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Articles

Where the Exception is No Longer Exceptional: Visualising Sovereignty, Violence and Refusal in the Spanish-Moroccan Borderscape

by Vincent Förster



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Abstract

Borderscapes are spaces of exception: They are where the state exercises sovereignty in a violent and unrestrained manner on the one side, and where citizens and non-citizens subvert the state's authority by refusing to acknowledge its existence on the other. Borders are hence socially constructed liminal spaces that extend beyond the borderline. To understand these complex bordering processes and practices, both monolithic and ideographic academic analyses are required. By visualising the borderscape we uncover the multi-faceted realities at borders, the performative acts that constitute them, why and how exceptional violence and refusal are performed and give agency to non-state actors otherwise hidden from history.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Border, Resistance, Sovereignty, Violence, Visual IR

Introduction

In the Borderlands

you are the battleground

where enemies are kin to each other;

you are at home, a stranger

the border disputes have been settled

the volley of shots have shattered the truce

you are wounded, lost in action

dead, fighting back;

[...]

To survive the Borderlands

you must live sin fronteras^[1]

be a crossroads. (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 194–195)

[1] *sin fronteras* = without borders



Figure 1. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. Ceuta from afar.

'It is January 2016. Morocco's coastline is rolling past; Spain and Europe seem only a stone's throw away. I'm on a bus to Ceuta, one of the two Spanish exclaves on North African territory. Together with Melilla, Ceuta is the only land border Europe shares with mainland Africa. Slightly smaller than London's City of Westminster, it is located at the eastern end of the Strait of Gibraltar, only 25km from continental Europe. An 8.4km long and 6m high fence topped with barbed wire surrounds the enclave, where surveillance, smuggling, irregular crossings, physical violence and deaths are regular occurrences. Yet, despite these "hard facts" Ceuta and, thus, the border are not officially recognised by Morocco. For the Moroccan state, Ceuta is territory occupied by its former coloniser, Spain, that should be returned to the righteous sovereign. For the Spanish state, however, Ceuta is in their hands since 1668 and, thus, as Spanish as anything can be. At the same time, Ceuta is one of the EU's most southern external borders. Here, European, Arab and African identities, Muslim and Christian values, Northern and Southern economic realities are constantly renegotiated, produced and reproduced, reinforced and contested. The "gate to fortress Europe" for some, the last European outpost for others, Ceuta is a textbook example of a modern border, a place of political, social and cultural meaning-making and meaning-breaking.'

The above excerpt is the scripted opening sequence after a prologue in my documentary *the wound that needs to be healed* (55', UK/Germany, 2016), a film I shot in and around the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in January 2016 and in which I explore the lived realities of sub-Saharan migrants and Moroccans at and around the border. In this essay, I draw on the fieldwork I conducted there to argue that bridging politics and aesthetics is a valuable, even necessary, methodology to do justice to the multi-faceted, contradictory and complex realities of and around borders. I will use excerpts, stills and quotes from the film to support my argument throughout this paper. After discussing the shift within critical border studies away from the mere perception of borders as territorially identifiable sites towards the notion of borderscapes that encompass both the border as a space *and* bordering processes, I demonstrate that this shift requires a bridging of politics and aesthetics. By visualising the human border experience and thus focusing on emotion rather than meaning, the images become a site of knowledge production in their own right enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of what borders do and how they affect the people living within and

around them. This is followed by a case study based on my fieldwork in Ceuta in which I contend that the borderscape is an exceptional space on two accounts: on the one hand, it can be viewed in the Agambian sense of the concept, given the state's unrestrained and often violent exercise of sovereignty in attempting to secure the border, and on the other, the borderscape constitutes the state's Achilles' heel, the space where the state is most vulnerable because it is here where state agents, citizens and migrants constantly challenge and subvert state power. I close with reflections on my aesthetic approach to the borderscape and a discussion of the limitations of this particular research.

From Border to Borderscape – A Turn Towards Bridging Politics and Aesthetics



Figure 2. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. 'We don't know where the border is.'

<https://vimeo.com/313709072>

In the past ten to fifteen years, the debate about state boundaries has shifted from a focus on 'borders as territorial dividing lines and political institutions to borders regarded as [dynamic] socio-cultural and discursive processes and practices' and thus away 'from the concept of border to that of *bordering*' (Brambilla, 2015, pp. 14–15, emphasis added). By recognising the importance of identity, culture, language, symbols and emotions in the construction of borders, borders are problematised and opened up for critical scrutiny rather than taken for granted as the mere territorial demarcation of a political distinction between inside/outside, us/them. While by no means diminishing its territorial and real-political role, this shift calls for a thinking about the border not purely in terms of the borderline itself but beyond it, which means taking the landscape through which it runs, the borderlands that are territorially close to it and all the processes that take place around it into consideration as well. Methodologically, this requires a shift from a nomothetic to an ideographic analysis of the border, as the latter becomes partially de-territorialised, disseminated across space and, hence, more wide-ranging in its material practices of demarcation, as well as its inclusion of the actors these processes involve (Schimanski, 2015, pp. 35–36). In other words, the border is more than a fixed, primeval line on a map, which, in its materialised form of a wall or a fence, delineates sovereign state territory today. Rather, it is a dynamic space constantly re-imagined



through political, cultural and symbolic everyday performances by the sovereign authority, citizens and migrants, including their respective discourses of political geography, history, race and identity (cf. Paasi, 2005, p. 18).

