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Strategic Advantages of Visual Violence: Red Brigades and ISIS

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Chapter 1—Introduction

Visual Culture and Terrorism: A Literature Review

A new age of visual culture has proceeded to affect the world we live in and has simultaneously made us both active participants and spectators within society. This new age is characterized by more sophisticated forms of communication technologies that have emerged from the Twentieth Century and have influenced the way we interact with images. More specifically, this period “can be seen as an acceleration of a longer history involving photography, film, television and video” that would incline those within visual culture studies to “suggest that everyday life has become ‘visual culture.’”¹ These sophisticated technologies include digitization, satellite imaging, new forms of medical imaging and virtual reality, *ibid.* Particularly relevant to the study of visual culture is “tak[ing] account of the centrality of vision in everyday experience and the production of meaning [because]...the scrap of an image connects with a sequence...to produce a new narrative formed out of both our experienced journey and our unconscious” *ibid.*, 63. That is to say that the personal viewing experience of images met with the narratives produced within a societal construct, also known as the daily life experiences within the lived society, shape the reality of an individual, thus creating a personal narrative.

Digital technologies have impacted visual culture mainly through its scope, outreach and accessibility, and through this impact the visual component has become a form of power within the society, a power that affects both the audience

¹ Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. (California: Sage Publishing, 2001): 62.

and the producer of the image. As such, it becomes vital not only to understand this power, but to also understand who holds this power within the visual component, especially when relating it to the violent component; also known as visual violence. As suggested by Friis“...[I]n the era of new media technologies and increased visual interconnectivity across borders, the communication of the horrors of war through visual imagery has been transformed and accelerated,”² thereby transforming visual violence into a tool that tries to establish visual power that can play into the hands of all parties involved. The visual power is characterized by its psychological impact it holds from the audience who views the visual violence. Additionally, the more inhumane the visual violence is perceived in a performance, the more the viewer will respond and potentially act.

The production of meaning within visual culture studies has provided a good backdrop of which to evaluate visual violence and understand the power that it possesses. Moreover, the centrality of vision has also become useful for those who study visual culture, saying that it “can not be confined to the study of images [alone].”³ Solely relying on images to understand their impact on society is limiting, especially when attempting to understand visual violence as a strategic tool. When used as a strategic tool, there is a societal meaning associated with the image that is produced as a form of narration. Hence, both the production of meaning and the centrality of vision are at the forefront when discussing cases of individuals,

² Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond anything we have ever seen’: Beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 728.

³ Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. (California: Sage Publishing, 2001): 63.

organizations, and groups who resort to utilizing visual violence as a strategy. This is because the visual component affects the way meaning is produced through violent images when they are narrated against the backdrop of society. In order to understand what this means for the power of visual violence within a strategy, it is essential to understand how the visual component interacts with the violent component.

Performance Violence and the Spectacle

Violence, whose meaning is commonly seen as physical force intended to hurt or harm an individual, is an act whose effect and impact would seemingly be on the individual who incurs the act and the person who perpetrates the act. However there is another impact on the person viewing the violence, whether it is seen in real life events or through a screen (often times narrative forms of entertainment). This particular impact on the viewer is emotional abuse and its effect is psychological in nature, that within this visual culture holds a different, perhaps more substantial kind of weight than physical force. When discussing violence within the context of emotional abuse, both the real life viewership and the narrative that is produced within the individual psyche when viewing through forms of entertainment will, thus, have a relatively higher emotional impact on the spectator. Understandably, there is variance within the degree to which real life spectatorship compares to narrative forms of entertainment on the psychological impact incurred by the visual component. Though the concept of visual violence can encompass many scenarios, the focus here is on visual violence within terrorist acts, which when their images

and constructed narrations are analyzed, appear to be within the spectrum of entertainment and real life events that are placed within the dimensions of the spectacle and theatre.

Nacos discusses the impact of the 9/11 attacks as a movie spectacle where “they outperformed Hollywood...[with] the horror of the quadruple hijack coup and the deliberate flights into the World Trade Center and Pentagon.”⁴ It was a form of terrorism that produced “a global television spectacular, as breaking news that [was] watched by international audiences and transcend[ed] by far the boundaries of theatrical events, *ibid.*” Their target choice and timing, having been performed in the “bright daylight, guaranteed the most “spectacular” visuals and the loss of life for which they undoubtedly aimed, *ibid.*” This spectacular form of entertainment performed as a terrorist act, was so dramatic with its Hollywood inspired climatic plot, that the emotional impact was felt worldwide with various responses. This “perfectly orchestrated production *ibid.*” was performed as a spectacle.

Guy Debord, adopting a Marxist approach, defines the spectacle in terms of specialization of power that represents a hierarchical society, as “the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself...is the self portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the of existence...separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle...the mythical order with which every power shrouds itself from the beginning.”⁵ The spectacle is a “pseudo-sacred entity” that is a “separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of incessant

⁴ Brigitte L. Nacos, “The Terrorist Calculus Behind 9-11: A Model for Future Terrorism?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 1 (2003): 3.

⁵ Guy Debord, *Society of the spectacle*. (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983): 23-25.

refinement of the division of labor,” *ibid.*, 25. Moreover, “the spectacle originates in the loss of unity of the world” *ibid.*, 29. Hence, based on Debord’s description of separate power being that of the alpha and the omega of the spectacle means those who separate the images in a sequence that is not based on reality have the power to produce the meaning of which the viewers will react. Because the totalitarian power has control of the production of meaning within the visual component, they are capable of influencing the audience without it knowing what is happening. The spectacle, an unreal scene, influences the viewer’s perceptions in a way that they lose the purpose of viewing.

The purpose of viewing is explained within the context of Jacques Rancière’s description of theatre clarifying it in terms of community action and active participation. For him the concept of viewing is a “means to take pleasure in images and the reality outside the theatre.”⁶ The spectacle, defined against Debord’s description of separation, is seen as an “autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator,” *ibid.*, 14. Here, the spectacle can be defined as the “[confusion] of two different distances [such as]...the distance between artist and spectator...[that is]...“inherent in the performance itself,” *ibid.*

Rancière, in his description of spectacle, provides useful concepts to analyze the visual impact of violence or rather the visual power within violence with his use of the “autonomous thing.” The “autonomous thing” is that which we cannot comprehend when watching the visual violence on screen. It is the distance between

⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso, 2009): 12.

the producer and the spectator, which we associate as a spectacle. Hence the “autonomous thing” creates confusion because it is something that is incomprehensible in the performance itself. This idea of the spectacle is in contrast to the form of theatre in which the distance from the spectator and the artist is ideally non-existent, and by Rancière’s definition is attributed to community action.

Performance violence is best described as a form of theater used for dramatic effect where the scene itself, capturing an inhumane death, physical force, or authoritarian power, is both a spectacle and staged theatrics. Inhumane refers to “acts of deliberately exaggerated violence”⁷ whose “gruesome sight” is “vivid and horrifying” that “by their demonstrative nature...elicit feelings of revulsion and anger in those who witness them,” *ibid.*, 122-126. “Performance violence...are dramas designed to have an impact on several audiences that they affect [and] those who witness the violence—even at a distance, via the news media—are...apart of what occurs,” *ibid.*, 126. The psychological effect in performance violence is the response from the viewer whose personal narrative, a combination of daily life and visual images produced from the performance continues to shape how he will interact within the society he/she lives. In this way “in practice, it is seldom, if ever, possible to separate the cultures of everyday life from practices of representation, visual or otherwise,”⁸ meaning that the personal narrative produced from the performance (a practice of representation) is a reflection of everyday life.

⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, “Theater of Terror,” in *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 122.

⁸ Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. (California: Sage Publishing, 2001): 61.

Visual Violence and War

While it is the theatre spectacular that plays an important role in the literature to provoke a response from the opponent, it is clear that the literature on terrorism lacks an understanding of the impact of visual violence on the politics of war. Friis, in particular, notes a lack of focus on the actual analysis of the act of watching beheading videos and its connection to the politics of war or what he expresses as “the significance of visual imagery for international conflict and security,” adding that “the way in which the visibility of the beheadings shapes the politics of war in the states ‘watching’ the videos has been largely neglected as an object of study.”⁹ Friis focuses on the ISIS videos’ impact on the politics of war in the victims’ home states and provides evidence that the “ISIS beheadings have functioned as ‘visual facts’ within a political discourse promoting military action against ISIS,” *ibid.* His calls for more attention to be paid to the “boundaries between which acts of violence are rendered visible and which are not” *ibid.*, 728.

The choice of the producer of the violent images to show to the wider audience in this day and age affects the politics of war because it holds a certain strategic advantage toward the party who chooses the image. This choice from the producer to choose the visual violent images becomes important for its psychological impact on the adversary. Those who use visual violence on a strategic level need to elicit a strong response from the adversary in order for it function as a tool within warfare.

⁹ Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond anything we have ever seen’: Beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 726-727.

However, from a broader perspective visual communication holds its own power, whether the image is produced intentionally or not. This power is not in the control of the producer, but rather from those who interpret the images for their own political agenda. In this case, the power resides with those who can control the interpretation and the message of the image.

Terrorism—A Dispute of Definitions is all Rhetorically Justified

The debates that surround terrorism, and more specifically its definition, are made controversial based on a rhetorical approach that tends to dwell around the moral and political dimensions as oppose to creating a useful political science theory that objectively explains the phenomenon.

Finlay describes three “rhetorical possibilities” typically used as “definitional criteria” that include: 1) “basic moral or political values,” 2) “descriptive criteria...derived...from...basic norms” and 3) conventional descriptive criteria.¹⁰ He goes on to say that speakers who “do things with the word ‘terrorist’ ...typically involve ‘redescription’ ...a mainstay of ordinary moral language as well as forensic oratory” *ibid.* Given the convoluted nature of defining terrorism, Finlay discusses the controversy in terms of rhetoric saying that it is “of ordinary ‘redescription’” *ibid.*, 756. Whether it is revisionary descriptions tending toward a more persuasive definition where “speakers try to alter public attitudes and achieve wider ideological change,” (*ibid*) or emphatic descriptions “where speakers seek to

¹⁰ Christopher Finlay, “How to do things with the Word ‘Terrorist,’” *Review of International Studies* 35 no. 4 (2009): 754.

emphasize its moral affinity with terrorism,” (*ibid*) Finlay argues that, “there will always be disagreement about the right criteria,” *ibid.*, 759.

He convincingly places a revisionary descriptive label on all the work of scholars in terrorism. However, he places this debate on basic criterion being that of “the use of civilian, ‘innocent,’ or non-combatant targeting” which he refers to as “the ‘orthodox’ approach to definition,” *ibid.*, 760-764. His critique on the scholars is only useful within an ethical approach to terrorism, or rather in the debates based on morality, and in this way perhaps there is no sense in defining terrorism. But perhaps, there is a better way to approach terrorism as a method within warfare that is separate from any war justification.

Among the debate of defining terrorism are also its legal dimensions, which arguably fall under Finlay’s revisionary redescription to which many other scholars have argued its results to be fruitless and unnecessary. Levitt so eloquently explains the attempts at legal definitions akin to “the quest for the Holy Grail [where]...others before have tried and failed...[and] some daunted by the difficulties and dangers along the way, give up, often declaring the quest meaningless. Others return claiming victory, proudly bearing an object they insist is the real thing but which to everyone else looks more like the same old used cup, perhaps re-decorated in a slightly original way.”¹¹ He concludes that not only would a legal definition of terrorism not be beneficial, but due to the international context, with “the intractable conceptual and political differences among states on the issue, it would be at best a watered-down, papered-over, exception-ridden orphan whose main

¹¹ Geoffrey Levitt, “Is ‘Terrorism’ Worth Defining?” *Ohio Northern University Law Review* 13 (1986): 97.

practical result would provide a further basis for dispute...at the United Nations”
ibid., 115.

Nathanson acknowledges this definitional challenge within his moral dimension of explaining terrorism saying that the difficulty resides in the fact that many approach it in a political as opposed to a theoretical way¹² and “the debate about defining terrorism becomes impossible to resolve because it mirrors disagreements about contentious moral and political issues” *ibid.*, 15. Therefore, practicing politicians, journalists, and even scholars use this moral and political context that plays into the agenda of labeling the terrorist as wrong against that which is right. He suggests the best way to define terrorism is by “focusing on terrorist acts rather than terrorist groups” because the latter is, frankly, confusing, *ibid.*, 14. He notes that “we need to focus on the idea of a terrorist act, directing our attention to what is done, not who does it” because “what makes them terrorists is the nature of the acts themselves, not the group that carried them out” *ibid.* He further outlays that a definition “that is morally and politically neutral [would] enable us to label acts as terrorist or not independently of our views on whether they are morally justifiable or not” *ibid.*, 15.

Herschinger approaches defining international terrorism through a discursive perspective and explains the phenomenon in terms of collective identity-building process where the identity of ‘self’ is defined against the ‘other’.¹³ “An

¹² Stephen Nathanson, *Terrorism and the Ethics of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13.

¹³ Eva Herschinger, “A Battlefield of Meanings: The Struggle for Identity in the UN Debates on a Definition of International Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25 no. 2 (2013): 186.

absolute enemy is clearly present in the UN debates on terrorism...[to which] terrorism symbolizes the absolute threat to humanity," *ibid.*, 191.

With all this said however, the only benefit from this discursive and rhetorical definitional approach is for counterterrorism measures, which tend to be better for practice rather than explaining the phenomenon objectively. As many scholars would suggest, use of the word terrorist tends to have a moral and political agenda attached to the endeavor. As such if terrorism studies intends to understand the phenomenon, there should be detachment of negative connotations of the term that would imply a moral or political categorization.

Whether terrorism is wrong is not relevant as it is akin to associating it with the justifications within war. This is to say that if war can be justified as right, then so can terrorism. McPherson says "much of this language is not helpful in morally distinguishing terrorism, since conventional war tends to be at least as 'ruthlessly destructive,' 'unpredictable,' and 'horrific' for noncombatants and combatants."¹⁴ Though his definition includes "the deliberate use of force against ordinary noncombatants," the fact that war is as horrific for noncombatants as it is for combatants creates a lot of confusion on the moral front of both war and terrorism. Steinhoff further discredits the ethics of terrorism when he says that "even if the United States were to succeed in its 'war against terrorism' ...there would be only a little less violence in the world. There would certainly not be more justice."¹⁵ Even Scheffler assumes that "terrorism may sometimes be a response to great wrongs,

¹⁴ Lionel K. McPherson, "Is Terrorism Distinctively Wrong?" *Ethics* 117, no. 3 (2007): 525.

¹⁵ Uwe Steinhoff, *On the Ethics of War and Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 134.

and great wrongs may be committed in opposing it.”¹⁶ And in her discussion of terrorism and war, Held associates terrorism to small war and goes as far to say “...the violence used to suppress terrorism is the price paid to maintain the status quo, as the violence used by the dissatisfied group is the price paid to pursue its goal, [and] from a moral point of view, it is entirely appropriate to compare these levels of violence.”¹⁷

As the literature suggests, the justifications associated for going to war can be made the same for justifying terrorism, to which the act of justifying becomes nothing more than a blaming mechanism that enforces the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ or the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. In this sense the justifications become another form of discursive and legal approaches that have also proven to be meaningless within the literature. Retired General Michael Hayden makes claim to this rhetorical device discussing the moral dilemmas. He justifies attacking the enemy and pointedly says it involves tough decisions because it is reality we live in.¹⁸ The real world offers those who practice making decisions the moral clarity to do what they do, that by labeling the enemy as a terrorist becomes a tactful device when justifying war.

Terrorism as a Means is More Than What it Seems

Though a discursive approach forebodes uncertainty within the term, perhaps a different method from a historical perspective would fulfill a better

¹⁶ Samuel Scheffler, “Is Terrorism Morally Distinctive?” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 14 no. 1 (2006): 2.

¹⁷ Virginia Held, “Terrorism and War,” *The Journal of Ethics* 8 no. 1 (2004): 68.

¹⁸ Michael Hayden, *Playing to the Edge: American Intelligence in the Age of Terror* (New York: Penguin, 2016).

definition to explain terrorism as a phenomenon. Though Hoffman lays out the changing meaning of terrorism throughout its history from the French Revolutions *regime de la terreur* to Carlo Pisacane's theory of "propaganda of the deed" circa 1857 and the use of this concept by terrorist groups in nineteenth-century Russia to 1930's Italy, Germany and Russia to the Second World War and the September 11 attacks in New York City and Washington D.C.,¹⁹ these accounts offer precedents of the rhetorical dimension of the word which has proven to have little value in explaining the phenomenon. Instead of looking at historical representations of terrorism on a rhetorical basis, it would be of more help to look at history from the accounts taken by the terrorist.

