

## The „I“ of IS or religion matters

There has been an intense debate for many years now whether the ideational products of jihadi groups are to be understood as religious, merely ideological or not.<sup>i</sup>

The fact that jihadis have produced significant amounts of resources that deal with religious issues, for instance under the umbrella of al-Qa'ida (Lohlker 2009) or IS (Lohlker 2016a), may allow us to question this common assumption. Thousands of pages and uncountable megabytes have been filled with discussions on religious matters and the construction of a jihadi-type religion or somewhat of a jihadi Islam. Indeed, to everybody who can witness and understand what jihadists are writing and saying, it become clear, that religion matters.

Since this not the place for a lengthy discussion about religion in general – as tempting as it may be for a scholar of religion – we will restrict ourselves to a more pragmatic distinction and approach to issue from the perspective of jihadi communication. Consequently, we have to focus on the establishment of a religious-ethical community of jihadis by the means of communication and bear in mind that, in fact, terrorism itself may be regarded as communication (Waldmann 2005: 13), as long as:

"one pole of the communication has" a "*non-human, non-empirical, transcendent, or 'supernatural'* character, the communication may count as religious. It is the negative definition [...] that gives religion in modern global society its fluidity and ambiguity, allowing the construction of cultural entities as religion if only they can be convincingly established as such." (Beyer 2001: 144)

Turning to IS we may say that this entity spends many of its resources on the production of religious material, which includes even teaching books for Islamic creed (*'aqīda*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), or the terminology of Hadith, to give but a few examples. This is done intentionally and not as a kind of camouflage for the real interests of IS (power, money or anything else); because it matters and because it is the 'real thing' for them.

If we understand ideology not simply as a set of ideas – be it political, economic, philosophical, or religious – or follow up the derogatory turn of the word 'ideology', as analysed by Mannheim (Mannheim 1936), we can discern a difference between ideology and theology/religion.

Referring to the standard introductions to ideology we may read, e.g., in Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction*, which is essentially a list of 16 forms of ideology (Eagleton 1991: 1-2). Some of them are very general and particular, yet all of them refer to the behaviour and ideas of social groups. For Marxists, an understanding of ideology as 'false' and 'inverted' consciousness initially appears to be more appropriate (Rehmann 2013: 5). Others may differentiate between three forms of ideology: a) a form in which talk about certain mistakes caused by epistemological shortcomings, b) a system of ideas and values, and c) a social and political program (Tepe 2012, 1-2). All these ways of conceptualizing ideology betray an uneasiness to acknowledge that religion may be still

alive and may even be part of the realms of evil – at least to some extent. Regardless, not recognizing the importance of religion is, in fact, due to a Western prejudice that emerged in the 1960s and due to the paradigm of the inevitable decline of religion and an attempt to absolve religion from violence committed with reference to religious framings. But: Jihadists do not subscribe to this paradigm. There is a reason for it if we look at Eagleton's comparing remark below on ideology:

"The study of ideology is among other things an inquiry into the ways in which people may come to invest in their own unhappiness. It is because being oppressed sometimes brings with it some slim bonuses that we are occasionally prepared to put up with it. The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire and identify with his power; and any practice of political emancipation thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation freeing ourselves from ourselves. The other side of the story, however, is equally important. For if such dominion fails to yield its victims sufficient gratification over an extended period of time, then it is certain that they will finally revolt against it." (Eagleton 1991: XIII-XIV)

Since the history of religions is full of cases of cognitive dissonance resulting in the reinforcement of the same behaviour, which led to the experience of dissonance, we may assume that the relation to the transcendent realm (see above) helped to sustain belief even if the gratification did not appear in this world. A paradigmatic case is the repeated experience of the end of the world not happening when announced by religious leaders, whereas the majority of followers still believed in the power and knowledge of its leaders regardless.

This conceptual discussion is not an exercise in academic nit-picking. It rather implies the assumption that without deconstructing the theology of violence inherent in jihadi communication and practice, these religious ideas will pop up even after an organized force like IS may be destroyed on the ground. This is not to deny the need for well-funded social work, interventions in families and institutions (schools, prisons) or even effective actions by the police.

