

Slaves of the Caliphate

Wartime Sexual Violence as propaganda by deed

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Resumé

I kölvattnet av den Islamiska Statens [IS] offensiv mot den yezidiska minoriteten i norra Irak 2014 uppdagades återkomsten av det forntida sexuella slaveriet; en bedrift som skrytsamt förmedlats och lovprisats av IS. Kombinationen av sexuellt slaveri och propaganda indikerar att det sexuella våldet utnyttjas som såväl ett krigets verkansmedel som påverkansoperation genom handling. Syftet med föreliggande studie var följaktligen att undersöka huruvida IS nyttjar sexuellt våld som propaganda genom handling samt vilka budskap som kommunicerats genom dessa handlingar. Inledningsvis genomfördes en kvalitativ innehållsanalys av fem rapporter från olika humanitära organisationer samt ett urval av propagandamaterial. Därefter identifierades fem teman av narrativ om, samt handlingar av, sexuellt våld. Slutligen genomfördes en semiotisk analys av dessa fem teman, med hjälp av ett egenutvecklat analysverktyg framtaget medelst positioneringstriaden samt en metod för propagandaanalys. Resultatet indikerar att IS nyttjar sexuellt våld som propaganda genom handling och att de avser influera såväl globala som lokala målgrupper för åtskilliga ändamål.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN times of war is a primordial human atrocity, one arguably as old as war itself. It is a weapon of manifold possibilities, a calculated means of rewarding and recruiting as well as an act of terrorising, humiliating, punishing or destroying.¹ This notion of rape as a premeditated strategy of war is a recent insight, born of the atrocities of the Balkan Wars and the Rwandan genocide. Historically, wartime rape has been ignored as a naturally occurring and an inevitable feature of armed conflict. Today however, the narrative of the strategic sexual weapon holds sway; framing our understanding of how and why wartime rape occurs. This dominant account of sexual violence, though essential for waking the international community to the realities of war, brings with it a dilemma. Our perception of wartime rape is shaped, and ultimately constricted, by this prevailing framework.

Accordingly, we risk obscuring and misinterpreting aspects of sexual violence not congruent with the dominant theories.² For that reason, in an attempt to broaden the generalized story of wartime rape, this study investigated the on-going case of sexual violence in Iraq, as perpetrated by the Islamic State [IS], through the perspective of *propaganda by deed*; the act of symbolic communication through violence.³ This endeavour to expand on our understanding of the instrumentality and functionality of wartime sexual violence undoubtedly holds academic merit, within the war sciences as well as beyond. As for the armed forces and security and defence policymakers however, it is one of absolute necessity; not least in regards to the United Nations [UN] Security Council resolution 1325.⁴ It elucidates aspects of how terrorist organisations and insurgent groups garner support, maintain morale, and recruit sym-

pathisers. Moreover, it clarifies how such groups employ sexual violence as a weapon of war against hostile forces and populations, both locally and globally. Arguably, this knowledge helps military professionals and policymakers alike combat insurgent groups as well as prevents wartime sexual violence and aids those who survive it.

Introduction

In November of 2014 the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq reported that 2,500 Yazidi girls and women, aged between eight and 35, had been abducted, raped and sold into sexual slavery.⁵ Additionally, in March of 2015, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] reported that Yazidi women were systemically seized as spoils of war and divided as concubines amongst the warriors of IS.⁶ Accordingly, IS seemingly adheres to the idea of sexual violence as a weapon of war. However, in the case of IS, sexual slavery appears not only a somatic act, but one of propaganda by deed, amplified through the narratives justifying that violence.⁷

IS masterfully exploits atrocity propaganda, flaunting and celebrating violence through a wide range of propaganda material across an array of platforms.⁸ Wartime rape, boastfully unveiled in the IS propaganda magazine *Dabiq*, is no exception to this.⁹ This ominous repertoire of brutality is grounded in Salafi Jihadism, an exceptionally selective interpretation of Islam.¹⁰ David Sorenson argues that sympathisers consider such violence legitimate features of Jihad and that this helps IS attract followers wishing to serve in the defence of Islam.¹¹ Furthermore, apocalyptic prophesy constitutes an integral aspect of IS's agenda. They contend that not only are the end times imminent, but that the Caliphate is both herald and

prerequisite for the grand battle against the armies of Rome as promised in the Quran.¹² Accordingly, IS sympathisers are drawn to a war of mythical proportions, one which will bring about judgement day. It is thus in IS's interest to not only expose the signs of the end of times, but to actively ensure that it takes place, lest their prophetic claims be disproven.¹³ Therefore, IS appears intent on drawing the west into battle through outrageous brutality, a fact widely apparent in their propaganda.¹⁴

Subsequently, the implementation of sexual slavery indicate a calculated strategy; one seemingly unique to IS. In light of their communicative proficiency and inclination towards projecting atrocities as propaganda, the purpose of this study was thus to investigate whether IS uses sexual violence as propaganda by deed and consequently what those deeds attempt to communicate. Accordingly, wartime rape is investigated not only in and of the acts themselves, but through the narratives disseminated through IS propaganda. This study hence attempted to derive the positioning strategies of wartime rape by examining both the symbolism in and of the deeds themselves, as a means of symbolic communication, and the projected communications about the deeds through propaganda. Subsequently, the research questions of the study were as follows:

- What acts of sexual violence have IS perpetrated?
- What narratives regarding sexual violence are conveyed through IS propaganda?
- What are the positioning intentions of IS when perpetrating and narrating sexual violence?

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

Baaz Eriksson and Maria Stern state that sexual violence can only be understood by studying the context in which it manifests; arguing that every conflict is unique.¹⁵ Moreover, in an attempt to illustrate the multifaceted nature of rape as a weapon of war, thus challenging the prevailing consensus in our understanding of it, Paul Kirby argues that feminist research has provided us with three modes of explanation: instrumentality, unreason and mythology.¹⁶

Instrumentality explains wartime rape in terms of political economy, placing material accumulation and incentives at the forefront.¹⁷ Victims are seen as objects to be consumed in order to further the assailants own goals and rape a rational and low-cost means to an end towards individual gain. Accordingly, rape can serve as a means of ethnic cleansing; compelling enemy populations to flee through the infliction of terror, humiliation and shame.¹⁸ Sexual violence can also constitute a reward for troops and a calculated means of maintaining morale. Additionally, it can be an act of material appropriation, where women are seized as spoils of war to be sold, gifted, or forcefully married.¹⁹

In contrast, *unreason* understands wartime rape as a subliminal act, stirred by biological or psychological desires.²⁰ Assailants are described as exasperated, livid or deranged. Subsequently, through the perspective of unreason, rape is seen as an attempted discharge of emotions and yearnings owing to wartime trauma.²¹ This mode of explanation appears closely related to the sexed story of sexual violence; an explanatory perspective which frames rape as a natural consequence of biological heterosexual needs.²² The sexed story postulates that society limits male sexu-

ality and that the chaos of war removes these boundaries, allowing men to freely satisfy their desires.²³