Garrison has resulted to approach terrorism by looking at the records that terrorists themselves have offered. He attempts to establish a "continuity of thought" by reviewing the writings of terrorists' agendas dating back to the 18th century with the famed French Revolutionary Robespierre and his arguments of virtue and terror to the more recent Osama bin Laden.²⁰ He concludes that the "examination of their writings reveals that terrorists share a common understanding of the utility of terror [that by] their adoption of terror as a tool to achieve their respective goals and their view on the utility and necessity of violence to achieve those goals are not dissimilar" *ibid.*, 260.

¹⁹ Bruce Hoffman, "Defining Terrorism," in *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3-19.

²⁰ Arthur Garrison, "Defining Terrorism: Philosophy of the Bomb, Propaganda by Deed and Change through Fear and Violence," *Criminal Justice Studies* 17 no. 3 (2004): 260-262.

The most compelling argument derived from these historical writings is the proof “that terrorism is not explained by the cause, because causes change. Terrorism is [rather] defined by the rationalization, logic and perception of how to effect change” *ibid.*, 263. Those figures namely Robespierre, Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Nechaev, Bakunin and Osama bin Laden, all used “terror to instill fear” within their target whether that be countrymen or a government, *ibid.* Hence, to define terrorism based on a rational approach, where the means justify the ends, is the most beneficial and useful to explain the phenomenon of terrorism. As Garrison points out, “terrorists are different when viewed from the social context of time, the target selection of the terror, the reason for the use of terror, the justification of the use of terror, the evil that terrorists seek to address, and the goals they have...but the use of terror as a tool to achieve desired goals has not changed” *ibid.*

Nathanson argues “that we should define terrorism in terms of means rather than ends,”²¹ and Garrison found a pattern within terrorist writings that supports Nathanson’s argument that “terrorism is best understood as a tactic, a means of fighting,” (*ibid.*) when he discusses the “utility of terror”²² as a tool. He says, “It is this uniformity in the use of terrorism as a tool to achieve a desired political, social and/or religious goal that allows for a neutral and systemic definition of terrorism,” *ibid.* This idea stems from focusing on the nature of terrorist acts in which “the act of using terror defines the terrorist,” *ibid.*, 272.

²¹ Stephen Nathanson, *Terrorism and the Ethics of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

²² Arthur Garrison, “Defining Terrorism: Philosophy of the Bomb, Propaganda by Deed and Change through Fear and Violence,” *Criminal Justice Studies* 17 no. 3 (2004): 260.

The argument that terrorism is a means is furthered by Dexter's discussion of terrorism and violence. In his attempt to make sense of terrorism, he discusses it in terms of a violent communication tool. He refers to terrorism as a category of violence to which "violence is targeted against civilians...[and] intentionally targets civilians or intentionally terrorizes; that terrorism is a communicative form of violence; and finally that terrorism is an exceptional form of violence."²³ Hence, "terrorism as a category of violence can only be understood in relation to warfare," *ibid.*, 125. In the end, in Dexter's discussion he argues that terrorism is a means, a form of violence that communicates. As such, the logic behind studying the power of visual violence as a tool becomes necessary within today's political environment because many terrorists' acts are being carried out through the utility of visual terror.

Research Framework, Methodology, and Case studies

In his opening, in the classic work *Arms and Influence*, Thomas Schelling says, "the usual distinction between diplomacy and force is not merely in the instruments, words or bullets, but in the relation between adversaries—in the interplay of motives and the role of communication, understanding, compromise and restraint," (Schelling, 1). The key word here is *interplay*. The interplay between non-state actor and state actor within asymmetric warfare, one where the weaker entity goes up against the stronger entity, is a vital distinction that defines the relationship between the two adversaries and the way they interact. This relationship is defined

²³ Helen Dexter, "Terrorism and Violence: Another Violence is Possible?" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no. 1 (2012): 122.

by the use of visual communication because it acts as a form of power for the non-state actor against its stronger adversary. It enforces the inherent threat of violence that comes from the inhumane images themselves.

Visual communication is valuable to the non-state actor because of its indirect coercive nature. As Schelling says, “the hurting does no good directly; it can work only indirectly [to which] coercion depends more on the threat of what is yet to come than on the damage already done” *ibid.*, 172. This indirect coercion with which Schelling discusses is the leading framework to explain the assumption that the non-state actors are acting rationally. Through the communication of their visually violent and inhumane images, non-state actors are portraying themselves with the perception of irrational behavior within the act itself. Visual violence, thus, acts as an extension of extreme communication.

The visually violent images are used as a psychological weapon because it is one of the few weapons that non-state actors have at their disposal. Two cases of non-state actors, the Red Brigades and ISIS, will be compared in order to understand the strategic advantages of visual violence, the underlying argument being that visual violence is used as a mechanism that enables the perception of irrationality. Both of these cases have produced their own forms of images that have impacted their subsequent audiences, and it is this impact to which this research focuses. Since it is the psychological level that these images resonate with their audiences, it is imperative to understand how exactly visual violence functions as a tool within warfare. Moreover, both the Red Brigades and ISIS utilize images that reinforce this power dynamic making their organization appear more credible than they might

otherwise appear in reality, as they attempt to act as a representative state through the function of their images.

The Red Brigades were chosen based on their utilization of images used to send a message to their associated audience. The production of the three images they choreographed and publicized is comparable to the dramatically staged cinematography from the infamous Jordanian pilot video distributed February 8, 2015. Both the Red Brigades and ISIS have produced images that illustrate a visual narration within the frames. On the one hand the Red Brigades stage their images in a manner that suits their political agenda with varying levels of violence and inhumanity illustrated within the frame. Secondly, ISIS visually narrates an inhumane death whose impact is on those who view the dramatic effect.

While the images themselves are important in terms of visual appeal toward the audience, what holds the most value in terms of comparing the Red Brigades against ISIS is the intended fear and publicity. Both the Red Brigades and ISIS, working within the context of asymmetric warfare, work within their means to gather the best ends with the tools they have at their disposal. The terror tactic becomes the visual violence framed within the image whereby the intention from both non-state actors is to cause a high level of fear. Likewise, both actors work within their means to obtain the highest level of publicity within their audience.

Because fear is an essential emotive quality that is instigated within the frame, the central method is a visual analysis that is used in order to conceptualize the performance itself. The concepts of spectacle and theater are important to the understanding of performance violence that both the Red Brigades and ISIS have

chosen within their terrorist acts. The visual analysis is useful when explaining how the visual component interacts with the violent component within visual violence, and will highlight where the threat of visual violence serves the non-state actor and where it hinders their pursuits.

Chapter 2

Irrationality versus Rationality

The perception of irrationality associated with visual violence is a constant outcome because it is likely that visual violence is a mechanism that enables this perception. Those who argue that terrorists are irrational are limiting their discussion to the framework that frames the enemy as irrational because to frame the enemy as a terrorist is one of the main objectives in coercive diplomacy. The literature that discusses terrorists as irrational actors falls under the category of 'framing the enemy' because they are either refuting or agreeing with terrorists as irrational actors in warfare. Many scholars who refute the idea that terrorism is irrational illustrate why it is problematic, and the underlying problem throughout remains that irrationality is based in framing the enemy as a terrorist when terrorist acts have been committed. Furthermore, when the rhetorical use of terrorism becomes normal within the lexicon of the global community, it is easier to label the enemy as irrational.

Terrorism as Irrational

Undoubtedly, the frequency with which the rhetorical use of terrorism has presented itself in today's global political environment from both a media and scholarly level has impacted the discussion and focus of the research. In fact many who attempt to explain and understand terrorism as a phenomenon have to refute the idea that terrorists are irrational when explained from a psychological approach.

They have to argue against those who would label terrorists as irrational and have done so successfully. Frankly, such an approach has not garnered enough traction to substantiate any distinction from a terrorist to a non-terrorist.²⁴ As Clark McCauley says, "...we have to face the fact that normal people can be terrorists, that we are ourselves capable of terrorist acts under some circumstances," *ibid*. Faced with this disconcerted and outspoken notion, each individual must ask themselves 'what would I do if circumstances arose that prompted an act of terrorism?'

An individual person does irrational acts, but that does not necessarily mean a terrorist is irrational when resorting to terrorist acts. Certainly, the act of purposely-killing innocent civilians and prisoners seems irrational. And when a labeled terrorist organization conducts a raid on a prison, then leads a mass execution of a specific and careful selection of 1000 of those prisoners, or when an organization fighter posts photos on Twitter "of himself holding a severed head in one hand with the caption, "Chillin' with my homie, or what's left of him,"²⁵ the typical response is to label these people as mentally unstable, insane and irrational. Their actions are so brutal, outrageous and attention grabbing that leads the audience to believe these people have a mental disorder because to publicize not only the killings of innocent people, but also the enjoyment of doing so seems like an act of insanity that could only be explained through a mental illness.

²⁴ Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, "The Psychology of Terrorism: "Syndrome" Versus "Tool" Perspectives," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 2 (2006): 195.

²⁵ Benjamin Hall, *Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army* (New York: Center Street Hachette Book Group, 2015): 58-60.

The literature discussing mental illnesses and terrorism have found no causal relationship between the two. David Weatherston and Jonathan Moran have argued such a case and claim that “the process of going underground and engaging in violent clandestine activities is, by its very nature, hazardous and stressful [in which] symptoms of pathology may be a natural reaction within the circumstances and not indicative of a disorder.”²⁶ Their discussion of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), often experienced by war veterans, further shows that “the condition is a natural psychological reaction to an extreme situation and is experienced not only by combatants but is also manifested by those involved in extraordinary threatening situations,” *ibid.*, 702-703. This means that an entire society can experience PTSD if exposed to “long-term exposure to the threat of physical harm in uncertain circumstances,” *ibid.*, 704. As such, an exposure to war zones, being an example of a circumstance, the environment to which soldiers, police, and terrorists can develop mental health problems are natural reactions that does not necessarily deem one mentally disabled, *ibid.*

Arie Kruglanski and Shira Fishman have summarized mental traits in what they term a “syndrome” perspective on terrorism as “contributing factors.”²⁷ They disqualify the “root causes” of terrorism being traced to one particular personality variable or situational conditions, but they do not disqualify that the “wide variety of personality traits...and situational conditions...may well qualify as contributing

²⁶ David Weatherston and Jonathan Moran. “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 47 no. 6 (2003): 702.

²⁷ Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, “The Psychology of Terrorism: “Syndrome” Versus “Tool” Perspectives,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 2 (2006): 199.

factors to terrorism” *ibid.* Charles Ruby in his quest to argue that “terrorism is another form of military action,”²⁸ discusses the debate “on whether or not terrorism is just a sign of psychopathology” (*ibid.*, 21) by referring to the Fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to which he concludes with a definition that “one must also then include as pathology such diverse activities as law enforcement work, organized crime, professional football and wartime military activities” *ibid.* He argues, that “terrorists are not unique in their susceptibility to these kinds of psychological consequences” and that this can be seen within the military, *ibid.*, 23.

The effects of 9/11—Government and News Media Response to the Terrorist Threat

The events of 9/11 are well known for giving international recognition to terrorism, to which has also been associated to Islamic Jihad given the link to al Qaeda. Therefore, in today’s environment, a group associating itself with Islam is more easily framed under the terrorist label than any other religion due to the repercussions of 9/11. This, as a result, has offered governments the means to legitimize their counterterrorism measures against the targeted enemy to which they profile as terrorists. As long as they have international support, governments tend to legitimize their use of military and counterterrorism measures against the common enemy of terrorism. And if journalists, governments and organizations can

²⁸ Charles L. Ruby, “Are Terrorists Mentally Deranged?” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2 no. 1 (2002): 15.

find a connection to such entities as the Muslim Brotherhood or Al Qaeda, it is easier to obtain support from such international actors as the United States and Europe.

When faced with terrorist acts, governments typically respond by profiling the perpetrators as a means to define the enemy. It is a counter terrorism measure that serves the government and is counter productive to understanding the phenomenon of terrorism. For instance in her discussion of separatist terrorism Pokalova says “in today’s world where terrorism is considered a grave international threat, states have an opportunity to frame their ethno-nationalist conflicts as a threat of terrorism.”²⁹ Though her analysis is centered around ethnic groups within a state structure, the framing effect she references is relevant to the current security apparatus that responses from the coalition of governments is based a group is labeled as a terrorist.

The framing effect, says Pokalova, is the shaping of “individual opinions [that] can be shaped through certain emphases on issues of potential resonance [and as a result], these changes in the presentation of an issue...affect our opinions about them,” *ibid*. Furthermore, these issues have a wide range of interpretations and value systems that play toward the “societal values in order to generate a desired level of policy support” (*ibid*) needed by the government. Therefore, since terrorism holds a definitional ambiguity, policy and decision makers are able to generate support from the rhetorical use of the concept of terrorism.

²⁹ Elena Pokalova, “Framing Separatism as Terrorism: Lessons from Kosovo,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33 no. 5 (2010): 432.

The United States response to terrorism and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security is an example of when a government securitizes the issue of terrorism by profiling terrorists. In this way, al Qaeda was given high priority after the bombings of the Twin Towers in New York. Bryan Mabee describes the creation of the DHS as “a monumental act of restructuring of the architecture of the US government”³⁰ that as the United States is a major security actor with the power to respond to threats, was able to institutionalize a new way to frame security. As such the United States was able to “[re-think]... the role of borders within US security policy,” *ibid*. They institutionalized a response to the threat of terrorism with the ‘War on Terrorism.’

As Judith Miller recounts the events, the reporting, and the responses from the US government following the 9/11 attacks, she describes then President George Bush’s national security team’s failure “to give al Qaeda sufficient priority in the first eight months in office,” and “was determined to compensate by embracing a fierce “war” on terror.”³¹ She recalls key decision makers such as then “National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and other senior officials...arguing that the counterterrorism campaign had to be waged against both the tactic to delegitimize its use and the people who practiced it,” *ibid*. Furthermore, their response and the fact that they “defin[ed] the enemy broadly empowered Washington to forge alliances against anti-Western Islamist groups that were only loosely linked to al-

³⁰ Bryan Mabee, “Re-imagining the Borders of US Security after 9/11: Securitisation, Risk, and the Creation of the Department of Homeland Security,” *Globalizations* 4, no. 3 (2007): 386.

³¹ Judith Miller, *The Story: A Reporter’s Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015): 148-149.

Qaeda; Hamas in Gaza; Hezbollah, Iran's proxy in Lebanon; the Islamic Group and Islamic Jihad in Egypt; Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines; and Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, *ibid.* Undoubtedly, the counter terrorism approach that the Bush Administration enacted was based on the profiling techniques used to create an enemy through framing them as a terrorist in order to respond to a threat they neglected to foresee and thereby prevent in the past.

In the last 10 years, Heads of States have been using profiling techniques to isolate Muslims as the enemy. Recent examples of the rhetorical use of terrorism are seen in the statements made by Secretary of State John Kerry, Prime Minister David Cameron, and President Francois Hollande among others, their statements largely label the perpetrators as irrational. After three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped, a press statement from John Kerry refers to the occurrence as "a despicable terrorist act" to which "many indications point to Hamas...that Hamas is a terrorist organization known for its attacks on innocent Civilians and which has used kidnapping in the past."³² Prime Minister David Cameron in his press statement following the November Paris Attack, referred to terrorists who are "threatening the lives of innocent civilians."³³ Most compelling is President Francois Hollande statement calling the Paris Attacks "an act of absolute barbarity...[where]...the

³² Kerry, John (June, 15, 2014) US Condemns Kidnapping of Three Israeli Teenagers, Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/06/227599.htm>.

³³ Cameron, David, (November 23, 2015) PM Press Statement following Paris Talks, UK Gov, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-press-statement-following-paris-talks>.

families are suffering grief and distress, and the country is suffering.”³⁴ The statements themselves, discussing the psychological effects such as grief and distress after killing innocent civilians, is a propaganda tool to gain support for their governments’ counterterrorism measures.

Emmanuel Todd has captured the essence of profiling Muslims as terrorists within French society by analyzing the reaction after the Charlie Hebdo attack in January of 2015. He discusses the French reaction from an internal French societal level that captures a divisive, self-preservation of French society. He cites “profound differentialism” as an internal social division of the immigrant population in which “the dominant party on the French left does not view itself responsible for the well-being and the future of this part of the population.”³⁵ While he admits that “stick[ing] the label ‘Muslim’ onto this human diversity is...a racist act” (*ibid.*, 153) he identifies the French prison system and the jailing of people with a “recent immigration origin” who endure “overpopulation...add[ing] to the harmful atmosphere of the prison environment,” *ibid.*, 171. France has systematically succeeded in indirectly creating a segregated society rooted in its fundamentally Catholic experience. Islamophobia and the profiling of Muslims as terrorists is the result of internal racism and class inequality in order to maintain the French status quo. In the end this example of profiling is inherently a fear mongering technique that is common with any society who wants to maintain the status quo.