Flatly denying the importance of religion will indeed overlook one crucial element of jihadi thought and actions. Assuming that religion is the reason for the positive behaviour of humans and refuting there may be religiously legitimized negative behaviour does not hold up to closer scrutiny and the examples found in the history of religions. Even if we abhor jihadis using Islamic religious concepts, we cannot deny the fact they are trying to cut out their version of religion – a religion of violence.

The only way to deconstruct this violent variety of religion is to develop alternative forms of religion able to resist a theology of violence as characterized by the apology of violence, authoritarianism, homogeneity or the strict demarcation of boundaries, etc. (see below). This religion of violence is now spread in a complex dissemination structure. Said structure ranges from more or less elaborate theological tracts, smaller booklets, condensed forms (like four to six pages leaflets), public speeches, events, and propaganda meetings in mosques (*da'wa*), videos, posters in public space, issuing forms for somebody who has been accepted as not being an unbeliever (*kāfir*) to finally the face-to-face communication. All these acts of communication convey one message in

a very coherent way: there is an Islamic entity, the organized form of *true* Islam.

A reaction that is quite understandable is that Muslims declare IS-Islam as not Islamic at all and alien to their religion. However, since IS and other jihadi propaganda is not aiming at persons who are anchored firmly in their belief, and is actually tapping into parts of Islamic heritage, such an approach is a reaction of believers who don't recognize what they believe when being confronted with the brutal crimes of terrorists committed in the name of their religion and so refrain to engage with the thoughts of the terrorists as religious thoughts. Still, this will not help to solve the general problem of religiously legitimized extremism and destroy the religious appeal of this extremism. Turning again to Eagleton we might say that the critique of ideology mentioned by him may also apply to the critique of the theology of violence if we take specificity of religion into account:

"[...] only those interventions will work which make sense to the mystified subject itself. [...] 'Critique' is that form of discourse which seeks to inhabit the experience of the subject from inside, in order to elicit those 'valid' features of that experience which point beyond the subject' present condition." (Eagleton 1991: XIV)

But now we have to turn to theology and religion leaving ideology aside.

### *Religion*

In this part, we will turn away from discussing ideology as an appropriate term, but will turn to religion as a concept, which useful to understand what often is somewhat awkwardly called 'religiously motivated terrorism' in order to avoid any negative reaction from believers. Violence is a contingent possibility in religion(s) – history proves it indeed is – and acknowledging this fact and possibility does not violate beliefs but those who advocate violence. By acknowledging the contingency of a violent turn, the possibility of turning to non-violence is acknowledged as well.

Religion only exists through believers 'doing religion'. Alternatively, non-violent ways of 'doing religion' are what is needed – not only for Islam. Excluding religion from the picture is an attempt to reproduce the emergence of political and religious fields in early modernity on a theoretical level. This, however, does not take into account that the configuration of these fields may be different in other regions of the world and outside Western Europe. It is not taking into account that what holds true on the level of governmental affairs, and to some extent for theoretical/academic discussions in Europe, may not hold true on the level of the ordinary members of societies. Hence, the surprising 'revival' of religions since the 1970s, is much more a revival in the realms of academic discussions. Even in Europe (or North America) the situation has changed:

"Researchers in the field of new Islamic movements talk about the emergence of religious subcultures as the foundation of a lifestyle motivated by a certain religious ethos (Riesebrodt 2004: 27). Following James W. Jones we might say that the mingling of religion and politics in religiously

motivated terrorism (and not only in jihadism) is one foremost challenge of the 21st century. The divine master plan claimed by these subcultures and movements gives them the mandate to act against societies at large." (Lohlker 2012: 130)

As Jones puts it "the issues of national liberation, resisting domination, and economic justice are often intertwined with and sacralized by religious and spiritual motivations that cannot be ignored if contemporary terrorism is to be understood." (Jones 2008: 28)

"In other words: switching from religious language advocating violence to violent action depends on recoding conflicts in a religious language enabling the believers to perceive themselves as threatened by satanic forces, by apocalyptic powers, by Babylon, etc. and thus legitimizing violent resistance and changing the way these conflicts will go on. It depends on specific situations, but religious language and symbolism advocating violence is necessary for the process of recoding (Kippenberg 2010)." (Lohlker 2012: 131)

Conflicts being coded or recoded in terms of religion leads to the practical logic (Bourdieu) of the actors acting in religious terms – even in the most superficial form. Claiming the *true* reason for their actions is political, psychological, criminal etc. privileges the academic-theoretical epistemology and ignores the practical logic of religious actors. To assess the share and form of religion in every individual case determines the best way of intervening and in this fashion it has to include religious elements. The text of the following illustration reads:

"We will create supporters in your houses.