The last mode of explanation, *mythology*, illustrates rape as a symbolic act within the bounds of collective ideology, religion, and doctrine.²⁴ The victim is seen as a subject of mythology, the symbol of a collective differing from the assailant's. Consequently, women are targeted because of their imagined symbolic role as communal representatives and raped in an attempt to punish, violate or destroy the enemy culture.²⁵

This perspective coheres to the gendered story of sexual violence, through which rape is understood as a means of reinforcing the masculinity of the perpetrator whilst simultaneously feminizing the enemy.²⁶ Accordingly, rape can serve as a symbol of domination and as a means of humiliating and traumatising both the victim and her male relatives, effectively emasculating husbands and fathers through their failure to protect their females.²⁷ Moreover, Sondra Hale argues that rape is a tool for marking and erasing identity, aimed at that which differentiates one community from another: the bodies of women.²⁸ The rapist marks his victim as different from himself, the symbol of an adverse culture, yet simultaneously erases that difference by raping her and thus annihilating the identity of the person she used to be.²⁹ Lastly, due to the symbolic status of women's bodies and their sexuality, sexual violence often serves as a direct assault on the moral canons of a society.³⁰

The Art of Propaganda

Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell define propaganda as "[...] a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired

intent of the propagandist".³¹ Accordingly, propaganda is always intentional and pre-meditated; purposefully designed to achieve the greatest impact. It is systematic in the sense that it operates with methodical consistency and uniformity, endeavouring to produce a desired perceptual, cognitive and behavioural end state in a selected audience. Propaganda shapes perceptions through language and visual images, influencing our beliefs and how we perceive ourselves and the world around us. Moreover, propaganda manipulates cognitions, shifting the audience's attitude towards a phenomenon in line with the propagandist. Lastly, it directs behaviour, impelling audiences to act or behave in a certain way. In short, propaganda attempts to influence the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of an audience for the benefit of the propagandist.³²

There are several forms of propaganda, contingent on shape, origins and objectives. Agitative propaganda attempts to elicit activity, to rouse an audience to act towards certain ends. In contrast, integrative propaganda strives towards pacifying and unifying, making the audience acquiescent towards the propagandist and their agenda. Atrocity propaganda deals in gruesome brutality and inhumanity, promoting fear and hatred by disseminating stories about massacres, mutilation or torture. The goal of which can be to frighten a population into passivity, or to stir an audience to action.³³

Propaganda by deed is the concept of communication through the language of violence, a form of political advertisement typically employed by terrorist organisations.³⁴ Benedict Wilkinson and Jack Barclay argue that terrorism communicates through three languages, the first of which being propaganda by deed; the violence in and of itself.³⁵ The second language is the cause justifying that violence and the third is propaganda;

the dissemination of messages which unites the organisation and intimidate the enemy. Accordingly, terrorists use violence, and narratives about violence, in order to influence beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.³⁶

Research into Al-Qaida [AQ] propaganda has identified several general narratives frequently disseminated by Jihadist organisations in pursuit of these ends.³⁷ For one, the message of religious piety is crucial, legitimizing violence as the defence of Islam and promising rewards after death. Moreover, Jihadists frequently incite violence through moral outrage, invoke Holy Scripture as justification, and actively frame democracy and western culture as inherently un-Islamic. Paul Baines and Nicholas O'Shaughnessy also argue that one prevailing narrative claims that Islam is under siege by a global conspiracy, spearheaded by the materialist west.³⁸ Accordingly, to act against it is an act of heroism in defence of Islam. Furthermore, unlike their morally bankrupt enemy, the Jihadists are portrayed as modest and righteous. Their faith is pure and sacred, their spirituality superior. Consequently, to deny this rhetoric constitutes an act of heresy and treason. Baines and O'Shaughnessy furthermore argue that AQ propaganda between 1998 and 2008 targeted an array of audiences; both internal and external.³⁹ The analysis indicated that AQ propaganda attempted to boost morale, recruit followers, and influence enemy publics and policymakers; provoking overreactions and changes in foreign policy.⁴⁰

The Positioning Triad

Building on previous research on semiotic analysis and the study of symbols, Baines and Chris Fill created *the positioning triad* as a means of describing the process wherein communicators attempt to convey certain meanings in their messages.⁴¹ The model (see

figure 1) illustrates the disparity between the communicator's intended positioning, namely what they want the audience to understand, and the actual positioning, what the audience in fact understands.

Baines and Fill argue that there is a triadic relationship between the three variables of the positioning triad: *item*, *symbol*, and *meaning*.⁴³ Firstly, the item represents the signified object of the message, that which we are communicating about. Secondly, symbol signifies the intended meaning of the item, the specific connotation a sender is trying to convey. Lastly, meaning designates the audience's interpretation of the symbol, in other words how a receiving party actually understands the message on the basis of their cultural context.

Accordingly, a communicator attempting to position an item a certain way does so by projecting a specific symbol. That symbol is then received and interpreted by an audience in a certain cultural context, wherein the item gains meaning and is collectively understood. Depending on the culture, the symbol will have different meaning in different contexts. In other words, the actual positioning of the item varies depending on the cultural context and does not necessarily correspond with the communicator's intended positioning.⁴⁴

As previously mentioned, O'Shaughnessy and Baines utilized this semiotic approach in their analysis of Jihadist propaganda.⁴⁵ Accordingly, they attempted to ascertain the positioning intentions of the Jihadist communicators; exploring how the senders wanted their projected communications to be interpreted by different audiences.⁴⁶

Jowett's and O'Donnell's 10-step Plan for Propaganda Analysis

Jowett and O'Donnell argue that any attempt at propaganda analysis is an inherently complicated enterprise; a task which requires thorough research on the messages conveyed, the context in which it takes form, and the responsiveness of its target audience. Moreover, identifying propaganda is in itself a challenge, owing to the fact that propaganda tends to operate amongst firmly rooted, subliminal cultural stereotypes and myths.⁴⁷ Consequently, Jowett and O'Donnell created a 10-step plan for propaganda analysis, prescribing an analysis of 10 different factors.⁴⁸ In order to construct a coherent analytical framework capable of deriving the possible positioning strategies of wartime sexual violence, four of these 10 divisions were selected to supplement the aforementioned position-

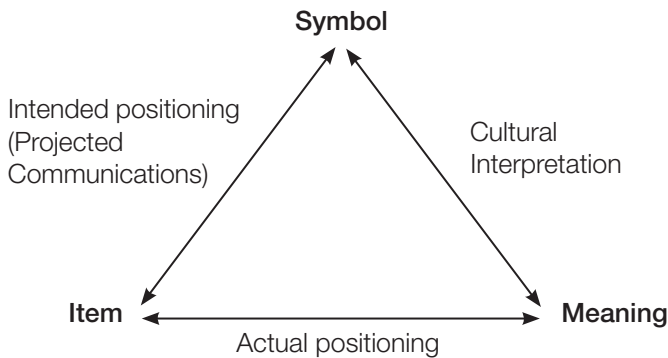


Figure 1: The Positioning Triad.⁴²

ing triad model; consequently laying the grounds for the analytical framework.