Consequently, the border is conceived in a different epistemological and ontological sense as well: instead of being the focal point of territorial integrity imposed “from above”, the border becomes a liminal relational space, a ‘threshold (en)folding the margin’ in which not certainty and security, but *uncertainty* and *insecurity* are the main features (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2009, p. 585). Such an actor-oriented outlook gives voice and agency to people who are otherwise merely the passive objects of sovereignty in traditionally state-centric IR discourses, if they are mentioned at all. Moreover, this combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches challenges the widespread “‘territorialist’ Western geopolitical imagination’ of borders and becomes inevitably more political by privileging the dynamic encounters and processes that produce, shape and sustain borders (ibid.). In order to describe this broadened, yet more precisely defined space in all its complexity more accurately, the term “borderscape” has been introduced to replace the “simple” notion of the border within the field of critical border studies (cf. dell’Agnese and Szary, 2015). This way of (re)thinking the border enables us to interrogate the relation between the geography of the borderlands, the state’s bordering practices and the violence that often accompanies it, as well as the modes of resistance and contestation to these very state practices by people “on the ground”.

What, then, does a turn to visualising the borderscape add to the discussion about them? In a purely academic context, there is little room for experiences and imagination. This, of course, is not to say that academics lack either or both of these. Yet, the language used is by definition (and thus by necessity) so precise and rational, and the endeavours so intellectual that it is often hard to take away any kind of sensory experience, perception or meaning from what they are describing. Politics and aesthetics are thus often seen as two diametrically opposed fields. In contemporary IR scholarship, documentary film, for example, is not only rarely used as an object of analysis, but also neglected as a means of exploring issues within IR (van Munster and Sylvest, 2015, pp. 230–231). Real life, however, is full of things we see, feel and hear, i.e. *sense*, and borders are indeed among such tangible experiences. Were it not for their very evident sensorial components, their existence would not be recognised by anyone and, therefore, become irrelevant. Indeed, one of their major markers – at least at certain geographical points – is their high level of visibility: ‘we view fences, markers, gates or contours in a landscape as what constitutes a boundary’ (Rosello and Wolfe, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, everyone will have some kind of feeling or sensation based on expectations and/or experiences when approaching a border, may it be annoyance or boredom for those who will not have problems crossing to the other side, or uncertainty and fear (to name a few) for those who will or might have problems doing so. The very point of borders is that you feel them, that you recognise their existence and that they wield a power seemingly greater than yours.

While the border is then a sensorial experience in its own right, its visualisation will always have a sensorial aspect to it in two other ways: on the one hand, visualisation is the attempt of a person to make sense of and capture their personal sensory perception of a given phenomenon, place or event. In that sense, the study of border aesthetics is ‘another way of expressing the relational dimension of socio-political interfaces and of questioning their political component’, as well as opening ‘the ground for questioning the positionality of the investigator’ (dell’Agnese and Szary, 2015, quoted in Rosello and Wolfe, 2017, p. 4). On the other hand, once this personal perception is “out there”, it demands other people’s reception of it, triggering their imagination and evoking feelings while and after they look at the images, listen to the sounds etc. The language of aesthetics, as well as the visual itself, thus engage in a highly political conversation articulating what Rancière calls ‘the distribution of the sensible’: who and what can be seen in the images, who has the ability



to see them, what can be said about them and who has the ability to speak about them. These are inherently political questions for they 'reveal who can have a share in what is common to the community' (Rancière, 2004, pp. 12–13). Whoever is excluded from these activities does not take part in the 'sharing of the perceptible', is rendered invisible and, thus, a victim of a kind of symbolic violence from above, ostracised from the political system. Therefore, visualising discourses like that of the borderscape opens up the possibility for notoriously invisible and under-represented non-state actors, i.e. the people "on the ground", to become active agents and 'borders are revealed as political, symbolic, cultural, anthropological and epistemological constructions' (Brambilla, 2012). Thus, the visualisation of the border as a method of inquiry helps us widen our understanding of what it means to experience the border in its complexity, plurality and highly personal forms. In other words, the images become a source of knowledge production in their own right that is neither linguistic nor linear, but instead focus on what certain experiences can do and how they affect us (cf. Callahan, 2015). Hence, I adopt the theoretical starting point of scholars like Elena dell'Agnesse, Johan Schimanski, Chiara Brambilla and Stephen Wolfe among others, to whose work I am especially indebted, namely that 'there is no such thing as a non-aesthetic figuration of the border' (ibid., p. 6) and that in order to make sense of borders, a bridging of politics and aesthetics is imperative.