We will turn your sons into mujahidin.

We will raise them according to the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, the trustworthy.

We will revive in their hearts

honour, moral elevation, pride."



*telegram* (accessed January 29, 2016)

This illustration is a hybrid using a visual language that is easy to understand: The threat to the parents, the reference to military jihad (in the context IS the most important religious duty), the reference to the religious foundation of IS in the Sunna of the prophet, and the psychological element of reclaiming the honour and overcoming feelings of inferiority (Lohlker 2016c). Cutting religion out of the illustration would make it impossible to think – and feel – the connection of (re-)claiming superiority, communicating terror and threat, and the reference to religion.

The following lines read:

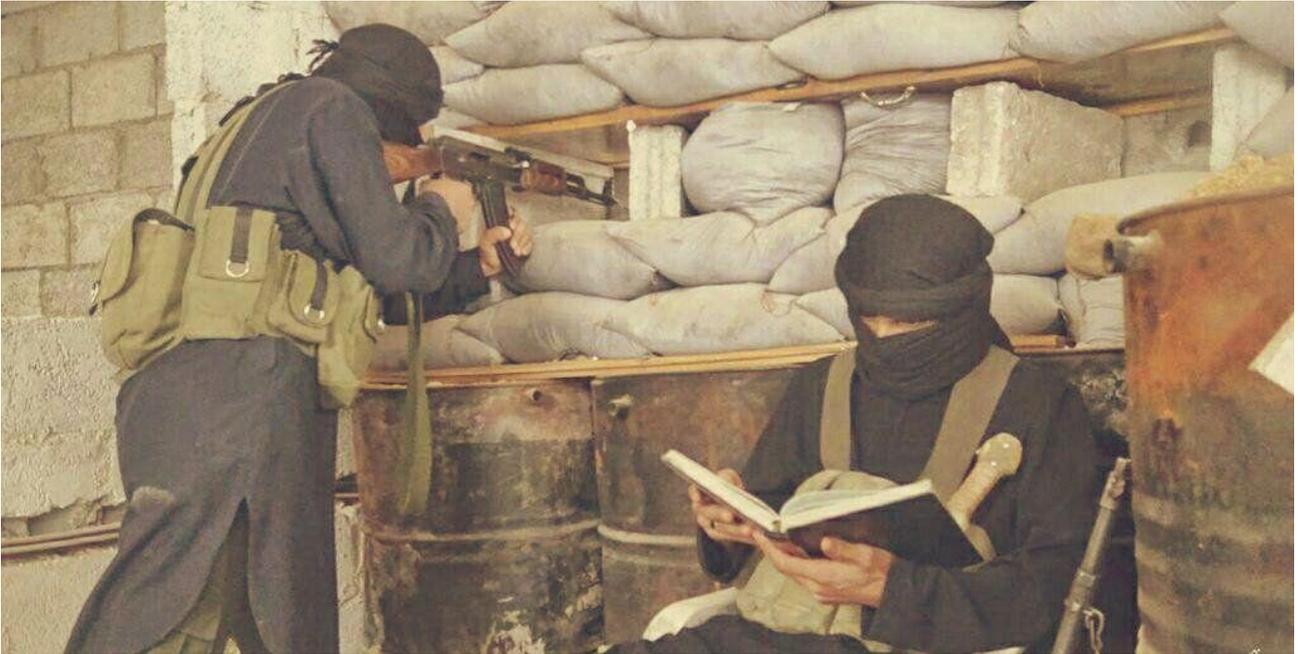
"O, God! This religion is Your religion, and we are thy soldiers. We fight in Your path. O God! Our victory depends on your grace, on your favour and on your kindness. Their polytheism will not defeat our monotheism. Our disobedience will not vanquish their unbelief. O, God! Forgive us our sins. We seek Your forgiveness and turn to You in repentance. We do believe in You and we trust in You. Don't blame us for what the shameless are making of us. Bless, o God, our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and his companions. The last of our prayers is that praise may be alone for God, the Lord of the universes."