The first step requires the identification of the ideology and purpose of the campaign.⁴⁹ Any attempt at determining the propagandist ideology requires the identification of the core values, attitudes and beliefs being conveyed along with the fundamental social norms differentiating good from bad, right from wrong. The second step, identifying the context, accentuates the necessity of understanding the social, cultural, and historical circumstances around which the propaganda manifests. Understanding the context requires an understanding of the specific cultural myths and stereotypes invoked by the propaganda, as well as the relevant historical background. The fifth step is identifying the target audiences, the groups or populations whose responses will somehow be useful to the propagandist. The seventh step entails identifying special techniques utilized to maximize effect, such as exploiting religious authorities, visual symbolisations of power, or propaganda by deed.⁵⁰ The remaining six steps concerns factors already known or beyond the scope of this study. Accordingly, the identity and structure of the propagandist organisation, the media techniques and their effects, audience's reactions and counterpropaganda was not included in the analytical framework.

The Analytical Framework

The analytical framework constitutes an operationalization of the Positioning Triad⁵¹ and the relevant four steps from Jowett's and O'Donnell's⁵² 10-step plan of propaganda analysis. The purpose of this framework was to help systematize and concretise the semiotic analysis of IS's positioning intentions. Consequently, identified acts of war-

time rape and narratives of sexual violence are examined in regards to:

- 1) Core analysis: The overall gist of the theme in terms of what kind of message it attempts to convey and the methods and approaches utilized.
- 2) Positioning: The positioning of the theme and the elements therein; in other words how IS attempts to create a coherent image of themselves, their acts and narratives, and their enemies.
- 3) Symbolization: The symbolism employed in conjunction with the item, ranging from mythology and metaphor to framing and rhetoric; all laden with meaning. The symbols signify the intended meaning of the item, the specific connotation that IS might be trying to convey. These symbols are analysed in regards to the historical, cultural, ethnical and ideological context within which they appear.
- 4) Meaning: The inferred intended positioning of the theme; that is to say what the communicator might want the audience to think, feel or do. The intended meanings are derived by analysing the interplay between positioning and symbolization and the likely interpretation to be expected from certain target audiences.

These four factors constitute the analytical framework, operationalized from the aforementioned theories, and utilized in order to derive the positioning intentions of IS.

Methodology

Research Design & Methods

This study employed a qualitative instrumental case study approach, based on a constructivist epistemology and a triangulation of symbolic interactionism and structuralism.

The study is by necessity a single case study and the units of analysis within the case are [1] IS propaganda and [2] humanitarian reports on sexual violence in Iraq. Accordingly, the in-depth analysis of the case allows us to understand the issue at hand: symbolic communication through sexual violence. This study employed a mixed methods approach for interpreting and finding meaning within textual content; combining conventional qualitative content analysis [QCA] and semi-otic analysis [SA]. Although the two methods diverge in their approach towards finding denotative and connotative meaning, they can be combined to achieve a systematic and in-depth analysis of qualitative data.⁵³

QCA is a flexible method of systematically classifying qualitative materials and reducing data into categories which signify the essential meaning of the text.⁵⁴ SA is an approach towards interpreting and understanding signs and symbols that represent meaning within cultural contexts. In essence, SA identifies denotations, that which is explicitly described, and attempts to derive the connotations, the meaning which is construed through culturally specific interpretation.⁵⁵ This generates an in-depth and holistic description of a multiplicity of various denotative and connotative meanings. This allows researchers to identify simultaneous implicit meanings in mass communications directed at different audiences.⁵⁶ By using this mixed method approach, the systematic and transparent approach of QCA is combined with the in-depth, holistic power of SA.

Research Process

This study utilized a three-step approach. In the first step, a selection of humanitarian reports were analysed using QCA. Following an initial evaluation of the available empirical material, four reports were selected for

analysis due to their perceived credibility, transparency and applicability. One 2015 report from the OHCHR⁵⁷ and one 2014 report from Amnesty International [AI]⁵⁸ were analysed. Furthermore, two reports from the Human Rights Watch [HRW], one from 2014⁵⁹ and one from 2015,⁶⁰ were analysed. All reports feature interviews with victims, relatives, community leaders and humanitarian workers.

Firstly, a preliminary coding frame was generated after initial examination of the OHCHR report. That coding frame was then applied to the rest of the humanitarian reports and appropriately expanded. Lastly, the reports were coded again using the expanded coding frame in an attempt to evaluate its validity and reliability. Thereafter, the codes were analysed, abstracted and sorted into categories of similar denotation. Accordingly, each code was assigned a category signifying acts of sexual violence varying in their apparent primary instrumentality, thus answering the first research question. The analysis produced 18 different codes, classifying different *acts* of sexual violence, which were then abstracted into four overarching categories: acts of genocide, demoralization, material appropriation, and sexual gratification.⁶¹

In the second step, still using QCA, three pieces of IS propaganda covering the revival of sexual slavery were analysed; two articles from the digital magazine *Dabiq* published in English and the pamphlet *Questions and answers on taking captives and slaves* translated from Arabic. *Dabiq* is an online magazine, published in several languages, attributed IS.⁶² Following an initial investigation of the 14 publications available so far, two issues featured articles discussing sexual slavery. The fourth issue, entitled “The failed crusade”, covers sexual slavery in the article “The revival of slavery before the hour”.⁶³ The ninth issue, “They plot and Allah plots”, discusses

sexual slavery in the article “Slave-girls or prostitutes?”⁶⁴ Allegedly published in 2014 on a IS Twitter account, the pamphlet was presumably released by the Research and Fatwa Department of IS.⁶⁵ The pamphlet makes clear the rules governing sexual slavery and the treatment of captured females in regards to IS interpretation of Islamic law. The pamphlet is translated from Arabic by the Middle East Media Research Institute [MEMRI] and was retrieved from their Jihad and terrorism threat monitor website.