³⁴ Hollande, Francois (November 14, 2015) Attacks in Paris–Statement by M. Francois Hollande, President of the Republic, following the defence council meeting, <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Paris-attacks-Official-statements#s-Attacks-in-Paris-Statement-by-M-Francois-Hollande-President-of-the-nbsp>.

³⁵ Emmanuel Todd, *Who is Charlie?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015): 143.

While governments typically frame someone as a terrorist as a means to defeat the enemy, the news media also contributes toward building the irrational claim. When discussing how the news media supports this irrational claim, it is first relevant to understand how terrorism is framed within their stories. First “the nature of terrorism stories themselves...contain universal concerns like drama, tragedy, fear, heroism, and survival³⁶ [where] terrorism news leads to...the inherent and universal shock, horror, sympathy, and unity such attacks bring,” *ibid.*, 110. Second, “framing occurs when media make[s] some aspects of a particular issue more salient in order to promote “a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation,” *ibid.*, 114.

Furthermore, an essential part of the coverage of the news media is to understand that a large part of their sources come from the governments and Heads of State from which the damage is being done. As Traugott and Brader suggest, “coverage tends to focus on events and details, often from the perspective of the government under attack,” *ibid.*, 184. This means that, often times, the descriptions, the information, and the sources of quotes come directly from the government actors. As such “studies of how perpetrators are labeled (e.g., as “guerillas,” “terrorists,” or “insurgents”) suggest the selective use of these terms by journalists in ways that correspond to the interests of the government,” *ibid.* More often than not, the perpetrators are labeled with such descriptions that suggest irrationality. However, it is a means to securitize terrorism, making it an important international

³⁶ Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion R. Just. *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public.* (London: Taylor and Francis Book, 2003): 104.

issue that makes it more convenient to generate support that a government needs in order to maintain its power and control.

This rhetorical use of terrorism used by governments when classifying certain groups as terrorist is a labeling mechanism that serves their political agenda as oppose to aiding the understanding of terrorism. With terrorist acts a constant threat creating an unstable international environment; understandably a government's response becomes the means by which a phenomenon like terrorism is understood. The broader perspective is overlooked and tactics useful for categorizing the perpetrators such as profiling becomes the normal defining tool. However, it should be understood that this is reactionary and not an explanation of the phenomenon.

Terrorism is Rational

On the surface, the appearance of blood-lust violence from an individual seems irrational, but perhaps it is a means to an end or a means of individual expression.³⁷ If it is a means to an end, then the use of blood-lust violence can be analyzed through the perspective of rationality. The rationalization of terrorism dates back to the German radical theorist Karl Heinzen's two-part *Murder* essay in 1849 where he provides "the first systematic justification for terrorism" or rather a reason for killing in a moral context as "an act of legitimate self-defense when directed against a murderous tyranny" *ibid.*, 475. Though most of the rationalist

³⁷ Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 477.

thought refers to revolutionaries in Russia during the 19th Century, and an “[attraction] to the developing doctrine of revolutionary socialism,” (*ibid.*, 478) the idea that violence used as an act of terror to obtain an end result is compelling enough to say that those who kill in a blood-lust act of violence, must have a reason for doing it.

There are two reasons for choosing to focus on rationalism. On the one hand, groups that resort to terrorism are normally weaker than their enemies, and therefore they might want to instigate a fear response from the audience as a means to be taken seriously. Meaning that because these groups do not have a solid military capacity or international recognition and support, their only tool to generate change is through a response from the public and the adversary or target government. Secondly, based on the logic suggested by scholars Neumann and Smith who attempted to rationalize terrorism by associating it, in the context of military strategies, with that of a campaign strategy. Neumann & Smith suggest, “rationality on behalf of the terrorists [where]...terrorists will make an attempt to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate targets. Legitimate targets, which typically include the institutions and the representatives of the state...can be rationalized as agents of repression and, to that extent, attacks on them will represent a discriminate targeting policy.”³⁸

Neumann & Smith are quick to point out the challenge with the illegitimacy or weakness argument, that “terrorists need to appeal to ‘hearts and minds’ and

³⁸ Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R Smith, “Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and Its Fallacies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 577-578.

generate political strength in order to compensate for their military weakness [thus]...prevent[ing] a full understanding of the military dynamics of terrorist violence” *ibid.*, 579. They clarify the “terrorist strategy” as “set[ting] the target a series of (military) dilemmas and then challenge it to react” *ibid.*, 579-580. An important dimension of the terrorist strategy to consider within the military dynamics of violence is the coercive nature of said violence as a threat. Here Schelling’s diplomacy of violence is a good building block in which to elaborate on Neumann & Smith’s concern of the understanding of the military dynamics of terrorist violence. He says, “Military strategy...is now...the art of coercion...intimidation [and it]...has become the diplomacy of violence.”³⁹ Here the diplomacy of violence can be discussed within the context of strategic terrorism and psychological warfare.

Strategic Terrorism and Psychological Warfare

Strategic terrorism and psychological warfare are themes within the literature on terrorism as rational actors that help explain a labeled terrorist organization’s strategic advantages. The underlying motive within strategic terrorism literature is that terrorists use the shock effect to provoke a response from the enemy whose response will ultimately benefit the organization who provokes by harboring support for the organization’s political agenda. Rapoport,

³⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and influence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966): 34.

refers to it as “politics of atrocity,”⁴⁰ Nuemann and Smith refer to it as target response,⁴¹ Kydd and Walter refer to it simply as provocation,⁴² and Freedman refers to it as coercion.⁴³ Even Nacos refers to Osama bin Laden having “considered terrorism...as a vehicle to dispatch messages—“speeches” in his words [and]...concluded that Americans...had heard and reacted to the indented communications,” *ibid.*, 3. “Bin Laden and his followers managed to set America’s public agenda for many months, perhaps even years...” with the dramatic images that were replicated on 9/11, *ibid.*, 3.

To extend this idea, George McCormick utilizes game theory to discuss terrorist strategic decision making in a rational way. In the study of terrorism a “strategic frame has been...adapted [as]...an instrumental activity designed to achieve or help achieve a specified set of long run and short run objectives [and]...is forward-looking and “consequential,” in the sense that the decision to use terrorism and the nature of the terrorism that is used are based on the anticipated consequences of the current actions.”⁴⁴ “What this implies...is that a terrorist group’s decision to act (or not act)—a decision that includes its choice of targets, tactics, and time—is influenced by the decisions of its opponents,” *ibid.*, 482.

⁴⁰ Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 484.

⁴¹ Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, “Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and Its Fallacies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 579-582.

⁴² Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 3 no. 1 (2006): 51.

⁴³ Lawrence Freedman, “Terrorism as a Strategy,” *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007): 319.

⁴⁴ Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 481.

What George McCormick offers that sets his analysis of strategic terrorism apart from the others is his connection to the Department of Defense that offers by simple association, subjectivity toward concepts related to traditional warfare. The choice of establishing targets, tactics and time is a forward-looking process that is influenced by the decisions of its opponents. This is a logic that appears to resemble military strategy, but at the same time is a useful means to explain terrorism tactics. He therefore provides a strategic framework based on decisions where the terrorist group relies on the choices of those countering its terror tactics, which means that terrorism coexists with counterterrorism to be mutual reinforcing by their influence toward one another.

Another theme present within the strategic terrorism literature concerns its persuasive elements. While coercion and provocation both work on the level of persuasion, it is the analysis of Neumann & Smith that deserves a well-rounded explanation for its military and campaign strategic association. They start the evaluation by identifying “a campaign of ‘strategic terrorism’...one...based on achieving political effects primarily through terrorist violence.”⁴⁵ In establishing that “...the aim of a strategy of terrorism...[is]...to break the spirit and create a sensation of fear within a target group...” three stages of strategic terrorism 1) Disorientation, 2) Target Response, and 3) Gaining Legitimacy are identified as a means to define Strategic Terrorism. The *first* attempts to break the perceived psychological bond between the population and government (*ibid.*, 577) “...by

⁴⁵ Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R Smith, “Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and Its Fallacies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 573.

escalating the violence to a level where it appears that the authorities are unable to prevent the spread of chaos...[thereby isolating] the individual from the regime and environment [in hopes]...that he will become susceptible to the alternative political program offered by the terrorists," *ibid.* The *second* "is to set the target a series of (military) dilemmas and then challenge it to react," (*ibid.*, 579-580) and the *third* involves "[holding] out an attractive vision of a 'new' legitimacy," *ibid.*, 582. "The eventual purpose...is to erode the target's legitimacy and replace it with that of the insurgents," *ibid.*, 585. This is done by "[exploiting] the emotional impact of the violence [inserting] and alternative political message and [seeking] to broaden support, often through the media" *ibid.*, 590.

The basis of Neumann & Smith's analysis lays in the campaign strategy of the groups who commit terrorist acts and the effect of the campaign to disorient, generate target response, and gain legitimacy. These goals are all contingent on the art of persuasion, whether the recipient is the government or the mass population.

Neville Bolt also contributes to the debate on the role of persuasive elements in strategic terrorism as a means to provoke the opponent into a response. However, he offers a more symbolic analysis with regard to strategic terrorism. This is to say that his analysis "draws on the symbiosis between Propaganda of the Deed and global media, that near ubiquitous and instantaneous space where narratives and myths have become the insurgent's weapon of choice in a politico-military strategy."⁴⁶ In that sense, he uses Propaganda of the Deed to draw on the

⁴⁶ Neville Bolt, *The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 20.

psychological nature of terrorist acts where the propaganda of the Deed becomes a psychological weapon that is driven by the constructed narratives and myths they construct against the enemy.

He uses other defining concepts such as “political marketing” and “strategic communication” to explain terrorism in today’s environment. By creating a juxtaposition against 19th century use of POTD and late 20th Century POTD, he identifies the failure in the 19th century being the inability “to convey a sustained message and explain how using violence could deliver a better society,” (*ibid.*, 50) and says that new digital media... “allowed insurgents to use violent political acts not just as kinetic or symbolic deeds but as systematic triggers for memory of political-economic grievance and stories that tapped deep into communities’ spiritual lives,” *ibid.*

Bolt’s analysis is of particular importance because it emphasizes strategies for marketing and propaganda that terrorists can utilize for the message. This is portrayed within the concept of POTD, Political Marketing and Strategic Communication. The former, having delved into marketing strategies, make up the 4 P’s. The 4 P’s associated with a “product-centric definition demanded four prerequisites: ‘the right product backed by the right promotion and put in the right place at the right price,” *ibid.*, 37. As Bolt goes further into discussing political marketing, he asks an important question with regard to insurgents, that is, ‘does using violence disqualify insurgents from being political marketers?’ From this question, he identifies al Qaeda’s ideologue, Ayman al-Zawahiri as having an “attentiveness to the information marketplace, intuitively recognizing three of the

marketing 4 P's: namely, a willingness to adapt the product with the right promotion in the right place," *ibid.*, 40.

Another important contribution from Bolt is the concept of "Opportunity Space". He explains that speed is an asset of POTD to which "governments, media and insurgents compete to control the opportunity space," *ibid.*, 111. Additionally, most important to control this reaction aka "...POTD's opportunity space, insurgents command their own communications timeline—self-initiated and self-propelled" *ibid.*, 112. By competing for the Opportunity Space, "states must react to visual acts of violence broadcast indiscriminately with instant global diffusion. This is exacerbated where governments hesitate to intervene in 'opportunity spaces'" *ibid.*, 193. Similarly to the previous scholars mentioned, he associates this method to "disorientate an anxious public [where]...those spaces become the crisis arena for political exploitation when images create an emotional impact," *ibid.*

What is strategic about terrorism is the psychological effect it attempts to exploit. It is here where Bolt's symbolic approach to Propaganda of the Deed contributes to the connection between strategic terrorism and psychological warfare because he creates an operational means for understanding how terrorists are able to persuade the masses on a psychological level with the use of narrative, memory and myths. At an operational level, it becomes understandable why the media is of high importance to the strategy of a labeled terrorist organization because as Bolt says there is a symbiotic relationship between the media and Propaganda of the Deed.

Other scholars also associate terrorism with the media as a strategy. Nacos highlights that “when one says “terrorism” in a democratic society, one also says “media.” For terrorism by its very nature is a psychological weapon which depends upon communicating a threat to a wider society...publicity via the mass media is not an end in itself; it is a means to more important ends, namely the realization of short- and medium-term or long term political objectives.”⁴⁷

Furthermore, Siboni also discusses this psychological effect to which he refers to as “the savage terrorist theater used by ISIS.”⁴⁸ He discusses the psychological effects from savagery as “[creating] an atmosphere of prolonged international interest and awareness,” that is “[shaping] its cruel image” that in turn “[creates] the impression of being more powerful than it actually is,” *ibid*. The effects are very important to the terrorist strategy within the framework of psychological warfare when considering that terrorists are operating within a scope of weakness to the opposition. The effects seem to illustrate a need for power that is obtained when the media discusses the spectacular and the savage cruelty, thus creating a sense of legitimacy.

Irrationality is Rational

To be irrational is hence the strategy to which a labeled terrorist organization wants within their strategy. That is, they want to provoke the

⁴⁷ Brigitte L. Nacos, “The terrorist Calculus Behind 9-11: A Model for Future Terrorism?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 1 (2003): 5.

⁴⁸ Gabi Siboni, “The Islamic State Strategy on Cyberspace,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 7 no. 1 (2015): 135.

emotional response that the media inevitably creates within the methods of how they frame terrorists. The traditional hero/villain storyline is one that promotes irrationality for the villain organization. For instance, “the events of 9/11 had a powerful psychological impact for many Americans [where] health researchers found elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress syndrome among American adults and children after the attacks.”⁴⁹ This means that “to induce fear and anxiety” within a group of people is “one of terrorism’s central goals” that focuses on “acts of brutality and violence that gain broad publicity,” *ibid.*

A scholar of terrorism, David Long supports the psychological claim⁵⁰ by arguing that “the immediate objective of the terrorist group is to create terror—not destruction—and then to use the unreasonable fear and the resulting political disaffection it has generated among the public to intimidate governments into making political concessions in line with its political goals,” *ibid.*, 6. Indeed, he claims that terrorism is essentially a “psychological tactic, with fear and publicity two of its most important elements,” *ibid.*

Through his analysis of American tourists who stayed away from Europe between 1985 and 1986 he identifies “the transformation of reasonable fear into a kind of irrational hysteria as a terrorist tactic,” (*ibid*) and continues to say that “in order for terrorists to instill fear, they must publicize their activities [and]...maximum public exposure after the fact is still more crucial...[in

⁴⁹ Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion R. Just. *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public*. (London: Taylor and Francis Books, 2003): 255.

⁵⁰ David E. Long, *The Anatomy of Terrorism* (New York: Free Press, 1990): 5.

which]...victims, location, and timing of terrorist acts are all chosen with public exposure in mind," *ibid.*

With fear and publicity being important elements for strategic terrorism, acting as communication outcomes for the acts committed by terrorists, then communication becomes the key mechanism of control. Following the logic of Kydd and Walter, who say that "the literature on uncertainty, conflict, and costly signaling" are a helpful "starting point for a theory of terrorist strategies," they purport that "if uncertainty about power, resolve, and trustworthiness can lead to violence, then communication on these topics is the key to preventing (or instigating) conflict."⁵¹ Hence, "because talk is cheap, states and terrorists who wish to influence the behavior of an adversary must resort to costly signals" *ibid.*, 58.

Costly signals defined as "actions so costly that bluffers and liars are unwilling to take them," (*ibid*) can explain the psychological effects and strategic use of visual violence because it is categorized as a form costly signaling. It is a communication mechanism that enables the producer of the images to appear irrational to those who might bluff or lie. Visual violence, as a communication mechanism, is presented as a form of power that counteracts those who would bluff or lie and, simultaneously, signals the importance of the threat or damage that an image illustrates to the audience. Furthermore, the idea that communication on power, resolve and trustworthiness is key to preventing or instigating conflicts, (*ibid.*, 57) is critical when understanding why irrationality is rational because it

⁵¹ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 3 no. 1 (2006): 56-57.

shows that if communicated in an extreme way, the emotional response of fear and anxiety will instigate a wanted conflict.

In his description of James Foley's beheading video, Friis confirms that, "the actual beheading is not explicitly shown in the video,"⁵² which means that ISIS chose a form of costly signaling that allows the audience to imagine what actually happened. Therefore, when left to imagination, the worst outcomes typically are understood to have happened even if they did not. What "the video does show [is] the black-clad insurgent pressing a knife against Foley's throat, followed by a shot displaying a beheaded body in a prone position with a head placed on the back, thus leaving little hope for Foley's fate," *ibid.* This scenario when the audience reflects on what they see leaves them feeling outraged, scared and potentially weak, especially considering the role that Foley played, a civilian journalist. The audience speculates that this cannot only happen to them, but anyone they know. In the initial stages, this video worked in order to expose ISIS as a threat to the world because ISIS was perceived as irrational, and with irrationality comes uncertainty that is threatening to the world.