اللهم إن هذا الدين دينك، ونحن جنودك، نقاتل في سبيلك،  
اللهم وقد نصرتنا بفضلك ومَنِّك وكرمك، لا حول لنا ولا قوة،  
ولسنا أهلاً للنصر، اللهم فلا يغلبنَّ شركهم توحيدنا.  
ولا تغلبنَّ معاصينا كفرهم، اللهم فاغفر لنا ذنوبنا،  
إنا نستغفرك ونتوب إليك،  
ونؤمن بك ونتوكل عليك،  
ولا تؤاخذنا بما فعل السفهاء منا.  
وصلِّ اللهم على نبينا محمد وآله وصحبه.  
وآخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين.



*telegram* (accessed December 2, 2015)

The text is deeply imbued with religious emotions ingrained with hostility against everyone who is not part of the 'believing group'. The message conveyed by the text is stressed by the visual elements: one fighter on guard, one fighter reading presumably the Qur'an, and the flag of IS dominating the scenery. Again, we see violence and religion combined and the combination of 'fighter-reader' has become part of the iconography of IS:



*telegram* (accessed November 29, 2015)

We may find many examples for recoding conflicts in religious language and symbols (Kippenberg) – without saying what was first: religion or conflict. We may assume the practical logic of the jihadi actors allows for just one code: religious violence.

This (re-)coding may be very simple:

"You will not enjoy peace unless we will live it in reality in the lands of the Muslims."



*telegram.me* (accessed November 14, 2015)

The above example shows a contextualization of the terrorist attacks in Paris with the bombings of French airplanes in Syria (left corner) and evokes an antagonism of Muslims and non-Muslims, adding religion as a code to interpret what is perceived and constructed by IS as a conflict between two states.

There is a very simple fact that needs to be stressed in order to avoid a misunderstanding that often results from a way of thinking in antitheses. Stressing the importance of religion does not mean that religion is the *only* reason for the existence jihadism – or any form of religiously motivated terrorism. Jihadism is in fact a multi-determined, multifactorial phenomenon. This misunderstanding constitutes the basis of some of the positions that deny the importance of religion.

#### *Case studies of misunderstandings*

In a recent book titled *Jihad and Nihilism of the West* (Manemann 2016) we read that relating Islam to jihadism means to assume a causality between religion and violence and, especially, between Islam and violence (ibid.: 20). Later on, the author acknowledges that Islam may offer a set of symbols and ideasm which used to legitimize violent conflict (ibid.: 21). The author then turns to his counter-argument as he refers to the undeniable fact that religion in most cases of Europeans turned jihadists was not the central element of the process of radicalization into violence of young Europeans. He is referring to some widely publicized cases showing that jihadists may indeed only have a superficial knowledge of Islam. Consequently, (IS-) Islam cannot be the cause of their

radicalization. This often voiced opinion ignores the impregnation of certain parts of the Internet by jihadi propaganda that does not convey long theoretical-theological tracts but a very condensed slogan-like (IS-) Islam, which enables the articulation of a diverse opposition. The opposition articulated is, for example, against – if we refer to some elements of (IS-) propaganda – double standards of 'Western' politics, the persecution of Muslims, history ranging from colonialism to the present bombings in Iraq and Syria killing civilians, the discrimination/racism against Muslims (defined as a group discriminated against for religious reasons) and the creation of an ideal state based on (IS-) Islam. This kind of propaganda is embedded in a larger structure that intertwines with religious motivations and political, social, individual feelings of malaise (Löwenthal 1990).

