Laden in order to avoid any obligations and formal hierarchical relationship to the Taliban.⁶⁷⁰

Pledges of allegiance on the local level: The Syrian FSA and the Somali Shabaab al-Mujahidin Movement; the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and al-Qaeda central

In times of armed conflict in Muslim societies, the need arises to create martial spirit as well as to establish organizational and/or spiritual hierarchies. In order to foster group cohesiveness, pledges of allegiance to God and Islam, as well as to actual persons are applied.⁶⁷¹ For example, in the civil-war in Syria during March 2012, members of the Free Syrian Army (*al-Jaish al-Suri al-Hurr*) defended civilian neighborhoods against the onslaught of President Bashar al-Assad's militias and military. They took an oath on Allah and the Free Syrian Army. The *bay'a*-ritual is performed by three times kissing and then touching the Quran with the forehead while speaking out a ritual formula of glorification: The Quran is held by a member of the forces on eye level. The pledging members wait in queue, and every individual passes by and performs the ritual. At the same time, the participant speaks out a verbal ritual formula; a glorification of God. The next one in line repeats the procedure.⁶⁷²

It is not clear, if members or subgroups of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) support al-Qaeda, or to what extent al-Qaeda members have infiltrated FSA networks. Yet, the use of the ritual by FSA is very similar to what al-Qaeda strategist al-Suri proposes in terms of a re-structuring of hierarchy and control mechanisms in global Jihadi groups: Not a specific pledge to a personal leader, but a general contract with God stands at first place. Al-Suri may have observed the above described ritual in practice, which seems to be common in contemporary Arab-Muslim culture in times of conflict. Al-Suri then deduced an abstract, but simple formula and

670 Vahid Brown, "The Facade of Allegiance: Bin Ladin's Dubious Pledge to Mullah Omar," Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint – CTC Sentinel 3:1(2010): 1-5, accessed June 11, 2011, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-facade-of-allegiance-bin-ladin%E2%80%99s-dubious-pledge-to-mullah-omar>.

671 For example, an activist with a Youtube channel calls for the "renewal of the pledge of allegiance during the pact of Tabuk." al7nawey2, "***Jaddidu al-bay'a min 'ahd Tabuk**Nashida jihadiyya hamasiyya ra'i'a", accessed March 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpelCuuxTdE>. One should also not underestimate the influence in broader Arab Muslim societies of the *bay'a* as a sacred and legitimizing ritual to install personal authority and leadership. In October 2010, a supporter of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi put footage of a ritual, a pledge of allegiance to Qadhafi by Libyan tribal leaders in 2010, on YouTube. The activist's goal was to confirm the "Renewal of the pledge of allegiance to the highest leader colonel Qadhafi." See the YouTube-user "LibyanSpecialForces," "*Tajdid al-bay'a li-l-qa'id al-a'la al-'aqid Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi*", accessed March 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iy2PkkgZInc>.

672 When new recruits join the Free Syrian Army, they technically take a *bay'a* of joining. When members of these forces regroup for a new fight and can expect to get killed in battle, they technically take a death *bay'a*, i.e. swear allegiance until death. Al-Jazeera English Television online, "Syria: The War Within – Free Syrian Army Withdraws From Idlib," March 15, 2012, accessed March 15, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2012/03/201231581226274911.html>.

integrated it into his theory of “Global Islamic Resistance.” He claims that his theory is “observation-based.”



Al-Suri's comparison between traditional Jihad groups and the system of GIR cells

(Global Islamic Resistance; *al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya*)

Feature	Traditional Organizations	System of GIR Squadrons
Size	up to several thousands	1–10
Objective	overthrow of the government and formation of an Islamic regime in a specific state	resistance against occupiers and their allies wherever possible
Program	Jihad organization	Global Islamic Resistance Call
Leadership	central emir and leadership	general informational guidance for squadrons globally and a specific emir for each squadron
Financing	often interest-bound financing from abroad, donations	primarily self-financing, donations; at a later stage distribution of foreign assets and treasuries of overthrown regimes
Allegiance	pledge of allegiance (bay'a) to a central emir	unmediated contract (<i>'ahd</i>) with Allah and contract of obedience to a squadron's emir

Source: Al-Suri, *Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya*, Chapter 8, subsection 5

The Somali *Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement* is an outcome of several factors. Among them are failed Western interventions, broken-down state building, scandalous malnutrition, a religious breeding ground and raging civil wars at the Horn of Africa. The movement presently dominates most of southern Somalia. In January 2012, the senior leaders pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda once again. It was a long-distance virtual pledge via the Internet without physical contact between both sides. The movement applies the same mechanism on the ground, in its life environment, yet as a physical ritual. Senior members frequently take oaths of allegiance from local Somali tribes. For example, in early January 2012, members of the large Somali *Gaaljal* clan from the administrative region of Hiran, as well as the central and the lower Shabelle-River regions - all these regions lying to the north of Mogadishu – gathered in the administrative province Jalalaqsi to pledge allegiance to the Shabaab Movement. The (renewed) pledge on January 1, 2012 came, according to a Jihadi report, immediately after Ethiopian forces had conquered Beledweyne, the provincial capital of the

Hiran province, on December 31, 2011. When their territory is under attack, Somali tribes commonly pledge allegiance to the Shabaab movement, mostly in order to renew already existing loyalty. This behavior is very rational and strategic in regards to local clan-politics. Also the *Gaaljal* clan decided to re-strengthen the relationship to the Shabaab militia, when its territory came under attack.

At the ceremonial gathering, one of the leaders of the *Gaaljal* tribe details the nature of the pledge. The pledge is not limited to the struggle against foreign interference in Somalia. Rather, the tribal elder describes the pledge as an obligation to fight under a global-Jihadi agenda. The tribal elder thus adds a divine hierarchy to the contract, which confirms our theoretical observations from above in practice: The pledge of allegiance in an Islamic religious framework is always a transcendental one and finally directed at God: “As long as the unbelievers join war-alliances against the Book of God and the Tradition of His Prophet, we agree that we will fight for God’s sake and bring back the Caliphate. Our concern is not Somalia, we are followers of a global idea, and we have completely adopted this idea like the Shabaab Movement has adopted it.”⁶⁷³

A Jihadi report was published on the Internet together with pictures of the event. The report offers an excellent description of the exact procedure.⁶⁷⁴ The pledge itself happened according to the report in the following way: About one hundred elders (*a'yan*) of the *Gaaljal* gathered in the village “*Shu*” in the *Jalalaqsi* district in order to pledge allegiance to Sheikh Ali Mahmud Raji. Raji had been deputized by Abu Zubayr, the emir of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement, to accept the pledge on his behalf. One Sheikh initiated the ceremony by sending the greetings and peace of the Shabaab-Emir Abu Zubayr to the *Gaaljal*. The deputy of al-Zubayr then explained to the elder sheikhs the obligations connected to the *bay'a*. Afterwards, one elder following the other performed the pledge in front of a public audience. The report says that about 100 tribal leaders participated in the ceremony. It is not mentioned, however possible, that 20 among them were deputized to perform the ritual on the tribe’s behalf, since this number of persons can be seen on pictures as they are giving the pledge. The pledge itself took place like this: The pledging (*al-mubay'*) shakes the hand of Sheikh Ali, while Sheikh Ali tells him:

⁶⁷³ *Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, “*Taqrir an bayat Gaaljal li Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahideen yaum al-ahad [Safar 7] 1433*” (Report on the pledge of allegiance of the *Gaaljal* to the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement on January 1, 2012), accessed April 27, 2012, <http://alplatformmedia.com/vb/showthread.php?t=3771>.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

“You pledge to me loyalty to listen and obey in times of action and calm, to expend your efforts in times of hardship and in times of ease, to act strongly against selfishness in your own rows, and not to fight amongst you, unless open unbelief amongst you is revealed, and [the word of] God himself stands proof for it; and you pledge to me to control the observance of Islamic principles (*al-hisba*)⁶⁷⁵ according to what is known and forbidden and to enforce Islamic Law, by setting up bounds for acceptable behavior and performing mandatory punishments for *hudud* crimes against God’s commands (which stipulate severe punishments, including death),⁶⁷⁶ to fight the unbelievers and apostates; not to give asylum to a refugee who has perpetrated a capital crime; and to swear in the name of God that you will not fear accusations against you; to help Islam become victorious in your dwellings, to protect him from what you protect yourselves from and your wives from and sons from as it is in your power, and I put an oath on you to God.”⁶⁷⁷

Below one can see pictures of the ceremony and the pledge of allegiance, which was given to Sheikh Ali Mahmud Raji. We can further categorize the ceremony according to Albert Bergesen’s ritual order.⁶⁷⁸ The first picture focuses on the micro-ritual, i.e. the handshake (*musafaha*) itself. The second picture shows the macro-ritual, i.e. the gathering of a public audience, while the third and fourth pictures show the handshake again at the example of two different participants. These pictures also illustrate the meso-ritual, which is contained in the ceremonial reading by Sheikh Ali Mahmud Raji of the formula. The formula of allegiance seals the contract of loyalty.

If we categorize this oath, then it is first of all a practical and a physical ceremony. However, the ceremony is a virtual one as well. The Jihadi report proves that a lot of importance is given to the ritual’s virtual marketing via Jihadi websites. Suddenly, the rite becomes more accessible, more trustworthy to a global audience. This strengthens the whole idea of rites of

⁶⁷⁵ See for a detailed explanation of the concept Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶⁷⁶ Such as *al-zina* (fornication), *al-qadhif* (defamation), *shurub al-khamr* (drinking alcohol), *al-sariqah* (stealing), *al-hirabah* (spreading disorder by rebellion), *al-baghiya* (adultery) and *al-riddah* (apostasy). There are differences in the inclusion and categorization of hadd-crimes between the major jurisprudential schools of Sunni Islam, i.e. the Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi’i and Hanbali schools. Some of the schools, for example, include murder and highway robbery, but exclude heresy.

⁶⁷⁷ Original wording of the ceremonial formula in Arabic that accompanies the oath to the *Shabaab al-Mujahideen* Movement:

(تبايعني على السمع والطاعة في النشاط والكسل، والنفقة في العسر واليسر، على أثره عليكم وأن لا تنازعوا الأمر أهله إلا أن تروا كفرا بواحا عندكم من الله فيه برهان، وعلى الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر وتطبيق شرع الله وإقامة الحدود وجهاد الكفار والمرتدين، وأن لا تجيروا فارا بدم أو جناية، وأن تقولوا في الله لا تخافون لومة لائم، وعلى أن تنصروا الإسلام في دياركم وتمنعوه مما تمنعون منه أنفسكم وأزواجكم وأبنائكم ما استطعتم وأجركم على الله).

⁶⁷⁸ Albert Bergesen, “Die Rituelle Ordnung,” in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, 49-76.

allegiance among Jihadi peer groups, which plays an important role for their more abstract, faith based self-perception as a large kinship group of brothers and sisters, who are connected through the same “spiritual blood.” The transition from the practical physical to the more abstract virtual sphere, which is rudimentarily visible here, also allows a better understanding of purely Internet-based pledges.







A German-Uzbek case further highlights the importance of oaths of allegiance in Jihadi reality. In April 2009, at least five German Jihadis together with Uzbek fighters swore an oath of allegiance to Tahir Yoldashev (allegedly killed in an U.S. airstrike in August 2009), the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.⁶⁷⁹ This ceremony took probably place near the town Sera Rogha in the Waziristan region of North-Western Pakistan.

The Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IBU) was founded in the mid-1990s. The majority of members are Uzbek Islamists from the Fergana valley, which originally formed a consistent cultural region. The valley was split up during the 1920s, when parts of it were integrated into the Soviet republics Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kirgizstan. Since the early 1990s, after the demise of the Soviet Union, regional Islamists have fought for the establishment of an Islamist regime in the Fergana-Valley. This effort was and is portrayed by the actors as a liberation struggle against foreign domination. The focuses of armed attacks during the 1990s

⁶⁷⁹ From Hamburg Ahmad Wali Sidiqi, his brother Suleiman Sidiqi, Shahab Dashti, and from Bonn Khojah Javad Sediqi. Probably, Rami Makanesi, originally from Frankfurt-Bockenheim, also participated in the oath. However, Makanesi left the camp of the IBU around one month later (in late April or early June 2009).

were the three secular regimes, but especially the Uzbek regime under the dictator Islom Karimov.⁶⁸⁰

In 1998, the IBU moved its headquarters to Afghanistan (military headquarter in Mazar-e Shari and civil headquarter in Kabul and Kandahar). The IBU runs training camps and has headquarters also in Waziristan in North-Western Pakistan. The strategic focus shifted towards a central-Asian Jihadi orientation. Following an alliance with the Pakistani branch of the Taliban as well as contacts to al-Qaeda at about the same time, the ideological orientation started to change. Since 2008, IBU's former leader Yoldashev (k.2009) had been promoting a global Jihadi orientation, featuring al-Qaeda propaganda in IBU videos. Enemies are now also the United States, the West in general, and all states participating in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. The goal is the establishment of Islamic systems the world over.⁶⁸¹ This strategic shift plays into the hands of an aggressive U.S. foreign policy that is characterized by assassinations of sub-state adversaries in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen.

IBU is structured hierarchically. Most importantly, a central leader combining religious and military authority (*sheikh mujahid*) stands at the head of the organization. Until 2009 the leader was Tahir Yoldashev. He was replaced by his former deputy Usmon Odil. A *shura* committee with consulting functions supports the leader. The *shura*-council deals with matters of security; training; finance; media and propaganda; as well as military operations. The council comprises around ten to fifteen persons. At the next level, numerous commanders support the central leadership. All members are bound by pledges of allegiance to the central leader and his commanders.⁶⁸²

The indictment of the Federal Prosecutor General of Germany against the German Jihadi Ahmed Wali Sidiqi, which contains numerous witness reports, sheds light on different uses of the oath of allegiance by German Jihadis to the IBU, as well as to al-Qaeda operatives in Waziristan.⁶⁸³

Firstly, the oath of loyalty by German Jihadis to the IBU's leader Tahir Yoldashev in April 2009 was an important ceremony and surrounded by collective rituals within the group. Five

⁶⁸⁰ „BGH AK 18/11 - 15. November 2011 (-); Untersuchungshaft (Fortdauer über sechs Monate hinaus); mitgliedschaftliche Beteiligung an einer terroristischen Vereinigung im Ausland,“ <http://www.hrr-strafrecht.de>, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.hrr-strafrecht.de/hrr/2/11/ak-18-11.pdf>; as well as „Der Generalbundesanwalt beim Bundesgerichtshof; Anklageschrift gegen Ahmad Wali Sidiqi,“ 2 BJs 40/11-8-2 StE 10/11-8, Karlsruhe, den 26. Oktober 2011.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid. „BGH AK 18/11 - 15. November 2011 (-); Untersuchungshaft (Fortdauer über sechs Monate hinaus); mitgliedschaftliche Beteiligung an einer terroristischen Vereinigung im Ausland,“ Der Generalbundesanwalt beim Bundesgerichtshof; Anklageschrift gegen Ahmad Wali Sidiqi.“

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ The following paragraphs on the two oaths of allegiance by German Jihadis to IBU and al-Qaeda are also based on the indictment of the Federal Prosecutor General against Ahmad Wali Sidiqi, which contains testimonies by Sidiqi and fellow Jihadis who participated in their training at IBU and al-Qaeda.

German Jihadis participated together with Uzbek and central-Asian fighters. The stay of the German in IBU training camps was characterized by a rigid daily schedule. This schedule included common praying, Quran-reading, sports and meals. The more radical the ideological orientation of small-groups, the stronger such ceremonies influence their collective identity. The awareness of participants rises from the individual to a collective level. It seems that the culmination of the German Jihadis' socialization was the oath of allegiance near Sera Rogha. The German Jihadis met Yoldashev for the first time on the occasion of a wedding. To strengthen the intergroup bias, the members were introduced to Tahir Yoldashev with their *kunya* (Islamic nom de guerre).⁶⁸⁴ The renaming of group members in Jihadi training camps is a common rite to separate them from the outside world and give them a new identity, which is solely focused on the group and its goals. Moreover, the re-naming has security reasons to conceal and possibly eradicate their civilian identities during the stay. Short time later, the formal integration of the German Jihadis into IBU took place by an oath of allegiance. The ceremony was attended by Yoldashev and his deputy Usmon (Jan) Odil. The ceremony was initiated with a speech on jihad by Yoldashev, which he held in Farsi and Uzbek. The group of five Germans sang a religious song on jihad without instrumental accompaniment (either *anashid* or *huda' genre*). Further contributions by other participants followed. Afterwards, Yoldashev began again to speak and summoned all to take the oath of loyalty and allegiance. The German group took the oath "on Tahir Yoldashev's hand."

Secondly, the five German Jihadis had to take a special oath on concealing a terrorist plot in Europe. They received information-security training from a high-ranking al-Qaeda operative in Mir Ali. The al-Qaeda member "Sheikh Yunis al-Mauritani," who is involved in foreign strategy and operations planning, seems to have intensively trained the five German Jihadis for a week in information security in the beginning of June 2010. Al-Mauretani put special focus on the use of encryption programmes and the secure use of different computers for offline and online use. Two programmes were used especially intensively: The encryption programme "Mujahedin Secrets" to encrypt and decrypt text messages as well as the programme "Camouflage" to hide encrypted text messages behind picture files. Furthermore, the workshop concentrated on the use of numeral coding to hide the secret files. If a message was to be sent, it should be encrypted beforehand on an offline-computer with the help of "Mujahidin Secrets." Then, it would be hidden with "Camouflage" behind a picture file. This picture file would be put as 15th file into a folder consisting of 30 picture files. These files were to be put on a USB stick and to be sent from public Internet-cafes. The receiver would save

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

them in an Internet-cafe on a USB stick and decrypt them at home on an offline computer. To open the 15th picture file and decrypt it, a code was necessary, which had been agreed with al-Mauretani: It was based on the digits in file names of the last five picture files. After each exchange of information, a new Email-address should be created and announced with the encrypted file that was sent as an answer. After the workshop, the five German participants had to take an oath not to reveal any of the secrets they had learned. Sheikh Younis stretched out his hand and summoned the Germans to put their hand on his and to promise not to tell anyone about their plot.

Pledges of Allegiance on the Intra-Organizational Level: Algerian and Somali Groups towards al-Qaeda central

On the next level of our analysis of allegiance rituals, we will see how physical and virtual ceremonies of investiture and allegiance become strongly entangled. In fact, it is sometimes hard to decide for the observer which element is to the fore. There are semi-virtual *bay'a* ceremonies which have clear organizational and pragmatic dimensions. That means that the virtual oath of allegiance is not only used by grassroots Jihadis to mirror the physical oath. Several Jihadi organizations have pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda central organization via the Internet, expressing their wish to become subordinate affiliates. Examples are the pledge of the Algerian *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Qital* (Salafi Group for Propaganda and Fighting, GSPC) in September 2006,⁶⁸⁵ which re-named itself in January 2007 into “al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb.” Another example is the recent pledge of allegiance of the Somali *Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement* to al-Qaeda in February 2012.

The GSPC mentioned in her written statement that continuous contact with al-Qaeda central had lasted for about a year, before the pledge was taken⁶⁸⁶

“[T]he ‘Algerian Group for Propaganda and Combat’ joins the ‘Jihad-Base Organization’ and pledges allegiance with its emirate and its soldiers to the fighting Sheikh and the pious man Abu Abdullah Osama bin Laden.”⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁵ *Bayan wa bushra bi indimam wa mubayaat al-Jamaa al-Salafiyya li-l-Dawa wa-l-Qital li Shaykh Abi Abdallah Usama bin Laden* (Statement and glad tidings of the Salafi joining and homage of allegiance of the Group for Propaganda and Combat to Sheikh Abu Usama bin Laden), Internet: 2007, archive of the author.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

The emir of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement, Abu al-Zubayr, issued a lengthy audio message. Similar to the written GSPC statement, the audio message of al-Zubayr overflows with ceremonial and poetic formulas of glorification. In the following, we will look only at the excerpt that forms the core of the allegiance ceremony, the expression of the pledge. The message was directed to al-Qaeda's emir Ayman al-Zawahiri and published by al-Qaeda's media wing "al-Sahab."⁶⁸⁸

"Our beloved Amir, on behalf of my brothers in the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement, leaders and soldiers, I say:

I pledge allegiance to you on the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet, to hear and obey immediately in good times and bad times, and not to argue matters with people unless I see clear infidelity, and I have proof of this from Allah inasmuch as I am able to."⁶⁸⁹

In both cases, the pledge was given via the Internet to bridge the geographic distance between the North-western Pakistani region, where al-Qaeda is based, and the respective home regions of the two subordinate groups (Algeria and Somalia). The leaders did not meet personally. The ritual did not take place face-to-face and by handshake. Instead, written respectively recorded-oral pledges were sent to the mother organization al-Qaeda. The texts are both lengthy, elaborately "decorated" and adorned with ceremonial theological speech, yet contain very short and concise passages, which entail ceremonial formulas of subordination, i.e. who subordinates to whom. Both cases accord with classical organizational Jihadi doctrine. Accordingly, in the case of multiple groups, "younger groups" must subordinate themselves under the "oldest group." Every single Muslim must obey this rule. Previous pledges to younger groups are invalid, even if the pledging were ignorant about the existence of an older organization.⁶⁹⁰ Moreover, the pledge of allegiance was in both cases the climax of a lengthy development of operational and ideological convergence.

In the Shabaab's case, strategic and ideological subordination to al-Qaeda central and its affiliates was already clear in 2008,⁶⁹¹ and especially since 2010.⁶⁹² A suicide-attack video by

⁶⁸⁸ „Bushra sara li-l-shaykhayn Abi al-Zubayr, amir harakat shabab al-mujahidin fi al-sumal wa al-amir Ayman al-Zawahiri, hafizahu Allah“ (Glad tidings of the two sheikhs Abu al-Zubayr, military commander of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement and Ayman al-Zawahiri, may God protect him), *al-Sahab* Media Foundation, <http://www.ye-forum.net/vb/>, accessed February 27, 2012, <http://www.ye-forum.net/vb/showthread.php?t=649613>.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Al-'Umda fi i'dad al-'udda li-l-jihad fi sabil Allah ta'ala*, 94.

⁶⁹¹ Nick Grace, "Shabaab reaches out to al Qaeda senior leaders, announces death al Sudani," *The Long War Journal*, September 2, 2008, accessed January 15, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/09/shabab_reaches_out_t.php.

the group featured a bombing in Somalia against Ethiopian peace-keeping forces. The video justified the bombing as retaliation for the death of two al-Qaeda leaders in Iraq. The driver of the bomb-truck prays. The chirping of green paradise-birds in which the souls of martyrs are said to live on is added as background sound. Afterwards the driver swears to revenge the slain al-Qaeda leaders. This is followed by an audio speech of Abu Yahya al-Libi (killed 2012 in a U.S. drone strike), the chief theologian of al-Qaeda central in Waziristan. The video itself was produced by al-Kataib, the media wing of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement in Somalia.

A complex doctrine of subordination, retaliation and deterrence emerges from this piece of evidence. From an organizational network theory point of view, major Jihadi groups seem to share a collective sense of deterrence as well as an obligation and solidarity to revenge killings of leaders of their own networks. Although they are sub-state actors, they behave on retaliation and deterrence level as a collective, or also as quasi-institutionalized players (whose institutions are based on informal organizational (often tribal) and clandestine networks).

It is also interesting, that Shabaab's media department "al-Kataib" issued a separate statement after the group's formal subordination to al-Qaeda. Intra-group policies accompany the ritual on the high end of organizational-network politics. The statement summarizes the ceremony, but puts much less weight on the meaning of subordination (of the Movement in relation to al-Qaeda central organization). Al-Kataib's statement was probably directed at their home base:

"the fighters in Somalia joined al-Qaeda in order to be one army that fights for the sake of God alone, so that God's word may be exalted [...] This pledge comes in a time where the Islamic Nation is in deer need of unity and of community and of uniting the forces to resists the enemies of Allah who united their goals and have begun to lie in wait for the Islam everywhere [...] At this place, we would like to express our special thanks to Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may God protect him, for his efforts to unite the armies of the Umma under one flag. May God grant him best reward through the Umma of Islam and may He write his reward and his victory upon his enemies. We bless for him and for our fighting brothers

⁶⁹² Video-archive of the Jihadism Online Project at Vienna University. Summary of the attack in April 2010 on this website: "*Tha'ran li dima' shahidayna al-batalayn bi 'idhn Allah, al-sheikh al-Qa'id Abu Umr al-Baghdadi wa waziruhu al-darr gham Abu Hamza*," accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.el-sanur.de/html/seite159.html>. As well as here: "al-Shabaab al-Mujahedeen - martyrdom operation against the governmental & the foreign forces in Mogadishu near the presidential palace - revenging the leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq," April 29, 2010, accessed January 15, 2013, http://irhabeat.blogspot.de/2010/04/blog-post_29.html.

everywhere this oath of allegiance and ask God that this year may be the year of community for all fighting groups. May they fight under one flag in the army of the Umma.”⁶⁹³

The statement by the Shabab’s media wing portrays the oath almost as if it is a merger with al-Qaeda on equal footing in order to form one united Islamic army. This may have intra-group and political reasons, since the Shabaab Movement is an influential player in Somali politics and shows itself accordingly. As discussed above, the Shabaab Movement itself frequently takes oaths of allegiance from local Somali tribes. If we break down the chain of command from al-Qaeda central via Shabaab to local tribes, a hierarchy emerges which is built on tribal as well as informal organizational networks that use traditional mechanisms of election and consultation.

However, the merger of the Somali Shabaab with al-Qaeda drew heavy criticism on an Arab language Internet discussion forum.⁶⁹⁴ This kind of discussion can be described as a virtual macro-ceremony around a certain topic: Several pro-al-Qaeda members gathered in a thread and were annoyed by the comments of al-Qaeda critics. We will discuss this online-phenomenon in more detail below:⁶⁹⁵ The loss of face of Jihadi supporters was answered with a ritualistic death curse against critics. The function of the curse was to protect the cohesiveness of the Jihadi online group and its virtual collective identity.

The death-curse can be seen as a corrective interaction ritual in the sense of Goffman’s *corrective process*. Goffman argues that one’s face is a sacred thing, and that the need to sustain it is a ritual one.” Protecting face is also utterly important in Jihadi online communities. Every supporter stands with his online-character, his cyber-face, for the radical, cult-like community, mores and values. If a threat threatens to damage core-beliefs of the group, then the offender can “provide compensations to the injured [...] or provide punishment, penance, and expiation for himself.”⁶⁹⁶ However, in virtual life the Jihadis had a hard time, since they invaded and debated in a hostile environment, on a non-Jihadi discussion forum.

A similar process happens sometimes in the context of purely-virtual pledges, i.e. pledges that are not exchanged between two physical organizations, but between online-Jihadis and virtual entities or persons: The Internet becomes a platform of dispute about the validity and sense of

⁶⁹³ “*Bayan tahni'a li-l-umma al-Islamiyya bi munasibat al-bay'a*,” al-Kataib Media Foundation, February 2012, archive of the author.

⁶⁹⁴ Abu Hamza al-Muwahhid, “*Bushra li kull mu'min: Amir Harakat Shabab al-Mujahidin yubayi' al-amir Ayman al-Zawahiri*,” February 9, 2012, accessed July 5, 2012, <http://www.ye1.org/vb/showthread.php?t=649613>.

⁶⁹⁵ For a further analysis see the chapter “Spells and Curses (*la'nat*)” below.

⁶⁹⁶ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*, 21.

organizational and intra-Jihadi-group politics. In real life, such a debate can be avoided, or held in small circles. But the openness of the mass-medium, in this case the discussion forum, does not allow such avoidances. An egalitarian exchange of views can cause a sudden depreciation of the ritual which runs totally counter the Jihadi power-discourse. Participants in these discussions either try a “corrective process,” or in case of an extreme face-threat, they utter a ritual death-curse against the deviant person. That Salafi-Jihad and its connected rituals are cherished by truly international communities, however, was indicated by another post on a Jihadi forum: The “Jihadi Salafi Group in Alexandria” congratulated the Shabaab Movement in Somalia to its oath of loyalty to al-Qaeda in Waziristan.⁶⁹⁷

The effect of the virtual *bay'a* in social media can be vividly demonstrated by a male French YouTube user.⁶⁹⁸ The owner of the channel “Deen4ever” is probably a Muslim male from Paris in his thirties. “Deen4ever” is a skilled propagator of “just violence.” He edits and produces his own videos, which are a mix of anti-globalization, leftist and Jihadi critique of U.S. foreign policies. One video shows the unarguably brilliant verbal attack against the U.S. occupation of Iraq by the U.S.-Iraqi medical doctor Dahlia Wasfi, which is followed by U.S. reverend Jeremia Wright’s critique of U.S. violence throughout history including the extinguishing of the American natives and the nuclear bombardment of the Japanese. After the heavy barrage of critique, the pictures of the burning Twin Towers are faded in. Accompanied by soft background music, the attack suddenly appears like a justified retaliation; it seems like a just event that falls out of the blue sky (which also owes to the camera perspective).⁶⁹⁹ In short, the propagandist effect works, since a viewer may easily forget that “Deen4ever” is not concerned with justice or conflict-resolution. He is concerned with global Islamic dominion, as another one of his self-generated video shows. The video focuses on the classical pledge of allegiance which is exercised by a handshake. The reconstructed scene has probably been cut out from a documentary movie; it depicts the succession of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab as the second “righteously guided” caliph (following Abu Bakr al-Siddiq). The scene shows al-Khattab’s ceremonial investiture. During the famous ceremony, al-Khattab held a speech, in which he promised to care for the wellbeing of the

⁶⁹⁷ „*Majmu'a al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya bi-l-iskandariyya bayan bi sha'n bayat harakat al-shabab al-mujahidin li tanzim qa'idat al-jihad*,” <http://www.i7ur.com/vb/>, accessed May 9j, 2012, <http://www.i7ur.com/vb/showthread.php/25956--بيان-بشأن-بيعة-حركة-شباب-المجاهدين> - مجموعة-السلفية-الجهادية-بالأسكندرية - لتنظيم-قاعدة-الجهاد -

⁶⁹⁸ See the excellent analysis of Ruth-Sabrina Trujillano Egoavil-Hamidi, *Dschihadistische Videos: Eine Fallstudie* (M.A.th., University of Vienna, 2012).

⁶⁹⁹ “deen4ever,” “Message aux Occidentaux par des Occidentaux (Message to Westerners),” December 21, 2011, accessed January 18, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xshobmeIbVs&list=UUA1l0C8AY3YxVHg8KqU3SZg&index=1>.

Muslim community and mentioned important aspects of taxation and welfare.⁷⁰⁰ The video clip then shows Muslims as they are passing by. They give their hands to al-Khattab and pledge him allegiance. The scene is repeated several times in order to strengthen its appeal.⁷⁰¹ “Deen4ever” integrates this scene with headlines, such as “belief versus unbelief,” “sharia versus secularism” or “khilafa versus democracy.” The example illustrates how the classical ritual of investiture and allegiance informs the online Jihadi grassroots milieu.

However, the exploitation of the ritual among online Jihadis to create classical top-down hierarchies has not been really successful. Hierarchical leadership models on the Internet show little success because the virtual *bay'a* cannot really replace physical structures or install charismatic leaders to guide members of networks. Over the last years jihad organizations could not introduce the virtual *bay'a*, for example, as a viable substitute for personal guidance in their efforts to exert direct control over followers via the Internet. However, from an alternative communicative leadership perspective, where leadership is measured in terms of the strength of group-binding and steering communication within online networks, the virtual *bay'a* plays an important role. Within communicative networks, actors and ideas gather around central ideas and create strong ties. The closer they get to communicative hubs, the more status and communicative leadership qualities they gain. The *bay'a* seems to play an important role for communicative leadership purposes, to build imaginary hierarchies; raise identification with jihad; gather sympathizers around central ideological-hubs within networks; and to gear media-effective propaganda campaigns. The fact that the virtual *bay'a* is so disputed among online-Jihadis attests to its influence.

The *bay'a* on the Internet indeed sheds a very interesting light on this problem. Similar to popular ideologues, also forum members debate the issue. One example is the forum member “alyasa.” Forum members like alyasa are the second guard of ideological and opinion leaders in Jihadi thinking. They reproduce and rethink jihad propaganda collectively. This increases the appeal of Jihadi ideas to “simple” percipients, who are nevertheless interested in justifications for uploading videos and theological justifications, or venerating role models.

In 2005, “alyasa” called on the jihad forum al-Hisba for a “death-*bay'a*” (*mubaya'a 'ala al-maut*) to Usama bin Laden:⁷⁰² Classically, a *bay'a* means to follow Muhammad or another

⁷⁰⁰ Ruth-Sabrina Trujillano Egoavil-Hamidi, *Dschihadistische Videos: Eine Fallstudie* (M.A.th., University of Vienna, 2012), 135.

⁷⁰¹ „deen4ever“, „Bande Annonce Sharia“, September 9, 2011, accessed January 18, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbV7mwDWdE4>.

⁷⁰² *Al-Bay'a li amir qa'idat al-jihad al-shaykh Usama bin Laden*.

This call to pledge allegiance to Bin Laden was published in 2006 on the Jihadi forum al-Boraq (which in the meanwhile has been shut down). Sympathizers keep on republishing the statement on the Internet.

Muslim leader under all conditions until death. The ritual was sometimes repeated before battle to strengthen the fighting spirit of Muslims. In battle, the pledge was also given to field commanders.⁷⁰³

“alyasa” differentiates between the primary **pledge of convention** (*bay'at al-in'iqad*) and the secondary **general pledge** (*al-bay'a al-'amma*). His reasoning is similar to that of the popular jihad ideologue 'Abd al-Qadir, whom we discussed above. The most famous examples of a primary election are the four Rightly Guided Caliphs. The secondary, general pledge is a **popular pledge** (*bay'a sha'biyya*). Muslims, both authors argue, traditionally confirmed the choice of a leader with a popular pledge in their local mosque. Now this can be done via the Internet and by writing (*kitaba*).⁷⁰⁴

“alyasa’s” goal was to build an Army of conscripts in the Internet, who would blow themselves up at a demanded time. In an opinion poll on al-Hesba forum 171 persons voted for the pledge, however, without putting it later into effect.⁷⁰⁵ In general, the death bay'a, or any other terrorist pledge of allegiance via the Internet seems not to be very effective as a direct leadership mechanism, or for operational purposes.

Another example should be mentioned because it concerns the attempt to create a Jihadi core state as a political alternative for the time after the U.S.-retreat from Iraq. In October 2006 the Shura Council of Mujahidin (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*) announced the establishment of the **Islamic State of Iraq** (*Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya*). The Shura Council of Mujahidin is supposed to be the umbrella of a coalition of Iraqi and foreign Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq that are allied with al-Qaeda. The Islamic State of Iraq would be its political and institutional manifestation. Much has been written on the Council and State.

This part of the analysis will deal with the electoral mechanisms that led to the confirmation of its supposed leader, Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi via the Internet.⁷⁰⁶ With the *shura* council, the chief-planners of the Islamic State of Iraq have tried to create an Islamic legislative body. Western parliaments are mainly based on the Westminster System. But *shura* is based on pre-Islamic tribal mechanisms of consultation and election. A *shura* council as understood by

⁷⁰³ ...such as before the battle of Yarmuk, when Muslim fighters pledged a “death-bay'a” to a low rank Muslim leader, mentions a Jihadi participant in the same discussion.

⁷⁰⁴ The forum activist “alyasa” quotes the example of the 7.th century Ethiopian king al-Najashi. Al-Najashi allegedly wrote a letter to Muhammad, in which he said: “I pledged you allegiance, and I pledged allegiance to the son of your uncle, and your companions, and I submitted myself under the hand of Allah, Lord of the worlds.”

⁷⁰⁵ Hanna Rogan, “Jihadism Online: A study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes” (Kjeller: Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI), 2006).

⁷⁰⁶ The following analysis of the virtual electoral process of Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi is based on the author’s paper “Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications and Discussion,” Herzliya Conference 2011, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, accessed December 3, 2012, http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/PhilippHoltmann.pdf.

radical Islamists has not only monitorial and legislative, but also electoral powers.⁷⁰⁷ It also fulfils the task of the “people of resolution and contract” (*ahl al-hall wa-al-'aqd*), who are authorized to elect and proclaim a new leader.

This allegedly happened in the case of al-Baghdadi. He was elected emir by the Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin. Yet, a secondary pledge of allegiance took place via the internet, which reminds of the “death bay'a” to Bin Laden (see above). A great deal of al-Baghdadi’s authority was thus created virtually. The pledge to al-Baghdadi took place in a two-steps process, adopted from the classical ritual, in which the Shura Council of Mujahidin did the primary pledge (actual election, *'aqd al-in'iqad*). The secondary virtual pledge followed via the internet. With the primary pledge supposedly confirmed, the secondary pledge gained strength in Islamic legal terms.

In April 2009 Iraqi authorities announced Abu Omar al-Baghdadi’s arrest like several times before.⁷⁰⁸ In April 2010 Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was allegedly killed in Iraq, and a pledge of allegiance by AQI was announced to his successor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.⁷⁰⁹ But it still remains unclear if either of the al-Baghdadis really exists, or if they are just phantoms. This, too, has caused a big debate among Jihadis since Abu Omar al-Baghdadi’s “election” in 2006. It directly touches upon the question of his legitimacy and the legitimacy of the announced state. Is the state a virtual construct? Do the leaders exist or not, how are leadership and state justified and how does the debate around them approximately look like? We will try to shed some light on these questions.

The in October 2006 announced **Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya)** by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) does not really exist, but describes the coalition of Iraqi and foreign Sunni fighters allied with AQI (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*).⁷¹⁰ ISI has since its announcement been celebrated as a mega-event in the Jihadi media, forums and sites on the Internet. The collective celebration reminds of a macro-ritual, similar to an interactive superstar-contest among Jihadis.⁷¹¹ ISI on the Internet stands also for a constantly repeated ceremony of virtual

⁷⁰⁷ In many Muslim countries the parliament is called *Majlis al-Shura*, although it functions closer to the Western model.

⁷⁰⁸ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, April 29, 2009, 1.

⁷⁰⁹ “88alfars,” “*I'lan bay'at Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi amir Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya*,” accessed November 27, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=hiZmxZtFBBfw, 1:40 min. For more information on the death and person of Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi see the following clip on YouTube: “Mr3twe,” “*Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya wahta'iqay maqtal Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi ba'ad ta'ayyun Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi amir al-Dawla al-Islamiyya*,” accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YumaSVS0Zlw>.

⁷¹⁰ With the establishment of the ISI a “dual-leadership”-model came into effect. The Iraqi terrorist Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (d. October 2010) was elected as Emir and the Egyptian Abu Hamza al-Muhajir as war-minister of the ISI. This reflected the attempt to make AQI attractive for both Iraqi and foreign Jihadis. See also Guido Steinberg, “Down, but not out – Wounded AQI is not finished yet” Jane’s Intelligence Review Special Edition, “Relationships and Rivalries: Assessing Al-Qaeda’s Affiliate network,” October 2010: 28.

⁷¹¹ See the definition of rituals in the introduction to this dissertation.

state building, which reflects the attempt to establish a bureaucratic form of leadership. A state, which is hierarchical and features legislative, judicative and executive institutions, has much more formal power than an informal network of likeminded individuals. The ISI state lends legitimacy and authority to Jihadi actions, verdicts and statements, even if it is “just” a virtual construct. Al-Qaeda in Iraq has thus succeeded to put a “legitimate and institutional” virtual umbrella over its existence, which is highly accepted and re-produced by its online supporters, who can sit everywhere the world over and are not limited to geographical boundaries.

In the following, we will analyze the virtual electoral mechanics that led to the confirmation of ISI’s supposed leader, Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi, via the Internet and the creation of the ISI as an important virtual entity. Jihadis argued that ISI was institutionally and legally sound, since it was represented by its “Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin” (Consultation Council of Fighters). In Islamic elections, the *shura* is traditionally the consultative meeting where the “the men of resolution and contract” (*ahl al-hall wa-al-‘aqd*) meet. They are formally qualified to elect or depose a ruler (caliph or amir or sultan) on behalf of the Muslim community (umma).⁷¹² Thus, the concept of *shura* increased the legitimacy of the ISI among online sympathizers.

The Discussion of the Virtual Bay’a to ISI leader al-Baghdadi –Supporters and Opponents

In September 2007 an anonymous “from one of the Jihadi media-platforms” announced the “bay’a to the leader of the faithful” (*amir al-mu’minin*) in a discussion forum of www.aljazeerataalk.net.⁷¹³ The discussion that followed gives us important insight into the justification of virtual leadership and its electoral mechanisms. Physical contact, acquaintance or knowledge of a virtual leader is not necessary according to the jurisprudence of radical Islamists. The call for allegiance to al-Baghdadi by the anonymous says:

“We strongly request from our fighting brothers in the border regions (*thughur*) to gather under the flag of the Islamic State of Iraq and under the command of the caliph of the Muslims, the leader of the faithful, Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi.

⁷¹² The election includes consultation (*shura*) and proclamation (*mubaya’a*), ritualized by a handshake (*musafaha*).

⁷¹³ Accessed May 12, 2012, <http://www.aljazeerataalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=77767v>.

Oh Allah, we pledge allegiance to the leader of the faithful Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi, may Allah protect him, we shall be soldiers under his command, so Allah wishes, in the arena of media and fighting.

Let us all sign here the proclamation (*mubaya’a*) and remove [what obstacles are] in the souls and unite against the enemies of the religious community and of monotheism.”

A group by the name of Ansar Allah (Supporters of Allah) added a graphic which depicts an old brownish linen document that hangs on a golden stick and is surrounded by a Victorian-style frame. The kitschy ancient-style graphic contains a text similar to the one above that shall be copy-pasted to confirm the proclamation of al-Baghdadi. Most of the 17 Jihadi chatters confirmed the pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi and used the exact wording proposed in the introduction by anonymous. Some used the wording of the graphic or a slight modification. One of the chatters even asked if it was legal to pledge allegiance via SMS. Every proclamation started with “Oh Allah, we pledge allegiance to the leader of the faithful Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi” and contained the classical phrase “to the command” (*‘ala al-sam’ wa-al-ta’a*). Some added “*fi-al-manshat wa-al-mukrah* (in good and bad times). However, one participant expressed doubts. Ibn al-Imarat wrote:

“I want to proclaim him (*ana uridu mubaya’ahu*). But I do not know who this is, Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi and who will be [the amir]. And how the Islamic State of Iraq will look like, what its borders are and its characteristics among the states? And if it is like the states of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and how!!”

Illustration below: A Wallpaper designed by an internet-supporter of ISI, Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, accessed March 15,2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15811>.



The Islamic Legal Justification of the Virtual *Ba'ya* to al-Baghdadi

Al-Jarmani, a discussion-participant under the flag of Senegal, responded immediately to Ibn al-Imarat. He seems to know the Iraqi radical Islamist scene well and explains in length why it is not necessary for every Muslim to know his leader personally. This also applies to the pledge of allegiance and proclamation of al-Baghdadi, he claims. His argument is central to the justification of virtual *bay'a* and virtually created leadership. Similar justifications resurface in other Internet discussions around the topic. Al-Jarmani writes (translated in excerpts; important sections underlined):

“My dear brother, in terms of Islamic law you do not need to know the emir or make his acquaintance at any time. This does not invalidate the *bay'a*.

There is no doubt that Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi is known. Thus, it has been negated that he is unknown, praise be to Allah. There are people who pledged allegiance to him – the Majlis

Shura al-Mujahidin, the Alliance of the Anointed⁷¹⁴, and others. With them the ignorance (jahala) about the emir stopped, because the ignorance stops with the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of some. The knowledge of the whole community is not necessary. Neither is it necessary that everyone, who pledges allegiance to him, knows him.

As far as I know, no jihad group mentioned that the emir is unknown. No group apologized for the *bay'a* with this invalid excuse, because Abu 'Umar is known by some of the jihad groups. This means: The heads and emirs and leaders of the jihad groups. The soldiers, however, are retinue and do not need to know the emir.

It is also known that the other groups may get to know him if they want to proclaim Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi. They will not be told: “pledge allegiance to an anonymous man!” On the contrary, they know him without a doubt. And it is also known that the amir Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi established the Shura Council with three persons from every group that joined the State [and that the influence was being distributed] according to their number and the size of their operations. ...The State did not tell them: Pledge allegiance without knowing me!

But rationally, it is neither possible, nor Islamic legally (*shar'an*) correct that all the people of Iraq must know the emir completely (*ma'rifa kamila*). Al-Mawardi said in “The rules of power” (*Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya*): The masses should know that knowing the imam is obligatory for a sufficient number out of the entirety [of Muslims] without further detail. Not everyone must know him by his eye and his name [see him and know him].

The emirs and leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq are the most known of all the Iraqi groups. The Islamic Army (*al-Jaysh al-Islami*), for example, does not even know the kunya (nom de guerre) of its emir. He did not appear with a voice-message a single time, but his statements are read by one of the fighters. The famous leaders are unknown, except for Dr. Ibrahim al-Shamri, the speaker of the group. The voice and the kunya of the leader of the Ansar al-Sunna (Supporters of the Sunna) is known. The same goes for groups that are less famous. But the leaders of the State [Islamic State of Iraq] even appear with their voices and their bodies, and perhaps they sometimes also uncover their faces.

In a specific period and under certain circumstances the *bay'a* may be sort of concealed (*naw' min al-khafa*'), like it happened in the *bay'a* of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, may Allah have mercy with him. The people pledged allegiance to who is in this book without knowing his name [sic] . . .We are in a state of war with the enemy, our lands were conquered and our homes

⁷¹⁴ In 2006, Zargawi's alleged successor Abu Hamza al-Muhajir , meanwhile also believed to be dead, tried to reverse Zargawi's policy of brutal intimidation. He integrated armed groups from friendly Iraqi Sunni tribes into an Alliance of the Anointed / Good People (*tahalluf al-mutayyabin / al-mutayyibin*). Al-Sharq al-Awsat, October 13, 2006, 1.

occupied. There is no state on earth that governs according to the *shari'a* of Allah and Islam... This requires some changes in some questions [regarding the process of *bay'a*].

In conclusion, not knowing (*al-jahala*) according to the *shari'a* is divided into ignorance of state (*jahalat hal*) and ignorance of eye (*jahalat 'ayn*), and both do not apply to Abu 'Umar, may Allah the Exalted protect him. He is free of the ignorance of eye without doubt for everyone knows that there is a man with the *kunya* “Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi”, which is a truth that is not imagined. He is a leader who fights the unbelievers and leads the Muslims.

Concerning the ignorance of state, he is free of it, too, by way of the *bay'a* of the people of resolution and contract (*ahl al-hall wa-al-'aqd*) from the groups that pledged allegiance to him and by way of the knowledge of other groups which did not proclaim him...

Concerning the condition that the imam of the people must step outside and get to know them by himself and that they see him, so he will not be unknown (*majhul*): The [fulfillment of this] condition is impossible in the present circumstances where the House of Islam is occupied. Moreover, it is not necessary because the ignorance [as explained above] has stopped without it, blessings to Allah!”

Al-Jarmani understands the problem of the inquiring chatter. Ibn al-Imarat is highly motivated to participate in jihad and is looking for authority via the internet. Yet, he feels helpless. The problem is that the virtual pledge to al-Baghdadi sounds striking, but there is nothing physical to it. He does not even know who al-Baghdadi is. But al-Jarmani wants to make him feel perfectly comfortable in accordance with his belief system. He simply relaxes him and gives him the feeling that “Your doubts are understandable, but believe me, the way you describe your ignorance is perfectly legitimate. You do not need to change anything. You do not need know your leader!”

Yet, even within the radical scene the election remained disputed. For example, a discussion participant named *al-Muqatil al-'Iraqi* (Iraqi Fighter) wrote: “Pledge allegiance to who you want. That is your problem. But do not force any Muslim to pledge this allegiance! Refrain from spilling the blood of Muslims and clerics and fighters! And protect the inviolateness (*hurma*) of the blood of Muslims and innocents! Do not explode the homes of Muslims with explosive belts claiming that an apostate lives in it – according to your thinking! Listen to clerics who are older and wiser and more pious than you!” **He immediately received a death-threat from another chatter.**⁷¹⁵

⁷¹⁵ <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.Net/forum/showthread.php?t=77767v>, accessed 1 May 2009.

In summary, the Islamic legal justification of the virtual bay'a relies on two arguments: The elected must only be known to the closest entourage; furthermore, the virtual pledge is only a “secondary pledge” to confirm the election of a terrorist leader. In the case of Abu Amr al-Baghdadi, the primary pledge was already given by al-Qaeda members in Iraq, argues al-Jarmani.⁷¹⁶ It is quite difficult to refute the Islamic legal argument of al-Jarmani. It centers on the questions of “ignorance” (*jahala*) and knowledge (*ma'rifa*). They are solved by the classical argument that “not every Muslim needs to know the imam with his eye and by his name.” The virtual pledge is the secondary pledge for confirmation and submission. Al-Jarmani states that the primary pledge was already given by the “people of resolution and contract”, mainly members of the Shura Council of Mujahidin in Iraq (i.e. al-Qaeda in Iraq).⁷¹⁷ This invalidates the argument that al-Baghdadi is “unknown”, since he is known by “some”, namely the “people of resolution and contract”. Chatters are equated with “soldiers who are retinue”. They must not know their leader in order to submit themselves according to classical rules. A second, very important argument to justify virtual bay'a is practical. “In a specific period and under certain circumstances the bay'a may be sort of concealed (*nau' min al-khafa*)...This requires some changes in some questions [regarding the process of bay'a].” Al-Jarmani thus admits that it is not a classical bay'a, but a highly modified version. It is “concealed” in the sense that it is secretive. Thus, the ignorance about the leader (*jahala*) is intentionally created and not comparable to the classical condition (but rather caused by the security situation). In this light it remains to be asked if the questions of ignorance (*jahala*) and knowledge (*ma'rifa*) have truly been solved as al-Jarmani proposes. It may sound punctilious, but the question is central to justifying virtual leadership.

Critical Voices against the Islamic State and the Virtual Pledge to al-Baghdadi

Another interesting discussion on the virtual pledge to al-Baghdadi appeared on www.muslm.net a few months before (August 2007). The Jihad-supporter *al-Subh al-Mushriq* (The Shining Morning) asked for answers to detailed questions on the Islamic legitimacy of the bay'a.⁷¹⁸ The unwillingness to discuss the topic critically on Jihadi forums made him start a discussion on www.muslm.net: “After I found the topic ‘Here is the pledge to the leader of the faithful Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi’ on one of the Jihadi forums, I proposed a topic there, but

⁷¹⁶ The primary pledge is the ritual by which the actual election of the leader takes place (*in'iqad al-khilafa*).

⁷¹⁷ The primary pledge is the ritual by which the actual election of the leader takes place, such as *in'iqad al-khilafa*.

⁷¹⁸ Al-Subh al-Mushriq, “Bay'a 'abr al-Internet!!!”, July 25, 2008, accessed April 16, 2009, www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=304962.

I was surprised that it was deleted and I was stopped.” Internet discussions like this one indicate that some supporters seem to take the Islamic legal aspect very seriously, while others just look for simple justifications for their terrorist activity. The questions of *al-Subh al-Mushriq* reveal some skepticism. He also points out that the virtual pledge may easily be manipulated. But nevertheless he seems to support the idea of virtual leadership. However, he wants to be very sure about its Islamic legal rules. Let us look at a short excerpt of this important discussion, which is but one exemplary piece that illustrates the treatment of the topic among Jihadis. *Al-Subh al-Mushriq* asks:

“Must they [the Muslims] actually pledge this *bay’a*? If someone took this kind of pledge, must he keep his pledge to Abu ‘Umar [al-Baghdadi]?”

I fear that some intriguing figures may abuse topics like this to announce a pledge for themselves. Sympathizers of jihad will suffer from the illusion that they belong to them while in reality they [the ones who called for the pledge] are enemies of jihad.”

The first participant gives an answer based on his own common sense. Muhammad Salim al-Nabil writes: “I believe that this [*bay’a*] is invalid (*batil*) because the names are made-up and it is not known who the pledgers (*al-mubayi’un*) are.” The chatter Ibn Khaldun al-Jaza’iri adds: “The ignorant pledger does not know that his pledge - if it were sound in Islamic legal sense – obliges him to emigrate to the Islamic State of Iraq. And if Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi ordered him to explode himself in his country, then he would have to do it because he has to follow his command unconditionally (in what he likes and hates)...”

Slightly out of context, an Ahmad al-Muharib asks: “Is the *bay’a* via telephone *Islamic* legally valid? The commander is in Baghdad and the pledger in Kirkuk or Ramadi...and there is no means but the telephone to pledge allegiance...?” In the meantime another chatter frantically pledges allegiance to Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi but *al-Subh al-Mushriq* calls him to order and asks for a scientific, not an emotional discussion of the topic. Chatter samy7 is especially critical and calls it “forced pledge” (*al-bay’a bi-l-ikrah*). He comments on the questions of *al-Subh al-Mushriq*:

“The whole issue evolves in the internet, which means completely in the electronic space like the situation of this Internet state [*al-dawla al-internetiyya*, i.e. the Islamic State of Iraq] and the situation of this internet emir (*al-amir al-internetiyy*, i.e. al-Baghdadi)...There is no *bay’a*. Even if the one calling for *bay’a* was honest or actually credible with his claim of the

existence of his state or the emir whose name is al-Baghdadi, he would have to come out [appear, show himself], but...”⁷¹⁹

Al-Subh al-Mushriq accepts the critique against al-Baghdadi. But he vehemently rejects samy7’s idea that the Islamic State of Iraq does not exist. On the contrary, it has “might and extend” (*sawla wa-jawla*). Another chatter, al-Radi, has a severe moral conflict with the concept of virtual *bay’a*. On the one hand he supports jihad, but he doubts the validity of virtual *bay’a*. He is aware that the pledge may implicate death and is not sure if such decisions should be decided via the internet:

“Now things are tricky . . . you will find that a lot of the members [of the forums] are zealous supporters of jihad and its people and then you will find them in the hereafter. I will not pledge allegiance because the things are different and not clear. What would be my duties if I pledged allegiance to Abu ‘Umar or someone else? I ask Allah that he will assist the fighters to win. But concerning the *bay’a*, the topic is very difficult. With all due respect, those present in the forum do not look credible to me – because some of them may have entered for other reasons. I will not pledge allegiance because the issue is not clear.”

The moderator of the topic scolds chatter samy7 for his jihad-critical views. This especially concerns samy7’s critique of Sunni terrorist attacks against civilians, which, according to the majority of the participants, are merely a US-Shiite-Iranian conspiracy. What is more important, *al-Subh al-Mushriq* rejects samy7’s claim that Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi is anonymous (*majhul*). According to classical legal theory (mentioned before in *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya* by al-Mawardi) it suffices that the “people of resolution and contract” know the imam. But samy7 counters immediately saying: “Please explain to me who the “people of resolution and contract” are if you mention them and who supposedly knows Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi [personally]!”

Again, the same central Islamic legal argument for the virtual *bay’a* is used: The leader who is known by some must not be known by the masses (see also al-Jarmani in the discussion above). The ignorance (*jahala*) of all is canceled by the knowledge (*ma’rifa*) of some. Several months before al-Jarmani uses this argument we can already find it in this thread led by *al-Subh al-Mushriq*. A chatter called Abu Yusuf al-Bashir is the contributor. But it is probably

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

also not his pen. Maybe a radical jurisprudent prepared it for distribution via the Internet to legitimize the election of al-Baghdadi, since we can find it in other discussions, too.⁷²⁰

In other discussions, the virtual bay'a was justified likewise.⁷²¹ The frequent repetition of the argument suggests that Jihadi jurisprudents prepared it for distribution via the Internet. Sympathizers picked it up to legitimize the virtual election of al-Baghdadi and other figures. Until today, ISI is one, if not the most popular topics on Arabic language and international jihad forums. The celebration of ISI is a continuous Jihadi macro-ritual. Nearly every forum has a section that is exclusively dedicated to discussions and "news" of the ISI. AQI sells many of its videos and statements under the label of ISI. Thus, ISI is an example for the fold between the physical and the virtual worlds, which Jihadis aim to create. The creation of authoritative and institutional halos around themes like the ISI, even if they are deceptive, is a brilliant solution to rally sympathizers. Even if virtual bay'a or ISI do not have much meaning in practical terms, they are extremely strong ideas, which can influence supporters' self-perception of strength, cohesion and firing-power.

Similar bay'a and leadership discussions in the context of the Syrian civil-war in 2012

Very similar Jihadi forum discussions turn around the Syrian Islamist rebellion. These discussions strongly focus on the establishment of hierarchical leadership in actual insurgency and civil war scenarios. Furthermore, these discussions evidence to the effort of online activists to influence, and thus contribute to the leadership of developments on the ground. The Jihadi media-strategy on the Internet, "watching the watchers," here transforms into a "watching and improving yourselves" approach, and rapidly transcends into actual battle strategy. This kind of online-counsel is not only tactically, but also strategically important, which makes it an integral element of virtual and communicative leadership.⁷²²

For example, a member of *al-Jihad al-'Alami* forum advised Syrian Islamist fighters how to improve their military strategy (August 2012) after monitoring YouTube video clips of their

⁷²⁰ For example, "*La ajidu audah min kalimat al-sheikh bin Laden raddan 'ala al-ba'd hadahum Allah*," accessed April 28, 2009, <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=136357>.

⁷²¹ On the forum www.muslm.net a participant who calls himself Abu Yusuf al-Bashir argued likewise. See "*Bay'a 'abr al-Internet!!!*" www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=304962, accessed April 16, 2009, but also "*La ajidu audah min kalimat al-sheikh bin Laden raddan 'ala al-ba'd hadahum Allah*," accessed April 28, 2009, <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=136357>.

⁷²² We have defined virtual leadership as the "leadership of communications in virtual life in Internet networks" and communicative leadership as "the effort to influence through online communications developments in real life." See the chapter "Theoretical Framework" of this dissertation.

operations.⁷²³ He based his counsel on video footage of Syrian rebel attacks, which were published on the Internet. In his view, their offensive tactics were ineffective.⁷²⁴ More interesting than his tactical advice, in our context, was his strategic online counsel on the question of leadership. The Jihadi forum member advised Syrian fighters that they should unite under a central Jihadi command and elect an emir for all fighters in Syria, to whom they should give a pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*). To this purpose, “al-Nusra Front for the Support of the People of Greater Syria” (*Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl al-Sham*), a Syrian rebel group which was formed in late 2011 and is suspected of affiliations to al-Qaeda,⁷²⁵ should unite with Islamist fighters in Syria, advised the forum member. In a second step, all fighters should unite under a Mujahidin Shura Council formed and headed by al-Nusra Front. The unification of forces, so the forum member, would quells the multiplicity of factions. The forum strategist quotes examples of consolidation among the Somali, Malian and the Taliban Jihadi forces.⁷²⁶ The advice of the forum member strongly reminds us of the formation of the Mujahidin Shura Council (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*) of al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2006, which was led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006), and which after al-Zarqawi’s death in the same year was renamed by his successors, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, into the Islamic State of Iraq (*Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya*; ISI).

⁷²³ “Alfarooq,” “*Khutwa hamma yajib ala Jabhat al-Nusra al-qiyam biha*,” August 9, 2012, accessed October 31, 2012, <http://aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=21875>.

⁷²⁴ In his view, the fighters wasted light ammunition against armoured vehicles, and did not attack enough police, security or strategic state targets; they should instead execute more guerrilla-style ambushes, use more improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against Syrian government troops, attack critical supply lines, power centres, gas stations and electrical grids.

⁷²⁵ Justin Vela and Liz Sly, “In Syria, group suspected of al-Qaeda links gaining prominence in war to topple Assad,” *Washington Post*, August 20, 2011.

In February 2012, Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of al-Qaeda central organization, addressed Syrians to struggle against the regime under a Jihadi agenda. See Ayman al-Zawahiri, “*Ila al-amam ya usud al-sham – kalima tahridiyya*,” accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C2GFX8xanc>.

A Jihadi forum discussion took place shortly afterwards on February 13, 2012, on www.muslm.net. A discussant wrote that “the responsible for al-Nusra Front,” Abu Muhammad al-Julani, gave a speech in which he supported al-Zawahiri’s incitement. The forum member then asked: “What is the connection between *Jabhat Nusrat al-Sham* [sic] under al-Julani and al-Qaeda Organization under al-Zawahiri – Are they one team?” Another forum member answered affirmatively, “Yes, they belong to one team.” See “al-Natiq,” “*Ayman al-Zawahiri wa Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham*,” February 13, 2012, accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=470626>.

⁷²⁶ “Alfarooq,” “*Khutwa hamma yajib ala Jabhat al-Nusra al-qiyam biha*,” August 9, 2012, accessed October 31, 2012, <http://aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=21875>.

“The Jihadi Al-Nusrah Front, wrote the contributor, should join ranks with the mujahideen, establish a Shura Council of Jihadi brigades, generate communication and coordination tools, establish a logistics and intelligence center and a unified command center, and appoint one leader for all of the mujahideen in Syria [...] Every group fighting the regime should declare its organizational, administrative and military allegiance to the Al-Nusrah Front.” International Institute for Counterterrorism (ICT), ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, September 2012, accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/JihadiWebsitesMonitoring/JWMGPeriodicalReviews/tabid/344/Articleid/1118/currentpage/1/Default.aspx>, 30.

In the Syrian discussion, the forum member also advised that all fighters “should unite under one flag” (*raya wahida*). This flag should be provided by al-Nusra Front. The discourse around Prophet Muhammad’s black war banner has a strongly mobilizing function, as well as a special pictorial, semiotic and theological dimension in online jihad (see chapter 4.d.iii.1). The black flag with the Islamic credo on it in white represents leadership and unity in armed struggle and is steadily present in the designs and the graphic art of online jihad; the concept is bolstered in numerous theological articles, which, for example, appear in Jihadi e-magazines, such as *Mu’askar al-Battar*.⁷²⁷

Interestingly, the forum member above quoted who gives advice on leadership issues has no formal theological education. He is not a sheikh who is eligible to issue religious opinions (*fatawa*), or a leader within any formal organizational affiliation, neither is he connected to authority and standing within a physical Jihadi group. His credentials are “only” virtual; they lie in the quality of his Jihadi online activity, since he is a member of the quasi-institutionalized discourse of online jihad. Traditional religious or organizational authority structures are in online jihad partly irrelevant (see also the chapter “Theological Virtual Leadership”). Instead, the membership in a discussion network (here: The Global Jihad Network; <http://aljahad.com/vb/>), and the quality of contributions create status, then hierarchy, and in the end translate into discursive dominion and leadership. Co-discussants reacted positively to this post, which the same member also published on “The Network of Supporters of the Fighters” (*Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahidin*). This example can serve as a yardstick to measure discursive leadership: The process by which status, authority, hierarchy and then finally discursive leadership are created, depends on the quality of contributions and their popularity among co-discussants.⁷²⁸ Discursive dominion and leadership also result from the use of different linguistic means as well as inequalities and elaborateness in communicative codes and speech patterns, such as the elaborateness of laudations, intercessions and religious formulae (See the chapter “Discursive Ritualism on Jihadi Forums”). However, it must be said that both the Global Jihad and Supporters networks are heavily streamlined discussion forums. More diverse and open discussions, including the frequent critique of posts and the breach of Jihadi discussions-harmony, take place, for example, on the “Hanin,” “Islamic Awakening” and “I am a Muslim” forums. However, the latter forums attract mixed audiences and are not as dominated by doctrinaire proponents of global jihad.

⁷²⁷ Abu Jandal al-Azdi, “*Al-Alwiya wa-l-rayat*,” *Mu’askar al-Battar* 6(2003): 4-8.

⁷²⁸ Alfaroq, “*Khutwa hamma yajib ala Jabhat al-Nusra al-qiyam biha*,” accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=70150>.

5.b Mutual Virtual Leadership

In Jihadi online discussion networks, mutual virtual leadership models seem to work better than hierarchical models. We have already discussed some of their principles in the chapter “Jihadi media strategies,” for example, the “watching the watchers” concept, i.e., the mutual and participative reproduction of media-coverage on Jihadi relevant topics in order to use this information in favour of Jihadi propaganda and turn it back against opponents. Mutual leadership models are based on participative activities, whereby online-Jihadis coordinate and guide each other mutually. The goal is to bind larger groups of individuals together into shared activities and discourses. Autonomous propaganda teams and shared media activities on jihad forums are the best examples for this. They resemble al-Suri’s “secret incitement cells” (*saraya al-tahrid al-sirriyya*), al-Salim’s “media-teams” to initiate “media-campaigns” on online forums, but also those teams of activists who call themselves „media-jihad-development-units“ (*wahdat tatwir al-i’lam al-Jihadi*) and strive to adapt Hollywood based marketing and media strategies to jihad.⁷²⁹ For example, al-Suri’s envisioned self-reliable and participant units consist of one to three members, who are supposed to be well versed in Islamic law, politics, ideology and the use of modern media, especially the Internet. With the help of the WWW, they spread and translate everything that helps jihad, but particularly the propaganda of al-Qaeda and its subgroups. In spreading Jihadi propaganda, they shall act innovatively and according to their possibilities, which reflects al-Suri’s motto “a system, not organization!”⁷³⁰

There are manifold manifestations of mutual leadership in the Jihadi cyberspace. Examples are “media-incursions” into other forums and social networks, workshops to create propaganda, classes to learn design and iconography, Bluetooth groups to make propaganda compatible with cellular phones, upload-groups to put material on the Net, and transcription groups to translate material in different languages. The common element of all these groups is their coordination and participative communicative guidance of themselves and of their target audiences within virtual social networks. Most of these groups are organized on jihad forums,

⁷²⁹ For a further description see the chapter Jihadi media strategies above.

⁷³⁰ That does not mean that online Jihadis have consciously adapted al-Suri’s guidelines. But it helps to understand their mutually guiding behavior, for al-Suri’s analysis (finished in 2004) is strikingly close to Jihadi reality. Abu Musab al-Suri 2004: 2. Part, chapter 8, subchapter 5, „*Nazzariyat al-tanzim wa nizam al-amal fi saraya al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-’alamiyya*“ (Organizational theory and practical work mode of the Global Islamic Resistance Cells). Al-Suri’s precepts also concord with al-Salim’s concept of Jihadi media activists and teams. See Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim, „39 *wasila li khidmat al-jihad wa-l-musharaka fih*“, available on the Internet.

which work as “collective organizers” in the mutual leadership process.⁷³¹ Yet, similar groups also form on non-Jihadi discussion forums. This process falls under participative “media incursions” (*ghazwat i’lamiyya*). Moreover, Jihadi e-magazines, which are published on the Internet, also function as collective organizers in as much as they facilitate the built-up of mutual leadership groups: The magazines often initiate agendas, call for contributions and glorify lone wolves. The mutual glorification of lone wolves, for example, happens on the side of major media companies and dispersed Jihadis, and it is the collective organization of the individual terrorism paradigm through communication. The guidelines are then picked up in the discourses, workshops and distribution activities of grassroots-activists. An illustrative example is the following post from a Jihadi forum, which describes virtual leadership through the words of a report in the Lebanese daily al-Nahar. The article was scanned in, annotated and re-published by forum members. The post and the original newspaper report are about a group of Jihadi media activists who call themselves “descendants of Bin Laden” (*Ahfad Bin Laden*) and circulate a popular cd-series of Bin Laden’s speeches. The speeches are described as programmatic (*manhaji*), which in theological terms refers to the Jihadi method by which Islam is supposed to be put into practice. *Manhaj* refers here to a practical theological guideline how to practise jihad by a deceased organizational authority – Bin Laden – who in this case assumes the position of a *post-mortem* virtual leader. In addition, the mutual leadership aspect is recognizable in the summons “Watch and Spread” (*shahid wa unshur*). The slogan is printed on the downloadable cd-covers and accords with the participatory multiplier-effect of social media, which is the root mechanism of mutual virtual leadership. In this post, Jihadis also use words from the newspaper report that clearly define their own social interactions as mutual leadership. In fact, Jihadis exercise mutual leadership through this report. All activists are supposed to spread and re-distribute this topic as many times as possible among Muslims:

“Written on these discs is “Watch and Spread!” That is no coincidence or does not appeal to the curiosity of a few, but is a carefully targeted policy on the side of the terrorist groups to

⁷³¹ “Collective organizers” are carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites. The concept stems from Vladimir Lenin. According to Lenin, the “role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.” Vladimir Lenin, “Where to Begin?,” *Iskra*, No. 4, May 1901, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/may/04.htm>.