Whereas the purpose of the first step was to illustrate acts of wartime rape, the second step attempted to identify and elucidate the narratives describing and framing sexual violence in IS propaganda; thus answering the second research question. The same approach towards generating codes, coding frames, and categories was applied here. The analysis produced 24 codes classifying different narratives of sexual violence which were then abstracted into five categories: narratives of demoralization, antagonization, righteousness, sexual gratification, and material appropriation.⁶⁶

In the third step the nine categories were then merged and abstracted into five privileged themes. Each theme comprises of acts and narratives that represent a coherent approach towards understanding how and why IS engages in and communicates about sexual violence, namely: righteousness and conviction, demoralize and terrify, material appropriation, antagonize and goad, and sexual gratification. The five themes were then subjected to SA; the aim of which was to derive the positioning intentions behind them. Using the analytical framework, the possible implicit messages conveyed to different audiences within these themes were explored, thus answering the third and final research question.

Source criticism

By using humanitarian reports and alleged propaganda, the validity of the data comes into question. This study cannot conclusively determine whether the purported propaganda was in fact produced and distributed by IS or to what extent the reports of the humanitarian organisations are sufficiently accurate. Consequently, in order to critically assess the findings of this study, a thorough source critical evaluation in regards to authenticity, independence, contemporaneity, and tendency becomes necessary.

It is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of the IS propaganda and it is entirely possible that both the pamphlet and the Dabiq magazines are falsified propaganda *against* IS. The magazines were accessed through the Clarion Project website, a non-profit organisation accused of Islamophobia by the Council on American-Islamic Relations [CAIR].⁶⁷ Moreover, the pamphlet was allegedly posted on Twitter and then translated and uploaded by MEMRI, another organisation similarly accused of islamophobia and inaccurate translations by CAIR.⁶⁸ Accordingly, one has to consider the risk that this material is purposefully or accidentally falsified. Nonetheless, this study argues that the material appears authentic, based on the fact that there have been no statements from IS refuting the material. Moreover, several of the humanitarian organisations, amongst them the OHCHR,⁶⁹ reference the pamphlet. Similarly, researchers such as James Fromson and Steven Simon discuss the Dabiq articles.⁷⁰ Arguably, this provides further support for the authenticity of the material. Lastly, other copies of the Dabiq magazines, accessed through Live Leaks, appear identical to those uploaded by the Clarion Project.

As for the independence of the humanitarian reports, source confirmation and distance between stories and those reporting them are an issue. The reports contain several secondary sources, reciting what other people have told them rather than what they experienced themselves. Ideally, a study attempting to discern how IS uses sexual violence would conduct interviews with victims in person. It is moreover difficult to confirm the atrocities depicted by the reports, as interviewees are anonymous. For that reason, four independent reports from three internationally renowned organisations were selected. Regarding contemporaneity, the study finds no issues regarding the temporal distance between the event and when it was reported. Tendency however, the impartiality of the sources, has to be taken into account. Considering the enmity between the Yezidi and IS, one has to ask whether these sources purposefully present the most detrimental version of reality. This fact notwithstanding, distrusting the stories of rape survivors appears absurdly cynical.

Acts of Sexual Violence as Described by the Humanitarian Reports

Genocide

The first category was generated by grouping acts of sexual violence that are genocidal in nature; namely forced abortions, forced conversion, and the intentional impregnation of captured women. All codes constitute different acts of biological and cultural genocide, directed at enslaved Yezidi women. The OHCHR reports that two women were subjected to forced abortion and that witnesses allegedly heard an IS fighter declaring that they did not want any more Yezidis to

be born.⁷¹ Moreover, the practice of forced conversion is widespread throughout all reports and several victims describe an unceasing pressure to convert to Islam or face the threat of further physical and sexual violence. These acts would indicate that IS purposefully attempts to destroy the Yezidi religion, erasing an essential cultural marker of the community. Forced childbearing also appears throughout all reports and one victim was told: “forget about your relatives, from now on you will marry us, bear our children, God will convert you to Islam and you will pray.”⁷² This indicates that enslaved women are purposefully impregnated and forced to carry to term.

Demoralization

The second category groups the codes suggesting that acts of sexual violence are employed as a means of demoralizing the enemy. This includes instances of inflicting shame, dishonour and terror upon victims and their families, the systematic separation and frequent relocation of victims, as well as the glaring punishment for noncompliance. All reports indicate that these acts have spread fear amongst the population. One husband told Amnesty International that: “Yes I am a Peshmerga, but I have a wife and children who need protection, so my priority had to be to take them to safety before Da’esh attacked the area. I could not leave my family to be taken hostage or slaughtered by Da’esh; so we fled”.⁷³ This could, with a measure of caution, suggest that IS terrorizes the targeted population by acts of sexual violence; demoralizing fighters and civilians alike. The systematic separation and frequent relocation of victims are described by all organizations and might suggest a demoralizing agenda. Moreover, all reports state that sexual violence is highly stigmatised in the

Yezidi community and that rape unmistakably inflicts shame and dishonour upon the victim and her family.

Material appropriation

This category clusters the codes indicating that IS perceives and treats captured women as material resources and private property, to which they are entitled. The codes illustrate how women are priced, sold in markets, given as gifts or rewards, and kept alive despite attempted suicides. All reports provide numerous examples of victims who have been bought, repeatedly raped, and then re-sold in a slave market. In addition to being bought, many women were given as rewards to fighters. Moreover, enslaved women were utilized as domestic resources; forced into marriage or household servitude. The reports provide numerous accounts of how captured victims are coerced into marriage, suggesting that captured women are regarded as legitimate spouses. Accordingly, forced childbearing, presently categorised as genocide, might also be construed as an attempt at material appropriation. The reports also contain several accounts of victims who were taken to houses and forced to cook and clean, further suggesting that they exploited as household labour. Furthermore, several reports demonstrate how IS fighters actively attempt to prevent suicide, indicating that they are protecting valuable spoils of war.

Sexual gratification

This category was induced by grouping the codes which indicate that sexual violence is an act of achieving sexual pleasure and gratification. The codes expose how IS fighters inspect and select victims on the basis of beauty and how intercourse with Yezidi women and prepubescent girls are considered

permissible. The Human Rights Watch for instance, interviewed one victim who stated that: “The men would come and select us. When they came, they would tell us to stand up and then examine our bodies. They would tell us to show our hair and sometimes they beat the girls if they refused”.⁷⁴ These acts would suggest that the rapes occur at least in part for the sexual enjoyment of the perpetrators.

Narratives of Sexual Violence as disseminated by IS Propaganda

Demoralization

The first category groups the codes which represent demoralizing narratives. As illustrated in the article “Slave-Girls or Prostitutes?”, sexual violence is described as an act of humiliation: “I was sent with the sword before the Hour so that Allah alone is worshipped without partners. And my provision was placed beneath the shade of my spear. And humiliation and degradation was made for those who oppose my command”.⁷⁵ Moreover, IS disseminates stories of Yezidi women abandoning their religion and converting to Islam. Stating, for instance, that: “Many of the mushrik women and children have willingly accepted Islam and now race to practice it with evident sincerity after their exit from the darkness of shirk”.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the narratives within this category appear to be conveying a message of demoralization, breaking the enemies will to resist by narratives of humiliation, stories of religious desertion, and by the promise of violent punishment against any non-complaint women.