Claiming that converts are doing something that may be against some rules of Islam (e. g., *ibid.*: 26), perceived as a non-contradictory system of thought, implicitly advocates the idea that only a religiously well-educated believer can be regarded as a representative of his/her religion. A recent convert cannot be called a true believer. Certainly we are overdrawing this idea. Yet, it may be justified to identify the absurdity of this way of reasoning. Setting benchmarks for being accepted as a believer and expecting believers to act in accordance with one set of normativity would consequently exclude the majority of believers throughout history. The basic assumption is that religion cannot be ambiguous or contradictory, which is in fact a quite modern idea (cf. Bauer 2011, Ahmed 2016). Here the author does not want to say that there is no role for Islam in jihadism but would rather prefer to argue against mono-causal explanations of radicalization (Manemann 2016: 28). The author, however, does not offer a solution of how to approach the compatibility of his claims: "religion plays no role" and "religions play a role". We would expect him to answer the question, which role...

This conceptual uneasiness is borne out of a demarcation against other positions to be characterized by some misunderstandings; though being aware of the importance of religion in jihadism. The first misunderstanding of writers like Graeme Wood (2015) is that a barbaric variety of Islam has to be "medieval". It is a modern variety of religion, emerging as part of the dark side of modernity. But it is, in fact, a religious variety. To construct a distinction between a "medieval", evil religion, that cannot be modern and an enlightened modernity, subscribes to the common normative misunderstanding of modernity being a homogenously positive force. The history of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century bear witness to cruelties that were based on modern rationality. Even enlightenment is an idea much more difficult to understand than the - at best naive - defenders of the word "enlightenment" may think. *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Horkheimer seems to have been forgotten.

The second misunderstanding (Wood 2015) is that IS is really an attempt to re-enact the times of the early Islamic community. As scrutinizing the material produced by IS demonstrates, it is a conscious construction of an IS-Islam based on some kind of archaeology of the Islamic tradition.

These one-sided arguments are rooted in a flawed approach to jihadism and IS, which is only referring to selected sources in the English language. However, knowledge of the bulk of jihadi discourses in Arabic remains missing and unexplored.

## *Reading their lips*

Turning to jihadi Arabic language resources we will for example find a blog called *A'iddū! (Prepare yourself!)*<sup>1</sup> The title refers to a Qur'anic imperative. The blog offers resources (documents, videos) enabling jihadis to fight the military jihad at different levels. As such, it is a predominantly jihadi military blog.

There are many files on explosives, weapons, anti-tank weapons, intelligence, but also a file about the spiritual preparation of fighters. Tactical aspects are discussed, training of leaders, but also 'Alī b. a. Tālib, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad, and Abū Dharr, a prominent companion of the prophet, as role models for cautious behaviour, and another one discussing security issues following the biography of the Prophet, find mentioning. We can even assess a special file extracting examples from the biography of the prophet whilst among other files, we will find the story of Abū Mahjan al-Thaqafī, another companion of the Prophet, as an example for those who have committed great sins and think they are not permitted to fight military jihad – quite the contrary, for sure.

The selected texts, files, and videos come from diverse sources: older al-Qā'ida files, HAMAS, Free Syrian Army documents, translations of Sun Tzu into Arabic, even a translation of an Israeli texts; a very pragmatic selection indeed. All these technical, military resources are evidently embedded in religious traditions and understand themselves as the natural outflow of these traditions. When quoting the *basmala*, (the formula that there is no god other than God), etc., the texts are not using a culturally set phrase but subscribe to a religiously impregnated discursive formation and a history of jihadism going back to the Afghan Arab volunteers.

## *IS-Caliph*

The core of the identity of IS consists of two elements: the caliphate and violence (Lohlker 2015 and 2016a). One of the prerequisites to proclaim a caliphate is to have a person who has the qualifications of being proclaimed as a caliph. Leaving aside other elements of the theory of proclaiming a caliphate, we see that IS argues for al-Baghdādī as a caliph by saying that he proved to be a successful fighter and a scholarly man based on him having authored some books. He additionally fulfils another one of the requirements of becoming a caliph as he has the appropriate genealogy. The following illustration published on a channel on *telegram* connected to IS cites a genealogy going back to the Prophet Muhammad via his daughter Fātima.:

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1 We do not give any URL for jihadi material. All the material discussed is archived and available.