Modifying Lenin’s idea, there are two sorts of collective organizers. Firstly, there are collective organizers in the sense of central ideas and myths. Secondly, collective organizers are also central publications, organs or platforms that facilitate information-sharing and networking.

coordinate their thoughts and policies through a new form of media warfare” [...annotated in red]: “Who joins [the new media warfare], oh descendants of bin Laden???”⁷³²

...يا أحفاد بن لادن # الصحافة للأمريكان # اتفعد ؟! # نشر الإصدارات بين المسلمين على الأثر

http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=38267

الأمّن يطارد مرّوجي أقراص مضغوطة تشيد بالإرهاب في سطيّف

علّمت "النهار" أنّ مختلف الوحدات الأمنيّة على مستوى ولاية سطيّف، خاصّة المختصّة في الثّحري والبحث، قد باشّرت مؤخّراً عمليّة واسعة وبطريقة سرّية لملاحقة ومتابعة الجهات المسؤولّة عن ترويج مجموعة من الأقراص المضغوطة التي تشيد بالعمليات الإرهابيّة، والتي تنبّأها ما يعرف بالجماعة السلفيّة، حيث علّمت أنّ الأمّن بسطيّف قد عثّر مؤخّراً على مجموعة من الأقراص المضغوطة، لتسجيل خاص بمجزرة المنصورة قبل

أكثر من عام، والتي راح ضحيتها أعوان الدرك الوطني، خاصّة وأن هذه الأقراص مكتوب عليها "شاهد وانشر" وهذا ما يعني أنّ القضية غير متعلّقة بالصدفة أو فضول البعض، وإنما بسياسة منتهجة من طرف الجماعات الإرهابيّة لتسويق أفكارها وسياسات، من خلال حرب إعلاميّة جديدة

فمن لها يا أحفاد بن لادن
؟؟؟؟

نشر الأقراص التي توضح للمسلمين منهج المجاهدين

ضمن حملة أسمع منهم ولا تسمع عنهم !

Screenshot of the scanned-in newspaper article from Lebanese daily al-Nahar with Jihadi annotations: “Who joins [the new media warfare], oh descendants of bin Laden???”



Screenshot from post discussed above that symbolizes the copying and re-manufacturing of the propaganda-cd that can be downloaded from the forum (via a free file hoster)

⁷³² “Ya ahfad bin Laden,” accessed May 5, 2011, <http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=38267>.

In respect of mutual leadership, the Jihadi Net propagates two paradigms in parallel. Members are supposed to be “lone wolves” in real-life, but tight knit groups and participative actors in cyberspace. Moreover, it becomes clear through their shared activities, that online Jihadis are neither passive reproducers of propaganda, nor marionettes of central leaders. They often integrate new elements into the mutual propaganda process, such as watching western media and discussing them for their own purposes. This so-called “watching the watchers” media strategy was already discussed in the chapter “Jihadi media strategies.”

Firstly, mutual leadership can be very well observed in “media incursions” (*ghazwat i'lamiyya*) on jihad forums. Such campaigns are often triggered by statements and videos of Jihadi media companies. Forum members and sympathizers call upon each other to form teams and distribute the material in the Internet. In addition, they create design, translate the material and develop background scenarios for terrorist attacks. This happened, for example, after the German Jihadi Bekkay Harrach had threatened Germany society with attacks in October 2009, should German troops not be withdrawn from Afghanistan after the elections. In a video published by al-Qaeda’s media company al-Sahab, Harrach appeared in a suit and in front of a red background just like U.S. president Barack Obama in his Cairo speech in June 2009. With this iconic self-depiction Harrach tried to reverse the image of power and project it on himself. Members of jihad forums immediately called upon sympathizers to distribute the message on German forums in order to influence German public opinion. In parallel, strategic scenarios dealt with the location and size of German population centres, which was part of a debate, how 100.000 people could be killed. The post was titled “The night of the 100,000 deaths – A present for those who gather intelligence [on the forums].”⁷³³ Below is an example of a media-incursion that was promoted on one forum:

⁷³³ “*Laiylat al-100,000 qatla – Hadiya li-l-mutaraqqibin*,” accessed October 9, 2010, <http://www.al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=86979>.

غزوة ألمانيا الإعلامية

لأصحاب الهمم التي تناطح السحاب ... حصراً

1 von 7

06.10.2009 13:34

غزوة ألمانيا الإعلامية - [الفترة محدودة جداً !!] الله أكبر - منتديات الطلوجة الإسلامية

<http://www.al-falouja.com/vb/showthread.php?t=86158>

الفترة محدودة جداً !! الله أكبر

المطلوب هنا فقط

فريق للنشر في المنتديات

و فريق للنشر عبر البريد

سيتم طرح المواضيع التي ستُنشر لاحقاً

رتبوا صفوفكم جهزوا أنفسكم

المطلوب إعادة ترتيب قائمة بالمنتديات الغربية بشكل عام و الألمانية بشكل خاص

„The media-attack against Germany“, a reaction to a threat video against Germany by al-Qaeda's media company al-Sahab, al-Falluja Forum, 2.10.2009

„Media-Invasion of Germany

There is little time ... Allah is the greatest!

The only thing that is required:

A team to publish on forums

And a team to publish via mailing lists

Topic suggestions for further publications will follow

Arrange your rows and get ready!

Revise the list of common foreign forums, especially German forums!“⁷³⁴

All major jihad forums have subsections dedicated to media incursions in order to spread Jihadi propaganda. These contain often “sticky” posts that are chosen for further discussion

⁷³⁴ Source: „The media-attack against Germany“, a reaction to a threat video against Germany by al-Qaeda's media company al-Sahab, al-Falluja Forum, accessed October 2, 2009.

and remain on top of discussion threads.⁷³⁵ Al-Jahafil contains the following sections for interactive and mutual actions:

مواضيع المنتدى : الجهاد الإلكتروني				
الموضوع / كاتب الموضوع	التقييم	المشاركة الأخيرة	مشاركات	المشاهدات
مُشَيِّت: هدية من كنوز القلوجة ■ هام ■ شرح مرني لكيفية توليد عشرات الروابط بأقل من نصف ساعة/ مثل المراكز الإعلانية جليليبي الارهابي	4	17:17 10-11-14 بواسطة محمد الفلاح	4	32
مُشَيِّت: غزو المنتديات العامة بالإصدارات الجهادية (بالصور) الجهاد الإلكتروني	8	11:12 10-11-09 بواسطة محمد الفلاح	8	440
مُشَيِّت: دور أنصار الجهاد لمواجهة الحملة الصليبية ضد المنتديات والمواقع الجهادية نرجوا التثبيت salafi	3	20:59 10-04-25 بواسطة حنطة	3	255
مُشَيِّت: لامة ألماتيا الكافرة : تمن عليكم لثالث مرة بتحديد اليوم الموعد!!! محمد الفلاح	2	15:43 09-10-05 بواسطة الجهاد الإلكتروني	2	250

Sticky posts on the Jihadi forum al-Jahafil posted between May and September 2009, accessed November 23, 2010, see <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=63>

1. “A video-explanation how to create dozens of links within less than half an hour”;
2. “An incursion on general forums with Jihadi publications”;
3. “The role of jihad supporters in countering the crusader campaign against jihad forums and websites”;
4. “To the infidel German nation: We grant you for the third time the date of the promised day [of a terrorist attack, i.e. the threat uttered by Bekkay Harrach against Germany in October 2009].”

Secondly, workshops (*warshat 'amal*) are another important form of ritualized participative activities. Their purpose is to work collectively on media strategies and products. At the same time this work intensifies the emotional bonds among participants, which heightens the in-group cohesion. A prominent contributor on Jihadi forums has formulated a recipe for reproduction and shared propaganda. He details how the dynamics of a workshop and media-campaign function:

“This one publishes the speech, another one analyses it,

And another one summarizes it.

They keep in their bookmarks a favourite list of free file hosters,

And another list of non-jihad forums.

⁷³⁵ “Sticky posts” (also discussed above) are selected topics chosen for further discussion, which remain on top of a discussion thread. The normal chronological sequence, last post first, is thus stopped. The sticky post here are taken from the jihad forum al-Jahafil, which was probably abandoned in late 2009, kept floating through virtual space like the “Flying Dutchman” of Jihadi forums, and became again very active in late 2011, when a number of other, primary forums suffered from periodical shut-downs.

And barely has a Jihadi production been published, they already retreat into workshops to continue and contribute to its spreading.”⁷³⁶

Participants with at least 30 posts are asked to translate jihad material into English, French, German, Russian, and even Hebrew and vice versa. Furthermore, they shall up- and download data on free file hosters and use sound- and video engineering, media animation and graphic programs like Flash and Photoshop in order to create propaganda material:

ونعلن لأعضائنا المجاهدين أن الورشة بحاجة للمهارات والخبرات التالية :

- الترجمة من اللغة العربية إلى - الإنجليزية - الفرنسية - الألمانية - الروسية - العبرية - والعكس -.
- رفع الملفات على مواقع الرفع المتعددة .
- الهندسة الصوتية والمونتاج .
- التصميم والجرافيكس - العمل على البرامج التالية - فوتوشوب - فلاش - سبوتش ماكس .
- تفريغ الإصدارات الصوتية والمرئية .

“Workshop”, *Shabakat al-Mujahidin al-Elektruniyya* Forum, 20. Oktober 2010

Thirdly, another important element of mutual leadership is design (*tasmim*). On forums, there is a small scale industry of devotional pictures. We must differentiate between the process and the product. In the process, activists teach each other cooperatively how to design, which is an integral element of mutual leadership. This way, activists learn how to produce their own propaganda. The activists gather around certain topics, often triggered by messages and productions of Jihadi media companies. This activity shows clearly, that cyber jihad is fed by real terrorist activity. Activists then teach each other cooperatively how to design and this way strengthen their online cohesion. They collectively glorify violent deeds. The outcomes are iconic representations. Iconic images perpetrate and permeate all levels of online jihad, mostly depicting martyrs and icons of global jihad.

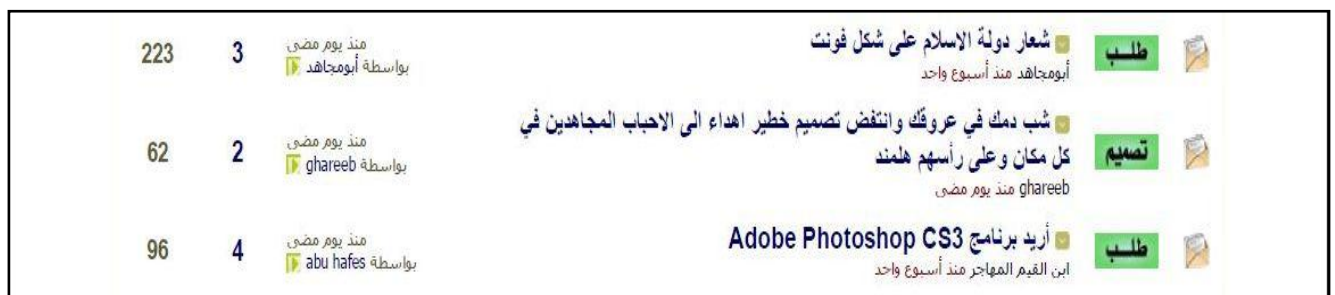
The grade of participation and quality of designs also determine a participant’s position in the forum hierarchy. If the quality is good, he or she raises within the forum hierarchy. Artistic leaders thus emerge within the design sub-forums. Others want to catch up with them. A vivid competition develops. For example, the Ansar al-Mujahidin forum regularly organizes “design contests” and honours the best results. The participants rise within the forum’s

⁷³⁶ Abu Dujana al-Khorasani (Humam al-Balawi), *Sifat la budda minha li-majahil al-Net*, accessed January 25, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=99249>.

internal hierarchy.⁷³⁷ But fame is not limited to the jihad forum alone because graphics are distributed in the wider Internet, which makes designers and forums known and attractive for possible sympathizers.

On a semiotic-conceptual level of virtual leadership, their common religious iconography through design, sound and script leads to a strong commonality of ritual praxis among online Jihadis. The chapter “symbols of online jihad” discusses this question at length. Jihadi signs are iconic in terms of their shape (such as the use of Arabic calligraphy to embody divine guidance), sound (such as *anashid* and *huda* songs to foster supernatural communitas), and their marketing value (such as propaganda designs). The latter create iconic connections between the abstract concept jihad (object) and a concrete idea in a recipient’s head (a “mental representation” of how jihad should be fought).⁷³⁸

The interrelated iconography of script, sound and design signs characterizes virtual networks in general. If “religious symbolism” creates according to Habermas “a commonality of ritual praxis and a linguistically produced intersubjectivity,”⁷³⁹ then we could argue that one of its effects in our context is communicative-guidance in the organizational virtual networks of “online jihad.” The symbols of online jihad co-function through rituals of online jihad; and both need a third complementary component, which Foucault calls religiously based conscience-guiding (“*la direction de conscience*,” also *ars artium, techne technon*), i.e., the doctrinaire element, which in our case is embedded into the “theology of online jihad” (to be discussed in the next main chapter).



In the screengrab above, a forum member calls for designs on Jihadi campaigns in Iraq and in Afghanistan. The section also contains a member’s question if someone can provide the

⁷³⁷ For example, a Jihadi design competition, which was organized on the Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum in January 2010. Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, subforum “contest for the best design”, March 2009, <http://www.ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15811>.

⁷³⁸ See Elizabeth Mertz, “Semiotic Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36 (2007): 337-353.

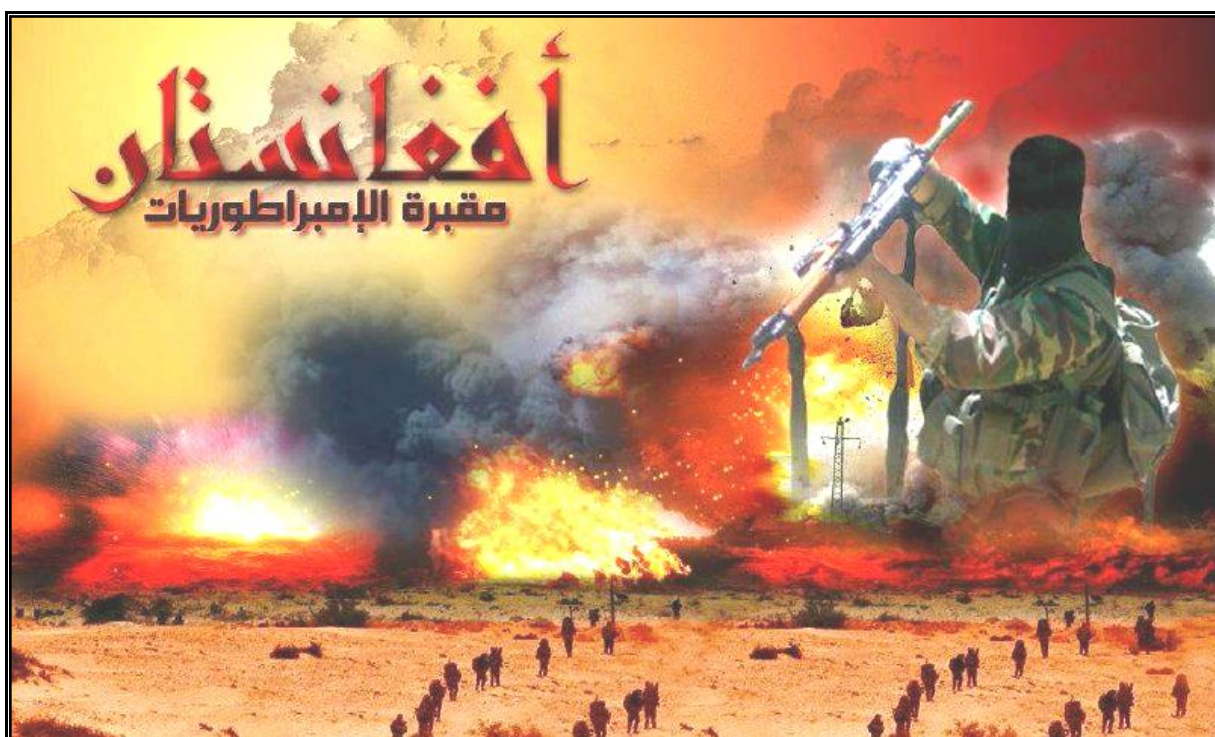
⁷³⁹ Leaning on Habermas’ „über den religiösen Symbolismus hergestellte Gemeinsamkeit der rituellen Praxis und einer sprachlich erzeugten Intersubjektivität.“ Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Band 2, *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 74.

program “Photoshop CS3”. The different sections deal with instructions for graphic programmes and sound engineering, as well as how to create propaganda graphics for different Jihadi fronts in Irak, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia, as well as for other pressing Jihadi topics: Al-Faluja Forum, January 2010.



Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, subforum “contest for the best design”, March 2009,

<http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15811>



Place 1 in the “contest for the best design”, Afghanistan-section, *Ansar al-Mujahidin* forum,

March 2009, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15811>

The slogan “Afghanistan: The Imperial Graveyard” crowns one of the pictures that were awarded a prize in the “contest for the best design” on Ansar al-Mujahidin forum. Clouds seem to arise from combat, and they merge with the clouds of heaven. According to a well-known tradition on a battle prayer of Muhammad, Allah is “the mover of the clouds” (*mujri al-sahab*).⁷⁴⁰ The Kufi calligraphy used in the picture awakens notions of piety and right guidance. Generally, Kufi script is often used for inscriptions on buildings, and therefore an expression of power. But it also reminds of a “true” original Islam between the 7th and 10th centuries. Among the classical calligraphic scripts used on Jihadi forums are Thuluth, Eastern Kufi, old Kufi, Muhaqqaq, Naskhi, Nastaliq and Riq’a.⁷⁴¹ This depiction also influences the discussions around the topic, which often contain phrases of legitimacy and reward.

Fourthly, another form of mutual leadership takes place through Jihadi e-magazines. Dozens of Jihadi e-magazines have been published on the Internet since 2003. Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia started with the online publication of two Jihadi magazines. Its magazines “*Sawt al-Jihad*” (2003-8) and “*Mu’askar al-Battar*” (2003-4) were milestones in terms of Jihadi online missionary work, medial professionalization, coherent ideological self-explanations and virtual leadership of enthusiastic followers. The e-magazine “*Sada al-Malahim*” picked up on the guidelines of virtual leadership in Jihadi media strategy. It was published by al-Qaeda in the south of the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen) between January 2008 and February 2011. The first issue treated the doctrine “*Do not rely on anyone but yourself*” at length and called for more individual activism guided by principles, not physical structures.⁷⁴² *Sada al-Malahim* once served as the media intersection between Saudi Arabian and Yemenite al-Qaeda activists. Following repeated crackdowns on militants in Saudi Arabia, Jihadi activism shifted to Yemen, where in January 2009 the remnants of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda and the Yemenite al-Qaeda merged into al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Not long time afterwards, one of AQAP’s strongest weapons in the media sector emerged. The e-magazine “Inspire” has been published by AQAP’s media arm “al-Malahim.” Technical details, simple messages and a glossy design try to draw media activists, copy cats and single attackers into the ideological milieu of AQAP. The marketing of attacks in such a way is in line with Jihadi media strategy; the main goal is to make the message popular and guide followers. At the same time, it fulfils a third function, since the propaganda frightens opponents. The upload of the magazine on jihad discussion forums triggers intense discussions. Then the message is

⁷⁴⁰ For example, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, No. 2818, accessed April 26, 2013, http://library.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=146&hid=2818&pid=101511.

⁷⁴¹ See Jonathan Fighel, “Radical Islamic Internet Propaganda: Concepts, Idioms and Visual Motifs,” in *Intermedia Seduction for Terrorist Recruiting*, edited by Boaz Ganor et al. (Amsterdam: IOS, 2007), 34-38.

⁷⁴² *Dhu al-Fiqar*, “*La tukallaf illa nafsaka*,” *Sada al-Malahim* 1(2008), 12-13.

further spread in the Net. The fact that Inspire is an English-language magazine increases its reach to audiences all over the world. In the past, professional media operators like the U.S.-American Samir Khan (killed by U.S. in September 2011) ran and edited the publication, but grassroots activists are given ample possibilities to participate. Together they initiate discourses around terrorist tactics, ideology and role-models, which transcend the circle of editors and contributors. The mutual leadership element lies in the competition of supporters who strive to contribute to the magazine, plus in the widespread discussions that are set in process by the ideas of “Inspire.”

The first issue of al-Qaeda’s e-magazine Inspire appeared on the Net in June 2010. The publication has picked up al-Suri’s doctrine of self-responsible attacks and communicative leadership through propaganda. “Inspire” markets this doctrine in the global Jihadi movement. The magazine represents the doctrine, since it draws its name from the Quran verse “*O Messenger, incite [harrid] the Believers to fight*” (Q 8:65). One of the focal points are lone-wolves who have allegedly been “inspired” by Jihadi propaganda. Inspire issue 4 of January 2011, for example, features different articles on single attackers. One of them is the Iraqi-born British resident Taimour al-Abdaly, who prematurely detonated himself in an attempted bombing in Sweden’s capital Stockholm in December 2010. Al-Abdaly’s goal was to avenge the publication of the Muhammad caricatures and Sweden’s military involvement in Afghanistan. The second “hero” and role-model featured in the same magazine issue was Roshonara Choudry, a U.K. citizen of Bangladeshi origin, who was jailed for life by a British court for stabbing British MP Stephen Timms in May 2010.⁷⁴³ Choudry allegedly watched sermons of Jihadi online leader Anwar al-Awlaqi, who was the main ideologue Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Awlaqi, according to U.S. allegations, also influenced several other terrorist attackers in the U.S.⁷⁴⁴ He cooperated closely with the U.S. citizen Samir Khan, who had moved to Yemen in 2009. Together they ran the publication of the Jihadi e-magazine Inspire from Yemen. Both were assassinated by the U.S. with a drone strike in September 2011.

Let us illustrate the communicative leadership approach of the magazine! The title story of al-Qaeda’s e-magazine Inspire, special issue of November 2010, describes how two assemble explosive devices and why to do so. The publication illustrates this with two attempted terrorist attacks by the AQAP, the organization which publishes the magazine: Two packages were sent via FedEx and UPS in freight airliners to Jewish targets in the U.S., but were detected in Dubai and London respectively. The targets in the U.S. were thus spared. The

⁷⁴³ Inspire, issue 4, January 2011, archive of the author.

⁷⁴⁴ See U.S. media coverage on al-Awlaqi.

explosive material PETN was hidden in toner cartridges of printers. A financial effort of 4,200 U.S. dollars, boasts the magazine, caused millions of costs to the West, which had to take new security measures for its international airfreight. The story boasts also that the two bombs sent to two Synagogues in Chicago almost reached their destinations. AQAP calls this “Operation Hemorrhage,” which is in line with its strategy of “bleeding out the enemy by small cuts.” The base-line of the story is of course “Do it yourself!” – i.e. individualized terrorism (*irhab fardi*)

In his book “The Administration of Barbary” al-Qaeda strategist Abu Bakr Naji already describes an asymmetric guerrilla and media warfare strategy to “bleed out” the West.⁷⁴⁵ The regional al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) follows this strategy to the point, calling it a “strategy of thousand cuts” that is supposed to “bleed the enemy to death”. Since large and spectacular attacks are not feasible at the moment, smaller attacks must do. In order

“...to bring down America we do not need to strike it big. In such an environment of security phobia that is sweeping America, it is more feasible to stage smaller attacks ... This strategy of attacking the enemy with smaller, but more frequent operations is what some may refer to as the strategy of thousand cuts. The aim is to bleed the enemy to death.”⁷⁴⁶

Complemented by an effective guerrilla marketing via the Internet, the “strategy of thousand cuts” is supposed to increase the “environment of security phobia” in the West. At this juncture, online supporters (“jihobbyists”) play an important role. They are supposed to participate. Participants shall implement the strategy by up- and downloading material, discussing it, and by creating communicative structures that attract followers and copy-cats, who in turn might organize their own small scale attacks.

In its winter 2010 issue, the e-magazine “Inspire” strengthened its call for participants. Like in the special issue of November 2010, one of the last pages was dedicated to the question how supporters can participate in media jihad.

The Inspire approach accords with what U.S. Intelligence-Analyst Jarret Brachman calls **“Watching the Watchers”**.⁷⁴⁷ Friedrich Dürrenmatt wrote once a crime novel, which tells about a situation in which everyone is watching everybody. It is about the paranoia, but also

⁷⁴⁵ Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarat al-tawahhush: Akhtar marhala satamurr biha al-umma*, accessed July 31, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr>, and Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The most critical stage through which the Umma will pass*, English translation by William McCants, accessed July 31, 2012, <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/olin/images/Management%20of%20Savagery%20-%2005-23-2006.pdf>.

⁷⁴⁶ *Inspire*, issue 3 (November 2010), “Letter from the Editor.”

⁷⁴⁷ Jarret Brachman, “Watching the Watchers”, *Foreign Policy*, November 2010.

creativity and dynamism caused by panoptical surveillance (“Vom Beobachten des Beobachters der Beobachter”⁷⁴⁸). In a Dürrenmatt-sense the editors of Inspire – as all other active online operators and supporters – are watching and correcting each other’s behaviour. But they are also very aware of being watched and the press coverage on jihad in the Western media. Their argument is that all media coverage should be collected in order to re-use it for Jihadi purposes. This is also in line with al-Qaeda’s the **“Power of Truth”-strategy** to patrol the net for exploitable tidbits and lever them against the United States and the West by turning its own words against it (see the chapter on media strategy above). One of the main goals is to quote western experts on western failures. “Leading al Qaeda thinkers had long seen that propaganda was useful for riling up their base and thumbing their noses at the West. But they now realized that the web could transform passive consumers of their ideology into active producers of it.”⁷⁴⁹

starting a media campaign – Inspire 4
FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO HELP AL-MALAHM MEDIA

WE GET A LOT of e-mail's from Muslims all around the world asking: 'how can I help you guys? What can I do to help the cause of Allah?' Due to that, we have decided to dedicate an article to this subject so that one's *ajr* (reward) for helping the mujahidin is multiplied swiftly, *In Shā' Allāh*.

Let's now look at some of the things one can help the mujahidin in within the confines of the media sector.

1. Archiving

One of the best ways to communicate large amounts of data to us is to archive that into a PDF or DOC file. We are typically looking for archives on events related to international jihad, events here in Yemen, and jihadi's in the West that make the news. So for example, collect reports and analysis on a topic, let's say Taimour Abdaly, gather all the HTML or MHT files together or compile it into a PDF or DOC file.

„watching the watchers“

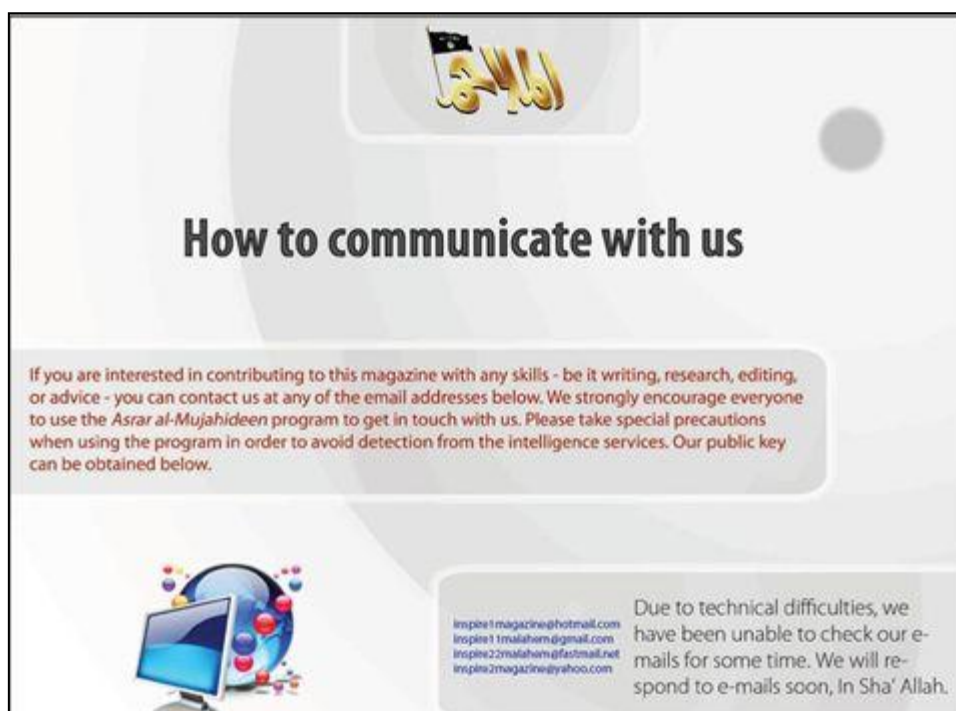
Source: Inspire, issue 4, December 2010, red box added by the author

⁷⁴⁸ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Der Auftrag oder vom Beobachten des Beobachters der Beobachter. Novelle in 24 Sätzen (Zürich: Diogenes Verlag, 1988).

⁷⁴⁹ Jarret Brachman, “Watching the Watchers.”

The magazine Inspire exerts hierarchical as well as mutual virtual leadership. The hierarchical element is represented by “al-Malahim,” the media-arm of AQAP, which publishes the magazine. The magazine was first edited by the U.S.-citizen Samir ibn Zafar Khan, who was killed by the U.S. in 2011 together with the U.S.-Yemenite Jihadi cleric Anwar al-Awlaqi. Al-Awlaqi was a staunch supporter of the magazine and has been tied to a number of terrorist plots in the United States. Moreover, grassroots followers participate in the publication. Participating in Inspire is like an honour and gate to online jihad and motivates other grassroots freelance activists to produce similar publications.

The magazine also tries to break down the barriers of inactivity by integrating its readers into an all out media jihad. A possible outcome of this may be a process of radicalization, when sympathizers who normally just sit and watch start participating in the media-work of Inspire, and then decide to follow up their radical speech with actions. Supporters and followers gather around the media campaigns of Inspire, which enhances the feeling of “agency” among the participants.



U.S. counterterrorism analyst Jarret Brachman observes from an insider viewpoint that

“America’s counterterrorism establishment is acutely aware that a growing number of individuals have moved beyond consuming extremist content online and now yearns to reproduce this content in new online social media. What is lacking, however, is an

explanation for why and when this process becomes a security concern. Is uploading a photo of Anwar al-Awlaki as your Facebook avatar a cause for concern? Or is this just a way to blow off steam? Could it actually be therapeutic in that it helps individuals release the frustration and anger they hold in the real world? [...] The online al-Qaeda movement has created an expectation—particularly given the influence of Abu Dujanah [a Jihadi forum leader who perpetrated a suicide attack] —that Internet participants will try to live up to their virtual selves in the real world. Abu Dujanah’s rage and depression about the dissonance he saw between his legendary virtual self and his mundane physical self became unbearable. He had to blow himself up in order to set the balance right. In essence, his act of suicide bombing was the only way he knew how to relieve the pain of that dissonance.”⁷⁵⁰

As Brachman’s observations show, the international CT community is becoming increasingly aware of the dangers of online jihad and advises security policies how to deal with the phenomenon. Since approximately 2005, al-Qaeda’s has gradually transformed from an “[Arab,] elitist, exclusive, hierarchical organization into an inclusive [international and multiethnic] global movement,” at the same time stressing participative leadership and self-responsible actions. It becomes ever harder to distinguish between a “non-violent propagandist and violent al-Qaeda activist.”⁷⁵¹ Furthermore, Brachman asks himself where the border between physical and online reality begins, respectively blurs. This is certainly one of the most important questions of our time. Governments and their security apparatuses, fond of tough measures, need to be careful not to crack nuts with sledgehammers in their attempt to defeat both the physical and virtual infrastructures of global jihad. Yet, propaganda by itself can be perceived as so dangerous that its figureheads are taken out. The personification of al-Qaeda’s transformation into a popular “join the caravan” approach is, in Brachman’s eyes, the U.S. citizen and preacher Anwar al-Awlaqi, who “instinctively understood the Challenges of being Muslim in the West.”⁷⁵² Al-Awlaqi allegedly influenced more than a dozen radicalized Muslims, who planned, prepared or executed attacks, with his online sermons on YouTube. A follower with whom he was in Email contact, perpetrated a life costly terrorist attack at a U.S. military base in December 2009. Several other attacks, “inspired” by al-Awlaqi, failed to be executed due to poor technical knowledge of the perpetrators, or maybe simple due to lucky

⁷⁵⁰ Jarret M. Brachman and Alex N. Levine, “You Too Can Be Awlaki,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 35:1 (2011), 25-46.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 43.

circumstances.⁷⁵³ Al-Awlaqi was assassinated by a U.S. drone-team in Yemen in September 2011. But Brachman understands that the “biggest challenge for governments is the increased difficulty for law enforcement to distinguish between legitimate security threats and those who may be undertaking legal activities in the name of al-Qaeda, such as making graphics, videos, or websites. By over-policing individuals who may not be operationally supporting al-Qaeda, governments may actually be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, where their search for terrorists is actually the catalyst for the emergence of operational terrorists, not just virtual fantasy ones.”⁷⁵⁴

#1
AM 09 : 09 2010 / 11 / 21

مجلة Inspire 3 الرائعة تكشف تفاصيل عملية الطرود الطائرة : \$ 4200 !!

مجلة Inspire 3 الرائعة تكشف تفاصيل عملية الطرود الطائرة : \$ 4200 !!
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

الطرد ————— الطرد

فقط \$ 4200

Bandwidth Exceeded :(

This file is unavailable because this user has ran out of bandwidth. Please try again later.

INSPIRE 3 مجلة

الرائعة

تكشف تفاصيل عملية الطرود :

تكلفة الطرد الطائر الذي فجر طائرة UPS فقط \$ 4200
واما الخسارة فلا مبالغة إن قلنا ملايين الدولارات !!
وهناك تفاصيل اخرى تحتاج لترجمة الاسود

فهلموا يا اسود ... فهلموا يا اسود

:: فالهمة الهمة في تعلم تجهيز الطرود ::

منقول

ابو يوسف البشير

وقف عضوية مؤقت

الحالة : 0

تاريخ التسجيل: 2009-06-01

رقم العضوية: 4402

المشاركات: 23,502

⁷⁵³ Robert Mackey, “Anwar al-Awlaki in his own words,” September 30, 2011, accessed January 28, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/30/anwar-al-awlaki-video-blogs>.

⁷⁵⁴ Brachman and Levine, “You Too Can Be Awlaki,” 44.

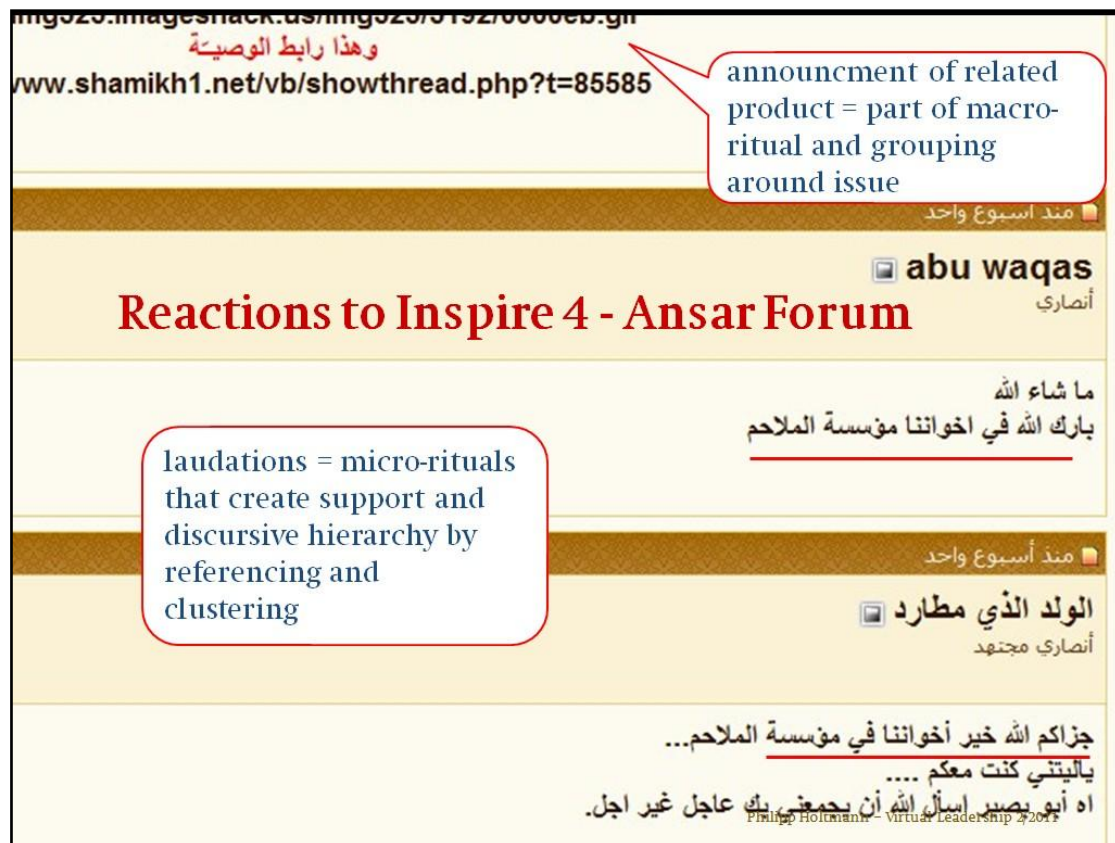
Announcement of the “Inspire”-magazine, issue 3 on the Jihadi forum al-Hanin (“The Longing”), accessed in January 2011,
<http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=207434&page=1>

“The costs of the air parcel that exploded the UPS flight were only 4,200 U.S. \$
Regarding the damage, it is no exaggeration to say that it is millions of dollars!!
There are other details that require translation by the lions
Come on, lions [of jihad] ...come on!
:: The task is now to learn how to assemble the packages ::”⁷⁵⁵

In the post above, a Jihadi forum member advertises the magazine and calls upon other members to take the instructions on bomb building seriously. The forum member ritually lauds the participants in the operation, calling them “lions [of jihad], to strengthen the message,”

Another post from a Jihadi discussion forum shows how supporters further advertise and distribute the e-magazine “Inspire.” They start a media-campaign around its re-distribution. The thread shows typical ritual processes of mutual leadership, such as the grouping around a key-topic and mutual laudations of members who introduced and followed up on the topic in the discussion thread. At the same time, the thread offers a possibility to announce related products and widen the discussion.

⁷⁵⁵ See the illustration above, text of a Jihadi forum-discussion on “Inspire” magazine. *al-Hanin* Forum, accessed in January 2011, <http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=207434&page=1>.



Following the assassination of the Jihadi media leaders Ibrahim al-Banna, Anwar al-Awlaqi and Samir Khan by the U.S. in September 2011, a further e-magazine appeared on the Internet. In spring 2012, a new magazine was published by al-Malahem media (AQAP) titled “Expectations Full.” One contributor tries via discursive and participative stimuli to create classical communicative leadership patterns, which are almost comparable to the written commands of the Anarchist press in the late 19th century.⁷⁵⁶ The writer addresses decentralized organizational networks that are bound together by a common ideology. According to the writer, self-responsible individual attacks are successful against a militarily and politically over-confident enemy.

“If you're coming from the West, especially America, you might be asked by the leaders of the mujahidin or those who know where you're from why you didn't partake in jihad inside your country. If you tell them, "to help the mujahidin," they might tell you that attacking the enemy in their backyard is one of the best ways to help the jihad. They certainly will not force you to go back home, but they will leave that option open for you just in case you change your mind and decide to attack the enemy back home.

⁷⁵⁶ Compare to Whitney Kassel, „Terrorism and the International Anarchist Movement of the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries,“ *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32(2009): 237-252.

I strongly recommend all the brothers and sisters coming from the West to consider attacking America in its own backyard. The effect is much greater, it always embarrasses the enemy, and these type [sic] of individual decision-making attacks are nearly impossible for them to contain.”⁷⁵⁷

Online jihad activists appropriate the lone-wolf paradigm and market and discuss it self-responsibly on discussion forums. Proof for this can be found in posts such as the one. A forum member presents a list of 19 lone-wolf style attackers in the U.S. on whom he found news coverage. The contributor wants to honour the 19 attackers of 9/11 with this post and to motivate fellow Jihadis to do it likewise. The list includes attackers who are not Muslims or religiously motivated. However, the pattern of individualized action stands in the foreground.⁷⁵⁸

The Lone Wolf... الذئب الفردي... الخطر الكبير على أمريكا.. سلسلة رائعة! - شبكة المجاهد... <http://www.majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=9694>

عرض أول مشاركة عبر مغرور

أنواع عرض الموضوع أدوات الموضوع

#1 منذ يوم مضى

تاريخ الإنساب: Jul 2010
العمر: 20
المشاركات: 159

دوي القتابل
عنوان التميز
مشارك ومميز بالإعداد العسكري

مشاركة
قائمة

The Lone Wolf... الذئب الفردي... الخطر الكبير على أمريكا.. سلسلة رائعة!

يحيى المهاجر و يرجى التثبيت*

السلام عليكم

انا هنا سأحاول أن أضع ملخصات لبعض الناس الذين قاموا بعمليات حربية ضد أمريكا سواء كانوا من الأمريكان أنفسهم أو من غير الأمريكان و سواء كانوا مسلمين أو فقط أناس ما استطاعوا تحمل ظلم حكومة أمريكا... راجياً من الله أن يكثر من أمثالهم و أسأل الاخوة أن يتفاعلوا مع الموضوع... قال تعالى (و ما يعلم جنود ربك إلا هو)

⁷⁵⁷ Samir Z. Khan, “Expectations Full,” al-Malahem Media (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), accessed May 17, 2012, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=161389>, 8.

⁷⁵⁸ “Abu Turab al-Sa’idi,” “The lone wolf...al-dhi’b al-fardi...al-khatr al-kabir ala America, silsila ra’i’a,” May 14, 2011, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=39276>.

5.c Discursive Virtual Leadership: Post-Mortem Virtual Leaders

Leadership in cyberspace can also take the form of prominent discourses and ideas. In this chapter, we will focus on two examples of post-mortem virtual discursive leaders, their veneration as Jihadi icons and their most prominent ideas. The permanent discussion of Jihadi topics and the mutual motivation, as well as the rejection of critique, create discursive hierarchies and therefore communicative leadership structures that have a guiding effect on online-sympathizers. Within these structures, some contributors become more famous and popular than others. Discursive leaders on jihad forums emerge on the basis of group discussions.

A fundamental element of small-group communication is the development of guidance and emergence of leaders through discussions.⁷⁵⁹ By definition, functioning social networks are rather small units, the maximum size lying at 150 persons.⁷⁶⁰ Everything above that becomes impractical. Just one percent of the users on jihad forums are actively participating.⁷⁶¹ They choose their leaders by way of discussion and ritualized admiration. On jihad forums, temporary opinion leaders even emerge post mortem.

Differentiated ideas are expressions of individualism, but groups are bound together by a limited vocabulary and lexis. The encoded meaning of words and idioms can only be understood by insiders who share the group culture.⁷⁶² In jihad discussions, “linguistic codes” often create solidarity and homogeneity among discussants. They use “restrictive codes” to enhance their cohesion.

If an online jihad discussion participant lauds another contribution with “*Jazak Allah khayran*” (May Allah reward you) in script size 20, red letters, the message is automatically understood by other discussants: Someone else has greatly contributed to jihad. Also expressions like “*sinam al-Islam*” (literally “the hump of Islam”) are only understood by insiders. It means that jihad is the ultimate expression of Islam.⁷⁶³ Ever repeated expressions

⁷⁵⁹ Charles Pavitt, “Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship,” in *The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research*, ed. R. Frey et al. (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 313-334.

⁷⁶⁰ The Dutch media theorist Geert Lovink in an interview with „DiePresse.com” – “Interview mit Geert Lovink: Warum Facebook wieder verschwinden wird”, accessed December 16, 2010, <http://www.twentytwenty.at/2010/09/diepresse-com-interview-mit-geert-lovink-warum-facebook-wieder-verschwinden-wird/>.

⁷⁶¹ Daniel Kimmage, „Al-Qaeda Central and the Internet,” policy paper (Washington: New America Foundation, 2009).

⁷⁶² Compare to Felix Menzel, *Medienrituale und politische Ikonen* (Schnellroda: Antaios 2009), 51-52; and Albert Bergesen, “Die rituelle Ordnung,” in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, ed. Andreá Belliger and David J. Krieger (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 58-60.

⁷⁶³ This expression goes back to an allegedly sound Prophetic hadith (transmission of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions), in which Muhammad compares the duties of Islam to the different body parts of a camel, which was an extremely valuable animal in Arab tribal culture of the 7th century.

transport a sacrosanct meaning; create respect and hierarchies between Jihadis. But Jihadis are also capable of expressing differentiated ideas. Members who combine laudations with strategic thoughts often become discursive leaders on jihad forums. They enjoy a great deal of respect from other members.

This has become especially clear since early 2010. Finally, wrote a forum member, the goal is to break through the border between virtual activity and terrorist reality. Words shall be followed by deeds. “To demonstrate the honesty of words” became a key concept of discursive leadership. The trigger was the story of the Jordanian suicide attacker and online activist Humam al-Balawi aka Abu Dujana al-Khorasani. Al-Balawi was a loner and lived an isolated life. Jihadi forums were his major reality. He used them as main platform to channel his anger and self-radicalization. The Jordanian secret service allegedly recruited him to pose as a recruit and spy in terrorist training camps in the Afghan-Pakistani border region.⁷⁶⁴ Then the Jordanians passed al-Balawi on to CIA. In December 2009, al-Balawi perpetrated a suicide attack during an information exchange at a U.S. forward operating base near Khost in Afghanistan, where he killed several high-ranking CIA-officers and his Jordanian handler. Following his deed, al-Balawi became a superstar of the Jihadi cyberscene, whose members compared him to al-Qaeda leaders Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri as well as to al-Qaeda’s main theologian Abu Yahya al-Libi. Al-Balawi became a discussion magnet on jihad forums. “Therefore, we call upon our brothers, the lions of media jihad, ... to follow his example. Firstly, participate in the propagandist jihad and then in the military jihad, which may demonstrate the honesty of your words!”⁷⁶⁵ On jihad forums, subsections for propagandist design (tasmim) glorified him with hundreds of pictures. His example should be followed, members of the Jihadi Net exclaimed.

⁷⁶⁴ „Ghumud yaluff shakhsyat Abu Dujana al-Khorasani la tubaddiduhu siratuhi ... tabiban urduniyyan al-Hayat, January 16, 2010, see also a description of al-Balawi as a “loner” on al-Falluja Forum, Asda’ *‘amaliyat al-shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani*,” accessed January 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=99060>.

⁷⁶⁵ The forum writer „Zarqawi al-Falluja“, refers here to the classical division between jihad of the pen (*al-jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan*) and jihad by the sword (*al-jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan*), al-Falluja Forum, accessed January 19, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=98931&page=2>.



Design (*tasmim*) that glorifies the suicide-attacker al-Balawi aka al-Khorasani, “Vanquisher of the American secret services and degrader of the Jordanien secret services.” Source: Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, accessed January 2010

The meso-ritualistic identification with al-Balawi is mainly reflected in formulas that refer to passages of his texts. They are only clear to readers of his texts. For example, “When will my words drink from my blood [be put into practice] is the title of one of the last manifests by al-Balawi that has become a major slogan in the virtual Jihadi discourse.⁷⁶⁶ “My articles will witness against me, if I will not put them into effect!”, “My words will die, if I do not water them with my blood!, “Nothing is more assertive than a saying that is certified by a deed!” Due to their permanent discussion, these words of al-Balawi have become “discursive icons” that create a vivid interaction among forum discussants.

A specific discourse has developed with the goal to copy his radicalization process. Major jihad discussion forums like al-Falluja, Ansar al-Mujahidin and Shumukh al-Islam quickly opened sub-forums to honour al-Balawi’s death. His deed was interpreted as perfect example of “Then fight in God's cause—Thou art held responsible Only for thyself—And rouse the Believers!”⁷⁶⁷ – the epitome of Abu Musab al-Suri’s individualized jihad paradigm. Some participants simply posted quotations and lauded al-Balawi. Others observed how the deed of al-Balawi has changed the “meaning of words” in jihad. One member observed, “topics have

⁷⁶⁶ Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, „*Mata satashrab kalimati min dima'i*,“ accessed January 21, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=39970>.

⁷⁶⁷ Quran Yusuf Ali Version, Surat al-Nisa’ 84, for example on Shumukh al-Islam forum subsection “*Ustuwana bi 'idhn Allah al-shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani taqabbalahu Allah*,” accessed October 17, 2009, <http://www.shamikh1.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=69710>.

become time-bombs ... writers can achieve a lot, but only under one condition: They should die so their thoughts will live.”⁷⁶⁸ “When will we follow him?” asked the title of another post and continued “what would we have learnt from your [al-Balawi’s] words, if we don’t redraw them with our blood?”⁷⁶⁹

Al-Balawi’s transition from virtual to physical jihad was described as “*naḥfir*” (moving out to jihad).⁷⁷⁰ *Naḥfir* is a key-concept of jihad. The Palestinian Jihadi ideologue Abdallah Azzam wrote in the 1980s that Muslims were allowed migrating to jihad without the permission of their Muslim rulers (*naḥfir*).⁷⁷¹ Also the global jihad strategist Abu Musab al-Suri invokes this hallmark of Azzam’s international jihad paradigm and integrates it into his concept of “individualized terrorism” within Global Islamic Resistance.⁷⁷² In cyber jihad, the *naḥfir*-concept has come to mean the full transition from E-Jihadi to suicide bomber.

The second suicide bomber who resembles this paradigm is a former cyber-Jihadi known as “Abu Omar al-Shami”. Al-Shami attacked a cultural centre in West Iraq, killing 11 people on February 24, 2011. His deed immediately triggered an excited discussion on the Shumukh al-Islam jihad forum. Also al-Shami’s deed was glorified as “departure to war” (*naḥfir*). The surrounding discussions resembled very much the reactions to al-Balawi’s attack. “Here is a real terrorist man...while we are still sitting around. May Allah be merciful with you, my brother, and let you dwell in the highest paradise!”⁷⁷³ The discussions around al-Shami revealed again a very flexible treatment of the cyber jihad-issue: On the one hand, participation in cyber jihad is being venerated. Humam al-Balawi himself wrote on the “vital characteristics of the unknown Net-fighters of online jihad” that they should “not undervalue a good deed, even if it just was to write underneath an excellent Jihadi post ‘May Allah reward you with something good’, this way supporting the active brothers and stimulating

⁷⁶⁸ See Mufakkirat al-Falluja, „*Rihanat al-jihad: Al-Shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani*.

⁷⁶⁹ „Khitab al-Gharib“, “*Mata nalhaq bi-l-habib alladhi sharabat kalimatuhu min dima’ihi?*”, al-Falluja Forum, accessed January 25, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=39970>.

⁷⁷⁰ “*Allahu akbar – Naḥfir al-akh Abu Dujana al-Khorasani ila Khorasan*” (Khorasan describes in jihadiideology Afghanistan, Pakistan, parts of Iran, and the central Asian republics bordering Afghanistan. *Naḥfir* also means the alarm horn that calls to depart for war), accessed February 2, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=85247>.

⁷⁷¹ Azzam referred to Qur’an 9:41 “Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah! That is best for you if ye but knew.” Drawing on the Hanbali jurists Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathir, Azzam called this situation “the general departure for war” (*al-naḥfir al-‘amm*). If, according to Azzam’s revival of the classical concept described above, the enemy entered Muslim lands, the individual religious obligation (*fard ‘ayn*) for defensive jihad duty would spread in concentric circles throughout the world. Accordingly, no Muslim had to ask for anyone’s permission to join the fight. Azzam argued that in modern times Muslims were not bound by an Imam’s directive to join the jihad.

⁷⁷² Holtmann 2009a: 45 and 131.

⁷⁷³ Shumukh-forum member “Terrorist for the aid of the religion” (Irhabi li-nusrat al-din), accessed March 8, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=97338&page=8>.

their energy...⁷⁷⁴ But then, says the tenor on jihad forums, online activity must stop and the radical visions of cyber jihad be realized in real-life. Also noticeable is the direct addressing of venerated martyrs in the first person singular, present tense on jihad forums. Forum participants often enter imaginary dialogues with their role models, either through words, or through images. “May Allah grant you the highest Paradise”, or “Congratulations to your martyrdom” said supporters of al-Shami’s suicide attack. Another characteristic of Jihadi discussions is that they are long-lasting and cohesive. This seems to be a feature of extremist and „geek-culture“-discussions in general, which are topic focused and underlie strict rules. In contrast, mainstream discussions water down quickly and lose topic-focus. Examples are readers’ reactions to newspaper articles in the Internet, which after ten or so posts often lose the red line. Yet, the Jihadi Net seems to have different dynamics. Within a short time span of several days, al-Shami was lauded consistently on 11 consecutive pages more than 120 times (on the Shumukh al-Islam forum).



A design (*tasmim*) that glorifies the suicide-attacker al-Shami, quoting from his will that he wanted to „plunge into the enemies of Allah” (*li-anghamis*, i.e. perpetrate a suicide attack). Source: Shumukh al-Islam Forum, accessed March 2011

⁷⁷⁴ Abu Dujana al-Khorasani (Humam al-Balawi), *Sifat la budda minha li-majahil al-Net*.

The example of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani evokes until today strong repercussions on jihad discussion forums. He serves as a role model and post mortem virtual leader in the context of the Arab revolutions, he re-appears in the mocking of and in threats against Western intelligence services, and he features prominently as a discursive node in extremist discussions. Let us look at some of these repercussions through communication rituals on Jihadi forums. We have already discussed above several of the most visible discursive rituals and leadership models at the example of design competitions (*musabaqat tasmim*), workshops (*warshat 'amal*), media-incursions and campaigns (*ghazwat i 'lamiyya*) as well as the function of key-topics as communicative glue for discussion groups. Al-Khorasani came again to the fore of Jihadi forum discussions in the context of the Arab revolutions, where, for example, a post on the “latest developments of the revolution from the land of *al-Kinana* (Egypt),” featured the typical laudations of the topic by discussion participants. The discussion started in March 2010 and went on until February 2011. Laudations serve to strengthen the in-group cohesion of discussion participants and forum members. One post from this discussion of March 2010 lauded the topic and praised the suicide attacker al-Khorasani (*wa barak Allah fi al-akh Humam al-Balawi, wa jazahu Allah al-janan wa al-hur al-husan wa Allahumma amin*).⁷⁷⁵ The reference to al-Balawi comes in the form of a supplication, also called petitioning (*du'a'*), which is one of the most common Islamic prayers and micro rituals on Jihadi forums. The laudation of al-Khorasani is not topic related in this discussion. Yet, it serves as a strong motivation within the discussion. This is a ritual of idolization, where the quasi-sacred status of al-Balawi is supposedly transferred upon the whole discussion. Within this context, the supplication takes on the form of a cultic invocation, and one can literally feel how the status of the contributor of the post, and lastly of all discussion participants in this discussion rises.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷⁵ “May Allah bless the brother Humam al-Balawi and reward him with paradise and the lovely black-eyed maids, oh Allah, amen to that.”

⁷⁷⁶ Khadim al-Jihad wa-l-Mujahidin, “*Akhir akhbar al-thawra min ard al-Kinana (misr), yanquluha murasil al-shabaka*,” accessed August 29, 2012. <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=4528>.



Supplication for al-Balawi framed in black. Source: Sinam al-Islam forum, accessed August 29, 2012, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=4528>

In another post on an Arabic language forum, dated January 2010, discussion participants try to construct a historical continuity of this powerful slogan of contemporary Jihadi discourse, by linking it to older traditions and sources: “When will my words drink from my blood (*Mata satashrab kalimati min dima'i*)?” The slogan stands for an absolute and imperative theme of longing, which often can be found in classical Arabic *qasida*-poetry, and means that the author impatiently waits for the possibility to perpetrate a suicide attack. Together with the specific Jihadi theological underpinnings that surround the theme, it also becomes a divine command in Jihadi thinking. The slogan titles an essay which al-Khorasani wrote only a few months before he perpetrated a suicide attack, killing several high-ranking CIA officers. First of all, the post starts with a reference to the Kuwaiti ideologue Hamid Bin Abdallah al-Ali, who is popular for telling Jihadi propaganda through poems and magic stories. Al-Ali himself is a distinguished virtual leader, who has been described as “the bridge between ideology and action”.⁷⁷⁷ One discussion participant lauds al-Ali and al-Khorasani, using supplications and eulogies and finally quotes al-Khorasani “When will my words drink from my blood????” Another author answers enthusiastically to this post. He invokes a supplication, i.e. prays on al-Khorasani’s behalf that God may have mercy on him, and that he may bless Sheikh al-Ali and the discussion participant. Then, the author claims that there is a historical continuity to the slogan, since the Muslim commander and companion (*sahib*) of the Prophet, Khalid bin

⁷⁷⁷ Chris Heffelfinger, “Kuwaiti Cleric Hamid al-Ali: The Bridge Between Ideology and Action”, *Terrorism Monitor* 5 (2007), accessed November 2010, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4112](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4112).

al-Walid (592-642 AD), supposedly said: “When will we drink from the blood of the infidels (*mata sanashrab min dima' al-kuffar*).” Al-Walid allegedly addressed “the Byzantine king, saying that ‘we heard that the best blood is that of the Byzantines – and we would like you to taste it.’” Historical continuity is utterly important to create a legitimate, but also comfortable surrounding for discussion. Jihadis try, wherever possible, to create such as continuity by emulating the example of Muhammad. If there is no precedent in traditional narratives on the sayings and mores of the Prophet (*sunna*), then narratives about the first three generations of his Muslim followers are used to legitimize ideological claims.⁷⁷⁸

Contextualization of al-Khorasani on Qissat al-Islam Forum

المشاركة الأصلية كتبت بواسطة asdalislam

الله أكبر الله أكبر!!!!.....

سمو الشيخ حامد العلي فوق الخلاف الفرعي وحسن ظنه بإخوانه , هو الأصل في أمثاله ,

له دره ما أروعها من كلمات , ولله دره ما أروعها من جهاد , أفضاه أساندة في كل شيء حتى في أدب الخلاف ,

وأما أنت يا أبو دجاجة.....

فيا خجل كلماتي من جهادكم

و يا لهف قلبي على لفيكم

متى سنشرب كلماتي من دماي؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟؟

reference to modern Kuwaiti sheikh Hamid al-Ali and al-Khorasani's text

رحمه الله وبارك بالشيخ والسؤال أخي هو

متى سنشرب من دماء الكفار واللفظ وإن قوي فهو لسيدنا خالد بن الوليد

عندما خاطب ملك الروم قائلا سمعنا أن أطيب الدماء هي دماء الروم فأردنا تذوقها

Reference to classical source Khalid bin al-Walid, who suggests to taste the blood of the Byzantines; historical continuity is created

Reference to al-Balawis slogan of „drinking blood“

For the analysis of the next post, it is crucial to keep in mind that al-Khorasani outwitted the Jordanian secret service and CIA, when he joined the Pakistani Taliban Movement and became a double-agent. This fact allowed him to perpetrate a life-costly attack, which killed several high-ranking CIA officers. The attack has earned him the deep admiration of fellow Jihadis. They especially admire al-Khorasani's wit and that he was able to play a double game. A post from a Jihadi discussion forum hits the bull's eye. Like in other discussions, al-Khorasani is being emulated on two levels. His words serve as “discursive icons.” Moreover, his deed, i.e. the careful planning and execution of the attack, “inspires” discussants who

⁷⁷⁸ These are either the companions of the Prophet (*al-sahaba*), or those, who did not accompany the Prophet directly, but knew his first followers (*al-tabi'un*). The successors of the tabiun (*atba' al-tabi'in*) are the third generation of *al-salaf al-salih*.

express their wishes to perform a similar operation. Al-Khorasani himself impersonates in this case the guidance concept *tahrid* (incitement).

In August 2011 a Swiss news channel reported on the formation of a new Swiss police intelligence unit, which analyses Jihadi propaganda. The clip was even translated into Arabic.⁷⁷⁹ Shortly afterwards, a discussion thread on a Jihadi forum mocked the video.⁷⁸⁰ The discussion thread is an illustrative examples of the “watching the watchers” concept put into practice, which we have explained before in the chapter “Jihadi Media Strategy.”

Example: Discussion of Swiss unit on Shumukh Forum

#1 04-10-2011
المشاركات : 2,651
أبو حورية الجزائري
طالب في كلية شموع الإسلام للإعلام
فيديو // تشكيل لجنة سويسرية مكلفة بمناقضة الدعاية " الجهادية " على الإنترنت

شوفوا هؤلاء المساكين ويأسهم في توقيف الدعاية الجهادية

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56WMI...layerbedded>

والله لن تهزمونا

«Watching the Watchers” – media strategy according to al-Zawahiri, Inspire etc..

#2 04-10-2011
المشاركات : 259
جند مدد الوعد
شايخ محرض

هههههه قال لعبة

اتذكر سنة 2006 عندما اعلنت دولة الاسلام كنت اتفرج على قنوات سويسرية

صدقني اخي لقد تبللت سراويلهم من الخوف

سويسرا دولة صغيرة ليس لها جيش وهي اقرب للعراق وبوابة اوروبا الجنوبية

<http://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130071>

Taking up of the topic, mocking of the adversary, strenghtening of the ingroup

The distortion of facts, mocking of enemies⁷⁸¹, religious doctrine and the iconography of al-Khorasani keep the discussion group together. However, the post also contains a very substantial and direct threat against the Swiss police intelligence unit, which is portrayed in the news clip. The discussion thread is titled “A video – formation of a Swiss unit tasked to resist Jihadi propaganda on the Internet.”

⁷⁷⁹ swissinfo.ch, “Didd al-da'aya al-irhabiyya,” accessed August 29, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56WMI5WRYT4>.

⁷⁸⁰ “Abu Huriya al-Jaza'iri,” “Video // Tashkil lajna swissriyya mukallafa bi munahadat al-da'aya 'al-jihadiyya' 'ala al-internet,” April 10, 2011, accessed June 8, 2011, <http://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130071>.

⁷⁸¹ Maybe this is a Jihadi modification of *hija'* - a classical Arabic poetic theme of mocking an satire.

The first participant exclaims “Watch those poor chaps in their despair to stop Jihadi propaganda,” followed by a link to the news clip on Youtube. The post is concluded by a petitioning, “By God, do not let us be defeated!”

“Haaaaa, what a play!” answers another discussant. “I remember the year 2006, when the Islamic State of Iraq was announced. I was watching it on a Swiss news channel. Believe me, my brother; they surely wetted their pants out of fear. Switzerland is a small state without an army, and closest to Iraq and the door to southern Europe.” The participant posts several screenshots from the report, showing triumphant Muslims after the announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq.

Example: Discussion of Swiss unit on Shumukh Forum

Reference to the topic and Quran, Surat al-Anfal 8:30:
„They plot and plan, and Allah too plans; but the best of planners is Allah. “

Laudations and supplications:
Micro-ritual, which generates support and cohesion, but also discursive hierarchie, part of clustering and *dancing*

Quran = revealed Imperative!

New thematic point: Desire to die as a martyr and „inflict worst damage upon the enemy“

04-10-2011
 ابو تراب الصعدي
 طالب في كلية الشريعة الإسلامية في القاهرة

مقطع روعة بمعنى الكلمة ، إسماعيل وعيسى الله والله خير الصالحين
 أسأل الله أن يره قديم في نحرهم ، لتعلم رئيس اللجنة كان يشاهد علماء الثغور لشبه

04-10-2011
 جندي دولة الخلافة
 شامخ مبرور

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته
 رفع الله قدرك وكتب أجرك أخي الكريم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 { قَاتِلُوهُمْ يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَيُخْزِيهِمْ وَيُنْصِرْكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَشْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمٍ مُّؤْمِنِينَ وَيَذْهَبْ غِيظَ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَيَتُوبَ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ } التوبة: 14-15

اللهم كن مع إخواننا المجاهدين كن لهم عوناً معيناً وناصراً ونصيراً
 اللهم سدد الرمي وثبت الأقدام
 اللهم سدد الرمي وثبت الأقدام
 اللهم سدد الرمي وثبت الأقدام
 { وَمَا زَمِنْتَ إِذْ زَمِنْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَزَمَى }
 والله أكبر على من طغى وتجبر
 { وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَكِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ }

اللهم ارزقني وجميع الاخوة والاخوات شهادة في سبيلك مقبلين غير مدبرين بعد اخن في اعدائك اعداء الملة والدين

<http://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130071>

The next post is topic related, lauds the contributor of the discussion thread and adds some detail information, such as “the boss of the unit was watching speeches by clerics connected to “al-Ansar Network” [one of the major forums and organizational networks of online jihad].”

The fourth post, however, is less topic-related and features highly aesthetic *martial discursive dancing* (this concept will be explained in the next chapter). The contributor uses big letters,

different colours (black, orange, green, dark red, blood-red, light blue, dark blue), numerous supplications and two verses from the Quran (9:14-15, 63:8, and 8:17). The post is dedicated to the initiator of the discussion thread. The appellation *Allahumma* (Oh God) dominantly introduces four petitioning invocations (*du'a'*) in a row. “Oh God, be with our brothers, be their supportive helper, be a stalwart champion for them; Oh God, aim their shots and strengthen their stances (3 times).” The invocations derive substance from the Quran, “It is not ye who slew them; it was Allah. when thou threwest.”⁷⁸² The contributor ends his prayer by repeating three times “Oh God, amen!”

The following post contributes again topic-related information to the discussion. The participant mocks and excommunicates (*takfir*) Farhad Afshar, the Muslim president of the Suisse Coordination of Islamic Organizations (KIOS). Afshar, who appears in the news clip and speaks out against Jihadi propaganda, is called “the donkey who wears yellow [jacket].”

Example: Discussion of Swiss unit on Shumukh Forum

04-10-2011 ■■
طلب الفردوس
شامخ هدرى

شباب اريد الانضمام الى فريق العمل

04-10-2011 ■■
Jihad Media Player
شامخ بنشيط
طالب في كلية علوم الاسلام العلمية
كلمات من الفيديو !!