Antagonization

This category clusters the codes which describe narratives challenging and antagonising the infidels of the west. The narratives appear boastful of sexual slavery and ominously threatening towards the west, promising the enslavement of all infidels. The fourth issue of Dabiq directs the following message towards the crusaders: “[...] We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted.”⁷⁷ Moreover, in the ninth issue, Michelle Obama is ridiculed, the author stating: “[...] maybe Michelle Obama’s price won’t even exceed a third of a d n r, and a third of a d n r is too much for her!”⁷⁸ Additionally, both articles explicitly express disdain towards democracy, western values, ethics and lifestyles. These codes would suggest that IS propagates narratives which are intended to antagonise and provoke the western world.

Righteousness

This category clusters the codes which frame sexual slavery as a righteous and benevolent practice, justified through Islamic scripture, Sharia law, and historical precedencies set by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. The narratives frame sexual violence against the infidels as a dutiful and sacred aspect of Jihad, one governed by and prescribed by Sharia law. The fourth issue of Dabiq declares that: “After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shar ’ah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations [...]”⁷⁹ Both articles provide ample historical examples of how the Prophet and his companions have enslaved their enemies, taken concubines, and practiced sexual slavery. Moreover, the enslavement of unbelieving women is described as

an obligatory aspect of Jihad, one which cannot be denied or criticized: “[...]if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Qur’ n and the narrations of the Prophet [...], and thereby apostatizing from Islam.”⁸⁰

Moreover, the fourth issue frames sexual slavery as both a sign of and a prelude to the battle before the hour; the prophesized final battle which will ignite the apocalypse.⁸¹ Furthermore the articles frame sexual slavery as kind and compassionate, arguing that slavery is both an antecedent to and a means of achieving salvation within Islam. In the article “Slave-Girls or Prostitutes?” the author claims that the aim of enslaving women is not pleasure but salvation, arguing that: “Yet He (subh nah) made their liberation from the lands of kufr a way for their salvation and guidance towards the straight path”.⁸² Additionally, the narratives frame IS fighters as humble and compliant with the proper religious rulings, emphasizing the scholarly discussions which preceded, advocating the revival of slavery and legitimizing the Yezidis as permissible targets. Moreover, the narratives also stress the different rules governing sexual slavery, suggesting that it is a just and reasonable practice. Lastly, exploitation of concubines is framed as a proper and morally justifiable method for reducing sinful fornication and adultery.

Sexual gratification

This category groups the codes which project the sexual nature of sexual slavery; framing slavery as a means of achieving erotic pleasure and gratification. The pamphlet contains rules explicitly condoning sexual intercourse with captured women and prepubescent girls.⁸³ Furthermore, the narratives included in this category frame concubines as sexually permissible, free from the sin of fornication

otherwise limiting unmarried Muslims. The pamphlet, for instance, declares that: "It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse."⁸⁴ This suggests that sexual slavery is framed as erotic enjoyment, catering to the desires of the perpetrator.

Material appropriation

This category clusters the codes framing sexual slaves as property, rightfully captured from the enemy, to be enjoyed, gifted or sold. The pamphlet, for instance, proclaims that: "It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of [...]"⁸⁵ Furthermore, the narratives promote sexual slavery as a legitimate means of securing a wife, fathering children, and expanding the household. The ninth issue of *Dabiq* argues that marrying converted female slaves is preferable to marrying unbelieving free women.⁸⁶ Moreover, the fourth issue explicitly emphasizes that the children of concubines inherit the status of their free fathers, in addition to providing historical exposés of men who successfully expanded their family by taking concubines.⁸⁷

The Positioning Intentions of IS

Nine categories were induced from the QCA. These categories were then combined and abstracted into five themes. Firstly, the general media techniques, which span all themes, were analysed. Thereafter, using the analytical framework and semiotic analysis, the individual themes were analysed.

General Media Techniques

The medium through which IS narratives are conveyed shows symbolic forethought. The *Dabiq* magazines stylistically resemble glossy commercial magazines sold in the west. It is professionally designed and visually appealing. This is interpreted as the symbolisation of legitimacy, targeted towards audiences in the west. By mimicking western media and hijacking a familiar medium, the message might be more likely to resonate with western audiences. Accordingly, the meaning construed from these symbols might be to position IS as a legitimate state with a lawful agenda. It might also be an attempt at unsettling western audiences, celebrating the graphic atrocities of beheadings and mass graves within a medium otherwise associated with recreational journals.

The language is often magniloquent and flowery, interwoven with quotes from the Quran, Islamic metaphors, and historical anecdotes. This apparent positioning of language might signify that the authors attempt to camouflage the message as scripture, achieving an associative transfer of the veneration shown the Quran. It might also constitute an attempt at appropriating and distorting aspects of the Islamic faith, propagating their selective Salafist reading. Moreover, the article "Slave-Girls or Prostitutes?" is accredited to the female name Umm.⁸⁸ Using a female author, or the guise of a female author, can be construed as an attempt at securing a female alibi; a gendered symbol through which the legitimacy of sexual slavery might resonate further.

Righteousness and Conviction

The first theme includes the category narratives of righteousness.

Core analysis: Sexual slavery is designated and confirmed as a righteous, holy and

virtuous endeavour though the invocation and appropriation of Islamic symbols and scripture.

Positioning: IS positions its messages as Islamic scripture and mythology, arguing that sexual slavery is not only acceptable, but a desirable and inherently holy practice; inseparable from the true Islamic faith. Furthermore, sexual violence is positioned as a well-meaning and benevolent practice; one offering plentiful prospects and opportunities for victims. The Yezidis are demonized as heretics deserving of divine punishment and those criticising their enslavement are scorned as infidels, apostates or Muslims failing in their obligation to conduct Jihad. Victims are positioned as thankful would-be converts bestowed a means of journeying the road to salvation. Perpetuators in turn are positioned as righteous actors, guiding captured women into the abode of Islam by way of slavery or punishing the heretical enemies of Islam. Loyalists defending the practice against the attacks of the unbelievers are portrayed as misguided apologists; conclusively positioning sexual slavery as unfaultable.

Symbolization: The religious symbols are abounding with Islamic myths, icons and rhetoric. The narratives invoke numerous holy names, reminding the reader of the historical exploits of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. They also frame sexual violence as Sharia law and declare it to be proof of Allah's favour. These symbols can be construed as an attempt at legitimizing sexual violence and rendering it unchallengeable through Islamic law and through historical precedencies; daring the reader to find fault in the actions of the Prophet, the rulings of Sharia, or even Allah.