The video supports Long's idea of "the most important operational characteristic of terrorism [which] is the premeditated use of threat of violence."⁵³ What he refers as premeditated violence is crucial in understanding the impact that the James Foley beheading video had on the public because the threat of violence echoed everywhere. The plan of violence that ISIS could propagate is the impact and

⁵² Simone Molin Friis, "'Beyond anything we have ever seen': Beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS," *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 1.

⁵³ David E. Long, *The Anatomy of Terrorism* (New York: Free Press, 1990): 6

not the act itself. People were rightly afraid of the uncertainty that ISIS posed to the world because they planned to use the threat of violence once the video was publicized to the world.

This further shows that “the impact of terrorism on the general public is more psychological than physical” through victimization as well as fear, *ibid.*, 1. He says that “thousands of travelers avoid certain carriers or airports for fear of hijacking or sabotage; senior business and government officials regularly undergo training in how to avoid becoming terrorist victims; and when there is a major terrorist attack, the media bring it right into the living rooms of millions of families around the world,” *ibid.* The fear of victimization that Long argues here aligns with Friis’ discussion about “beheading videos as a strategic tool for terrorist organizations [that] provide[s] valuable insights into the strategic goals motivating the production and dissemination of beheading videos.”⁵⁴

While Friis admits that “videos shared on the Internet are nearly impossible to control, given contemporary modes of circulation and reproduction [and that]...the videos’ political impact is not a direct effect of the original intentions of their producers,” he adds that “after their dissemination, the videos may be watched, interpreted and translated by a wider audience; they may be circulated extensively, censored or ignored; they may be reproduced, appropriated and discussed on various media platforms; and they may be picked up by political leaders and mobilized in political discourse,” *ibid.* Essentially, the videos’

⁵⁴ Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond anything we have ever seen’: Beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 730.

dissemination forebodes uncertainty and with uncertainty comes the wanted 'irrational' label that many associate with the organization who produced the content, thus ensuring maximum exposure.

Schelling's description of coercive diplomacy is relevant when discussing Long's 'psychological impact' argument and how it relates to the utilization of visual violence. As Long has discussed the transformation of fear to irrationality as a terror tactic,⁵⁵ Schelling helps to clarify the transformation process in the context of war when he says that, "...the hurting does no good directly; it can work only indirectly [to which] coercion depends more on the threat of what is yet to come than on damage already done."⁵⁶ While the indirect coercion that Schelling describes explains the reasons behind wanting to appear irrational to the audience, it does not fully explain the logic for why visuals is a useful mechanism that enables the perception of irrationality. To answer the question, two organizations that utilize visuals in which they themselves produce will be compared. The underlying argument being that they are perceived as irrational by the audience based on the amount of violence that is represented through the visual component.

⁵⁵ David E. Long, *The Anatomy of Terrorism* (New York: Free Press, 1990): 6.

⁵⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and influence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966): 172.

Chapter 3—The Red Brigades and the Three Stages of Images

The Red Brigades, “created from a “real schism” within the Italian Communist Party (PCI)—is the history of a political movement operating with the typical words, thoughts, and dogmas of a religious sect.”⁵⁷ Their existence from its rise to its fall can likewise “be described as having “three generations.”⁵⁸ Sociologist Robin Wagner-Pacifica describes the second generation as being “responsible for the kidnapping of Moro while the first generation would be the “group that would be on trial in Torino in March of 1978” *ibid.*, 52. The first generation is unique because of the particular political atmosphere in the “northern Italian city of Trento” that influenced their ideological perspectives. Trento “was the home of both the most progressive wing of the DC and the first accredited, university department of sociology in Italy,” *ibid.* Such figures as the leading founder Renato Curcio were influenced by such a “Trento Catholic/Sociologist matrix” in the late 1960s that influenced their Marxist-Leninist leaning ideology as they progressed into the radical and clandestine Red Brigades well-known in the 1970’s.

Additionally, Alison Jamieson divides the evolution of the Red Brigades into three stages, the social from 1970 to 1974; the existential from 1975 to 1979 and

⁵⁷ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 6.

⁵⁸ Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 50.

the survivalist from 1980 onwards.⁵⁹ The first stage was brought on by the “rapid economic boom of the 1960s, the neglect of the problems caused by the mass emigration from south to north and the inadequate social, housing, health, educational and working conditions in...Turin, Milan and Genoa,” *ibid.*, 511. The Second stage is distinguished in a particular instance, “when the Red Brigades murdered for the first time and lost a founding member in a gun battle with police...[and subsequently became] fully equated with the acceptance of death given and received,” *ibid.*, 513. And “as the group members increasingly sought clandestinity...their social analyses became more abstracted and removed from practical reality,” *ibid.*, 514. The third stage came immediately after the Moro killing in which the group tried to maintain its clandestine activity while in prison.⁶⁰

Those who belong to the first stage of the Red Brigades are known for “their first major action [that] was carried out in 1972 when, on March 3,” [who was] “a Sit-Siemens manager disliked by the workers for his dictatorial methods.”⁶¹ This particular event produced a well-known photo.⁶² Those who belonged to the second stage were responsible for the Moro killing and simultaneous murder, and those who belonged to the third stage were responsible for the kidnapping and murder of “the younger brother of ‘repentant’ terrorist Patrizio Peci...when Patrizio refused to retract evidence against former companions; Roberto was shot 11 times on a stretch

⁵⁹ Alison Jamieson, “Identity and morality in the Italian Red Brigades,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 no. 4 (1990): 510.

⁶⁰ Alison Jamieson, “Entry, discipline and exit in the Italian Red Brigades,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 no. 1 (1990): 17.

⁶¹ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 45.

⁶² See Appendix 1, Photo 1.

of waste land near Rome and a video film of the assassination [was] sent to the authorities.”⁶³ It is these three acts that produced three very different images that range in degree of violence that this case study will be focused.

Based on these three events, and the way violence was utilized as visual communication, the Red Brigades had varying degrees of impact toward their audiences. In identifying the effects of violence and the psychological mechanism of terrorism, David Moss postulates that “the total act of violence may have quite distinct effects on various audiences reached by news of the act, and it might be that none of the most consequential reactions among these audiences can be accurately ascribed to “terror.”⁶⁴ Hence, since fear is not the only reaction that would potentially come out from the act of viewing an image, there is a more basic logic of visual communication that the Red Brigades enforced within the three images.

Orsini outlines the timeline of the Red Brigades first kidnapping of 1972, “that happened immediately after the start of the trial for the anarchist Pinelli’s death. The victim, to be released after a “political process,” was Idalgo Macchiarini...”⁶⁵ When Orsini refers to release, what he describes about the actual event is that the Red Brigades kidnapped Macchiarini, held a gun to his head for a photo opportunity and let him go thereafter. The image itself shows a headshot of Macchiarini with two guns pointing at both his left and right sides of his head,

⁶³ Alison Jamieson, “Identity and morality in the Italian Red Brigades,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 no. 4 (1990): 517.

⁶⁴ Moss, David. 1983. ‘Analysing Italian Political Violence as a Sequence of Communicative Acts: the Red Brigades 1970-1982’ *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 13: 85.

⁶⁵ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 45.

holding a sign that translates as “Hit and Run! Nothing will remain unpunished!.” His expression, with no sign of pain or fear, shows a lack of interest as he gazes to the left of the perpetrators who are not shown within the scene.

“The Red Brigades’ act of “armed propaganda” makes use of two communicative channels, violence and texts,”⁶⁶ and the Macchiarini image is a perfect example of said armed propaganda. Their attempt at presenting the message to the public, that those powers that Macchiarini represents will not go unpunished as a gun is held to his head. This enables the imaginary violence to take place as oppose to the reality of actually killing the victim. For the Red Brigades, at least in the first stage, the use of visual communication is utilized for the political message. The problem here is the expression on Macchiarini’s face. The message that is presented unintentionally within the frame is somewhat comical. With Macchiarini’s lack of concern and enthusiasm of the guns pointing at his head, the image can be interpreted with a lack of seriousness to the kidnapping and potential punishment itself. It is not until Moro that they finally learn that killing their victims is a reality that must come to pass.

Before discussing the context of the Moro kidnapping, of the second stage of the Red Brigades existence, a third more grotesque and overall inhumane video is produced by the Red Brigades, only this time it is against Roberto Peci, an ex-brigadist and younger brother of Patrizio Peci, a pentito, or informant to the Italian government. Fellow brigadists kidnap him on June 10 1980 and on August 3...”the

⁶⁶ David Moss, “Analysing Italian Political Violence as a Sequence of Communicative Acts: the Red Brigades 1970-1982,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 13 (1983): 90.

execution is filmed, with the notes of the “Internationale” in the background, so that the Red Brigades can view the event.”⁶⁷ This final image produced by the Red Brigades is the most inhumane of all the images that were produced by the Red Brigades.⁶⁸ “Roberto is killed...in front of a ruined wall in the Rome suburbs, surrounded by garbage. He is wearing the same clothes he had on fifty-four days before. His body is riddled with eleven bullets. His face is unrecognizable. They shoot him in the mouth, cheek, temple, and ear. His hands are tied with a chain. He has gauze and sticking plaster over his eyes, mouth, and ears.”⁶⁹

This final image, produced in the brigadist survivalist stage is most intriguing in part because he was murdered, “when Patrizio refused to retract evidence against former companions.”⁷⁰ The resultant inhumane “video film of the assassination [was] sent to the authorities *ibid.*” Based on this image, the brigadist show themselves with an intentional irrationality based on the level of crude and grotesque violence from Peci’s body within the frame. The message is clear: to leave the Red Brigades a traitor is far worse than the opponent from which the Red Brigades based their resistance. Moreover, because it is the brother of the informant shows the level of punishment for condemning such an act. The family is not safe, so those who belong to the Red Brigades should think several times before leaving.

⁶⁷ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 46.

⁶⁸ See Appendix 1, Photo 3.

⁶⁹ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 46.

⁷⁰ Alison Jamieson, “Entry, discipline and exit in the Italian Red Brigades,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 no. 1 (1990): 16.

Though inhumane, this image should be further discussed within the context of the survivalist stage in which most of the brigadists were leaving, many in prison from the Moro kidnapping and murder, and internal bickering became the norm. As Jamieson poignantly notes, “[The Red Brigades] began to kidnap and kill in desperation and from rivalry” *ibid.* The Peci murder was an act of strategic desperation and a last ditch effort to survive that simultaneously presented the Red Brigades with a high level of irrationality to those who would view the image and video. In this case, the Red Brigades utilized inhumane images that presented themselves as irrational as a desperate form of group survival. This is in contrast to the scene of events that played out through the kidnapping and ultimate murder to Aldo Moro who throughout the event held a dehumanized mind to kill.

The Red Brigades—A Mind to kill

While Orsini describes the Red Brigades as a political movement, he also discusses the Red Brigades as a revolutionary sect which “is a sociopolitical organization formed by separation from a historically consolidated political-cultural tradition.”⁷¹ Within the same connotations of a revolutionary sect, he defines a religious sect explaining that “every revolutionary sect is a “church party” ...[and]...to justify this separation, the sects typically accuse the “church” of reaching a compromise with the powers of “this world” *ibid.*, 6. To extend the religious sect explanation he continues with descriptions coming from their own documentation saying that “they are children of the light,” arriving in this world to

⁷¹ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 5.

punish and redeem, to destroy and purify. The Red Brigades want to wash away the sins of capitalism with blood" *ibid.*, 7. The way the Red Brigades justified their actions through ideology (both revolutionary and religious in nature) is important because they were able to follow through with the political agenda without remorse.

This connection between the religious and revolutionary sect to carry out a political agenda is what is necessary for murder to take place without remorse. As Orsini describes of the importance of the revolutionary sect, "it is inside the revolutionary sect that the pedagogy of intolerance carries out its "dehumanization of the enemy" procedure...it is in the revolutionary sect that a person becomes a killer" *ibid.*, 85. He further explains that sociopsychological conditions of "belonging to an organized group" that "giving and receiving death becomes a "routine job" *ibid.* Killing becomes nothing more than a small procedure within a larger picture of purifying the world after the ideological justification has been adhered to by the followers through a disassociation with the "human" they are set to murder.

The "educational pathway" needed to dehumanize the enemy is a process that makes the enemy comparable to animals, as the Red Brigades spoke of their enemies as "shit," "filthy worms," "swine," "pigs," "rabid dogs," "servants," "drudges," "wretches," "filthy bastards," delinquents," and "neofascist bastards" *ibid.*, 58-59. Orsini explains, "When the enemy becomes a "monster," a "State hangman," a "filthy mercenary," a "State hack," a "Zionist pig," their lives become valueless" *ibid.*, 59. As brigadist Valerio Morucci says, "if you see him as a human being, you can no longer kill him," and Raffaele Fiore, noted as a "multiple murderer, who never repented nor distanced himself from terrorism...degrade[d] the relationship between people to

that between ‘animals’” as a means “to eliminate the enemy, adding: “We had no type of direct relationship...with those we killed. Ours was a political bond. For us they were symbols, political targets, and not people” *ibid.*, 59-60.

Continuing to dissect the Red Brigades’ religious mind set, Orsini refers to the words of ex brigadist Gianluca Codrini: “We’re profoundly marked by an alienated social life...in which ‘separation’ seems to be the prevailing law: separation between public and private, separation between being and awareness, separation between your mind and your balls” *ibid.*, 34. As they continue to delve deeper within their own world, they continue to separate themselves from society, and as Orsini says, “being “out of this world” is a key to understanding the mental process leading to murder” *ibid.*, 89. The Red Brigades essentially separated themselves from society and the people who live within it to the point where they did not feel any pain for their killings. While this mental process is essential to understand the mind-set needed to kill without remorse, a mind-set some would label as irrational, the main concept within this process is the inherent separation.

Jamieson highlights the social separation that took place upon entry in to the Red Brigades. She says, “on the whole entry was refused on the basis of unsuitability rather than attained by skills or merit” whereby leading “a ‘double life’ quickly brought another test of commitment.”⁷² The environment was strict and to be clandestine, isolation and separation became a necessity; from family, friends, and other common daily human interactions and routines. For example “whenever possible meals were to be consumed at home. Anything which could cause

⁷² Alison Jamieson, “Entry, discipline and exit in the Italian Red Brigades,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 no. 1 (1990): 3.

disturbance to neighbors such as music or radio late at night were to be avoided and...militants were to return home by midnight, *ibid.*, 6. Furthermore, “the spouse/partners, children and parents of anyone being sought by police would be the first to be kept under surveillance...any contacts had to be strictly controlled and limited, *ibid.*, 6-7.

The initiation process to become a clandestine Brigadist took six months in which “the first three months of clandestinity would be spent lying low, with few social contacts and negligible political activity [and] after six months he/she would be fully occupied with the political work of the organization, but would suffer increasingly from the restricted social environment” seeing “at most two other clandestine members in the course of any one day, *ibid.*, 10. Separation was a key component not only for the dehumanization effect that enabled murder without remorse from the group members, but “the fact that the [Red Brigades] did have such strict codes of conduct for every sphere of their activities was a major factor in their survival” *ibid.*, 7.

With that said, the concept of separation not only comes out of the societal dimension, the “real schism” within the Italian Communist Party (PCI) that Orsini notes,⁷³ but it also comes out of the performance dimension (terrorism as a form of a spectacle). Since the Red Brigades define themselves in opposition to the world with reference to a revolutionary sect, their proceeding actions would be based on their own reality; one that is expressed through a performance as a spectacle. Their

⁷³ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 6.

attempt was the kidnapping of Aldo Moro and the resultant imitation mug shot photo.⁷⁴

Act One—The Kidnapping

Put in context, “the skill with which the Red Brigades brought off the Moro kidnap and evaded the state authorities for 55 days while they continued to circulate freely throughout the country, deliver 24 letters, nine communication and attack people and property, made it the most successful terrorist attack ever seen in Italy.”⁷⁵ Wagner-Pacifici describes Aldo Moro as “a man of rigorous habit [who] departed from his home in the Monte Mario section of Rome every morning at nine o’clock.”⁷⁶ Following this routine, “Moro was escorted each day by five men, all from the south, all from poor backgrounds” who were always divided into two cars, “two men with Moro, three in the other car,” in which “neither car was bullet proof,” *ibid.*

On this day, March 16, 1978, Moro was abducted on Via Fani by “approximately ten people...some wore disguises designed to make them appear to be Alitalia airline pilots waiting at the bus stop...others waited in parked cars, another on a motorbike. One of their cars backed up from ahead, feigning a confused driver unsure about the road, one approached from behind. They opened up machine-gun fire, and in a minute it was over. All of the bodyguards were dead (four killed immediately, one later at the hospital). Moro was pushed into one of the

⁷⁴ See Appendix 1, Photo 2.