1- يدعى هذا الفيديو إلى الجهاد !! (أقول الحمد لله يسمون قتلتنا جهاد على عكس كلام السلطان !!)
2- هذا الخير في شؤون الإسلام !! هو رئيس اللجنة المناهضة للجهاد عبر الإنترنت !!
3- معه سنة متخصصون في الإسلام !!
4- زيادة الفيديوهات و الشباب بشكل رهيب !!
5- ظهور الشاب التونسي سعيد التونسي !!
بارك الله بكم أخي جليلي و جزاك الله خيرا

القياس:
المشاركة الأصلية كتبت بواسطة طلب الفردوس ■■

شباب اريد الانضمام الى فريق العمل

حسنًا إذا لم يتعلموا من درس أبي دجّة الخراساني
فسيُعلمون من طالب فردوس !

04-10-2011 ■■
جند الله
شامخ دهش

رني

Restrictive code: Aspirant says, he wants to join taskforce: Joke or transition from virtual to physical jihad like al-Khorasani?

Restrictive code: “If they [the Swiss unit] did not learn from the lesson of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, so they will learn from Talib al-Firdaws (name of the aspirant).”

⁷⁸² Some translations refer to “a handful of dust” that is thrown and relate to the metaphysical understanding that any action of an individual lastly involves God’s actions. See the Yusuf Ali Quran translation. Surat al-Anfal 8:17, accessed August 30, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/8.htm>. Jihadis understand “throwing” in the sense of shooting, attacking. See the Yusuf Ali Quran translation. Surat al-Anfal 8:17, accessed August 30, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/8.htm>.

The next post comes from a forum member with more than 400 contributions, who wears the merit badge “inciting Shumukh member,” which gives him an especially high status within the network.⁷⁸³ This discussant steers the discussion into a new direction. His post says in big red letters “I want to join the taskforce.”

The answer is not long in coming. The big red-lettered request is reposted, followed by a comment directed to the Swiss unit. “Well, if they did not learn from the lesson of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, so they will learn from Talib al-Firdaws (name of the previous contributor who demands to join the unit).” The implication is, of course, another operation such as that of al-Khorasani against CIA in December 2009: If a Jihadi could be able to infiltrate the Swiss intelligence unit as an informant, then he might also be able to perpetrate an attack.

Example: Discussion of Swiss unit on Shumukh Forum

Leading thought of the thread:
Surat al-Anfal 8:30 „They plot and plan, and Allah too plans; but the best of planners is Allah. “

وَإِذْ يَمْكُرُ بِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيُثْبِتُوكَ أَوْ يَقْتُلُوكَ أَوْ يُخْرِجُوكَ
وَيَمْكُرُونَ وَيَمْكُرُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَكْرِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

#11 04-10-2011
المشاركات: 1,001
الإفريقي شامخ مغير

1. interpretation: Suggestion of a counter info-op, ergo learning form the „watching the Watchers concept“

swissinfoarabe يجب إنشاء قناة يشبه اسمها اسم هذه القناة
لبيت الدعاية الجهادية على الانترنت

#12 05-10-2011
المشاركات: 1,291
شيل صابر شامخ مغير

2. interpretation: Support and advice „not to waste any time“

لا تضيع وقتك لقد حاول أسياذك من قبلك ولم يفلحوا و الله الحمد و المنة

The discussion does not develop this theme much further, either because the topic is too “hot,” or the suggestion not taken seriously. Two more discussion participants relate to the suggestion “to join the [Swiss] team.” One suggest to open an news-channel on Youtube,

⁷⁸³ Shamikh muharriid.

which imitates the Swiss channel “swissinfo” with a similar name and appearance to spread Jihadi propaganda – This is the counter-counterterrorism approach of Adam Chessser, which we have discussed in the chapter “Jihadi media strategy.” A second contributor advises the “aspirant” not to waste any time, since similar operations by others have already “blossomed with God’s help.” However, it remains a short discussion thread, on two pages with 16 contributions.

5.d Discursive Ritualism on Jihadi Forums

Following the analysis of virtual leadership models, we will now look at the more subtle level of communicative leadership processes through discursive rituals and ceremonies in Jihadi web-discussions. In Jihadi discourses, the function of the *commentary*⁷⁸⁴ is often a ritualistic confirmation of a discussion topic. This relates also to the following models of discursive ritualism.

According to Dorta, whose study of chat communication is a conceptual guideline for this chapter, hierarchies and power relations in chats result from the use of different linguistic means as well as **inequalities and elaborateness** in communicative codes and speech patterns, **such as the elaborateness of laudations, intercessions and religious formulae**. This includes rules and rituals of avoidance and courtesy (ceremonial politeness), as well as rituals of award, identification, integration and socialization, which all create status and hierarchy, and are thus inextricably connected to (virtual) discursive leadership.

Since these factors are utterly important for virtual leadership, we can assume that not only concrete virtual leadership models, which we have discussed above, keep the texture of online jihad together. Subtle ritualistic processes within discussions fulfil the same role as their more concrete counterparts (i.e. the virtual leadership models discussed above): Discussion rituals have a leading and steering function within the ritualistic and discursive structure of jihad.⁷⁸⁵

The claim of this chapter is thus one of the main theses of this dissertation: Discursive and verbal rituals lie at the core of communicative leadership. In digital and virtual contexts, some of these rituals seen in the discussion behaviour seem to have developed out of the transformation from physical and verbal rituals into written expressions. Moreover, we will integrate an evolutionary biological approach and argue that these expressions are elements of online-socialization patterns, and that the socialization patterns of web-culture resemble those of primordial culture. The problems, which arise in web-culture, seem to require solutions that are similar to primordial behaviour and socialization mechanisms. In parallel, these expressions are integrated into transcendental emblematic religious frameworks (see the following chapter “Theology of Online Jihad”). For example, religious expressions (eulogies)

⁷⁸⁴ The “commentary” relates to Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis. See the chapter “Theoretical Framework of Virtual Leadership,” sub-point 3.

⁷⁸⁵ Following the analysis of concrete virtual leadership models, we will look at more subtle **hierarchies and discursive leadership in Jihadi web-discussions**. This happens on the level of communicational ritual processes and ceremonies, which are connected to the use of different linguistic means and communicative inequalities in terms of superiority and inferiority to establish discursive cohesiveness and power. They include codes and speech patterns on Jihadi forums, rules of courtesy and ceremonial politeness, rituals of award, identification and interaction. These chat rituals contribute to the emergence of status, power and hierarchy relations within Jihadi discussion groups.

in Jihadi chat-culture represent on the one hand transcendental oaths of allegiance, but they also stand for a concept which we will call *discursive martial dancing*. Among early hominid as well as in Jihadi communities, martial dancing is a popular form of ritualistic show of force, preparation for battle or deterrence of enemies. Martial dancing, in fact all forms of dancing, may go back to simple deterrence rituals by early hominids, such as collective rhythmic stomping with the feet. Pledges of submission and war poetry often accompany Muslim dancing ceremonies and vice versa. The online religious expressions, which we will analyze in this chapter, are a constant renewal of root-pledges of submission to God, which are integrated into *discursive martial dancing*, and vice versa. Dancing with friends and with words around topics, using the aesthetics of the Arabic language and its signs, applying certain colours, bold and big letters and accompanying graphics; this all defines *discursive martial dancing* on the micro level. Some contributions are more community than topic-related; they lack content, input or contribution value at first sight. Big colourful letters and ideological-religious formulas bind actors together and have an immense socializing and integrating value among “friends,” while they deter foes. Furthermore, in ancient Arab tribes, poetic verses and aesthetic language were said to be whispered into a poet’s ear by supernatural powers. Jihadis consciously cultivate these ancient characteristics in their poetry for spell casting and to foster *communitas*.⁷⁸⁶ Less consciously and also less recognizably at first glance, the same seems to have happened with martial dancing and its adaption to the Internet discourse. Martial online rites could be connected to prehistoric instinctive patterns of socialization. This concerns especially those forms of socialization that are connected to averting dangers or displaying threats.⁷⁸⁷ In addition, martial online rites (netflaming, nethating, netshitting, etc.) may belong to the strongerst factors for virtual group cohesion. In the following, we will present a rough categorization of discursive online rituals among Jihadis will be presented. According to this categorization, we will use samples from different Arabic language jihad forums to bolster our analysis. Before we enter into the analysis of different types of discursive ritualism, we will look at the social-structure of jihad forums,⁷⁸⁸ the ranks, tasks and positions of members, as well as rules of admittance to discussion forums. These observations will show that already Jihad forum rules create clear hierarchies and foster

⁷⁸⁶ See See Philipp Holtmann, “Casting Supernatural Spells and Fostering Communitas: Abu Yahya Al-Libi’s Qasida Poetry,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 90-103.

⁷⁸⁷ For such patterns see Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 194-199.

⁷⁸⁸ This concerns the visible forum-internal social structure such as names, ranks, avatars and profile-pictures, self-descriptions. The real identities of forum members can never be ascertained.

discursive mechanisms of dominion. Moreover, the mutual panoptical surveillance of members maintains the coherence and dominance of shared discourses.

5.d.i Panoptical Surveillance and Mechanisms of Discursive Dominion in Jihadi Discussion Networks

Jihadi discussion networks (*shabakat*) function like “collective organizers”⁷⁸⁹ of online jihad. Concerning their social structure, there are clear hierarchies and mechanisms of dominion. These are based on discursive regulation, sanctioning, inclusion and exclusion (prohibition, marginalization of topics), as well as a tight control of admittance, and the competition for status.⁷⁹⁰ Participation and function-based ranking systems are common to most Web-forums. Many include categories like “beginner”, “elite member” and “administrator”. Jihad forums are not different. Members are classified according to the frequency and quality of their contributions, and according to their functions. They are controlled by administrators and can ascend in the hierarchy, if they participate well, or be temporarily or for good be banned if they behave badly. Titles reward special contributions. Members gain reputation and administrative rights, when they are promoted. Also the Jordanian suicide bomber Humam al-Balawi was promoted as a forum administrator, because he wrote, from a Jihadi viewpoint, commendable posts. For example, the prominent jihad forum “*Shumukh al-Islam*” has different member-categories. It ranks:

- new members; 0-100 posts (*shamikh jadid*);
- active and inciting members, 100-1000 posts (*shamikh nashit* and *shamikh muharrid*);
- special members; up to 3000 posts (*shamikh mumayyiz*);

⁷⁸⁹ Collective organizers are methods or carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites, rituals, or icons. The concept is based on the idea of “collective organizers” by Rüdiger Lohlker, Orientalist Seminary of the University of Vienna, who first mentioned it in an interview with the author in August 2009, referring to Lenin’s newspaper “Iskra” and to the Jihadi webmagazine “Sawt al-Jihad”. See also Lohlker, preface in Prucha 2009.

⁷⁹⁰ Soriano holds that roster-programs automatically categorize members of Web-forums and are largely responsible for internal hierarchies: “Administering the Web forums can an be carried out simultaneously by a limitless number of users, who can participate in the administration anonymously. In fact, many site administrators have no connection to actual members of jihadigroups and achieved their positions by being ‘promoted’ through the Web forum’s roster.” However, administrators may as well have actual contact to terrorists. Furthermore, promotion is not always an automated process, especially when members are promoted on basis of the quality of their posts. In this case, not programs, but administrators decide collectively about the promotion of members. For example, Humam al-Balawi, who perpetrated a suicide attack in December 2010, was raised in rank by administrators of *al-Hesba* forum. Roster-programs can automatically categorize and classify members. See Manuel R. Torres Soriano, “Maintaining the Message: How Jihadists Have Adapted to Web Disruptions,” Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint – CTC Sentinel 2:11(2009): 22-23. See also “*Rhumud yaluff shakhsiyat Abu Dujana al-Khorasani: La tubaddiduhu siratuhu ... tabiban urduniyyan*,” al-Hayat, January 17, 2010, 16.

- golden members; 3,000 posts and more (*shamikh dhahabi*).

The member “*Bairaq al-Tauhid*” (Banner of Monotheism) of the *Shumukh* network is classified as an “active member” (written underneath the name in the headline). He participated with 945 posts (written to the far left side of the headline). Excellent contributions are credited with virtual merit badges, defining a member’s qualities in more detail. Forum members are awarded merit badges for special propaganda and writing activities, such as “*ramh al-shumukh*” (spear of *Shumukh*-forum) and “*qalam al-shumukh*” (pen of *Shumukh*-forum). Another badge is “special exertion in continuing topics,” which is awarded to members who follow up on important discussions. One of this badge’s bearers is the “golden” member *Hamza al-Najdi* of the *Shumukh*-forum who has written 3,706 posts. Badges are supposed to motivate other members with fewer posts to compete and strive for similar distinctions.

The Arabic section of *Ansar al-Mujahidin* forum, which is issued in several languages, has different member categories, such as:

- reader (*qari*’)
- supporter (*ansari*)
- diligent supporter (*ansari mujtahid*)
- shining supporter (*anasari muta'aliq*)

Similar to other virtual social networks, there is a 90-9-1 ratio on jihad forums⁷⁹¹: One percent of the members produce 90 percent of the messages; 9 percent of the member produce 10 percent of the messages; and 90 percent are so-called „lurkers.“ They are not registered, but they read contents, download material and further distribute it.⁷⁹²



A Member information from *Shumukh al-Islam*-forum, October 2010: Name: „The one who loves seeing the Compassionate (one of the 99 names of God in Islam)“; rank: „member without borders“; merit-badge: „glorious pen“, Contributions: 9,620

⁷⁹¹ Daniel Kimmage, „Al-Qaeda Central and the Internet,“ policy paper (Washington: New America Foundation, 2009).

⁷⁹² Ibid.

Some forums, such as *Shumukh*, do not include female members in their ranking systems. Females may participate, but regardless of their participation, they will all carry uniform ranks - “*Ukhtukum fi Allah*” (Your sister in Allah).

An exception to the rule that female members are not integrated into internal ranking systems is “*Mufakkirat al-Faluja*” (Female Thinker of Faluja), a high-ranking member of *al-Faluja* forum (shut down in 2010). *Shumukh* and other major forums frequently publish her lengthy Jihadi-strategy texts. The *Shumukh* forum attributed to her the subtitle *Shabakat Faluja al-Islamiyya* (Islamic network of Falluja). The allegedly female forum member *Mufakkirat al-Faluja* has acquired legendary status among E-Jihadis. Other forums, such as *Ansar al-Mujahidin*, do rank female members by adding an Arabic female ending (*ta' marbuta*) to their title (example: *ansari mujtahid/ansaria mujtahida* – i.e., “diligent supportress”). However, gender, age and identity cannot really be ascertained in virtual characters. Members who use female names could as well be males and vice versa.

Administrative rights concern choices of layout and content, as well as the right to promote and to remove members. Moreover, administrative-rights vary according to the tasks and importance of forum members. Another set of hierarchies is created.

A “*mudir 'amm*” (general director - *Shumukh*), or the “*idara*” (administration - *Ansar al-Mujahidin*) seem to have full administrative rights. A “*muraqib*” or a “*mushrif*” (surveillant – numerous forums use this rank) seem to be members with limited administrative right who are tasked with observing deviant behaviour or infiltration of non-Jihadis. For example, simple members are supposed to report infiltration, doctrinal clashes or disputes to a “*mushrif*”. A “*murasil*” is an E-correspondent of a jihad organization who can log in and upload propaganda material. But he cannot change the layout of a forum. Similarly, some media production groups of jihad-organizations seem to have forum accounts with special administrative rights that allow them to upload material. However, the distribution process is even easier. A single member account suffices. Through this member account links to a free file-hosting website can be posted, where stored propaganda material can be downloaded.



Mutual control is at the same time a *meso*-ritual that centres on the creation of hierarchies and taboos: Members are called upon “to report deviant entries” with the help of the icon “x.”

Source: *al-Shumukh* forum, November 2010

Often, posts are ordered chronologically on Web discussion forums. This means that the latest entry of a discussion thread appears first. However, jihad forum administrators manipulate this sequence. Posts containing propaganda material or contributions deemed important are prioritized and marked as “sticky” (*muthbit*), which is a common practice in most online discussion forums. “Sticky” posts remain on top of a discussion thread. This way, the normal chronological sequence for discussion threads on Internet discussion forums can be reversed (latest post first).

مواضيع المنتدى : الجهاد الإلكتروني				
أدوات المنتدى	ابحث في هذا المنتدى	الموضوع / كاتب الموضوع		
المشاركات	المشاركة الأخيرة	التقييم	الموضوع	المستخدم
32	4	17:17 10-11-14 بواسطة محمد الفلاح	مُثبت: هدية من كنوز القلوجة همام شرح مرني لكيفية توليد عشرات الروابط بأقل من نصف ساعة/ مثل المراكز الإعل	جيب الارهابي
440	8	11:12 10-11-09 بواسطة محمد الفلاح	مُثبت: غزو المنتديات العامة بالإصدارات الجهادية (بالصور)	الجهاد الإلكتروني
255	3	20:59 10-04-25 بواسطة حطلة	مُثبت: دور أنصار الجهاد لمواجهة الحملة الصليبية ضد المنتديات والمواقع الجهادية نرجوا التثبيت	salafi
250	2	15:43 09-10-05 بواسطة الجهاد الإلكتروني	مُثبت: لأمة ألمانيا الكافرة : نمن عليكم ثلاث مرة بتحديد اليوم الموعود!!!	محمد الفلاح

Example of sticky posts on the jihad forum *al-Jahafal*, accessed November 23, 2010, topics: <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=63>

In summary, an elite clique of administrators can promote, rebuke, or expel members. They control forum rules and strengthen ideological cohesiveness by choosing and prioritizing topics. This way, social structure and discourse are governed by a strict ideology and quasi-bureaucracy, using a rigorous stick and carrot method, which leads to obedience. Criticizing jihad is taboo. Ranks and medals need to be earned. Ambitious members try to excel each other in propaganda and participation. Internal social processes are psychologically very attractive. It is forbidden, full of tension, yet physically seemingly not dangerous. Moreover, the interaction on jihad touches religious-cultural triggers. At the same time, online jihad is perceived by many of its performers as totally modern and progressive in terms of informational-technical know-how and *Zeitgeist*.

Furthermore, strict forum and participation-rules create communicative hierarchies and discursive clusters. They also prescribe the social milieu and *habitus* within which Jihadis have to move communication-wise. Deviant behaviour is punished, in severe cases even with virtual death, which means the exclusion from a network and non-existence on a forum. The rules on Jihadi forums are especially interesting as a vantage point to understand the internal social structures and related discursive and ritualistic processes. For example, the administrators of the *Ansar al-Mujahidin* forum expect members to “tie themselves” to the

forum-rules (*taqayyud*). Prohibitions in social groups do not only have restrictive, but also manipulative mobilizing functions. On the *Ansar* forum, these prohibitions include not to write anything against jihad, i.e. any topic that deviates from Sunni Islam with a specifically Jihadi interpretation. The administrators announce that “we accept diverging opinions within the limits of public behaviour, yet anyone who transgresses them will be excluded permanently or temporarily.” “Public behaviour” refers here to that code of conduct which is expected from and among Jihadis in their sub-cultural milieu. It is not “public” at all in a common sense, but in the sense that Jihadis introspect themselves as the vanguard of a new Muslim society. Therefore, they allegedly represent “public” Muslim behaviour. If common interests and ideological cohesion are protected, participants address each other in an utterly polite way. If discussion participants breach the consent, however, behaviour towards them tends to turn utterly aggressive. The administration of *Ansar al-Mujahidin*-forum announces that “attacking the supporters [of jihad] is strictly forbidden and will be punished with exclusion.” Moreover, it is forbidden to register under names that oppose the Islamic law, exchange Emails or publish pictures of women.”⁷⁹³ The Jihadi discussion and propaganda forum www.atahadi.com has similar rules and asks all members to notify the surveillants (*al-mushrifun*) should anyone disregard the rules. The network politely asks its members to work closely together with the administration and its surveillants to quell any opposition.⁷⁹⁴ Al-Tahaddi forum justifies the panoptical supervision of its members with God’s command to “*Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour.*”⁷⁹⁵ The very prominent Jihadi forum *al-Shumukh* (www.shamikh1.info/vb/) prohibits as well any deviant, non-Jihadi behaviour among its members. The accounts of members who attack Jihadi clerics or other forum members will be temporarily or

⁷⁹³ *Mithaq shabakat ansar al-mujahidin*, accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/misc.php?do=showrules>:

- no writing of any topic that deviates from fundamentalist Sunni Islam
- correct writing of Quranic verses
- no writing of any hadith without making sure that it is sound
- prohibition to publish any news on the mujahidin from the secular media without checking its soundness
- we accept diverging opinions within the limits of public behaviour and anyone who transgresses them will be excluded permanently or temporarily.
- Attacking the supporters [of jihad] is strictly forbidden and will be punished with exclusion
- registering with multiple identities is forbidden, unless for security reasons. In this case the request needs to be send to the administration.
- It is forbidden to register under names that oppose the Islamic law
- It is forbidden to exchange emails
- It is forbidden to repeat the same topic in different threads
- It is forbidden to publish links to networks that are not approved by the administration
- it is forbidden to publish material that contains photographic depictions of women or anything that violates the Islamic law, before the violable content has been deleted.

⁷⁹⁴ *Mithaq shabakat al-tahaddi*, accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/faq.php>.

⁷⁹⁵ Quran Surat al-Ma’ida 5:2, accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/5.htm>.

permanently suspended, the administration announces. Doctrines (*aqa'id*) that do not conform to Salafi-Jihadi belief are not accepted.⁷⁹⁶ The Jihadi forum www.hanein.info has – in Jihadi terms – a slightly more liberal membership and discussion policy. This has a direct effect on the discussions-culture of its members, who discuss divergent topics quite critically. Topic-threads on this forum often exceed the mere ritualistic confirmation of key-statements, which are dominant on most other jihad forums. For example, al-Hanin discussion network explicitly prohibits the excommunication (*takfir*) of other Muslims. The exceptions to the rule are legal opinions (*fatawa*) allowing *takfir* by accepted clerics and by “the heads of Muslim states,” unless these states support foreign occupations. The distortion of other members’ contributions is forbidden, as well as improper talks on Christianity and Judaism. Moreover, contributions on the production and handling of weapons and explosives are forbidden, as well as the dissemination of information how to reach Jihadi training camps or battle-grounds. General discussions as well as personal messages between the members must not contain any advice how to support Jihadis financially, says the *Hanin*-forum. The use of profile pictures that display movie actresses and actors, or the upload of pictures of women is forbidden.⁷⁹⁷ Also the Jihadi forum *al-Jahafal* (<http://al-jahafal.com/vb/>) prohibits any sectarian discussions to avoid major doctrinaire clashes on its platform. Similarly, members must not write any topics that do not suit “the Islamic religion,” insult religious people or touch topics that create disunion. Members shall not contact each other via Email, and they can contact the administration only via the forum. “The administration of *al-Jahafal* and its surveillants retain for themselves the right to modify or replace any posts without prior notice to their authors [...] All forum rules in the covenant apply also to personal messages (*rasa'il khasa*), not only to general discussions.”⁷⁹⁸

In addition to the watching and reporting of each other’s behaviour, forum members share another “professional paranoia.” They feel constantly watched by security services. This increases their sense of panoptical surveillance. In fact, growing infiltration and surveillance by security services have led many Jihadi forums to close the public viewing-options. That means that outsiders who visit the forum cannot read anymore the discussion threads. A visitor first needs to undergo a lengthy process of membership application and verification by the administrators. Furthermore, numerous forums have stopped to admit new members at all. Critical Jihadi discussions address this problem. They complain about the lack of access to

⁷⁹⁶ *Mithaq shabakat shumukh al-Islam*, accessed July 2011, 202.149.72.131/~shamikh/vb/announcement.php?f=150.

⁷⁹⁷ *Mithaq shabakat hanin*, accessed July 2011, <http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=214615>.

⁷⁹⁸ *Mithaq muntadayat al-jahafal*, accessed November 2012, <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/>.

Jihadi forums and the lack of mutual trust. Between the lines, one can notice a certain nostalgia for the times around ten years ago, when the Jihadi E-community was allegedly less harmed by mistrust and isolation.⁷⁹⁹

5.d.ii Rules of Conduct in Jihadi Online Discussions

Rules of conduct seem to be of utmost importance for online leadership purposes.⁸⁰⁰ A study by the German Institute for Trust and Security on the Internet (DIVSI) has found out that managers of market-leading corporations see a chance to guide consumers' offline-actions by influencing their online rules of conduct. The future task of corporations is to gain definitional power over the central values of a "digital culture."⁸⁰¹ This can, according to the managers, be achieved by controlling online rules of conduct, which then influence offline behaviour. Thus, the control over online rules of conduct bears utmost significance for the latest trends of leadership and guidance.

In virtual leadership processes, Jihadis try to treat each other respectfully and politely in a way that levels out their status positions. At the same time, higher ranking forum members put emphasis on their positions. This allows them to coordinate and guide, for example, larger media ceremonies.

In addition, ceremonial politeness among Jihadis creates the necessary intrinsic motivation, which keeps the mutual propaganda process alive. This has a direct impact on the organization and leadership of Jihadi discussion and propaganda networks. If the heavily protected harmony is threatened, i.e. if the mutually expected rules of conduct are breached or agreed-upon discourses are criticised, Jihadis react very aggressively in order to protect the socio-discursive centres of their groups.

⁷⁹⁹ See for example this discussion that criticizes *Shumukh al-Islam* forum's policy not to admit new members, which took place on *Ansar al-Mujahidin* forum: "[Sultan] Saifuddin Qataz," "*Talab min zawwar shabakat Shumukh al-Islam ila idarat Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*," January 4, 2011, accessed December 4, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=32387>.

⁸⁰⁰ A rule of conduct is "a guide for action, recommended not because it is pleasant, cheap or effective, but because it is suitable or just. Infractions characteristically lead to feelings of uneasiness and to negative social sanctions [...] Rules of conduct impinge upon the individual in two general ways: directly as obligations, establishing how he is morally constrained to conduct himself; indirectly, as expectations, establishing how others are morally bound to act in regard to him [...] In all societies, rules of conduct tend to be organized into codes which guarantee that everyone acts appropriately and receives his due. In our society the code which governs substantive rules and substantive expressions comprises our law, morality, and ethics, while the code which governs ceremonial rules and ceremonial expressions is incorporated in what we call etiquette." Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), 47.

⁸⁰¹ „DIVSI Meinungsführer-Studie „Wer gestaltet das Internet?“,“ Deutsches Institut für Vertrauen und Sicherheit im Internet (DIVSI), accessed December 5, 2012, <https://www.divsi.de/divsi-meinungsführer-studie>.

For example, a discussion among Jihadis about online jihad forums, which do not allow new members to register or unregistered visitors to view threads, draws a lot of different opinions. However, the topic is not essentially threatening to the cause of global jihad. Therefore, members who agree and disagree about this forum policy remain utterly polite in their interactions with each other. Another discussion on the killing of Muslim civilians by Taliban fighters shows quite a different picture. The topic is highly ideological and endangers the community sense of the online discussants. As soon as a discussant voices critique about the atrocity, she is severely chastised by other participants in the discussion.

Let us go into more detail. The first discussion piece is from the E-network “*Ansar al-Mujahidin*,” the other from “*al-Hanin*”-forum (the terms “forum” (*muntada*) and “network” (*shabaka*) are used inter-changeably by the protagonists and mean the same).

The first discussion is introduced by a member of the *Ansar*-forum who laments that he has tried for more than five months to apply for registration at the biggest jihad network “*Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*,” but to no avail. In addition, the forum has closed the viewing of threads to unregistered visitors. We remember the 90-9-1 ratio, which can be assumed valid for jihad forums: One percent of the members produce 90 percent of the messages; 9 percent of the member produce 10 percent of the messages; and 90 percent are so-called „lurkers.“ They are not registered, but read content, download material and further distribute it.⁸⁰² The discussant speaks about his experience in detail, which he perceives as a trial. He reveals a lot about internal and hierarchical decision-making processes, as well as about the interconnectedness of the forums community, in which members of forums oftentimes know people from other forums.

“My brothers, members of the Shumukh forum and administration of the Shumukh forum, I appeal to you know in the name of the visitors of the *Shumukh* forum, and I demand from the general administration to open the registration section for us. As for them, if they open the registration section - *A prayer by a Muslim for his brother in his absence [is always answered]*.” This so-called “supplication for the absent” (*al-du'a' fi zahr al-ghayb*) goes back to a tradition on a saying of the Prophet Muhammad and is taken utterly serious among Muslim believers.⁸⁰³ “I contacted some brothers who are members of *al-Shumukh* and of the other forums and said to them that I wanted to become a member. They contacted the administration of *al-Shumukh* and informed them that one of the brothers wants to register.

⁸⁰² Daniel Kimmage, „Al-Qaeda Central and the Internet,“ policy paper (Washington: New America Foundation, 2009).

⁸⁰³ *Sharh al-Nawawi 'ala muslim*, “*Bab fadl al-du'a' li-l-muslimin bi zahr al-ghayb*,” accessed December 19, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?idfrom=7954&idto=7959&bk_no=53&ID=1276.

All the brothers whom I informed got back to me with different excuses.”⁸⁰⁴ The topic is highly emotional and touches the innermost desires and wishes of some of the discussants. “By God, I cannot even describe my feelings when I saw that *al-Shumukh* forums has closed its doors in front of me.” Another discussant shares the same feelings. “May God bless you, my brother *Saif al-Din Qataz*. I expressed my deep inner pain in the wake of the latest decision of the brothers in the blessed network (*al-Shumukh*) [...] and I experienced the same when I tried to register at *al-Shumukh* after *al-Faluja* and *al-Tahaddi* forums were shut down [in 2010]. But this did not stop my eagerness to register as a member [and to share] secret information that concerns the fighters.”⁸⁰⁵ How secret the information really is, or if the other discussant merely wants to move himself into the foreground remains unknown. However, it surely attests to the fact that registration and activity at Jihadi forums is anything but “Jihobbyism,” as Jarret Brachman has put it, and it has become big Jihadi media industry. Admittance and input are tightly controlled, if even enthusiastic activists, such as the ones quoted above are waved away. Moreover, paranoia and fear of infiltration must be serious. The frustration over the closure of admittance, however, did not result in impolite or aggressive speech of the complainers and among the discussants.

The second discussion turns around attacks against Muslim civilians by the Pakistani and Afghani Taliban. A female member of *al-Hanin* forum expresses shock about a Sudanese news report on the Internet which says that the Pakistani Taliban have shot a girl in the head, because she behaved “un-Islamic,” when she criticised the domestic human rights situation in her blog via the Internet and propagated girls’ education. “Isn’t it forbidden to spill the blood of Muslims? And what about that girl,” asks the female discussant who has started the discussion. At first, other discussants ask her not to believe such reports, which are allegedly part of Western psychological warfare.⁸⁰⁶ A participant in the discussion tries to preserve the amity and social cohesion. “May God bless you, my sister Maymuna, but we neither believe nor believe such news, until the brothers [from the Taliban] have issued a statement with details.” As for the background: The 14-years old Pakistani blogger and human rights activist *Malala Yousafzai* was shot in the head by a Taliban fighter on October 9th, 2012. Two other

⁸⁰⁴ *Saif al-Din Qataz* [member name], “*Talab min zawwar Shabakat shumukh al-Islam ila idarat Shumukh al-Islam*,” accessed December 19, 2012, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=32387>.

⁸⁰⁵ “*Mukhabarat al-Qaeda* [member name],” post no. 17 of the discussion, accessed December 19, 2012, Source: “*Talab min zawwar shabakat Shumukh al-Islam ila idarat Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*,” January 4, 2011, accessed January 18, 2013, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=32387&page=2>.

⁸⁰⁶ “*Maymuna*” [member name], “*Itlaq al-rasas 'ala fatat Pakistaniyya*,” accessed October 31, 2012, <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=297625>.

girls were wounded in the attack that took place on a school bus.⁸⁰⁷ Malala was first treated in Peshawar, then in Birmingham, UK and has survived the attack with severe neurological and physical deficits.⁸⁰⁸ Malala stands for an independent, “non-Jihadi” jihad. She leads a media-jihad for the improvement of human rights.

Another female participant in the discussion docks on the topic of civilian casualties. She finds a news report awful that says that Afghani Taliban have beheaded 17 Muslim civilians. This female discussant also posts the news report of the mass beheading. But then she withdraws her criticism partly and reacts apologetically. She seems confused and irritated, noticing the turning winds in the discussion: “Now I have understood the topic better, after I have read it a second time. I thought we were talking about the Afghani Taliban, but now I found out that we talked about the Pakistani Taliban. They are not worth anything to me; therefore, I withdraw my comments.”

Suddenly the tone of the discussion becomes more aggressive. The topic is highly problematic. Where would Jihadi legitimacy stand, if a sincere discussion about it developed? Some of the discussion participants suddenly snap. At first, they were irritated by the inquiries and criticism. But now they go into the offensive to save their face (since they identify strongly with both factions of the Taliban). A male discussant answers as follows to the last post: “The Pakistani Taliban don’t need the likes of you to defend them.” He reasons that they are the ones who truly fight for the establishment of Islam. Every Muslim must be loyal to them. Another discussant posts a text that looks as if he has written it himself, but allegedly is a statement of the Pakistani Taliban claiming responsibility for the attack on the girl in the school bus. Now the female discussant charges back and changes her opinion again. She stubbornly returns to her initial contempt of violence against Muslim civilians: “For this reason, I do not like the jihad of the Pakistani Taliban and I don’t support it. There is no might or power except in Allah. If this news is right, then it is an actual catastrophe.” The discursive cohesion, at least of this discussion-thread, is gone. Two participants in the discussion ritually curse the young Muslim girl who was shot by the Pakistani Taliban (for ritual curses in Jihadi discussions, see below).

These two discussions show that individuals –not only in secular societies - tend to perceive themselves as their own gods, with an own sacred sphere of invulnerability around them that

⁸⁰⁷ Jibran Ahmad, “Taliban shoot Pakistani schoolgirl campaigning for peace,” October 9, 2012, accessed January 18, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/09/us-pakistan-schoolgirl-idUSBRE8980EB20121009>.

⁸⁰⁸ Kate Kelland, “Pakistani girl shot by Taliban leaves British hospital,” January 4, 2013, accessed January 18, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/04/us-pakistan-malala-britain-idUSBRE90309Q20130104>.

is ritually reproduced through behavioral patterns and interactions with others.⁸⁰⁹ This owes not only to the numerous eulogies, invocations and supplications which fill the Jihadi discourse culture. Erving Goffman argued that interaction rituals, specifically ceremonial rules of etiquette and face-saving processes demonstrate that “many deities have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance.”⁸¹⁰ Also virtual selves are **quasi-sacred**,⁸¹¹ **especially so in closed cultic E-environments with extremist outlooks.** As Victor Turner observed, “every social position has some sacred characteristics.”⁸¹² The cultic reenactment and admiration of virtual selves on social networking sites augments this thesis. Neo-liberal marketing-propaganda exploits this phenomenon⁸¹³ and peer pressure brings many participants into line to strengthen this effect in majority contexts and their social networking sites. Among online Jihadis, a perception dominates of being transcendently guided through a quasi-divine caste of theologians, who serve as intermediaries of God. As a consequence, grassroots Jihadi actors are bewitched and touched by this spell, in the sense that they appropriate transcendental characteristics. They perceive themselves as part of a supernatural elite-community, which experiences wonders (*karamat*) and sees signs (*'alamat*) that confirm their chosenness. Indeed, miraculous things seem happen to Jihadi fighters. Wonders and signs are being told in Jihadi reports from the battle fronts, where fighters are said to be invulnerable to bullets. The miraculous reality blurs with online the online world when these incidences are discussed on the forums.

In Jihadi discourses, sanctity flows from the material world into the digital world, further into the transcendental world and back. Almost every online Jihadi expression is mixed with discourses around the Hereafter. Jihadi fighters in the field often tell about miracles, such as not getting hit by bullets, or being invulnerable. Those who carry cameras sometimes film clouds in whose shapes the names of God seem to appear. The networked structure of online-jihad and its martyrdom-discourses are poly-realistic; the three worlds (material, media, transcendental) blur and become hard to distinguish for the participants. According to

⁸⁰⁹ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual; The Nature of Deference and Demeanor*, 91-95.

⁸¹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 95.

⁸¹¹ Also secular industrialized society and its members are much more religious-spiritual than they introspect. In fact, each member of secular industrialized capitalist society – and nowadays the neo-liberal consumer of the information society – perceives himself as if he is his own God, with a sacred sphere of invulnerability around him, which is ritually reproduced through behavioral patterns of interaction. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual; The Nature of Deference and Demeanor* (Middlesex, Penguin, 1967), 91-95.

⁸¹² Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969), 96-7.

⁸¹³ ...which is based on SRI's psychological values research program. Stanford Research Institute's *psychological values research program* in the late 1970s used Freudian methods of psychoanalysis to measure the desires of individuals and direct them towards buying certain products which were tailored to fit the values and lifestyles of certain consumer groups.

Goffman, “the person in our urban secular world is allotted a kind of sacredness that is displayed and confirmed by symbolic acts.”⁸¹⁴

Let us return to the theoretical plane and discuss a few more thoughts on rules of conduct. In offline face-to-face interactions, rules of conduct (*decorum*) can be expressed by gestures, such as yielding the door to someone, or saying “Good morning” to someone. Although there may be nothing good about a specific morning, shaking hands with someone, keeping eye-contact while talking, dressing clean cloths, or avoiding physical contact on a crowded street are expected as “good behaviour.” In fact, the way we walk down a crowded street properly is governed by an observable ceremonial etiquette and requires a lot of stylization. The observation of participants’ movements allows us to draw plenty of conclusions on their self-view, upbringing, socio-psychological states and alleged statuses in society. Rules of conduct are oftentimes not recognized as rituals by their performers, although they have the crucial function to establish functioning social groups.⁸¹⁵ Net communication generally has a disinhibiting effect. Actors find it easier to behave rude to each other online than offline.

But both the levelling and the stressing of status positions, in physical as well as in online contexts, can be leadership mechanisms. Actors who believe in a common cause or work together tend to remain very polite. Let us look at one of Goffman’s real life key examples. He observed how the ritualistic display of respect created hierarchies in staff meetings in a psychiatric clinic. Goffman did field-research in this clinic in the 1960s. Doctors could sit around laxly, curse and indulge in monologues, while nursing staff was generally quieter. By definition, they had the same rights to discuss and ask questions. But the staff conformed to unwritten rules of “manner,” which told them to keep quiet and formal. Another example of Goffman is that of a petrol station owner, who may prefer to be on first name terms with his employee in order to rise his employee’s working morale.⁸¹⁶ These examples can help to understand dynamics and strategies of virtual leadership. Let us take a look at the function of discursive interactions and chat-interactions in online jihad. On jihad forums, low-profile members with fewer posts are generally much “quieter.” The number of posts and entries, the description of members’ functions, and thus hierarchical differences seem to be connected to their communicative behavior. It seems that long time, high-profile members communicate

⁸¹⁴ See Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), 47-55.

⁸¹⁵ Ronald Grimes, “Typen ritueller Erfahrung,” in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, 124.

⁸¹⁶ Erving Goffman, “Interaktionsrituale,” in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, 323-338. According to the status and power relationships of inter-actors, rules of conduct are either expected or obligatory interaction rituals. If both actors are approximately on the same level, polite and face-saving behaviour is expected. If one actor occupies a much higher status, then the inferior seems to be obliged to stick to rigid rules of conduct, while the superior still can chose if he wants to level this out, by responding in kind, or not.

more fluidly and authoritatively than foot-soldiers, who still need to earn their ranks and merit badges.

Ritualistic rules of conduct and ceremonies often take place in parallel, which gives an extraordinary strength to the organization and leadership of shared-cause networks.⁸¹⁷ For example, at a conference, a group of top-managers may share a great level of harmony among each other, while the conference itself is a show of force to deter another corporation. Protesters at a demonstration will harmonize with each other, which is expressed by the polite and likeable rules of conduct among them, while they may shout threatening at police (which functions according to the same duality). This dual mechanism also applies to the organization of online Jihadi networks and to discursive leadership. Examples of ritual duality in online jihad are participative media campaigns and design contests, (see the chapter “Mutual Virtual Leadership”). In these communicative guidance processes, discursive rules of etiquette and politeness among the participants are complemented by martial threat behavior against outsiders.⁸¹⁸

Randall Collins concept of “Interactional Ritual Chains” helps to further understand the important role of discursive conduct in virtual leadership processes. According to Collin’s theory, which continues Goffman’s concept of “interaction rituals,” conflicts, groups and power relations emerge from the repeated use of interaction rituals that generate and conduct emotional energy.⁸¹⁹ One possible definition of Jihadism is that of “a violent discourse whose actors form groups and charge symbols through interactions.” Similar to actors in heated political debates, Jihadis invest positive emotional energy in their allies, while downgrading their antagonists. These directed flows are asymmetrical and contribute to power imbalances. They help actors to gain definitional power over central cultural values and lead to the formation of discursive hierarchies within online discussion groups.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁷ Ceremonial rules (etiquette) take place between a limited number of individuals, whereas ceremonies take place between larger groups. Ceremonies divide the world into larger “we versus them” dichotomies. Examples are demonstrations, revolutionary gatherings and military parades. Ceremonies often construct and defend an ideological territory; they may be used to agitate people, re-enact a mythology of victory, heroism and sacrifice. Orientated at V. Turner’s description of ceremony as “social drama;” see Ronald Grimes, “Typen ritueller Erfahrung,” in *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*, 125.

⁸¹⁸ Online Jihadi ceremonies are media incursions into non-Jihadi discussion forums, where propagandist material is spread among non-Jihadis and heated discussions are started.

⁸¹⁹ Randall Collins, *Interactional Ritual Chains* (Princeton: University Press, 2004).

⁸²⁰ Rituals, in contrast to games, are candid and programmed social transactions that usually proceed in series, hence their dynamic nature. Regarding the intersection of gaming and rituals, Clifford Geertz in his seminal work, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, found out that rituals are reproduced through playing and vice versa. Geertz illustrates his concept of “deep play” at the example of the Balinese cockfight. The Balinese cockfight reflects hierarchies and power relations within Balinese society. “For it is only apparently cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men.” The playful display of raw violence and anger is at the same time extremely ordered. The social structure in the Balinese cockfight is not represented realistically. The cockfight allows participants and players to live out aggression, violence and cruelty that must be subdued in daily life.

5.d.iii Discursive Ritualism on Jihadi Discussion Forums: Several Models

In a discourse, a commentary picks up something that has been said or written before, i.e. a pretext, and thus creates discursive coherence, hierarchy, structure and dominion. At the same time the commentary abolishes randomness and eventfulness in a discourse.⁸²¹ One example could be an Internet cooking forum, where participants have the possibility to discuss recipes. A participant could start with a recipe, and similar to a smooth chain, others would add commentaries that turn around the recipe, such as improvements, anecdotes, suggestions, etc. The governance and regulation of commentaries and discursive behaviour, then, lays the cornerstone for what may, or may not be said in a discourse, what is being further discussed and what is ignored. In Jihadi online discourses and discussions, the commentary is often a ritualistic confirmation of a discussion topic. This can be clearly demonstrated by our analysis of the models of discursive ritualism (see below). In that sense, tightly rule-controlled discussions networks seem to foster streamlined, not very interpretative commentaries, through which discursive dominion is further expanded. This way, certain statements become hegemonic in the Jihadi discourse, while others are marginalized. The questioning and qualifying of the hegemonic discourse is often countered by sanctions.⁸²² Forum rules provide the sanctioning mechanisms, which prepare the ground for the functioning of Jihadi discourses (see the discussion above). The emerging discourses are often so ritualistic that they can be describes as “discursive-ritualism.”

5.d.iii.1 Discursive Martial Dancing

Fear, fright and distancing from large predators or enemies were probably learned as survival mechanisms by early hominids. Socialization, i.e. the basic buildup of groups, motivation and loyalty to the own group are closely connected to this process. An apt way to form groups out of individuals is through common ritualistic behavior. Common threat rituals, such as martial

However, on the ritualistic and “virtual” level, the cockfight allows participants to live fully through the dark and wild powers underneath the peaceful coexistence of societies. Thus, the ritual play allows expressing everything that is unacceptable in reality. Thus, the question is legitimate if online jihad also may have therapeutic effects on participants, channelling their real world frustrations like a release valve?

⁸²¹ The following explanation of the commentary has been borrowed from the summary of Focault’s theory of dominion by Stefan Meier, (Bild-) Diskurs im Netz: Konzept und Methode für eine semiotische Diskursanalyse im World Wide Web (Köln: Herbert van Halem Verlag, 2008), 32-34.

⁸²² Sanctioning measures includes all mechanisms of exclusion directed against subjects. The participation in established discourses is conditional and often status dependent (money, prestige, power, charisma, style). Meeting these conditions decides if a subject is admitted to certain discourse-, or doctrine-groups, which can isolate themselves from the outside-world by the adaption of certain speech-rituals and privileged discourses. Power is directly exerted by admitting, rejecting or excluding deviant members.

dancing, bear a strong rhythmic and colorful aestheticism, for example by the use of costumes, by rhythmic drumming noises or the throwing of things to the ground, as well as by body paintings. Ralph Jordania assumes that these actions first served early hominids in Africa to keep enemies at a distance and intimidate them. Jordania assumes that early hominids millions of years ago left more protected mountainous environments and went to the open grass lands of the Savannah in Africa. They needed to find ways to deter large predators, and later other hominid groups. Ritualistic stomping, dancing, throwing things, making noises and body-painting served them to enter a state of “battle trance” in order to deter or fight enemies. But these rituals also functioned as basic social mechanisms that helped to glue groups together: During the course of shared defensive, later aesthetic ritualistic behavior, hominid participants may have switched from an individual awareness to a collective awareness.⁸²³ In the later stages of cultural development, *de-individuation* describes the dissolution of personal identity in the WE-group. The ingroup-outgroup bias, the WE versus THEM divide appears most visible in ethnocentric prejudices and hostilities, where other races and ethnicities are attacked. But it easily emerges out of other categories, such as religion, sex, age, support for a sports team (ultras and hooligans), the wearing of differently colored cloths (gangs in the U.S.).⁸²⁴

The correlation between in-group harmony and out-group aggression is probably one of the most basic social behavioral patterns. It is a trans-species pattern and males are especially involved in it.⁸²⁵ Attacks often take place for reasons of domination, intimidation and winning, which are ends in itself. Wrangham and Peterson argue that “[w]ars tend to be rooted in status [...]” “The first great multistate war, the Peloponnesian War, which ravaged Greece from 431 to 404 B.C. and led to the total defeat of Athens, was studied for years by the first great historian, Thucydides, who eventually felt he understood its cause: ‘What made

⁸²³ Joseph Jordania, *Why do Humans Sing? Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: Logos, 2011).

⁸²⁴ Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 196.

⁸²⁵ It is a trans-species pattern that seems to exist among chimpanzees in a very similar fashion as it does among humans. Males are especially strongly involved in this process. Male chimpanzees, for example, are first and foremost “defenders of a group of territory, a gang committed to the ethnic purity of their own set.” They may attack chimpanzees from other groups without an obvious reason, but to ascertain their status. This way, unprovoked attacks and raids into the territory of other chimpanzees seem to strengthen the cohesion of the attacking groups. Moreover, groups of male chimpanzees from southern or northern adjacent territories will simply attack each other for reasons of domination, intimidation and winning, which is an end in itself. In addition, group-internal fighting often takes place at moments, when established or old hierarchies can be challenged. Aspiring alpha-males seem to wait strategically for these moments. “It looks the same with men,” argue Wrangham and Peterson, “[w]ars tend to be rooted in status.” Another, more profane example may illustrate the in-group out-group bias and de-individuation mechanism. See Ibid, 186; 199; 192. Three close friends who went to different colleges in the 1960s, two went to North-Carolina and one to Duke, became bitter enemies in the ensuing time due to the deep-seated rivalry of their colleges. They even attacked each other at a freshmen basketball-match between the two colleges. Ibid., 193-194.

war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta.”⁸²⁶ Collective fear, if it is real or imagined, furthers out-group-aggression. But attacks may also take place without an obvious reason, to ascertain the status of a group, and we can trace this behavioural pattern also among online groups. Unprovoked attacks and raids into the territory of others, in our case discursive attacks by Jihadis into other online discussion forums, seem to strengthen the cohesion of the attacking groups.

Membership in closed groups and the related in-group behavior strengthen the collective identity of group members and further outward-aggression.⁸²⁷ One example in the context of our study is the magico-religious aesthetics and spell-power of Jihadi poetry. This perception of poetry in Jihadi thinking goes back to its use in pre-Islamic tribal society. Nowadays, this perception helps Jihadis to foster strong *communitas* and perceive allegedly superior force through the use of magico-religious spell-power.⁸²⁸ Furthermore, oaths of allegiance and eulogies of God often fall together with poetic singing and war-dance ceremonies. This can be seen in Jihadi reality as well as in their propaganda videos and online discussions. In this respect, it should be remembered that propaganda addresses both friend and foe.⁸²⁹ The enemy needs to be intimidated and the member strengthened in his conviction to fight, which goes back to two states of consciousness, *fear* and *fright*. Firstly, the member experiences an internal, abstract fear to violate divine injunctions and draw God’s anger upon himself and the group. Secondly, the member experiences a more concrete and external fright from harm by the enemy against him and his group, or in an extended sense, co-members (co-religionists; co-nationals; relatives). If both states of mind are triggered together, they translate easily into a psychology of excessive hubris, perception of invulnerability, exaggerated fighting spirit and accordingly, readiness to use excessive violence.⁸³⁰ The stronger the in-group cohesion of doctrinaire groups becomes, the more aggressively they react against the outside world. These conditioning mechanisms are structurally similar to the training of soldiers, who are prepared for battle, yet Jihadis are promised salvation and transcendental rewards. In online jihad, these mechanisms seem to be triggered considerably by the magico-religious power of religious formula and discursive-semiotic aesthetics, i.e. *discursive martial dancing*.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁸²⁷ Eugene G. D'Aquili, “Human Ceremonial Ritual and the Modulation of Aggression,” *Zygon-Journal of Religion and Science* 20(1985): 21-30.

⁸²⁸ Philipp Holtmann, „Casting Supernatural Spells and Fostering Communitas: Abu Yahya al-Libi’s Qasida Poetry,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohker (Vienna: University Press, 2013).

⁸²⁹ Peter Waldmann, *Terrorismus: Provokation der Macht* (Hamburg: Murman, 2011).

⁸³⁰ For different concepts of awe, fear, fright and terror in Muslim thinking see Philipp Holtmann, „The Concept of Deterrence in Salafi-Jihad - Classical Islamic Paradigms of Deterrence and their Expression in Modern Islamist Thought,” working paper prepared for the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel (IDC), June 2012.

By this token, Jihadi forum discussions show how older Muslim and collective ritualized behavior is transformed into analogue virtual actions. For example, the writing of big-lettered Islamic formulas of laudation on Jihadi discussion forums serves as virtual counterpart for classical group ceremonies that include martial dancing, which is often combined with the recitation of poetry, pledges of allegiance and singing of martial songs (both the *huda'* and *nashed* genres). A special significance is here attributed to the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*), whose obvious physical and virtual adaptations we have discussed above. The oath of allegiance permeates every discursive interaction in online jihad, since different forms of eulogy are nothing but confirmations of allegiance to God according to Quran 48:10,⁸³¹ and can be found in almost every speech pattern. This observation goes back to our thesis that online Jihadi religious formulas are actually to be understood as oaths (within a specific martial context, namely that of global jihad, see below “Eulogies”).⁸³²



Source: <http://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130071>, accessed December 18, 2012.

The post above is a highly illustrative example of *discursive martial dancing*. In August 2011 a Swiss news channel reported on the formation of a new Swiss police intelligence unit,

⁸³¹ “Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. the Hand of Allah is over their hands: then any one who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and any one who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah,- Allah will soon grant him a great Reward.”

⁸³² Chapter 5.d.iii.2 Eulogies and laudations of God (Dhikr).

which analyses Jihadi propaganda. The clip was even translated into Arabic, and shortly afterwards a discussant on the major Jihadi forum al-Shumukh posted the video and mocked the Swiss intelligence unit.⁸³³ The post above is a reaction, and thus a commentary to the mocking. In a power-discourse, a commentary picks a theme up and develops it further. It has the function to create discursive coherence, hierarchy, structure and dominion. This commentary moves thematically like in a circle around a metaphorical, discursive campfire, i.e. the discussion topic. There is a eulogy, followed by an intercession-prayer on behalf of the initiator of the topic-thread, followed by a Quran verse on fighting (Q 9:14-15), which is followed by numerous consecutive intercessions on behalf of Jihadis in general (“May God strengthen their firepower and determination”). At the end, this commentary includes a thematic contribution, namely the wish to punish the enemies of God and die as a martyr. The main function of this commentary is not to develop an argument, but to develop discursive strength through emotive-spiritual support. It is a very typical characteristic of reactive Jihadi posts, which do not initiate new topic threads. The most striking characteristic is the ample use of colours and big letters. The contributor uses green, orange, dark red, light red as threat colours, and azure, light blue and light green letters as symbolisms of Islam, paradise, water and justice. By playing colourfully around the topic in this fashion, the contributor secures himself standing, and may even rise in the forum hierarchy. He avoids any “dancing out of line.”

Also the screenshot below is an example of discursive martial dancing. This post is from the above mentioned Jihadi discussion on the Taliban attack against the Pakistani school girl and human rights activist Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the head in a school bus in October 2012. Here, the focus lies on a mixture of alarm colors and big letters to display threat behavior. First, the contributor tries to convince a female member who criticized such attacks, since there is allegedly no proof to it. Immediately after another discussion participant has published a statement of responsibility by the Pakistani Taliban, he switches and infuriated curses the girl, who allegedly has worked for the corrupted West, when she criticized domestic human rights violations. The question of morality or immorality of such an attack does not matter. If a statement of responsibility is issued, or enough participants in the discussion defend the crime, it automatically becomes legitimate. The reaction is typical for discursive followership in Jihadi discussions.

⁸³³ YouTube channel “swissinfo.ch arabe,” name of the clip: “*Didd al-da'aya al-irhabiyya*,” accessed August 29, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56WMI5WRYT4>; as for the forum thread, “Abu Huriya al-Jaza'iri,” “*Video // Tashkil lajna swissriyya mukallafa bi munahadat al-da'aya 'al-jihadiyya' 'ala al-internet*,” April 10, 2011, accessed June 8, 2011, <http://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130071>.

اختي ميمونة ومن يقول ان هذا المصدر صحيح وعلى المسلم ان يتحرى الاخبار من المصادر الموثوقة والصديقة فالأخوة في باكستان او في افغانستان ومن يريد ان يفرق بينهم فلا يضرهم بشيء على كل حال ان فعلو يتبنو اي عمل يقومون به مع تقديم السبب والدليل	ابو قداء تصوير المستنسخين 05-02-2010 : تاريخ التسجيل 22,518 : المشاركات محل تقييم المستوى: 25
اذا كانت هذه افعالها وهذه اخلاقها فلجنة الله عليها وعلى من يدافع عنها	ابو قداء تصوير المستنسخين 05-02-2010 : تاريخ التسجيل 22,518 : المشاركات محل تقييم المستوى: 25

Source: accessed December 19, 2012, <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=297625>.

To strengthen our claim that *discursive martial dancing* is extremely important for Jihadi online culture, let us call to mind ceremonies and related group rituals in training camps of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. *Discursive martial dancing* is a virtual adaptation to physical martial dancing. This helps us to understand the complex transition of group leadership through ceremonies and ritualistic behavior from physical to virtual reality.

German Jihadis who stayed at training camps of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Waziristan between 2009 until 2011 have explicitly described their conditioning. “The stay at the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was governed by a rigid daily schedule, which comprised common prayer, reading the Quran as well as communal sports activities and shared dinners.”⁸³⁴ During these integrating and socializing interaction rituals, local and global Jihadi discourse dominated discussions.⁸³⁵ In addition, common singing of traditional Islamic battle songs (*huda'* and *anashid*), as well as ritual of passage from outsider to loyal insider (*bay'a*) were used to induce “battle-trance” states, group cohesion, motivate loyalty and intimidate enemies. In combination with actual battle operations, this resulted into a strong socio-ideological gluing together of some of the German Jihadis with the Uzbeks (*ingroup-outgroup bias*).⁸³⁶ The group cohesion was disturbed by hierarchy conflicts within the German group, which took place between “elders” and “novices,” i.e. those who arrived later from Germany. These conflicts and the rough atmosphere were the reasons why some

⁸³⁴ „Der Generalbundesanwalt beim Bundesgerichtshof; Anklageschrift gegen W.S.“, 2 BJs 40/11-8-2 StE 10/11-8, Karlsruhe, den 26. Oktober 2011.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

German Jihadis quickly left the Uzbek training camps. The Germans, who stayed, however, became indoctrinated so strongly that they were convinced that their appearance alone would frighten and deter U.S. soldiers (stationed in Afghanistan).⁸³⁷ “The defendant described himself as a man not from this world, but from the hereafter. He strived to live with his whole family in paradise. Enemies he saw would be beheaded by him; American soldiers were afraid of him and the likes of him, he assumed. He summoned his father to move to him at the end of his life in order to participate in jihad and die as a martyr.”⁸³⁸

This example of the psychology of a young European Jihadi is very telling. He has fully incorporated simple Jihadi myths of community, enmity and salvation, which lead him to believe that the sole aura of his group spreads dreadful fear among the enemies. This belief leads to an excessive hubris and self-perception as living martyr, based on an undifferentiated and awestruck veneration of martyrdom culture (*ittiqā' al-istishhadiyya*).⁸³⁹ For him and his group, specific group behavior and rituals strengthened their collective identity, but also anger on the perceived enemy; this resulted in ever more dissociation and fear, which in turn evoked display of power in order to intimidate the enemy. In other words, one could also describe this process as a “socialization of group cohesion and deterrence.”

#1
AM 03:12, 07-11-2012

بشرى: عودة شبكة شموخ الإسلام

بشرى: عودة شبكة شموخ الإسلام

الله أكبر

بشرى شبكة شموخ الإسلام

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الإخوة أعضاء وزوار شبكة شموخ الإسلام

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

نعمل الآن على ترقية وتطوير الموقع على أن نعود إليكم في أقرب وقت ممكن بإذن الله عز وجل. لا تنسونا من صالح دعائكم

إخوانكم في الإدارة.

[/http://www.shamikh1.info/vb](http://www.shamikh1.info/vb)

المصدر: منتدى المنبر الاعلامي الجهادي

ابو ملك الانصاري

مشرف قسم الحدث والأخبار

العاجلة

تاريخ التسجيل: Jun 2012

الدولة: دولة العراق الاسلاميه

المشاركات: 5,635

⁸³⁷ Ibid and interrogation protocol by German Federal Police of R.M.

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

⁸³⁹ For different concepts of awe, fear, fright and terror in Muslim thinking see Philipp Holtmann, „The Concept of Deterrence in Salafi-Jihad (“Classical Islamic Paradigms of Deterrence and their Expression in Modern Islamist Thought”), paper prepared for the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel (IDC), June 2012.



The two illustrations above are further varieties of discursive martial dancing types. The concept combines the power of Jihadi semiotics, aesthetics and colors, religious speech and formulae. Both samples are from a discussion on *al-Minbar al-I'jami al-Jihadi* forum that turns around the re-opening of *Shumukh al-Islam* forum in July 2012, after the latter had been shut down for a while.⁸⁴⁰ The first sample shows a clear symmetry and relies less on colors. It is a message by the administrators of the *Shumukh* forum that they will shortly re-open. The content and the calligraphic style, its centeredness and symmetry, make up the main discursive dancing elements. The second sample is a frantic laudation and reaction to the announcement. The colors, asymmetry and poetic vocabulary make up its discursive dancing style. While the former sample is orderly and aesthetic, the second sample is wild, fast, loud and thrilling. Both styles are different, but harmonic counterparts of the same concept.

5.d.iii.2 Eulogies and laudations of God (*Dhikr*⁸⁴¹)

Basic Islamic eulogies such as “God is great” and “There is no God but Allah” count as pledges of loyalty to God. This can be clearly seen from the often cited tradition “the one who dies without a pledge in his throat, dies an ignorant death (*man mata wa laisa fi unuqihi bay'a mata mita jahiliyya*).⁸⁴² Eulogies are essentially confirmations of the oath of allegiance to

⁸⁴⁰ “Bushra: 'Awdat shabakat Shumukh al-Islam,” accessed December 29, 2012, <http://alplatformmedia.com/vb/showthread.php?t=8782>.

⁸⁴¹ Literally: „an invocation of remembrance.”

⁸⁴² *Ma'na al-hadith: man mata wa laisa fi unuqihi bay'a mata mita jahiliyya*, January 31, 2012, accessed January 17, 2013, <http://www.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=172641>.

God, according to Quran 48:10,⁸⁴³ and can be found in almost every Jihadi speech pattern. In the awareness of close death a pious Muslim will try to utter a last glorification of God, which counts as a final oath of loyalty. Utterly cruel proof of this is given in real life, where civilians who were deadly hit in the Syrian civil war shouted loudly “God is great” before they died, being machine-gunned and slaughtered either by government troops or militias with so far unclear affiliations or objectives (June 2012).⁸⁴⁴

Jihadi forum discussions show how classical Islamic and collective ritualized behavior is, first of all, hijacked, but also transformed into analogue virtual actions. The writing of big-lettered Islamic formulas of laudation of God (a direct ritual) on Jihadi discussion forums represents virtual oaths of allegiance. A special significance is here attributed to the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*), which is adapted to virtual space. Religious written formulas on Jihadi forums such as eulogies of God and blessings of God are actually all in one way or other transcendental oaths of allegiance. This phenomenon is strengthened by the transformation from physical (handshake) and verbal rituals (face-to-face speech) into written expressions in online culture. Van Gennep already observed that different ceremonies and rites are sometimes so intimately intertwined with each other that it is impossible to distinguish them clearly.⁸⁴⁵ Thus, in addition, the ritual formula “God is great” by victims and bystanders is in the above case supposed to carry the soul of the dead to a safe hereafter; similar passage-of-the-dead rituals are known to most cultures through singing, collective lamentation, lamentation songs, prayer and burial services. However, the Islamic one distinguishes itself through its immediateness in battle. Religious formulaic language has a tremendous meaning in Islam and an outside-observer could never empathize with or relate to it without appropriate cultural knowledge. Eulogies on Jihadi discussion forums are a steady repetition of the highest pledge to God and its transformation to virtual space. A further understanding among Jihadis emerges through the adaption of the *hisba*-doctrine of legal calculation (“enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong”) to a pledge.⁸⁴⁶ From this vantage point further functions of discursive pledges of allegiance can be classified in E-space. These pledges serve also as *rites of passage* from mainstream Muslim culture to Jihadi subculture, they are rites of *rebirth* that are supposed to

⁸⁴³ “Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. the Hand of Allah is over their hands: then any one who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and any one who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah,- Allah will soon grant him a great Reward.”

⁸⁴⁴ For example, “Syria Horan Izra 22-APR-11 Great Friday Massacre,” accessed June 2, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xicvu4_syria-horan-izra-22-apr-11-great-friday-massacre_news. The footage shows unarmed civilians being indiscriminately killed with live ammunition. Some of the deadly wounded, or people who take care of the deadly wounded, utter the ceremonial formula of obedience to God before dying: “God is great” (*Allahu Akbar*). This formula is also supposed to ritually carry the soul of the dead to a safe afterlife.

⁸⁴⁵ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 12.

⁸⁴⁶ Abd al-Hakim Husan, “*Al-Bay'a: Suwaruha wa wujub al-wafa' biha.*”

carry the soul of the fighter safely to the Hereafter, these formulas induce a state of *battle-trance*, they serve the *intimidation* of enemies, are supposed to foster *communitas*, their frequent use contributes to *status and hierarchy* of discussion participants, and finally, they server as *avoidance and presentational rituals*. For example, in Jihadi online discourses, altered states of conscience of fearlessness – “battle-trance” - are created through the steady repetition of ceremonial formulas, which correspond to the ritualized induction of battle trance through collective dancing, shouting and threat display in the physical world. In addition, the elaborateness or repetition of eulogies in Jihadi online discussions resembles a competition that is closely connected to the status and hierarchy of participants. The more often and more elaborate a participant uses such eulogies, the stronger his or her dedication to the discussion group appears. This raises a participant’s status within the discussion hierarchy. Connected to status are discursive power and dominion, and thus leadership (in a discussion- and communication-guiding sense).

The most common invocations of God (*dhikr*) are *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the greatest), a general confirmation of monotheism and loyalty; *Subhana Allah* (Praise to Allah), an exclamation of astonishment; *Alhamdulillah* (All Praise be to Allah), an oral ritual of giving thanks to God; *La ilaha illa Allah* (There is no God but God), a confirmation of monotheism; *La hawla wa la quwwata illa billah* (also abbreviated as *al-Hawqala*: There is no might and no power except with Allah), an oral ritual of admitting the own shortcomings and leaving the final decision to God, if a situation or decision seems beyond human control; *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful), an oral ritual that precedes all actions of spiritual significance, such as praying, eating, working, putting forward an argument; *Insha'allah* (So Allah wishes) is an uttering which stands for the wish that one’s action agrees with God’s will, since everything is preordained by God (*maktub*). The Quran says that Muslims should never utter future plans without adding an *Insha'allah* at the end.⁸⁴⁷

Formulas that glorify and remember God are immensely popular in Muslim culture. They belong to the religious-conversational repertoire of every devout Muslim woman and man. It does not surprise that Jihadis obsessively use the formulas. Their lack of legitimacy among Muslims, and in parallel their claim to represent Islam, leaves only one escape route: A frontal

⁸⁴⁷ *Surat al-Kahf* 18:23-24: “Nor say of anything, ‘I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow’- Without adding, ‘So please Allah’ [*Insha’Allah*] and call thy Lord to mind when thou forgettest, and say, ‘I hope that my Lord will guide me ever closer (even) than this to the right road.’” Accessed December 20, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/18.htm>. Some of the punctuation in the translation has been slightly changed to enhance the clarity.

verbal attack. Thus, Jihadis hijack all those formulas that are especially popular and add even more ceremonial religious speech in order to create an ultra-righteous halo for themselves.

5.d.iii.3 Amity through Invocations, Supplications and Intercessions (*du'a'*)

The *du'a'* is a profound form of Islamic worship and describes the obligatory, but unscheduled and irregular personal prayers of Muslims to God (See Quran 40:60), as opposed to the scheduled personal and often communal prayers (*salat*), which take place five times per day (See Quran 11:114; 17:78, and 62: 9-10). The function of supplications is to ask God for favours or for forgiveness. Supplications are often intercessions for others, i.e. in our context prayers by Jihadis for fellow Jihadis. In Jihadi discussions, supplications are important discursive rituals. This has several reasons. Firstly, supplications are an integral part of the sacral, religious and righteous Jihadi vocabulary. As such, they are important identifiers of belonging to the Jihadi in-group. Regardless of the discussion topic, Jihadis discussants always use eulogies and supplications to create ideological cohesion. Secondly, supplications are part of the Jihadi discourse pattern. Commentaries in discussion must inevitably contain supplications, in order to guide every discussion into the “right” direction, and to create a Jihadi master-frame of speech. Discussants cannot really relate to co-discussants who avoid oral or written supplication rituals. Thirdly, by uttering supplications Jihadis motivate each other. Motivating co-members of the in-group is a crucial discursive leadership mechanism. Within discursive leadership, such motivation techniques strengthen mutual and participative guidance to shared goals.⁸⁴⁸

- The supplication for the absent (*al-du'a' fi zahr al-ghayb*)

A common supplication on the Jihadi forums is “the supplication for the absent.” According to Islamic tradition, “the invocation of the Muslim on behalf of his absent brother will be answered [...] every time he asks something good for his brother, he will be rewarded likewise.”⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁸ Psychologically seen, supplications on behalf of others can also be compared to the ritual of giving loose change to a needy person on the street. The giver always yields some profit in the form of spiritual salvation; and gets a clean conscience almost for free.