Enslavement is moreover framed as a long lost aspect of Islam now renewed. This might attempt to symbolise that Islam is on the

rise again, reclaiming its power against the crusaders of the west and the glories of days past. Furthermore, concubines are portrayed as a means of reducing deviant and sinful behaviours. Accordingly, slavery becomes a symbol of remedy for fornication and adultery. The narratives give ample reference to well-established Islamic rulings and religious guidelines regulating sexual slavery; symbols indicating that this is a fair and just system, governed by holy laws. Moreover, the narratives explicitly state that sexual slavery is in fact not sexual at all, but rather a means of guiding the infidels upon the straight path. This seems to place a sense of agency upon the victims, signifying that they are given a unique chance at salvation should they only accept. This seems to symbolise that slavery is benevolent and well-intentioned; a virtuous thing and an act of devotion.

Furthermore, IS narratives suggest that there has been a thorough scholarly discussion prior to the revival of sexual slavery and the legitimization of the Yezidis. The symbolism of this approach seems to indicate that IS fighters are humble before the proper Islamic rulings and that they ultimately answer to the judgments of a higher religious authority. Lastly, the narratives invoke the myth of prophesy, symbolising that sexual slavery not only validates and verifies IS ideology, but constitutes a practical means of achieving that end. The narratives are highly antagonistic, expressing frustration and indignation at ignorant critics who, well-meaning or otherwise, do not understand the obvious holiness and righteousness of this practice.

Meaning: The target audiences appear to be internal; devout IS fighters, ambivalent sympathisers and pious recruits. The positioning intentions thus seem to be that sexual violence is a holy, righteous and benevolent thing; an act of spiritual mercy which is cher-

ished by Allah and an obligatory aspect of Jihad which punishes the enemies of Islam and strengthens the Muslim community. A righteous Muslim should not feel sorry for the unbelievers, as they are either justly punished or given a holy gift. Moreover, a pious Muslim should not condemn slavery, for it is a well-intentioned, deliberated, and sanctified practice endorsed by those most knowledgeable of the Islamic faith. Anyone daring to criticise sexual slavery is, by extension, criticising Islam; silencing potential critics under the threat of being declared apostate.

These messages are interpreted as a means of rallying troop morale, encouraging them not only to participate in the practice of sexual slavery, but to feel good about it and to condemn critics as blasphemers. Moreover, it appears to be a means of placating sceptics who might otherwise distance themselves from IS. Furthermore, prospective recruits are given further incentive to join by framing sexual slavery as Jihad and a means of punishing the heretical enemies of Islam. It also gives further strength to IS ideology, signalling that Muslims in the west can help make Islam strong and true yet again and that they can be a part of a holy thing; bringing about the battle before the hour.

Demoralize and Terrify

This theme includes the categories *acts of genocide*, *acts of demoralization*, and *narratives of demoralization*.

Core analysis: The theme is structured around symbols of humiliation and acts of inflicting fear and terror; the purpose of which appears to be to sap the morale of the enemy population and their fighters.

Positioning: Rape and enslavement appears to be presented for its terrifying effect, positioned as a means of degrading and terrifying the enemy and to ensure that

the victims and their family feel humiliated and powerless.

Symbolization: Acts of sexual violence against the Yazidi community appear particularly symbolic, owing to the fact that rape undermines the moral foundation of the Yazidi honour-culture. Accordingly, sexual violence might signify degradation and the infliction of dishonour upon the victim and her family. Accordingly, these acts can be construed as symbols of humiliating and feminizing Yazidi men for having failed to protect their women from desecration. IS narratives explicitly portray enslavement as a means of humiliation and an inevitable consequence of resisting the Caliphate. This might attempt to dissuade active resistance against IS. The explicit celebration and high visibility of sexual slavery indicates that it is presented for its demoralizing effect. This interpretation is supported by IS narratives promoting stories of Yazidis joyfully converting to Islam and finding peace; all symbols of submission, defeat and successful deracination.

Moreover, the narratives obligating violence against the Yazidi due to their heretical unbelief can be construed as a symbol which invokes fear; promising that IS will not stop until the Yazidis and their faith are exterminated. Likewise, acts of cultural and biological genocide through forced abortion or childbearing can signify a means of terrorizing the population; prompting religious minorities to flee. Furthermore, the act of frequently relocating women, making them vanish behind IS lines, might symbolize IS's complete control over the captured women; disorienting not only the victims but purposefully disheartening their family and community. Likewise, the acts and explicit narratives of punishment awaiting victims attempting to flee or refusing to comply with their owners, might signify the totality of IS control

and the subsequent promise that they will sexually exploit any female captured.

Meaning: The target audiences appear to be the victims, their community and other religious minorities. The positioning intentions of sexual violence can thus be interpreted as terror, humiliation and dishonour; sapping enemy morale, compelling minorities to flee rather than resist, or fighters to stay at home to ensure that their families are not captured. IS seems to communicate that they will not stop until the Yezidi's heretical faith is uprooted and eradicated, that they exercise complete control over captured women and are thus inevitably successful in violating them, and that those subjected to this practice should feel humiliated. Furthermore, it is also possible that the audiences are internal; constituting an attempt at boosting morale by celebrating the humiliation and desecration of IS's enemies.

Material Appropriation

This theme includes the categories *acts of material appropriation* and *narratives of material appropriation*.

Core analysis: Sexual violence is promoted as material gain and means-end rationality, framing captured women as spoils of war.

Positioning: Sexual enslavement is positioned as admissible material appropriation; a potential industry of economic incentives and a rational and legitimate means of taking a wife. Victims are positioned as private property and potential spouses, mothers and maids; material resources to be captured, exploited, and if willing discarded. Perpetuators are in turn positioned as those worthy of reward, longing for fatherhood, or as entrepreneurs enjoying the financial possibilities of slavery.

Symbolization: The symbols found within this theme are in essence those of property

and materialism. Captured women symbolize dehumanised objects; spoils of war that are enslaved and kept alive for material or personal gain. The practice of rewarding fighters and sympathisers with women, for the purpose of sexual enjoyment, can be construed as a symbol of favour, a reward for a job well done. It can moreover signal that the enemy, like their women, are less than human and rightfully treated as such. Furthermore, the symbolism of establishing slave markets and appraising the value of women appears materialistic in nature; signifying that women are chattel and potential sources of profit. Furthermore, the narratives tell of historical occurrences of concubines providing much loved children for their owners. Unlike their mothers, these children are free from birth as per the status of the father. The narratives also recount examples of children of slaves who have gone on to do great things within the Islamic world. These symbols can be interpreted as a means of dispelling any doubts concerning the legitimacy of children born from concubines and thus encouraging those eager for fatherhood. The acts of using women as domestic maids moreover indicate that captured women are regarded as household resources; serving both the owner and the owner's family.