⁷⁵ Alison Jamieson, “Identity and morality in the Italian Red Brigade,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 no. 4 (1990): 509.

⁷⁶ Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 62.

commando cars, which sped off. He was then transferred to a waiting, ambulance-styled van which siren blaring, raced through the city to an unknown destination,” *ibid.*

Wagner-Pacifici’s description of the kidnapping highlights some of the key performance elements necessary for terrorism to work as a performance. For instance, she notes the use of the *machine gun*, a fear-inducing weapon, *the dead bodyguards* who were left behind in their visually grotesque and bloody forms, and the “*sirens blaring*” that made for a dramatic Red Brigade exit. The kidnapping was orchestrated by the Red Brigades as a performance. However, the leading publications failed to comply with the Red Brigades in the manner they needed for the performance to be fully framed. The Red Brigades attempt at using the kidnapping as a performance is noted when immediately following the event itself “at approximately 10:15 am, newsrooms in Rome, Milan, and Turin received phone calls in which the Red Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack and the kidnapping,” *ibid.*, 62-63.

Overall, the event itself had all the makings of a dramatic performance, as Wagner-Pacifici notes, “it was abrupt, unexpected, violent, and jarring...[taking] place in the capital of Italy, the city of Parliament and political party headquarters, the site of the Vatican and of the RAI headquarters...and it was...an unfinished event” *ibid.*, 68. However, the media responded in a manner that was unexpected: instead of complying with the Red Brigades demands for the release of Moro, they used Moro as a social drama in which “this event was presented to the protagonists and audience alike as a series of competing interpretations...[whereby]...these

interpretations were rhetorically structured in specific, namely narrative ways,” *ibid.*, 5. When looking at the media and paying particular attention to interpretations, David Moss provides an explanation for this response that “by the systemic use of violence...the Red Brigades establish a frame for communication between themselves and the political defenders of that order, whose actions and inactions cannot avoid interpretations as responses, direct or indirect to the...acts of violence.”⁷⁷ Meaning that by its very nature, interpretations of the acts of violence are unavoidable, and in this case, the media was able to provide their own interpretations through their own editorial process to the public. And as Moss notes, “both parties [DC and PCI]...develop[ed] their own classificatory schemes to identify and advertise the meaning of the Red Brigades’ ...actions...” *ibid.*, 88.

Therefore, “political violence” as understood within the context of “legal codes, political ideologies and mass beliefs...the Red Brigades wishing to use violence as a mode of political communication must work in an already highly interpreted context [in which case]...acts of violence...constitute resources to be exploited in communicative acts as well as obstacles to intended uptake for the Red Brigades and their opponents” *ibid.*, 87. With violence being both a resource and an obstacle for the Red Brigades, the interpretations of violence become a game between their clandestine organization and the opposing political parties. Moreover, because the political parties controlled the traditional modes of communication via

⁷⁷ David Moss, “Analysing Italian Political Violence as a Sequence of Communicative Acts: the Red Brigades 1970-1982,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 13 (1983): 85.

newspapers, violence ultimately became an obstacle because the Red Brigades did not have full control over their interpretations.

The Kidnapping—An Uncooperative Narration

Violence as a mode of communication tends to be uncooperative because of the many interpretations that come from violence as a political message. As Moss says, “violence...is a highly resistant medium...commonly subject to friction between intended and actual results” *ibid.*, 90. He further notes the communicative and instrumental power that “legitimate authorities” maintain within their response over such groups as the Red Brigades, whose capacity for such power is limited *ibid.*, 91. He then discusses the “many communicative shortcomings” with the use of violence... [where]...the uncertain effects of violence are in part due to its inability to transmit messages with any precision, *ibid.* This inability to transmit messages is exemplified by the coverage from the Aldo Moro kidnapping and the proceeding societal reactions to the event.

Wagner-Pacifici approaches the Moro case from an anthropological framework with a focus on the rhetorical story telling and dramatization of events both referencing the letters written by Moro during his 55 days in captivity and the newspapers’ coverage. Though the “use of a dramatic paradigm for intercepting and constructing the events”⁷⁸ is her main analytical mechanism that places the Red Brigades as a sideshow act, her explanations of Italy’s political history and the juxtaposition between Aldo Moro’s political career against the background of the

⁷⁸ Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 79.

Red Brigades provides context in which to place the mug shot of Aldo Moro. In other words, this context highlights how the actual events influenced the Italian community based on how it was portrayed through the newspapers (*Il Giornale Nuovo, La Stampa, L'Espresso, Il Messaggero, La Repubblica, Il Popolo, Corriere della Sera and L'Unità*).

For example, “on the front page of the March 17 edition” of *Il Popolo*, an “article about the flower vendor was titled “The Bothersome Character of the Drama” *ibid*. Here, she intends to illustrate how “the party organ” acting as the media, “was...constructing a dramatic plot out of the events,” *ibid*. Hence as the article reads “The flower vendor, a minor character in this ferocious story, unconsciously passed through the plot and remains, at least for now, the only one who, if he had been interrogated, would have been able to give a very weak sign of alarm,” (*ibid.*) she adds that *Il Popolo* was “designating major and minor parts, and imagining roles for those who were present as well for those who were in fact, only involved through their absence,” *ibid*.

In addition to the dramatization of the events, she also highlights moments in which the newspapers performed the ‘othering’ technique. For instance, *L'Unità* referred to the Red Brigades as ‘beasts’ and *Corriere della Sera* referred to Aldo Moro as a ‘baby’ within the course of the 55 days, *ibid.*, 227. Though her analysis spoke of the process of infantilization to explain this word choice instead of explicitly referring to ‘othering’, she did mention their capacity for “inspiring horror or pity,” *ibid*. The fact that these two publications portrayed the perpetrators as ‘beasts’ and the victim as ‘baby’ illustrates another level of complexity of the social

reaction to the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, namely that the Red Brigades were in some context considered 'irrational' from public perception.

The 55 day time period, as Wagner-Pacifiçi argues was a "drama" between the Moro of the letters and the state-supporting protagonists" or those belonging to party affiliates, *ibid.*, 231. She cites *Il Popolo's* March 31 article in which "Moro's own party published an article," stating "that it is not possible to accept the blackmail of the Red Brigades...this letter [of Moro's], even though it is signed, has little of the usual modes of expression of the man," *ibid.*, 229. This whole scenario, how the party itself reacted to the Moro letters with doubts, describes how these 'protagonists' within the Moro social drama would not politically accept the Red Brigades as a legitimate negotiating entity. While the letters themselves were used by the Red Brigades as a negotiating tool for the release of Aldo Moro, they soon discovered the lack of cooperation those they were in opposition to had in granting their wishes.

Since the party had control of the media, they acted out the sequence of events placing themselves in the role of a protagonist within their own self-created social drama, and since they "are almost constantly surrounded by cameras and tape recorder, journalists and microphones, crowds and institutional settings," (*ibid.*, 231) the task of narrating themselves against Moro as oppose to granting the Red Brigades wishes, became a natural progression. In this case, the public went along with the "serial narrative mode" in which the society is "constantly being provided with acted-out scenarios" *ibid.* Thus proving incapable of instigating a cleavage between the media and the political parties, they had to use other means to

make themselves appear like a credible 'state-like' entity because using the media, that was a proven party organ, was not working in their favor.

Despite this illustration of a self-induced social drama promoted by the media and the party alike, Wagner-Pacifici adds a scenario of "nonoccurrence" which would show a level of cooperation and the wanted effect from the Red Brigades by the political organs as she says, "In the case of the Moro social drama, the most obvious nonoccurrence was the locating and releasing of, or the negotiating for and having released Aldo Moro. The social drama's ending would have been very different if either of these modes of redemption were employed." The "nonoccurrence" was undoubtedly what the Red Brigades wanted. They wanted to negotiate for Moro's release, and the society through the narration of the party organ, was noncompliant.

The Italian media was acting as a party organ in 1978; meaning that parties like the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party used it as their own form of communication. While Wagner-Pacifici discusses the fifty-five day captivity of Aldo Moro as a social drama, her analysis shows how much control the political parties held to the existing Italian media by developing a social drama that focused on Aldo Moro, and not the Red Brigades. By identifying the spaces as, "newspaper pages, television screens, radio amplifiers, courtrooms, piazzas, [and] walls," she explains that they "contained and encouraged competing interpretations and forms of discourse," *ibid.*, 2. The fact that these spaces encouraged competing interpretations means that they created their own narratives about a kidnapping that suited their agenda where facts were not the objective but rather stories that

interpreted the coming information as a drama. The fifty-five days were dramatized and influenced by the political parties and the Red Brigades failed to permeate this dramatization with their message. They inevitably resorted to using visual violence as a form of a performance as a means to show their credibility as a “state” to the unresponsive audience.

The failure of the Red Brigades stems from the complexity of violence as an act of communication. For the Red Brigades, this means that they “must construct paradigmatic contrasts and syntagmatic relations from among this narrow set of discriminable elements [identity of the victim or target, the timing, location and form of the act] exploiting or avoiding existing meanings attached to types of violence and creating recognizable conventions to perform successful illocutionary [or warning] acts,” *ibid*. Therefore, “for a clandestine group seeking recognition as a strategic actor the indexical features in any act of violence are particularly crucial since they convey to other actors information about the groups which is not otherwise obtainable.”⁷⁹ They are competing with two forms of linguistic units the text and the image as they attempt to point the focus toward punishment. This syntagmatic or the relationship between two or more linguistic elements (visual violence and text) is most relevant to Macchiarini’s photo, whose linguistic units are competing within the overall message within the frame.

As a clandestine group, the Red Brigades want to provide information as a political message. In this capacity, they can try to appear irrational with the use of

⁷⁹ David Moss, “Analysing Italian Political Violence as a Sequence of Communicative Acts: the Red Brigades 1970-1982,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 13 (1983): 91.

acts of violence. The hard part is the distribution of the images that display the acts of violence. The act of violence itself is not enough to be perceived as irrational, there also need to be a visual narration of the violence that can capture this perception. Without it, and the capacity to distribute with the intended agenda, there is no success. As Alison Jamieson refers that despite the “most successful terrorist action ever seen in Italy...the decisive...rejection of violence by the mass of the population and the disapproval of the Moro action...drove the [Red Brigades] into extreme isolation.”

Act Two—The People’s Prison Trial and the Moro Mug Shot

Following along the lines of producing their own mug shot of Aldo Moro, was one last attempt at swaying the media to report their acts. Since the Moro letters “that were bound for public domain...for publication in the daily editions of the Italian press,” (*ibid.*, 250) were unsuccessful, a “People’s Prison Trial” that mimicked a democratic trial, was chosen as a means to make themselves be perceived in a state-like manner. However, like the kidnapping, the media worked against their attempt again, by “immediately set[ting] about to discredit this trial [whereby] all but two...Italian papers printed the word trial between parentheses every time they were referring to the “People’s Prison” trial” *ibid.*, 247. Essentially, the coverage of the trial did not promote to the statist perception that the Red Brigades wanted to portray. They unsuccessfully mimicked a “democratic trial” in the hopes that the state or party affiliates would listen; instead they mocked it. This is the difference

between the Torino Trial which was “legitimate” and the “People’s Prison” trial which was not.

Therefore, the Red Brigades produced their very own mug shot of Aldo Moro and on May 6, it was distributed. The ubiquitous black and white photo⁸⁰, reproduced widely across the Italian press at the time, shows a somewhat content Aldo Moro, holding a sign with the Italian newspaper’s name ‘La Repubblica’ as he sits with ‘Brigate Rosse’ and its star logo in the background. What is particularly distinctive and relevant of this photo, not least that the Red Brigades produced it themselves, is the fact that they strategically placed the newspaper “La Repubblica” at the forefront, as if they themselves owned the publication or they simply wanted to mock the publication in the same manner they were mocked. In any case, “*La Repubblica* edition had the front-page headlines “Moro Has Been Killed,” [in which the story went]...”Unfortunately—said an administrator—at this point we think that all there is left to do is wait for the last tragic piece of news.”⁸¹

The Red Brigades’ “People’s Prison”

Leading up to the Aldo Moro’s Mug shot, the Italian press was playing the part of a party organ. They were essentially working in favor of the Red Brigades’ opposition, and not reporting on such terrorist acts they needed to be publicized such as the kidnapping act or narrating the Moro letters in favor of negotiations. Therefore, through the production of the image itself, they attempted to make a

⁸⁰ See Appendix 1: Photo 2.

⁸¹ Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 253.

photo worthy of publication in the daily newspapers. If they posed as the press themselves, perhaps they could persuade for negotiations. When this did not happen, one of the Brigadists, Mario Moretti did the inevitable, and murdered Aldo Moro, leaving his corpse in a red Renault 4 on Via Michelangelo Caetani. The fifty-five days in which Moro was held in captivity had been a tug of war where the Red Brigades demanded negotiations, the party affiliates refused to comply using their party organ (the media) to narrate their own drama and where the surrounding public followed along with the narrations. The Red Brigades were not taken seriously, so they produced their own mug shot photograph of Aldo Moro whose intention was meant to illustrate a perception of power.

A photograph always holds a pattern and a meaning within a human experience, and visual anthropology in particular “assumes that photographs...of human experience may be both creations and concrete reflection of what is visible within the scope of the lens and frame.”⁸² Furthermore, “photographs...are, ultimately, complex reflections of a relationship between maker and subject in which both play roles in shaping their character and content” *ibid.* With regard to the photograph in question, the maker (Red Brigades) and subject (Aldo Moro) convey a power relationship in which the Red Brigades present their authoritative power through its production and function as a mug shot and the diminished appearance Aldo Moro presents within the frame. Compared to the dominant “Brigate Rosse” and its star logo behind, he appears very small and insignificant. This, in itself, conveys a sense of authority on the part of the maker (the Red

⁸² Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. (California: Sage Publishing, 2001): 35.

Brigades, thus making them superior to the authoritative role that “Prime Minister Aldo Moro” and his party constituency, the Christian Democracy hold within the Italian society they oppose.

The authoritative nature that is presented within the frame is also understood within the societal understanding of a mug shot. The nature of a mug shot is to illustrate the prisoner in his most vulnerable state, which the Red Brigades did by taking away his authoritative appearance, appearing in a white button down shirt as oppose to a suit and tie. Though his face shows no sign of abuse, he looks neither sad nor happy as he looks up directly at the camera; his posture connotes a sense of embarrassment and fragility as his shoulders slouch. A sense of vulnerability, embarrassment and humiliation are essential emotive elements that can be conveyed within a mug shot photo, elements that the Red Brigades fulfilled within the frame.

The mug shot served its purpose in so far as the Red Brigades intended to produce an image similar to a mug shot image typically produced within the judicially accepted prison system. It is a symbol of the prison system that pits the authoritative power on the side of those deemed as ‘beasts’ or irrational to the public. However, there is a difference of power between holding Moro in captivity after the kidnapping and producing an image to be presented to the press. This difference is control. The Red Brigades had no control not only on how the kidnapping was covered and reported, nor the coverage of the days holding Moro in the “People’s Prison.” They only had full control over the production of the image.

Authority is the first step, Irrationality the second: The Red Brigades' Failure

Part of the Red Brigades representation within the Moro mug shot is a perception of authoritative power. However, they lack the perception of irrationality provided by the audience because they do not display a high level of violence through the visual component. They were unable to access the needed hysteria that would come from a high level of violence. It is for this reason that *La Repubblica*, the newspaper seen within the mug shot, responded in a manner that was accepting of the inevitable death. They were already claiming "Moro Has Been Killed" within the headline before the death had actually happened. Therefore, it was not used to convey the perception that the Red Brigades were irrational, crazy or mentally unstable that would induce a fear response from the media or audience. While Moro's death was tragic, it was not committed by actors that were necessarily perceived as irrational, despite a few banal references within the press. The Red Brigades did not exploit the violence within the photograph itself to be perceived as irrational.