⁸⁴⁹ “Supplication for the absent,” accessed December 19, 2012, <http://islamicvoice.com/may.97/hadith.htm>.

The “supplication for the absent” goes back to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad and is taken utterly serious by Muslim believers.⁸⁵⁰ A Muslim believer who wants to make an absent Muslim feel at ease will direct this supplication at him. It shows the actor’s sincere amity and loyalty. “It is because of this sincerity that Allah answers such a supplication and rewards the supplicant as well.”⁸⁵¹ The supplication traditionally applies to situations, where two believers, who have been together, depart. In the online environment, this supplication is important because it probably helps to bridge E-spaces and physical spaces between actors, who are constantly communicating with each other, yet do not share a real (physical) community.

“It is normal practice that when two Muslims are about to go separate ways, after they have been together for sometime, one of them requests the other to pray for him. This is also the case if the parting will be for sometime, as when one of them is about to travel far. If that travel takes him to Umrah or pilgrimage, he is requested by everyone he meets before his departure to remember him when he makes a supplication in the Grand Mosque in Makkah or when he attends at Arafat. Even the Prophet (Pbuh) said to Umar when he was about to leave for Umrah: *“Do not forget us when you make your supplication, brother.”* [...] *“The fastest supplication to be answered is that made by one person on behalf of another when they are away from each other,”* (Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al Mufrad, At-Tirmithi and Abu Dawood).”⁸⁵²

This *hadith* commentary can be found on a “classical” Muslim website, “islamicvoice.com,” which closed its gates in the late 1990s, but remains running as an archive for Muslim issues. The commentary continues to explicate the exact use of “supplication for the absent,” which enhances our understanding why this prayer is so significant for virtual Jihadi culture, where participants are physically separated from each other.

“The main point about this latter type of prayer is the fact that the two persons are not together. While it is commendable that one person prays on behalf of another when they are together as when one says to his Muslim brother, *“May Allah reward you, or give you honour, or may He enhance your position in the hereafter, etc.”*, it cannot be absolutely

⁸⁵⁰ *Sharh al-Nawawi 'ala muslim*, “*Bab fadl al-du'a' li-l-muslimin bi zahr al-ghayb*,” accessed December 19, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?idfrom=7954&idto=7959&bk_no=53&ID=1276.

⁸⁵¹ “Supplication for the absent,” accessed December 19, 2012, <http://islamicvoice.com/may.97/hadith.htm>.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*

certain that this supplication is totally free from a personal element. One may pray for another to assure him that he cares for him and harbors no ill-intentions against him. Or he may try to assert his friendship by showing how keen he is that the other receives Allah's grace. When the two are not together, such a prayer acquires special significance. No one prays for another when the latter is absent unless he is sincere and he cares for his well-being."⁸⁵³

• ***La tansauna fi salih du'a'ikum* (Do not forget us in your sincere supplications)**

"Do not forget us in your sincere supplications" is again very popular prayer, with which Muslim coreligionists try to strengthen their mutual allegiance. For this reason, it is also very common in Jihadi discourse culture. Jihadis tend to appropriate ritual interactions of mainstream Muslim culture, intensify them and incorporate them into their own subculture. This intercession is not a direct prayer on behalf of someone else, but a double-transitive one, which is supposed to benefit the intercessor. The invocator of this prayer actually desires from a third party an intercession on behalf of himself. The prayer is thematically connected to the supplication for the absent (*al-du'a' fi zahr al-ghayb*), yet has a different motivation. The supplication for the absent is uttered because an intercessor wishes to do so on behalf of someone else. In this case, the invoker has an intrinsic motivation (loyalty, amity, friendship to a fellow Muslim). In this prayer, however, the invoker, who is absent, expects the prayer on behalf of his or her own person. The invoker has a strategic motivation (self-preservation, trust-building) and tries to stimulate another actor's intrinsic motivation to pray for him in his absence. One might even say, it is a more selfish thing to utter this invocation, because it is a request that can hardly be denied. The phrase belongs in the Jihadi subculture to the discursive guidance mechanisms that address actors' motivations. In addition, the supplication is relevant for Jihadis, when they communicate with each other via the Internet, because Jihadis often struggle and live clandestine lives; some are in danger and may be killed at any given moment. Jihadi organizations, for example, write this supplication when they publish announcements via the Internet. Fighters use it in their messages from the field. Frequently, media companies of Jihadi organizations, which document, produce and distribute propaganda material, fade the text of this supplication in at the endings of their videos. The prayer fosters a fatal attraction among online supporters to the secretiveness and distance of actual fighters. The Jihadi sense of urgency, thrill and danger translates into online discussions, in which participants answer with intercessions and invocations to this request.

⁸⁵³ Ibid.

The computers are often far away from the actual battlefields of jihad, and the forth an back of such prayers creates a martial and brotherly atmosphere among actual fighters and online activists.

Other transitive supplications and intercessions

The majority of Jihadi supplications and intercessions are direct ones, which are uttered in the presence of the discussants to award each other. Any transitive verb and action that God may do, such as “to strengthen,” “to grant mercy,” “to have mercy,” “to protect,” “to elevate,” can be formulated as a supplication. To this purpose, a transitive verb in the third person singular perfect tense is put in front of the name of God. This construction is translated in the present tense, as a wish in the sense of “may God do so and so.” An addressee of the supplication can be added as the accusative object, who is the receiver of the blessing. In that case the wish is uttered on behalf of this person. For example, “*na'amahu Allah*” means “May God grant mercy to him.” Or, “*rafa'a Allah qadarakum*” means “May God lighten your fate.” The most common supplication in Jihadi discussions is *Jazak Allah khayran*, which is an expression of gratitude that means “May God reward you with good things.” Interesting contributions and posts are frequently rewarded with this phrase and variations of it, such as *Jazak Allah khayr al-jaza'*, or *Jazak Allah ahsan al-jaza'*. If members of Jihadi media organizations upload new propaganda material, or a discussion member starts a new topic, co-discussants invoke the blessings of God upon him or her. It is noteworthy that the most common supplications on Jihadi forums are expressions of gratitude. By blessing and thanking each other nonstop for their discussion activities, Jihadis create a culture of reward, which sticks like a communicative glue among its participants. The sample below is from the forum *Shabakat al-Jihad al-'Alami*. In two executive posts, the phrase *Jazak Allah khayran* illustrates the high level of cohesiveness and community-sense around divine leadership.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵⁴ Al-Saif al-Battar [member name], “*Zawabit al-jihad al-shar'i fi-l-Islam*,” May 23, 2012, accessed December 29, 2012, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=18485>.



The first phrase of gratitude is by one of the forum’s surveillants (*mushrif*), a high ranking member, who is responsible for the enforcing of orderly behavior, the surveillance of conduct, the cohesiveness of discourses and the reporting of deviances on a discussion forum. In this case, the surveillant expresses deep gratitude and the wish that God may reward the contributor of a preceding post, which contains a few copy-pasted verses from the Quran and remarks on “the parameters of jihad in Islamic law.” The contributor of the post obviously tries to start a theological discussion. Similar to most other discussants in this thread, he is an inexperienced member and still experiments with topics, fonts, posting options, wording and speech. After he has expressed his wish for God’s gratitude, the surveillant remarks that the post is in the wrong thematic section of the forum, and asks the contributor, very politely, to arrange his posts more orderly in the future. The surveillant closes his advice with another supplication, *Barik Allah fik* (May God bless you). The next discussion participant is an inexperienced newcomer, who has only 17 posts. He also utters the standard expression of deep gratitude and adds in his short commentary some ritualistic display of consent, by lauding the contributor and the topic and eulogizing God. Several more discussants greet the contributor similarly. They ritually express their deep gratitude and add more formulaic Islamic language. In this short discussion thread with seven posts, the discussants are mainly newcomers, with two experienced members guiding their discussion. These are the surveillant and an experienced female member of the forum who has a statistic of 760 written posts.

The sample below is from the “Global Jihad”-forum. It shows two discussants’ reactions to a video posted by a female discussant (the virtual avatar is a female one). The video by “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” (AQIM) was posted in March 2012. The organization

condemns the French-sponsored U.N.S.C.-resolution 2071 which was drafted in March 2012 and adopted in October 2012. The resolution calls for the combating of AQIM, which uses northern Mali as a safe haven and training ground.⁸⁵⁵ In December 2012, the U.N.S.C. additionally adopted resolution 2085, which authorizes the deployment of multinational African forces to Mali. In the video, titled “The invasion of Mali: The French war with the help of the U.N.,” Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wudud attacks resolution 2071 and criticizes French politics in Africa. Al-Wudud compares the plight of Muslims in Mali to the situation of Muslims in Syria, where the Assad regime slaughters them. Additionally, the French involvement, claims al-Wudud, is guided by economic interests, for which Muslim children have to pay. The French neo-colonial goal is to secure and control Cacao production in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Benin, argues the head of AQIM.

Two members of the discussion forum praise and laude the posting of the video by AQIM's media arm “al-Andalus.” In the first post, a discussant repeats the ritualistic elevation of God two times (*takbir*). The *takbir*-phrase “God is great” is shouted as an expression of joy or in distress to motivate oneself and other Muslims. It is a common group rituals, where one man stands in front of a group and shouts “*takbir*.” The group answers in unison “*Allahu Akbar*.” In this case the *takbir* expresses joy. It is followed by the supplication “May He grant mercy to the lions of Islam, the men of *al-Malahim* media-company and al-Qaeda. Like I prepared myself in the Jihad base, for a wonderful day such as the Tuesday when we spilled the blood of the unbelievers and smeared it [probably a tale about a fighting experience of the contributor]. God is great and may all might be His, and to His Prophet and the believers.” The next discussant picks up the commentary and likewise starts with two eulogies of God, which he bolsters with numerous successive supplications for the Mujahidin of AQIM. “God is great. Praise be to God. Oh God, please support your servants, the Mujahidin. Oh God, please correct their mistakes. Oh God, please aim their shots. Oh God, please heal their wounds. Oh God, please free their prisoners. Amen, oh Lord of the worlds.”⁸⁵⁶ Laudations, supplications and intercessions such as these are like the dance steps of discursive dancing, which align all participants according to a certain melody and rhythm.

⁸⁵⁵ “Prime Minister Arrested,” New York Times, December 28, 2012, accessed December 29, 2012, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/mali/index.html>. See also France at the United Nations, “Mali,” accessed December 29, 2012, <http://www.franceonu.org/france-at-the-united-nations/geographic-files/africa/mali-1202/article/mali>.

⁸⁵⁶ “*Mufakkirat al-Jihad al-'Alami* [forum member's name],” *Al-Andalus tuqaddim: Ghazwat Mali..harb faransiyya bi-l-wikala – Kalima mar'iya li-l-sheikh Abi Mus'ab Abd al-Wudud – hafizahu Allah*,” accessed December 29, 2012, <http://aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24480>.



Source: accessed December 29, 2012, <http://aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24480>

5.d.iii.4 Hostility through Spells and Curses (*la'nat*)

Jihadi online curses can be seen as corrective interaction rituals in the sense of Goffman's "corrective process. Goffman argues that one's face is a sacred thing, and that the need to sustain it is a ritual one."⁸⁵⁷ Protecting face is also utterly important in Jihadi online communities. Every supporter stands with his online-character, his cyber-face, for the radical, cult-like community, mores and values. If a threat of face seems uncorrectable and threatens to damage core-beliefs of the group, then the offender can "provide compensations to the injured [...]," or will have to expect punishment, penance, and expiation for him."⁸⁵⁸

According to Irving Goffman's theory of interaction-rituals, a "person will have two points of view [if another inter-actor behaves "out of face"] – a defensive orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving the other's face." Saving face depends on common codes of conduct and deference, which vary according to cultural contexts. If a threat by behaviorally deviant participant occurs, other participants in a group that shares the same judgments will try to correct for its effects. Goffman calls this "*the corrective process*: [If] one or more participants find themselves in a state of ritual disequilibrium or disgrace, and an attempt must be made to re-establish a satisfactory ritual state for them. [...] the length and intensity of the corrective effort is nicely adapted to the persistence and intensity of the

⁸⁵⁷ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-To-Face Behaviour* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 2005), 19.

⁸⁵⁸ Leaning on Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*.

threat. One's face, then, is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one." Protecting face is also utterly important in Jihadi online communities, because every supporter stands with his online-character, his cyber-face, for the radical, cult-like community, its mores and values. If a threat of face seems uncorrectable and threatens to damage core-beliefs of the group, then the offender can "provide compensations to the injured [...] or provide punishment, penance, and expiation for himself."⁸⁵⁹ Deviance from Jihadi ideology is an existential threat to discursive online groups. Accordingly, the corrective effort is adapted to the existential nature of the threat and answered with a death curse. Every in-group member is required to support such a step. If he does not, then he will be punished by other participants and excluded from the group according to the social habits and conditioning that is maintained within the group, namely a cultic veneration of death and violence paired with a high degree of self-righteousness, paranoid conspiracy outlook on out-groups and dogmatic doctrinaire wish to strengthen the in-group bias. This happened in response to critique against the Shabaab's pledge to al-Qaeda, for example.

The situation: Jihadi supporters posted news on and discussed the merger of the Somali Shabaab al-Mujahidin Movement with al-Qaeda in February 2012 on a mainstream Arabic discussion forum. Jihadi supporters of the discussion sang from the tree-tops and praised the post of a certain "Abu Hamza," who copy-pasted the announcement of the merger from one of the Jihadi forums. We have already discussed this procedure, which is a mutual "media-invasion" (*ghazwa i'lamiyya*) by several activists on a non-Jihadi discussion forum, in more detail above in the chapter "Mutual Virtual Leadership." "Abu Hamza" also posted a link to a video of the pledge of allegiance on Youtube. Two other Jihadis supported his discursive attack on the non-Jihadi discussion forum – They repeatedly posted formulas of laudation, which are very emotional, ritualistic and standardized expressions.

Suddenly three other participants in the discussion start a counter-attack. They voice a very argumentative and destructive, yet rational-normative critique, and try to create a situation for communicative action, based on mutual agreement. A forum member named *Muhammad al-Abasi* asks "can you reveal to us the gains of this merger or pledge of allegiance for both sides, Abu Hamza? They behave like business-companies. When they approach bankruptcy, two or more merge in order to survive the crisis. Sometimes they succeed. And sometimes they draw each other into the abyss, and their downfall is gigantic." Immediately afterwards, a participant called *Nabil al-Araby* asks "what will happen after the pledge of allegiance of the *Shabab al-Mujahideen* Movement to al-Zawahiri? Will al-Qaeda stop killing Muslims there?

⁸⁵⁹ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-To-Face Behaviour* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 2005), 21.

It is better for the Shabaab Movement if it concentrates on Somalia and does what is best such as services to the Muslims over there instead of a pledge to a person who together with his group caused the destruction of more than one state. Somalis die from hunger and killing, and in what way do they benefit from this pledge?” Next, another member of the forum, *Ahmad Hamdan*, writes “We heard about pledges of allegiance of others to the leadership of al-Qaeda [such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, killed in 2006], among them Bin Laden and others. Where are they now [obviously dead]? I think that this proves that the fate of al-Zawahiri is sealed. The pledge to al-Qaeda results only in destruction and death.” Three consecutive critical “out-of-face” threads are a massive fusillade against the online conduct and deference of Jihadis, which is tightly controlled on all-out jihad forums, meaning that face-saving depends on the avoidance of critical topics. However, this is not a Jihadi forum. “Abu Talha,” whose avatar carries a picture of Bin Laden, assumes the role of corrective face-guardian. He addresses all deviant participants in the discussion-thread with their names and puts a ritual curse on them: “*Say: ‘Perish in you rage; Allah knoweth well all the secrets of the heart.’*” [Quran Surat al-Imran 3:119].⁸⁶⁰

Something similar happened in October 2006. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) announced the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, *Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya*). Part of the electoral mechanism that led to the confirmation of ISI’s supposed leader Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi (k.2010) was the virtual pledge of allegiance via the Internet (*bay'a*). ISI is an important virtual entity which draws thousands of sympathizers together into forum-discussions, design-contests and propaganda-activity. Yet, even within the radical scene the existence of ISI and election of its leader remains disputed. For example, an online discussion participant wrote: “Pledge allegiance to who you want. That is your problem. But do not force any Muslim to pledge this allegiance! Refrain from spilling the blood of Muslims and clerics and fighters! And protect the inviolateness (*hurma*) of the blood of Muslims and innocents! Do not explode the homes of Muslims with explosive belts claiming that an apostate lives in it – according to your thinking! Listen to clerics who are older and wiser and more pious than you!” He immediately received a death-threat from a discussion participant.⁸⁶¹

Virtual curses are not only directed at internal critics in online environments, but also externally at enemies in the physical world, such as “apostate” Muslim heads of states or Muslim human rights activists who oppose Sunni fundamentalism and Jihadism. The cursing

⁸⁶⁰ قُلْ مُوتُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ

Abu Hamza al-Muwahhid, „*Bushra li kull mu'min: Amir Harakat Shabab al-Mujahidin yubayi' al-amir Ayman al-Zawahiri*,” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.ye1.org/vb/showthread.php?t=649613>.

⁸⁶¹ <http://www.aljazeera.talk.Net/forum/showthread.php?t=77767v>, accessed May 1, 2009 (not available anymore).

of online adversaries is a tool for Jihadis to preserve the cohesion of their (virtual) discussion groups. The cursing of adversaries in the physical world shows that the identification with the own group extends the virtual environment. For example, anyone, who allegedly harms the reputation and interests of offline Jihadi organizations, can be cursed by online activists. Above, we have discussed face-saving processes in a discussion that turns around the legitimacy of the attack at 14-years old Pakistani blogger and human rights activist *Malala Yousafzai*, who was shot in the head by Pakistani Taliban on October 9th, 2012. A participant in this discussion wishes the curse of God upon her (*la'nat Allah 'alayha*) and upon everyone who supports her. However, his curse is conditional, depending “if the news [i.e. the Taliban report] is right” that she supported “the war on terror in Pakistan’s Swat Valley” by blogging is correct. The Taliban further accuse Malala of six additional offences. She was awarded medals for her “treacherous” work by the “United Nations of Corruption;” she has incited women to revolt against their husbands and daughters against their fathers; she has incited women to leave their houses [sic]; she has supported the “crusading media” to spread moral corruption; and she has defamed the Taliban.”⁸⁶² A discussion participant, a new member on the forum with only 25 posts criticizes “May God guide you (*hadakum Allah*). One does not utter such a thing [wishing the curse of God upon another Muslim] if the intention is not sincere.” Yet, a senior member with more than 60,000 posts repeats the curse, adding that the 14-years old girl deserves her throat being cut. The role of Malala is so closely intertwined with the reputation of the Pakistani Taliban that a heated discussion goes on for several consecutive pages. In a different discussion on another forum, a participant says that it is right to wish “the curse of God upon everyone who vilifies jihad.” But the conditional character of the curse comes even stronger to the fore in this post, where the participant says in the same breath “but, my dear brother, what does jihad exactly mean to you? Is jihad for you the killing of Sunni Muslims on the markets, or when the Mujahidin kill young Iraqis, because these reject to swear an oath of allegiance at gunpoint to an unknown person; or does jihad perhaps mean to you attacks against Sunni targets in the neighbouring countries? Please illuminate me.”⁸⁶³

We can conclude some discussants show reluctant behaviour to express curses. An illegitimate invocation of curses is probably connected to fears from divine repercussions. God’s curse is regarded as something so mighty and undefeatable, that the wish for it is

⁸⁶²Maymuna [member name], “*Itlaq al-rasas 'ala fatat Pakistaniyya*,” accessed October 31, 2012, <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=297625>.

⁸⁶³ “*Bay'a 'abra al-Internet*,” accessed December 29, 2012, original discussion from July 2008, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?304962>.

uttered with a strong reluctance. God may punish those who wish curses upon other Muslims, if the cursers err in their judgments and intentions. In fact, an online Jihadi discussion group reacts very irritated if a Muslim participant turns the tables around and asks in a prayer of petition for God's curse upon Jihadis.⁸⁶⁴

5.d.iii.5 Transcendental Kinship and Virtual Social Order (Afterlife-Marriage Perceptions)

Meyer Fortes observes in his anthropological study of 1969, *Kinship and Social Order*, that intermarriage between tribal and clan societies (exogamy) creates bonds among them which are existential and decisive in regards to war and peace. Intermarriage creates the perception of a dichotomy of *insider versus outsider* among relatives and prevents *strategic action* among insiders. Habermas claims that the ideal of a collectively shared homogenous Lebenswelt comes closest to existence in archaic societies, which share common social and mythological structures and are inter-married.⁸⁶⁵ There is an obligation of relatives to act agreement-based with each other, be loyal, support each other, be honest, in short, show “amity.” According to Habermas, Meyer Fortes’ principle of *amity* is a meta-norm that obligates relatives to interact with each other and meet the conditions of *communicative action*. However, mythological worldviews also blur the divide between reality and vision, rationality and cult; they mix norms, spirituality, morality and causality with each other. Therefore, one cannot yet speak about a universally applicable situation of *communicative action* among doctrinaire ideological groups, whose identity is founded on a myth and common social structure.⁸⁶⁶ Meyer Fortes originally explains that “where amity is the rule in the relations of clans or tribes or communities, there kinship or quasi-kinship by myth or ritual allegiance [underl. b. author] or by such institutions as the East African joking relationships, is invoked and the kind of fighting that smacks of war is outlawed. By contrast, non-kin whether or not they are territorially close or distant, and regardless of the social and cultural affinities of the parties, are very commonly identified as being outside the range of prescriptive altruism and therefore marriageable as well as potentially hostile to the point of serious fighting (or, nowadays, litigation) in a dispute. It is as if marriage and warfare are

⁸⁶⁴ See, for example, „parabol“, „La'nat Allah 'ala man yad'i al-jihad fi-l-jaza'ir,“ April 12, 2007, accessed December 29, 2012, <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?222592>.

⁸⁶⁵ Jürgen Habermas, TKH 2, 234. According to these bonds relatives from different tribes are obliged to agreement-based *communicative action*. This does not rule out the possibility of conflict and clashes between inter-married tribes.

⁸⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas, TKH 2, 237-238.

thought of as two aspects of a single constellation the direct contrary of which is kinship and amity.”⁸⁶⁷

Kinship, amity, warfare and marriage will now be explained at the example of “the lovers of the huris” and their marriage perceptions. “The lovers of the huris” (*'ushshaq al-hur*) is another self-description of online Jihadis, which they use in expectation of paradise and inter-marriage with black-eyed paradise maidens. In the following analysis the term comprises the realm of martyrdom-related marriage conceptions of afterlife, which appear frequently in online Jihadi discussions. Based on the theoretical impulses of Fortes and Habermas, we will argue that these shared conceptions (through common discursive rituals and shared myths) create homogeneity, amity and quasi-transcendental kinship relations among online Jihadis. If the firm belief in afterlife-kinship creates transcendental lineage and kinship patterns, then, in addition, transcendental lineage concepts create social order and structure in Jihadi networks. Based upon this myth, every Jihadi irrespective of nationality or ethnicity who dies a martyr will share kinship relations with co-martyrs in the hereafter. Also Jihadi *ancestor worship* is related to transcendental lineage patterns and becomes fully visible in the veneration of saint-like martyrs, which strongly reminds of a distorted form of Sufi spiritualism.⁸⁶⁸ From an in-group perspective, this process creates a perfect situational context and environment for a ratio-deprived *communicative action* situation within the group. Members of the group do not apply strategic action when they communicate with each other, because their kinship and amity forbid this. Yet, this situation is perfectly *strategic* from a critical outsider perspective. The critical outsider does not share the common myth, and he thus cannot share the integrating, socializing and target-oriented common discourse, which the mystic realm of transcendental inter-marriage purports. Let us illustrate our point with relevant examples from online jihad.

One illustrative example is the propaganda movie “The Lovers of the Huris” by al-Qaeda in Iraq, which presents their slain fighters.⁸⁶⁹ The movie was released in 2004 and shows that the concept has been prominent in Jihadi web-discourse for a number of years. Similarly, a 21-years old German suicide bomber in Afghanistan, for example, is described in an online propaganda-video as “the uncompromising bridegroom,” and thus alludes to his marriage to

⁸⁶⁷ Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and Social Order* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 234.

⁸⁶⁸ In this context, see Meyer Fortes on ancestor worship. Meyer Fortes, “Fate in Relation to the Social Structure,” in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 350-355.

⁸⁶⁹ “Ushaaq ul Hoor by Jamaat Al-Tawheed wal Jihad (2004)” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/ushaaqulhoor>.

paradise maidens in afterlife.⁸⁷⁰ Martyrdom, as demonstrated in this example, is an imperative ethos, which structures and integrates Jihadi groups. On Youtube, a Jihadi supporter of the Libyan revolution calls himself “Lover of the Huris.”⁸⁷¹ This self-designation is not a coincidence, but results out of the above described function of virtual and transcendental kinship that is supposed to create a situation of *communicative action* among Jihadis. On a more conscious level, this self-designation is supposed to witness to the actor’s readiness to sacrifice himself. That, in turn, raises his status within online Jihadi hierarchy, i.e. the hierarchy in the information-network “online-jihad;” the Youtube-Channel of this user is a small node within the network. The prominent “Global Jihad Forum” calls its online video-channel, which publishes audio-visual propaganda by different organizations, “Screen of the Lovers of the Huris.”⁸⁷² Furthermore, one of the major Jihadi forums calls itself “Islamic Network of The Lovers of the Huris.”⁸⁷³ But a similar concept is also anchored in the *salafi-da’wa* trend with its “Forum of the Lovers of the Huris.”⁸⁷⁴ Also in popular Islamic culture the concept of the *huris* raises pressing questions. For example, a worried Muslim woman asks an online sheikh, if her husband will be with her or with the paradise maidens in the hereafter. The sheikh laughs, since he cannot really answer that question; leaning again on Fortes, he is not capable of defining where the “locus of prohibited or prescribed marriage” lies.⁸⁷⁵ This example is very telling about the lack of credible religious authority in Muslim mainstream-information society. An “apt” Jihadi framing of the concept is delivered via the immensely popular Jihadi website “Pulpit of Monotheism,” where the classical metre of the Arabic *qasida*-poem conveys the myth of the black-eyed paradise maidens with a supernatural spell; “The Paradise Maidens are Calling Me.”⁸⁷⁶ The transferability and permeability of the concept comes clear to the fore as we find a link to the same poem on the Ansar al-Mujahidin

⁸⁷⁰ Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, German Sub-Group, Ibrahim Chouka, “Der kompromisslose Bräutigam – Eine Reportage aus Usbekistan,” accessed November 10, 2012, <http://www.vidoosh.tv/videos/18247/latest-leaks-der-kompromisslose-brutigam-eine-reportage-aus-usbekistan>.

⁸⁷¹ “*Ashiq al-Hur*,” “*Al-Jihad al-jihad, ya abtal Libya*,” February 25, 2011, accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHNHqZm0Hpo>.

⁸⁷² *Qanat al-jihad al-alami al-jihadiyya, Shashat 'ushshaq al-hur*, accessed October 2, 2012, <http://aljahad.com/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=114>.

⁸⁷³ *Shabakat 'Ushaq al-Hur al-Islamiyya*, accessed October 2, 2012, www.i7ur.com/vb.

⁸⁷⁴ *Muntada al-Hur al-Ayn*, accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.hor3en.com/vb/>.

⁸⁷⁵ “*Al-Sheikh al-Arifi maa mutassila la turid al-hur al-ayn li zaujiha*,” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84yFdHINm-w>. The last remark refers to Meyer Fortes, Kinship and Social Order (Chicago: 1969), 234.

For a very critical salafi view see <http://www.al-haq.net/vb/showthread.php?t=31908>.

⁸⁷⁶ “*Al-Hur al-ayn tunadini*,” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=hwksu4fh>. See also this fatwa on the Paradise maidens by a Sheikh of the Tawhed.ws website’s Fatwa council: http://www.tawhed.ws/FAQ/display_question?qid=1961.

Network, which is one of the most prominent multi-lingual jihad websites.⁸⁷⁷ The same poem has been vocalized as a song (*nashid*) by a member of the prominent “Shumukh al-Islam Network.”⁸⁷⁸

The black-eyed paradise maidens are calling me
 So let me go mother, let me
Don't cry, oh mother
 About my path, no, your tears won't bend me
Oh Mother, my way has become so clear
 And the heart walks it joyfully
An ardent war and struggle
 And blood that sprinkles with glory
Oh mother, my religion smoulders
 And wants men who are truthful
Let me create with my blood
 A dawn that glows red on the horizon
Mother, my heart beats so fast
 And the breeze of paradise smells good
Let me precede my brothers
 Those who went before us, they laid a seed within us
Oh mother, if the message arrives
 That I died on the battlefield
May your condolence be, my mother, that
 I received exactly what I wished for

The poem expresses several genealogical and kinship lines. Firstly, the verse “The black-eyed paradise maidens are calling me” stresses the transcendental concept of kinship through intermarriage with paradise maidens, which Jihadis believe to share once they become martyrs. In the mortal world, they already foster this myth by referring to themselves as “lovers of the huris,” i.e. future bridegrooms who will all share the same lineage in paradise. Secondly, the verse “Those who went before us, they laid a seed within us” seems to relate to

⁸⁷⁷ The Mujahidin Supporters Network,” “*Anshid al-hur al-'ayn tunadini manqul min minbar al-tawhid wal-l-jihad*,” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://113.20.29.51/vb/showthread.php?p=12449>.

⁸⁷⁸ “*Nashid ra'i'a: Hur al-ayn tunadini – bi sawt Muhammad al-Salman*,” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/andar-alanashed>.

the Islamic mythology of the pious forefathers, i.e. *al-salaf al-salih* (the first three generations of Muslims), whose tradition of practicing an unadulterated Islam Jihadis claim to continue. It is essentially a belief in “righteous predecessors.” Thirdly, the reference to “my brothers” in the poem expresses a common perception among Muslims, who often refer to co-religionists as “brothers” or “sisters.” Jihadi subculture does so likewise, however, with an extremist cultural sub-framework in mind. Here, we can detect a perception of kinship that is not based on intermarriage and blood relations, but on spiritual grounds. The reference to a “dawn that glows red on the horizon” could refer metaphorically to a suicide-bombing; at least this impression comes to mind in regards to the fact that suicide bombings are at present the major *modus operandi* of Jihadi warfare; and inextricably connected to martyrdom-imaginings. The frequent appellation of “mother” seems to be a stylistic element, as it stands for emotionality, family, kinship and closeness.

A 21-years old German suicide bomber in Afghanistan is described in an online propaganda-video as “the struggling martyr Faruq from Germany, who read the orders in the book of his Lord.”⁸⁷⁹ The same video describes the young German suicide attacker as “the uncompromising bridegroom [...] who put the bride-gift around his belly,” and thus alludes to his marriage to paradise maidens in afterlife, which possibly has a socializing and integrating value for German Jihadis who are trained by the Uzbek group, as well as for those Jihadis who support them from Germany and regularly watch their video productions. Another example is that of the 21-years old Pennsylvania citizen Emerson Begolly aka Asadullah Alshishani, who was arrested in 2011 for spreading Jihadi propaganda and soliciting violence. The Jihadi grassroots activist Begolly composed a rap-style Jihadi propaganda song (*nashid jihadiyya*) to elegize a slain fighter, which was published on the “Mujahidin Supporters Network.” Begolly’s example is very relevant, since he was not an intellectual figurehead of the jihad movement. It seems that he was influenced by common, simple narratives, which got through to him. The song contains the strophe

The Hoor al Ayn are waiting for me
 Grab my Gun and my Ammo
 Strap my kamarband onto my chest
 Get dressed up in my camo

⁸⁷⁹ Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, “Der kompromisslose Bräutigam – Eine Reportage aus Usbekistan,” accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.vidoosh.tv/videos/18247/latest-leaks-der-kompromisslose-brutigam-eine-reportage-aus-usbekistan>.

Martyrdom is what I wanted best⁸⁸⁰

However, the transcendental kinship concept via afterlife-marriage perceptions is not restricted to global Jihadi discourse. It also appears prominently in nationalist Islamist struggles. The difference between the latter and the former is that proponents of global jihad are doctrinaire ideological and often hijack foreign and abstract causes for their vision of global struggle. Nationalist Islamists often use terrorist tactics, but tend to fight within clearly defined frameworks of political struggles, which are directed against foreign occupation or domestic repression. This is the case with the Palestinian Islamist organizations. The Palestinian discourse around the veneration of martyrs also has a deeper function, which is to foster group cohesion on the basis of above explained transcendental lineage concept. Let us look at the headlines of a number of posts on Palestinian martyrs: “The ‘Father of the Huris’: The honour of martyrdom was bestowed on him after he frightened his enemy”; “The lover of the black-eyed paradise maidens – wonderful”; “A young lad sees the *huri*”; “He died while he heard the voices of the *huris* calling him”; etc.⁸⁸¹ The forum “Paradise Birds,” on which these posts were published, not so much reflects Palestinian extremism, but a tormented society in despair that finds the channel for its traumata in a death-culture. However, also the Palestinian cause is not immune from being taken hostage by the manipulative rhetorics of extremist doctrinaire jihadi propaganda. On another Palestinian website we find the saddening picture of three mourning women, who are veiled in black; one of them is the former bride of a slain Palestinian fighter. The picture is titled “Her merry dream has come true - The marriage of her bridegroom to the Huris.”⁸⁸² But the women on the picture look anything else but cheerful. YouTube commentaries and Jihadi forum discussions show that the concept of afterlife-marriage to black-eyed paradise maidens is accepted in Muslim popular culture, in different strands of Salafi culture (political, propagation-oriented, and violent Jihadi strands), as well as in the culture of Islamist nationalist struggle. The concept permeates online jihad on all levels, from organizational propaganda to grassroots speech and even discussion networks are named after the paradise maidens. This has a socializing and integrating community effect, which in Jihadi online culture, transcends the meaning of earthly kinship. The focus on transcendental social structures in afterlife is

⁸⁸⁰ “Nasheed Tribute to Shaheed Taimour Abdulwahab ☪ in English ☪ Written & Sung by Asadullah Alshishani,” December 14, 2010, accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=29569>.

⁸⁸¹ All these links appear in the following post: “*Abu al-hur al-ayn: nala sharaf al-shahada baad jihad araba bihi aduhu*,” accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.6oyor-aljanah.com/vb/t223476.html>.

⁸⁸² “Ham-Uhibb-As,” “*Marah tastafiq min hilmiha 'ala zafaf 'arisiha li-l-hur*,” October 7, 2012, accessed October 2, 2012, <http://www.paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?t=1034941>.

immensely strong in Jihadi culture. The root causes for this phenomenon still need to be explained. However, while this task breaches the scope of the present study, it may be justifiably argued that the concept of afterlife-marriage enhances the effectiveness of communicative and virtual leadership of Jihadis. But this effectiveness also owes to different theological constructs and transcendental guidance in connection with virtual leadership, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

6. Divine Virtual Leadership (*Hidaya*) - The Theology of Online Jihad

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Bible, 1 John 2:15

“In everything the will of God, madam,” said Chichikov with a sigh. “Against the divine wisdom it is not for us to rebel. Pray hand them over to me, Nastasia Petrovna.”

“Hand over whom?” - “The dead peasants.” - “But how could I do that?” - “Quite simply. Sell them to me, and I will give you some money in exchange.” Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, The Dead Souls (1842)

This chapter deals with the theological guidance element of online jihad. Devout Muslims (as do Jews and Christians) believe that true piety means to follow “God’s divine guidance on the right way” (*hidaya*). They perceive the Qur’an as the unadulterated commands of God. The holy text can be installed and manipulated as an ultimate chain of command, which reaches from Allah down to every single believer (*hidayat al-Quran*).⁸⁸³ But Muslims cannot agree on a common implementation or realization of God’s divine guidance on earth.⁸⁸⁴ This problem is vividly demonstrated by the existence of different Sunni and Shiite sects in Islam, who follow diverse doctrines (*'aqa'id*) and methods of belief practice (*manahij*). Furthermore, Sunni Islam lacks central religious-political authority, and it is easy for different interpreters to legitimize a variety of doctrines for their own purposes. The two other religions of the book, Judaism and Christianity, have as well a similarly strong, yet slightly different relationship to the text and its metaphysical-theological power. For example, Judaism and Christianity assume that the world was created through the “word;” and Christianity, respectively, assumes that man is the result of the transformation of God’s word into human flesh. Thus the scripture incorporates the myth that the male was created from the substance of God, and the female was created from a piece of the male. Moreover, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches have managed to exercise centralized institutional and discursive control over believers much more effectively for centuries than any central Islamic school or center of

⁸⁸³ See, for example, Ali Bin Nayef al-Shuhud (ed.), *Hidayat al-Quran allati hiya al-aqwam*, (Pahang (Malaysia): Dar al-Ma'mur, 2010), accessed November 10, 2012, <http://sh.rewayat2.com/da3wa/Web/31736/001.htm>.

⁸⁸⁴ “There is not a common Muslim view on religious authority. Adherents of Islam are united in the belief that ultimate authority lies with God, but they have disagreements regarding the implementation of His will on earth.” Karim H. Karim, “Changing Perceptions of Islamic Authority among Muslims in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom,” *IRPP Choices* 15 (2) (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2009), accessed October 16, 2012, <http://www.irpp.org/choices/archive/vol15no2.pdf>, 4.

learning. The most effective tool for governance (*ars atrium/techne technon*) was the guidance of the consciences of their members through themes of sin and salvation. However, modern critics counter that the religions of the book cannot be juxtaposed. A key difference between Islam and Christianity is allegedly “Islam’s integration of *deen* (faith/spirituality) and *dunya* (society/the material world). Proper social conduct (including in domains such as business and politics) is viewed as part of Islamic piety.” The authors of the report conclude that “Muslims who choose to continue practicing their faith under conditions of Western modernity often find themselves in search of authoritative guidance in order to remain faithful to Islamic precepts.”⁸⁸⁵ This statement is problematic, since devout Christians or Jews as well long for religious guidance and coordinate their social, economic or political matters according to their religious beliefs. And yet, in practice and conceptually-wise, it can be agreed that Islam is a more holistic and legalistic religious-political system than Christianity or Judaism.

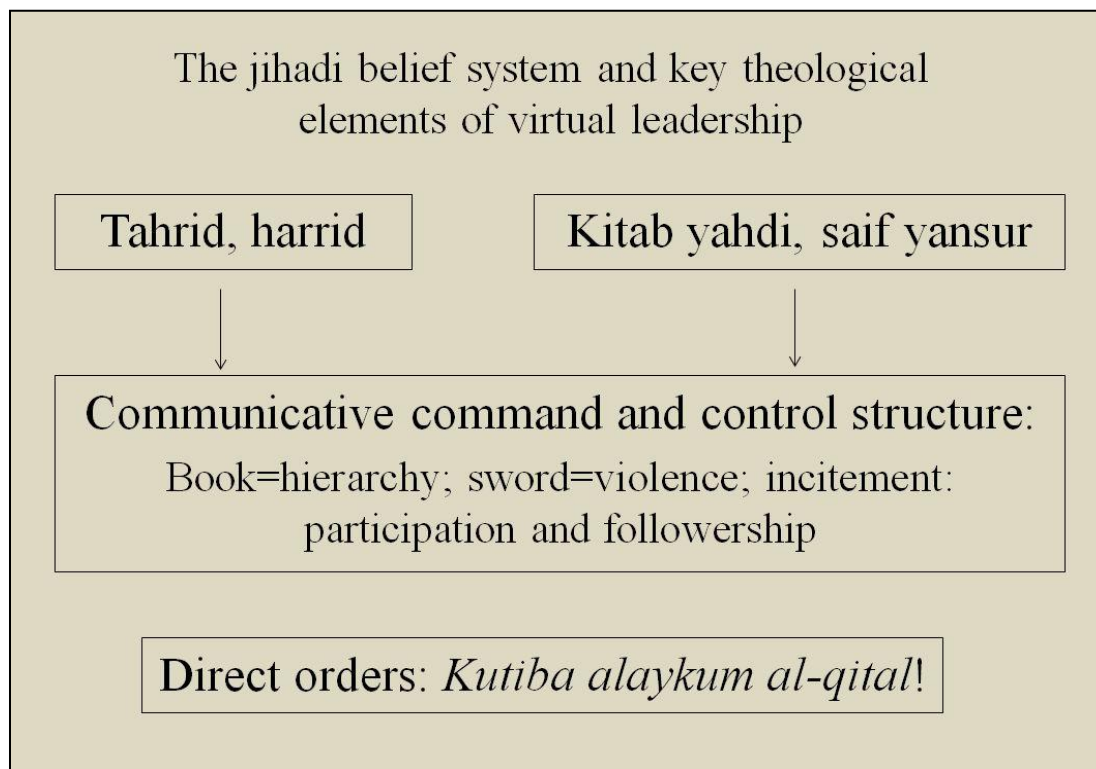
A number of Muslim majority websites feature the theme of divine guidance through the Quran, which we will discuss in this chapter from a Jihadi viewpoint. One such example is the site “*Huda al-Quran*” (<http://www.hodaalquran.com>), which is administered in Bahrain and features 50 some verses from the Quran, which stand for different aspects of divine guidance.⁸⁸⁶ This is noteworthy, since we will encounter a similar buildup and similar verses again in the discussions below, which can be easily taken out of Muslim majority contexts and embedded into Jihadi frameworks. With divine leadership scenarios Jihadi aim to create emotions of fear, fright and obedience that are utilized in long-range control and command scenarios.

Since Muslims commonly believe that the ultimate authority of God is manifested in the injunctions of the Quran, the manipulation of the scripture is a keen interest of Jihadi propagandists. For example, a 21-years old German suicide bomber in Afghanistan is described in a German-language propaganda-video that can be found online as “the struggling martyr Faruq from Germany, who read the orders in the book of his Lord [...] and armed, with the dowry [suicide belt] attached to his body, he attacked a CIA compound in

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁸⁶ One of them is verse 20 of *Surat al-Hadid* (57:20): “Know ye (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude: How rain and the growth which it brings forth, delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a Penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And Forgiveness from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure (for the devotees of Allah.)” And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception?” *Surat al-Hadid* 57:20, accessed November 29, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/57.htm>.

Afghanistan.”⁸⁸⁷ Martyrdom as the result of a suicide operation is portrayed as a perfect act of obedience to the scripture. The same propaganda video describes the young German as “the uncompromising bridegroom,” which alludes to his alleged marriage to paradise maidens in the Hereafter. In the chapter “Transcendental Kinship and Virtual Social Order (5.d.iii.5)” we have already described the afterlife-marriage concept of Jihadis. In Jihadi theology, various doctrines are intertwined, and this strengthens the imperative function of theological guidance.



The doctrine of divine leadership (*hidaya*) is immensely popular among Muslims. In fact, the word root is mentioned right at the beginning of the Quran in *Surat al-Fatiha* 1:6: *Ihdina al-sirat al-mustaqim* (“Guide us to the straight path”). In Muslim understanding, the verb “*hada*” means “to guide the right way.” Similarly, the related noun *hidaya* (divine guidance) is derived from the word root *h-d-y*.

⁸⁸⁷ The operation took place in March 2011, claims the propaganda video. See “Der Kompromisslose Brautigam,” Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Producer: Jundullah Studio, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/DerKompromissloseBrautigam>.

“[It] means taking by the hand and leading and guiding rightly, and gently. The noun *hidāyah* derived from it usually means true or right guidance, and is the opposite of deviation or being astray.”⁸⁸⁸

The word root *ha-dal-ya* appears frequently in the Quran, such as in *huda* (“righteous leadership and religious guidance”), *hada* (to lead the right way), *hadin* (leader), *muhtadin* (righteously guided), or in later Muslim eschatology the *mahdi* (righteously guided leader). However, the *mahdi*-character does not appear in the Quran itself.⁸⁸⁹

The belief in God and the Quran is supposed to guide the believers’ actions. For Jihadis “righteous guidance” can only be toward “fighting.” Quotes from the Quran are mixed with Jihadi theological interpretations to lead operations on the ground. Online jihad is the carrier of divine commands which are encapsulated in the Quran. For example, the Quran injunction “*Fighting is prescribed for you*” is read like a direct order by Jihadis, especially if it is put into a divine guidance framework.⁸⁹⁰ Analogically, Jihadis do not only understand injunctions from the Quran, but also theological rulings (*ahkam*), which are often highly fabricated to fit their interests, as supreme orders. In modern Jihadi theology obedience to divine leadership is an obligation that is rewarded; disobedience will be punished. A simple, but effective reward (salvation) – punishment (hellfire) theme emerges. The Iraqi-born Swedish suicide bomber Taimour al-Abdaly, who detonated himself prematurely in the capital Stockholm in December 2010; and the British student Roshonara Choudhry, who stabbed and injured the Parliamentarian Stephen Timms in May 2010 were both lauded by Jihadi propagandists. They argued that the attackers obeyed divine commands. The Jihadi e-magazine “Inspire,” which has been published by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) since summer 2010, honored Choudary as a role-model who “rushed to her obligation of jihad and answered the call of Allah: {March forth whether you are light or heavy...} [Q 9: 41].”⁸⁹¹

A few years prior, the “legendary” Jihadi e-magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar* was published by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. A local wing of al-Qaeda started a terrorist campaign in Saudi Arabia in 2003. Saudi security forces were initially overwhelmed, but from 2004 on gained the upper hand against the organization.⁸⁹² By 2006 the Saudi wing of al-Qaeda was effectively smashed and activism shifted to Yemen, where a new wing was formed in 2009 which

⁸⁸⁸ “1.6. Guide us to the Straight Path,” accessed December 26, 2012, <http://www.mquran.org/content/view/6/4/>.

⁸⁸⁹ See for a detailed explanation David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

⁸⁹⁰ Quran *Surat al-Baqara* 2:216, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00226.htm>.

⁸⁹¹ *Al-Malahem* Media Foundation, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, “Inspire,” issue 4, Winter 2010/2011: 4.

⁸⁹² Guido Steinberg, “Gefährdete Stabilität in Saudi Arabien,” *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, January 9, 2013, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.nzz.ch/meinung/debatte/gefaehrdete-stabilitaet-in-saudiarabien-1.17928736>.

remains active.⁸⁹³ The new branch, a merger between Yemenite and Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda members, has taken over the name of the former Saudi organization, *al-Qa'ida fi Jazirat al-'Arab*. Between 2003-2004, the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda branch published an online magazine which explicitly features the divine guidance doctrine “a book that leads the right way and a sword that assists” (*kitab yahdi wa saif yansur*). In this chapter we will focus on the magazine’s theological articles, which epitomize Quranic guidance (*hidayat al-Quran*) from a Jihadi perspective. In the Jihadi e-magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar*, the maxim serves as a master headline of all articles that deal with theological matters and thus frames theological topics within a divine leadership context. The theological articles always have a secondary headline which is related to a specific theological topic/sub-doctrine. But first we will discuss important conceptual and theological questions of Islamic authority and sectarian trends, especially that of Salafism and its subcategory Jihadism.

6.a Root Factors that Facilitate Divine Virtual Leadership

There are several root factors that facilitate virtual leadership in Sunni Muslim culture. Among them are the focus on divine dominion for lack of secular alternatives, the lack of central theological authority, and the plurality of theological power centers in Sunni Islam. The theological art of directing the conscience through allegedly divine commands has survived stronger in Muslim culture, while it shifted in Western culture to the capitalist art of mind guidance (marketing), which also exploits religious myths and themes. Habermas argues that there remains an authority of holiness that determines social norms and communicative action in secularized societies.⁸⁹⁴ Goffman orientates himself like Habermas at Durkheim’s thesis that the roots of moral authority and social norms are sacral. They are based on worship-like and ritualized actions. “Durheimian notions about primitive religion can be translated into concepts of deference and demeanor, and [...] help us to grasp some aspects of urban secular living.”⁸⁹⁵ Repressive Muslim regimes, which have been supported over decades for purely strategic reasons by western powers, have exacerbated effects of brainwashing and repression by trying to exercise complete surveillance over Muslim societies, with the help of panoptical secret service apparatuses. But in pious Muslim perception, God alone sees, guides, rewards and punishes everything justly. This perception

⁸⁹³ Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – *al-Qa'ida fi Jazirat al-'Arab*.

⁸⁹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, TKH 2, “Die Autorität des Heiligen und der normative Hintergrund kommunikativen Handelns,” 69-117.

⁸⁹⁵ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*, 95.

has since the 1960s become a strong mobilization valve for political frustrations, which comes at present to the fore in the agendas of insurgent Islamic groups in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Libya, who counter-check the formerly all-pervading control of repressive governments. It also plays a major role for (online) Jihadis in their quest to install divine leadership patterns. The theological Panopticon is not a mechanical architecture, i.e. a prison building, but a mental architectural structure with clearly definable mechanisms.

Jihadi actors establish conscience-guidance through rigid rules that must be obeyed to enter their discussion forums, or their attempts to install God as the supreme leader who calls for jihad (a form of charismatic, transcendental and paternal leadership). It is a strategic discourse around allegedly divine imperatives which feeds itself and is fed by participants with themes of religious fear that are supposed to discipline and thus train and create obedient followers. Panoptical, participative schemas of dominion and control are visible in all networks of power of modern societies (see the theoretical framework chapter). But the Jihadi divine panoptic schema is that of a radical subculture, and therefore visible as if intensified by a magnifying glass.

Moreover, modern Sunni Islam, theologically and institutionally speaking, is in a state of anarchy.⁸⁹⁶ Significant changes concerning Islamic authority and knowledge production have taken place over the last half century. Among the root causes are the lack of central authority and hierarchy and the reduction of the clergy's legitimacy.⁸⁹⁷ Regarding the lack of authority and hierarchy, four causative factors come to mind. First, the egalitarianism of Sunni Islam also extends to equal rights to interpret religion. Second, Different sects and schools of jurisprudence compete with each other. Third, there is no formal hierarchy of scholars. Individual scholars can issue religious edicts. Fourth, corrupt religious-judicial centers have bolstered official, oftentimes repressive state policies.

This leads us to the third root cause, the reduction of the clergy's legitimacy. Modern Sunni Muslims often do not believe in the independence and trustworthiness of official clerics. Among the reasons are: Muslim states have co-opted the clergy and transformed them into

⁸⁹⁶ From a western analytical perspective, one tends to associate political thought at present with (relative) hierarchy and order and Sunni Islam with anarchy and disorder. In addition, heterodox Shiite Islam (although this categorization is itself very problematic) is much more hierarchically organized than orthodox Sunni Islam. This concerns all its sects, movements, brotherhoods and sheikh-cults, but also Jihadi movements. For example, hierarchies and cohesion are often created through the loyalty oath (*bay'a*) in Jihadi groups. In terms of anarchy versus hierarchy, debates also tend to speak about underdevelopment, social quarrels and civil strife in the Muslim world in contrast to political, social and economic order in the Western world. If Western colonial, political, economic and military interventions in the Muslim world are one root cause for this situation is a matter of heated debate.

⁸⁹⁷ It seems that *virtuality* is more possible in hierarchical structures. One example is the successful and early build-up of internet-presences by 12er Shiite authorities. Maybe the heterogeneity of the Shiite clergy facilitates forms of virtual leadership.

salaried employees since the 1950s.⁸⁹⁸ Since then, secular states, led by socialist army-juntas, have controlled their religious endowments (*awqaf*) which once sustained the financial independence of the clergy. In addition, modern Muslim statesmen use the pulpits of the clergy as a forum to present their own policies, making official scholars look as corrupt as them, dependent from and aligned with an all-consuming capitalist West.

Historically, as early as in the 11th century the independence of some Sunni-scholarly institutions was already severely curtailed. By then, the Seljuk *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk created his own school (*madrasa*, pl. *madaris*) for religious scholars in Baghdad to bolster his policies. This process continued all over the Islamic world. Muslim governments have always tried to indirectly exercise power over religious authority and its political dimension. Therefore, they install moderate and regime-friendly scholars as official *'ulama*. With the increasing proximity of religious scholars to worldly affairs also popular mistrust towards the scholars developed. The nationalization and integration of religious institutions into socialist Arab states in the post-independence era since the 1950s led to the creation of alternative and informal centers of learning where ordinary Muslims could acquire religious education. First, these were mosques; later Islamic groups in technical universities, nowadays the Internet has become like a virtual mosque and alternative center for learning. The justification by regime clerics of peace-treaties with Israel, especially Egyptian clerics in 1979, dealt a further blow to their legitimacy and standing among Muslim populaces.⁸⁹⁹

Since the raise of political Islam in the second half of the 20th century, ever more independent scholars have filled the gap created by the lack of trusted official religious institutions. As Lindholm observes, the authority of the learned

“has never been completely accepted by the egalitarian masses. Suspicion of the *faqih* (scholar) has been metaphorically expressed in popular discourse through a comparison with secular leadership. Sultans and princes are viewed as frankly self-interested individuals reliant on their personal abilities in their eternal struggle to gain and hold power. Their values are the values of manly warriors: bravery, generosity, honour, autonomy, power. Religious figures present themselves as the opposite, that is, as servants of God emptied of personal ambition.

⁸⁹⁸ Especially drastic was the appropriation of the Egyptian al-Azhar's pulpit by the Nasserist government. As Günther Kassian has lucidly shown us, the Free Officers used the pulpit of al-Azhar and its magazine “*Majallat al-Azhar*” as a forum to present their own position like statements of the clerics in order to create the impression that the Sheikhs were the keenest advocates of the revolutionary program. See Günther Kassian, *Die Orientierung an der frühislamischen Geschichte in der Ideologie des arabischen Sozialismus in Ägypten unter Nasser* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität, 1991), 231. See also Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁸⁹⁹ Philipp Holtmann, *The Transformation of the Jihad-Doctrine in Sadat's Egypt* (Munich: Grin Verlag, 2009).

But they can also be accused of being the converse, namely effeminate, cowardly, miserly and dishonorable.”⁹⁰⁰

The reduction of the clergy’s legitimacy has been accompanied by significant changes in Islamic authority and knowledge production. Traditional (Sunni) religious authority is based on textuality, i.e. the Quran and the *sunna* and discursive method, i.e. norms of juridical theory and praxis within Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This is complemented by the personification and localization of authority and knowledge, which are linked to reputed scholars and schools of learning, such as the famous al-Azhar in Cairo. Modern Islamic authority, however, is based on new forms of textuality and spaces,⁹⁰¹ which leaves the doors of interpretation wide open to a “jurisprudential anarchy” (*fauda fiqhiyya*).⁹⁰² Individuals, many of whom are not formally educated in Islamic theology, have adapted Islamic discourses that mix philosophical ideas, modern populism, an ultra-literal reading of the Quran and classical sources with personal pious narratives and political ideas. Thus, the personification and localization of religious authority have given way to pluralized and often virtualized forms of authority via the Internet and modern mass media, accompanied by the development of hybrid forms of authority centered on transnational networks and charismatic New Islamist Intellectuals (NII), i.e. laymen who are not authoritative in the classical sense.⁹⁰³ In fact, Islamic authority is more and more exercised by laymen (NII), or alliances of laymen and jurists.

A shift from “traditional” to “modern” attitudes and techniques has contributed to a revolution in Islamic authority. Adding to official jurists, so-called “tele-imams” have become prominent figures, as well as virtual fatwa-services and autonomous sheikhs with their own websites. In the 1980s, tape-recorded sermons of Sheikh Kishk could be heard all over the streets of the Arab world. Nowadays, “tele-imams”, who preach on the Internet and via Arabic satellite stations (such as the Egyptian 'Amr Khaled and the Saudi Muhammad al-Shanqiti), represent a new form of clergymen parallel to the “classical” Islamic establishment. Jihadis, with a broad and Internet-based propaganda structure, represent another authoritative theological discourse that is open for all Muslims to participate. The massive proliferation of virtual *fatawa* via modern mass media - the Internet and satellite television - makes it

⁹⁰⁰ , Charles, Lindholm. The Islamic Middle East: Tradition and Change (Oxford: Blackwell 2002), 163.

⁹⁰¹ Bettina Gräf, Medien-Fatwas@Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. Die Popularisierung des islamischen Rechts (Berlin: Zentrum Moderner Orient, 2010).

⁹⁰² Abu Musab al-Suri, "Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya", published on the Internet, 2004, accessed June 24, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/Dawaaah>.

⁹⁰³ Gilles Kepels, Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 14.

increasingly difficult for petitioners to discern authentic from spurious legal opinions. Moreover, this facilitates the issuing of extremist legal opinions. Practically, Mandaville has observed that all these phenomena have led to functional pluralization of Muslim authority; ie. changes in the social purpose and ends of religious knowledge seeking; Spatial pluralization, i.e changes of spaces in which Muslims seek authority; and mediative pluralization, i.e. changes of textual forms and figures through which Muslims seek authority.⁹⁰⁴

The title Sheikh literally means “elder” in Arab societies, but in a Sunni-Muslim context it also refers to a “theological leader.” The title is given to someone with religious learning and authority. Traditionally, the title was reserved for men who had undergone religious education at a center for Islamic learning, such as al-Azhar University in Cairo. Nowadays, the formal qualification has become less important. Most of the leaders of al-Qaeda bear the title without the corresponding certificate; some are even titled “imam” in the sense of “community leader for all Muslims.”⁹⁰⁵ Salafi prayer groups sometimes choose a charismatic member as leader and call him Sheikh. If they cannot agree on a spiritual leader, a Sheikh may also be a long-distance leader. Salafis then follow his online-counsel or writings through letters or via the telephone or Internet. An interesting field-interview with Salafis in front of a Mosque in Tunis in 2012 by Ed Husain sheds more light on this phenomenon:

“[...] there were several youth, and all repeatedly stressed that they did not have a political party, leader, or even an imam or cleric in Tunisia. The “real and true” clerics were in Saudi Arabia, and they emulated them. Names included the late Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh bin Baz, and the popular, but also deceased, Shaikh Uthaymeen [...] We bid them farewell after they gave us names of Salafist scholars such as Madkhali and al-Albani as “real scholars” and denouncing Saudi Arabia’s reformist names. All the while, another Salafist man was listening to this conversation from afar [...] ‘Our scholars are not in Saudi Arabia. The other guys were wrong in what they told you. We in Tunisia follow Shaikh al-Maqdisi in Jordan and Abu Qatadah al-Filistini.’”⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰⁴ Peter Mandaville, “Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World” *Theory, Culture and Society* 24 (2007): 101-115.

⁹⁰⁵ For example, the Jordanian jihad theologian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi was called by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula an “imam.” See al-Maqdisi’s articles in the Jihadi e-magazine “*Mu’askar al-Battar*” that was published between 2003 and 2004.

⁹⁰⁶ Ed Husain, “Meeting Salafists in Tunisia,” Council on Foreign Relations Blog, October 4, 2012, accessed November 6, 2012, <http://blogs.cfr.org/coleman/2012/10/04/meeting-salafists-in-tunisia/>.

Virtual leadership works especially well in Sunni Muslim culture due to the lack of authoritative doctrinaire centers which appear trustable and uncorrupted by elite politics. Unlike Shiite Islam, Sunnis have no clerical hierarchies, but often ponder on the principle of egalitarianism in personal and religious matters. Protest cultures in Sunni Islam, such as Salafis, stress a direct relationship and thus chain of command between Allah and the believer, which is manifested in the Qur'an. The Quran is perceived as the unadulterated word of God. Jihadis are a small, but growing fringe culture within Sunni Islam's Salafi movement and have recognized the appeal of this idea. They have even turned it into a Jihadi doctrine: Closing a contract (*'ahd*) with Allah is presented as the truest and most devout model of religious obedience. Sacred words are then equipped with violent and ideological meanings (see the writings of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri). Therefore, leadership does not even need a human leader, so the extended Jihadi strategic logic. Practically speaking, of course, this idea must be created by intermediaries. But it is supposed to look untouched and as a natural consequence of the right belief. People who perpetrate suicide attacks and die under the direct command of Allah are just obedient, the steady propaganda says. Conceptually, the idea of a direct contract with God can be compared to Protestant-Puritan theology.

6.b The “Framing” Concept

Theological guidance and discursive dominion can be very well explained with the **concept of “framing,”** which was originally introduced into the study of Islamic social movements by Quintan Wiktorowicz, and then adopted to online jihad by Rüdiger Lohlker. The following explanation of framing and all quotes are borrowed from Lohlker's article “Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic discourses.” Lohlker uses the definition of framing by David A. Snow and Robert Benford who speak about “a set of dynamic processes of production of meaning, socially constructed, sustained, contested, and altered, experiencing phenomenological and infrastructural constraints with specific effects of mobilization of social movements.”⁹⁰⁷ Lohlker himself understands Jihadism as a religiously framed subculture that emerges and operates in an Islamic environment and uses Islam as a master frame. If an individual frame is anchored in a master frame, then the chances of frame resonance increase, argues Lohlker on the basis of Snow's and Benford's study on the

⁹⁰⁷ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Clarifying the Relationship between Framing and Ideology in the Study of Social Movements: A Comment on Oliver and Johnston,” accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/PROTESTS/ArticleCopies/SNOW_BED.PDF, 3.

subject.⁹⁰⁸ According to Wictorowicz, Frame resonance results from frames being “interpretive devices that translate grievances and perceived opportunities into the mobilization of resources and movement activism.”⁹⁰⁹

Religious doctrines, such as divine guidance, are anchored in Jihadi master and specific Jihadi frames. Jihadi frames partly operate within Islamic master-frames. Islamic master frames refer in this context to Muslim majority discourses on questions of piety, struggle (jihad), Islamic ethics and doctrine, life and death issues, reward for Islamic struggle in paradise, resistance against Western military policies in the Muslim world, the establishment of Muslim authority and the abuse of dominion by repressive regimes, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, etc. Jihadis regard the resonance of Jihadi references in Islamic majority contexts as a chance to eventually supplant and exploit the interpretational, ideational and mobilizing authority of Islamic master-frames.

Lohlker observes that framing is not only a verbal activity, but also the use of symbols and symbolic discourses as a highly effective form of activist communication. Lohlker refers to Thomas Olesen’s observations on Islamist terrorism that “[...] symbols travel well across space and across social, cultural and political differences, because symbols condense meaning and identity in a manner that is not necessarily dependent on verbal explanation. Two aspects are worth mentioning here. First, the terrorist act in itself can be viewed as a form of symbolic communication [...] The terrorist organization sends a message through its choice of places and targets. Second, certain events and situations can attain a symbolic character. Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo, for example, are of course very real events and situations, but they are also global symbols in the sense that references to them condense and illuminate a certain conception of injustice that is to some extent independent of the empirical realities.”⁹¹⁰

A **master frame**, such as the Islamic one, can feature a radical frame within – “**a radical Islamic master frame**” – which is centered on globally available symbols of injustice and aggression against Muslims, such as the ones explained above. For example, a radical Islamic

⁹⁰⁸ David A. Snow and Rodert D. Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest,” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Eldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (Yale: University Press, 1992), 133-155. Quoted in Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 69-72.

⁹⁰⁹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory,” in *Islamic Activism: a Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), 19. Quoted in Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 69.

⁹¹⁰ Thomas Olesen, “Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism,” in *Center for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation - Islamism as Social Movement Series* (Aarhus: Aarhus University, 2009), 25. Accessed May 26, 2012, http://cir.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/pdf-filer/H%C3%A6fte2final.pdf. Quoted in Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 70. .

master frame is represented by Islamic discourses, semiotics and semantics around the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the prisoner abuse in the Guantanamo prison facilities; as well as the U.S. torture scandal in the Iraqi *Abu Gharib* prison, which was already infamous under the Hussein regime. A master frame is influenced by real events and symbolic references. The radical Islamic master frame portrays the West and Islam at conflict, just as a “radical Democratic master frame” nurtures extreme and conservative right wing views on Muslims.

For Jihadi purposes, it is very useful to operate the own sub-cultural **Jihadi master frame** within the **greater radical Islamic master frame**, because this way, the possibilities of resonance and mobilization increase. Lohlker supports his argument that “[t]he master frame of Jihadism operates specifically in the greater radical Islamic master frame”⁹¹¹ with Marranci’s observation that some members of Jihadi subculture do “not speak of and act for ‘jihad’ because they are Muslims but rather they *feel* Muslim because of jihad.”⁹¹²

Lohlker observes that the use of Islamic references in the Jihadi environment produce “a specific religious knowledge we may call subcultural capital, a concept developed first by Thornton and enlarged including Bourdieuan concepts of social capital. Religious subcultural capital raises the status of Jihadis as being the true Muslims and differentiating themselves from members of global mainstream culture and Muslims in general by their willingness to use violence, creating a style that can be interpreted in accordance with values being subversive to the frame shared by Muslims in general.”⁹¹³

Framing can be well combined with similar research approaches, which try to explain how Islam and Islamic identity are defined by different Muslim activists. Gary R. Bunt, for example, orientates himself at Peter Mandaville’s “‘fluid’ conceptualization of Islam, where the single banner of Islam as a ‘master signifier’ encompasses ‘a totalising abstraction through which meaning and discourse can be organized.’”⁹¹⁴ Accordingly, boundaries are set up around different types of “Islams,” which belie the perspective of “the vast majority of Muslims” of a single Islam.⁹¹⁵ Mandaville’s thesis on the pluralization of Muslim authority has been quoted above. Bunt’s conceptualization of Muslim authority on the Internet could be read in conjunction with Lohlker’s framing approach. Where Lohlker speaks about master-

⁹¹¹ Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 70.

⁹¹² Gabriele Marranci, *Jihad beyond Islam* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2006), 158.

⁹¹³ Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” 71.

⁹¹⁴ Gary R. Bunt, *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009), 27.

⁹¹⁵ Summarized and Quoted in *ibid.*, 27.

frames and specific/sub-frames, Bunt makes a distinction between “Muslim Majority Contexts” and “Muslim Minority Contexts.”⁹¹⁶

Lohlker finally asks how religious framing works when “a discourse styled as religious discourse is produced.” He touches this question shortly at the example of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s (*Tanzim al-Qaeda fi Jazirat al-‘Arab/AQAP*) online periodical *Mu’askar al-Battar*. The title itself provides a historical context which is anchored in the Islamic master frame, since it relates to one of the mythological swords of the Prophet Muhammad. At the same time, the magazine is situated in a specific Jihadi frame and in a contemporary context, since the title also refers to the *nom de guerre* of Yusuf al-‘Uyairi (1974-2003), a former leader of AQAP, whose *nom de guerre* was *al-Sayf al-Battar*.⁹¹⁷ The main discussion of Lohlker, however, focuses on the Islamic and Jihadi framing of discourses on weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Lohlker stresses the importance of understanding the complex interplay between Islamic master, radical Islamic master, Jihadi master and specific Jihadi frames. We will in this chapter focus on the Salafi master frame, Jihadi master frame and specific Jihadi frame at the example of the discourse around the divine guidance doctrine “a book that leads the right way and a sword that assists.” We will first explain some elements of master Salafi, radical Salafi, master Jihadi and specific Jihadi frames.