Meaning: The target audiences would appear to be mainly internal, namely the rank and file of IS and prospective recruits. The intended positioning of these acts and narratives are interpreted as a message of material incentives; conveying that slaves are spoils of war and private property to be captured and then used for material gain, sexual pleasures, or marriage and motherhood. Accordingly, IS appears to be communicating that sexual slavery is an opportunity, that those who join them can claim a slave for themselves and that those already fighting can and should enjoy the spoils of war and the economical

and household possibilities this new industry offers. Consequently, sexual violence can be understood as both a means of recruiting and rallying troop morale.

Antagonize and Goad

This theme is comprised of the categories *acts of genocide* and *antagonizing narratives*.

Core analysis: Sexual violence appears to be presented for its antagonizing effect on western publics and political elites. The narratives celebrate atrocities and threaten the west, possibly as a means of provoking public outrage and forcing an armed response.

Positioning: Sexual violence is positioned as wilful defiance of western morals and values and as a practice to be proud of. IS does not shy away from the atrocity of these acts, but rather seems to rejoice in it as a purposeful rejection of western hypocrisy. Moreover, they position themselves as boastful warmongers who enjoy humiliating their enemies and who will one day conquer and enslave the west.

Symbolization: The main symbols within this theme are those of boastful taunting, dismissal of western culture, warmongering, and atrocity propaganda. The warmongering narratives explicitly call for the enslavement of women in the west; pledging to one day conquer and enslave the crusading infidels. This is interpreted as an attempt at antagonizing western audiences by ensuring them that they remain a target and that a war in the west is only a matter of time. Furthermore, by metaphorically selling Michelle Obama as a slave and mockingly speculating about what she would be worth, IS appears to employ a symbol which would invoke anger amongst American audiences.

Additionally, the boastful narratives, rejoicing in the enslavement and deracination of the Yezidi, appears taunting in nature; as

if goading the world with their accomplishment and attempting to provoke a response. The explicit genocidal nature of these acts might also be construed as a symbol, meant to communicate with the spectating outside world. Documented genocide arguably garners considerable public outrage and demands for swift actions. Accordingly, the very public and purposeful deracination of the Yezidis might be a symbol intended to force an armed response. Lastly, the explicit dismissal of and enmity towards western culture also appears symbolic; interpreted as an attempt at positioning true Islamic values as opposing and contradictory to the ethics of the infidels. Furthermore, this symbol might signify that the Caliphate will never accept non-violent and democratic approaches to achieving peace; leaving only military intervention.

Meaning: The target audiences appear to be enemy publics and political leaders baring witness to the Caliphate's war. The positioning intentions of these acts and narratives are interpreted as provocation and enmity; conveying that whereas the world might consider genocidal sexual violence an atrocious act, IS rejoices in it. Therefore, IS seems to communicate that they will never be stopped without military intervention and that sooner or later the rest of the world is next. This interpretation makes sense in light of the doomsday prophesy integral with IS ideology; where a full-scale ground invasion by the armies of the crusaders is prelude to the prophesized final battle.

Sexual Gratification

The last theme includes the categories *acts of sexual gratification* and *narratives of sexual gratification*.

Core analysis: This theme is structured around symbols of sexual pleasure and sat-

isfaction; acts and narratives indicating that wartime rape occurs, and is prescribed, as carnal enjoyment.

Positioning: Sexual violence is positioned as a source of sexual enjoyment; catering to the desires of the perpetrator. Victims are positioned as sexualized bodies, objects assessed in terms of beauty, purity and age to be exploited and consumed as the owner sees fit.

Symbolization: The main symbols of sexual gratification are permissibility; condoned rape of adult women and prepubescent children. The apparent rules governing sexual slavery explicitly state that intercourse is permissible and free from the sin of fornication. In the pamphlet it is the very first question concerning what owners are allowed to do with their slaves. Furthermore, sexual slavery is framed as a remedy to temptation and deviant sexuality outside the bonds of marriage; indicating that the author believes in the natural and biological sexual needs of men. These symbols might signify that intercourse and sexual enjoyment is in fact a core objective in sexual violence. Whether or not children are fit for intercourse is decided by the owner; a symbol which appears to condone acts of rape against prepubescent girls and thus satisfying the deviant sexual desires of paedophilia. The act of choosing women for rape, on the basis of beauty, indicates that attractive women are more desired for intercourse. This is moreover supported by the acts of forcing women to dress attractively and to wash and prepare themselves prior to rape. Accordingly, this might signify that the systematic rapes aims to accommodate sexual needs and desires; serving as a substitute for conjugal intercourse.

Meaning: The supposed target audiences appear to be IS fighters and potential recruits. The positioning intentions of these acts and narratives are interpreted as promises of

sexual enjoyment. IS seems to communicate that sexual violence is a means of maintaining morale; providing sexual outlets and satisfying sexual needs. Furthermore, the message sent to prospective recruits seems fairly straightforward: if you join IS, you can find boundless carnal enjoyment and pleasures, free from the sin of fornication, from an abundance of girls and women. Arguably, such sexual enjoyment is difficult to find within conservative Islamic cultural contexts, where premarital sex is condemned as sinful.

Summary of the Research Results

Four categories, exposing various types of sexual violence and their apparent instrumentality, were induced from the humanitarian reports. In answer of the first research question, the analysis consequently suggests that IS has perpetrated acts of sexual violence towards the ends of genocide, demoralizing the enemy, material appropriation, and sexual gratification. In answer of the second research question, five categories of different narratives were induced from the propaganda material, suggesting that IS disseminates narratives which appear to convey a message of demoralization, antagonization, righteousness, sexual gratification, and material appropriation.

By merging these nine categories, five themes of sexual violence as propaganda by deed emerged. Each theme is comprised of acts and narratives that represent a coherent approach to understanding how and why IS engages in sexual violence. In order to answer the third research question, the analytical framework was then utilized to derive the possible positioning intentions of IS, indicating that sexual slavery is positioned as:

Righteousness and conviction: positions sexual violence as a holy, righteous and benevolent thing. An unassailable practice, integral with Jihad, and holy vengeance against the dehumanised unbelievers.

Demoralize and terrify: positions sexual violence as humiliation, terror, and genocide, celebrating the enslavement and the eradication of the unbelieving Yezidi and inciting minorities to desist and flee.

Material appropriation: positions sexual violence as justified spoils of war and women as property to be pillaged for material and domestic purposes.

Antagonize and goad: positions sexual violence as provocative atrocities and as an inflaming challenge inciting a response.

Sexual gratification: positions sexual violence as carnal pleasure and gratification; a substitute for sexual enjoyment otherwise sinful.