## نسب أمير المؤمنين الخليفة إبراهيم

فأمير المؤمنين وخليفة المسلمين هو إبراهيم بن عواد بن إبراهيم بن علي بن عبد بن مصطفى بن حسن بن عثمان بن دولة بن محمد بن بدري بن الحسين (الملقب بـ: عرموش) بن علي بن سعيد<sup>(٣)</sup> بن بدري بن بدر الدين بن خليل بن حسين بن عبد الله بن إبراهيم الأواه بن الشريف يحيى<sup>(٤)</sup> بن عز الدين بن الشريف بشير<sup>(٥)</sup> بن ماجد بن عطية بن يعلى<sup>(٦)</sup> بن دويد<sup>(٧)</sup> بن ماجد بن عبد الرحمن بن القاسم بن الشريف إدريس بن جعفر الزكي بن علي الهادي بن محمد الجواد بن علي الرضى بن موسى الكاظم بن جعفر الصادق بن محمد الباقر بن علي زين العابدين بن الحسين بن الإمام علي بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه وفاطمة بنت رسول الله محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم بن عبد الله بن عبد المطلب بن هاشم بن عبد مناف بن قصي بن كلاب بن مرة بن كعب بن لؤي بن غالب بن فهر بن مالك بن النضر بن كنانة بن خزيمة بن مدركة بن إلياس بن مضر بن نزار بن معد بن عدنان بن أدد بن مقوم بن ناحور بن تارخ بن يعرب بن يشجب بن نابت بن إسماعيل عليه السلام بن إبراهيم عليه السلام بن تارخ وهو آزر بن تاخور بن شارخ بن أرغو بن فالغ بن عابر بن شالغ بن أرفخشذ بن سام بن نوح عليه السلام بن لامك بن متوشلخ بن أخنوخ وهو إدريس عليه السلام بن يرد بن مهلائيل بن قنن بن يافت بن شيث بن آدم عليه السلام.<sup>(٨)</sup>

telegram (accessed February 13, 2016)

### A Video

A recent video entitled *Night Arrows (sihām al-layl)*<sup>ii</sup> demonstrates the strong reference to religion and the appropriation of Muslim religiosity by a specific IS-Islam.

Showing a city by night and a minaret, which evokes the idea of the call to prayer to be heard from it, the setting of the video is contextualized as a Muslim city where the mosque is the most important structure. The clip cuts to a man slowly rising from his sleep, taking a candle, then proceeding to his ritual ablutions and taking water from a clay jug. Afterwards the man goes to another room in order to pray. An audio file can be heard featuring the voice of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqāwī, the founding father of a precursor organization of IS. It starts with the call of "the Muslims" in general having to pray for the fighters.

Some sparkling points are moving down into the hands of the praying man, symbolizing al-Zarqāwī's speech calling "the Muslims" to pray for the jihadi fighters, and become part of the prayer. The candle slowly fades away and a landscape with two birds flying is shown at the sunset. A voice in the background is telling the viewers that "the Sunna," the obligatory example, has to be followed as "set by God for his creatures" and that this includes the fight against oppressors. Again a

religious amalgamation of a, at first glance, political statement.

Also the next sequence is a political statement, showing Obama, Putin, and Hollande speaking. In the background a voice is talking about the necessary retaliation for the "war against Islam and the Muslims". The crimes of these aggressors are, so the background voice continues, evident from the destruction caused by the bombing campaigns of the anti-Is coalition. The following sequences show ruins, people trying to help injured victims (especially children) and an enraged elderly man who summons the wrath of God. The film cross-fades between images from the Paris November 2016 attacks and the speaker continues talking about retaliation, before a sequence shows fighters training for urban warfare. The calls "those who stand up in sincere belief to fight the unbelief in the world" to take revenge for the Russians bombings – Putin's image is shown – of the "houses of the Muslims". The fighters, the speaker continues, prepare themselves trusting in God – IS-fighters are shown parading with their cars – with their first and foremost important equipment being "belief" (*īmān*). The viewers are told, that they are aware of their sins for which they repented.

Then the film continues to show praying Muslims, whereas the overall orientation towards god in all aspects of life is stressed again and again. The prayer to god is considered "the most important weapon" and while showing an old man praying alone and a boy and an old man praying together, a short recitation of the Qur'an closes this part of the video. A man appears elaborating on the virtue of prayers and again we experience a cross-fade to a congregation of men praying. In this regard, the speaker mentions that the praying men are asking for the support of God against their enemies.