6.c On the Nature and Genesis of Jihadism: A Comparison to Doctrines of Other Monotheistic Groups

There are not only considerable intersections between Jihadi theological as well as ideological interpretations and those of other Sunni majority and minority groups.⁹¹⁸ There are also considerable doctrinaire similarities between Jihadism and Protestant or Jewish Puritan Sects. Jihadis are but one branch of the so-called Salafi or Sunni fundamentalist trends, to which also the Saudi religious discourse belongs (Wahhabism). Salafis try to emulate the mythological time period of Muhammad and his followers, which they perceive as epitome of the golden age of Islam in terms of piety, morality, spirituality, strength, and guidance. Central views of Jihadis (extremist Salafis who follow a martial interpretation of Salafism),

⁹¹⁶ See Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber-Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), chapters 8 and 9.

⁹¹⁷ Roel Meijer, ed., *globalsalafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009); Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 170

ff.

⁹¹⁸ This concerns moderate and quietist Salafis (the Salafi-mu’tadili streaming), political Salafis (the Muslim Brothers movement), propagandist Salafis (groups such as Jamaat Tabligh).

moderate, propagandist, political, and literal Salafis (*al-salafiyya al-nassiyya*), as well as ultra-fundamentalist Saudi Arabian-influenced Wahhabis often overlap. They share a common theological master-frame, namely their belief doctrine (*'aqida*); this increases the resonance, both positive and negative, between different adherents of the doctrine within this master frame.⁹¹⁹ For example, all these groups despise established clerical authority, which they regard as corrupted, and seek an alternative, direct relationship with God. The theology of Jihadism, however, distinguishes itself by an activist, violent approach, while most other Salafi strands follow a quietist evolutionary, or political strategies. Since the 1960s, modern Jihadis have used analogies to the Islamic law of War to justify terrorist tactics.⁹²⁰ Due to the over-emphasis on martyrdom culture, the veneration of saint-like martyr figures, and the centrality of suicide-attacks over the last 10 years, Jihadism can as well be described as a death-cult. In Arabic, this could be expressed by the term *jihadiyah istishhadiyya* (martyrdom-jihadism).

The development of modern Sunni extremism and its accompanying theological justifications started the mid-1960s in Arab countries. Radical groups broke away from broader Islamist oppositions. Repressed and frustrated in their political aspirations, these groups started fighting their local governments, paraphrasing Marxist-Leninist revolutionary slogans and ideas in Islamist parlance and utilizing analogies to the Islamic law of War to justify terrorist

⁹¹⁹ While *'aqida* refers to the sectarian and theological doctrine, *manhaj* means the adherence to certain methodological principles. Salafi-Jihadis believe in the main principles of Salafism and follow the violent method of jihadism. Salafis deduce where possible from the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*) - They favor transmitted dogma from the Quran (*naql*) and *sunna* over reasoning (*'aql*), and reject voluble interpretation (*ta'wil*) as well as personal opinion (*ra'y*) and dialectic debate on Islamic theology (*kalam*), which in their view leads to innovation (*bid'a*) and is seen as a sin. In spite of their rejection of opinion and debate Salafis are heavily opinionated on religious, political and social issues and defend their fundamentalist views in heated debates against moderate Muslims. Main differences to less fundamentalist Muslims concern how strictly monotheism (*tawhid*), deviations from it like sin (*kufr*) and idolatry (*shirk*), and the principle to follow Muhammad's example (*ittiba'*) are to be interpreted and judged. See al-Hilali, *Al-Jama'at*, 558-562.

⁹²⁰ The Islamic Law of War on the ethics of war, declaration of warfare, conduct of warfare, legitimacy of warfare etc. may be comparable in many points to the Western *jus in bello*. See also Rudolph Peters, "The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern Islam" in *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, (ed.) Rudolph Peters (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996), 103-148. Sidenote: These concepts originated in the 1970s in the Jihadi scenes of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. By then, they in the contexts of local oppositional and liberation struggles. These doctrines are heavily inspired by the medieval jurisprudential Hanbali school, led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). The Damascene Hanbali school formulated war doctrines when the Abbasside caliphate was under attack by the Mongols. Modern Jihadi sub-state actors have taken inspiration from the war theology of the Medieval Damascene Hanbali school, led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350), who wrote extensively on jihad; when the Abbasside caliphate was under different attacks by the Mongols. However, their interpretation both by Jihadis and analysts is very selective and does not give justice to the wide range of topics they treated. See Yahya Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya*, (Oxford/London: Interface, 2006). Moreover, the ultra-literal Sunni fundamentalist school of Wahhabism, which originated in Saudi Arabia in the 18th century, is strongly influencing Jihadi thinking. Since the Afghanistan jihad 1979-1989, fighters and ideologues from Saudi Arabia have been exerting a strong doctrinaire influence on the international Jihadi scene.

tactics.⁹²¹ They took theological inspiration from the Medieval Damascene Hanbali school, which was led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and later his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350). Both were erudite scholars who treated a broad scope of topics, but also wrote extensively on jihad, since the Abbasside caliphate suffered different attacks by the Mongols at that time.⁹²² Moreover, the ultra-literal Sunni fundamentalist school of Wahhabism, which originated in Saudi Arabia in the 18th century, has been strongly influencing Jihadi thinking since the Afghanistan Jihad (1979-1989). Fighters and ideologues from Saudi Arabia, who joined this struggle, started exerting a strong doctrinaire influence on the international jihad scene. Since the start of the Iraq war in 2003 and the emergence of an al-Qaeda wing in Iraq in 2004, internal doctrinaire feuds have led to a split between classical al-Qaeda followers and so-called Neo-Zarqawists, who follow a more extremist line oriented at the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Protest by internal critics against ever more brutal terrorist tactics and the massive killing of civilians have been refuted by the latter strand with pseudo-legal arguments.⁹²³

The modern idea of jihad does not originate out of a vacuum, nor is it by any means a new or young phenomenon. Firstly, terrorist trends in any culture emerge in contexts of repression (perceived and real), social and political change as well as occupation. Secondly, precursors of Jihadi activism can be found in doctrinaire, militant and Islamic resistance movements, respectively on the Arabian Peninsula since the 18th century (Wahhabism), in Sudan (The Mahdi-Movement between 1885-99, which fought against oppressive Egyptian Muslim rulers and their British colonial supporters), as well as in Libya (Senusite resistance-forces against Italian colonial occupation in the 1930s). Narratives on these earlier militant and resistance groups resonate within the radical Islamic master frame, as well as in the Jihadi master frame of identification.

Since the mother of analysis is comparison, it is justified to situate Salafism and its sub-culture Jihadism in a broader analytical context. Millenarian and apocalyptic sects cannot be regarded as an isolated Islamic phenomenon, but exist among all three monotheistic belief groups and cults. To analyze the radical Islamic phenomenon as an isolated case would not

⁹²¹ The Islamic Law of War on the ethics of war, declaration of warfare, conduct of warfare, legitimacy of warfare etc. may be comparable in many points to the Western *jus in bello*. See Peters 1996: 103-148. On a sidenote: The local jihad concepts originated in the 1970s in the Jihadi scenes of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. By then, they were interpreted in the contexts of local oppositional and liberation struggles. The Jihadi theological doctrines are heavily inspired by the medieval jurisprudential Hanbali school, led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), which formulated war doctrines when the Abbasside caliphate was under attack by the Mongols.

⁹²² However, the interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya is extremely selective and does neither represent their life-works, nor the historical reality. See Michot 2006.

⁹²³ Neo-Zarqawists call themselves after the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006. They mainly use the Medad al-Suyuf Forum, which was closed in late 2010 and not relaunched by the time of writing. See the excellent analysis by Musawi 2010.

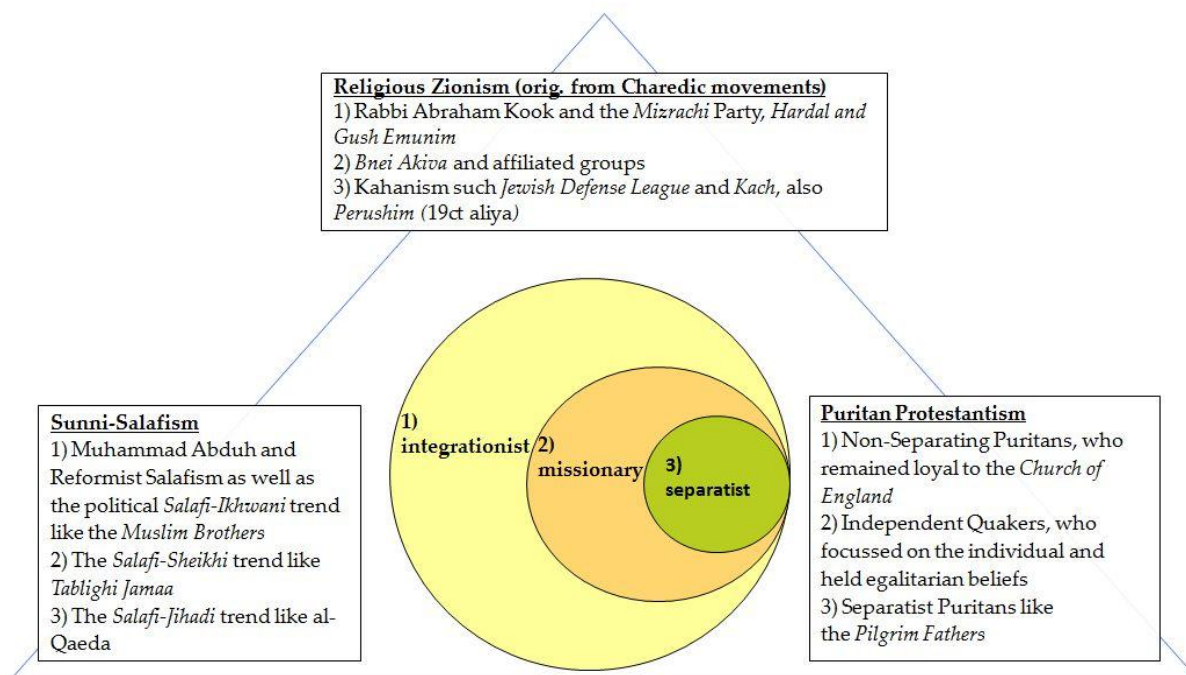
give justice to the plurality of messianic puritan trends; it would not only be unscientific, but from a moral standpoint pure hypocrisy. Since a detailed comparison will breach the scope of this study, we will focus on the most salient doctrinaire and mythological similarities among monotheistic cults and sects.

Puritan monotheistic groups who uphold messianic belief interpretations and practice violent methods share certain characteristics. First of all, they share major doctrinaire similarities. Jihadis are a messianic and violent-separatist sub-culture of Sunni-Salafi Islam. But all three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have brought forth similarly radical and separationist groups. They share very similar concepts in regards to their myths of community, conspiracy, salvation and cult. Let us keep in mind that the root of culture is *cultus*, just as the intensification of community is *communitas*.⁹²⁴ The impulse to enter a short discussion of this wider conceptualization, which admittedly still is in its infancy, is the case of the 17th century Puritan Protestants, whose followers colonized Northern America (They were not the exclusive colonizers, but an influential trend among them). 17th century Puritans were persecuted because they had separated from the Church of England. Groups of Puritans fled from England, regathered in the Netherlands and sailed off to the Promised Land (such as the *Mayflower Pilgrims* in 1621). Their doctrinaire underpinning, situation and self-perception, with due respect to changes in space, time and culture, is strikingly similar to what we nowadays call “Salafism.” Yet, Puritans contributed greatly to the democratic foundational structures of the United States. Nathaniel Philbrick describes that a “Puritan believed it was necessary to venture back to the absolute beginning of Christianity, before the Church had been corrupted by centuries of laxity and abuse, to locate divine truth.” The Puritans regarded the Bible as “a direct and personal connection to God.” They would not go to the messes of the Church of England, but would read directly from the Bible. They would refuse to kneel or making the sign of the Cross when uttering Christ’s name, because they regarded these rituals as innovations. Instead, for Puritans the “only biblically sanctioned organizational unit was the individual congregation [...] a congregation began with a covenant (a term they took from the Bible) between a group of believers and God. As a self-created and independent entity, the congregation elected a university trained minister and, if the occasion should arise, voted him out.” For Puritans, their covenant was an individual relationship with God. Ever since the Initial Sin, God had perpetually damned man, but in Puritan doctrine, sainthood would spare

⁹²⁴ We will extend Hartmut Böhme’s argument on the development of culture out of *cultus* to combine it with Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas*. See Hartmut Böhme, “Vom *Cultus* zur Kultur(wissenschaft). Zur historischen Semantik des Kulturbegriffs,” in *Kulturwissenschaft – Literaturwissenschaft. Positionen, Themen, Perspektiven*, ed. Renate Glaser and Matthias Luserke (Wiesbaden: Opladen, 1996), 48-68; Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969).

certain individuals and lead to their redemption. God had chosen certain people to be saints among man. The members of Puritan sects reckoned a pious life would enable them to detect signs of sainthood among each other. Their utterly pious and observant life only allowed one conclusion: They had to be the redeemed saints. Puritans started fostering an elitarian community cult. Puritans frequently excommunicated own members over disagreements, such as those who wanted to leave their groups, and Christians of the Churches.⁹²⁵

A Spectrum of monotheistic messianic groups



Let us briefly illustrate a few key concepts. Firstly, the illustration below shows a basic spectrum of monotheistic sects. They shape into integrationist, missionary and separatist models.⁹²⁶ This can be demonstrated in Judaism at the example of Haredis, it applies to Christian Puritan Protestants, and it is strongly visible in Sunni-Salafism. The illustration below conceptualizes these similarities (all illustrations by the author).

Secondly, monotheistic belief sects in general are strongly influenced by what can be termed “apocalyptic-principles,” and “exodus-principles.” The latter is a shared idea that an original community was suppressed and had to take refuge from a hostile environment. The exodus principle also entails the idea that the future, especially salvation, takes priority over contemporary matters. This principle is then emulated by respective sects in their present

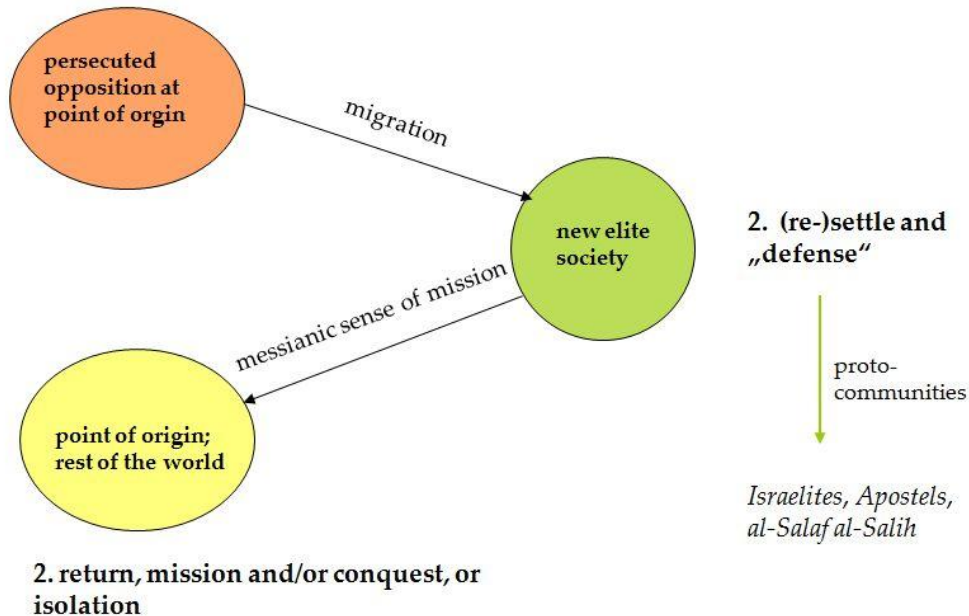
⁹²⁵ Summary of Puritan doctrine as described in Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 8-12.

⁹²⁶ The following graphs were developed by the author in the framework of a research project at Tel Aviv University under the auspices of Shaul Mishal in 2007.

environments. The graphs below illustrate this at the example of Islamic, Jewish and Christian variations. It is also an immensely important point to understand where Salafi thinking is headed, whose theological dimension we will discuss in more detail in the following sub-chapter. Flight and migration characterize the origin of the early Muslim community. Thus, a powerful community myth is born. The general scheme of the exodus principle can be read like this: The own group was persecuted, but survived, due to strong pioneer-ship, the self-sacrifice of central figures, the endurance of hardships and cruelty, and the firm belief in divine guidance. This pattern repeats itself in the presence. The experience of hardships and sacrifice endow the group and its members with special charismatic leadership qualities. A very clear feature of the exodus principle is the physical relocation from a point of a origin, which is preceded and/or accompanied with a mental relocation from the surrounding society, its “pagan” mores and “sinful” rites. Accordingly, a sect needs to resettle somewhere else (be it a spiritual or a physical relocation, or both), in order to build its own proto-community. A messianic sense of mission based on heavenly promises/orders drives the group again back to the point of origin to save or convert the remaining “unbelievers.” This second step only follows once a group has established a powerful base and has gained tactical force. The group leaves its refuge, in order to re-conquer what was lost, and to proselytize its mission among the rest of all humanity (Christianity/Islam). A group may as well create a stronghold to isolate itself (Judaism).

Central paradigm: The Exodus principle; Refuge from a hostile world

1. flight (*exodus* principle and *hijra* paradigm)



Thirdly, belief doctrines of monotheistic puritan groups read like a messianic competition to enter paradise. They are anchored in respective religious master frames. All three belief models (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) can enter very unlucky ideological matrimones with radical doctrines. More specifically, we can speak about a doctrinal triad that includes radicalized interpretations of monotheism, messianism and a strong sense of mission. This can be seen in radical interpretations of Maimonides' *13 Principles of Jewish Faith*, in the *Five Solae* of Calvinist Protestantism, but also in radical interpretations of the *tawhid*-doctrine of Islam. If a small cultic group from either belief doctrine develops a messianic explanation of its own existence, then the sense of mission and martyrdom becomes overwhelming. Certain strands of Christian Puritanism, Salafism or Religious Zionism develop along such lines.

Similar doctrines: A competition to enter paradise

Judaism

Monotheism

From Maimonide's 13
Principles of Jewish faith:

- 1) Elohim's unity (*monothesitic*)
- 5) Elohim alone should be the object of worship
- 3) The immutability of the Tora as Elohim's law

Messianism

Jews as chosen people have to return to Zion (Israel) to await the arrival of the Messiah ("The Anointed")

Mission

„I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, That you shall be my salvation to the ends of the earth“ (Isaiah 49:10)

→ nowadays practically denied in favor of *Noachidic Laws* !

Sunni Salafism

Tawheed ("Oneness") of Allah:

- 1) Oneness of the Lordship of Allah (*monothesitic*)
- 2) Oneness of the worship of Allah
- 3) Oneness of the names and attributes of Allah

Only the *firqa najiyya* ("The saved sect" = Sunni Salafis) will enter Paradise after the return of the *Mahdi* followed by Christ before *Yaum al-Qiyama* (Judgement Day); See Koran Surat 75 *Al-Qiyama*

„Allah will judge between them on the day of judgement ... invite (all) of them to the way of thy Lord“ (Al Nahl 16:125)

Puritan Protestantism

From the *Five Solae* of Calvin:

- 1) *Solus Christus*: Christ is the only mediator between God and man (*trinitarian*)
- 5) *Sola Scriptura*: Only the teachings of the bible are valid (with special focus on the Old Testament)
- 3) *Soli Deo Gloria*: Glory is to God alone

Puritans as chosen people have to establish God's new kingdom in the „promised land/new Zion“ and await the second coming of Jesus (*Parousia*; see Matthew 24:27/ Daniel 7:13-14) before Judgement Day; however, first the Jews have to return to the Holy Land

„Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe ... to the end of the age“ (Matthew 28:19-20)

Finally, radical monotheist sects, who establish “new monotheistic societies,” frequently decide to excommunicate and/or kill “apostates” and “hypocrites” in their surroundings. Cases of selective excommunication happened in all three major monotheistic belief groups. It depends on the strategic and tactical strength, or weakness, respectively, of a monotheist sect, if it cultivates this idea. Puritan Protestants in Northern America developed an ever stronger position from the 17th to the 19th century, and thus had fewer reasons to excommunicate non-Protestant Christians; exceptions were excommunications of Mormons and Quakers. When the Catholic Church saw its dominion endangered in the Middle Age, it tried to excommunicate its opponents under the cloak of the Inquisition. Nowadays, the Church refrains from it. Yet, sectarian groups which include Catholic hate-preachers, such as the German network www.kreuz.net, still show tendencies to apply this practice against other Catholics who are not strict enough in their view. The network operates under the umbrella of an ultra-conservative theology that is mixed with white supremacy and national-socialist

ideologies.⁹²⁷ Similarly, contemporary mainstream Sunni Salafis - with their established networks - try to refrain from excommunicating fellow Muslims who are less fundamentalist, even if they strongly reject their lifestyles and mores. Yet, they tend to indiscriminately excommunicate Sufis, Druses and Shiites.⁹²⁸ The dogmatic-doctrinaire change from a selective to an indiscriminate *takfir* happens mostly in extremist messianic fringe-groups of the Salafi movement. Examples are the radical Salafi-Jihadi group *al-Takfir wa-l-Hijra*, which originated in 20th century Egypt; the radical factions of the Algerian *Jabhat al-'Inqadh*, which retreated to the mountains, excommunicated the rest of the population and supported massive killings during the “black ten years” of the Algerian Civil War (*harb al-'ashariyya al-sauda'*) in the 1990s; the Algerian *al-Jama'a al-Musallah*, which was guided theologically by the London based cleric Abu Qutada al-Filastini in its massacres against civilians;⁹²⁹ or the Moroccan *Kata'ib al-Tawhid*. All of these groups followed the principles of self-isolation (*al-'uzla*), excommunication of non-members and violence.

A fundamentalist society may decide to kill heretics, unbelievers and pagans for strategic reasons as well. If forced proselytizing is inefficient and unwished, for example, due to economic and expansionist reasons, then feeble doctrinal arguments may legitimate the extinguishing of “the other.” The mass-killing of South and North American natives from the 15th century onward by colonialist Christian settlers makes this case. However, more Muslims have been killed by fellow Muslims than by Christians (Shiite-Sunni conflicts), and more Christians have been killed by fellow Christians than by Muslims for similar reasons (for example, during the Catholic-Christian Wars in Europe).⁹³⁰

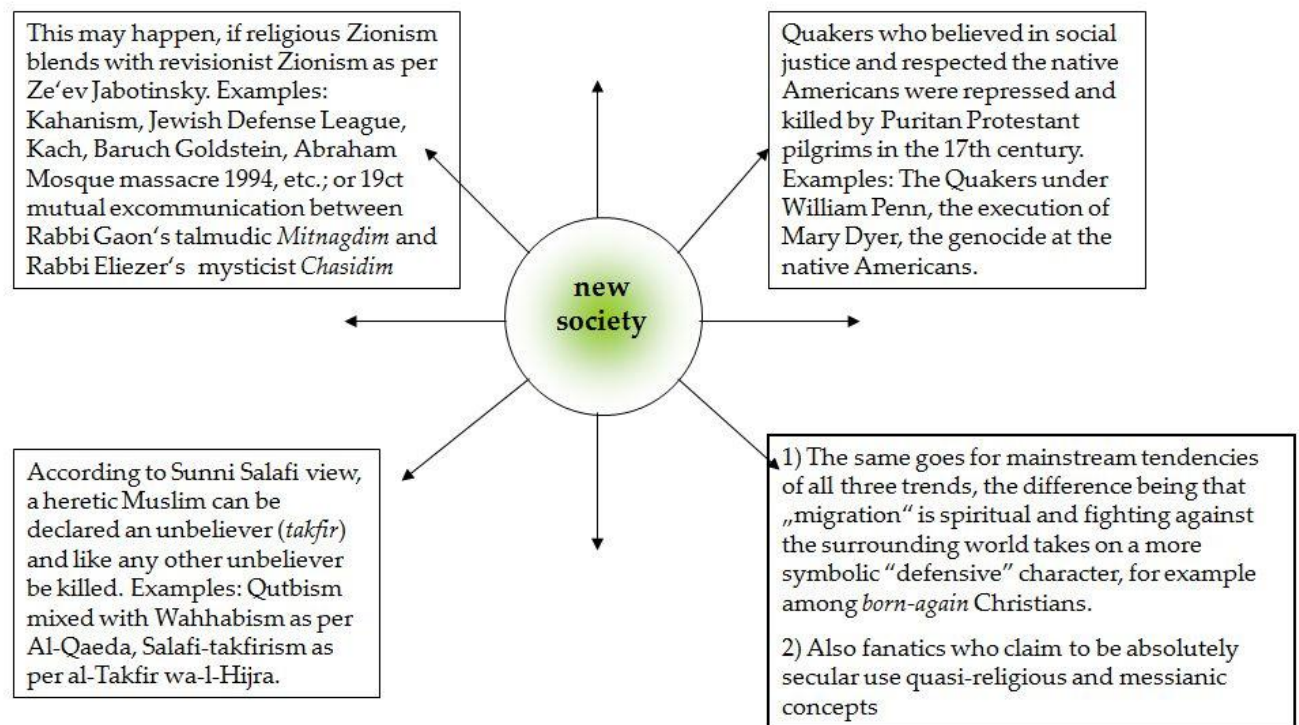
⁹²⁷ Peter Wensierski, “Theologischer Tripper: Katholische Hassprediger hetzen im Internet gegen Juden, Schwule und Kirchereformer. Auf der Website finden sich auch Beiträge von Priestern,” *Der Spiegel* 44(2012): 38-39.

⁹²⁸ This is practiced especially by members of the large, but ultra-fundamentalist Salafi-Wahhabi strand, which has its roots in Saudi Arabia.

⁹²⁹ Abu al-Laith al-Misri, “*Shahadat Abi Musab al-Suri fi Abi Qutada wa qiyadatuhu al-'ilmiyya min London li-l-Jama'a al-Musallaha fi-l-jaza'ir*,” accessed November 15, 2012, <http://www.muslm.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-485946.html>.

⁹³⁰ The terrible plight of European Jews is different. The majority of European Jews were murdered by perpetrators who had adopted Nazi ideology and sworn an oath to Adolf Hitler, yet they were influenced by a Christian cultural heritage.

“A New society” may decide to excommunicate and/or kill heretics, unbelievers and pagans for doctrinal reasons



6.d Master and Specific Jihadi (Ideological and Theological) Frames

Despite their internal and organizational schisms, online Jihadis are extremely tight-knit communities compared to Muslim mainstream societies. There are several reasons for the high in-group cohesion among Jihadis.

Intentional communities, such as congregational cults, messianic sects and alternative subcultures, display a much stronger in-group cohesion than mainstream societies, because they successfully manage to frame their *raison d'être* with specific symbols, myths and discourses, and thus create a much higher sense of belonging. The impetus comes from shared beliefs and actions as well as strong leadership, which bears a mixture of charismatic, participative, transcendental and discursive elements. Members of intentional communities believe in common political, religious, and/or spiritual goals and formulate alternative social concepts to realize these goals. *Communitas* is the highly emotional feeling of brotherly/sisterly compassion that is created around a shared aura of righteousness, which is framed by Jihadis through their theology and ideology (for *communitas* among Jihadis, please

see the chapters “Theoretical Framework,” point 6 and “Infrastructure and Work Mode of the Jihadi Web”).

The ideology of Jihadis is orientated at a broader Muslim sense of humiliation and aggression against the West. It feeds on popular anger against repressive Muslim regimes (which are supported by western allies).⁹³¹ In this case, the **ideological Jihadi master frame** overlaps with the **radical Islamic master frame**, which increases mutual resonance and broadens the possible scope of Jihadi sympathizers. Popular Muslim resentments against Western military interventions, the abuse of Muslim prisoners by Western militaries, one-sided political support for Israel, the corruption and repressiveness of local Muslim regimes and related popular conspiracy theories are starkly exaggerated by Jihadis.

In a nutshell, the ideological Jihadi master frame reads like this: Currently, the third [sic] Crusade against Islam takes place.⁹³² The U.S. (Army) leads the Crusade, European powers support it, but Jews control it. All westernized Muslim regimes are accomplices of this constellation. Furthermore, the Western aggression is based on an old scheme to re-colonize the Middle East. It is now the duty of Muslims to defend themselves against a technically advanced, but morally and spiritually inferior army of “zionised Crusaders”. This can only be achieved by using terrorist tactics.⁹³³ This ideology finds its echo in broader Muslim grudges against the West’s support of repressive Muslim regimes. But also in Europe and the U.S. broader trends of Islamophobia play into the hands of Jihadi and anti-Muslim agitators.⁹³⁴

Secondly, Jihadi theology strengthens a *panoptical group leadership mechanism*. The Jihadi interpretation of Salafism focuses on the role of God as a paternal charismatic and transcendental leader who sees, hears and knows everything, including even the slightest thoughts of doubt or sin in a believer’s mind. For Jihadis, God commands only one thing: To

⁹³¹ For example, this article in the independent electronic daily “*Al-Quwwa al-Thalitha*” discusses very similar grudges and resentments which we find in Jihadi ideology. Mahmud Rihal al-Suwid, “*Harb 'ala al-irhab yaquduha sina' al-irhab*,” accessed November 12, 2012, <http://www.thirdpower.org/index.php?page=read&artid=36216>.

⁹³² In Jihadi theology, the „Third Crusade after 1990“ and after the end of the Cold War ist he continuation oft he „First Crusade from 1050 to 1291“ and the „Second Crusade from 1798 (occupation of Egypt by Napoleon) until 1970 (taking power of Assad in Syria). See al-Suri 2004 introduction, as well as chapters 1, 3 and 4.

⁹³³ This is but a very short summary of the Jihadi ideology. For a more detailed description see Holtmann 2009a: 71-89. The roots of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in global jihad can be traced back to the 1960s writings of Sayyid Qutb and the 1980s texts of Abdallah Azzam. Osama bin Laden and his Deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri laid a further cornerstone for the ideological component of the „Third Crusade“. They participated together with other prominent Jihadis in the “Declaration of War against the United States occupying the two holy sites of Islam [Mecca and Medina]” in 1996 and they founded the Global Islamic Front to Fight the Crusaders and Jews (al-Jabha al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya li Qital al-Salibiyyin wa-l-Yahud), which can be seen as the foundation of “al-Qaeda”. The text of the statement can be a read on the website www.tawhed.ws, accessed December 15, 2010, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo>. See also http://www.homelandsecurityus.Net/america%20threats/declaration_of_war_against_the_a1.htm.

⁹³⁴ See John Feffer, “Islamophobes seduced by Crusader myth”, AsiaTimesOnline, Nov 10, 2010, accessed November 11, 2010, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LK10Ak04.html.

fight against the repression of Muslims, and afterwards for the global domination of Islam. With this theological argument, Jihadis try to create an air of sacred legitimacy around their own actions.⁹³⁵ Jihadis judge everyone, except for themselves, at the measure stick of this ideological-theological interpretation of paternal leadership. Jihadis also regard the absoluteness of divine, panoptical surveillance as “righteous” and “justified,” because it is an effect of “divine guidance” (*hidaya*). Once the propagation of this idea becomes a discernible communicative process on the Internet, we can speak about divine virtual leadership.

Salafism is not a form of Friday worship.⁹³⁶ It is a specific code of religious ethics that frowns upon modernism, secular governance, secularity, women’s rights, sexual liberty, premarital sex and homosexuality. But Salafis also emulate characteristics of classical role models, which include virtuous and fair behaviour as well as kindness.⁹³⁷ According to Salafi creed, excessive social or friendly contact with non-Muslims must be avoided (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*). In exchange, Salafi networks offer their members robust and effective social networks, which help and support them in times of trouble and provide mutual loyalty to an extent that is difficult to find elsewhere. Salafis therefore work hard to build networks of friends among each other, create communities, foster a dichotomist worldview and realize shared values and goals. The central goal is to live according to the *shari'a*, possibly install it as state law, and finally as universal law (*tatbiq al-shari'a*). Salafis feel that the all-encompassing nature of their faith, its spirituality and the alternative social model it offers in a disturbingly chaotic world make the belonging to a network a wonderful and warm experience, which weighs out the insularity that sets members apart from mainstream (Muslim) societies.

With these characteristics, Salafism and its radical sub-trend Jihadism appeal to protest cultures. They claim to offer to converts spiritual and social alternatives which established, and, in their view, spiritually deprived mass-societies lack. The sense of belonging, channel for frustrations and protest, and a relatively simple worldview draws youth both in the West

⁹³⁵ Moreover, theology structures and integrates Jihadi subculture, by drawing a clear line between Jihadi in-group members and non-Jihadis; the broader Jihadi theology docks onto Muslim protest ideologies. The theological Jihadi master and specific Jihadi frames are crucial for the self-perception of online-Jihadis, especially if they have no physical contact to a radical scene. The Salafi master frame helps Jihadis to identify with mainstream Muslims, while the specific Jihadi frame is based on doctrines that isolate Jihadi thought from moderate and outside influences. Jihadi theological doctrines are often not known in Muslim majority contexts and are rather elements of the specific Jihadi frame (with the exception of prominent doctrines, such as the *Salafi-'aqida*, (Salafi-doctrine), or the theological justifications of suicide attacks, which have been picked up by Sunni mainstream actors as well). In the mid- to late 1990s in the wider Islamic debate around Hamas’ suicide bombings against Israeli civilians drew support from a number of mainstream.

⁹³⁶ Salafis are characterized by an over-strict observation of the six tenets of Sunni religious doctrine, the five pillars of Islamic faith (), a distinct religious exegesis, and a particular view of the early Muslim community that dictates a rigid religious interpretation of worldly matters and dichotomist religious worldview.

⁹³⁷ For example, the classical scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350) allegedly never harboured feelings of hatred against anyone. Mustapha Abd al-Qadir 'Ata, Introduction to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Za'ad al-ma'ad fi hadi khair al-'ibad* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya: 2004).

and in the Muslim world into the orbit of Salafi, and in more extreme cases of Jihadi thinking. The border between ideology and theology blurs quickly in Salafi thinking, since Islam is interpreted as an all-encompassing religious, political, legal, and social concept.

But there is a dichotomy within the Salafi trend that informs its outlook on other Muslims. Salafis demand total religious commitment from their co-religionists. They have next to zero-tolerance for the practice of a “cultural Islam,” such as Muslims who “only” pray on Fridays or on holydays. The acceptance of “man-made” laws and legislations is utterly rejected. Quarrels over these issues can lead to the zealous excommunication (*takfir*) of other Muslims. In addition, radical Salafi groups with differing methods frequently excommunicate each other.

Ideally, Salafis have to meet high moral expectations, participate regularly in group activities and fully accept Salafi doctrine. This entails, besides the strict observation of the five pillars of faith,⁹³⁸ the belief in the absolute unity of God (*tawhid*), who is the only sovereign and legislator of worldly and heavenly matters, the belief in his angels, who are part of God’s messianic army, the belief in his [revealed] books, the belief in his prophets and messengers, the belief in Judgement Day and the final apocalyptic battle between forces of righteousness and evil, as well as the belief in predestination (a believer’s fate depends on God’s unchangeable will).⁹³⁹ Salafis regard themselves as “saved sect” at the Day of Judgement, which unlike 72 other religious sects [sic] will not be perished. This self-perception of Salafis is not very different from Christian sects. We find a similar concept in Christian eschatology. “Sectarian groups in every age have seen themselves in John’s 144,000 (compare also 14:1). The number has become synonymous with those who are saved, elect or chosen.”⁹⁴⁰

In Salafi parlance, two theological terms are of utmost importance. *‘Aqida* means creed, or doctrine. It is taught as a body of principles. *Manhaj* means “method” and refers to the different methodological principles, by which the doctrine is put into practice. The *manhaj* (method) category enables us to clearly distinguish “*Salafi-Jihadis*” other adherents of the *Salafi*-strand. Different Salafis use these categorizations by themselves in order to draw clear lines and define their sub-groups. *‘Aqida* refers to the sectarian and theological doctrine, *manhaj* means the adherence to certain methodological principles. Salafi-Jihadis believe in the main principles of Salafism and follow the violent method of Jihadism.

⁹³⁸ These are monotheism, prayer, fasting, giving alms, pilgrimage. Many Jihadis claim that jihad is the sixth pillar of faith and has nowadays become the most important one.

⁹³⁹ See Orhan Elmaz, “Jihadi-Salafist Creed: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s Imperatives of Faith,” in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism*, ed. Rüdiger Lohker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2012), 15-36.

⁹⁴⁰ “Revelation 7 - IVP New Testament Commentaries,” accessed January 14, 2013, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Rev/144000-Unnumbered-Multitude>.

Salafis deduce their guidelines for a pious life where possible from the Qur'an and the *sunna* - religious legislation can be derived directly from the Qur'an or indirectly from the *sunna* on the basis of precedence, i.e. analogy (*qiyas*) or consensus (*ijma'*). They favor transmitted dogma (*naql*) from the Qur'an and *sunna* over reasoning (*'aql*), and reject voluble interpretation (*ta'wil*) as well as personal opinion (*ra'y*) and dialectic debate on Islamic theology (*kalam*), which in their view leads to innovation (*bid'a*) and is seen as a sin.⁹⁴¹ In spite of their rejection of opinion and debate Salafis are heavily opinionated on religious, political and social issues and defend their fundamentalist views in heated debates against moderate Muslims. Main differences to less fundamentalist Muslims concern how strictly monotheism (*tawhid*), deviations from it like sin (*kufr*) and idolatry (*shirk*), and the principle to follow Muhammad's example (*ittiba'*) are to be interpreted and judged.⁹⁴²

Manhaj and *'aqida* questions have been treated extensively by classical Muslim jurists. But as expressions of contemporary Salafi Islam they have become ever more simplified and ideological since the early 1990s. The modern jihad movement did not yet ponder strongly on doctrinal questions in its nascent period between the 1960s and 1980s.⁹⁴³ The main interest of ideologues and leaders was to build revolutionary movements based on Islamic principles and topple Muslim regimes. The ideological figurehead of modern jihad was Sayyid Qutb, (1906-1966), who was hanged by the Egyptian regime. Qutb's major work *Ma'alim fi-l-tariq* ("Signposts") "became a guide to many new Jihadi organizations that sprang up in the 1970s in Egypt, including Farag's ["Islamic Jihad" organization that killed Egyptian president al-Sadat in 1981]."⁹⁴⁴ But other regional offshoots of the Muslim Brothers, such as Marwan Hadid's (1934-1976) *al-Tali'a al-Muqatila* ("Fighting Vanguard") in Syria, were heavily influenced by Qutb's precepts as well. Following the crackdowns on the Muslim Brothers in Egypt in 1948, 1954 and 1957, Qutb recommended a longer period of indoctrination and spiritual awakening at the grassroots level of Egyptian society, which was to be combined with military training for defensive purposes should the system once again decide to clamp down on the re-organizing Islamic Movement. It is also noteworthy that Qutb's vision of

⁹⁴¹ See al-Hilali, *Al-Jama'at*, 558-562. See also Philipp Holtmann, "Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications and Discussion," IDC-Policy Paper, 2011, accessed August, 29, 2012, http://www.herzliyaconference.org/eng/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/PhilippHoltmann.pdf.

⁹⁴² See al-Hilali, *Al-Jama'at*, 558-562.

⁹⁴³ Sayyid Qutb did not even differentiate between doctrine and method: "The Islamic doctrine (*'aqida*), even if it was a doctrine, then it is a doctrine that represents a realistic method (*manhaj*) for life that can be practically implemented." Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Quran, Tafsir Surat al-An'am*, accessed November 12, 2012, <http://zeham.maktoobblog.com/1719/>.

⁹⁴⁴ Aaron Y. Zelin, "*al-Fariḍa al-Ghā'iba* and al-Sadat's Assassination, a 30 Year Retrospective," *International Journal for Arab Studies* 3:2 (2012): 1-34, accessed January 20, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/1259614/al-Fari_a_al-Gha_iba_and_al-Sadats_Assassination_a_30_Year_Retrospective, 3.

prolonged indoctrination towards a radical Islamic struggle, which was heavily informed by social-liberation and Marxist strategies and informs key-thinkers of the global Jihadi movement until today, was gradually thrown overboard by radical Islamist groups during the 1970s in favor of an immediate militant jihad.⁹⁴⁵ An exception was the Palestinian jihad ideologue and Qutb-follower Abdullah 'Azzam, who revived the idea of prolonged ideological and spiritual preparation in a global context in the 1980s in the Afghan Jihad. However, during the 1980s, also Salafi thought and doctrine started to inform the Jihadi trend tremendously. This happened especially in Saudi Arabia, to where many militant Egyptian Muslim Brothers had fled, and in the Afghan Jihad scene, to which many Saudis Wahhabis and Jihadis were attracted alike. Adherents of the Salafi-Wahhabi and of the Jihadi trends met each other intensively during the international Afghan Jihad against the Soviets (1979-1989). But let us examine how doctrinal and methodological questions influence theological and ideological behaviour. The Salafi belief doctrine (*al-'aqida al-salafiyya*) creates a **theological master frame**,⁹⁴⁶ which is based on an overarching belief interpretation. According to this doctrine, Salafis adhere to the example of the first three generations of Muslims and prefer a direct literal reading of the main Islamic sources. This means that Salafis try to emulate the “correct Islamic example” of the first three generations of Muslims, called the “pious predecessors” (*al-salaf al-salih*). Adherents of this sectarian streaming within Sunni Islam orient themselves at the time period, in which Islam is perceived as original and uncorrupted, and represented by a nascent Muslim community which develops within a short time from a persecuted tribal minority (*ghuraba'*) into a centralized imperial force (*khilafa*). The first three generations of Muslims are either the companions of the Prophet (*al-sahaba*), or those, who did not accompany the Prophet directly, but knew his first followers (*al-tabi'un*). The successors of the *tabi'un* (*atba' al-tabi'in*) are the third generation of *al-salaf al-salih*. The most authoritative guidelines and sources of the *salafiya* trend are the Quran and the Sunna, traditional narratives on the sayings and mores of the Prophet and the first three generations of followers. „The Quran is first and foremost interpreted according to the Sunna, and not according to individual interpretation (*tafsir*), which is regarded with strong skepticism. The orientation at the practices of the Prophet Muhammad is an important aspect of Salafism. Being the [monotheist] Prophet with a divine message is a singular aspect that imposes a

⁹⁴⁵ Aaron Y. Zelin, “*al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba* and al-Sadat's Assassination, a 30 Year Retrospective,” *International Journal for Arab Studies* 3:2 (2012), accessed January 20, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/1259614/al-Fari_a_al-Gha_iba_and_al-Sadats_Assassination_a_30_Year_Retrospective, 1.

⁹⁴⁶ If we logically continue Lohlker's conceptualization of *framing*, then the Salafi-doctrine is “a general theological frame” within the minority Salafi context, but “a specific theological frame” within the majority Sunni context.

particular authority upon him. Consequently, Muhammad himself becomes a role model for imitation.⁹⁴⁷ Adherents of Salafism frequently justify the importance of emulating the personal circumstances of the Prophet by referencing to Quran verses 16:44, 3:32 and 3:132.⁹⁴⁸

Jihadis regard the influence of Salafi-doctrine on their own trend with mixed feelings. Abu Mu'sab al-Suri's analysis of the influence of Salafi doctrine on Jihadis attests to this. Al-Suri argues that there is an utterly positive aspect to Salafi influences on the Jihad trend, since the latter found the solution to its jurisprudential obscurity and insularity in the Salafi *fiqh* and the Salafi *'aqida* at the beginning of the 1980s. The Afghan Jihad became a hub for militant Islamist oppositionists (Jihadis) and religious Fundamentalists (Salafis) who started to influence each other heavily. Salafis, observers al-Suri, joined the "dynamic Jihadi trend" (*al-tayar al-Jihadi al-haraki*), which rested on Muslim Brothers- and Sayyid Qutb-thought and methodology (*al-fikr al-ikhwani wa-l-qutbi*). New mixed networks and recruitment-groups soon emerged in countries, which were involved in the proxy war between the Soviet Union and the U.S., such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and numerous Western countries. Despite its benefits, there is a negative aspect to Salafi influence on Jihadis, claims al-Suri. The contemporary Salafi trend's (*al-tayar al-salafi al-mu'asir*) influence has caused a damaging jurisprudential anarchy (*fauḍa fiqhiyya*) in the Jihadi trend. It is nowadays exploited by "fools" (*jihal*) among Salafis and Jihadis all the same, who cultivate principles of excommunication (*takfir*), extremism (*tatarruf*) and ideological hardening (*tashaddud*). For the future, the rebuilding the barrier (*hajiz*) between Jihadi and Takfiri thought, which is a very narrow edge (*hamish daqiq*), remains one of the most important tasks, concludes al-Suri.⁹⁴⁹ At the moment, there is neither a clear separation, nor an absolute blending of both trends, which al-Suri perceives as very dangerous.

The second major concept in Salafi thinking is the **manhaj**, which means "method" and can be understood as a belief-action relation in Salafi thinking.⁹⁵⁰ For example, the adjective "Jihadi" in the composite-noun "Salafi-Jihadi" stands for the method by which Jihadis put the Salafi doctrine (*'aqida*) into practice, i.e. jihad. Thus, Salafi-Jihadis believe in the main

⁹⁴⁷ Ruth-Sabrina Trujillano Egoavil-Hamidi, *Dschihadistische Videos: Eine Fallstudie* (M.A.th., University of Vienna, 2011), 24.

⁹⁴⁸ Bernard Rougier, ed., *Qu'est ce que le Salafisme?* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2008), 4.

⁹⁴⁹ Abu Musab al-Suri, "*Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya*", published on the Internet, 2004, (Accessed June 24, 2012) - <http://archive.org/details/Dawaaah>.

⁹⁵⁰ There are different ways to put the Salafi doctrine into practice, and thus, **specific theological frames** for different groups of the Salafi strand. Salafis understand the practicing of the "right" *manhaj* as the establishment of the infallible law of God (*shari'a*) into earthly reality (*dunya*) by obeying divine leadership (*hidaya*), which results in divine sovereignty (*hakimiya*). See for a more detailed analysis Adis Duderija, "Constructing the religious Self and the Other: neo-traditional Salafi manhaj," *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* 21:1 (2010): 75-93.

principles of Salafism, but try to realize them through jihad. At the same time, this specific theological approach creates a **Jihadi master frame** of reference.⁹⁵¹ In spite of their insularity, Salafi-Jihadis claim to represent all Muslims. A common Jihad argument is that the Jihadi method is essentially a Muslim method. According to the Jihadi ideologue Abu Thabit al-Najdi, “the Umma finds nowadays many youth searching for the right way to establish divine leadership (*hidaya*). Yet, it [divine leadership] is essentially a question of proselytizing the youth towards the method of righteousness (*manhaj al-haqq*) and the way of the surviving sect (*sabil al-firqa al-najdiyya*) [which will not be damned at the Day of Judgment]”⁹⁵²

Among the other Salafi sects, there are also those who call themselves “*Salafi-mu'tadilis*” (Moderate Salafis), such as al-Albani movement in Jordan. These moderates follow a quietist, proselytizing method which represents their **master frame** of belief practice. They are ultra-literal practitioners of faith, but reject jihad and propagate by preaching, public-outreach, calls for conversion, and the establishment of religious shared-cause networks. Since some of the moderates have extremely rigid views on women’s rights, political participation or unbelief, the adjective “moderate” has to be read with caution.

For the majority of Jihadis, the adherence to their *manhaj* means that they accept the divine command doctrine “*Then fight in God's cause — Thou art held responsible only for thyself — And rouse the Believers!*”⁹⁵³ According to Muslim exegesis, Q 4:84 was revealed to Muhammad after Muslim forces had disastrously lost the Battle of Uhud in 625 AD (3 AH) against the Quraysh tribe from Mecca. Some of the Muslims refused to follow Muhammad, when he summoned again to battle. The verse was revealed to incite them.⁹⁵⁴ It is justified to say that this injunction is the basis of contemporary Jihadi discourse. It dominates the Jihadi master frame (i.e. *manhaj*) and contains the major strategic and operative paradigm of self-responsible jihad and individualized terrorism (*jihad fardi*, *irhab fardi*). The doctrine bolsters a specific virtual leadership model (see the chapter “Divine Guidance (*hidaya*) and Incitement (*tahrid*)”).

Salafis in general and Jihadis in particular introspect themselves as pious elite among corrupted Muslim masses. Their self-perception is, among others, based on the Prophetic saying: “One sect (*ta'ifa*) of my umma remains that stands up for truth until the Hour of

⁹⁵¹ This refers to the belief practice of “jihad,” with which Salafi-Jihadi sub-sects identify.

⁹⁵² Abu Thabit al-Najdi, “*Iftitahiya*,” *Mu'askar al-Battar* 5: 4.

⁹⁵³ Qur'an Surat al-Nisa 4:84, accessed May 22, 2012,

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/Qur'an/00411.htm>

⁹⁵⁴ Some Muslims rejected to mobilize again, therefore, the strongly inciting tone of the verse. See “*Sabab Nuzul: La tukallaf illa nafsaka wa harrid al-mu'minin*,” accessed October 16, 2012, <http://www.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=167317>.

Resurrection.”⁹⁵⁵ This central doctrine enhances group identity, which entails the idea that only Jihadis are qualified to lead “common” Muslims. They argue that it is a “divinely ordained” task, and thus an imperative, to remember and guide the “corrupted” Islamic Community (*umma*) until Judgment Day: “Then let those beware who withstand the Messenger's order, lest some trial befall them, or a grievous penalty is inflicted on them” (Qur'an 24:63). Jihadis in particular introspect themselves as successors of the classical “victorious sect” (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*) or “the surviving group” (*al-firqa al-najiya*), which unlike 71 other sects will not be damned at the Day of Judgment and perished in the Hereafter. A complementary self-view is that of “disciples of the Prophet's tradition and the community” (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jama'a*), who adhere to the body of traditions on Muhammad's exemplary life (*sira*) and his deeds (*athar*), but also the general Salafi self-description The People of the Truth (*ahl al-haqq*).⁹⁵⁶ As the Salafi-sheikh al-Hilali states:

“The majority [of Muslims] have no idea of the Shari'a. And Islam is not a republican or public religion, nor about a democratic majority, which is ruled according to the opinion of the public. Islam settles the rule of Allah in every matter.

It is intelligible to all that “the people of the truth” (*ahl al-haqq*) are only a few compared to the people of falsehood. This is an existential prophetic tradition which means that the multitude does not have any weight in this course. An explanation of the “victorious sect” and “surviving group” as being the majority of the populace, masses, or common people cannot last under the scrutiny of [religious legal] scientific critique. There is no evidence for this, it lacks proof, and it depreciates the right evidence (*dalil*; i.e. evidence from the Qur'an and *sunna*).”⁹⁵⁷

The imaginary power of this Salafi-Jihadi *community myth*, which we have already described in the semiotics chapter, transcends the imagination of outsiders. However, it can be said that it glues Jihadis together through a shared sense of pioneering, suffering and survival. Similar community myths exist in other (religious) cultures and are connected to narratives of persecution, martyrdom, suffering, exile, migration and refuge, pioneering and struggle.

⁹⁵⁵ “*La tazal ta'ifa min ummati zahirin 'ala al-haqq hatta taqum al-sa'a*” (...there remains a righteous sect of my nation until the hour [of Judgement Day]), quoted in: Abi Usama Salim bin 'Aid al-Hilali, *Al-Jama'at al-islamiyya fi daw' al-kitab wa-al-sunna bi-fahm salaf al-umma* (Islamic movements in the light of the Qur'an and the Sunna according to the forefathers of the Umma), (*Al-Dar al-Athariyya*: Amman, 2003), 45.

⁹⁵⁶ Furthermore, “*ahl al-amn*,” or “*ahl al-amr wa-l-dhirwa*,” are complementary self-designations of Salafi-Jihadis.

⁹⁵⁷ Al-Hilali, *Al-Jama'at*, 46.

These experiences and hardships allegedly create special social, political, military and leadership skills.⁹⁵⁸

In the opinion of the Jihadi ideologue Sayyid Qutb “the Muslim group emerged to lead mankind.”⁹⁵⁹ In a video message via the Internet on the eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda confirmed: “Set common goals and maintain Muslim unity, by following the Jihadi leadership, which has amassed experience and established pioneering forces.”⁹⁶⁰ The video message came in the usual form of an “inciting speech” (*kalima tahridiyya*), which is a specific theological leadership model.⁹⁶¹ One of the typical representations of the elite and pioneering myth in online jihad is the image of a horse rider who bears the black war banner (*al-rawa*).⁹⁶²

Jihadis constantly integrate doctrinal, methodological and sectarian questions into their wider military strategies.⁹⁶³ Most of their discussions have little in common with the elaborated discourses of classical jurists on these issues. The example below is taken from a discussion thread on the online forum “Islamic Awakening” and depicts a quarrel over the *manhaj* between several discussants, some of them are Jihadis. The heatedly debated question is whether the use of modern social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, accords

⁹⁵⁸ U.S. Mormons, who suffered tremendously under U.S. Protestants, when they established an alternative Christian belief system in the early 19th century, share this self-view. But U.S. Protestants identify as well with pioneer-ship, emigration, martyrdom, struggle and salvation. Also the idea that Muslims are a “chosen elite” informs the identities of a wide range of Muslims.

Mitt Romney’s home, for example, features in the hallway five paintings of five family ancestors, who played important roles in the establishment of Mormonism in the U.S. It is justified to interpret this exhibition not merely as an expression of family tradition. These ancestors stand for the Mormon community myth, to survive in the midst of hostile environments in the Mississippi, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico regions, which made them strong and capable and, in their view, good leaders. Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, *The Real Romney* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), ch.2, pp.31-51.

⁹⁵⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Quran, al-Jaz’ al-thani, Tafsir Surat al-Tawba*, accessed November 12, 2012, <http://zeham.maktoobblog.com/category/التفسير-الكامل-للسور/>.

⁹⁶⁰ International Institute for Counterterrorism (ICT), ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, September 2012, accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/JihadiWebsitesMonitoring/JWMGPeriodicalReviews/tabid/344/Articleid/1118/currentpage/1/Default.aspx>, 4.

See the original document: Ayman al-Zawahiri, “*Shams al-nasr al-bazigha ala al-umma al-muntasira wa al-salibiya al-munhadira*,” *Tafrih Nukhbat al-I’lam al-Jihadi* (September 16, 2012), accessed October 31, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/shmes.alnaser>.

⁹⁶¹ This model is based on the divine injunction “to incite” (Quran 4:84). See the discussion below “**“Divine Guidance” (*hidaya*) through Incitement (*tahrid*).**”

⁹⁶² See the chapter “Semiotic Virtual Leadership: The Symbols and Aesthetics of Online Jihad.”

⁹⁶³ For example, argues Jihadi ideologue Abu Zahra al-Zabidi, all Jihadi trends and preachers should support the announcement of the Nusra-Front (*Jabhat al-Nusra*), which allegedly assists people in their struggle in Syria, because “there is no Islamic movement in Greater Syria [referring to historic Syria including parts of Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and parts of Iraq], with a clear agenda and method (*manhaj*).” “*Al-Fawaid al-shariyya fi-l-ilan an jabhat al-nusra al-jihadiyya – al-sheikh al-mujahid Abi Zahra al-Zabidi*,” accessed May 17, 2012, <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=161736>.

with the Jihadi method of propagation. This discussion demonstrates the implicitness and simplicity with which online grassroots Jihadi actors use the framing concept “*manhaj*.”⁹⁶⁴



Among (online-) Jihadis, doctrinaire, methodological and lastly ideological feuds have led to splits between classical al-Qaeda followers and so-called Neo-Zarqawists (named after the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq), who follow a more extremist line. Protest by internal critics against ever more brutal terrorist tactics and the massive killing of civilians like in Iraq and Afghanistan are being refuted with pseudo-legal arguments lest the ideological coherence be endangered.⁹⁶⁵

In addition, online Jihadis frequently copy theological texts from Salafi discussion forums and quote legal opinions by contemporary Saudi Arabian Salafi clerics such as Ibn Baz und Humud b. 'Uqla. Their goal is to strengthen their own ideological cohesion and tap into the theological discussions of other Salafi trends.

The most vividly discussed doctrines, which are supposed to enhance the virtual group-cohesion of Jihadis are the following: Muslims, they claim, are not supposed to have any contact to non-Muslims (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*); Muslims, who ignore this and act or rule according to western concepts are idolaters and seduce righteous Muslims to erring beliefs (*taghut*). Many adherents of the other Salafi strands concord with this. The Jihadi interpretations starts at the crucial point where transgressions may be judged as disbelief and punished by excommunication (*takfir*), which according to Jihadis, often justifies a death

⁹⁶⁴ Ibn Adam. "Islamic Awakening Facebook & Twitter," accessed October 15, 2012, <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f21/islamic-awakening-facebook-and-twitter-42613/>.

⁹⁶⁵ Neo-Zarqawists call themselves after the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006. They mainly used the *Medad al-Suyuf* Forum, which was closed in late 2010 and not relaunched by the time of writing. See the excellent analysis by Mohammed Ali Musawi, "Cheering for Osama – How Jihadis Use Internet Discussion Forums", Quilliam Foundation, August 2010, accessed December 15, 2010, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/stories/pdfs/cheering-for-osama.pdf>.

sentence. This charge is frequently leveled against “traitors,” “collaborators” or “unjust” secular rulers. Other typical Salafi-Jihadi doctrines entail the justification of terrorism (*irhab*), and specifically individual terrorism (*irhab fardi*); the emphasis of the merits of self-inflicted martyrdom (*istishhad*); the veneration of martyrs and their “miracles” (*karamat*), which reminds of tenets of the Sufi veneration of saints; the analogical deduction (*qiyas*) that “martyrdom operations (*'amaliyat istishadiyya*) are like medieval single attacks (*inghimas*; *iqtiham*), which caused the death of a Muslim attacker; the revival of the classical “general call for mobilization” (*al-nafir al-'amm*); the revival of the classical concept “frontier guarding” (*ribat*); and in the latter two contexts a specific interpretation of emigration (*hijra*) as the journey to a training camp or a battle field, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq, or presently (October 2012) Syria; the interpretation of mutual “incitement” (*tahrid*) as a participative mutual leadership mechanism; the emulation of the gradual empowerment of Islam, from its early stage, when Muhammad conquered Mecca and afterwards the rest of the Arabian peninsula (*tamakkun*), which was followed by the conquest of the whole of the Middle East, northern African and parts of southern Europe until 750 AD. The role of these doctrines in contemporary Islamic theology has not yet been researched thoroughly.

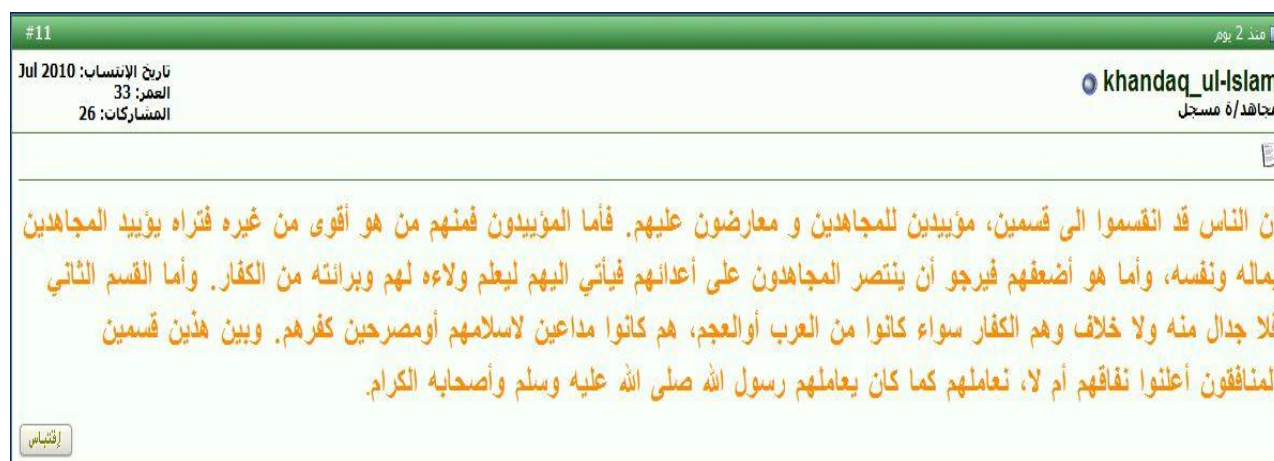
In the following examples, we will find copy-pasted pieces of texts that allow the killing of civilians and legitimize terrorism. In the Jihadi discourse, these pieces of text also contain restrictive “linguistic codes” and “discursive icons” with a high symbolic meaning. Such pieces of text, endlessly repeated, serve as a confirmation of the Jihadi myth as isolated, violent, but righteous elite:

ولهؤلاء العجول من الطواغيت ومن دخل في موالاتهم ونصرتهم من البلاغمة، نقول: ثقافة التكفير .. وعقيدة التكفير .. عقيدة قرآنية نبوية .. قد دلت عليها مئات النصوص من الكتاب والسنة .. وقد تأملت كلمة " كفر " ومشتقاتها فوجدتها قد وردت في أكثر من ثلاثمائة موضع وآية من كتاب الله تعالى .. فأين تذهبون بهذه الآيات، وما دلت عليه؟! فأنتم إذ تحاربون ثقافة وعقيدة التكفير .. تحاربون الله ورسوله .. وتحاربون الكتاب والسنة .. وأنتم تعلمون!

„Excommunicating is a verdict of Allah; which doctrine do you follow? [directed at Muslim critics]!, from the salafist [not the Jihadi] al-Hisba Forum, accessed January 2009, <http://vb.hisbah.org/showthread.php?t=6649>.

“To those idols (*tawaghit*) and the bigmouths, who are loyal to them, we say: The culture and doctrine of excommunication (*takfir*) are a central Islamic belief that has been treated in hundreds of texts of the Qur’an and the Prophetic tradition. ... if you fight against it, then you fight against Allah and his Prophet. . .“

The following post a Jihadi forum was written by a sympathizer and explains the concept of *wala' wa-l-bara'*; the contributor concludes that all those who do not support the Jihadis must be treated as infidels “like the Prophet treated them.”



The next screenshot concerns an Islamic legal opinion (fatwa) by the Saudia-Arabian cleric Humud b. 'Uqla (gest.2001), which legitimizes suicide attacks and the killing of civilians (under certain conditions).⁹⁶⁶ Jihadis do not only take doctrines from Salafi sites and discuss them on their own forums, but they also post these argumentations on secular and mainstream websites. These arguments are used to justify bomb attacks that claim civilian victims on a massive scale, which happens regularly in attacks on police posts and administrative building in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The argument below can be found all over the Internet:



From al-Qasimi Net, accessed November 2008,

<http://www.ahm1.com/vb/showthread.php?p=313114>⁹⁶⁷

⁹⁶⁶ A *fatwa* is a written or oral religious legal opinion on a specific subject that requires clarification based on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*).

⁹⁶⁷ This textual piece is very prominent in the Jihadi discourse. The theological justification of suicide bombings, here the exact wording, is being repeated so often that it may be described as a “discursive icon” within virtual leadership on Jihadi discussion forums. However, arguments and phrases supporting controlled suicide,

„Realities and Incidents, to which martyrdom operations apply:

Firstly, the question of human shields (*tatarrus*):

If the army of unbelievers took Muslims as shields and encumbered the Muslim combatants in the sense that they could not fight, unless they kill the human Muslim shields, then it was allowed.”

6.e The conjunction of divine, discursive and semiotic virtual guidance at the example of suicide attacks

The conjunction of divine, discursive and semiotic guidance can be vividly demonstrated by concepts such as “the general call for mobilization to depart into war” (*al-nafir al-'amm*),⁹⁶⁸ or at the example of “martyrdom operations” (*'amaliyat istishhadiyya*). Palestinian Jihadi ideologue Abdullah Azzam revived the classical doctrine *al-nafir al-'amm* in the 1980s. It appears in the theology, semiotics and discourses of online jihad.

The semiotic, theological and discursive confluence of key-concepts in online jihad can also be demonstrated at the example of suicide bombings. Suicide bombings have over the last years become the major *modus operandi* of Jihadi actors. The Sunni legal justification of suicide bombings started in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the early 1990s and was subsequently adopted by global Jihadi actors. It is strongly oriented at the classical *inghimas*-doctrine, which refers to single Muslims fighters who plunged into the enemy's rows during battle and were killed as an effect of their actions. The analogical deduction from classical single attacks to the permissibility of modern “martyrdom operations” is based on analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), which is one of the four principal sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*).⁹⁶⁹

enforcing the entrance to paradise, are also very prominent on Salafi discussion forums, from where they are distributed to other websites and forums that are not connected to the Jihadi web at all. For example, this screen shot was taken from a popular Arabic language youth forum, where it was posted in September 2004. The post contains seven more lengthy and uncommented legal opinions on suicide attacks, mainly justifying them. See al-Qasimi.net, “Martyrdom operations on the scale of Islam”, accessed December 15, 2010, <http://www.ahm1.com/vb/showthread.php?p=313114>.

⁹⁶⁸ Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti, “*Al-Nafir al-'amm ila Jabhat Nusrat al-Sham*,” accessed November 30, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=09031201>. The treatment of the topic in Sheikh Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti's article is a good example of its discursive strength. The *nafir*-concept also features prominently in Jihadi pictorial discourses and semiotics. See, for example, the wall-banner accompanying the article. Also in Jihadi theology, the concept is dominant. See, for example, an article in the 16th issue of the online Jihadi magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar*.

⁹⁶⁹ The process of analogical reasoning is called *qiyas* and comprises four elements. In Islamic legal terms, the *qiyas* is the extension of a shariatic ruling (*hukm*) from an original case (*'asl*) to a new case (*far'*) because the new case has the same legal reasoning (*'illah*) as the original one. The legitimacy of life-threatening single

The suicide-martyrdom doctrine directly concerns a contemporary meta-psychology of fear; it is justified to say that, on the global level, the doctrine touches a wider, cross-cultural, if not global debate on the meaning of just and unjust war, which is triggered by an almost phobic fear from “irrational” Muslim fanatics and their major terrorist tactic, i.e. suicide attacks. Stephen L. Carter analyses differing cultural and ideological views on war, death and killing by Muslims and Westerners.

Illustration below: “General call for mobilization to join the *Support Front for the People of Greater Syria*,” source: accessed November 30, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=09031201>



“One reason the rhetoric of war seems, in the modern age, so old-fashioned is because it is. The just war tradition evolved in an era when it was widely understood that the moral problem involved in war is the killing. Nowadays, with our thought blurred by materialism, we tend to behave as if the moral problem involved in war is the dying. One is reminded of the point made by Anthony Kronman, in his fine monograph on contemporary higher education: ‘Other living things die, but only we are tormented or inspired by the knowledge that we will.’ That knowledge has always been with us. As Kronman points out, it often inspires. But lately it seems instead to torment. [...] Talal Asad, in his controversial study of suicide bombers, argues that one reason the West is so susceptible to the terror the bomber causes is precisely that we value our own lives so highly. One can conceptualize the Terror War as pitting people who are not afraid to die against people who are.”⁹⁷⁰

attacks, i.e. *inghimas*, is extended to martyrdom operations (*'amaliyah istishhadiyyah*, i.e. suicide bombings) on the basis of the reasoning that they are self-sacrifice for the benefit of religion.

See for a detailed discussion David Jan Slavicek, “Deconstructing the Shariatic Justification of Suicide Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:6 (2008): 553-571; Philipp Holtmann, *Martyrdom, not Suicide: The Legality of Hamas’ Bombings in the mid-1990s in Modern Islamic Jurisprudence* (Munich: Grin, 2009).