Conclusion

In regards to previous research into wartime sexual violence, this study aligns itself with Eriksson and Stern, supporting the notion that sexual violence is an idiosyncratic aspect of war that must be analysed within the specific context it manifests. Sexual violence as propaganda by deed appears unique to IS, thus clashing with the prevailing consensus and demonstrating the necessity of challenging the dominant framework. Moreover, these findings support Baines' and O'Shaughnessy's analysis of Jihadist propaganda narratives, as well as Wilkinson's and Barclay's research into terrorist communication through violence. Accordingly, through the eyes of the Caliphate, rape becomes a language of Jihad.

The first theme, righteousness and conviction, resembles the characteristic Jihadist narratives described by O'Shaughnessy and

Baines: religious piety, holy war in defence of Islam, and spiritual superiority and humility. Aimed primarily at devout Muslim audiences, supportive of IS, sexual violence becomes both integrative and agitative propaganda by deed, rousing support through spiritual incentives, silencing potential critics, and asserting legitimacy as the prophesized Caliphate.

The second theme, demoralize and terrify, manifests as acts of terror against the infidels, amplified through agitation and atrocity propaganda. This becomes comprehensible when viewed through Kirby's modes of mythology and instrumentality. Acts of genocidal sexual violence coheres to the mode of instrumentality, serving as a means of ethnical cleansing by purposefully inciting the Yezidi to flee. It also adheres to the mode of mythology, by targeting women as symbols and cultural representatives. In accordance with Hale, IS appears to effectively deracinate the Yezidis through rape; annihilating the victim's identity as Yezidi and compromising the ethnical purity of her community through forced pregnancy. Similarly, forced conversion eliminates an essential cultural marker. Through the perspective of instrumentality, and in accordance with Goldstein, IS consequently appears to employ sexual violence as a means of humiliating and terrorising the enemy. Through mythology, these acts are understood as demoralizing due to the symbolic status of women and female sexuality. Accordingly, by violating Yezidi women, IS desecrates the Yezidi community and signals their intent to destroy it; inflicting terror and shame amongst the population. In accordance with Eriksson and Stern, these acts undermine the moral canons of Yezidi society and feminize the enemy, humiliating Yezidi men for failing to protect their women. Furthermore, sexual violence and humiliation appear congruent with Sorenson's no-

tion that IS attracts followers through their celebration of brutality.

The third theme, material appropriation, appears as agitative and integrative propaganda by deed, attempting to garner active support for IS by providing incentives to join and to continue fighting. Sexual violence as material appropriation adheres to the mode of instrumentality. Women are seen as objects to be consumed and sexual violence as a low-cost, means-to-an-end approach towards appropriating women’s bodies for the benefit of the perpetrator. Accordingly, Yezidi women are seized as spoils of war and then sold for profit, gifted as rewards, or assimilated into men’s households as reproductive labour.

The fourth theme, antagonize and goad, manifests as atrocity propaganda by deed, seemingly designed to agitate enemy audiences. This act of apparent provocation makes sense when considering the apocalyptic prophesy fundamental to IS ideology and their apparent intent on precluding judgement day by drawing the west into

battle. Accordingly, IS appears intent on goading the west into action through their boastful celebration of sexual violence and the desecration of Yezidi women.

The fifth theme, sexual gratification, is interpreted as both integrative and agitative propaganda by deed; inciting active support through sexual incentives and intercourse as a morale boost. Sexual gratification can be understood through Kirby’s mode of unreason and the sexed story of sexual violence. Accordingly, women’s bodies are desecrated for the explicit enjoyment of the perpetrator, owing to their biological urges and desires. Furthermore, IS fighters appears to be rewarded with sex, given a substitute for conjugal intercourse, and allowed a permissible sexual outlet otherwise sinful.

In conclusion, these findings suggest that the various positioning intentions of sexual violence as propaganda by deed are characterized on the basis of the target audiences and the apparent instrumentality (see figure 2 below). Accordingly, wartime rape appears a ruthless and comprehensive approach to

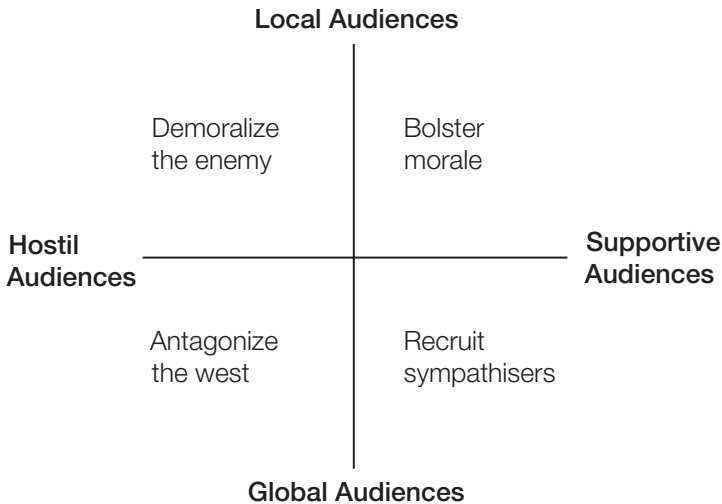


Figure 2. The positioning intentions of IS

propaganda and an atrocious weapon of persuasion that targets audiences both global and local, supportive and hostile.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate whether IS uses sexual violence as propaganda by deed and consequently what those deeds attempts to communicate. In short, this study indicates that IS indeed utilises sexual violence as propaganda by deed, amplified by the narratives justifying that violence. As illustrated in figure 2, the findings suggest that sexual violence can and has been employed for a multiplicity of aims and reasons. Accordingly, agencies and policymakers intent on combating IS and similar terrorist organisations and insurgent groups has to reconcile with the fact that sexual violence seems to be employed as a weapon of war on both a tactical and a strategical level. Moreover, they have to understand towards what ends and purposes these wartime rapes serve.

When aimed towards supportive audiences, it serves IS as a potent tool of boosting and maintaining morale as well as a means of attracting and recruiting sympathisers. When targeting hostile audiences, it appears to demoralize local enemies; inciting fear and encouraging escape rather than resistance. As for the global community, it elicits horror and outrage, conceivably in order to provoke a government response which would further IS ideology. Consequently, the struggle against the Caliphate arguably requires military professionals and policymakers to

counteract not only the rapes themselves, as a somatic and psychological weapons of war, but the ideological messages and symbolic meanings conveyed through IS propaganda as well.

Reflection

Despite the author's attempts at systematizing and concretising the propaganda analysis process, SA, as with all qualitative research, is highly subjective; fundamentally dependent on the researcher's individual perspective, knowledge and understanding. The empirical material in question is analysed from a non-Muslim, northern European perspective within the field of war science, a social, cultural and theoretical viewpoint that does not necessarily correspond with those of the prospective target audiences. This brings with it certain limitations in regards to validity and reliability that must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Another researcher, using the same analytical framework and theories, might still draw different conclusions on the basis of a differing cultural perspective, religious understanding or scientific field of study. This does not automatically nullify the findings, but undeniably limits the generalizability of the study and the analytical framework.

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