Rancière's earlier description of the "autonomous thing" describes why this photograph did not instigate a reputation for the Red Brigades irrationality. The Red Brigades did not exploit the needed level of violence nor the separation needed between the artist and spectator within the photo to make a spectacle that would associate them to irrationality within the society. As mentioned in chapter 1, the "autonomous thing" is the distance between the producer and the spectator and the spectacle is the "[confusion] of the two different distances [such as]...the distance

between artist and spectator...[that is]..."inherent in the performance itself."⁸³ On the one hand, the subject, Aldo Moro, had no fearful facial emotions that would portray a sense of fear to the press or public in which the makers could use to their benefit causing a cycle of irrational hysteria on the side of the public. Secondly, while the distance between the artist and the spectator did make for a spectacle, in order for this spectacle to work in favor of the Red Brigades, there had to be more violence within the photograph. It is not enough to be perceived as an authoritarian power, the Red Brigades had to be perceived as an irrational authoritarian power who had no limits to what their violent capabilities could conjure to have any salience within the media.

While the Red Brigades were castigated as the enemy, the way the media dealt with them as an organization diminished their 'terrorist' credibility to cause fear from being irrational. Not only were they mocked as is seen from the media's reaction to the "People' Prison" trial, but they were also ignored and Aldo Moro himself became the narrative focus within the social drama constructed by the Italian press.

Still a conundrum remains, if the Red Brigades are labeled as a terrorist group by today's standards, and they maintained a mind-set of routine killings, then why was the mug shot rendered visible by the Red Brigades as oppose to the actual killing of Aldo Moro which would have provided for a more gruesome and inhumane visual impact? Based on what the mug shot represents, authoritative judicial power, the Red Brigades did not necessarily want to be perceived as irrational more so than

⁸³ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso, 2009): 14.

wanting to be taken seriously within the Italian political organs and other entities. Their goal was to negotiate for Aldo Moro's release, not to cause irrational hysteria within the public. The Red Brigades played the visual component safe.

They did not decide to present their image with a high level of irrationality until their collective group identity was threatened. Visual violence in its extreme format through the presentation of inhumanity was not a strategic necessity for the Red Brigades to get their message across to their opponents. More useful to their political agenda was sending a message of power represented through two linguistic units: violence and text that represented itself as an illocutionary act, one that sends a distinct warning to the opposing party. That is the logic of visual communication that is present within all three photos that the Red Brigades played apart in their production. Hence, irrationality, through the use of inhumanity was used as a desperate act of survival. They wanted to show the consequences of leaving the collective brigadist identity while equally showing the wider audience the level of crude brutality their group as a whole could ultimately inflict on a given human being. It was an act that represented their failure and inability to ultimately gain the authority they tried to bargain within the leading political parties that dominated the Italian government.

Chapter 4—The Case of ISIS

There is no question that within the Middle Eastern region, there is often confusion about “the various sub-currents of Islamic ideology” which nowadays “a process of ideological hybridization has occurred, [resulting in] enemy of hierarchies of many jihadist groups...becoming more unclear or heterogeneous than they used to be.”⁸⁴ To answer this observation, terrorism scholar, Hegghammer argues, “that this hybridization is a result of strain and a sign of weakness [where] when enemy hierarchies become unclear, undefined, or heterogeneous, then this is...a sign of increasing radicalization and political isolation [and] groups often adopt ambiguous enemy hierarchies because they are experiencing recruitment problems,” *ibid.*, 2. Hegghammer specifies his use of “hybridization” as “the mixing of ideal rationales for violence and the attendant blending of their associated enemy hierarchies,” *ibid.*, 9.

For the purposes of understanding the origins of ISIS that is believed to have stemmed from al-Qaeda, it is more relevant to explain how rather than why. As Hegghammer observes, “modern jihadist organizations have always been somewhat ideologically hybridized” *ibid.* If assumed what is argued here, that hybridization is a sign of weakness, then it can also be assumed that ISIS is a hybrid of al-Qaeda whose potential aim was to radicalize more for the purposes of recruitment. Hence, ISIS history, and how it relates to al-Qaeda is vital in order to explain the logic behind non-state actors’ use such visual violence and the extreme manslaughter.

⁸⁴ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups,” *Hudson Institute* (2009): 1.

ISIS, Performance Violence and Visual Power

Some consider the founding of training camp in Afghanistan in 2000 by the Jordanian Musab al Zarqawi, as a helpful starting point to describe the origins of ISIS,⁸⁵ while others refer to its origins “with the 2003 Iraq War.”⁸⁶ However, the exact point of reference is irrelevant because the individual who gave rise to ISIS’s fanaticism and brutality was Zarqawi, and he was involved in both events. His organization “began as a small terrorist group, using high-profile attacks against Shiites and international targets to undermine the Iraqi government and make a name for itself,” *ibid.*, 146. Still, it was not until 2004 when he pledged his allegiance to Osama bin Laden that he named his group al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and it is he who committed many beheadings and other types of manslaughter until his death in a US airstrike on June 7, 2006. Because of this brutality he was known as “the sheikh of the slaughterers” (*ibid.*, 131) and his history in prison has become an important time period in which “he forged a close connection to...a Salafi preacher [and]...one of the most important jihadist thinkers of the current age,” *ibid.*

The life of Zarqawi and his actions as a radical Islamist, whose fame and image is based on committing many inhumane executions is crucial. Following the logic of Che Guevara’s focoist approach, “the foco [being]...the small guerrilla center or base,” (*ibid.*, 126) Zarqawi is a political vanguard. Zarqawi’s actions of brutality illustrate a guerrilla-centered focoist strategy in which, “the guerillas themselves

⁸⁵ Michael Griffin, *Islamic State: Rewriting History*, (London: Pluto Press, 2016), Timeline.

⁸⁶ Daniel Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State—Review Essay,” *International Security* 40 No. 4 (2016): 131.

are...the political vanguard, the only interpreter and guide for the masses," *ibid.*

From Al Qaeda in Iraq, he was able to demonstrate violence that would radicalize the masses and inevitably facilitate "people's revolutionary spirit" that comes from war, *ibid.* He was one of "the hard-core, militant believers: the vanguard of the people, who could radicalize the masses, *ibid.*, 127."

ISIS has grown out of the radicalization of the masses, whose predecessor, Al Qaeda, was based from the assumption that violence radicalizes. This means that, "violence is...a catalyst for the nascent revolution, sparking ideological fervor in otherwise quiescent populations [in which] the strategic goal is to use violence to advertise the cause and radicalize the masses" *ibid.*, 130. Furthermore, one of the leading Islamic movement scholars, al-Suri describes that "foreign aggression...is the most suitable cause in fostering a 'revolutionary climate' that might be sparked by focoist violence" *ibid.*, 133. He further says that "military activity and armed revolutionary jihadi action are what will compel the enemy to retreat" *ibid.*, 131. Put into perspective, this means that inhumane violence that Zarqawi exemplified had an exponential influence based on the focoist logic that violence radicalizes the masses. The radicalization of the masses is one argument for why the strategies for conducting inhumane executions were adopted by al-Qaeda in Iraq and why ISIS has chosen to continue as part of its strategy.

Another argument, perhaps related with the argument that violence radicalizes, is based on Zarqawi's experience in prison; in which case, there is a correlation between Zarqawi's prison experience and the rise of his slaughter mentality. Prisons, at their core, are reminiscent of the foco or base in which the

radicalization process happens that produces the vanguards that will uphold the political agenda. Hence, prisons have become a hot house for extremist ideologies. Emmanuel Todd, a French sociologist says, “[p]rison radicalizes everything: petty delinquents become hardened criminals, and ordinary Muslims with traditional beliefs end up as terrorists.”⁸⁷ To this end, he adds that an understanding about the mechanisms that “turn a fantastical, deformed version of Islam” can be associated to “whether or not they have spent time in jail;” noting alienation of young people as a variable within the prison environment, *ibid*.

Zarqawi’s death in 2006 is a prominent point that marks the beginning of the hybridization process. The transition from al-Qaeda in Iraq to present day ISIS is based within this period where many so called “jihadist” were captured and put into prisons including: Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and Camp Bucca being the most popular. Between the years 2007 to 2013, these jailed jihadists were able to radicalize within the prison environment that led to the conceptualization of ISIS by more extreme individuals. It is within the prison that their ideology was formed and by which many of their initial recruits were taken. For instance, the attack on Abu Ghraib prison in July of 2013 marked a significant progression of ISIS because they were able to release 500 prisoners, which were used to build their growing army.⁸⁸ Therefore, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and Camp Bucca are infamous for fostering extremist ideologies that helped create the foundation of ISIS.

⁸⁷ Emmanuel Todd, *Who is Charlie?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015): 171.

⁸⁸ Michael Griffin, *Islamic State: Rewriting History*, (London: Pluto Press, 2016), Timeline.

After the release of these prisoners, ISIS was able to expand its campaign with more recruits adhering to its ideology. And in 2014, ISIS started to expand by taking land; first with Fallujah and Ramadi in January, and then Mosul, Tikrit and Tal Afar in June. Their state-building strategy was successfully being employed as they established their rule over conquered territory in Iraq and Syria.

Nevertheless, it was not until August 19, 2014 with the release of the infamous video of James Foley, which signaled ‘A message to America,’ and later on September 2, 2014, with the release of the video of Steven Sotloff, that ISIS was recognized as a threat. The moment ISIS released the video of James Foley, President “Obama labeled ISIS a ‘cancer’ with a ‘nihilistic ideology’ and ‘no place in the 21 century’; and on 10 September he argued that ‘if left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond [the Middle East]—including to the United States.’”⁸⁹

The other major video was released February 8, 2015 of the Jordanian Moath Al Kasasbeh being burned to death in a professionally constructed video. Though many more videos of prisoners wearing orange jumpsuits were released, these are the ones that not only shocked the world the most, but also established the visual representation of ISIS.

What makes ISIS different in the way they utilize visual and performance violence is because “the means of dissemination have been transformed,” *ibid.*, 733. Friis in his analysis of the visibility of the beheading videos discusses the rapidity to

⁸⁹ Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond anything we have ever seen’: Beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 734.

which these filmed beheadings can spread world wide with the use of savvy technologies, *ibid.* He describes that, “within minutes of their initial dissemination, journalists, monitoring companies, and social media users were noting the videos’ existence,” *ibid.* Although the “original videos” disappeared “relatively quickly from the “mainstream social media platforms, images, frame-grabbed from videos” were circulated that were eventually seen in the traditional televised media,” *ibid.* The idea that a ‘screen grab’ cannot be erased whose image was “eventually established as a recurrent visual representation of ISIS,” places the performance into the category of visual power.

Moreover, these videos did “not [show] the actual act of killing, the screen-grabs remained incomplete and suggestive shots of implications, but nonetheless imbued with all the right cues for the viewer to imagine the end,” *ibid.*, 733-734. In effect, it is a “[constant reminder to] their viewers of the horrific actions perpetrated by the ‘other side’” *ibid.*, 734. In the case of James Foley, his image became “instant icons,” (*ibid.*, 733) where the rest of the world could remember the ‘look’ of ISIS. As such, because an image can make someone an instant celebrity within popular culture, there is a need for further research on visual power within the field of IR; especially in relation to the new digital technologies and the sophistication of their use. Particularly when dealing with labeled terrorist groups whose iconic images present violence and inhumane methods of killings its prisoners (left to the imagination of the viewer in the case of James Foley and Steven Sotloff) it is important to understand the power an image can hold which has been translated into a valuable weapon for those who use it.

The subjects ISIS has chosen to target to publicize their inhumane killing methods, most notably James Foley among others, have been journalists. It is a point journalist Benjamin Hall makes clear as he chronicles the kidnapping of both James Foley and his colleague John Cantlie's starting November 22, 2012 in Idlib. He says, "at the time ISIS, didn't yet exist as an entity, and they had been captured instead by Jabhat al-Nusra...when ISIS emerged, they must have been handed or sold on—ISIS had been amassing Western journalists paying large money for them—knowing their real worth."⁹⁰ The worth was within the visual violence that would be enacted. There is a distinct power with the executions of the journalists in the way they are visually constructed, performed and communicated as a weapon.

The term "Inhumane," defined in chapter 1 as "acts of deliberately exaggerated violence" whose "gruesome sight" is "vivid and horrifying" that "by their demonstrative nature...elicit feelings of revulsion and anger in those who witness them," (Juergensmeyer) is a key concept in which this analysis is based in order to deconstruct the effect that performance violence plays as a method within warfare.

Fact or Fiction in performance violence—Jordanian Pilot Video Analysis

With the spectacle and theatre defined by Rancière and Debord⁹¹, the editing i.e. narrative structure, and camera angles can be attributed to what Debord terms 'separated powers' within the Jordanian pilot video. ISIS has used its editing power,

⁹⁰ Benjamin Hall, *Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army* (New York: Center Street Hachette Book Group, 2015): 96-97.

⁹¹ See Chapter 1 "Performance Violence and the Spectacle."

or the power to produce what it wants the viewers to see and has made the spectacle coincide with theatre, which is active participation. This is representative of the selected images used to represent the video in question used to describe the narrative structure.⁹²

A man⁹³ wearing an oversized orange T-shirt and trousers resembling those of the detainees held in Guantanamo Bay and prisoners in the United States approaches a line of soldiers in combative gear; combat boots and camouflage uniform with a beige ski mask hiding their faces aligned with guns in hand. The scene is staged for a dramatic effect. The hostage knows that what lays before him is his death, looking into the eyes of combatants surrounding him high and low, he looks into the eyes of the masked combative figures. Then the scene moves to him standing in a cage drenched in gasoline and barred as if he is a tiger in a zoo. There is a moment of anticipation as the audience looks at the expression of the man about to be burned alive. And as the moment of truth comes, as a combative figure lights the train of fire in slow motion, a harmonic sound of Arabic rhythms comes into play as we watch the man suffer in pain as the flames consume his entire body until all is left is a black figure whose fingers are shown in the last scene after the gravel is poured over the body.

This combination of the spectacle and theatre, or fake versus real, is what makes the Jordanian pilot video both 'separate power' and 'active participation'

⁹² See Appendix 1.

⁹³ ISIS captured Moath Al Kasasbeh after his F-16 plane landed in Raqqa on 24 December 2014 with reports indicating from the side of ISIS that they were responsible from their heat seeking missiles and others from mainstream news organizations such as CNN describing it as a "mechanical failure."

because it is making a spectacle out of a real event. Here, the spectacle of the performance persists because of the confusion of the distance between the artist and spectator that plays to the confusion of fake versus real in its interaction with the audience.

The video is a form of theatrics because it plays to the spectator's active participation. It utilizes a sense of symbolism of how the United States treats its criminals in the judicial system. It is particularly symbolic of the treatment of those detainees held in Guantanamo Bay during the peak years of interrogations that bordered on illegal torture by United States' definition. As Fletcher and Stover reference, "abuse does not rise to the level of torture under U.S. law unless such abuse inflicts pain "equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death...to qualify as torture, the infliction of pain had to be the "precise objective" of the abuse rather than a by-product. An interrogator could know that his actions could cause pain, but "if causing such harm is not the objective, he lacks the requisite specific intent" to be found guilty of torture."⁹⁴

Furthermore, the environment in Guantanamo Bay was one described as comparable to animals in a cage, particularly upon Camp X-Ray, opened for three months in 2002. "The Camp consisted of 8'x 6' wire-mesh cages connected by a corrugated metal roof, while a row of wooden shacks served as interrogation rooms. The open cages made them feel as if they were living outdoors, several former

⁹⁴ Laurel E. Fletcher and Eric Stover, *The Guantanamo Effect: Exposing the Consequences of US Detention and Interrogation Practices*. (University of California Press, 2009): 9.

detainees said," *ibid.*, 47. This said, the video's theatrics are staged in such a way that mimics the conditions in Guantanamo Bay where those members of ISIS are portrayed as the "moral" figures punishing the detainee; only the precise objective is death in this case.

To participate or not to participate, that is the question?

The act is real and staged and edited in such a dramatic way that leaves the spectator wondering if it is a scene from a movie similar to *Saving Private Ryan* or an actual event where we are witnessing first hand a man being burned alive. It being the latter, a sense of outrage from the audience seems to be the appropriate response, which is just what happened from the Jordanians and those witnessing the cinematography of ISIS. It leaves the audience wondering if the performance is reflective of our society that prompts active participation or if it is a spectacle that holds its own separate power and a pseudo reality to which no attention should be brought. It confuses the audience, and particularly policy makers when trying to determine if it is categorized as entertainment or something that decision makers should react to in terms of their policies toward ISIS and its destruction.

Therefore, when trying to understand this particular video and its impact on society, it is neither fake nor real and it is both a spectacle and staged theatrics, such is performance violence. Performance violence is what happens when both the spectacle and theatre, as defined by Debord and Rancière, are combined that creates confusion for the audience on whether to act or not. It is therefore a psychological weapon used to influence policy with the visual power the film insights with use of

the inhumanity associated with the resultant death. Therefore, in reference to Shakespeare, to participate or not to participate, that is the question? It is a pun that leads to the question that maybe what Shakespeare said that “all the world’s a stage, and all men and women merely players,” holds a sense of clarity particularly when discussing the reality that the video supports from a theatre standpoint.