The principal four sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) are in authoritative order the Quran; the practice of the Prophet as transmitted through his sayings and laid down in the literary genre of hadith, i.e. oral transmission, which was later written down (the *sunnah*); scholarly consensus (*ijma'*); and the analogical deduction from these three (*qiyas*).

⁹⁷⁰ Stephen L. Carter, *The Violence of Peace: America’s Wars in the Age of Obama* (Philadelphia: Beast, 2011), 84-85.

The construction of doctrines which support suicide operations depends on the socio-strategic situations and cultural contexts of actors. Actors who perceive themselves as weak and humiliated an/or who are totally committed tend to use means of asymmetric warfare. Guerilla or terrorist warfare entails a much higher risk of getting killed, which makes it easy to justify tactics in which death is anticipated and legitimized from the outset. *Inghimas* signifies a concept of tactical deterrence that developed in classical Muslim warfare (around the 7th century AD). Since then, the concept appears frequently in Islamic martial jurisprudence. Tactical deterrence as it surfaces in the *inghimas*-concept seems to be one of the most ancient patterns of social organization; tactical deterrence paradigms influence group behavior (in-group versus out-group bias). In-group cohesion correlates to out-group aggression,⁹⁷¹ the more frightening an out-group appears, the more terrible are the mechanisms that are invented to deter it; and vice versa, the more frightening the own deterrence mechanisms are, the higher is the own in-group cohesion.

The *inghimas*-doctrine, which serves supporters of suicide bombings as a major Islamic legal justification, is not only a focal point of theological discussions, but reappears frequently in the semiotics and discourses of online jihad. Once again, this shows the strong conjunction and confluence of the three virtual guidance elements (semiotics, discursive ritualism and theology), which eventually, all together establish virtual leadership. For example, an al-Qaeda propaganda video that was published online in 2011 promotes the “individual jihad” (*al-jihad al-fardi*) paradigm. The video tells the viewer that the single attacker (*munghamis*) and the modus operandi single attack (*inghimas*) are crucial elements in the realization of a global jihad strategy that is based on individualized terrorism. The video itself was produced by al-Qaeda with the goal to create a communicative leadership instrument, which steers followers through general strategic guidelines and precepts that are based on an action mode that addresses Muslim audiences.⁹⁷² Another example shows that major theological concepts reappear in the semiotics and discourses of online jihad. This shows again an interdependence of virtual leadership elements.⁹⁷³ Scenes of Jihadi online propaganda videos re-enact the classical *inghimas*-doctrine, where a single fighter plunges himself into the rows of the

⁹⁷¹ The goal is to build-up a coherent in-group, at the same time to deter and reduce the harmony of out-group(s). The correlation between in-group harmony and out-group aggression is probably one of the most basic social behavioral patterns. (trans-species: among chimpanzees as well as humans) (Demonic Males; Revilla; Jordania). See Philipp Holtmann, “The Concept of Deterrence in Arab and Muslim Thought - Classical Islamic Paradigms of Deterrence and their Expression in Modern Islamist Thought,” Working paper, June 2012, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, Israel.

⁹⁷² “*Tafrigh isdar al-sahab [La tukallaf illa nafsak] li-nukhbat al-i'lam al-Jihadi*,” accessed October 22, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/tafrigh105>.

⁹⁷³ See the chapter “Semiotic Virtual Leadership: The Symbols and Aesthetics of Online Jihad.”

enemy. For example, a production by the *Ansar al-Islam*, a Kurdish-Sunni group based in northern Iraq, whose goal is to establish an Islamic state in the Kurdish region of Iraq, clearly depicts *inghimas*-scenes.⁹⁷⁴ The *inghimas*-doctrine thus becomes not only a theological and discursive icon of online jihad, but also a symbolic representation. The role model of the single Moslem fighter, who throws himself into the enemy rows, and fights until he is killed, is used to justify suicide operations, deter the enemy, motivate the own men, and contribute to the greater good of the common cause. But the mythology of self-sacrifice is by no means singular to Islam. The Suisse national hero Arnold Winkelried, for example, is said to have thrown himself into the rows of the Hapsburg troops at the *Battle of Sempach* (1386); his self-sacrifice allegedly triggered the Swiss-confederate victory over the Hapsburgs. Myths of religion, race, belonging, sacrifice and heroism exist in every culture, and can be abused to lead people into death, or worse, lead people to kill others. Such propagandist/ideological frameworks are largely based on the power of myths and pictures. They represent a form of communicative leadership based on the art of guiding the conscience through ideology and modern propaganda, which goes back to First World War military and afterwards fascist Freikorps culture (in Germany and other countries of that time). The propaganda of national-socialists fostered the death cult of German soldiers, which was, among other elements, based on the installment of the charismatic leadership of Adolf Hitler as a mythical hero, who was worshipped like a God.⁹⁷⁵ This was, of course, neglecting the psycho-pathological illness of the man. A selective reading of Norse mythology was additionally grafted upon the Nazi death-cult.⁹⁷⁶ The Norwegian mass-murderer Anders Behring Breivik constructed his own martyrology and heroism on the basis of the Saint George figure and medieval Crusader romanticism. For many centuries, the Catholic Church analogized the martyrdom of Christian saint-fighters, such as St. Stephen, to the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷⁴ “*Silah la yundab*” (A weapon that does not dwindle), *Ansar I'lamiyya* Media Foundation, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/>, accessed November 19, 2011, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=12858>.

⁹⁷⁵ Harry Mulisch, *Strafsache 40/61* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 139 ff.

⁹⁷⁶ “Possessions perish, clans perish. You perish like them. One thing I only know that lives forever: The glorious deeds of the dead.” From the *Edda*, which contains the major books of Norse mythology. The verse above is from the poem *Hávamál* in the poetic *Edda*, 69. strophe. The translation is quoted in Armin E. Hepp, *Völker und Stämme in Deutschland: Von der Steinzeit zum Mittelalter* (Tübingen: Grapert, 1979), 63.

⁹⁷⁷ Clemens August Cardinal von Galen, „Predigten in Dunkler Zeit,“ accessed January 14, 2013, http://kirchensite.de/downloads/Aktuelles/Predigt_Galen_Deutsch.pdf.
 Ralf Wokan, „Heinrich aus Bonn stirbt den Heldentod im Kampf um Lissabon (anno 1147),“ www.briefeankonrad.com, November 3, 2010, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://www.briefeankonrad.com/2010/11/heinrich-aus-bonn-stirbt-den-heldentod.html>.

Illustrations below: Sequence of screenshots from the northern Iraqi *Ansar al-Islam*'s video "*Silah la yundab*" that depict *inghimas*-like scenes (the plunging of the single man into the enemy). 3rd Illustration below: „*Inghimas*“-style attack of Arnold Winkelried at the Battle of Sempach, July 9, 1386⁹⁷⁸



⁹⁷⁸ Augustus von Dusen, "The Debauching of Switzerland," accessed January 31, 2013, http://thinkingmachineblog.net/the-debauching-of-switzerland/schlacht_bei_sempach_gr/.



The twisted mysticism, occultism and spiritualism of Jihadi subculture and its theology has been largely disregarded by analysts of the phenomenon, who are themselves caught up in western power-discourses. Some aspects of Jihadism, such as the veneration of saints, the creation of hierarchies based on descent (“the pious forefathers”), or the focus on the Mahdi-figure at the end of times (*Yaum al-Qiyama*), bear aspects of Sufi and Shiite spiritualism. Jihadi subculture, with its particular rites and ceremonies, is a cult-phenomenon. Many Jihadi attacks, such as suicide bombings or the kidnapping and killing of hostages do not make much tactical or strategic sense. There are barely political or strategic gains to be reached by them. These attacks seem to be ritual murders. Psycho-pathologically, the attackers can be compared to ritual killers who claim that they received divine or supernatural inspiration. However, the fertile ground for this ideology is being prepared on a daily basis on two major fronts. The first one is the predominance of a hypocritical traditionalism in the Sunni Muslim world that is hostile to social reforms, reacts allergic to “insults” of the own religion, but slams and insults other religions or philosophies wherever possible. The second front is that of neoliberal global capitalism, in which wars and conflicts are regarded as futile markets. For neoliberal policy thinkers, “democracy” is merely another word for applying double-standards, Jihadism is a cheap currency on the global conflict-market, its growth rate is amazing, and there are plenty of dispensable “raw materials.”

6.f Divine Virtual Guidance (*hidaya*) at the Example of the E-Magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar* and its Doctrine “A Book that Leads and a Sword that Assists”

The main goal of Jihadi ideologues is to establish a perception of unquestionable divine leadership toward jihad. This imperative dogma frames jihad as the only authoritative interpretation of Islam. Jihadi ideologues use “sacred” texts and ideas to this goal. Among the most prominent carriers of “divine leadership” are Jihadi e-magazines, which are published on a regular basis on the Internet. The content is mostly a propagandist mixture of tactical, strategic and theological guidelines, reports on successful operations, despicable Western and local military policies and the miserable plight of Muslims and Muslim prisoners. This mixture offers docking points for broader Muslim protest cultures. The theological content is highly ideological in the sense that theology does not come in the ideal form of a scholarly dispute between different opinions, but as a strategic interpretation with the goal to steer the readers’ thinking and actions. The easy comprehensible and digestible articles have nothing in common with the complicated legal exhortations of classical Islamic jurisprudence (even though, pieces of classical texts are often quoted to awake an impression of traditional authority).

An illustrative contemporary example is the e-magazine “Inspire”, which is published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (*Tanzim al-Qaeda fi Jazirat al-'Arab*, AQAP). Several professional media operators, among them the U.S.-citizen and native English speaker Samir Khan (k.2011), run and edit the glossy publication. Immediately after its appearance in 2009, readers of the magazine started discussions around the articles and created with their commentaries a hegemonic discourse that fully supports the publication. Due to this copy-cat effect, the actual circle of editors and contributors of the publication quickly transcended. Copy cats started their own publications, contributions, forum-discussions and blog-posts which were related to “Inspire.” The publication predominantly presents terrorist tactics, strategy, ideology and role-models of “individual terrorism” (i.e. single worldwide attackers), and thus fully continues the Jihadi tradition of al-Qaeda chief-strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.

A few years prior, however, other Jihadi e-magazines, which were the first of their kind, gained popularity in the Jihadi scene. The e-magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar* (“The Camp of the Slicing [Sword]”) was one of two legendary Jihadi journals that were published by the Saudi Arabian branch of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the early 2000s.⁹⁷⁹ These

⁹⁷⁹ Sometimes, the publication referred to the group as al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (*al-Qaeda fi Bilad al-Haramayn*; AQSA); and actually, until its merger with the Yemenite branch of al-Qaeda in 2009, it was the Saudi branch which represented al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula. However, Muslim extremists in the region

journals formed the first full-fledged media platform of jihad.⁹⁸⁰ *Sawt al-Jihad* was the ideational and *Mu'askar al-Battar* the technical journal of AQAP, although the latter also featured theology in its own distinct right: *Mu'askar al-Battar*'s technical articles in the section "an assisting sword" were almost free from religious references, but preceded, and thus framed in each issue, by a specific theological section under the general headline "a leading book." The "leading book" referred to divine leadership. Since this propagandist process idea was disseminated via the Internet, we will speak about "divine virtual leadership."

Rüdiger Lohlker observes that "the name of the publication is deeply embedded in a history going back to the foundational period of the Islamic community and denotes a semantic field also available in contemporary Saudi religious discourse or Salafi discourse."⁹⁸¹ In the historical context, "*al-Battar*" ("the Slicing") refers to one of the nine swords of the Prophet. Most of them are preserved nowadays in Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey. In the contemporary context, "*al-Sayf al-Battar*" ("the slicing sword") was the *nom de guerre* of Yusuf al-'Uyairi (1974-2003), the former leader of AQAP.⁹⁸² The periodical was named in honour of al-'Uyairi, who was killed by Saudi forces in 2003. The full name of the E-journal was *Mu'askar al-Shahid al-Battar* ("Military Camp of the Slicing Martyr"), which honored the fact that al-'Uyairi had set up several Jihadi training camps in Saudi Arabia before his death. Some online Jihadis take this symbol as picture or name for their avatars.⁹⁸³

perceive no geographical-physical border between the countries on the Arabian Peninsula, especially not between Saudia Arabia and Yemen. See *Mu'askar al-Battar*, issue 2, December2003/January 2004/Dhu al-Qa'ida 1424, 5.

⁹⁸⁰ The other one was *Sawt al-Jihad* ("The Voice of Jihad"). According to Lohlker and Prucha, both together form the first full-fledged Jihadi media platform on the Web. See Rüdiger Lohlker, Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Dschihad "Sawt al-gihad": al-Qa'idas erstes Online-Magazin* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010), 31.

⁹⁸¹ Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 66.

⁹⁸² Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 170 ff. Lohlker observes "The historical context: Eight of the nine swords of the prophet are in Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey, the ninth one in the Husayn mosque in Cairo, Egypt. These swords are – following the list by the medieval Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya. Shams al-din Abu 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyya, *Zad al-ma'ad fi huda khayr al-'ibad Muhammad* (Provisions for the servants of Muhammad for their right guidance on their way to the Hereafter), edited by 'A. Al-Mahdi, Vol. 1., (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 2005), 50: *al-'adb*, *dhu l-fiqar*, the most famous one, *hatf*, *al-ma'thur*, *al-mikhdham*, *al-qadib*, *al-qal'i*, *al-rasub*, and *al-battar*, called "sword of the prophet" due to the names engraved on its blade." Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” 65.

⁹⁸³ For example, "Al-Saif al-Battar" [member name], in the discussion "*Zawabit al-jihad al-shar'i fi-l-Islam*," May 23, 2012, accessed December 29, 2012, <http://www.aljihad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=18485>.

Illustration below: “*Al-Battar*” in Topkapi Palace, Istanbul. Source: <http://mysteriesunsolvedstory.blogspot.com/2010/05/owned-swords-of-prophet-muhammad-saw.html>, accessed November 14, 2011



The doctrine “the foundation of religion is a book that leads the right way and a sword that assists” permeates modern Jihadi culture and goes back to a famous dictum by the medieval Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328).⁹⁸⁴ The doctrine nowadays stands for a communicative and decentralized Jihadi command and control pattern, based on divine leadership. The allegory “book” stands for divine orders and their communication through media jihad, and the “sword” represents action. One can also find this concept in the logos of the website of the Jordanian Jihadi cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (www.tawhed.ws), or in the logo of the Jihadi forum “Lovers of the Huris” (<http://www.i7ur.com/vb>). Most Jihadi websites use Quran and sword or rifle pictures to symbolize the doctrine of divine leadership (see the chapter “Semiotic Virtual Leadership”). The way pictorial discourses influence, are influenced by, or illustrate theological discourses shows us how interrelated Jihadi web-semiotics, discourses and theology are.

Only Jihadi participants can really see, feel and understand the relevance of this theological doctrine, which is being put to use to gather extremists around a guiding idea. This central idea represents the metaphorical campfire around which participants gather in a multi-layered interaction of rituals. Partaking in virtual jihad and visiting its electronic platforms means that supporters self-train, are co-guided and educated by other members. Also the Jihadi lone-wolf concept functions according to the divine leadership paradigm. Online jihad is marketed by its proponents like a communication-vehicle for divine leadership (“a leading book”), into which central theological principles and sub-doctrines are embedded. This also concerns the concept of individualized terrorism (*irhab fardi*). Individual terrorists are supposed to be led by

⁹⁸⁴ “There are two variants to be found in the *Majmu' fatawa* of Ibn Taymiyya.” Rüdiger Lohlker, „Religion, Weapons, and Jihadism. Emblematic Discourses,” 67.

inciting propaganda (*tahrid*). The concept has first featured prominently in the epochal strategic writings of Abu Musab al-Suri and presently dominates global Jihadi strategy.

Illustration below: Title page of *Mu'askar al-Battar*, issue 1, December 2003.



The ideational-technical journal *Mu'askar al-Battar* features the meta-doctrine “the foundation of religion is a book leading the right way and a sword assisting” in all of its 22 issues, which were published between December 2003 and October 2004. The magazine dedicates in each issue one article exclusively to Jihadi theology. This section has the master-headline “a book leading the right way.” Another chapter, which immediately follows the theological one, has the master-headline headline “a sword assisting” and features articles that

deal with military tactics. The theological articles featured in MaB represent contemporary Jihadi jurisprudence and theological discourses. The theological doctrines that are presented in the articles are thus embedded in a divine guidance framework.

The Contributors of the theological chapters in the magazine seem to belong to the elite of the ideological apparatus of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in the early 2000s. Their contributions have a competitive character. Each writer seems to try to surpass and outshine the others with his theological constructs. The theologians, who belong to AQAP or are affiliated with the organization, seem to enjoy a high standing among global Jihadi audiences, which probably owes to the organization's proximity to the most literal, cultic, and radical form of Sunni Fundamentalism that has its origins on the Arabian Peninsula. Wahhabism is a specifically Saudi Arabian form of Salafism that has several schools. AQAP, with its figureheads Yusuf al-'Uyairi, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, Abu Jandal al-Azdi, Abdallah al-Rashid et al., profited at the time of the publication of the magazine strongly from the organization's ideological nearness to the radical Wahhabi school of Sheikh Hamud al-'Uqla al-Shu'aybi, whose theological frame overlaps at some places with that of the Wahhabi "Awakening Movement" (*Harakat al-Sahwa*) under Salman al-'Awda and Safar al-Hawali.⁹⁸⁵ The latter strand, in turn, shares some theology and worldview aspects with "Neo-Wahhabism," which until a few years ago was represented by the late ex-Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz. Different Wahhabi frames partly fit into one another. This probably increased in the years of the publication of MaB, from 2003 to 2004, the resonance of the smaller Saudi-Arabian Jihadi tendency among larger Jihadi, Salafi and Wahhabi audiences.

An especially frequent contributor to the theology section of *Mu'askar al-Battar* is the Jordanian jihad theologian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who has been incarcerated in Jordan for almost a decade. One of the most influential websites for Jihadi theological and ideological texts (www.tawhed.ws) is dedicated to al-Maqdisi. It is unclear, how far al-Maqdisi exercises personal control over the website. But he is de facto a virtual opinion leader among Jihadis, due to the popularity of his writings on the Internet.

Al-Maqdisi was born in 1959 in Nablus, Palestine as Isam Mohammad Tahir al-Barqawi. Like many other Jordanian Salafis and Jihadis, al-Maqdisi received important parts of his theological education in Saudi Arabia, among ultra-literal Wahhabis.⁹⁸⁶ He was strongly influenced by a revolutionary and Jihadi-Takfiri interpretation of Wahhabism. One of his role

⁹⁸⁵ See Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices From a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Madawi al-Rasheed, *Mazaq al-islam fi al-saudiyyah fi al-qarn al-wahid wa-l-'ishrin* (London: Saqi, 2007).

⁹⁸⁶ A Jordanian Salafi told the author during field research in Jordan in winter 2006 that "going to Saudi Arabia for theological training" was very important for members of the Jordanian Salafi scene.

models and inspirers seems to have been Juhayman al-'Utaybi, who together with his group beleaguered the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, which was eventually stormed by local and foreign troops whom the Saudi Kingdom had called in for help. More than sixty men, including Al-'Utaybi, were afterwards executed publicly. Al-'Utaybi's writings *Rasa'il* ("Letters") seem to have influenced al-Maqdisi's ultra-literal and radical formulation of *al-wara' wa-l-bara'* ("befriending believers and disassociating from non-believers"), which serves as doctrinal guideline for Jihadis to justify their own encapsulation in fundamentalist communities and violence against Muslim "collaborators" and non-Muslims.⁹⁸⁷ The concept of *al-wara' wa-l-bara'* is nothing new to fundamentalist and radical Islamic circles. Muhammad al-Qahtani's work on the topic is another standard reading for Salafis, Wahhabis and Jihadis.⁹⁸⁸ But al-Maqdisi enlarged the context in which the doctrine was put to use. Accordingly, al-Maqdisi defines disassociation not only as staying away from unbelievers, but applies this idea also to non-Islamic systems such as democracy and all of its institutions, liberalism, and constituencies based on man-made laws. These systems, their proponents and mechanisms must be rejected, argues al-Maqdisi.⁹⁸⁹ Jihadi ideologues oftentimes propose severe punishment for the support of un-Islamic systems, including capital punishment. Al-Maqdisi's frequent contributions to the theology section "a leading book" in the magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar* (MaB) certainly strengthened his theological leadership position in Jihadi circles. Al-Maqdisi brings together the ideological-theological heritage of revolutionary Jihadi and Wahhabi streaming. He presents himself as an "improver" of the tradition of important Jihadi thinkers, such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj (1954-82), Juhayman al-'Utaibi (1936-1980), and Abdallah Yusuf 'Azzam (1941-1989). Besides the six articles of al-Maqdisi, two other dominant authors (numbers of articles in brackets) in the theology section of MaB-magazine are Abdallah [bin Nasir] al-Rashid (5) and 'Amir bin Abdallah al-'Amir (5). Further authors are Abdullah bin Suleiman al-Badri (2); Ma'adh al-Mansur (1), Abu Abdullah al-Sa'di (1), Abu 'Amr al-Saif (1) and Abu Jandal al-Azdi (1). It remains unclear, why al-Azdi wrote just one article. Al-Azdi's real name is Faris al-Shuwayl, and he was one of the ideological figureheads of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda.

⁹⁸⁷ Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The 1979 Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2008), 248-9.

⁹⁸⁸ At the same time as al-Maqdisi treated the topic, Muhammad al-Qahtani wrote a thesis about *al-wala' wa-l-bara' doctrine* under the auspices of the Muhammad Qutb in Mecca, and thus was also influenced by Wahhabi ideas. Muhammad bin Said bin Salim al-Qahtani, *Al-Wara' wa-l-bara' fi-l-Islam* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.).

⁹⁸⁹ See Orhan Elmaz, "Jihadi-Salafist Creed: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Imperatives of Faith, in *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline* (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2011), 30.

Most of the authors's names in the magazine are probably pseudonyms, which often lean on Salafi mythology and doctrine. For example, the alias of one contributor, *Bara' al-Qahtani*, seems to refer to Muhammad al-Qahtani's standard work on the Salafi-doctrine "befriending believers and disassociating from non-believers" (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*).⁹⁹⁰

The topics of the theological tractates in *Mu'askar al-Battar* are very revealing inasmuch as the authors attempt to frame injunctions from the Quran and major theological precepts of Sunni Islam within a divine guidance scheme. The "*kitab yahdi*"-section mostly starts at page 4 of each issue. The articles are two to six pages long. The authors use a mixture of Wahhabi-Salafi and Qutbi-Jihadi *haraki fiqh*.⁹⁹¹ Sayyid Qutb's Quran commentary "*Fi zilal al-Quran*" is one of the most frequently quoted sources. Almost every issue of MaB contains a half page quotation from the commentary. This is a clear statement of the editors and authors; they revive the roots of elementary and revolutionary Jihadi thought, which they mix with Wahhabi, Salafi and Jihadi doctrine. However this happens in the context of the 21st century Jihadi theology, which is saturated with more extremist views. The steady reference to Qutb's commentary also fits into a comprehensive guidance pattern on the basis of "the book," i.e. the Quran. Questions of obeying and disobeying, belief and unbelief, single/mutual responsibility and action stand at the fore and dictate readers to follow concrete modes of action in offline reality. The "how" is afterwards explained in the technical section under the general headline "an assisting sword" (*saif yansur*). This line of command and argument bridges the gap between virtual leadership and communicative leadership: MaB's "a leading book and a guiding sword" tries to transcend the threshold between the leadership of online communications (virtual leadership) and the leadership through online communications (communicative leadership). The clear goal is to dictate offline behavior in real life. The editors themselves state that "this publication is not only cultural or scientific; but much more, it is a military publication with the goal to participate in the training and preparation of the Islamic Community (*umma*)."⁹⁹² Another raison d'être of the journal is to substitute physical training camps. Many camps have been shut down due to state repression and international security cooperation. The youth of the Islamic Nation therefore need another platform that teaches them how to handle weapons, argue the editors.⁹⁹²

The publication of *Mu'askar al-Battar* stopped less than ten years ago (2004). *Mu'askar al-Battar's* detailed instructional articles on weapons handling are by the standards of

⁹⁹⁰ *Bara' al-Qahtani*, „*Wa saif yansur* [technical chapter] – *Al-Asliha al-khafifa*," MaB 1: 6.

⁹⁹¹ *Haraki fiqh* refers to „a dynamic jurisprudence." Qutb stresses the everyman's applicability of Islamic law, which, in his view, should be less theoretical, more practical and serve Jihadi revolutionaries as a guideline.

⁹⁹² MaB 1: 1.

contemporary digital culture already a little bit “colorless,” especially in comparison to today’s mainstream weapons fetishism, which is displayed in high-resolution videos on the Internet and easily accessible. Detailed videos on the use of almost any gun or weapon can be found on Youtube.⁹⁹³ However, there remains a real danger in *Mu'askar al-Battar*. It is the principle to combine theological guidance with training instructions, which possibly appeals to radicalized Muslim audiences. This danger is exacerbated in the present geopolitical conflict between state alliances and networks of Muslim sub-state actors.

i. (MaB 1) The general divine command of military preparation

The theological article in the first issue of MaB in December 2003 stresses the importance of military preparation. The author, Ma'adh al-Mansur, treats the topic “The importance of military preparation in Islamic law.”⁹⁹⁴ The topic fits as theological lead-article for the first issue of MaB. It resonates with Quran 8:60, which commands the preparation for fighting and the establishment of a deterrence-balance, and is one of the most quoted verses in MaB, epitomizing the magazine’s approach: “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, Of God and your enemies.*”⁹⁹⁵ In this article, numerous Quran verses are framed in the sense that divine leadership commands all Muslims to prepare for fighting - militarily, spiritually and technically. This reasoning is supposed to create a hegemonic and strategic online discourse, which has a discursive leadership function. Al-Mansur’s article is replete with Quran quotations and prophetic traditions. The article loses a bit of its focus and seems overloaded with martial religious references. The overuse by al-Mansur of the Quran, the principal source of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), reflects an attempt to create discursive and theological

⁹⁹³ For example, the channel of a weapons fanatic, who tests and explains handheld weapons, such as machines guns, pistols, sniper-rifles, shotguns, and romanticizes their deadliness, has almost three million subscribers, who cherish him as a role model.

“FPS Russia,” accessed November 12, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/user/FPSRussia>.

The channel ranks more prominently than those of the pop icons Justin Biber, Rihanna or Eminem. “FPSRussia started out posting footage of himself playing a number of first-person-shooter style video games. Myers, an avid gun enthusiast, wanted to take his videos a step further. He wanted to show how real guns work, compared to their portrayal in games [...] EpicMealTime and FPSRussia allow viewers to indulge in their most basic instincts: food and violence [...] It might sound unfair, but EpicMealTime and **FPSRussia’s videos unconsciously bring viewers back to their primal origins, sitting around a fire and digging into a messy piece of meat or trying out a new tool. I’m not saying these YouTubers are cavemen, but their success is tied to the kinds of deep-rooted instincts that have been with us since prehistory.** Robert Snow, “EpicMealTime, FPSRussia and the Secret to Mass Appeal on YouTube,” accessed November 12, 2012, <http://robertsnow.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/how-epicmealtime-and-fpsrussia-won-youtube/>.

⁹⁹⁴ Ma'adh al-Mansur, *Ahamiyat al-i'dad al-'askari fi al-shari'a*, MaB 1: 4-5.

⁹⁹⁵ Quran Surat al-Anfal 8:60 “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, Of God and your enemies.*” Accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00808.htm>.

authority. The article starts out with a general and apocalyptic description of the state of global affairs, including the post-Cold War enemy constellation: Al-Mansur claims that the Islamic Community (*umma*) goes through the worst stage of its conflict with the crusaders and their supporters (Jews and Muslim apostates). This conflict is totally asymmetric, both in extent and means. The enemy controls the military, security, economic, logistic and media levels. Muslims are being victimized; the number of the steadfast Jihadi elite is small; and the enemy is overwhelming. Nevertheless, claims al-Mansur, the signs of Muslim victory are looming at the horizon, since “*God will certainly aid those who aid His (cause);—for verily God is full of strength, exalted in might.*”⁹⁹⁶ After his theological rationalization of the promised victory, al-Mansur tries to justify fighting and struggle in more general terms, before he focuses on the actual Islamic legal reasoning that commands military preparation. For example, al-Mansur argues on the strength of a well-known prophetic tradition that the “infirmness” in most Muslims’ hearts results from their “love of life and hatred of death.” He strengthens this point with a Quran verse that commands Muslim mobilization in wartimes (*nafir*). “*O ye who believe! What is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of God, ye cling heavily to the earth? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.*”⁹⁹⁷

The main argument (that military preparation is prescribed by Islamic law) relies on an analogical deduction (*qiyas*). The overarching proof (*dalil*) for the prescription of military preparation is, in al-Mansur’s view, Quran verse 8:60 “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, Of God and your enemies.*” It is maybe noteworthy that contemporary Muslim online-exegetes, who are not formally trained, frequently interpret this verse as the prescription of military training: “Some madzhab [sic] ulama's have deemed it compulsory to learn and practice shooting or throwing in the framework of jihad fie sabilillah. And they made this verse as a daleel or basis for the askari training (and in today's term it is military training), because what was meant by strength here is throwing, namely studying the weapons, mortars, grenades, etc., which is a metaphor for the throwing at the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW.”⁹⁹⁸ Al-Mansur also explicates on the strength of a prophetic tradition (his second proof (*dalil*) in the analogical deduction (*qiyas*)): “Verily, strength is in throwing.” The verse and the tradition are read in a contemporary context by al-Mansur, who reasons that

⁹⁹⁶ Quran Surat al-Hajj 22:40, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/02206.htm>.

⁹⁹⁷ Quran Surat al-Tauba 9:38, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00906.htm>.

⁹⁹⁸ “Daleels Regarding I'dad Askariy (Military Training),” accessed October 23, 2012, <http://theunjustmedia.com/Islamic%20Perspectives/July11/Daleels%20Regarding%20I%27dad%20Askariy%20%28Military%20Training%29.htm>.

the mastery of all available military and intellectual power, all modern technological means of warfare that cause the moral and physical destruction (*nikaya*) of the enemy, should be part of Muslim training and preparation. “Throwing,” analogically becomes shooting, or explosives training in a Jihadi training camp. In Islamic legal terms, the reasoning (*'illa*) that Muslims are commanded “to strike terror into (*the hearts of*) the enemies” extends to the present situation. According to this extended reasoning “preparation is commanded” in weapons that cause the greatest possible horror and damage among the enemy. However, in contemporary Jihadi reasoning, the asymmetry of power requires even going one step further. The overlying rationale to terrorize the enemy justifies terrorist deterrence.

Table 5: The process of analogical deduction applied to military preparation (*i'dad 'askari*)

'asl original case	'far' new case	'illah Reasoning	'hukm Ruling
“Verily, strength is in throwing,” i.e. shooting bows and throwing spears	“shooting,” or any other modern mental or physical preparation is analogue to “throwing”	Preparation (training) to terrorize the enemy is a divine order; the goal justifies the means	Permission. Modern preparation in training camps is a divine order

Al-Mansur draws on a ruling from classical Islamic military jurisprudence which says “as long as the necessary is not accomplished except by it, then it is necessary” (*ma la yatimm al-wajib illa bihi, fa huwa wajib*). This ruling is attributed to the medieval theologian Ibn Taymiyya. Also Muhammad Abdul Salam Farag justified the assassination of Egyptian president Sadat in 1981 with this ruling.⁹⁹⁹ Moreover, al-Mansur argues that God has summarized all literature on theistic preparation (*i'dad imani*) in Q 8:45.¹⁰⁰⁰ Accordingly,

⁹⁹⁹ “*Majmu' fatawa Ibn Taymiyya*,” volume 20, page 156, accessed October 23, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=22&ID=2030. Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Farag, *Al-Jihad: Al-Farida al-Gha'iba*, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=a5ieej5j>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *O ye who believe!*

When ye meet a force,

Be firm, and call God

In remembrance much (and often);

That ye may prosper:

Surat al-Anfal 8:45, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00806.htm>.

military preparation should always go along with theistic preparation, i.e. ideology and theology training.

ii. (MaB 2) The specific divine command of military preparation in order to establish divine sovereignty (*hakimiya*)

The theological article in the second issue of MaB discusses the Quran doctrine “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power.*”¹⁰⁰¹ This is the most frequently quoted verse in MaB, since it reflects, or rather dictates the agenda of the publication that military preparation and terrorist deterrence is divinely commanded. The author is Abdullah al-Rashid. His article in the “leading book section” is a highly interesting piece, which makes our case: MaB tries to foster a hegemonic Jihadi online discourse, which creates virtual leadership. However, the actual goal of the publication is to transcend the virtual sphere and create communicative leadership, which influences offline reality. That means, very concrete action-modes in offline-reality are allegedly inspired by divine orders; and the editors and writers of the e-magazine present themselves only as mediators of this idea. Al-Rashid’s article illustrates this point. We will look at two elements of his article. Firstly, we will analyze how offline actions are allegedly prescribed by Q 8:60. Secondly, we will examine al-Rashid’s lengthy quote from Sayyid Qutb’s Quran commentary “*Fi zilal al-Quran*” on this verse. Qutb was the intellectual godfather of modern extremist Islam, and influences Jihadi theology until today. Al-Rashid integrates Qutb’s pragmatic approach to Islamist activism (*al-Islam manhaj ‘amali*) with divine leadership (*hidaya*).

Firstly, several offline actions are commanded by Q 8:60, claims al-Rashid. His interpretation of divine guidance aims at the melting of virtual and physical spheres: Now, leadership is not anymore restricted to online communication processes of individuals, groups and networks. The author uses the digital Medium and addresses readers directly to realize divine orders in their environment, or to create life environments which accord with these orders:

“In our age, preparation is the most imperative of all divine assignments. The Muslim must do everything in his power to fulfill this imperative; be it the studying of military sciences, physical training, the handling of different sorts of weapons, learning how to deal with weapons’ ammunition, the handling of explosives and their production, Muslims in every country must oblige to this order. This concerns countries under direct occupation, which

¹⁰⁰¹ Quran Surat al-Anfal 8:60.

means that they are under the rule of crusaders, apostates and their collaborators, and it concerns as well countries that are not occupied directly by the original infidel, the crusader enemy, but his attack on them is imminent.”

Fright from foreign occupation and repressive Muslim regimes echoes loudly through al-Rashid's lines, which addresses Muslim perceptions worldwide. Al-Rashid strategically exploits divine injunctions to counter hostility, the feeling of incapability to manage own political affairs, a conspiracy paranoia, but also honour-feelings, to create obedience via long-range communications. These are then turned by al-Rashid into a martial death-cult, which in his view is the only plausible solution to deter enemies of Islam with devastating suicide attacks. But, and this applies to Jihadi theological discourse in general, such an ideolization of death has its own dynamics, which easily slip out of control. Eventually, any hostility or enemy is a welcome reason to nurture the devotion to suicidal martyrdom further.

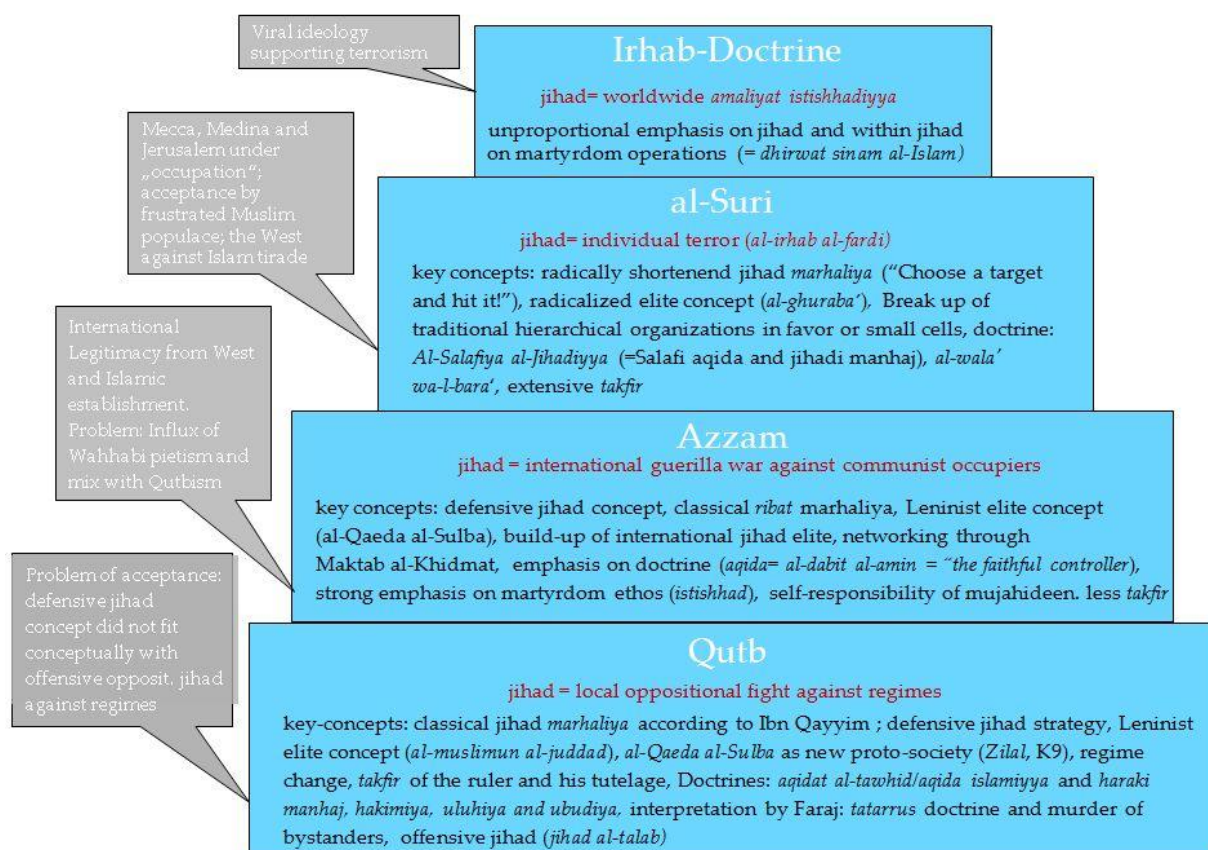
Secondly, al-Rashid quotes a lengthy passage from the Quran commentary of “the living martyr” (*al-shahid al-hayy*), i.e. the Egyptian jihad ideologue Sayyid Qutb on Q8:60: “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power [...]*.” Qutb argues in his commentary that

“Islam, as a theological system, is not only realized through a stable belief which resides in the hearts [of the believers]; and Islam is not realized merely by organized slogans, and then its mission ends. On the contrary, Islam is a practical and realistic method to lead one's life (*manhaj 'amali wa waqi'i li-l-hayat*). It opposes other methods of dominion and worldly power. Islam cannot do anything else but confirm its divine method by crushing worldly powers and destroying systems of dominion, which apply other methods [...] It should be remembered that Islam started out as an announcement of liberation of men from the yoke of men, by declaring the godliness of God alone and crushing the false godliness of pagan slaves ... We should know how much force to prepare towards this end. The text tells *Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power*. Thus, the Muslim cohort must put all its energy into this assignment [...] in order to sow fright and terror into the hearts of the enemies.”

The readers may ask themselves about the role of this long Qutb quote in a hegemonic Jihadi discourse, which takes place under the motto of divine leadership (*hidaya*). To a Jihadi audience it becomes clear that the idea of jihad must be realized under the aspect of Qutb's *manhaj 'amali* (practical method of living Islam). The writer al-Rashid uses Qutb's concept in

that sense and demands from his readers the transition from the mental into the physical sphere, i.e. to apply the ideas, which are being taught in the articles in practice.

Lineally ascending jihad concepts since Qutb



iii. (MaB 3) The heavenly bargain: The divine command to selling one's own life is prescribed on believers

The third issue of MaB in January/February 2004 (Dhu al-Hijja 1424 AH) contains a theological article by Abdullah al-Rashid, which is titled "He is the creator of your souls and the provider of your wealth."¹⁰⁰² The title echoes the wording of a tradition on *Surat al-Tawba*, verse 111,¹⁰⁰³ which then opens the article: "God hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): They fight in

¹⁰⁰² Abdullah al-Rashid, "Anfus huwa khalaqaha wa amwal huwa razaqaha," MaB3: 4.

¹⁰⁰³ which has been quoted by the hadith scholar Abu Shayba. See the *hadith* collection of Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Abi Shayba (d.235 AH) on the question: "What did they say on crying out of fear from God" (*Ma qalu fi al-buka' min khashiyat Allah*): *Ahadith wa ahkam, al-Masnaf* (N.p.: *Dar al-Fikr*, 1994), accessed October 26, 2012,

http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?idfrom=5063&idto=5065&bk_no=10&ID=4717.

His Cause, and slay and are slain: A promise binding on Him in truth, through the law, the gospel, and the Qur-ān: and who is more faithful to his covenant than God? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: That is the achievement supreme.” The tradition, the verse and therefore the text seem to be integrated into a classically treated question, i.e. “What did they say on [those who are] crying out of fear from God” (*Ma qalu fi-l-buka' min khashiyat Allah*). In the given context, verse Q 9:111 creates a specific Jihadi frame that glorifies martyrdom and stresses divine leadership. It reminds readers of the “obligation,” to kill and to be killed for the sake of God. Their reward is paradise. This agreement coincides with the highest oath of loyalty (*bay'a*), the one closed to God, which is expressed in “*Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. The Hand of Allah is over their hands: Then anyone who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and anyone who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah,- Allah will soon grant him a great Reward.*”¹⁰⁰⁴ (See also the discussion in the chapter “Hierarchical Virtual Leadership”). Etymologically, the words “to sell/to buy” (*ba'a*) and “to pledge” (*baya'a*) stem from the same Arabic verbal root. Both classical Arabic rituals, i.e. selling and of pledging, are closed by a handshake (*musafaha*). The word “to buy” (*ishtara*), which appears in the verse, is related to this bargain idea, since God buys, and thus the believers sell their souls. The verse stipulates that God has concluded a bargain agreement (*'ahd*) with the believers, which rationalizes the theme of reward, punishment and obligation. According to the Jihadi strategist Abu Musab al-Suri, this *'ahd* signifies an agreement with God to follow his orders. It creates the highest chain of command, i.e. with God, which does not require any intermediaries.¹⁰⁰⁵ Also al-Rashid addresses this idea explicitly. He uses a slightly different wording, and refers to “the slave’s worship (*'ubudiya*) of his master. The relationship between them is based on fighting in His way! This becomes clear in the exegesis of ‘*slay and are slain*:’ Fighting for His sake is the highest form of Islam. Seeking death and martyrdom is the utmost expression of truthfulness to the fulfillment of the contract (*'aqd*).”¹⁰⁰⁶ The metaphor “Fighting in his way” (*al-qital fi sabilihi*) strongly influences Islamic discourses. Jihadis lean on this expression and often speak about the “rough path of jihad” (*darb al-jihad*).¹⁰⁰⁷

This interpretation of Q 9:111 is extremely popular and by no means restricted to the extremist scene. It is a religious and discursive ritual that, metaphorically speaking, has the function of a community-fostering myth told by elders around a campfire. The same

¹⁰⁰⁴ Quran, *Surat al-Fath* 48:10, Yusuf Ali Translation, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/>, accessed Mai 9, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/48.htm>.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See the chapter “The Breakup of Traditional Organizational Structures: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.”

¹⁰⁰⁶ Abdullah al-Rashid, “*Anfus huwa khalaqaha wa amwal huwa razaqaha*,” MaB3: 4.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Darb* refers to a rather rough path, with stones, bushes and thorns.

theological story is told ever and again, just in slightly different variations. It thus reverberates in the extremist discourse and via its publications. It echoes forth and back like in a huge sound chamber. For example, a 1996 writing to justify Hamas' suicide bombings already uses the exact same interpretation. Although, the context was different, namely Hamas' nationalist Jihadi struggle against occupation. The theological/ideological discourse that was supportive of suicide bombings resounded much louder in the Islamic world than critical religious opinions.¹⁰⁰⁸

The chief proponent of the Islamic debate on Hamas' suicide bombings in 1996, Sheikh Ibrahim al-Ali, interprets the verse according to a common understanding of Islam – namely that a strong rational cluster of rules guides the right belief. Al-Ali stresses the economic character of the bargain (*bay'a/ safqa*): God is the buyer (*al-shari*) and the only one who has the right to liquidate the deal (*huwa wahdahu sahib al-haqq al-mutasarrif*). In contrast, the believer is the seller (*al-ba'i*). Since all believers' fate is predestined (*yamdu fi al-tariq al-marsum*), their obedience (*ta'a*) to God obliges them neither to look to the right or left, nor to choose or to dispute (among themselves), nor to quarrel or to speak (*la yatalaffatun; la yatakhayyarun; la yunaqishun; la yukhadilun; la yaqulun*), which is the condition to obtain their prize (*al-thaman*). The prize of their submissiveness is the paradise (*al-janna*).¹⁰⁰⁹ The wording in the last few lines creates a certain picture in front of the reader's eyes, namely that of jihad as a strenuous path.

In the third MaB issue, the common idea of jihad as a path, on which one should not “not look to the right or left, or talk while on the right way,” appears in a poem (*qasida*) which complements the theological article of al-Rashid. Classical-style poems enjoy an immense popularity in Arab-Muslim culture. In Jihadi subculture, they foster feelings of community and are associated with casting super-human spells and creating miracles.¹⁰¹⁰ The poem says

I know my path and my goal;

Death dances for me on every turning

But I do not pay any attention, so as not to care

The fear of death touches my coolest point

I do not care about the thorns and ordeals on my way

¹⁰⁰⁸ Philipp Holtmann, *Martyrdom, not Suicide: The Legality of Hamas' Bombings in the mid-1990s in Modern Islamic Jurisprudence* (Munich: Grin, 2009).

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰¹⁰ See Philipp Holtmann, “Casting Supernatural Spells and Fostering Communitas: Abu Yahya Al-Libi's Qasida Poetry,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 90-103.

I walk it with my firm will and fondness
I am the sword that sparkingly reflects the sun at a point
And I am as cutting as the Indian blade at a point
Maybe strange sounds flood from my mouth
Maybe an inferno floods from my pages
But I hasten aflame and smoldering to the heavenly garden
*My fiery longing brings me to shadows and chambers*¹⁰¹¹
 [...]

The people may shout "abstain!" And the clamor rises
But God chants to me: Come closer, don't be afraid
Past, and even if I was all alone in this world which screams at me "Stop!"
– I would go on, without slowing down or stopping

iv. (MaB 4) The divine command to refute non-valid excuses of those who deny jihad

Also the theological article in the fourth issue of MaB is written by Sheikh Abdullah al-Rashid.¹⁰¹² This time, the frequent author in the "leading book" section dedicates some time to the question how people are to be judged who try to evade their obligation to godly commands. This question clearly dovetails with his preceding article on the authority of "the heavenly bargain," described in Quran 9:111. The article is titled "Among them is (many) a man who says: grant me exemption and draw me not into trial," from Quran Surat al-Tawba 9:49, which is also the first piece of theological evidence that al-Rashid takes under scrutiny:

*"Among them is (many) a man who says: "Grant me exemption and draw me not into trial." Have they not fallen into trial already? and indeed Hell surrounds the Unbelievers (on all sides)."*¹⁰¹³

Al-Rashid's interpretation is not very far-fetched, but closely orientated at the original Quran text: The punishment of hypocrite layabouts is hellfire. Furthermore, the characteristics and excuse patterns of hypocrite Muslims, argues al-Rashid, come to the fore in verses 49 and 44-45 of *Surat al-Tawba*, where God describes the inherent weaknesses of hypocrites.¹⁰¹⁴ With

¹⁰¹¹ Salim Zanjir, „Madin,“ MaB3: 15.

¹⁰¹² Al-Sheikh Abdullah al-Rashid, "Wa minhum man yaqul 'idhan li wa la taftinni," MaB 4: 5-6.

¹⁰¹³ Quran *Surat al-Tawba* 9:49, accessed October 26, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/9.htm>.

¹⁰¹⁴ Quran *Surat al-Tawba* 9:44, accessed October 26, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/9.htm>.

this article, which focuses on obedience, al-Rashid wants to extend and bolster his foregone claim that the supreme bargain with God, to fight and become martyred for the sake of Islam, must be blindly obeyed.

“The hypocrites have certain characteristics and excuses [to evade jihad], which God – highest glory - mentioned, and among them are these two: One of their characteristics is to ask for exemption in order to escape jihad for the sake of God, and to depart from what he commanded and what he imposed upon them (*al-khuruḥ 'amma awjabahu alayhim wa iftaradahu*). And one of their excuses is the fear to sink into civil strife (*al-wuqu' fi-l-fitna*).”¹⁰¹⁵

Al-Rashid vehemently refutes any excuses by Muslims who do not participate in jihad and threatens every “hypocrite” Muslim who evades his obligations with hellfire in the Hereafter. According to Michel Foucault, the art of directing the conscience (*la direction de conscience*) emerged in Christian religion even before the establishment of Islamic theology.¹⁰¹⁶ A key element was the threatening of believers with transcendental punishment if they should disobey the dogma of the churches. The exploitation of fears leads us directly to the next article in the “Leading Book-” section of MaB-magazine.

v. (MaB 5) Divine commands and the exploitation of transcendental fears; among them the command that monotheism is jihad and that any other interpretation will be punished

The theological article by Abu Abdullah al-Sa'di in the fifth issue of MaB exploits the Islamic theme of fear, which features prominently in Jihadi discourses.¹⁰¹⁷

“Conscience-guiding” is a communicative process that manipulates the fears of believers. Jihadis argue that the only possible interpretation of religion is to follow God’s command that Muslims must fight off infidelity, which is equivalent with injustice, and then install Islam

“Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day ask thee for no exemption from fighting with their goods and persons. And Allah knoweth well those who do their duty.”

¹⁰¹⁵ Abdullah al-Rashid, “*Wa minhum man yaqul 'idhan li wa la taftinni*,” MaB4: 5.

¹⁰¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “*Que 'est-ce que la critique – Compte rendu de la séance du 27 mai 1978*,” *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, accessed Mai 28, 2013, <http://de.scribd.com/doc/56577710/Foucault-Qu-est-Ce-Que-La-Critique>.

¹⁰¹⁷ Abu Abdullah al-Sa'di, “*Wa 'aminhum min al-khauf*,” MaB 5: 5-6. See also the third issue of MaB. “What did they say on crying out of fear from God” (*Ma qalu fi al-buka' min khashiyat Allah*), which was answered with Quran Surat al-Tawba 9:111 and the religious “duty” to sell one’s life to God in order to kill and get killed for Him.

globally. Disobedience will be punished by God. The art of conscience-guiding by exploiting fears, *ars atrium* and *techne technon* respectively, refers to the spiritual guidance, which was first developed and then exercised for centuries by the Catholic and the Orthodox Church over their followers.¹⁰¹⁸ We will use the terms here in an Islamic framework of conscience guidance.

A comprehensive fear and fright concept can be based on a selective Quran reading. Words meaning “fear” and “fright” appear 296 times in more than 250 verses of the Qur'an. Psychologically, these can be split up into abstract fears and concrete frights.¹⁰¹⁹ Injunctions in the Quran also differentiate between fear/fright states in the minds of Muslims and fear/fright states in the minds of non-Muslims. These states of fear and fright are bluntly addressed by Jihadi actors. For Jihadis, correct faith equals militant jihad. The Jihadi discourse enforces this understanding of Islam, by frequently recurring on Islamic fear/fright and punishment motives that address Muslim emotions.¹⁰²⁰ Jihadi subculture is a specific fear-culture. It also characteristically represents the divide between Western and Islamic fear-cultures. It seems that the greatest fear of secular Westerners lies in loosing the benefits of their thisworldly lives. Vice versa, many Muslims seem to have a much stronger fear to loose the benefits of their afterlife, if they commit thisworldly mistakes.

Firstly, a selective Quran reading shows that religious obedience is based on an abstract, almost phobic fear, such as “the fear from hell-fire” (*khauf min al-nar*)¹⁰²¹ and “the fear of God” (*khashiya Allah*).¹⁰²² Secondly, a specific Muslim fright (*ittiqa'*), which can be

¹⁰¹⁸ Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 43.

See also Foucault's observation that “[...] Gregory of Nazianzus would call spiritual guidance the 'technique of techniques'— '*ars artium*', '*techne technon*'. This expression is significant since statesmanship or political techne was previously regarded as the *techne technon* or the Royal Art. But from the Fourth Century A. D. to the Seventeenth Century in Europe, the expression '*techne technon*' usually refers to spiritual guidance as the most significant clinical technique.” Michel Foucault, “Discourse and Truth,” 6 lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, Oct-Nov. 1983, “The Practice of Parrhesia” (lecture 4), accessed November 6, 2012, <http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/foucault.DT4.practiceParrhesia.en.html>.

¹⁰¹⁹ See Philipp Holtmann, *The Concept of Deterrence in Arab and Muslim Thought - Classical Islamic Paradigms of Deterrence and their Expression in Modern Islamist Thought*, Working paper, June 2012, Institute for Counterterrorism, Herzliya.

¹⁰²⁰ The second chapter of the Qur'an can serve here as an example. “This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah [*muttaqin*, noun: *ittiqa'*]; [...] As to those who reject Faith [...] great is the penalty [*adhab*] they (incur).” *Surat al-Baqara* 2:2-7, Yusuf Ali translation, (Accessed May 15, 2012) - http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter_display.php?chapter=2&translator=2#2

The concept of fear from God's punishment for misbehavior is concretized in another verse of the same chapter, as it is projected on the hell-fire, that says “then fear [*fa-ttaqu*] the Fire whose fuel is men and stones,- which is prepared for those who reject Faith.”

Qur'an *Surat al-Baqara* 2:24, Yusuf Ali translation, (Accessed May 15, 2012) - http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter_display.php?chapter=2&translator=2#24

¹⁰²¹ Applied by al-Suri, which he derives from different Quran verses, such as “*ashab al-nar*” in *Surat al-Baqara* 2:81, “*adhab al-nar*” in *Surat al-Baqara* 2:126.

¹⁰²² Quran *Surat al-Baqara* 2:74; *al-Nisa'* 4:77; *al-Mu'minin* 23:57.

translated as “believing,” “averting,” “acting aright,” connects to the fearful observance of detailed injunctions of God.¹⁰²³ *Khauf* is thus a more general and abstract concept of fear from God, while *ittiqa'* signifies a more concrete concept of fright to observe God’s commands, i.e. a dogmatic piety. It refers to His injunctions, which must be fearfully observed, otherwise concrete penalties will eventuate. This concept may also be called “the fearful observance of His services (of faith).”

Religious awe and piety are interconnected and may together be best understood as “fear from a transcendental authority.” In Islamic leadership culture, God is the supreme leader to whom all believers have given an oath of loyalty: “Those who pledged allegiance to you actually pledged allegiance to God.”¹⁰²⁴ Therefore, the psychological description of piety in Islam as “fear from a transcendental superiority” is not merely metaphorical. The relationship to God – a transcendental chain of command – is strongly based on fear and reappears in Islamic doctrines connected to “belief” (*iman*) such as “allegiance until death” (*bay'at al-maut*). Both concepts of fear and fright, i.e. *khauf* and *ittiqa'*, concern the internal Muslim psychology, not the fear levered against non-Muslim adversaries.¹⁰²⁵

Thirdly, fear that is levered against enemies of the Muslims lies in the concept *ra'b* (panic/dread), which appears five times in the Qur'an.¹⁰²⁶ It describes a feeling of paralyzed powerlessness; a psychological destruction that conquers the enemy’s mind. For example, adversaries are struck with a terrorizing feeling of fear when they turn against Islam. Fourthly, in contrast, the concept *irhab* (terrorizing) has a concrete meaning.¹⁰²⁷ The verb *arhaba*, means “to cause a concrete terrorizing fright” in the enemy’s mind, for example by show of force though military mobilization or preparation of war material. At present, suicide attacks (*'amaliyat istishhadiyya*) or assassinations (*ightiyalat*) are associated with terrorizing (*irhab*) by Jihadis.¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²³ *Surat al-Nisa'* 4:9, *Surat al-Imran* 3:28. The latter, for example: "Yea, - if ye remain firm, and act aright, even if the enemy should rush here on you in hot haste, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels Making a terrific onslaught."

¹⁰²⁴ "Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. The Hand of Allah is over their hands: then any one who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and any one who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah,- Allah will soon grant him a great Reward." *Qur'an Surat al-Fath* 48:10, Yusuf Ali Translation, (Accessed Mai 9, 2012) - <http://www.islam101.com/Qur'an/yusufAli/QUR'AN/48.htm>

¹⁰²⁵ "Khashiya" has a similar concrete meaning of fear and is used like "*ittiqa'*".

See *Qur'an, Surat al-Baqara* 2:74, *حَشْيَةً* see also *Surat al-Isra* 17:100, *حَشْيَةً*

¹⁰²⁶ Verses *Al-Imran* 3:151; *al-Anfal* 8:12; *al-Kahf* 18:18; *al-Ahzab* 33:26, *al-Hashr* 59:2.

¹⁰²⁷ The simple transitive verb *rahaba* means to fear God and especially the fulfillment of agreements which believers have reached with Him. Exact stipulations are connected to this concept of terrorizing fright. Either it is understood reflexively, i.e. terrorizing fear from something, or causing, i.e. to instill terrorizing fear. See Verses *al-Baqara* 2:40 and *al-Nahl* 16:51.

¹⁰²⁸ The most prominent Qur'an injunction is *Surat al-Anfal* 8:60.: “Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) [turhibuna] the enemies of

Finally, in Jihadi thinking, deterrence is based on a fear/fright synthesis. Muslims who follow the Jihadi interpretation of divine guidance are supposed to feel a general fear (*khauf*) from God, and to feel awe from divine punishment if they do not observe (*ittiqa'*) His commands and support jihad, which takes place in the form of terrorist attacks. A threat scenario must be created to deter the enemy (*ra'b; irhab*) through such attacks. Islamic deterrence itself is called *rad'*. This term does not appear in the Qur'an, but in classical texts, as well as in medieval and modern legal interpretations. The word in the Quran that comes closest to the meaning "being deterred" is "*muzdajar*" (Q 54:4).¹⁰²⁹ Modern Jihadi ideologues have developed an Islamic deterrence by punishment strategy, namely "terrorist deterrence" (*istiratijiyyat al-rad' bi-l-irhab*).¹⁰³⁰ However, there are modern Muslim interpreters who have very diverging opinions about fear concepts and their semantics in the Quran.¹⁰³¹ The author welcomes any critique that challenges his own limited understanding.

Abu Abdullah al-Sa'di builds his theological text in the fifth issue of MaB on an Islamic fear paradigm. His article is titled "Who provides them with safety against fear (*khauf*).” The title is based on *Surat Quraysh*.¹⁰³² "*Their covenants (covering) journeys by winter and summer,— Let them adore the Lord of this house, Who provides them with food against hunger, and with security against fear (of danger).*"¹⁰³³ The author concretizes what he sees as seemingly wonderful absence of fear, by quoting *Surat al-Baqara* 2:62, which promises: "*With their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*" Then, al-Sa'di quickly makes his own interpretational turn and argues that fearlessness results from fighting jihad. Safety from worldly fears, torture and misery (*al-amn min al-mahkayif, al-'idhab wa-l-shiqq'*) can be reached by following the straight path of Islam, which means to wage jihad, claims al-Sa'di. If Muslims obey, explicates al-Sa'di on the strength of a contemporary scholar whom he

Allah." This injunction is often used very selectively by Jihadi ideologues, for example, to prove that "terrorism" is a legitimate concept ('Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri).

"There have already come

To them Recitals wherein

There is (enough) to check (them)"

Quran *Surat al-Qamar* 54:4, accessed November 6, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/05401.htm>.

¹⁰³⁰ Philipp Holtmann, Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept (Tel Aviv, Dayan Center, 2009), chapters 8-9; Also Abu Musab al-Suri, "*Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya*", published on the Internet, 2004, (Accessed June 24, 2012) - <http://archive.org/details/Dawaaah>.

¹⁰³¹ For example, "Amatullah," "Usage of 'Fear' in the Qur'an « .:Tayyibaat.:," accessed January 9, 2013, <https://tayyibaat.wordpress.com/2009/04/18/usage-of-fear-in-the-quran/>.

¹⁰³² Quran *Surat Quraysh* 106:4, accessed November 6, 2012,

<http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/106.htm>.

"Who provides them with food against hunger, and with security against fear (of danger)."

¹⁰³³ Ibid.

cherishes,¹⁰³⁴ they will gain “complete safety” through “absolute divine guidance” (*hasala lahum al-amn al-tamm wa-l-hidaya al-tamma*).¹⁰³⁵ Al-Sa'idi stresses that here two sorts of safety, namely tangible safety in the temporal world (*al-'amn al-hissi fi-l-dunya*) and intangible safety which comes by divine guidance (*al-'amn al-manawi alladhi huwa al-hidaya*).

Modifying a metaphor that is popular in Jihadi discourse, al-Sa'idi analogizes militant jihad with the principal tenet of Islamic faith, which is the establishment of monotheism (*tawhid*). “The principal order of religion is to establish monotheism, and the highest form of establishing monotheism is jihad (*ra's amr al-din huwa al-tawhid wa dhirwat sinamihi huwa al-jihad*).¹⁰³⁶ The one who upholds both principles dearly (monotheism and jihad), cares about them and favors them over anything else, will be among the ‘people of safety’ (*ahl al-'amn*).” The “people of safety,” are, in al-Sa'idi's view, only Jihadis, who are righteous Muslims. Alternatively, he calls Jihadis “the people of the order and the peak” (*ahl al-'amr wa-l-dhirwa*). They are implicitly analogized to the people who will reside in paradise in the hereafter (*ahl al-janna*), while all others will roast in hellfire (*ahl al-nar*). Divine leadership (*hidaya*) is encapsulated in the orders which “God grants to his servants.” By following his orders to fight, Muslims may attain “complete safety at the Day of Judgment (*yaum al-qiyama*).”

However, also those people who fight jihad will definitely be tested; ‘Be sure we shall test you with something of fear (Q 2:155).’¹⁰³⁷ Al-Sa'idi reassures his readers, however, that this test of fear is merely temporarily. The quoted Quran verse relates to the Battle of Uhud in 625AD/3AH, which the Muslims disastrously lost.¹⁰³⁸ Afterwards, God calmed their hearts. “After (the excitement) of the distress, he sent down calm on a band of you (Q 3:154).”¹⁰³⁹

As he concludes his article, al-Sa'idi uses an emotive concept that carries a special significance in Jihadi subculture. He bolsters the fear-theme with a classical Arabic poem (*qasida*). In pre-Islamic Arab tribal culture, the lyrics of a poem were said to have been whispered into a poet's ear by supernatural creatures. Poets were held in high esteem. The recitation of poems

¹⁰³⁴ 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Nasir al-Sa'idi al-Tamimi (1889-1956) was a Saudi Arabian scholar who was influenced strongly by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and later developed his own literal approach to Islamic law. He wrote a Quran commentary and is a role model among adherents of the Salafi trend.

¹⁰³⁵ “As long as the Muslim adheres to the order of this religion, he will attain perceptible security (*'amn hissi*) in this world in likewise manner. Moral security (*'amn ma'nawi*) lies in divine guidance (*hidaya*), which God grants him, so he may feel complete security at Doomsday.”

¹⁰³⁶ Literally: „*dhirwat sinamihi*,” i.e. “the peak of the hump of monotheism,” analogizing Islam to a camel, which is a most precious animal in Arab tribal society.

¹⁰³⁷ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00219.htm>.

¹⁰³⁸ Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Surat al-Imran, “*Thumma anzala 'alaykum min ba'ad al-ghamm 'amina ta'asa*,” accessed November 6, 2012, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=49&ID=284.

¹⁰³⁹ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00316.htm>.

(the “oral ritual”) was a vital part of at tribal gatherings. Parts of these characteristics survived in Arab Islamic culture, which integrated the classical poetic verse with theological themes and the theological song genre *nashida*.¹⁰⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, Jihadis are obsessed with the, in their view, magico-religious power of classical poetry and Islamic songs.¹⁰⁴¹ Al-Sa'di puts poetry to use in order to cultivate a fascinating effect, to bewitch his readers, and draw them ever deeper into the Jihadi fear-, death- and war culture. The quasi-magical power of poetry exists in a wider cultural context.¹⁰⁴² In the Jihadi context, the *qasida*-verse has the function to diminish individuality and strengthen the collective identification with a magico-martial interpretation of Islam. Al-Sa'di borrows a well known maxim, which is attributed to the fourth righteously guided caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and puts it into a *qasida* meter. Modifications of this maxim are popular among Shiites and Sunnis equally, especially in their war poetry and in heroic odes of sacrifice:¹⁰⁴³

*Which one of two days of death is easier to escape?
The one that is predetermined or the one that is not
I do not fear the day that was not predetermined;
As for that which was predetermined, no caution can save you!*

The exact and original version of this maxim, which is attributed to the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, is unclear at all in digital Islamic culture. There seems to be either considerable confusion, or a vast interpretational freedom in regards to the lyric maxim.¹⁰⁴⁴ Al-Sa'di

¹⁰⁴⁰ Philipp Holtmann, “The Use and Genre of *Huda* (Encouraging Battle Songs) versus *Anashid* (Theological Music) in Jihadi Indoctrination,” working paper, presented at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Institute for Advanced Studies, June 11-13, 2012, Sacrifice and Death in Modern Islam: History, Ethos and Politics.

¹⁰⁴¹ Philipp Holtmann, “Casting Supernatural Spells and Fostering Communitas: Abu Yahya Al-Libi’s *Qasida* Poetry,” in *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*, ed. Rüdiger Lohker (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2013), 90-103.

¹⁰⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, being one of the most influential, but also controversial modern thinkers, “presented Greek lyric poets as achieving a kind of transfiguration by dissolving their own subjective being in the vital energy that flowed from a higher power [the made] themselves the vehicles of a power beyond ordinary individuality.” Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 545-546.

¹⁰⁴³ One version is quoted in Abd al-Zahir bin Abdullah Ali’s “*Awamil al-Nasr fi-l-ma'arik al-Islamiyya*,” accessed November 7, 2012, <http://www.saaaid.net/bahoth/22.htm>.