Another speaker appears speaking in Turkish calling the Muslims, "the jihadis", "to help the religion of God at least by praying"; the "help" that is asked for translates to fighting. The speaker is sitting in front of many rows of Arabic books, appearing to be religious literature, which is supposed to indicate his scholarly standing. Again, the praying men are shown and a song gets played about the people who stand in unity, which refers to the Muslims as confessors of the unity of god.

Another speaker tells the audience that the sky belongs to God, that the earth is his, and that the sea and rivers are his. High mountains are shown, forests, and a waterfall. The film cross-fades to airplanes and the speaker is telling his viewers that God will ultimately destroy all the tools of the attackers. This will be achieved through IS fighters who are shown recovering the corpses of killed fighters, which conveys the message that they will fight until they die. IS-Fighters in a city are cross-fading between images of an erupting volcano and a stream of lava. Footage is shown of catastrophes that happened in the US, and the speaker proclaims that God may punish America through earthquakes or other disasters.

The video is a true amalgamation of religion, which manifests itself in prayer, the utilized religious formulae and allows for an identification of jihadis with Muslims in general, for a political message, and an equalization of nature and the power of God – and IS. To subtract religion from this analysis means to overlook an important part of the message conveyed.

## *Anti-Shiism*

Anti-Shiism is a paradigmatic case for the religious dimension of jihadism. The enmity against Shiites often dehumanized as "filth" etc. (e. g., Lohlker 2016b) has been embedded into a centuries old discourse of marginalization and persecution, reinvigorated in modern times, with Saudi support.

It may be tempting to interpret his sectarianism as a mere ideological costume hiding geopolitical interests (Saudi-Arabia vs. Iran, IS vs. Iran, etc.) but a reconsideration. However, we may better understand the nature of the, now deepened, Sunni-Shii divide if we reconceptualise it as politics, amalgamating centuries-old religious traditions, and strengthening itself by tapping into these religious lines of force.

We may add the other elements of IS thought or IS theology of violence (Lohlker 2015, 2016a), like the need to establish a caliphate based on violence, the prevailing apocalyptic mood, a thoroughly constructed set of gender rules based on religious sources, even the anti-smoking campaign IS argued on religious grounds, the internal structure of IS referring to institutions mentioned in the history of Muslim communities, police/market control (*hisba*), welfare (*zakāt*), and the introduction of new currency, called gold dinar, as in the early time of Islam. All this provides ample evidence of the religious foundation of jihadism, enabling jihadis to envision the overall strategic aims. As Scott Atran wrote:

"This is the purposeful plan of violence that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State's self-anointed Caliph, outlined in his call for 'volcanoes of jihad': to create a globe-spanning jihadi archipelago that will eventually unite to destroy the present world and create a new-old world of universal justice and peace under the Prophet's banner. A key tactic in this strategy is to inspire sympathisers abroad to violence: do what you can, with whatever you have, wherever you are, whenever possible. [...] While many in the West dismiss radical Islam as simply nihilistic, our work suggests something far more menacing: a profoundly alluring mission to change and save the world." (Atran 2015)

That is why religion matters: It is the fuel making the machine of destruction move. Cutting off the supply means offering alternative conceptions of religion – and many other things. Religion matters, but it is not the sole solution to the problem of jihadism. Hard power may be needed, but soft power (youth workers, teachers, community, and family empowering, etc.) is required, too. The political, social, and economic preconditions are the soil for the rise of jihadist entities, but religion – in fact, a specific construction of religion – is part of this problem.

We are in need to help the people affected by this theology of violence and in order to create another sense for themselves we must remind ourselves of Eagleton's remark: "only those interventions will work which make sense to the mystified subject itself" (Eagleton 1991: XIV).

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i

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ii Dies bezieht sich zugleich auf die Verrichtung besonders verdienstvoller Gebete in der Nacht und auf die "Pfeile in der Nacht", die auf den Feind abgeschossen werden. Konsequenterweise hat sich in Syrien auch eine bewaffnete Gruppe so benannt (Qabalan 2013, 13)