ISIS and the Fear Tactic

Zarqawi led the stage with a combined effort of theatre and spectacle. He “understood the psychological warfare value of videos depicting ruthless, cold-blooded murder.”⁹⁵ In 2014, following in Zarqawi’s footsteps, ISIS led a series of multiple beheadings and killings captured on video.

Suddenly, a stream of literature on ISIS began to trend in 2015 as journalists, scholars and statesmen were determined to recount ISIS’ origin, explain who they are as an organizational entity or offer any insight into how to combat the modern day threat of ISIS who undoubtedly shocked the entire world with the use of their perpetual videos displaying inhumanity. Sekulow, Weiss & Hassan, Stern & Berger, Warrick, Stakelbeck, McCants, Hall, Cockburn and Gerges are among those who published their experience and insight into ISIS, each offering their own personalized interpretation into the infamous organization. However, it was Atwan who offered the most comprehensive analysis and explanation of the technological capabilities of modern times. He describes their “extreme violence” as “a deliberate

⁹⁵ Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, (London: Saqi Books, 2015), 48.

strategy to instill fear in both its enemies and the people it seeks to subjugate,” and is quick to fashion its historical precedent, *ibid.*, 49.

Byman notes “the Islamic State is building its state methodically, developing institutional structures, proselytizing, intimidating the population, and providing minimal services as it conquers territory.”⁹⁶ He references Charles Tilly’s famous maxim about the nature of state building—“War made the state, and the state made war”—adding that “terror and brutality serve state-building purposes” *ibid.*, 140, 142. However, there is always a balancing act with the use of terror and brutality to which “Zawahiri warned Zarqawi to avoid beheading and other measures that might alienate the masses,” *ibid.*, 143. In the case of ISIS’ actions, the use of fear and violence to intimidate is coming at a cost: they are proving unable to legitimize themselves as a sole power on an international scale.

While Zarqawi “stressed images of action and violence,” (*ibid.*, 147) understanding that “disseminating acts of spectacular violence is a way of fomenting divisions, weakening the enemy, and recruiting,” (*ibid.*, 148) these inhumane violent images have functioned only to garner a high profile for the purposes of recruitment and minimal action from the international community. These inhumane and “graphic images of violence” have been useful to “dishearten [its] enemies, making them more likely to flee,” *ibid.* This means that although ISIS has gotten the attention of their adversary and induced a high level of fear, this fear tactic has not

⁹⁶ Daniel Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State—Review Essay,” *International Security* 40 No. 4 (2016): 140.

succeeded in coercing the United States to respond by sending in military troops to combat ISIS.

The state-building tactic ISIS has chosen to use is a classical conquering mechanism of war dating to the conquests of Alexander the Great's, Persians, Greeks and Romans, whose strategies of war were sound in the classical war framework of Sun Tzu's "Art of War" and the Prussian strategic theorist Carl Von Clausewitz whose thoughts framed French Revolution tactics.

However, more fitting to ISIS strategic framework is the work of Schelling, whose concept of diplomacy of violence, an indirect use of violence, helps to understand how, strategically speaking, ISIS' use of visual violence is having a greater impact than brute force alone, (Schelling). Through his description of diplomacy of violence, he argues that "the power to hurt is bargaining power" where the "hurting...is measured in the suffering it can cause and the victims' motivation to avoid it [and]...suffering requires a victim that can feel pain or has something to lose" (Schelling, 2). The concept of suffering is an integral part of the bargaining power that Schelling discusses. Its basic premise can be used to explain ISIS' use of visual violence as he says "to inflict suffering gains nothing and saves nothing directly; it can only make people behave to avoid it" *ibid*. Here, the power ISIS holds is put forward as the amount of suffering that is created by the visual violence that is distinguished with a high level of inhumanity. However, according to Schelling, the effect of this suffering only goes so far as to make people behave to avoid it. Therefore, though the medium of the Internet holds a sense of ubiquity through the web sphere, the spectator has the means to avoid these images.

In the case of ISIS, the effectiveness of “the coercive power to hurt” as a concept, only goes so far as the “exploitation of enemy wants and fears,” (Schelling, 3). The visual violent aspect of what ISIS is putting forward for the audience is a communication mechanism that is used to instill pain, hurt and fear. As Schelling says, “...the power to hurt is often communicated by some performance of it [and]...it is not the pain and damage itself but its influence on somebody’s behavior that matters” *ibid.*, 3. That said, the burning of the Jordanian pilot mimicking a movie spectacle and theatre and the beheading videos of James Foley and Steven Sotloff were only intended to influence the behavior of ISIS’ adversary, namely the United States and European countries. ISIS wanted a response from these actors.

Though sometimes effective, the power to hurt is not always successful when “it is the expectation of more violence that gets the wanted behavior[;]” (*ibid.*) a sentiment that Schelling puts forward in this coercive diplomatic explanation of violence. In the case of ISIS, it is not effective because they did not incite the wanted response from the United States. The use of visual violence was an unsuccessful experiment attempting to understand what its “adversary treasures and what scares him” so as “to exploit a capacity for hurting and inflicting damage” *ibid.* However, because the United States holds a lot of power and ISIS, realistically does not, on a political, military, economic scale, ISIS tried to utilize the visual violence that would suggest they have more power than in reality. The images show combative figures with a high level of power compared to the victims. Furthermore, it was in their benefit to be seen as barbaric, uncivilized, unpredictable and irrational because this is where the power to hurt resides.

ISIS—The Psychological Battlefield

The Diplomacy of Violence: The Bargaining Power of Hurt and The Tragedy of Palmyra

Working within the construct of asymmetric warfare, there is interplay between non-state actors and state actors that is coercive when communicating with one another. Therefore, following Schelling's diplomacy of violence "the usual distinction between diplomacy and force is not merely in the instruments, words or bullets, but in the relation between adversaries—in the interplay of motives and the role of communication, understanding, compromise and restraint" *ibid.* Since ISIS has an adversary who is considered to have the greatest military and economic power of our time, the relations between the weak and strong (ISIS versus the United States) has taken a more coercive diplomatic interplay, one which is more psychological than physical. ISIS knows the strength of the United States, and they developed a visual power whose impact within the perception. They are using their own "bargaining" power that "can be polite or rude, entail threats as well as offers, assume a status quo or ignore all rights and privileges, and assume mistrust rather than trust" *ibid.* ISIS has been rude, threatened, ignored all rights and privileges, been "aggressive...[and]...vicious" (*ibid.*) as they orchestrated their diplomacy of violence.

Because ISIS' power is maintained in its image whose impact is psychological in nature, the best way to combat the United States and the rest of the international

community is through continued psychological warfare, one in which their ideology becomes their greatest asset. It becomes a battle of ideologies and not weapons. And as Schelling associates the power to hurt as a form of bargaining power, with its “sheer unacquisitive, unproductive power to destroy things that somebody treasures, to inflict pain and grief,” (*ibid.*) ISIS is exploiting anything and everything that could possibly hurt the international community on a psychological basis.

The destruction of Palmyra in Syria is just one of those instances where they chose to use the power to hurt as their bargaining power. Culturally speaking, witnessing the destruction of a history so valuable to our society, whose preservation withstood thousands of years, and a great Empire, did hurt us all. We witnessed with disillusionment and distain for the cultural insensitivity ISIS has shown to a once pristine preserved sight as they publically demolished and sold many of the significant artifacts into a black market.

The first ruin that ISIS chose to blatantly destroy was the Temple of Baal of the Sun Temple, the second ruin was the monumental arch also known as the victory arch, and the last was the Temple of Baalshamin. However, again, this attempt to hurt has also been unsuccessful. When the Assad regime in Syria backed by the Russian government recaptured Palmyra from ISIS control in March of 2016, it was hailed by the Syrians and Russians as the “biggest ISIS defeat since 2014.”⁹⁷ And in May of that year, Russian conductor, Valery Gergiev “performed a triumphal

⁹⁷ Shaheen, Kareem. (May 27, 2016). ‘Assad Hails Syrian Regime’s Capture of Palmyra from ISIS.’ *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/27/syrian-regime-forces-retake-all-of-palmyra-from-isis>

concert in the theatre of Palmyra in Syria” with the title of the concert “With a Prayer from Palmyra: Music Revives the Ancient Walls.”⁹⁸ From a psychological perspective, this momentous concert symbolized a combative move that the hurt that ISIS attempted to instill on the public would not work because restoration could be possible even after the damage was done. Palmyra could be preserved through the books, and historical recollection of researchers and travelers from the 18th and 19th century.

This means that though Khaled Assad has tragically died under the radicalism of the Islamic State, his work and preservation has not been lost even with the destruction by ISIS on the main Temples. And with the Syrian army having now reclaimed all of Palmyra, there is a universal concerted effort to restore the its lost ruins. It is those scholars such as Jean-Baptiste Yon, a French researcher and director for CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) and a collaborator to which Khaled worked, who are combatting the damage done by ISIS.

⁹⁸ Harding, Luke. (May 5, 2016). Palmyra Hosts Russian Concert after Recapture by Syrian Forces. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/05/palmyra-amphitheatre-hosts-russian-concert-after-recapture-by-syrian-forces>.

Chapter 5

Asymmetrical Warfare in context—Similarities and Differences between Red Brigades and ISIS

The visual component interacts with the violent component when the violence becomes a performance that is expressed as a spectacle. Here, there is a separation between the active participant and the spectator in the act of viewing. The spectacle then becomes a form of expression from a group, organization or individual who are separated from themselves and the conjoining society or environment they live. This has been explained within the context of the Red Brigades and ISIS. From the visual analysis and comparison as non-state actors, there are multiple similarities as well as differences that have come out of the research.

Similarities—Red Brigades and ISIS

Dehumanization Process

The educational pathway, or what Orsini refers as the pedagogy of intolerance is an important attribute within a killer's mind-set, and it is a process that both the Red Brigades and ISIS share. This pathway is a way to degrade the relationship between people so as to kill without remorse. Once this emotional separation between people occurs, killing becomes easy and blood becomes a symbol. The logic behind visually showing blood is simple in its visual component; it is a story. As Orsini says, "shedding blood is first of all a "story," a way of reporting

the “facts” common to all professional revolutionaries.”⁹⁹ Once the dehumanization occurs, blood can be used as a symbol of power. The Red Brigades and ISIS both degraded their relationship between people to the point where they could murder and use this murder as a symbol of their revolution.

Social Solidarity

Terrorist scholar Max Abrahms argues for the social benefits of using terrorism, which is a similar attribute between the Red Brigades and ISIS. Abrahms’ main contention is that “terrorists...use terrorism primarily to develop strong effective ties with fellow terrorists,”¹⁰⁰ and though the Red Brigades and ISIS rational behind using terrorism is not solely based on a communal solidarity, both organizations share the benefits of social solidarity.

The founder of the Red Brigades, Renato Curcio, for instance, “embodies the typical traits of the marginal and alienated individual who finds an answer to his existential drama in revolutionary politics.”¹⁰¹ He had “tremendous psychological difficulties adapting to Milan...to which he describes as a “foggy black nightmare” from which he wants only to escape” *ibid.*, 110. He eventually becomes a vagabond and an alcoholic until he enters the Faculty of Sociology in Trento. When he formed the Red Brigades with other alienated individuals, “they procured an incredible satisfaction of a need they would never have been able to find in civil society,” *ibid.*,

⁹⁹ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 58.

¹⁰⁰ Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” *International Security* 32 no. 4 (2008): 80.

¹⁰¹ Alessandro Orsini, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mind-Set of Modern Terrorists*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009): 109.

111. “Curcio removed himself from the world, in which he felt an outsider, to enter a group with very close bonds of solidarity and in which everyone could have a “heroic” function,” *ibid.* The Red Brigades was a brotherhood that filled the emotional need to belong in a society that he felt cast him aside.

ISIS also functions with a sense of solidarity among likeminded individuals. For ISIS, their social bonds were developed within the prisons in Iraq, such as Camp Bucca and Abu Gharib. They were alienated until finding such radical thinkers as al Baghdadi among other ‘focoist’ individuals. They eventually formed a bond with one another based on similar alienated and marginalized experiences that enabled the formation of a brotherhood that could not be matched. Their ideological bond can not be broken. Abrahms again notes, at least in the case of al Qaeda among other studied cases, the incentives for “joining the terrorist organization was having a friend or relative in it...also consistent with a fascinating July 2007 study of Guantanamo Bay detainees.”¹⁰² A “sample of 516 detainees that knowing an al-Qaida member was a significantly better predictor than believing in the jihad for joining terrorism, *ibid.* Based on what the Red Brigades and ISIS show, finding a common bond acts as an incentive for joining the cause. While not the sole rationale for these organizations to use terrorism, social solidarity is a strength they share.

The Prison Environment

The symbolism to the prison environment is a common reference that both the Red Brigades and ISIS have utilized in some context within their various self-

¹⁰² Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” *International Security* 32 no. 4 (2008): 98.

produced visual frames and video. Both the mug shot showing the Prime Minister Aldo Moro and the orange jump suit worn by Moath Al Kasasbeh contrasted with the American military style attire worn by ISIS operatives were referenced as a means to symbolize power over their perceived enemy. For the Red Brigades, the enemy was the Italian government, for ISIS, it was the broader powers within the international community, namely the United States.

Within asymmetrical warfare where the weaker power has a minimal defensive capacity, this image perception can be very useful to raise the authoritative power of the group. Since "...frames have an impact on our perceptions of reality...and can influence...the ways citizens construe political events,"¹⁰³ the perceptions that are conveyed through image frame produced by the Red Brigades and the video frame produced by ISIS have a large impact on how the group is perceived by the spectator to hold a substantial amount of power. Hence, the prison symbolism working within the frames also known as "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time..." have "meaningfully structure[d] the social world['s],"¹⁰⁴ perception of reality as it relates to the groups' need to be perceived as powerful.

Mystery of Perpetrators in Image

Another similarity is the mystery of the perpetrators within the frames they produce. The Brigades mug shot highlights the victim with no representation of a

¹⁰³ Pokalova, E. (2010) Framing Separatism as Terrorism: Lessons from Kosovo. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33(5): 432.

¹⁰⁴ Marco Pinfari, "Framing through Paradox: Egypt and the "Obama supports Terrorism" Campaign," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40 no. 2 (2016): 3.

brigadist. The only reference is their name and their logo. Likewise, while ISIS operatives are seen in combative gear, their faces are masked. When a spectator to the frames observes the mystery of the perpetrators while watching the victims with such tangible clarity showing facial expressions, it dehumanizes these perpetrators immediately. Through their mystery, they hold power.

This power is not arising from a societal dimension, but rather from the performance itself. It is arising from the spectacle, that earlier was defined in terms of specialization of power representing a hierarchical society and is “the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself...it is the self portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the existence...separation is the alpha and the omega of the spectacle...the mythical order with which every power shrouds itself from the beginning.”¹⁰⁵

There is a lot to be said about the power that arises from the mystery of the perpetrator within the words of Debord and his definition of the spectacle. The spectacle being a self-portrait of power, is totalitarian in nature whose power derives from separation. The separation is hence the mystery. They present themselves in contrast to their victims who are not separated from reality. The Red Brigades and ISIS have socially alienated themselves from reality that enables them to use the power of mystery. They both hold a mythical order, which is to say that they are representing a fictitious, imaginary and make-believe demeanor whose power is derived from the performance itself.

¹⁰⁵ Guy Debord, *Society of the spectacle*. (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), 23-25.

Elaborating further from Debord's description of the spectacle, as a "separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of incessant refinement of the division of labor," (*ibid.*, 25) this separate power perpetually grows into reality. The mysterious nature of the perpetrators that is illustrated within the frames produces a separate power that develops in itself until the world perceives it as reality. Here, the power becomes psychological. Through the power of repetition, the fictitious, imaginary and make-believe order becomes a reality. Mystery holds power when it is conveyed through the performance of a spectacle.

Differences—Red Brigades and ISIS

Though the Red Brigades and ISIS share many common traits, there are two distinct differences that separate their organizations. The first difference is the targeted audience. The Red Brigades' audience was domestic while ISIS' audience was primarily international. The audience of ISIS, while primarily international, is also domestic, more so than al-Qaeda. The Jordanian pilot video itself is an example of the type of domestic audience that ISIS focused its visual violence. For instance, final credits of the video had a specific reference to Jordan by addressing Jordan's air force, which had a direct impact on Jordan.

Therefore, both the Red Brigades and ISIS have maintained a high level of success relative to the outreach of their images within the context of their perceived audience. Hence, when discussing the second difference below, it should be noted that there is no difference in the medium used to convey their message, from the

Polaroid to the Internet, both function successfully within the outreach of the intended audience.