See also the website of the poet Muhammad Mundhir al-Sarmimi, who posts a poem of the popular poet Salim Abd al-Qadir. Accessed November 7, 2012, http://www.aboljoud.com/index.php?page=c291bmQ=&op=ZGlzcGxheV9zb3VuZF9kZXRhaWxzX3U=&sound_id=MjU1; Furthermore, this sermon, accessed November 7, 2012, <http://www.islamdoor.com/k/112.htm>.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Al-Sa'di uses past tense in the first line, as well as the verb “*rahaba*” (I do not fear it) instead of “*hadhara*” (to escape it) in the third line, which, for example, is the version that can be found on an Arab linguists forum, accessed October 15, 2012, <http://www.ahlalloghah.com/showthread.php?t=4067>. See also this Facebook page, titled “I Am Ready To Fight Against Israel,” which features a different version of the maxim:

أى يوم من الموت أفر ؟؟؟؟
يوم قدر أنى سأموت فيه (أم) يوم لم يقدر أنى سأموت فيه ؟؟؟

Accessed November 7, 2012,
http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=235666149824770&id=209265519131500

reserves the last word of his article again as an argument for divine guidance: “The heroic fighter kills for the sake of God and does not die; the fainthearted one who sits idly around dies one thousand and one deaths.” Only the former are rightly guided (*muhtadun*).¹⁰⁴⁵

vi. (MaB 6) The divine command to fight jihad under one banner (*raya*) and establish Islamic statehood under one flag (*liwa'*)

The theological article in the sixth issue of MaB, titled “*Al-Alwiya wa-l-rayat*,” was written by AQAP’s prominent ideologue Abu Jandal al-Azdi.¹⁰⁴⁶ The article titled “The flags and the banners” is a long, *hadith*-based exhortation on the meaning of Muslim war banners (*raya*, *pl. rayat*) and Islamic state flags (*liwa'*, *pl. alwiya*). Both banners play crucial roles for Jihadi communities. They are essential symbols of Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), and nowadays monopolized by Jihadi groups. The more groups adopt them, the stronger the sense of a global community becomes among geographically and culturally dispersed Jihadis. Al-Azdi quotes the pioneering 1960s Jihadi ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who recurred on a transmission by the classical scholar al-Bukhari, not to imitate or idolize the personal behavior of Muhammad [sic], but to use symbols of Islam to foster communities. In Qutb’s view, the crucial function of a common banner was to unite Muslims and invite people to Islam.¹⁰⁴⁷ In the chapter on the semiotics of online jihad, we have already described the meaning of the ample use of black and white flags on Jihadi websites.¹⁰⁴⁸ It is a sign with strong messianic and apocalyptic

¹⁰⁴⁵ Al-Sa’idi refers to Quran Surat al-An’am 82, accessed November 12, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00609.htm>.

“It is those who believe
And confuse not their beliefs
With wrong—that are
(Truly) in security, for they
Are on (right) guidance.”

¹⁰⁴⁶ Abu Jandal al-Azdi, “*Al-'Alwiya wa-l-rayat*,” MaB 6: 4-8.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Quran, al-Jazz al-thani, Tafsir Surat al-Tawba*, accessed November 12, 2012, <http://zeham.maktoobblog.com/category/التفسير-الكامل-للسور>.

¹⁰⁴⁸ See chapter 4.d.1: The most basic variation of the Muslim war banner is *al-*raya al-sauda'** (black standard), which refers to a solid black piece of cloth. The black banner served in Muslim armies as a war banner and therefore represents war, conquest and destruction of the enemy. It is being hoisted in the “*dar al-harb*” (abode of war), where Infidels rule (The term “*Dar al-Salam*” is being used by many Muslims synonymously for “*Dar al-Islam*” which is actually the correct theological term for “the abode of peace.” The division between “*dar al-harb*” and “*dar al-Islam*” goes back to Abu Hanifa (699-767), the founder of the Hanafi juridical school in Islam). In addition, there is a white banner that carries the credo in black letters. According to Muslim tradition the white banner (called “*al-liwa'*”) stands for Islamic statehood (caliphate, emirate) and government. Muhammad is said to have entered Mecca after the conquest in 630 AD with a white standard. On Jihadi websites, the white banner indicates support for the Afghan Taliban and represents the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban used a plain white flag between 1996 and 1997 and a white flag with the Islamic credo in black letters from 1997 on until today. It is often being raised in the “*dar al-salam/al-Islam*” (abode of peace)¹⁰⁴⁸, where the Islamic sharia is applied.¹⁰⁴⁸ Sometimes, both flags, standing for Islamic jihad

connotations, although the validity of traditions which refer to this interpretation is disputed among Sunni schools of thought. Abu Jandal al-Azdi's explanation presents highly interesting new aspects on the topic.

Al-Azdi's explication shows that there is even more need for clarification in regards to the meaning of Sunni-Islamic flags. In fact, there is a lack of clarity among many Muslims about the exact function of the standards and the flags.¹⁰⁴⁹ Al-Azdi writes in a clear and understandable style, in fact he argues almost like a Muslim historiographer. Only in the latter part of his article, the ideological volume of his tone increases. Not all of the transmitters of traditions, whom al-Azdi quotes, will be named.

The article starts with an etymologic definition of the two flags. The *liwa'* is the name of the flag that belongs to the imam, is knotted to the side of the spear and curls around it (*yalwi*). The *raya* is the name of the war banner of the leaders (*quwwad*) of the armies. Every military leader of a group (*jama'a*) carries a war banner. It is knotted to the side of the spear, not curled around it and flutters in the wind. Al-Azdi himself uses the designation *imam*, but the classical transmitter and biographer of Muhammad al-Sarsakhsi, on whom al-Azdi bases his definition, says that the *sultan* carries the flag (*liwa'*). Another tradition by Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi tells that "the *liwa'* is a huge flag (*'alam dakhm*) which marks the place where the governing *emir* has set up camp, and it stays always with him. The *raya* remains in the hands of the war-man (*sahib al-harb*)."

The Islamic flag is, according to al-Azdi, reserved for *imams*, *sultans*, and *emirs*. Hierarchically, the black war banner stands in rank and degree underneath the white flag. There is a maximum of one white flag in every army, but numerous black war banners. Moreover, the traditions quoted by al-Azdi narrate that in the command and control-line of classical Muslim armies, *emirs* (field-commanders) were higher positioned than *quwwad* (leaders), whereas it was possible that both carried a black flag. As for the colors of the flag and the banner, it is preferred that the flag is white and the banner black, although other colors are allowed. The reason is that numerous transmitters agree that the war-banner of Muhammad was black (*rayat al-'uqab*) and his flag was white. Allegedly, Muhammad entered Mecca after its conquest with a white flag. Moreover, al-Azdi narrates on the strength

and statehood, can be found on Jihadi websites (See the head-frames of the Persian Jihadi website www.rahejehad.com and the entrance page of the Turkish/Arabic website www.davetulhaq.com). However, the black flag dominates Jihadi websites. The black flag also announces the coming of *al-mahdi* (lit. "the rightly-guided one"), the prophesized Islamic redeemer, who, according to Muslim eschatology, will rule before the Day of Resurrection and lead Muslims into the final battle (In Islamic eschatology, at the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Qiyama*) all humans will be assessed by God according to their intentions and deeds. The sequence is as follows: The total annihilation of all creatures will be followed by their bodily resurrection and, finally, their assessment by God..

¹⁰⁴⁹ Field interviews of the author in Germany and the Middle East with Muslims and Salafis.

of al-Sarsakhsi that “black is the preferred color of the war-banner since it is the flag of those who fight (*'alam ashab al-qital*).” Probably, black war banners were used by Arab tribes in warfare before the advent of Islam, and Muslim armies adopted and modified this use. Al-Sarsakhsi observed that “every kin (*qawm*) is used to fight under its own banner. If they are separated during fighting, then they can regroup at their flag. Black is more visible and prominent in daylight than anything else, especially in the dust of fighting. Islamic law is not in conflict with white, yellow or red banners. But the flag of Islamic administration (*al-liwa'*) should be white because this is God’s favorite color.” Leaning on the tribal principle of one flag under which to regroup, “there is only one flag in every Muslim army (*wa-l-liwa' la yakun illa wahidan fi kull jaish*). The Muslims can retreat to it if they need to raise urgent matters with their sultan [sic]. They can find him, because the white field flag sticks out under the black banners of the military leaders.” To counter the dynamics of tribalism was a difficult task for the early Muslim armies. Many warriors, although aligned with the Muslims, preferred to fight under their own tribal flags.¹⁰⁵⁰ Al-Azdi bases his explanation on the Yemeni scholar al-Shawkani (1759–1834),¹⁰⁵¹ who argued that Muhammad had to impose an emir and a war-banner upon every tribe in his coalition to prevent intra-tribal fighting. It seems that the black war banner was an acceptable compromise for all tribes (*jawaz kawn al-raya sawda' min ghayr karaha*).¹⁰⁵²

In Muslim narratives, important role models are connected to the black war banner, which refers especially to those companions of Muhammad who gave their lives to protect the banner during the early battles which Muslims fought against their adversaries. Al-Azdi cites among many others the example of Ja'far bin Abi Talib, who carried the black banner at the Battle of *Mu'ta* (629 AD). After Zayd bin Haritha had been slain, Abu Talib penetrated on his horse deeply (*iqtahama*) into the ranks of the Byzantine enemies and fought until he was killed. “When his right hand was cut off, he clutched the banner with his left hand, and when the left hand was cut off, he protected the banner with his body until he was killed.” The story of Abu Talib’s self-sacrifice to uphold the banner in the Battle of *Mu'ta* is quoted in Ibn Qayyim’s standard work *Za'ad fi-l-ma'ad*, which al-Azdi quotes at length. The story becomes thus an admired martial narrative. Ibn Qayyim tells about a number of other Muslims who took up the war banner and protected it after Abu Talib’s death and were successively slain. Most of them eventually self-sacrificed themselves when they plunged forward into the rows

¹⁰⁵⁰ Al-Azdi quotes the classical scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.

¹⁰⁵¹ See Bernard Haykal, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁵² Once again quoted in al-Azdi on the strength of Ibn Qayyim.

of the Byzantines. The concept of the war-banner is thus clearly connected to the battle tactics *iqtiham* and *inghimas* (to plunge into the enemy) and narratives of self-sacrifice for the sake of Islam (see above the discussion on “martyrdom operations” (*'amaliyat istishhadiyya*)).

The tangible aspect (*al-janib al-hissi*) of the war-banner, its shape, color and function, has already been explained, says al-Azdi. There is another, even more important abstract aspect (*al-janib al-ma'nawi*). The war-banner represents the belief-method (*manhaj*) to establish monotheism by jihad. Classical sources say that Muslims must only fight under this Islamic banner. Those who fight under banners which represent paganism and tribalism (*jahiliya wa 'asabiya*) will end in hellfire. In classical religious thought, false, i.e. un-Islamic banners were epitomized by “the banner of foolishness” (*al-rawa al-'amiyya*), which either openly or in a concealed way promoted the principles of paganism and tribalism. Such banners lacked divine guidance, explicates al-Azdi on the strength of the prominent Jihadi propagandist Abu Qutada al-Filastini, who is an ultra-radical proponent of the *takfir* doctrine.¹⁰⁵³ Al-Azdi's tone becomes more intense and pressing as he approaches his main argument, which is supposed to create a legitimizing bridge that is constructed between the intersections of classical Islamic theology and modern Jihadi ideology:

Al-Azdi closes puts emphasis on the command that it is prohibited for Muslims to gather under flags and banners of infidel and apostate systems (*'anzima al-kufr wa-l-ridda*), even if these flags bear *pro-forma* the name of Allah. There is no clear evidence for this in the aforementioned classical *hadith*, admits al-Azdi, which prohibits tribalism and paganism, but does not say anything about intra-Muslim conflict. But he reasons that there is a similarity, because also modern Muslim state flags conceal their un-Islamic nature. “The one who fights under the banner of polytheism is a polytheist; and likewise, the one who fights under the banner of unbelief is an infidel.” With this reasoning, al-Azdi declares open season on anyone who works in a regime apparatus, not matter if office clerk or soldier. He promotes a selective *takfir* (excommunication) with vast interpretational range.

¹⁰⁵³ Those banners are categorized under the flag of foolishness (*al-rawa al-'amiyya*), which stands for paganism and tribalism (*jahiliya wa 'asabiya*). Fighting under such banners is punished with hellfire in the Hereafter. It either conceals or openly supports the latter principles. See Abu Qutada al-Filastini, “*Bayna manhajayn*” - Series, No. 79, accessed November 15, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=861>.

vii. (MaB 7) The divine command to judge only according to Jihadi jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in the present geopolitical conflict between the West and Islam

The theological tractate by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in the seventh issue of MaB carries the title “The dogs bark, but the caravan passes.”¹⁰⁵⁴ “The dogs” allude at this place to Muslims jurisprudents and (Muslim) experts in the counterterrorism field who observe the jihad movement and criticize it. Al-Maqdisi argues that the former sit idly around and lack respect for God’s commands. The latter are collaborating apostates. The key point of al-Maqdisi’s article is that only Jihadi jurisprudents are endowed by God with the special qualifications of divine leadership (*hidaya*). Al-Maqdisi announces thus the “divine command” to judge only according to Jihadi jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in the present geopolitical conflict between the West and Islam, which is embedded into the doctrine to associate with believers and to disassociate from unbelievers (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*).

Al-Maqdisi introduces an ode to people like himself, stating that Jihadi jurisprudents are the people who participate in fighting in the border regions of the Islamic nation (*ahl al-thughur*), their judgments and insights on jurisprudential issues are thus reality-based and nearly infallible (*lam yakud firasa ahadihim mukhti'*). “Therefore, the fighters do not need any outside jurisprudents or theorists. Their own jurisprudents are the most erudite people and have the strongest insight because their jurisprudence originates from the womb of jihad. They direct the fighters and choose for them the worthiest, purest, most selected and most devastating [theological arguments] of jihad and fighting.” In the semantics of al-Maqdisi, the verb “*hidaya*” signifies divine guidance by God, while the second stem verbal noun “*tawjih*” signifies its implementation into theological guidance by Jihadi jurisprudents. From a psychological viewpoint, Jihadi jurisprudents assume thus quasi-divine characteristics, even though most of them would never admit this. Not so al-Maqdisi, he clearly says that they see themselves as “the sheikhs struggling for God’s divinity” (*al-mashayikh al-rabbaniyyin al-mujahidin*).

Al-Maqdisi addresses a second category of opponents in the ideological arena, who are secular. He is outraged about apostate Muslim journalists and “experts” who try explain jihad to the Muslims and the Jihadis. So-called “Islam-experts” who frequently appear on television to analyze terrorist operations are an anathema to him. They have chosen loyalty to their own objectives and to their pagan masters, instead to the objectives of Islam and the Muslims,

¹⁰⁵⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, „*Al-Qafila tusir...wa-l-kilab tanbah*,” MaB 7: 4-9.

claims al-Maqdisi. Their analyses and theorizing about jihad have an agenda, namely to denounce and disqualify the jihad movement and its “heroic deeds.”

Al-Maqdisi addresses here three key problems. Firstly, he equates Jihadi clerics with active fighters in order to assert their status and trustworthiness in Jihadi communities. This may be connected to the well known fact that numerous Jihadi theologians, such as al-Maqdisi himself, do not participate in any kind of fighting. Secondly, al-Maqdisi tries to refute an ever growing trend of refutations of Jihadi theology by other Muslim clerics. At the time of writing of his article in 2004, the U.S. occupation of Iraq had already triggered a bloody spate of suicide attacks and assassinations, which frequently claimed civilian Muslim victims. In Saudi Arabia, the royal regime was fighting a Jihadi opposition (AQAP) which resorted to the same tactics. Both conflicts drew already heavy criticism against Jihadi operations and ideology from Muslim opponents. Al-Maqdisi’s focus on this issue indicates that the Jihadi jurisprudential elite may have perceived an ever growing pressure from the outside, maybe even critical questions from the inside of the Jihadi movement, and was struggling to legitimate itself. Thirdly, al-Maqdisi is concerned about the growing number of Muslim experts in the counterterrorism community, which has been traditionally dominated by Westerners. However, the reality is that the numerous reports and coverage on jihad from the CT community and journalist media popularize the global jihad movement.

The theological key-argument is embedded into a geopolitical analysis which focuses on discursive power relations in the media field and supports an all-out conflict between Islam and the West. In the ongoing conflict, argues al-Maqdisi, the discursive power relations are to the disadvantage of the Jihadis. The war against terrorism and foreign military strategies in Muslim countries is bolstered by Western and Muslim mainstream media. Moreover, the Western coalition against Islam presses Muslim regimes to motivate more and more Muslim clerics to speak out against jihad, which strengthens this imbalance. These clerics have disassociated themselves from their religion (*tabarra'tum min dinikum*) and distort jihad, he claims. Al-Maqdisi addresses critical Muslim clerics directly in the second person plural, in order to threaten them and raise their doubts. He calls their jurisprudential approach “the jurisprudence of those who sit around/armchair clerics” (*fiqh al-qa'idin*), which stands in strong contrast to the Jihadi jurisprudence (*fiqh al-waqi'/fiqh al-jihad*).

Drawing on the powerful doctrine *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, al-Maqdisi brings up a very dangerous theological tool. The doctrine is frequently used by extremist Salafis to excommunicate and get rid of opponents.¹⁰⁵⁵

The first solution against Muslim counter-discourses is according to al-Maqdisi to simply ignore any criticism. If that does not suffice to silence resistant critics, then Muslims should apply the *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* doctrine. According to al-Maqdisi, it commands righteous Muslims “to continue fighting, killing and slaughtering every enemy of God.” Al-Maqdisi does not directly call for punitive or retaliatory actions against opposing Muslim jurists, nor does he name anyone specifically. But by categorizing them as “polytheists,” he implicitly integrates them into the enemy-constellation of Jihadis. Quoting from the Quran that “oppression and civil strife are worse than killing,” al-Maqdisi reasons that Muslims who incite against Jihadis create intra-Muslim civil strife, which is the most serious crime commonly attributed to apostate polytheists and should be punished with death. Jihadis should take this as a theological directive (*tawjih*).¹⁰⁵⁶ However, as we will see, this is only one solution offered by al-Maqdisi against opponents of jihad. He also presents a detailed, but simple eight-point guideline to counter criticism (see below).

Although his theological guideline is primarily directed at a Jihadi audience, al-Maqdisi seeks to mobilize popular Muslim support against opponents of jihad. He accuses the West and Muslim collaborators of inciting a “crusader-war” against Islam. However, his argument

¹⁰⁵⁵ The *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*-doctrine is integrated into and connected to the *takfir*-doctrine (excommunicating other Muslims). Prominent cases of *takfir* were: The excommunication of the Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat by his assassins; the excommunication of collaborators with the communist regime by the Afghan resistance (1979-1989); the excommunication of Algerian civilians by the extremist wings of the Islamic Salvation Front which was supported by the London-based clerics Abu Qutada al-Filastini and Abu Musab al-Suri. This caused a bloodbath in the Algerian civil war in the 1990s; it is labelled nowadays against collaborators and Muslim enemies in intra-Muslim conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran's East-Baluchistan province, Mali, Somalia, or China's Xinjiang-Province.

Recently, the popular Saudi Arabian Wahhabi-Salafi preacher Salman al-'Awda (more than 2 million followers on Twitter) was excommunicated by Tunisian Salafis because of his support for the Islamist *Ennahda* Party, which won the Tunisian democratic elections in October 2011. *Ennahda* Party seems to take a sympathetic stance on economic liberalism and positions itself in the conservative center of Tunisian society.

Al-'Awda's support for the party was interpreted by some Salafis as *kufr* (unbelief) and infringement of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (the doctrine to befriend only believers and disassociate from unbelievers).

This conflict is paradigmatic for clashes inside the Salafi movement. Al-'Awda is a pragmatist. He represents the moderate trend of Saudi Arabian Wahhabism. He also supports the division of power between the executive, legislature, and judiciary in Egypt (democracy in an Islamic institutional framework). His differentiated views on Islamic leadership and government are refuted heavily by other Salafis, such as al-Albani sect in Jordan or Egyptian and Tunisian Salafis. At present, a major conflict arises among Salafis over the participation in post-Arab Spring democratic elections (2011-2012: Tunisia, Libya and Egypt), and over the political pragmatism that is required to share and execute power. Ed Husain, “Meeting Salafists in Tunisia,” Council on Foreign Relations Blog, October 4, 2012, accessed November 6, 2012, <http://blogs.cfr.org/coleman/2012/10/04/meeting-salafists-in-tunisia/>.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Quran Surat al-Baqara 2:217: “*Tumult and oppression Are worse than slaughter. Nor will they cease Fighting you until They turn you back From your faith If they can.*” Accessed November 18, 2012, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/quran/00227.htm>.

limbs in view of the fact that the *raison d'être* of doctrinaire Jihadis, of whom al-Maqdisi is a parade example, is eternal conflict, until either the whole of mankind has submitted to Islam or doomsday has arrived. But by addressing popular Muslim grudges, as well as the *shame-syndrome* of Arab-Muslim clan society, al-Maqdisi tries to open further venues to reach a broader audience. Firstly, al-Maqdisi refutes the Western claim that the present conflict is a “war against terrorism.” In his view it is a pronounced crusader war against Islam and all Muslims. Secondly, al-Maqdisi addresses the shame syndrome of Arab-Muslim clan society. He claims that Muslim defamers of the Jihadi movement violate not only Islamic religion, but also the codes of honour and chivalry of Arab-Muslim society. According to a Muslim conflict-psychologist, Arab culture can be perceived as very repressing, since obvious problems are often not spoken about outside of the own four walls (the *shame-syndrome*): “You can do everything, but under one condition: That nobody knows about it. It is the principle of the extended family and clan. I have to tolerate my brother or cousin, because otherwise I have to be ashamed for him.”¹⁰⁵⁷ Al-Maqdisi knows how to manipulate this principle with his frequent references to violations within “the family.” By referencing to shame and honour in his mass-published articles, such as the violation and rape of Muslim rights (abstractly) and women (specifically), al-Maqdisi takes the shame out of the house and onto the street, and thus breaches the major principle of the shame-syndrome not to speak about degrading violations. His goal is to trigger strong emotional reactions on the basis of guilt-feelings.

In this context, al-Maqdisi tries to justify Jihadi jurisprudential mistakes and the killing of civilians. “The infidelity of the enemies of God, their repulsion of the right way and their causing of strife among Muslims is a bigger crime than any crime which Jihadis are humiliatingly accused of. If Jihadis publish once in a while a unsound jurisprudential interpretation (*ijtihad khati'*), they do not need any corrections by polytheist jurisprudents because they will correct themselves. They are the most eager of all believers in regards to what is permissible and what is sinful (*'ala al-halal wa-l-haram*).”

Al-Maqdisi's tutorial guideline how to counter major points of anti-Jihadi critique

Al-Maqdisi knows that Jihadis are frequently under attack by secular critics and opposing jurisprudents. The critique by other Muslims is for al-Maqdisi the worst. Therefore, he

¹⁰⁵⁷ Sebastian Meissner, „Der Himmel über Gaza,“ Deutschlandfunk – Das Feature, November 20, 2012, 19:15, accessed November 23, 2012, min 22:00-25:00, http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2012/11/20/dlf_20121120_1915_e2047ea7.mp3.

presents a simple argumentative jurisprudential guideline against critics which can be utilized by ideologues and fighters in field. The guideline contains exemplary counter questions against major points of criticism which are frequently quotes by opponents. It is a “hands-on-approach,” and the general motto is to stay as simple as possible lest Jihadis become confused. This part of al-Maqdisi’s article deserves to be quoted at length (for better clarity in cursive text), since it allows a direct view into the buildup of Jihadi discursive strategies against Muslim criticism:

“Oh fighters, beware not to become powerless before the spread of false rumors by the enemies of religion, and watch out that they won’t damage your jihad with the disfigurations of their sins.

1. If they say to you [bold letters by al-Maqdisi]: Kids were killed as an effect of your fighting in such-and-such a place and the Prophet, may Allah pray on him and grant him peace, forbade the killing of kids...

So say to them: Yes, he forbade that, prayers and peace be upon him, but we know best about it and we are more eager than you to fulfill his orders and abstain from his prohibitions. God forbid that we targeted them on purpose! If we did that, we would accept our punishment from God. As for you, you build your conceptions upon sins and sinfulness. Therefore, we do not need your jurisprudence and theorizing. God has lifted from us the prohibition [to kill civilians or kids], if such a thing happens in the nightly raids against the unbelievers.¹⁰⁵⁸ And besides, what gives you the right to appear in the guise of those who care for the children?

You are the first who regard the killing of righteous Muslim children and adults as permissible (istahall) because of their jihad, their monotheism, and their disassociation from your own polytheist mores (bara'atuhum min shirkikum). If some kids are killed during their jihad-struggle, then you will immediately embrace the Muslim youth and kill the religion in their hearts with the corrupt methods of your [jurisprudential] schools, which draw them into loyalty with you and your guardians (al-wala' lakum wa li awliya'ihim).” But your main goal is to draw them into civil strife, away from their religion and jihad. If ‘oppression and civil strife are worse than killing’ [Q 2:217], then whose narrative is more faithful to his Lord?

2. If they say to you: You played into the hands of the Americans with your operations in New York and Washington: These happened at the cost of the Muslim countries. They [the

¹⁰⁵⁸ “Qad rafa' Allah 'anna al-haraj fi tabayyut al-kuffar 'in hasal fihi shay' min dhalik.” Al-Maqdisi refers with „tabayyut“ to classical “nightly inroads into enemies’ homes,” during which enemies, civilians and children could not be clearly distinguished due to darkness. “Tabayyut” is an important concept in Jihadi jurisprudential discussions around (1) civilian casualties, (2) civilian targets, (3) and/or collateral damage.

Americans] have ever since dominated your countries and riches with the claim to fight terrorism.

So say to them: Was there ever a time when these states were not repressed and repressive, and are we really the ones who caused this? This plot was set a long time before we came [...].

3. If they say to you: Israel abuses [lit.: istaghall = “fucks”] your deeds in order to perpetrate and double her terrorism against the Palestinians [...].

So say to them: Does Israel need any justifications to do this and when did Israel ever stop perpetrating its terrorism? [...] Israel is merely a criminal release valve under the patronage of your masters in Washington and under the custody of your armies in our countries [...].

4. If they say to you: Your strikes against the Jews and the Americans weakened the Arab systems and their economies, you undermine their development projects, you alienate foreign investors and chase tourists away.

So say to them: It is better like that. Do we really want anything else? If we had thought that ozone-depletion would weaken these despicable systems and cause their downfall, then we would have exerted ourselves to amplify it. Oh you simpletons, does anything bother us, or make us sleepless except for the quest to undermine these violent and infidel systems of government in our countries, how to weaken them and eradicate them at their roots? Development, investment, economy and similar matters are unattainable before our countries are not ruled by the religious law of God (shar' Allah).

5. If they say to you: Your operations in Istanbul drove the moderate Turkish Islamists into a corner. You pushed them to prostrate into the laps of the Americans and the Europeans [lit.: al-irtima' fi ahdan ... = “to give them a blowjob”].

So say to them: Do we want anything else but to expose every rascal who compromises on religion, glorifies Ataturk, does not disassociate himself from his secularism and embarrasses the religion of truth; who stabs the fighters in the back and aligns himself with their enemies under the pretext of the war against terrorism. Moreover, when did Turkey in its modern history not strive to satisfy Europe in order to be accepted in its crusader-union? And when did Turkey not prostrate into the laps of the Americans, and even the Jews?

6. If they say to you: Your terrorism was abused to put pressure on Arab systems like Saudi Arabia to encourage so-called reforms. These reforms are clear throwbacks [for your goals], because they further secularism, and in their wake the religious learning methods are distorted in order to disseminate a Western globalization culture [...].

So say to them: *It is better like that. Is it not one of the greatest goals of our jihad to unveil these systems and lay open their lies and fraudulence which they cover up with Islam [...] If these systems announced so-called reforms because of our jihad and changed the religious education schedules and fought the people of the religion, by openly disassociating themselves from the religion of truth [...] then we have entered the first phase of beating and unmasking these systems.*

7. If they say to you: *You ignited the fire of hatred between the West and the Muslims with your operations and pushed them into a clash of civilizations and elevated them over the Muslims, so that even the veiled women are thrown out of their schools [in France, Europe].*

So say to them: *It is better like that, and most decent, since it is one of the imperatives of Islam (wajib min wajibat al-Islam) that we cut the close bonds of cordiality between the Muslims and their enemies (an naqti' washa'ij al-mawda bayn al-muslimin wa a'da'ihim) [...]. The dismissal of veiled Muslim girls from [French European] schools is great as well, because it disinfects them from the dirtiness which they incurred by intermingling with their corrupt culture and unclean education methods [...].*

8. Finally tell them: *Your way of theorizing and your calumny [against Jihadis] defeats itself, and the facts on the ground reject it. This becomes especially clear in the testimonies of your masters, who bark at Jihadis with the help of Western writers, analysts and theoreticians [of the counterterrorism community]. According to their statistics, the concern with and study of Islam by Westerners and Americans has risen strongly after the attacks on Washington and New York. Take the example of one of those Westerners, whose intellectual culture has dazed the view of those defeated thinkers in our countries [...On November 21, 2003, Robert Fisk, who is a specialist on Middle Eastern issues, wrote an article in the British newspaper the Independent. The article deals with the twin-terrorist-attacks on British targets in Istanbul. The sentences in brackets were not translated into Arabic by al-Maqdisi]:*

'It's the price of joining George Bush's 'war on terror.' [They couldn't hit Britain while Bush was on his triumphalist state visit to London, so they went for the jugular in Turkey. The British consulate, the British-headquartered HSBC bank] Nor should we fool ourselves about what I always call 'the brain.' We have a habit of thinking that the bombers don't understand the outside world. If they are 'against democracy', they wouldn't understand us, would they? But they do. They knew exactly what they were doing when they attacked the Australians in Bali - they knew the Iraqi invasion was unpopular in Australia, that Howard might ultimately

be blamed. They knew the invasion was unpopular in Italy. So Italy would be punished for Berlusconi's hubris.

They knew, too, of the demonstrations that awaited George Bush in London. So why not distract attention from the whole panjandrum by assaulting Britain in Turkey. [Who would care about Bush's visit to Sedgfield when Britons are lying dead in the grounds of their consulate in Istanbul? Just so in Iraq. The Iraqi insurgents] They are well aware of George Bush's falling opinion polls in the United States. They know how desperate he is to extract himself from Iraq before next year's presidential elections. Thus are they increasing their assaults on American forces [and their Iraqi supporters provoking the US army to ever more ferocious retaliation?]

*[We have a kind of fatal incomprehension about those against whom we have gone to war; that they are living in caves, cut off from reality, striking blindly - "desperately" as Mr Bush would have us believe - as they realise that the free world is resolved to destroy them. Just now, I suspect] they are resolved to destroy Mr. Bush - politically if not physically. Mr Blair too [...].*¹⁰⁵⁹

This is a sample of the analyses by your masters. Take it and learn from it to restrain yourselves, oh you defeated thinkers [addressing Muslim analysts]. The fighters (al-mujahidun) have had enough from your analyses. They have their thinkers and jurisprudents. They are divinely guided by a magnificent code and cherished book [the Quran]."

Al-Maqdisi finishes his piece with a long quote from Sayyid Qutb's Quran commentary on the second verse of *Surat Fatir* (Q 35:2): "What Allah out of his Mercy doth bestow on mankind there is none can withhold: what He doth withhold, there is none can grant, apart from Him: and He is the Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom."¹⁰⁶⁰ Qutb interprets the verse in the sense that a believer "even sleeps on a thorn, with the mercy of God, if he is rightly guided." It is another attempt on the side of al-Maqdisi to put Qutb's innocuous commentary [other key-writings of Qutb had a more radical tone] into an extremist context in order to install virtual divine leadership. Moreover, al-Maqdisi approves the British journalist Robert Fisk's analysis of al-Qaeda's choice of Western targets, because it fits into Jihadi deterrence

¹⁰⁵⁹ Translated and quoted in Arabic by al-Maqdisi in his article, the author has used parts of the original text. Robert Fisk, "We are paying the price of an infantile attempt to reshape the Middle East," *The Independent*, November 21, 2003, accessed November 28, 2012, <http://www.middleeast.org/launch/redirect.cgi?a=26&num=22>.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Surat Fatir* or *al-Mala'ika* 35:2, accessed November 28, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/35.htm>.

thinking, the goal of which is to present al-Qaeda as capable of hitting any ally of the U.S.-led War on Terror at any place and time of choice.

viii. (MaB 8) The divine command that “the pillars of religion are a book leading the right way and a sword assisting”

In the eighth issue of MaB Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi writes a theological article on the key-theological doctrine divine guidance (*hidaya*).¹⁰⁶¹ The doctrine frames all theological articles of MaB, and the goal of this article is to cement the doctrine’s legitimacy in the minds of Jihadi readers. It seems that the editing staff of the magazine considered it of importance to shed some more light on the doctrine because of its popularity among Jihadi grassroots actors.¹⁰⁶²

Al-Maqdisi’s explanation is not so much anchored in the primary *fiqh*-source Quran, but based on classical jurisprudential interpretations, most prominently, but by no means exclusively, those of the scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328 AD), who is called lovingly “The Sheikh of Islam” by his admirers.¹⁰⁶³ The article was republished by al-Maqdisi on his website www.tawhed.ws.¹⁰⁶⁴

It is noteworthy that this issue of MaB for the first time presents al-Maqdisi as “Imam”, which is an important leadership position, both in Sunni and in Shiite Islam.¹⁰⁶⁵ Jihadis foster an occult form of Islamic belief that borrows both from Shiite eschatology and Sufi spiritualism. The mythological-apocalyptic figure of the rightly-guided Mahdi-Imam has a much more central position in Jihadi thinking than in Sunni-Muslim majority contexts. This resembles in some aspects Shiite-doctrine, in which the belief in the return of the Mahdi at the end of times is a central religious tenet. The spiritual-miraculous explanation of belief, including wonders,

¹⁰⁶¹ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “*Quwwam al-din bi kitab yahdi wa saif yansur*,” MaB 8: 4-6.

¹⁰⁶² Some Jihadi media activists even name their YouTube-channels after the doctrine. For example, the channel “*Quwwam al-din bi kitab yahdi wa saif yansur*,” (name of a YouTube-channel), accessed November 29, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/user/dewview>.

¹⁰⁶³ Other Sunni scholars tend to treat the doctrine less comprehensively and to focus only on the maxim attributed to Ibn Taymiyya. For example, Nasir al-Din al-Tamimi, “*Quwwam al-din bi kitab yahdi wa saif yansur*,” accessed November 29, 2012, <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?439531>.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “*Quwwam al-din bi kitab yahdi wa saif yansur*,” accessed November 29, 2012, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=i3gw3obn>.

¹⁰⁶⁵ In Sunni Islam, an Imam fulfills the role of a Muslim community leader, worship-leader and religious guide. Every Sunni mosque has generally one appointed Imam to guide the daily worship ritual and to hold the important Friday sermon (khutba). In Shiite Islam, Imams are the descendants of the lineage of the fourth rightly guided caliph Ali and his sons Hassan and Hussein. Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad and married to Muhammad’s daughter Fatima. Also Sufis, a peaceful and spiritual sect of Islam, hold Ali in high esteem, since they trace their lineal descent from Muhammad through him. Shiite Imams are endowed with special spiritual and divine leadership qualities. They exercise not only spiritual and religious, but also political guidance. However, according to the majority 12er-Shiite belief, the last Imam Muhammad bin al-Hassan went into occultation from 941 AD until the present day and will return at the end of times as the Mahdi.

magic and signs, among Jihadis resembles Sufi spiritualism. Although the Shiite religious-political explanation of the Imamate is different from Sunni interpretations, it seems that Jihadi leaders, such as al-Maqdisi, are eager to adopt spiritual-occult and political leadership characteristics that remind of the clerical hierarchies in Shiite Islam, when they designate themselves this leadership title. However, this question needs further research. By connecting the semantics of religious leadership (“*imam*”) and divine guidance (“*hidaya*”), the editors of MaB calculate that their “sacred” commands to fight become ever more powerful and authoritative.

The divine leadership article starts out with a tradition on Jabir bin Abdullah, who “was saying while he took a sword into one of his hands and a Quran into the other: The messenger of God, peace be upon him, ordered us to strike with this [the sword] because of that [the Quran].” From a Jihadi point of view, “the sword” represents all forms of Jihadi armed operations, while “the Quran” represents divine guidance which transforms into Jihadi jurisprudence and media activity.

The prominent Quran chapter of this article is *Surat al-Hadid*, because “iron” (*hadid*) stands for the sword in the divine guidance schema. On the basis of Ibn Taymiyya’s interpretation of the verse,¹⁰⁶⁶ Al-Maqdisi reasons that the most righteous of all truths is God’s command that people shall realize monotheism (*tahqiq al-tawhid*). For al-Maqdisi, monotheism means jihad. The divine guidance maxim by Ibn Taymiyya is based on binary terms, “a book (that guides) and a sword (that assists). Al-Maqdisi is eager to follow up with similar catch-phrases. He claims that “real Islam is based monotheism and jihad [i.e. the establishment of monotheism through jihad], propaganda and fighting, the Quran and iron.”

After he has established his argumentative position, al-Maqdisi goes into the offensive, which is but another example of the interpretational poverty of Jihadi *fiqh*, which unfortunately is fed heavily by the present geopolitical Christian-Jewish-Muslim and local Muslim conflicts.¹⁰⁶⁷ Al-Maqdisi quotes the second part of verse 25 of *Surat al-Hadid* “*and We sent down Iron, in which is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help.*” He declares: “Historically, whoever avoided this right

¹⁰⁶⁶ Al-Maqdisi quotes an interpretation by Ibn Taymiyya of verse 25. „*We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; [...]*“ The classical scholar repeatedly uses the terms righteous, truth and rights (*haqq*, pl. *huquq*). “It is meant by *We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong)* that men may stand forth in justice for the rights of God and for the rights of his creations.” The derivatives of the Arabic word-root h-q-q relate to meanings of “truth, justice, righteousness and reality,” which are attached to the semantic field of jihad.

¹⁰⁶⁷ The Jihadi tendency to revive historical patterns of Islamic grandeur and warfare, instead of trying to find *fiqh* solutions to empower contemporary Muslim societies through social, political and economic reforms, not only owes to the intellectual backwardness of the proponents, but is heavily influenced by outside factors as well.

and did not stand forth for it in justice, would be straightened by the sword [...] whoever does justice to the book does so with the iron. Therefore, the foundations of religion are established by the Quran and the sword,” and quotes here another variation of the maxim attributed to Ibn Taymiyya. Al-Maqdisi’s tone is patronizing, “all honest propagandists of all times should make this truth the pivot point of their calls. Under its banner (*tahta rayatihi*) they fight and get killed.” This statement picks up major pivot points of the Jihadi theological discourse, namely the heavenly bargain mentioned in Q 9:111 and the community symbol of the Muslim war banner. Both concepts have been discussed in other MaB articles (see above divine commands, points 3 and 6).

Al-Maqdisi tries to create deterrence leverage by threatening Muslims who oppose jihad. According to al-Maqdisi’s reading of early Islamic history, Muhammad traditionally sent out his best and closest men “to slaughter” (*li dhabah*) the enemies of Islam. These are not further defined. A recipient of the text might see them as Muslims, non-Muslims or both together. The task of all rightly-guided people is to follow in the footsteps of the early Muslim community, claims al-Maqdisi. Since Muhammad is not alive the only way to guide righteously, he implies, is to leave the interpretation and selection of Muhammad’s exemplary deeds to Jihadi theological leaders like himself. Al-Maqdisi admits that Jihadis are not yet capable of realizing their goal to establish universal Islamic rule, but he assures that they will be. In his view, one of the most important factors to realize this goal is to follow the divine leadership doctrine. According to al-Maqdisi, any moderate Muslim attempt to isolate the connection between “the book” and “the sword,” must be rejected, since “the Sheikh of Islam” himself stated that “the foundations of religion are a book leading the right way and a sword assisting.”

[detailed analysis of issues 9-11 omitted]

ix. (MaB 12) The divine command to establish divine sovereignty (*hakimiya*), orientated at the Quran injunction “*If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers*” (Q:5:44)

References to Sayyid Qutb’s (1906-1966) concept of divine sovereignty (*hakimiya*) appear often in Jihadi writings. We find references to Qutb and his major concept frequently in the 22 editions of MaB, together with a disproportionally strong focus on the fighting verses of Quran *Surat al-Tawba* (the ninth chapter). In the 12th issue of MaB, Abdullah bin Nasir al-

Rashid dedicates the theological article to Qutb's *hakimiya*-concept.¹⁰⁶⁸ Qutb drew on ideas of the Indian Islamist thinker Mawlana Abul 'Ala Mawdudi, who developed the concept of “*new jahiliyah*” (circa 1939) and claimed that Western influence had corrupted Muslim society. He argued that secular law transgressed the injunction of the unity of Allah (*tawhid*) and his governance (*al-hakimiya*). In 1941, Mawdudi founded the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, a non-violent proselytizing mass movement, to serve as a vanguard community formed in the image of the community of believers around the Prophet. While Mawdudi sought to work within the system, Qutb worked against it. The Salafi Hanbali scholars Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) and Ibn Qayyim (1292–1350), and their treatment of *al-uluhiah* (divinity), *al-rububiah* and *al-rabbaniyah* (divine lordship) provided Qutb with the inspiration for the term *hakimiyah*.¹⁰⁶⁹ Like Mawdudi, Qutb contrasted *jahiliyah* with *hakimiyah*, the perfect order against total chaos, and thus provided a simplified terminology for modern Muslims who were not educated in classical Islamic law.¹⁰⁷⁰ According to Qutb, who was hanged under Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966, the ultimate aim of Islamic struggle should be the establishment of *al-hakimiyah*, the reign of Allah's sovereignty on earth and the obedience to Allah's Oneness (*tawhid*), together *tawhid hakimiyah*.¹⁰⁷¹ Quranic evidence to bolster the concept can be found in *Surat al-Ma'ida* 5:44 where it says “*If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers*” (*wa man lam yahkum bi ma anzala Allah fa'awla'ik hum al-kafirun*).¹⁰⁷² This Qutbian neologism, which did not exist in classical Islam, has been igniting Islamist revolutionary thought since the 1960s. The concept *fiqh haraki* or *fiqh al-waqi'* provided, according to Qutb, the right tools and terminology by which to judge modern problems according to Islamic law.¹⁰⁷³ The term *fiqh* means jurisprudence, “*haraki*” stands for a dynamic, and *waqi'* for a reality-oriented interpretation, respectively. Qutb's idea of Islam as a “practical and realistic method to lead one's life” (*manhaj 'amali wa waqi'i li-l-hayat*) is closely connected to this concept. As an Islamist key thinker, Qutb followed a deconstructionist approach to traditional, and in his view, sclerotic centers of Islamic power and dominion (traditional clergy) which could be well analyzed through the lenses of French post-structuralism.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Abdullah bin Nasir al-Rashid, „*Al-Khawarij wa-l-hukm bi ghayr ma anzala Allah*,” MaB 12: 6-7.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Wiktorowicz, "A Genealogy of Radical Islam," 75–97.

¹⁰⁷¹ See R.Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (New York: Syracuse Press, 1995), 85.

¹⁰⁷² *Surat al-Ma'ida* 5:44, accessed January 2, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/5.htm>.

¹⁰⁷³ Philipp Holtmann, Abu Musab al-Suri's Jihad Concept (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan, 2009), 12-13.

[detailed analysis of issues 13-18 omitted]

x. (MaB 19) The divine command to follow “the general call to arms” (*al-nafir al-'amm*), according to Quran 9:41 “Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah!”

The article in the 19th issue of MaB calls voluntaries to join Jihadi groups wherever possible.¹⁰⁷⁴ The author is 'Amir bin Abdullah al-'Amir. He is a frequent contributor to the magazine, yet hierarchically ranks underneath al-Maqdisi. The latter carries the title “*imam*” (religious authority and community leader), while al-'Amir himself is introduced as a “*sheikh*” (religious authority). During the last 30 years, the *naafir*-concept has become ever more prominent among Jihadis. Jihadis have adapted a modified version to their needs, especially in regards to the lack of a legitimate central authority that is needed to call for a general mobilization or state of emergency. Bin Laden himself issued in February 2003 via the Internet a “general and worldwide call for mobilization.”¹⁰⁷⁵

“The general call to arms,” also “state of emergency” (*al-nafir al-'amm*) is a key concept of Islamic warfare and political conflict. We find it over and over again in Muslim history, such as during the Battle of al-Mansurah in February 1250, at which Egyptian and Mamluk forces defeated an attacking Crusader army, and at the ensuing Battle of Fariskur in April 1250, which led to the final defeat of the Crusaders in the Middle East. The concept has also been used by modern Muslim armies, such as the Egyptian army in the 1973 war against Israel. During Ramadan 2008, a Palestinian issued via the Internet a “call for mobilization.” It was a call for solidarity and support to Egyptian Muslims, “army and civilians,” to shatter the siege of Gaza.”¹⁰⁷⁶ The Free Syrian Army,” in cooperation with Muslim Brothers from Jordan, presently calls for conscripts and guerillas “to attack the Syrian regime forces at all possible places.”¹⁰⁷⁷ In late 2012, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers also announced a “state of

¹⁰⁷⁴ 'Amir bin Abdullah al-'Amir, “*Al-Nafir, al-naafir...ila asakir al-Islam*,” MaB 19: 4-5.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Osama bin Laden, “*Al-Khitab al-rabi' 'ashar, al-risala al-khamisa ila al-umma al-islamiyya (i'lan al-nafir)*,” *Dhu al-Hijja* 15, 1423 AH / February 16, 2003, accessed January 11, 2013, <http://aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=20613>.

¹⁰⁷⁶ “Sabbah,” “*Al-'Ashir min Ramadan yauman misriyan// yaum al-nafir al-'amm al-misri li-kasr al-hisar an Ghazza al-ahrar*,” www.paldf.net, September 1, 2008, accessed January 11, 2013, <http://www.paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?t=295712>.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Qa'id al-Jaish al-Hur yad'u al-suriyin ila 'al-nafir al-'amm' li muwajahat milishiyat al-Assad,” shorouknews.com, July 13, 2012. Accessed January 11, 2013, <http://shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=13072012&id=a5b79744-25db-4a34-b6ba-233d56a21e04>.

See also the Bahraini newspaper al-Watan: “*Al-Jaish al-Suri al-Hurr wa-l-ikhwan fi-l-urdun ya'lanun al-nafir al-'amm*,” www.alwatannews.net, July 14, 2012, accessed January 11, 2013, http://www.alwatannews.net/%28S%28a00hlnpqkddln2cnffypzig4%29%29/NewsViewer.aspx?ID=Wx8GaFENlYz0prwW_838_MJMPA_939_939_&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1.

emergency” on their Facebook page, when their landslide parliamentary and presidential victories became questioned. Also the Brethren’s dominant role in the constitutional assembly drew heavy criticism from Egyptian secular society, which the Brethren try to counter by mustering all their political supporters.¹⁰⁷⁸

The *nafir*-concept borrows its name from a trumpet-like instrument with a conical-cylindrical tube, which was probably first used by early Christians to call for battle. This use was later adopted by Arabs, but the actual name first appears in the 11th century AD under the Seljuks (Turk people who established Sunni dynasties between the tenth and twelfth centuries).¹⁰⁷⁹ Originally, “*nafir*” meant “a call to war,” and the trumpet type instrument used for this was the “*buq al-nafir*.” The dispatch and mobilization of a large expeditionary force by the Mamluks from Cairo to Syria was preceded by “the general muster.” The dispatch was accompanied by a military ceremony, and some time before the ceremony, a special flag would be hoisted to prepare the soldiers for the campaign.¹⁰⁸⁰ The Ottomans used the concept to mobilize their armies (*nefir i-’amm*). The Ottoman recruitment of volunteers was done by “a general call to arms.” Such was the case in 1769 at the Ottoman declaration of war against Russia. The Ottoman Sultan Mustapha the Third took this measure, “because of his reluctance to rely on the ill-trained and financially demanding Janissaries [Christian slave soldiers who were trained from childhood on in the Ottoman armies].” Over time, the association with the instrument became less important, and more weight was put on the concept itself and its Islamic legal interpretations.

The Arabic word-root *nun-fa-ra* found in the Quran stands as a verb for “hurrying to,” and as a noun for “troop” or “departure.” The term features prominently in Quran *Surat al-Tawbah*, verses 38-100, which explain, contextualize and embed the “departure to war” in the context of fighting. It is thus a very popular Islamic concept, which is known to Muslim majority and minority contexts (sects, cults, trends). One can find mainstream Sunni and Saudi-Wahabbi discussions or Quran recitations of the concept on the Internet.¹⁰⁸¹

¹⁰⁷⁸ „*Al-lkhwān ta'lun al-nafir al-'amm wa tad'u li-shahada fi sabil Allah*,” elmedar.org, December 4, 2012, accessed January 11, 2013, <http://elmedar.org/news/60293#comment-5603>.

¹⁰⁷⁹ H.G. Farmer, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1999), entry on “Buk.”

¹⁰⁸⁰ J. Burton-Page, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1999), entry on “Harb.”

¹⁰⁸¹ See this interpretation on an Islamic propagation website, “*Fi zilal al-Quran al-karim, al-Tawbah, min al-aya 38 ila al-aya 100*,” accessed January 9, 2013, <http://www.daawa-info.net/NewThelal.php?versnumber=38&suraname=9&nameofsora=%C7%E1%CA%E6%C8%C9>.

Or the recitation of Quran 9:38 by Sheikh Muhammad al-Luhaidan, “*Al-Sheikh Muhammad al-Luhaidan, idha qila lakum anfiru fi sabil Allah*,” accessed January 9, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFJ3bCeg4aI>. Al-Luhaidan is “a Judge by profession based in Saudi Arabia and a world renowned Saudi based Qur’an reciter known for his unique emotional style. He is currently the Imam of Jamia Al Nasir Masjid in Riyadh. Shaykh Muhammad Al Luhaidan has participated in numerous Islamic conferences and events in many countries

In the Jihadi context, the concept became popular through the Palestinian ideologue Abdullah Azzam (1941-1989). Due to the lack of a central Sunni religious and political authority at that time, Azzam revived the general call for mobilization with a theological argument. His goal was to muster men for the Afghanistan Jihad, in which Muslim jihad volunteers fought side by side with the local Afghan militias against the Soviet military, which occupied the country between 1979 and 1989.

Azzam was well aware that the Islamic legality of the international mobilization of jihad volunteers was problematic. The question was where permission for such mobilization could be obtained, since in the late twentieth century the Islamic *ummah* was an imaginary entity. Moreover, the caliphate had been abolished by the Turks in 1924 and there was no longer a supreme authority in Islam. In addition, the Arab-Muslim world was a patchwork of secular regimes and traditional monarchies, mostly authoritarian in character, with competing state ideologies that did not support Islamist strategies. In order to mobilize volunteers, Azzam referred to Quran 9:41 “Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah! That is best for you if ye but knew.” Drawing on the Hanbali jurists Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathir, Azzam called this situation “the general call” (*al-naḥīr al-‘amm*). If, according to Azzam’s revival of the classical concept described above, the enemy entered Muslim lands, the individual religious obligation (*fard ‘ayn*) for defensive jihad duty would spread in concentric circles throughout the world. Accordingly, no Muslim had to ask for anyone’s permission to join the fight.¹⁰⁸²

This allowed Azzam to issue a “general call for mobilization” without the order of an Imam. According to Azzam, the order for mobilization had to be issued by an Imam only when the jihad was *fard kifayah* (collective obligation), but not when the jihad was *fard ‘ayn*. Therefore, “if the *ummah* is called to march forward . . . so she marches forward to protect its religion and the matter of the obligation is according to the need of the Muslims or the demand of the Imam [author’s emphasis].¹⁰⁸³ Azzam received critical support for this *fatwa* from the Saudi Islamic establishment, among them the influential scholar Sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin Baz.

Nowadays, Jihadis are trying to re-establish a legitimate chain of authority. For example, by calling the Jordanian ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi an “*imam*.” For the imam, who leads a larger Muslim group, it would be technically allowed to issue “the call for

including Turkey, Australia, Malaysia and Kuwait.” (Source: “Exclusive Footage of Shaykh Muhammed al-Luhaidan,” accessed January 9, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE4vX7YCbXQ>).

¹⁰⁸² Abdullah ‘Azzam, *Al-Difa’ ‘an arad al-muslimin ahamm furud al-a’yan* (Amman: Maktabat al-Risala al-Haditha, 1987), 27.

¹⁰⁸³ ‘Azzam, *Al-Difa’ ‘an arad al-muslimin ahamm furud al-a’yan*, 29.

mobilization.” The editors of MaB-magazine try to lend an extra-air of imperative authority to al-Maqdisi and his theological texts.

Al-'Amir, who is the writer of the *nafir*-article in MaB 19, quotes two verses from *Surat al-Tawba* by which he wants to stress the imperativeness of joining Jihadi training camps and groups. This is a binding and obligatory command by God. Quran 9:38 “*O ye who believe! what is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the earth? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.*” The next verse, Quran 9:39, has a threatening tone: “*Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place.*” In MaB’s issue 16, al-Maqdisi has already written a few lines on the departure to Jihadi training camps and the preparation of operations (*nafir*, *hijrah*). Al-Maqdisi stresses to take precautions and ensure a high level of secrecy, even among fighters, before commanding or executing an operation. He anchors his tactical advice in Islamic traditions on fighting and classical legal interpretations.¹⁰⁸⁴

[analysis of issues 20 and 22 omitted]

xi. (MaB 21) The divine command to stand united and pledge allegiance to Osama bin Laden

Shortly before its publication stopped in Ramadan 1425 AH (October/November 2004), the editors of MaB announced in the second last issue that a major change was about to take place. The result would be a “new magazine.” The theological article in issue 19 follows up on the magazine’s new approach to focus stronger “on economic, political, military and religious strategic studies.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Strategically seen, Jihadis realized at that time that they needed to modify their elite-centered self-depiction into a broader mass appeal. The new concept echoes the approach of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda leader 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin by that time that “*this is a battle of ideas – with doctrine underpinning the will to win.*”¹⁰⁸⁶ Moreover, the new concept echoes the deep anxiety which al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia experienced at that time, due to its own isolation and illegitimacy in wider Islamic circles. The Saudi regime had

¹⁰⁸⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, „*Al-Hadhr wa-l-kitman bayn al-ifrat wa-l-tafrit*,” MaB 16: 6-9.

¹⁰⁸⁵ MaB 21: 2.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Julian Lewis, Foreword to Al-Qaida’s Doctrine for Insurgency: ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz Al-Muqrin’s A Practical Course For Guerilla War, translated and analyzed by Norman Cigar (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009).

successfully turned leading clerics of the Wahhabi and other Islamic movements, who hitherto had supported the Jihadis, against the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda.¹⁰⁸⁷

Another context is important: Heightened tensions in the Iraqi war theatre, not only between Sunnis and Shiites, but also among the Sunni groups, depopularize the agenda of al-Qaeda at another local front. In December 2004, the leader of a Sunni terrorist group which operates mainly in Iraq,¹⁰⁸⁸ the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006), swears an oath of allegiance to Osama bin Laden. Thus, an al-Qaeda wing in Iraq is effectively established. Even though al-Zarqawi's oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) is lauded euphorically by the article and al-Qaeda's franchise-strategy is supported with theological arguments, it cannot hide the fact that opposing Sunni clans in Iraq heavily reject al-Qaeda's escalatory strategy and gradually build an intra-Sunni oppositional front at that time (the Iraqi tribal *Sahwa*-Alliances).¹⁰⁸⁹

The headline of the article says: "The group is the undefeatable fortress of the people of Islam (*ahl al-Islam*)."¹⁰⁹⁰ The term "the people of Islam" reflects the quest for unity and the utopia of an emerging Jihadi mass movement, which informs the whole article. Al-'Amir quotes several Quran verses to demonstrate the validity of his argument, for example, "*Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure.*"¹⁰⁹¹ Moreover, al-'Amir cites "*And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided.*"¹⁰⁹² Every Muslim who obeys will belong to the "saved sect," which unlike 72 other sects will not perish in the Hereafter, but reside in Paradise. Al-'Amir quotes numerous classical traditions to this effect. Yet, every group requires some form of leadership, he argues. Al-'Amir warns from any lack of discipline and leadership. He reminds of the threatening example of the Battle of Uhud in 625 AD, in which the Muslims were almost defeated to the core. "*Allah did indeed*

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁸ "*Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*" (Monotheism and Jihad Group).

¹⁰⁸⁹ The first tribal alliance hostile to al-Qaeda in Iraq, called "Council of the Awakening of the Anbar Province" (*Majlis Sahwat al-Anbar*), was formed in September 2006. The alliance fought al-Qaeda in Iraq in collaboration with U.S. troops, and at times inflicted heavy damages upon the network. The principle of this and other Awakening Councils was the cooperation between U.S. troops and local tribes to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq and its followers. At times, the councils inflicted heavy damages upon the network. Similar, heavily-armed militia style Awakening Alliances have formed in other provinces on the model of Al-Anbar Alliance. *Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 13, 2006: 2; also 27 October 2006: 2.

¹⁰⁹⁰ 'Amir [bin Abdullah] al-'Amir, "*Al-Jama'ah hisn hasin li ahl al-Islam*," MaB 21:4-6.

¹⁰⁹¹ Quran *Surat al-Saff* 61:4 (The Ranks/Battle Array), accessed January 10, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/61.htm>.

¹⁰⁹² Quran *Surat al-Imran* 3:103, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/3.htm>.

fulfil His promise to you when ye with His permission Were about to annihilate your enemy,- until ye flinched and fell to disputing about the order, and disobeyed it after He brought you in sight (of the booty) which ye covet.”¹⁰⁹³ Every group of Muslims that is larger than three men needs an Emir who organizes it and gives the orders. Al-'Amir bases this argument on several traditions, which he quotes at length. If all Muslims act accordingly and follow Jihadi principles, they will finally become like “one united body” (*ka-l-jasad al-wahid*). The next sentence in bold expresses the policy of the Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda: “We advice all Sunni fighting leaders who fight to make God’s word supreme and the word of the infidels lowest, to put their hands into the hand of the leader [the ritual closing of a *bay'a*-pledge] of the army of Islam, who is at the present Osama bin Laden, may God protect him.” Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi is cited as most important role model, since he had pledged allegiance to bin Laden in December 2004.

¹⁰⁹³ Quran Surat *al-Imran* 3:152, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/3.htm>.

7. Two Additional Models of Virtual Leadership

I would like to call to mind two additional forms of virtual leadership, which have to be seen as complementation of the models described above. However, treating them in detail would go beyond the scope of this study. The obvious reason is that the first model requires a more exact social tier analysis of organizational networks, whereas the second model demands a comprehensive rhetoric and aesthetic analysis of audio-visual Jihadi propaganda. Yet, organizational network tiers as well as the steady output of movies that contain “inciting speech” (*kalima tahridiyya*) and semiotics via the discussions forums clearly have an effect on the interaction and discourses of Jihadis. Therefore, a short description into that direction may pin-point foci of further socio-anthropological and communicative research.

7.a Environmental Leadership by Second and Third Tier Influences in Virtual Milieus

Metaphorically speaking, jihad forums are like the peak of an iceberg. The iceberg leaps out of the water, but underneath its body dissolves and mixes with the surrounding salt water, drawing ever wider circles. The dissemination of Jihadi propaganda on the Internet creates virtual terrorist milieus through a process of information dissolution. Communication from major jihad forums creates larger Jihadi milieus in open social platforms like Youtube, where Jihadi networks emerge around user-accounts that disseminate and imitate propaganda. Furthermore, in some cases virtual terrorist milieus influence real terrorist actors and are thus to be seen as distinct strategic leadership environments.

Recent mass demonstrations for democratic change in Arab states were co-organized via Twitter and Facebook, and this drew Jihadi interest into the use of larger social networks. Shut-down campaigns against hundreds of Jihadi user accounts on Facebook even strengthen internal debates how to use the site more effectively. In fact, the Arab revolutions and their very successful use of social media have rung in the second phase of “Jihadi strategic studies.” Jihadists are trying to understand what they must do to gain the same popularity and how they can win and influence as many individuals as possible by jihad via the Internet.¹⁰⁹⁴ As part of a new communicational strategy, Jihadi media strategists advise to offer broader audiences a “lite-version” of terrorist propaganda, which excludes gruesome scenes of

¹⁰⁹⁴ This form of strategic Jihadi literature has increased since the start of the Iraq-War in 2003 and treats theological and ideological questions only marginally. See Siehe Brynjar Lia und Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaeda Policy Preceding the Madrid Bombings”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (2004).

executions and beheadings. Instead the task is now to reach the masses.¹⁰⁹⁵ Possible sympathizers should initially not even know that they are consuming Jihadi propaganda. User-accounts with simple Islamic names and profile-images such as “The one who loves Islam”, or a profile picture of the Quran do not betray the clear Jihadi inclination of their owners. The uploaded material shall first and foremost strengthen the Islamic identity of viewers, and only in a second step introduce them to an extremist interpretation of Islam.

Media jihad strategists argue that until now most Jihadi messages do not reach broader audiences, but remain largely encapsulated in consensual environments like jihad forums. Since mainstream social networks reach millions of people, they are especially attractive for propagandists. Jihadi messages may get liquefied on mainstream social networks. Moreover, the group and topic cohesion is lower than in hardcore Jihadi environments, where, sociologically speaking, most actors share strong ties. However, mainstream networks can create open milieus, attract broader audiences and even activate lone-wolf-type attackers. Here the “strength of weak ties” comes into play, which allows a much further spread of information across shared-cause- and virtual peer groups.¹⁰⁹⁶ Therefore, from a Jihadi perspective the advantages of mainstream networks outweigh their disadvantages. Jihadis are also making peace with the idea that the age of hardcore forums may be over. They must now integrate into and influence larger audiences.¹⁰⁹⁷

The future goal of jihad propagators is to create more “invisible” terrorist environments. There are thousands of sports- and leisure time groups on Facebook, which can be infiltrated by Jihadi media activists for this purpose. Undercover Jihadis are advised not to attract the attention of the administrators of these groups. “Suitable,” for example, are videos which display the suffering of Muslim prisoners and women at the hand of westerners and Muslim collaborators. Luring subtitles like “You must see it!” or “Best video on Facebook!” shall attract viewers and cause them to click on uploads without awakening any suspicion as regards to the terrorist inclination of the material. This makes it also possible to circumvent the closure of accounts under the accusation of propaganda. Further possibilities to create invisible terrorist environments from a Jihadi perspective are Islamic websites that deal with Salafist-Islam, but actually laude global jihad.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Aba Hafs al-Sunni al-Sunni, „*Kaifiyat muwajahat hamlat ghalaq al-hisabat al-jihadiyya*,“ Sinam al-Islam forum, accessed March 14, 2011, <http://www.snam-s.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=5203>.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Hanna Pilarczyk, *Sie nenne es Leben* (München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 2011). Building on Mark Granovetter’s thesis of the „strength of weak ties“ (1973), Pilarczyk develops her own thesis of the increasingly “weakness of strong ties” in today’s virtual networks, which increasingly form shared interest groups.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid.

While invisible terrorist environments shall attract large numbers of jihad supporters, a further goal is to steer radicalization processes through these environments. “So what is better, [...] raising the number of jihad supporters and lovers, or reducing them? Jihad supporters on Facebook are growing and the wicked website makes their lives hard. They will embrace jihad forums which are suffering from a lack of members, then go to closed chat rooms and finally some of them will join jihad fronts, such as Abu Dujana al-Khorasani and Abu al-'Ina' [two venerated suicide attackers who were first active in the Internet].”¹⁰⁹⁸

There seems to be a growing number of terrorists who are strongly influenced by cyber jihad. For example, Khalid al-Dawsari, a Saudi national who studied in the United States, planned to attack several high profile targets in the U.S. in 2010. He had no operational ties to a terrorist group, but was guided by ideas which he obtained online.¹⁰⁹⁹ The Fort Hood attacker Nidal Malik Hassan, an army psychiatrist who shot more than ten U.S.-soldiers in November 2009, was influenced by traumatic and traumatizing stories of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and the Jihadi Net in parallel. The action-guiding effects of online radicalization are clearly visible in “lone wolf”-attackers such as al-Dawsari, al-Abdali, Uka and Hassan. But one tends to overlook that also members of terrorist cells and groups are heavily influenced by virtual terrorist milieus and networks. They then pass on their ideas and influence others. All European Jihadis who planned or executed attacks in the last years watched Jihadi propaganda movies. This goes for the German suitcase bombers 2006 as well as the Sauerland-network that planned large-scale attacks in Germany and was arrested in 2007. German Jihadis who migrated to Pakistani training camps since early 2009 were strongly influenced by online Jihadi propaganda.¹¹⁰⁰ For, example, 25 years old Rami Makanesi from the “Hamburg travellers-group” had drug-problems and was violent as a teenager, but then found back to faith during Ramadan 2007. In this very sensitive situation, where a believer undergoes a kind of spiritual and physical cleansing, Makanesi watched jihad videos on the Internet. „Those propaganda videos, I would say, do not cast a spell over someone, but draw you right into it.“¹¹⁰¹ Makanesi's Net-radicalization started with jihad lectures on Paltalk, where other participants directed him to jihad videos on Youtube. Walid Othmani, a French national was member of a European jihad group that travelled to Pakistan in 2008. After his arrest he told

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁹ „Saudi Arabian College Student Arrested by FBI for Attempted Use of a Weapon of Mass Destruction; Allegedly Planning to Attack Hardened and Soft Targets”, Arlington Police Department Homeland Security / Special Events Unit – Situational Advisory February 24, 2011, Bulletin No.1102-069-H.

¹¹⁰⁰ Holtmann 2010b.

¹¹⁰¹ According to an interrogation protocol by the German police that was obtained by the German broadcast network Südwestrundfunk (SWR). See “ReportMainz”, November 22, 2010, „Wie deutsche Islamisten in den heiligen Krieg ziehen“, accessed November 25, 2010, <http://www.swr.de/report/-/id=233454/did=7198346/pv=video/nid=233454/1n4t4xa/index.html>.

French interrogators: “I don’t think I would have left to fight jihad without reviewing these videos [jihad propaganda videos on the French language pro al-Qaeda Website Minbar SOS].”¹¹⁰² Until shortly before the gruesome murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, the perpetrator Muhammad Bouyeri was posting hundreds of extremist contributions on the forum marokko.nl.¹¹⁰³ Also the German Pakistani Aleem Nasir, who provided logistical help and recruited for al-Qaeda, was deeply entrenched in the terrorist thought milieu on the Internet.

As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of virtual terrorist milieus is best illustrated by the suicide attacker Taimour al-Abdaly, an Iraqi national who blew himself up in Sweden’s capital Stockholm in December 2010. He was a former DJ, seemed well integrated in Great Britain, and was married to an attractive and intelligent woman with three children. Online-jihad researcher Aaron Weisburd pieced together cross-connections of al-Abdaly’s Facebook account. In cyberspace al-Abdaly was not a loner, but a member of a virtual terrorist network whose thought-milieu he tapped for inspiration. As of yet, it remains unclear how far Taimour al-Abdaly was involved into a physical network. His wife Mona seems still of interest to British and Swedish authorities. A man was arrested in Scotland for allegedly being in contact with al-Abdaly. Al-Abdaly probably also received explosives training in the Mosul area of Iraq. Yet, his virtual Jihadi presence stands out as a major feature of the case.

The U.S. terrorism researcher Aaron Weisburd traced al-Abdaly’s footprints in virtual space on the social network Facebook. Al-Abdaly and Inspire’s editor in chief Samir Khan (killed 2011) were only separated by three degrees on Facebook. This means that a Facebook “friend” of al-Abdaly had virtually befriended several network members, who were direct “friends” of Samir Khan. Social network theory suggests that social influence works in distances less than/or equal to three tiers or mediators. Indirect links can have a significant influence on people. Actors in social networks seem to be influenced in their behavior, attitudes, and performance by other actors to whom they are tied. Intermediaries, mediators and middlemen pass on thoughts and culture within a network. Taimour al-Abdaly’s case may illustrate that this rule also has implications in cyberspace.¹¹⁰⁴ Moreover, al-Abdaly and Arid

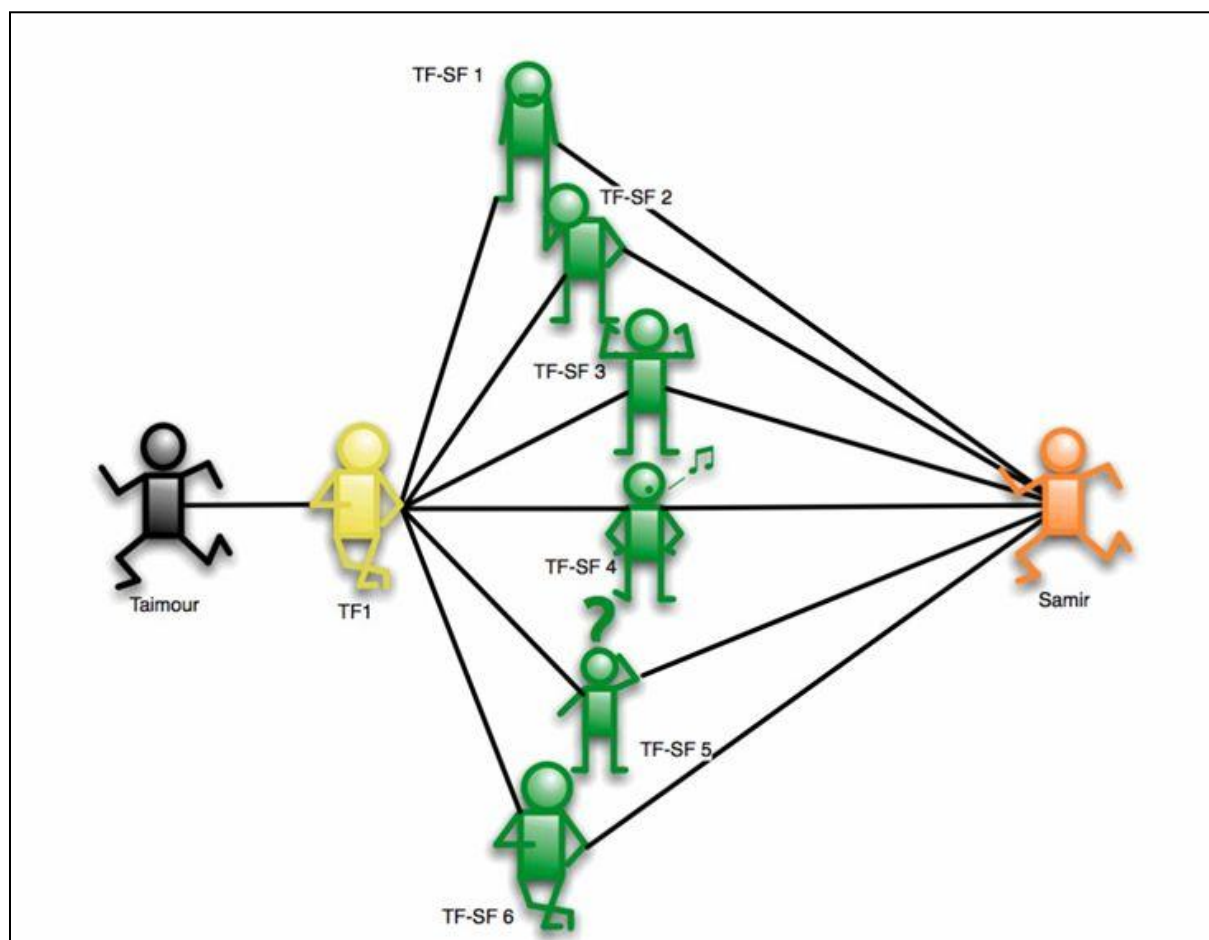
¹¹⁰² Paul Cruickshank, “Al-Qaeda’s recruitment challenges,” Jane’s Strategic Advisory Services, November 2013, 13.

¹¹⁰³ Albert Benschop, “Chronicle of a Political Murder Foretold - Jihad in the Netherlands”, accessed December 16, 2010, http://www.sociosite.org/jihad_nl_en.php#ontremming. Benschop is an expert on the influence of virtual networks on terrorists and teaches at the University of Amsterdam.

¹¹⁰⁴ Jeroen Bruggeman, “network Diversity and Economic Development: a Comment”, Cornell University Library, online article, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://arxiv.org/abs/1011.0208v2>. “We should therefore constrain be-tweenness to paths shorter than or equal to three ties in a row, and call it 3-betweenness for short. It thereby fits squarely into Fowler and Christakis’ “three degrees rule,” a stylized fact that various sorts of social influence do not reach further than path lengths of three.” However, indirect links can have a significant

Uka from Kosovo, who killed two U.S. soldiers at Frankfurt airport in March 2011, shared a common Facebook friend.¹¹⁰⁵ In both cases, it is clear that their radicalization was also connected to physical-life factors such as radical preachers, crime and violence experienced in the personal environment. But virtual aspects stick out increasingly.

Illustration: Network diagramm of Taimour al-Abdaly's Facebook account



Source: Aaron Weisburd¹¹⁰⁶

The graph above by Aaron Weisburd illustrates the cyber jihad network in which Taimour al-Abdaly was involved. Al-Abdaly and Samir Khan, a high-key al-Qaeda media operator, were separated by only three degrees on Facebook. Up to a separation of three degrees the level of

influence on people. Actors in social networks seem to be influenced in their behavior, attitudes, and performance by other actors to whom they are tied. They “choose relation partners on the basis of their behavior and other characteristics.” See Tom A.B. Snijders, “Statistical Methods for Social network Dynamics“, University of Oxford/University of Groningen, April 2010, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://www.stats.ox.ac.uk/~snijders/siena/>.

¹¹⁰⁵ Aaron Weisburd, “Friends in common: Salahudin Ibn Ja'far and Abu Reyyan/Arid Uka,” accessed March 14, 2011, <http://internet-haganah.com/harchives/007204.html#007204>.

¹¹⁰⁶ “Taimour al-Abdaly AKA Taimour Abdul Wahab [redacted],” <http://internet-hagana.com>, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://internet-haganah.com/harchives/007103.html>.

influence of central actors on network members remains strong, says social science theory. According to social network theory, social influence works to distances less than or equal to three tiers or mediators.¹¹⁰⁷ Indirect links can have a significant influence on people. Actors in social networks seem to be influenced in their behavior, attitudes, and performance by other actors to whom they are tied. Intermediaries, mediators and middlemen pass on thoughts and culture within a network. Taimour al-Abdaly's case seems to illustrate that this also applies to cyberspace.¹¹⁰⁸ Al-Abdaly and Khan had no direct virtual contact, but shared a similar thought milieu and ideology like all individuals of the network. It is noteworthy that the Facebook user by the name of "SALAHUDIN IBN JA'FAR" (centre-right in grey) was also a Facebook-friend of Frankfurt attacker Arid Uka.¹¹⁰⁹

7.b Divine Guidance (*hidaya*) and Incitement (*tahrid*) – Ceremonial Veneration of Role Models at the Example of the "Individual Terrorism" Paradigm (*irhab fardi*)

Video messages are regularly published on the Internet by al-Qaeda central and affiliate organizations. Some of these videos offer explicit guidelines to specific Jihadi scenes; in this case individual activists are called upon to perpetrate attacks. Guidelines issued by al-Qaeda are not formal orders, but observation-based directives, which are orientated at developments on the ground and are supposed to lend an air of authority to the organization. Several strategic concepts appear in al-Qaeda's video messages. For example, the organization increasingly appeals (by the time of writing in February 2012) to militant oppositional groups in Arab countries to overthrow their regimes and join global jihad. This strategy has vividly developed since the start of the "Arab Spring" in Tunisia in December 2010, which has radically changed the political landscape of the Arab region. The development of civil war like scenarios in Libya, Syria and Mali in addition to the existing war theaters and conflicts in Afghanistan, north-western Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia and Nigeria draws a lot of Jihadi strategic

¹¹⁰⁷ Bruggeman 2010: "We should therefore constrain betweenness to paths shorter than or equal to three ties in a row, and call it 3-betweenness for short. It thereby fits squarely into Fowler and Christakis' 'three degrees rule,' a stylized fact that various sorts of social influence do not reach further than path lengths of three."

¹¹⁰⁸ Indirect links can have a significant influence on people. Actors in social networks seem to be influenced in their behavior, attitudes, and performance by other actors to whom they are tied. They "choose relation partners on the basis of their behavior and other characteristics." See Tom A.B. Snijders, "Statistical Methods for Social network Dynamics," University of Oxford/ University of Groningen 2010, accessed January 1, 2011, <http://www.stats.ox.ac.uk/~snijders/siena/>.

¹¹⁰⁹ For a further discussion of invisible terrorist environments in the Internet see Philipp Holtmann, "No threat at first sight: Invisible terrorist environments on Facebook and Youtube." Vienna: Jihadism Online Project 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, <http://www.univie.ac.at/jihadism/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Philipp-Holtmann-No-threat-at-first-sight-Invisible-terrorist-environments-on-Facebook-and-Youtube.pdf> /.

attention. It fits very well into the strategic overall pattern of global jihad, which since the 1990s has been advocating the fight against the “Neo-Crusading Zionist” invaders into Muslim countries and the overthrow of “heretic” Muslim regimes, i.e. all governments in place in the Muslim world at the moment. This broader strategic command lacks specific operative or tactical directives, which are left to the responsibility of local groups on the ground. Yet, it is a powerful message which is being propagated over and again through videos.

Yet, one must not allow oneself to be deceived that Jihadi videos only offer broader, i.e. “watered-down” directives. The video-format deeply influences the Jihadi online scene with specific strategic-operative models as well. In years past, the model of “individual terrorism” and “lone wolves,” i.e. single attacks being perpetrated by individuals, has gained an infamous popularity in the Jihadi web. The idea that the media-operated transformation of supporters into terrorists and the emergence of “loners” can be achieved via web-agitation is developed cooperatively by web-supporters and central organizations. The former achieve this through discussions on role-models, while the latter communicate this major strategic-operative pattern through videos which present real-world cases as role-models. A ceremonial identification with single attackers lies at the heart of these video messages.

It seems that supporters of jihad, i.e. the grassroots scene which most actively expresses itself via the Net, have started this idea by analyzing individual attacks, comparing their patterns, and posting web-messages that glorified these “role-models.” Central organizations then realized the popularity of the phenomenon and jumped the train.

Also this development speaks for a clearly decentralized communicative command and control structure of global jihad. “Professionals” (i.e. actual full-time terrorists) actually wait and accept the inspirational guidance of the supporter scene and look for new trends in the grassroots milieu. Guidance and leadership in the information age cannot be defined mono-hierarchical, but must be seen as a cluster of influences from bottom-up to top-down and vice versa. Regarding the chaotic structure of information nodes on the Internet, maybe even as a three-dimensional model, in which communicative guidance clusters emerge by input from all sides; and then may disappear again.

The lone-wolf individual terrorism paradigm (*irhab fardi*) has been first featured in the writings of al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and since then seems to be very resilient. Together with web-chats, e-magazines, poems, music and wall-banners, the video genre effectively markets the lone-wolf-paradigm. This is one of the most important communicative leadership concepts and therefore deserves to be treated in some more detail.

It must also be mentioned that the concept “individual terrorism,” i.e. “lone-wolf” does not only concern Muslim phenomena of sub-state violence perpetrated for ideological and political purposes. In the years to come, more and more individual extremists of different sorts are likely to act according to this paradigm, i.e. preparing and perpetrating devastating attacks alone. These will be used in turn by politicians to justify further limitations on citizens’ rights. More restrictions will also result into the emergence of more individual terrorists, since a restricted security atmosphere and heightened transparency of personal movements (street cameras, finger prints, genetic probes, surveillance of Internet use) will prevent the build-up of larger terrorist organizations. Therefore, it must be expected that a growing number of militants from the new Christian right, anti-central government movements, environmentalists, anarchists as well as Jihadis will act according to the individualized terrorism paradigm.

The lone-wolf paradigm grows out of central principles of virtual jihad. The emblematic use of the concept “a book guides and a sword assists” stands for a communicative and decentralized command and control pattern, which plays an important role in Jihadi attempts to create more “lone wolves” through virtual incitement. The “book” stands for communication and the “sword” represents action. One can find this concept, for example, in the logos of the website of the Jordanian Jihadi cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (www.tawhed.ws) and the Jihadi forum “Lovers of the Huris” (<http://www.i7ur.com/vb>). Only insiders can see, feel and understand the relevance of this theological doctrine being put to use to gather extremists around a central guiding idea. By partaking in virtual jihad and visiting its electronic platforms frequently, supporters self-train and are educated by co-members into this direction.

Illustration below: Communication-Action-leadership motto displayed in the logos of two Jihadi websites





The idea of terrorists who develop from virtual life on Jihadi forums and then enter real life (lone-wolf paradigm) is thus reflected in Jihadi discussions, symbols, videos, theology, and strategic-operative guidelines. A number of icon-figures who represent this paradigm have emerged in Jihadi web-culture. To name but a few, among them are Badr Mashal al-Harbi, a Kuwaiti national who posted more than 1000 times on Jihadi forums, before he perpetrated a suicide attack in Iraq. The Jordanian physicist Humam al-Balawi aka Abu Dujana al-Khorasani was a very prominent Jihadi forum member with administrative rights on the al-Hisba forum that was closed down in 2008. He worked as an informant for CIA in Afghanistan and killed almost ten intelligence officers, when he detonated himself during an information change at the forward operating base Khost in December 2009. Abu Umar al-Shami was probably a Syrian national. He was an active member on Jihadi fora and perpetrated a suicide attack in March 2011 in Iraq. Of course the development of a single attacker from the Net is not as linear as Jihadi propaganda suggests. For example, al-Harbi was active on the Internet and received weapons training in parallel when he travelled to a training camp in Afghanistan. He returned once more to Kuwait to propagate for jihad. Then al-Harbi travelled to Iraq and returned again to Kuwait, before he went on his final trip to Iraq in 2008.¹¹¹⁰

¹¹¹⁰ „_Badr Mashal al-Harbi_ra_ _AVI,“ [www.mediafire.com](http://www.mediafire.com/?jeqa216ayjme2ne), accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.mediafire.com/?jeqa216ayjme2ne>.

Icons of Transition Websites-Battlefield



- Badr Mashal al-Harbi (Kuwaiti) – more than 1000 posts on jihadi forums, 2008 suicide attack in Iraq



- Humam al-Balawi aka Abu Dujana al-Khorasani (Jordanian) – prominent forum member, 2009 suicide attack in Afghanistan killing CIA personnel



- Abu Umar al-Shami (Syrian) – active on jihad-forums, 2011 suicide attack in Iraq

A second conceptual branch of the lone-wolf paradigm says that propaganda cells on the Internet should inspire the formation of small-terrorist cells. This idea puts a strong emphasis on the effectiveness and role of propaganda within global jihad. The concept of self-responsible individuals and attackers has been developed since the early 1990s. At that time, the emergence of a Jihadi web-culture that dictates developments in its own right was not yet foreseeable; neither could strategists predict that new battle grounds in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Mali and Somalia would emerge.

This requires a short excursion through the nature of leadership and traditional organizational structures of Jihadi groups. The 1970s and 1980s had not yet witnessed the explosive revolution of information which took place with the start of the Internet as a mass user medium since the mid-1990s. Therefore, hand-written orders on slips of paper, mouth to mouth commands and personal meetings defined decision making in hierarchical Jihadi organizations in the Arab world. In the Sunni Jihadi scene, cases in point were the organizations *Tanzim al-Jihad* and *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* in Egypt, *al-Tali'a al-Muqatila* in Syria, *Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin* in occupied Palestine, and *Jama'at al-Harakiyya in Libya*. Furthermore, during the Afghanistan jihad in the 1980s and the Islamist conflicts in Algeria, Bosnia and Chechnya in the 1990s, Jihadi groups established contacts to larger

international Islamist networks, therefore also increasingly using long-range communication tools such as telephone, fax and early computers. Moreover, in traditional hierarchic organization structures and clandestine cells, members gathered around an emir, who was oftentimes subordinate to a superior emir. Counsel-boards (*shura*) of the umbrella organization were responsible for the planning of attacks, military matters, financing, information-gathering and public relations of an organization.

The 1990s witnessed a reform trend in the global Jihadi movement and the development of new command and control strategies. Communicational strategies such as Internet propaganda and extremist discussion culture to enhance online group-identity became important elements in the direct and indirect guidance of followers. Direct guidance would take place by communication between individuals. Indirect guidance has become manifested in the build-up of pervasive propagandistic structures in the Internet culture.

One of the most influential proponents of this trend, the Jihadi strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, started revising classical command structures on the basis of a matriculate analysis of their strengths and weaknesses. He advocates a system of independent cells, which are totally isolated from each other. They merge under a common ideology instead of an umbrella-organization. It cannot be repeated often enough, but agitation-concepts (*tahrid*) are the basis of al-Suri's communicative leadership model. Absolute instruction and direct orders are replaced with the more effective and emotive idea of global jihad via propaganda, which is supposed to radicalize and carry supporters away. It is a model of covered leadership through propagandistic processes, which strongly rely on the establishment of role-models, who motivate followers.

From the early 1990s until the publication of his magnum opus, the "Global Islamic Resistance Call," al-Suri made "incitement" the key-motto of his concept of individual terrorism. Within his system of global terrorism, al-Suri envisions "Special Propaganda Units" which have the task to propagate so effectively that individuals independently join and form disconnected small terrorist cells.¹¹¹¹ Thus, the creation of virtual authority structures, among them the conceptual transition from virtual activist to actual terrorist, owes to al-Suri's spadework. He was a member of the Syrian Fighting Vanguard (*al-Tali'a al-Muqatila*) and after the failed Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in Hama in Syria in 1982, al-Suri joined the international jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In the 1990s, al-Suri ran his own training camp *Mu'askar al-Ghuraba'* (Strangers' Camp) under the Taliban. Al-Suri has gained strategic and tactical experience since the 1980s, among them close combat training,

¹¹¹¹ Abu Musab al-Suri, *Da'wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya* (Internet: 2004), 1559-1560.

special operations tactics, and tests with chemical agents. Following his marriage to a Spanish woman in the 1980s, al-Suri has held a Spanish citizenship. This way he could easily move and agitate between Europe and the Middle East. He was arrested in Quetta in Pakistan in 2005. The U.S. military extradited him to Syria, where he was incarcerated. Al-Suri was released from a Syrian jail in February 2012.¹¹¹² If al-Suri succeeds to build himself a new base in Syria, his role as a new Jihadi leader may be bolstered by the fact that many of al-Qaeda's old guard such as bin Laden, Mustapha Abu al-Yazid, Atiyatallah al-Libi, Abu Yahya al-Libi and Anwar al-Awlaqi have either been captured or killed.

The concept of guidance through incitement borrows from the Quran. For al-Suri, two verses explicate the role of incitement in battle in its entirety. *"Then fight in Allah's cause - Thou art held responsible only for thyself - and rouse the believers (wa harrid al-mu'minin). It may be that Allah will restrain the fury of the Unbelievers; for Allah is the strongest in might and in punishment."* Moreover, *"O Messenger, rouse the Believers to the fight (ya ayyuha al-nabiy harrid al-mu'minin). If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding."*¹¹¹³ The incitement-concept has been actively developed by Jihadis since the 1980s. Ample proof can be found in the texts of Abdallah Azzam, organizer and chief-ideologue of the Afghan-Arab mujahidin movement. Nowadays, its clearest manifestations are the jihaid e-magazine "Inspire" by *al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula*, whose name is borrowed from the Koran verse above that contains the Arabic word for "incitement" (*tahrid*).

The systematic glorification of individual attackers started in Jihadi web-culture in late 2009. A crucial role model was delivered to grassroots Jihadi propagandists by the Fort-Hood attacker Major Nidal Malik Hassan in November 2009. The army-physicist killed more than 10 service men with a gun out of protest for U.S. military actions in the Muslim world. Shortly afterwards, a post on the *Islamic Awakening* forum asked "Who do you think could be the next Major Nidal Hasan?"¹¹¹⁴ In the following months, similar attacks by individuals raised awareness towards lone-wolf style attackers among Jihadi sympathizers. Among them were the attempted Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad, the CIA bomber Humam al-

¹¹¹² Al-Suri was arrested by U.S. forces in Quetta in Pakistan in 2005 and allegedly handed over to Syrian authorities afterwards. He is said to have remained in a Syrian prison camp until early 2012, when he was released. Muhammad al-'Amr, "Abu Musab la zala mustaiqathan," accessed November 12, 2012, <http://www.al-jazirahonline.com/2012/20121015/wr23085.htm>.

¹¹¹³ Quran Surat al-Nisa' 4:84 and Surat al-Anfal 8:65, www.islam101.com, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/4.htm>; <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/8.htm>.

¹¹¹⁴ "Who do you think could be the next Major Nidal Hasan?", <http://forums.islamicawakening.com>, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f18/who-do-you-think-could-next-major-30286/>.

Balawi, the attempted Detroit bomber Omar Farouq, the U.K. based Iraqi Taimour al-Abdaly and Roshahana Choury and others. Earlier single attacks such as the gruesome killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by Mohammed Bouyeri in 2004 also returned into the limelight of Jihadi discussions. In July 2010, a Jihadi forum presented a list of 19 (not only Muslim) single attackers who fit the “lone-wolf” paradigm.¹¹¹⁵

The idea of individual terrorism (*irhabi fardi* - according to al-Suri’s strategy¹¹¹⁶) lately has started taking up much space in Jihadi video propaganda as well. In February 2011, a video-production that treats the individual terrorism paradigm was produced and released by the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). The producer GIMF probably is a decentralized international group of media-jihad supporters. The video is titled “My Precious Nation” (*Ummati al-ghaliya*). It belongs to the genre “viewable, i.e. illustrated theological song” (*nasheed mar'i*), i.e. a Jihadi music video, in which the video format serves as background-carrier for the audio format. Text and singing was done by “al-Sarmari,” whose battle-name could relate to a region in Bangladesh, and the production was edited by “Sayad al-Usud.” Both of them are Jihadi anonymouses who belong to GIMF. Al-Sarmari also features prominently as singer in the GIMF-video “We will help the Islamic State to victory.” Meant is the *Islamic State of Iraq*, a fusion of Jihadi groups under the command of al-Qaeda in Iraq, which was established in 2006.

The video “My precious nation” contains major propagandist, as well as strategic and operative statements. The goal of the video is to market the idea of single attackers within the strategy of global terrorism. The title “My precious nation” relates to role models. The claim is that these individuals not only represent Jihadi subculture, but Muslim culture in general. Scenes with and parts of speeches by major al-Qaeda leaders serve to connect the individual attackers to the overarching organization.

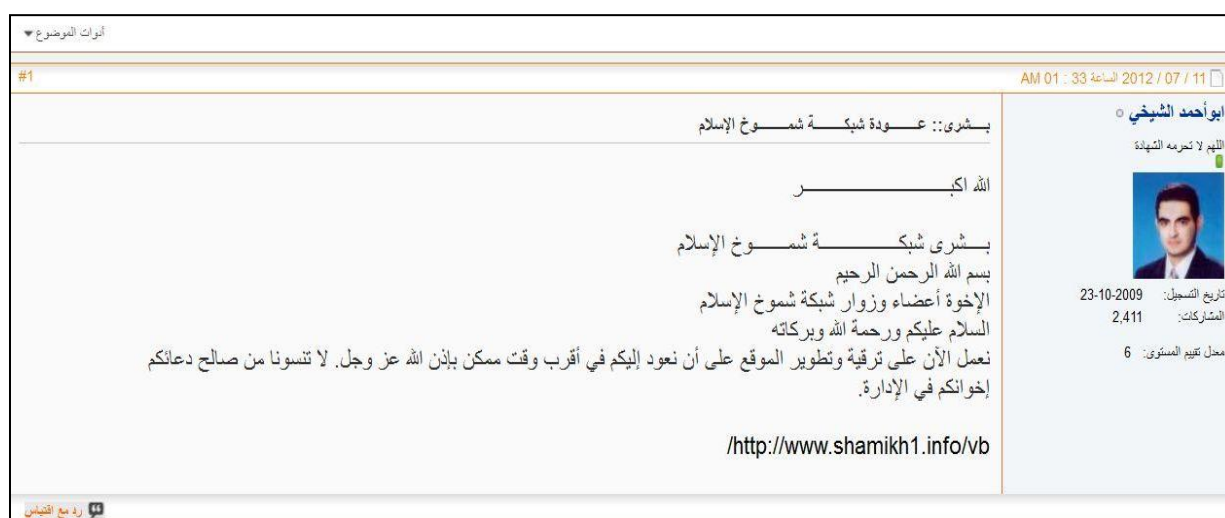
The first screenshots from the sequence below present five single attackers who are featured in the video. These are Nidal Malik Hassan, who shot thirteen U.S. servicemen at Ford Hood base in November 2009, Omar Farouq, who tried to detonate a U.S. passenger airplane (Northwest Airlines Flight 253) en route from Amsterdam over Detroit in December 2009, and Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, the Jordanian physician and double-agent, who killed seven CIA- officers and his Jordanian handler at the forward operating base in Khost in Afghanistan during an information exchange in December 2009. A blank avatar, cut out from the features

¹¹¹⁵ „The Lone Wolf ... *al-dhi'b al-fardi* ... *al-khatar al-kabir 'ala Amerika ...silsila ra'i'a!*“ (The Lone Wolf...The big danger for the U.S....a wonderful collection), <http://www.mojahden.com/vb>, accessed October 19, 2010, <http://www.majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=9694>.

¹¹¹⁶ See the chapter “Jihadi Media Strategy” of this dissertation.

of al-Khorasani then appears with a question mark in its middle, which symbolizes the question “Who will be the next role-model?” Afterwards, the picture of another Jihadi character, Farid Benyettou, is blended in. Benyettou recruited fighters for the jihad in Iraq from a Parisian suburb between 2003 and 2005. He was arrested and trialed, but did not commit an attack, neither did he die in battle. His presence falls somehow out of line. But maybe, the supposed message is that also a propagandist is worth as much as a fighter, since he co-steers global jihad.

Illustration below: “Fan” who uses the picture of suicide-attacker al-Khorasani as his avatar on a jihad forum (source: Ansar al-Mujahidin Network)



The video then turns to other icon figures of global jihad. Leaders of al-Qaeda and its regional affiliate organizations appear in voice and picture. From a propagandistic view, the link between individual attackers and leadership figures of al-Qaeda seems to create coherence and hierarchy within the individual terrorism paradigm. The video suggests that the individual attacker subordinates himself under the leaders of al-Qaeda and Co. From a different angle, the charismatic leader himself is an individual, ergo every determined individual can become a leader. Featured are al-Qaeda leaders from all major regional fronts, such as the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (killed 2006), and Yusuf al-'Uyairi, the former leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (killed 2003). Both are absolute super-stars of global jihad. The former represents the beginning of Jihadi struggle against the U.S. occupation of Iraq, which resulted into the formation of the among Jihadis famous, albeit virtual entity *Islamic State of Iraq*, which is an umbrella organization of Iraqi Jihadi groups subordinate to al-Qaeda. The latter stands paradigmatically for the honored role of a *Sheikh-Mujahid*, a struggling cleric, since al-'Uyairi was both active as a combatant and as a major media

operator for al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, the first franchise of al-Qaeda central, putting major landmarks in the cyberscape of global jihad. Al-'Uyeiri operated together with Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin (killed 2004) and Abu Jandal al-Azdi (arrested 2004) the first website of al-Qaeda, *al-Neda*, and published the first Jihadi e-magazines *Mu'askar al-Battar* and *Sawt al-Jihad* during the early 2000s. Excerpts of speeches can be heard by Musab abd al-Wudud, leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Ayman al-Zawahiri, second in command of al-Qaeda central, and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, who was one of the leaders of the *Islamic State of Iraq* (killed 2010). Pictures appear of Bin Laden (killed May 2011) and Ibn al-Khattab (killed 2002), a legendary Saudi Arabian Jihadi who fought in the Chechnyan Islamist struggle. The blind Egyptian Sheikh Umar abd al-Rahman also appears in the video. Al-Rahman is said to have provided the Egyptian *Tanzim al-Jihad* group with spiritual guidance and an Islamic juridical opinion (*fatwa*) that legitimated the killing of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat in 1981. Al-Rahman then became an influential propagandist in the Afghan Jihad (1979-1989), before CIA allegedly helped him to attain a U.S. visa. He was arrested and trialed for his involvement in the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and has since then been serving time in the U.S. high-security prison ADX Florence.

The GIMF production thus takes the viewer on a complete journey through the landscapes of global jihad, from the sandy grounds of Somalia to the snowy mountains of Chechnya and barren highlands of Afghanistan. During his journey, the viewer not only meets all celebrities of global jihad, but is also confronted with central symbolisms and dichotomies. The positive icons of jihad are attackers, prisoners, leaders, beautiful Muslim landscapes, the full moon (*badr*), horse riders with black flags (*al-rawa*). Negative signs stand for the dichotomic divide between good and bad, illustrated by prison-bars, jails, the White House, and the Israeli flag. *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam* are clearly defined within the semiotics of this video. The *nashid* (theological song) "Ummati" (My Nation) sung by al-Sarmari vividly underscores the encapsulation of individual attackers into the "precious Islamic nation." Semiotics of charismatic leadership are expressed by the central leaders who appear in the video, but signs of sacrifice, anguish and shame are expressed by a news clip of a dead child that stands symbolically for Muslim civilian victims. These victims are never portrayed as the results of Jihadi attacks, but always as a result of Western aggression and the compliance of "infidel" Muslim regimes.

Illustration: Sequence of screenshots from the GIMF video “Ummati” (My Nation)





It seems that the *Ummati*-video by the media-group GIMF inspired al-Qaeda. The organization caught up with a very similar, yet more elaborate video by its own media-company *al-Sahab* in June 2011. *Al-Sahab's* video, which is being marketed vividly in the Jihadi web, bears the title "*Thou art held responsible only for thyself.*" The title derives from the Quran-verse al-Nisa' 4:84, which for Jihadis explicates both the incitement (*tahrid*) concept and individualized terrorism paradigm (*irhab fardi*) of global jihad.¹¹¹⁷

The video makes a great leap forward in terms of production and marketing of individual terrorism. This concerns the use of elaborated computer generated images, the skillful assemblance of interviews with Jihadi leaders, and the presentation of a historic line of role models who shall demonstrate that individual action is a custom in Islamic warfare. The title of the video can be seen as adopted from, or at least strongly referring to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's jihad encyclopedia *Global Islamic Resistance Call*. The divine injunction "*Thou art held responsible only for thyself - and rouse the believers!*" is the epitome of individualized action in the eyes of al-Suri. The reader finds it in the circular logo of his book, in which it is the main motto. Al-Qaeda has been trying to market the individual jihad paradigm in earlier

¹¹¹⁷ *Al-Sahab*, "La tukallaf illa nafsak," accessed January 14, 2013, http://archive.org/details/osod_09a.

videos. In March 2009, its U.S.-American spokesman Adam Gadahn (aka Azzam al-Amriki) called upon Muslims who live in the West to carry out attacks on their own.

Illustration below: Wall-banner for al-Sahab's video *"Thou art held responsible only for thyself"*



The video *"Thou art held responsible only for thyself"* promotes eight individual attackers as role models and features eight major ideologues who explain the validity of terrorist jihad. Further key topics are asymmetric warfare, single attacks, clandestine activity, information security and decentralized command.

A historic line is drawn from Sulayman al-Halabi, who killed the imperialistb French General Jean Baptiste Kléber in a knife attack in 1800 to today's Jihadis. Al-Halabi serves as historic role model for individual attacks on high-profile targets. Besides al-Halabi, three other high-profile-attacks are featured in the video. Sayed Nosair killed the Jewish extremist Meir Kahane in New York in 1980 (Kahane founded the Jewish terrorist organization *Jewish Defense League* in 1968). Muhammad Bouyeri shot and stabbed the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh to death in November 2004. Malik Mumtaz Qadri, who was a bodyguard of

Sulayman Taseer, the former governor of the Punjab province in Pakistan, shot his boss over the latter's opposition to the blasphemy law in January 2001. The law prohibits insult against all religions, but practically only applies to Islam.¹¹¹⁸

Moreover, Jane's Intelligence Review observed in an otherwise ill-judged analysis of the video that similar to "Qadri, who was serving as one of Taseer's bodyguards at the time of the shooting, another three of Al-Qaeda's role models were members of the security forces. Egyptian soldier Suleiman Khater opened fire on Israeli tourists in the Sinai Peninsula, killing seven, on 5 October 1985; Egyptian border guard Ayman Hasan shot dead five Israelis near Eilat in November 1990; and US Army psychologist Major Nidal Malik Hasan allegedly shot 13 fellow soldiers dead at Fort [sic] Hood, Texas on 5 November 2009."¹¹¹⁹

Also Ramzi Yousef is promoted at length in the video. Yousef is co-responsible for the first World Trade Center bombings in 1993 and allegedly planned to blow up US airliners over Southeast Asia. However, Yousef slightly falls out of the individual terrorist paradigm. Similar to Bouyeri, the murderer of van Gogh, he belonged to a larger Jihadi network. But unlike Bouyeri, Yousef did not perpetrate the attack alone. Yousef had at least three accomplices. Maybe he is featured in the video because of his iconic role in the plot. Media bends reality, and since 1993, Yousef has been portrayed as the sole responsible.

From a propandist point of view, the leaders and ideologues who feature in the video give a stamp of authenticity and legitimacy to the message that individual terrorism is the new core paradigm of al-Qaeda. Each leader, starting from Bin Laden (killed May 2011) via Atiyatallah al-Libi (killed August 2011) and Ayman al-Zawahiri discusses different theological and strategic aspects of the paradigm. The ideologues Anwar al-Awlaqi (killed September 2011), Abu Yahya al-Libi (killed June 2012), the godfather of global jihad, Abdallah Azzam (killed November 1989), the street-preacher Abu Hamza from Great Britain and the US spokesman of al-Qaeda, Azzam al-Amriki foster these interpretations. Bin Laden gives an overarching theological umbrella by quoting the Quranic injunction "*And did not Allah Check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief.*"¹¹²⁰

¹¹¹⁸ The law effectively means that a person can be sentenced to death for insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad. A Pakistani politician was assassinated for his opposition to the Law. In March 2011, the Catholic Christian Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs, was assassinated by the group *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*. The Christian Pakistani woman Asia Tibi was sentenced to death in November 2010 on a charge of blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad.

¹¹¹⁹ „Al-Qaeda opens home front,“ Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, June 21, 2011.

¹¹²⁰ *Surat al-Baqara* 2:251, www.islam101.com, accessed February 20, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/2.htm>.

Illustration below: Eight role models featured in the video “*Thou art held responsible only for thyself.*” From top-left to bottom-right: Sulayman al-Halabi (played scene), Sulayman Khater, Ayman Hasan, Sayed Nusair, Ramzi Youssef, Muhammad Bouyeri, Malik Mumtaz Qadri, Nidal Malik Hassan.





According to the theological umbrella doctrine of the video, Muslims must fight unbelievers lest the world sink into infidel corruption, interprets Bin Laden. The street preacher Abu Hamza explicates that “Allah mentions *qital fi sabil Allah* in the Quran 79 times,” which is “physical fighting.” The video’s background speaker reads from the Ibn’ Atiya al-Undlusi’s (d. 546 AH) classical Quran exegesis *al-Muharrir al-Wajiz*, according to which the verse “*Then fight in Allah’s cause - Thou art held responsible only for thyself - and rouse the believers*”¹¹²¹ poses a binding command upon every believer. Every believer must fight by himself. Al-Undlusi probably orientates himself at bold inroads of single Muslim fighters into the enemy’s rows (*iqtihamat; inghimasat*), such as during the first Muslim siege of Constantinople (674-678 AD), which have been lengthily discussed in Muslim tradition. Afterwards, Abu Yahya al-Libi (1963-1912), the former chief theologue of al-Qaeda, speaks about individual and small cell attacks from a shariatic perspective and compares them to bold inroads during the founding period of Islam in the seventh century. Accordingly, Muhammad responded to a Meccan attack against the Muslim stronghold in Medina by sending out a single small troop (*sariya*), the members of which became heroes through their deed. Al-Libi analogizes this to the Western aggression against the Muslim world. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, presently commander in charge of al-Qaeda central, tells the story of the “lions of Islam,” who like Sulayman al-Halabi were students of the Azhar University in Cairo and “struggled for Islam with words and deeds”: ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam (1882-1935), who died as a leader of the Palestinian revolt in the 1930s, Muhammad Farghali (1907-1954), a leading Egyptian Muslim Brother who was responsible for the Ismailia and Suez Channel region and executed under President Nasir in 1954, the Egyptian *hadith*-scholar Ahmad Shakir (1892-1958), the Muslim Brother and Islamic scholar Muhammad al-Awdn (1894-?), as well as Abdullah

¹¹²¹ Quran, Surat al-Nisa’ 4:84, www.islam101.com, accessed February 20, 2012, <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/4.htm>.

Azzam (1941-1989). The list of role models, which are favored by al-Zawahiri not only includes hardened Jihadis, but also key characters of the resistance in Palestine and the Islamic opposition in Egypt in the mid-20th century. This choice owes to al-Zawahiri's background in the Egyptian Islamist scene, which strongly identifies with the Palestinian struggle. Furthermore, these persons cited are popular role-models of Muslim struggle against Western colonialism as well as against Muslim internal elitism - not Jihadi fanatics - with whom people in the Muslim street can identify. Following al-Zawahiri's entrance, al-Qaeda's top ideologue Attiyatullah al-Libi (all. killed August 2011) treats the important theological doctrine and deterrence tactic used on medieval battlefields "*inghimas*." The term refers to the single Muslim attacker throwing himself into the rows of the enemy. Al-Libi analogizes the classical example to contemporary single attackers and lone wolves. A 1980s speech of Abdallah Azzam is blended in, in which he predicts the spread of jihad from Afghanistan to the global level, the main enemy being the U.S. The U.S. citizen and al-Qaeda propagandist Azzam al-Amriki explains in plain words that "you can go down to a gunshow at the local convention center and come away with a fully automatic assault rifle...so what are you waiting for?" All these statements are puzzle-pieces which, when put together, form the picture of a comprehensive terrorist guidance concept. It evolves out of the veneration of role-model like single attackers, the correspondent strategic interpretations of divine injunctions and theological concepts.

Correspondent to its message, the video uses Jihadi aesthetics which we have analyzed in chapter two to strengthen semiotic effects. The animated Quran verse "*Then fight in Allah's cause - Thou art held responsible only for thyself - and rouse the believers*" passes by an animated gold-colored 7,62 mm Kalashnikov cartridge. The cartridge bears the Islamic credo (*shahada*): "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger." The second aesthetic depiction that catches the eye is the animated graphic of a Quran placed on a reading-podium. The background is held in blue, displaying Arabesque floral patterns. Both graphics, the Quran and the scripture, are supposed to symbolize God's transcendental command to fight.

Illustration below: Ideologues and leaders featured in “*Thou art held responsible only for thyself.*” From top-left to bottom-right: Usama bin Ladh, Azzam al-Amriki, Anwal al-Awlaqi, Abdallah Azzam, Atiyatallah al-Libi, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Yahya al-Libi, Abu Hamza





Illustration below: Aesthetic-semiotic depiction of Quran Verse *Surat al-Nisa'* 4:84 in al-Qaeda video “*Thou art held responsible only for thyself*”



Conclusion

In the present study, we have shed light on the organization and leadership of digital networks in online jihad. Virtual leadership is a dynamic triad of ritualistic, pictorial-aesthetic and theological discourses. These discourses take place in what we have defined as a virtual strategic action environment, namely online jihad. The discourses turn around the ideology and theology of global jihad; the persistence of these interconnected communicative processes is guaranteed by a high rate of participation of online grassroots actors, as well as the media functions of established terrorist organizations, which are like central corporate and market leaders of global jihad. The media outlets of central organizations set agendas for global jihad and market global jihad in specific ways. Grassroots actors allow these market leaders to infiltrate their virtual strategic action environments, which find their quasi-institutionalized expressions in online Jihadi discussion forums and websites, and partly follow their commands. Furthermore, grassroots actors of online jihad react to and reenact real-world terrorist agendas and incidents in their online spheres in very specific ways. The ritualized discourses of online Jihadis create new ritualized discourses in the grassroots milieu and can thus be interpreted as virtual communicative leadership patterns that emerge in the grassroots milieu and become partly independent of the central agenda setters: They establish dominant, hegemonic, repressive, controlling and discourse leading surveillance mechanisms in cyberspace. Cyberspace is an area with limited, if not to say without statehood. At least the Jihadi discussion forums and virtual social networks are areas in which no traditional, physical statehood prevails. Virtual social networks are digital institutions of the information age. Jihadi actors try to create virtual statehood in their strategic action environments. The ritualistic reproduction of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in the Internet, which is but a propagandistic media halo, gives ample proof of this phenomenon. Similarly, where Jihadi physical structures and power-balances are under pressure or unclear, such as in the Middle Eastern, Caucasian and African battle fronts, the Internet movement helps out by creating virtual structures which appear just as real to radicalized followers.

Let us summarize key findings of the main chapters of this dissertation. Firstly, virtual leadership is a group-internal form of *communicative action*, as we have argued in the Theoretical Framework. This argument is bolstered by a look at the in-group mechanisms of Jihadi discussion forums and their effects from a non-normative perspective. The actors of online Jihad perceive themselves as free agents. It requires an outsider perspective to detect strategic and manipulative mechanisms among them. The key impulse to such a reading lies in

Jürgen Habermas' adaption of Meyer Fortes' observations on the effects of inter-marriages between tribes (*exogamy*). Shared social and mythological structures among tribes create situations of *communicative action*. If we lean on Habermas's structural-functionalist impulse, online Jihadis are neo-tribal members of a cultic community that shares social and mythological bonds. The perception of virtual kinship is structurally rooted in the online networks of jihad, which function as amplifiers of transcendental theological and ideological bonds. The Kinship and amity relations among online Jihadis can be explained with their transcendental inter-marriage concepts. Jihadis – it does not matter if online or offline - regard themselves as bridegrooms and “lovers of the huris,” i.e. the Islamic paradise maidens. Within their belief system, Jihadi communication is agreement based. However, from a critical-normative outsider perspective, an agreement based co-existence around violent values cannot be accepted as rational *communicative action*.

Secondly, in the theoretical framework we have pointed out the metal levels of discursive dominion and governance among Jihadis in cyberspace. Discursive-panoptical control mechanisms in Foucault's sense merge with the strategic action concept of Habermas. Supported by participant observation, the meta-theory translates into practical concepts of leadership, which are orientated at marketing and managerial leadership styles. Central terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, apply managerial guidance concepts to online jihad, which are picked up by grassroots actors, and then refined and adapted to the communications of online discussion groups. Central terrorist organizations also orientate their online communication at guidance patterns of the marketing industry, which address the desires, values and emotions of specific lifestyle-groups. Examples are the value and lifestyle based online-marketing of terrorism, as well as al-Qaeda's adaptation to participative Management by Objectives processes (MbO). Al-Qaeda's distribution of work tasks according to the paradigm “*Thou art held responsible only for thyself!*” and the marketing of the concept “individualized terrorism” attest to this. At the grassroots levels further communicative leadership mechanisms come to the fore among online discussants. Statuses, hierarchies and influence among actors emerge through different styles of speech, frequency of participation and their influence on discussions. These are discursive leadership patterns. Discursive rituals are clearly defined, such as specific laudations, intercessions and invocations. Furthermore, micro-decisions of online Jihad are partly governed by quasi-tribal consultation processes. Archaic tribal leadership patterns based on virtual kinship relations resurface in Jihadi online communities, which are bound together by common ideological bloodstreams.

In the main chapters of Part Three we have consecutively examined the three elements, ritualistic, pictorial-aesthetic and theological discourses, and dedicated one chapter to each. The chapter on the pictorial-aesthetic discourses of online jihad, i.e. the Symbols of Online Jihad, has been treated first, since the creation of propagandistic semiotic rooms sets the fundament for virtual leadership. This chapter has shown that neither the coordination of colors, nor the alignment of signs, or the combination of text and picture on Jihadi websites happen accidentally. The creation of semiotic rooms underlies certain considerations by their makers. For example, the vertical arrangement of authoritative Jihadi media banners goes against the viewing direction of the picture and the reading direction of text. This tension creates topographic and semiotic rule in the virtual sphere. Witsch argues that “the semiotic room in the Internet is deliberately put to use as a rhetoric Interface. Worlds are constructed by the deliberate arrangement of colors, the integration of mythic pictures and symbols as well as the axiomatic of picture and text: Worlds that lessen the difference between reality and fiction are created by combining fictional dimensions (myth) with reality [such as Jihadi reports from the battle fronts, footage of operations, and statements thereof].”¹¹²² In a similar way, Jihadi websites, especially forums, present doctrinaire agitation together with real conflicts in Muslim countries and thus reduce the space between fiction and reality. The last step of a successful propagandist process is its adaption by followers and sympathizers, people who have been caught in the web of signification spun around the ideology and then re-enact it. The construction of a community myth requires identification with the group-ideology (mobilization) and offers for participation (communication) and partaking (action). For example, online activists frequently design pictures in which they present themselves as active fighters on the media front. They have gone through neo-traditional and digital rites of transition, with the difference of time, space and information technique. This ceremonial self-identification is strongly focused on aesthetics and symbols of online jihad, which have been drained from the Islamic mother-culture in order to fit into a new cult-culture whose dichotomist interpretations of reality succeed everything else.

Let us turn toward the hierarchical, mutual and discursive models of virtual leadership which are discussed in the second sub-chapter of Part Three, “The Rituals of Online Jihad.” This categorization has proven to be fruitful, since three different models of virtual leadership are clearly discernible in the ritualistic online interactions of Jihadis. The hierarchical model of virtual leadership is demonstrated at the adaption of oaths of allegiance and investiture (*bay'a*) to the Internet. Such Oaths play an important role for the organization of Jihadi groups, and

¹¹²² Witsch, Die Ästhetik fundamentalistischer Agitation im Internet, 107.

are used to recreate and strengthen a direct covenant (*'ahd*) with God. The ritual can take place offline as well as online. Furthermore, we can observe that there is a threefold scaling of oaths of allegiance and investiture. First of all, oaths play a tremendous role for the investiture of leaders of organizations in real life. On the next level, actors or organizations give pledges of allegiance via the Internet, in virtual life, because geographical distances or security reasons prohibit a direct interaction. For example, several Jihadi organizations have pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda central organization via the Internet, expressing their wish to become subordinate affiliates. Examples are the pledge of the Algerian *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Qital* (Salafi Group for Propaganda and Fighting, GSPC) in September 2006, which re-named itself in January 2007 into “al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb,” or the pledge of allegiance of the Somali *Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement* to al-Qaeda in February 2012. In both cases, the pledge was given via the Internet to bridge the geographic distance between the respective home regions of the two groups (Algeria and Somalia) and al-Qaeda. The ritual was not exercised physically, but via the Internet. Moreover, the Shabaab Movement frequently takes oaths of allegiance from local Somali tribes. Propaganda-wise, the Somalian Jihadis want to awaken the impression that a direct line of command reaches from al-Qaeda central in Waziristan and Afghanistan via the Shabab-Movement to local Somali tribes. On the last level, the oath of allegiance is solely applied on the Internet among virtual actors – the virtual oath of allegiance. Virtual actors use oaths in their attempts to establish virtual statehood, for example, in the form of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). This umbrella concept for insurgent and terrorist organizations in Iraq which are allied with al-Qaeda central has found its very own expression in the Internet. In online jihad, ISI is a “real” virtual state with its own ministries and spokesmen. ISI does not exist in real life, but mainly in the propagandistic imagination of its followers. Sub-sections of Jihadi discussion forums are reserved for ISI messages and serve as virtual institutions. A major point is the mixing of physical reality (terrorist attacks) with virtual reality (propagandist discussions) under the label of ISI. This category of hierarchical command on the basis of virtual statehood plays an important role for the organization of leadership in online Jihadi networks, and strengthens strong ties and *communitas* among Jihadi co-actors. A second feature of oaths of allegiance is tremendously important in virtual leadership. In physical and in virtual reality, oaths of allegiance are used to confirm and strengthen a direct covenant (*'ahd*) of the single believer with God. This facilitates the creation of divine virtual leadership patterns in online jihad, which supposedly create a straight chain of command from God to the single believer. From a Jihadi perspective, this contract requires obedience to the divine command to fight militant

global jihad. This contract is then not closed only in particular ceremonies, but also through discursive expressions and religious formulae, such as “God is great.” Subconsciously, the Jihadi theological discourse with its manifold ceremonial formulae represents a binding oath of allegiance to a martial interpretation of Islam, and this understanding seeps into the minds of its participants. As we have shown by the example of the model “Mutual Virtual Leadership” (in mainstream social media also the “multiplier-model” and “swarming”) this understanding is further sown through participative guidance patterns and mutual motivation principles, which resemble managerial leadership styles, such as Management by Objectives (MbO). These mechanisms serve the organization, coordination and spreading of Jihadi networks. Jihadis train each other to generate own propaganda content (graphics, pictures, videos), to establish “media-jihad groups,” to cooperate in “digital workshops,” to gather behind agendas, and to spread these agendas in participative media campaigns. Some of the participants in these interactions take leading roles, when they establish media groups or call for media-invasions into other Internet forums. These activities serve as essential multipliers for central discursive patterns among online Jihadis.

In the virtual discursive world, as in other strategic action environments and propagandistic realities, it is not important if a leader is alive or dead. This has come clearly to the fore in our examination of post-mortem discursive leaders in online Jihadi milieus, in the chapter “Discursive Virtual Leadership.” Post-mortem discursive leaders were active members on Jihadi forums, but died in suicide attacks. Nevertheless, they continue to influence interactions within online Jihadi networks tremendously. Their writings and key mottos have iconic value among discussants of the networks, and not only dictate the development of new media strategies, but also shape speech patterns and codes of Jihadi discourses. From a virtual leadership viewpoint, post-mortem virtual leaders are understood by Jihadi discussants as unquestionable role models who should be emulated. One example is the suicide attacker Humam al-Balawi, who killed several high ranking CIA officers in December 2009. His motto from one of his articles “when will my words drink from my blood” instrumenalizes a popular guilt and shame theme which is widespread in Arab-Muslim, but especially popular in Jihadi culture. This theme is characterized by the feeling of not doing enough to end Western domination; not being able to ward off the humiliation of Muslim women and thus to forsake the honour and integrity of Muslim men; and a constant externalization of mistakes and shortcomings in the Muslim world. Jihadi forum members readily pick up on this and find a new command paradigm in this sentence, which orders every single one to cross from the virtual to the physical sphere; i.e. practice what you preach, or walk it like you talk it! In

parallel, discursive rituals develop around the veneration of al-Balawi. These rituals play an important role for the virtual reenactment of al-Balawi in online jihad through discussions and design of peer-pictures. Maybe, the virtual ritualistic reenactment functions as a release valve, which substitutes for the physical reenactment in many cases, since otherwise much more attacks would have taken place under the name of al-Balawi. Moreover, these rituals of reenactment of role models serve to foster the self-perception of online Jihadis as a large kinship group of brothers and sisters, who are connected through the same “spiritual blood.” The transition of identity formation from the practical physical to the more abstract virtual sphere, which is rudimentarily visible here, also allows a better understanding of purely Internet-based pledges of allegiance.

The chapter “Discursive Ritualism on Jihadi Forums” allows us to understand micro-processes of virtual leadership. The chapter returns to the discussion of Internet-based pledges of allegiance, however, this time with foreknowledge on the ritual from the previous chapters. As we have observed, pledges of allegiance are used to close direct covenants (*'ahd*) with God. Firstly, in Jihadi online discussions, this use is omnipresent and ever repeated. A variety of eulogies and laudations of God in Jihadi online discussions are essentially oral rituals of allegiance to an omnipresent “war-god.” The Jihadi discourse itself with its theological formulae is interspersed with pledges, which foster the coherence of virtual peer groups and their Jihadi ideology. The discourse and ideology are fed and feed physical “real” world events. The boundaries between communicative and physical actions become at times blurry. Secondly, there is an extremely noticeable and strong use of big colorful Arabic letters for discursive formulae. This painting of literal pictures through the arrangement of colors and Arabic calligraphy is *discursive martial dancing*. Discursive martial dancing is an essential communicative guidance mechanism among online Jihadis. It is a communicative process that is supposed to deter outsiders and strengthen the community. The in-group process is further strengthened by afterlife-marriage perceptions (to paradise maidens), which foster the virtual social order of Jihadi networks.

Chapter three of Part Three has discussed the theology of online jihad under the aspect of “Divine Virtual Leadership.” This approach has opened a new venue for the understanding of Jihadi theology. Theology is but one major part in a propagandist communicative guidance structure. The symbols of online jihad co-function with the rituals of online jihad; and both need a third complementary component. Michel Foucault called religiously based conscience-guidance *ars artium*, or *techne technon*, and it can be found in the theology of online jihad. Jihadis regard their own communities and networks as the only theologically sanctioned

organizational units among Muslims. But this chapter also demonstrates that Puritan separatist groups, be they Muslims, Jews or Christians, uphold similar, if not the same messianic belief interpretations and share major doctrinal similarities. In Max Weber's sense the Protestant ethic does not only influence the spirit of capitalism, but also of neo-colonialism and conflict. If we take this premise in regards to Muslim fundamentalist actors, we will of course find that they are much closer to the actual thing, the pressing ethics of their belief system, which they have not yet rationalized and streamlined to secular values. True piety means here still to follow "God's divine guidance on the right way" (*hidaya*). Since Jihadis perceive the injunctions of the Quran as the unadulterated commands of God, they persevere to install the holy text as an ultimate chain of command, which reaches from Allah down to every single believer (*hidayat al-Quran*). The epitome of this discursive struggle is the theological doctrine "A book that guides on the right path and a sword that assists." Originally formulated by the brilliant 13th century scholar Ibn Taymiyya, Jihadis have hijacked this doctrine to justify the notion of divine leadership. At the example of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia's online magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar*, we could examine the online use of the doctrine in detail. The organization applies the meta-doctrine to specific, allegedly "divine" commands (in the form of theological sub-doctrines), such as overarching commands to fight militant jihad as well as more specific injunctions to exercise jihad, which borrow from classical Islamic martial jurisprudence. The "*hidaya*-"principle (divine leadership) can be easily taken out of Muslim majority contexts and be embedded into Jihadi frameworks. With divine leadership scenarios, Jihadis aim to create emotions of fear, fright and obedience that are utilized in long-range control and command scenarios. Since divine leadership is a completely abstract and transcendental concept, it fits them especially well into the virtual leadership paradigm.

The future danger of online jihad lies in the growing exploitation of mainstream social service providers, as well as the use of mobile phone applications (See Nico Prucha's work on this issue). to spread the Jihadi message as far as possible. This has two reasons. Firstly, the closure of jihad discussion forums drives online Jihadis into larger social service platforms such as Facebook and toward the use of more popular media applications such as Bluetooth. Secondly, the experience of the Arab revolutions, in which the activists made an effective use of large online social networks, is being thoroughly analyzed by Jihadis. The Jihadi goal is to exploit these networks for their own purposes. Jihadis have started to recognize that their discussion forums are encapsulated spaces in which actors with strong ties come together, who share more similarities than differences, the same background and interests, with little new converts to win. This awareness also impacts on the structure of virtual jihad. Jihadis are

now going to look increasingly to exploit the strength of weak ties and address audiences who are not typically attracted to their own milieu.

How can virtual jihad be countered? Online jihad cannot be criticized rationally, since it is a largely ritualistic phenomenon. It needs counter-rituals to defuse the message of jihad. One can learn from the present social media campaigns of Arab protesters that they are extremely effective in steering social activities toward a certain goal. By this token, Muslims are also the best allies to denounce Jihadi terrorism. Yet, there is also a down-side to social-media campaigning against Jihadis, which can be seen in conflicts in the Muslim world, where both sides are brutalizing each other. One such example is the Syrian regime's "successful" netwar campaign against its opposition, which is led by the pro-regime website "SyriaTube."¹¹²³ The multimedia team of the site presses every button to counter Sunni-Jihadi narratives from inside Arab-Muslim culture. But this includes the gruesome mocking of casualties in the Syrian war, which is likely to incite sectarian warfare ever more.

It will be a major task for political activists and serious agenda setters - in the sobering absence of responsible and reasonable politicians - to lower the impact of online radicalization and devise new action concepts that acknowledge Islam and regional traditions as integral elements of Muslim political culture. At the same time, all actors involved in such a process should regard it as a key-task to create discursive bulwarks against further radicalization and jihadization. Regarding counter-strategies, one could simply try to shut down all jihad websites and to fish every piece of propaganda out of the Net. But regarding the state of the art and relative freedom of flow of information, this is a pretty hopeless endeavor. A communicative strategy may be more helpful. Media rituals around the peaceful aspects of Muslim and Western cultures should be supported. Each culture and society strives for a collective and successful representation of itself. Therefore, the stressing of possibilities of peaceful action, freedom, cooperation and human rights could translate into according communicative action. In Islam as well as in Western culture similarities could be stressed and media campaigns be supported that openly discuss religious fundamentalism and repression, as well as grievances, and finally show that extremists do not tackle any of these problems. This is a "soft strategy" which includes the communicational targeting of specific discourses and requires objective research that is being provided to the relevant actors. On the Muslim side, the best solution would lie in deradicalization processes which are unaffected by western influence. Such processes would be greatly enhanced if western and Muslim states stopped disastrous, inhuman military policies in the Muslim world; if the Western support for

¹¹²³ <http://www.syriantube.net/>, accessed May 21, 2013.

repressive Muslim regimes stopped; and if key actors of the international community ended their one-sided stance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Without such bones of contention, Jihadi ideology will be mostly ineffective, not meeting approval from larger Muslim audiences.

Since militant jihad and the “War on Terror” are not unchangeable realities, they can be deconstructed and reconstructed by Muslim and Western actors cooperatively. Jürgen Habermas’ utopian concept of consensus-based communicative action is not merely an abstract ideal, but a pragmatic possibility to change communication conditions; For example, Muslim actors could apply the anti-thesis of Islamic violent struggle (*qital*; *irhab*), namely peaceful reconciliation (*sulh*), to jihad. Muslims could also synthesize a normative communicative approach with a modern theory of jihad in the sense of “peaceful Islamic struggle.” Western actors could support this approach in their popular depictions of Muslim culture. This involves the development of concepts of social order, which stress possibilities of mutual agreements within Muslim cultures as well as between Muslim and non-Muslim cultures.

Jihadis wildly utilize concepts of Sufi and even Shiite spiritualism to bolster their martyrdom ideology, their obsessive claims to possess supernatural powers and their promises of divine rewards. Why should true communicative reformers not apply the same method and gather positive input and impulses from wherever possible? Islamic sects, which are regarded as heretics by “true” Muslims, such as the Alevites, have developed extraordinarily well working conflict resolution processes. For example, the conflict resolution ceremony “*cam*” is well known among the Alevites of Turkey, where the state has done its best to brutally repress minority groups. The Palestinians are known for their tradition of peace rites (*sulh*), which are anything but folklore and applied until today to resolve major feuds between clans. Why should such processes not be adaptable to digital culture, such as “virtual *cam*” processes, or virtual conflict resolution, to build virtual communicative action environments? The functioning of Jihadi ideology has been satisfactorily researched. Now it is about time to apply this knowledge for a better understanding how to support de-escalatory communicative processes, maybe parallel in physical and in virtual space.

The concept of virtual leadership could be extended to further studies. It could be researched if similar patterns of leadership exist among other sub- and main cultures on the Internet. The main difference between extremist and non-extremist Net-cultures is the former’s violent outlook on the world and their pre-dominant focus on ideological discourses.

Observers of the phenomenon inside the academies and counter-terrorism communities, but also responsible civil society actors should be able to agree that Jihadis are not the sole creators of terrorist communication environments. They are rather pawns on the chess-board of transnational informational, economic and military strategies which can be influenced to the better by resisting established narratives and power structures through smart, non-violent denial, and the establishment of alternative communicative action channels. The fatally unmindful state of mind of present key-decision makers and opinion leaders requires visionaries and idealists to work everywhere, not only among Muslims, to change these conditions and minimize existing conflicts.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Kurzfassung

Die vorliegende Dissertation untersucht die kommunikativen Führungsmechanismen terroristischer Gruppen im Internet, genauer gesagt die Kommunikationsabläufe, die zur kommunikativen Leitung innerhalb jihadistischer Online-Gemeinschaften führen. Der Autor verwendet dabei das Konzept der „virtuellen Führung“, oder „kommunikativen Führung im Cyberspace“. Dieses Konzept ist das Ergebnis mehrjähriger induktiv-qualitativer Forschung und teilnehmender Beobachtung auf einem guten Dutzend jihadistischer Diskussionsforen und Webseiten (mehrheitlich arabisch-sprachig).

Die Dissertation benutzt das Konzept der *Organisatorischen Netzwerk-Analyse* von John Arquilla und David Ronfeldt (2001), innerhalb derer dann Ansätze der *Sozial-Anthropologie* zur Analyse der kommunikativen Führung verwandt werden. Die auf der Basis sozial-anthropologischer und teilnehmender Beobachtung auf Jihad-Foren zu untersuchenden Hauptelemente virtuell-kommunikativer Führung sind Symbolik, Ritual- und Diskussionsprozesse sowie Theologie des Online-Jihad.

Die vorliegende Dissertation argumentiert das virtuelle Führung auf drei kommunikativen Hauptpfeilern beruht. Dies sind die Symbol- und Zeichenwelt jihadistischer Räume im Internet, d.h. die Zeichen die verwandt werden, um eine Bezugsbasis zum Jihad zu schaffen. Desweiteren, werden mit Hilfe kommunikativer Rituale und durch Diskussionen der Akteure Hierarchien und Status ausgehandelt und verwirklicht. Außerdem schafft die Theologie des Online-Jihad ein referentielles Glaubenssystem, das auf “göttlicher Autorität” fußt und somit Handlungsanleitungen propagiert, denen nicht widersprochen werden darf. Diese drei Punkte werden in der Dissertation in je einem Kapitel untersucht.

Erstens, für die Untersuchung der Jihad-Symbolik in virtuellen Räumen jihadistischer Netzwerke wird ein semiotisch-anthropologischer Ansatz verwandt, der sich theoretischer Konzepte von Charles Sanders Peirce (1902) und Milton Singer (1978) zur Untersuchung der Auswirkung von Zeichen auf das menschliche Gruppenverhalten bedient. Zweitens, die Untersuchung der Ritual- und Diskussionsprozesse in Online-Jihad Netzwerken bedient sich der Konzepte der *Rituellen Ordnung* von Albert Bergesen (1998) in Bezug auf Interaktionshierarchien sowie der Untersuchung zu *Interaktions-Ritualen* von Erving Goffman (1986) und dessen Ausführungen zu Höflichkeits-, Ehrerbietungs- und Benimm-Ritualen. Goffmans Ansatz wird fortgeführt von Gabriel Dorta in seiner Studie zur Chatkommunikation (2005), in welcher Dorta die Bildung von Macht, Status und informellen Hierarchien durch den Gebrauch unterschiedlicher sprachlicher Mittel (plump, aggressiv, besonders versiert, etc.) und die Verwendung von Vermeidungs- und

Zuvorkommenheitsritualen beschreibt. Die Dissertation wird anhand dieser drei Konzepte ebenfalls die Schaffung von Autorität und Hierarchie in der Kommunikation von Online-Jihadisten aufschlüsseln. Drittens, die Theologie-Analyse des Online Jihad orientiert sich an den theoretischen Konzepten von Gary Bunt und Peter Mandaville, denen zufolge durch das Internet eine Pluralisierung religiöser Autorität im Islam stattfindet. Hier geht es um die Schaffung neuer virtueller Räume, neuer Arten und neuer Formen des religiösen Autoritätsbezuges. Aufbauend auf diesem Rahmen wird die Dissertation die Verwendung jihadistischer Doktrinen in Online-Netzwerken untersuchen und beschreiben, wie und in welchem Zusammenhang sie als autoritativ gelten.

„Jihad“ und die damit verbundene Ideologie „Jihadismus“ bedeuten in dieser Arbeit kämpferische Bemühung (*jahada*), was den Terrorismus (*irhab*) und entsprechende Taktiken im bewaffnetem Kampf (*jihad bi-l-saif, qital*) mit einschließt. Dazu gehören aber auch spirituelle Läuterung (*jihad al-nafs*), finanzielle Unterstützung (*jihad bi-l-mal*) und Propaganda (*da'wah* (vgl. al-Salim 2003); *jihad bi-l-qalam* (vgl. al-Suri 2004)). Das Phänomen des globalen Jihad wird fälschlicherweise oftmals gleichgesetzt mit der Bezeichnung „al-Qaeda“ (AQ), was sich sowohl auf die zentrale Organisation, dezentralisierte Bewegung sowie die physischen und virtuellen Netzwerke bezieht, in denen sich Akteure des globalen Jihad zusammenschließen.

Abstract

This dissertation argues that online jihad is not merely used for propaganda and the dissemination of jihadi videos, texts, pictures and rhetoric; the discourses in online jihad networks serve communicative leadership purposes. The goal is to strengthen in-group cohesion, raise conformity, radicalize members and inspire to terrorist attacks. Moreover, this dissertation argues that specific processes of communicative leadership are clearly discernible in online jihad, which fulfill leadership and guidance functions.

John Arquilla and David Ronsfeldt (2001) argue that “the information revolution favors the rise of network forms of organization. The network appears to be the next major form of organization – long after tribes, hierarchies and markets – to come into its own to redefine societies, and in so doing, the nature of conflict and cooperation [...]” The information revolution with the Internet as a mass medium has fostered the emergence of virtual social networks. These networks serve as organizational tools for different kinds of subcultures. Every organizational pattern displays certain mechanisms of leadership, decision making as well as command and control. In virtual networks, participative communicative and ritualistic

processes serve as leadership mechanisms that guide the online and at times even offline actions of network members.

The second main thesis of this dissertation argues that target-oriented communication is an important leadership element of virtual networks. To prove this point, the author undertakes extensive field research on jihadist-terrorist discussion forums. The dissertation probes into three elements of communicative leadership; it reveals how the discursive semiotics; rituals; and theology of online jihad are closely integrated with each other to create authority and (allegedly) divine guidance. Embedded into the theoretical framework of organizational network analysis, the first chapter investigates the symbols of online jihad and their deeper sub-cultural meaning from a semiotic anthropological perspective. Signs and symbols of jihad decorate online spaces and meeting places of networks in an authoritative way. In the second chapter, the dissertation uses concepts of ritual theory by Albert Bergesen, Irving Goffman and Gabriel Dorta to explain processes of hierarchical, participative and discursive guidance. Moreover, on a more subtle level, the second chapter shows how informal hierarchies, status and power positions are created by rituals of respect and avoidance in jihadi discussion, as well as formulas of glorification and different skill-levels in the application of jihadi speech. The third chapter investigates how theological expressions are embedded into jihadi discussions to create an authoritative belief system that commands members to obey.

While mainstream information society rather reluctantly comes to terms with the fact that persuasive information, when systematically structured, disseminated, repeated and shared, can guide people's thinking and actions, extremists are utterly aware of this. In this sense, target-oriented communication can pervade every social structure and can be accessible at almost any place, at very low production costs. Online-extremists have adapted their net-communication and media strategies to the changed information environment of the 21st century. Within the information society they become experts in “virtual leadership.”