The second difference is the generational makeup of the revolutionaries who make up the organizations. Simply put, the Red Brigades come from a different time of technology than ISIS. The Red Brigades come from a generation where the Polaroid camera was in fashion to capture an image. This means that in order to reproduce an image multiple times required the media outlets' cooperation who would publish the image. The problem here is the dependence on the media outlets, who in the case of the Red Brigades, proved to be uncooperative, as is exemplified by the way *L' Unità* decided to portray the Moro mug shot in its May 6 front page layout. It "was dominated by two photographs of Moro, a "before" ...full-faced, close up shot, very clear and sharp...[and]...an "after" [which] is the Red Brigades on and is reproduced in a very blurred manner..."¹⁰⁶ The Red Brigades did not have control of the medium, and for reproduction of their images, they had to rely on the editorial boards of Italy's news outlets that framed the photo in a manner that suited their own agenda and not the Red Brigades'. The Red Brigades use of images, illocutionary in nature, suited their personal agenda on a domestic level, but they did not have complete control of the interpretations of their message. That is not to say that they could have had any more success than they had by the utilization of the Internet as a medium, but rather that visual narration requires complete control by the party that is sending the message. The Internet is one such medium that is hard

¹⁰⁶ Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 253.

to control whereby personal agendas can be told without editorial permission and interpretations, it is up to the individual to decide the message.

ISIS has access to digitization that works well within the Internet to allow their message to reach their intended international audience in a manner that suits their personal agenda. Though not significant enough to make the effects of the images themselves change the perception of the audience, the Internet as a medium broadens the scope of viewership having an exponential emotional impact on the audience. This means that the Internet enables more repetition that would allow the reality that ISIS promotes to more easily become a reality to the spectators who view their images. With more reproduction, their fictitious reality becomes real.

The Internet is the Message

“The medium is the message,” so says Marshall McLuhan, “because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.”¹⁰⁷ This concept, having come into popularity in the 1960s was used to show that the success of John F. Kennedy in the 1960 debates against Richard Nixon was due to his appearance on television as oppose to the radio where Nixon proved to be the dominant winner. If a candidate can win a debate based on his appearance, then there is a certain level of power of visibility.

The importance of the “medium is the message” comes from the fact that it explains a changing social phenomenon within the communications field; a natural

¹⁰⁷ Marshall McLuhan, “Media is the Message,” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 24.

technological progression so to speak that, as time goes by, has greater ability to impact its viewers and receivers of the message through the medium used.

It is therefore true that the Internet as a medium might prove to have a greater impact on an audience for two reasons. First, because censorship is almost impossible, and second, because in terms of the impact that spreading visual components and producing meaning when “the scrap of an image...produce[s] a new narrative” for the viewer, the emotional response is heightened with the inhumanity associated with its high level of exposure.¹⁰⁸

Seeing that censorship is almost impossible when visual violence is circulated through the Internet, the Internet is then more important compared to others. ISIS chose to post their violent images and videos through specific Internet platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and other social networking mediums because they have the unrestrained ability to post exactly what they want with a higher level of viewership that is harder to control; both in content and in accessibility.

One distinctive factor that separates the Internet from other mediums that expose a group’s message and is circulated worldwide is the global use of social networks and the modern day concepts of “trending” and “going viral” that help to facilitate public discussion. Social media users simply need to open their Twitter, Facebook or Instagram accounts and search within the popular hashtags of the day to find what is trending or has gone viral, signifying what the world is discussing. In 2014, for instance, ISIS very strategically used “tweets sent from the accounts used

¹⁰⁸ Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. (California: Sage Publishing, 2001): 63.

by the propaganda operation” with the trending World Cup hashtags #Brazil2014, #ENG, #France and #WC2014 as a means “to hijack the World Cup tournament to spread their message.”¹⁰⁹ This hijacking illustrates why a group like ISIS that is considered “too weak to impose their will directly by force of arms”¹¹⁰ to use Twitter’s hashtag mechanism as a medium of communicating their message that would ensure their exposure in a transnational and global capacity.

Wordpress.com is another Internet medium that allows these images to circulate across a wide audience. This medium, in particular, is a platform used by many bloggers and aspiring journalists to which ISIS has used for its benefit. Wordpress.com for instance was used by al Furqan Media Center when they posted the image of a “carefully cropped screen-grabs¹¹¹ showing the hostages, clad in orange jumpsuits resembling the Guantanamo Bay detainee uniforms and kneeling in the desert next to the black-clad ‘Jihadi John, were widely displayed across media platforms,”¹¹² Therefore, the fact that ISIS has access to circulate this image with a what would seem to be journalist edge adds value to the visual power they have access through with their images.

¹⁰⁹ Milmo, Cahal. (June 22, 2014). ‘Iraq Crisi Exclusive: ISIS jihadists using World Cup premier league hashtags to promote extremist propaganda on Twitter.’ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-exclusive-isis-jihadists-using-world-cup-and-premier-league-hashtags-to-promote-9555167.html>.

¹¹⁰ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 3 no. 1 (2006): 50.

¹¹¹ Screen-grab from ‘A message to America’ available at: <http://beyondanythingwehaveeverseen.wordpress.com/>.

¹¹² Simone Molin Friis, “‘Beyond anything we have ever seen’: Beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 733.

Secondly, the visual component and the production of meaning construct an emotional response from the audience toward the images themselves that are published and circulated by ISIS through the Internet. This emotional response, used as a psychological weapon with the effect it holds on the viewers, has changed the nature of political communication. While the television and broadcast systems have visual components that produce meaning, it is the Internet's uncensored visual content and global reach that distinguishes the medium. Hence Friis' idea that, "in the era of new media technologies and increased visual interconnectivity across borders, the communication of the horrors of war through the visual imagery has transformed and accelerated" (*ibid.*, 728) has more value when understanding what is referred to as transformation.

The transformation can be viewed within the social media platforms that enable the global public to interact with the images by 'sharing', 'retweeting', and 'liking' the images and content that is posted. This means that the interaction from these social media platforms facilitates a heightened emotional response because the audience is not passive in their intake of the images. In this capacity, it becomes difficult to distinguish what is a real life image versus a photo-shopped image.

The Internet is the Medium for The Digital Caliphate

It is the digital environment that gives ISIS its unique impact, and is the inspiration for Atwan's narration who says "without digital technology it is highly unlikely that Islamic State would ever have come into existence, let alone been able

to survive and expand.”¹¹³ He gives preference to the digital explanation when he shows the Islamic State commanders and recruits’ “tech-savvy” experience in which he says “...coding (writing software programs, inputting information in html) is as familiar to them as their mother tongue” and “most of the digital caliphate’s business is conducted online,” *ibid.*, 15. This tech-savvy expertise and spirit offers a certain sense of credibility to the organization as it competes with its powerful state-functioning adversaries. It is the reason for Moath Al Kasasbeh’s newsroom inspired message before his inhumane death. He delivered it as if he were a newscaster delivering the news to the audience.

The psychological effect that this delivers to the audience is the illusion of a great power. Since, ISIS is reasonably not, compared to the United States, they are building themselves up through the appearance of a state-like system. ISIS employs “professional journalists, film-makers, photographers and editors...and has brought in cutting-edge technology and qualified operators...[that has resulted in] its film output [having the] quality more usually associated with national broadcasters or even Hollywood,” (*ibid.*, 21) but on a larger strategic scale from which Neumann and Smith hypothesize a strategic terrorism campaign, their efforts have only resulted in a high profile exposure for the organization of ISIS.

¹¹³Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, (London: Saqi Books, 2015), Introduction ix.

Visuals and Asymmetrical Warfare

With the visual acting as a power display, the violence reinforces the terror component inherent in the terrorist attack. The relationship between the visual component and the violent component that makes it useful as a terrorist tactic, as is proven from the Red Brigades and ISIS comparison, is the level of inhumanity that is presented through the narration itself. While the visual component might induce power that the weak organization desires that the state or larger international powers maintain, the perception of irrationality is what is needed from the visuals in order to create the response from the target. The Red Brigades utilized this inhumanity as a desperate act of survival and ISIS utilized it a method to appear irrational to their opposing audience.

The Nature of Warfare and Coercive Diplomacy: Rethinking Rationality and Irrationality in Warfare

Visual violence as a mechanism is one such example that illustrates this change in the appearance of combat because it is strategically being used as a weapon in warfare. Therefore, what the world is witnessing today where the Internet is the medium that makes connectivity easier on a global scale is not a change in the nature of warfare, but rather a change in the means by which the war is fought. The players who fight in war still hold to the classical framework proposed by Clausewitz in which he proposed the trinity of war strategy that is made up of the

interplay between Politicians, People and Military, only now, the weapon and its impact is based on a psychological effect and not one of brute force.

The way wars are fought today is through coercive diplomacy where threats rather than force hold more power to make the adversary do what the opponent wants. Therefore, though framed in a realism and nuclear deterrence logic, Schelling's description of coercive diplomacy is relevant when discussing the psychological impact and utilization of visual violence in warfare. He says that "...the hurting does no good directly; it can work only indirectly [to which] coercion depends more on the threat of what is yet to come than on damage already done" (Schelling, 172). The concept of coercion has a psychological impact that does not require the status of a great power, but rather the illusion of a great power or lack there of.

The results illustrate that in order for visual violence to be an effective tool in coercive diplomacy, the responders must associate irrationality to the images themselves. This can be done through fear or through labeling the enemy as irrational. Without fear, inhumane visual violence holds no value in coercive diplomacy, aka target response, because the psychological impact is most pronounced when the adversary fears those who show inhumane visual violence in a coercive manner.

However, inhumane visual violence might be successful in other persuasive capacities such as a last act of group survival. In the case of the Red Brigades, they killed Roberto Peci in desperation to maintain their group, and they used this inhumanity to appear irrational to the audience.

These two cases illustrate that the logic of coercive diplomacy needs to be developed to include irrational behavior. While political and behavioral scientist Alexander George criticizes the abstract theory of coercive diplomacy that “assumes pure rationality on the part of the opponent—an ability to receive all relevant information, evaluate it correctly, make proper judgments as to the credibility and potency of the threat, and see that it is in his interest to accede to the demand made on him,”¹¹⁴ by discussing the abstract theory of coercive diplomacy and its of consideration for “...the possibility of misperception and miscalculation or that an opponent’s “rationality” is affected by psychological variables and by values, culture, and tradition that may differ from those of the coercive state *ibid.*”

Though oriented toward policy makers, the misperceptions and miscalculations of the opponents “rationality” that is affected by psychological variables are extremely important in the context of coercive diplomacy. It is based on the traditional military strategic thinking of Sun Tzu who says know thy enemy. Had the adversary of ISIS considered the psychological variables that contributed to its rise, such as the prison and captivity mentality and the mistreatments and torture methods that were endured, they would be better equipped to understand that ISIS is indeed acting in a rational way when they are making themselves appear to be irrational as they went about utilizing inhumane visual violent deaths.

Irrationality holds its explanatory power when discussing the current international environment of terrorism. It is extremely valuable to terrorist

¹¹⁴ Alexander George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” in *The Use of Force*, ed. Robert Art and Kenneth Waltz (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2009), 72.

organizations because it offers a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty to their strategy as they follow through with their coercive diplomacy. As Schelling noted, "...uncertainty exists. Not everybody is always in his right mind. Not all the frontiers and thresholds are precisely defined, fully reliable, and known to be so beyond the least temptation to test them out, to explore for loopholes, or to take a chance that they may be disconnected this time," (Schelling, 93). Irrationality is inherently uncertain and in a strategic mindset, this uncertainty allows those who use it to explore these loopholes in the system. Uncertainty enables the non-state actors to test the thresholds of their adversaries in order to see how far they can go before they can manipulate a response.

Schelling himself also questions rationality in conducting war. He says, "true, there is a sense in which anything done coolly, deliberately, on schedule, by plan, upon reflection, in accordance with rules and formulae, and pursuant to a calculus, is "rational" but it is in a very limited sense" *ibid.*, 183. He then says, "even if this kind of warfare is irrational it could still enjoy the benefits of slowness, of deliberateness, and self-control" *ibid.* Most poignant of his argument on rationality is when he says, "nor is there any guarantee—or even a moderate presumption—that the more rational of two adversaries will come off the better in this kind of limited exchange. There is, in fact, likely to be great advantage in appearing to be on the verge of total abandon. However rational the adversaries, they may compete to appear the more irrational, impetuous, and stubborn" *ibid.* Though Schelling is discussing rationality and irrationality in the context of nuclear deterrence in the Cold War era, he points to something that should be taken into account when

developing the concept of coercive diplomacy, that rationality is not as simple in warfare as previously believed.

In this day and age, with asymmetrical warfare at center stage as oppose to conventional warfare, why and how a group, organization, state or enemy is perceived as irrational would help explain actions, especially when one group is weaker than the other. Visual violence is one such mechanism that enables the perception of irrationality to be used within coercive diplomacy. Hence, the concepts of irrationality and rationality should be developed within asymmetrical warfare.

The Role of Visual Violence in Warfare and Insights for Further Research

Visual Violence as a concept, being distinguished from its visual component and its violent component, does not have the desired impact unless the image contains two features: the perception of irrationality and a high level of inhumanity. Without these two features represented within the frame, the non-state actor is not utilizing the extreme form of communication to its full capacity. This is because the role of visual violence, as an extreme form of communication, is only effective when it used to induce a high level of fear and publicity. Fear and publicity are the desired ends within the means of visual violence.

This research has served to clarify the impact on the audience who views the visual violence in relation to terrorist acts by analyzing two non-state actors. In its broader framework based on Schelling's diplomacy of violence elaborated as "the

art of coercion” and “intimidation” where the “instruments of war are...punitive,” visual violence serves as an instrument in warfare used with the intention to punish. Visual violence is indirect coercion and the “hurting...is measured in the suffering it can cause and the victims’ motivation to avoid it” *ibid.*, 2. This analysis goes a step further in identifying the concept of suffering and highlighting the inhumanity within the visual component as a form of violence. Inhumanity is a useful measuring tool within a visually violent image because it determines the level of fear that is expected as the response from the audience.

Visual terror being defined by a high level of inhumanity represented within the frame leads to further questions about who holds the power. For instance, is it the audience, the producer or the interpreter of the image? While this comparative and visual analysis would lead me to suggest the latter, more research is necessary to substantiate this finding in a more systematic and quantifiable manner, using inhumanity as the leading concept within visual terror.

Another leading question is based on the irrational/rational dichotomy within indirect coercion. If “coercion depends more on the threat of what is to come than on the damage already done” (*ibid.*, 172) as Schelling suggests, to what extent can the perception of irrationality determine the threat of what is to come? Specifically, is irrationality a determining factor in coercive behavior? What role does it play in coercive diplomacy? As the leading assumption within this thesis, the perception of irrationality as a rational behavior deserves further research within the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy within asymmetrical warfare.

Finally, though this research does not focus on counterterrorism measures, it does shed light on the role of the audience. The role of the audience is relevant in the context of our own power as the viewer of the visual violence. Therefore, in understanding this power that we have, there are certain policy implications that can be applied to counterterrorism from understanding the role of the audience in terms of the fear and publicity outcomes that result from visual violence. The outcomes of fear and publicity deserve further research within the framework of counterterrorism.

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Appendix 1—Three Stages of the Red Brigades

Photo 1:



Photo 2:

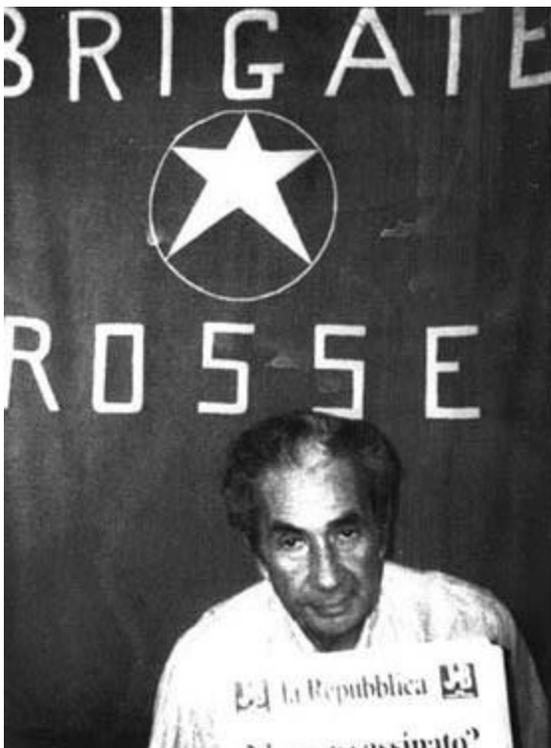


Photo 3:



Appendix 2—The Narrative Structure through Image: the Inhumane Death



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7