During my time in the Ceutan borderscape, I met three young sub-Saharan migrants, T¹, R and J, and four Moroccans, A, N, S and F, who agreed to be part of the filming process. The former three had successfully crossed the border into Ceuta and were waiting in the C.E.T.I. Centre for Temporary Residence of Immigrants (C.E.T.I. – Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes) to be transferred to mainland Spain. The Moroccans were living in the coastal town of Martil, bar one who was living and working in Ceuta. I chose to collaborate with them because they all had different experiences with the border. T, from the DRC, had been living in Morocco for several years trying and waiting to make it to Europe to support his family. R, a young woman from the Ivory Coast, tried to leave the 'misery' of Africa behind her and crossed the border by boat. J from Cameroon had climbed the fence. Among the Moroccans, A was born in Morocco but left to work in Ceuta, while S was still living on the Moroccan side but working in the cross-border trade for many years. F is a fisherman whose areas of fishing have been successively reduced, as Spain prohibited Moroccans from entering their waters. Finally, N is a young woman for whom Ceuta was a way of making a trip to Europe every now and then. The documentary is loosely divided into two parts with the first dealing with the Moroccans' point of view on the borderscape, and the second with the perspective of sub-Saharan migrants on Ceuta. Both parts are framed by Bertolt Brecht's late 1930s poem *An die Nachgeborenen*,² which is divided into three paragraphs referring to present, past and future in this order, serving as prologue, interlude and epilogue to the film. In the first section, Brecht speaks about living in 'dark times' under the Nazi regime, criticising those who remain silent despite knowing about the crimes committed in front of their eyes. In the second part, he deplores the missed opportunity during the Weimar Republic to nip the rising nationalism in the bud while it was still possible. Finally, in the third segment, he directly addresses 'those born later' asking for forbearance once the time comes 'at last [in which] man is a helper to man'. The poem, thus, has a kind of alienation effect, breaking the spell of the imagery of the real and alluding to the potential of history to repeat itself unless we stand up against injustices.

I chose documentary filmmaking as my *modus operandi* for the visualisation of the border, as it can be a powerful tool to make sense of international politics, and indeed shares – depending on its operational mode – theoretical considerations with IR theories like Marxism and critical theory. In the film, I try to combine explanatory arrangements with more observational ones. In the former arrangement, telling is privileged over showing in order to make analytical or interpretative arguments by connecting the reality 'that can be glanced [at] and a deeper reality of truth that



requires narrative excavation' (van Munster and Sylvest, 2015, p. 234). In the latter arrangement, showing is privileged over telling and, accordingly, demands a more active role from the viewer to interpret what he/she sees. The latter arrangement in particular allows me to challenge established regimes of visibility and the politics of exclusion that are connected to contemporary EU and Moroccan border management policies through a 'redistribution of the sensible', i.e. the creation of a visual subject out of the usually invisible irregular border crosser and the everyday-crosser from Morocco (cf. Brambilla, 2012). Instead of merely being a passive object of state sovereignty at the border, sub-Saharan Africans and northern Moroccans become active actors in the bordering process. Consequently, another narrative about borderscape reality emerges, one that makes room for those voices and biographies that are mostly hidden in official state, media and academic discourses. It is exactly this pluralisation of perspectives on the borderscape that gives documentary filmmaking 'not only critical but political, if not ethical, purchase' (Downey, 2009, p. 125).

In the following sections, I demonstrate this argument drawing on my fieldwork in and around Ceuta and using my documentary film *the wound that needs to be healed* as a recurring point of reference.

Visualising the Spanish-Moroccan Borderscape as a Space of Sovereign Authority and Exceptional Violence

Borderscapes are spaces in which the state is exercising sovereignty, for it is the border which marks the territory of a state and serves simultaneously as the assertion for implementing internal tasks of statehood (White, 2007, p. 696). Yet, Wendt argued that sovereignty is a man-made construct, 'an institution [which] exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations; there is no sovereignty without an other' (Wendt, 1992, p. 412). With respect to migration, borderscapes are thus the spaces in which the constructed authority of the state first meets – or rather collides with – the "other", i.e. the migrant or the refugee.³ The borderscape of Ceuta is exemplary for this collision since it constitutes not only a threshold between Spain and Morocco, and thus two nation-states, but is simultaneously (b)ordering the EU, a supranational institution, and Morocco, an African nation-state, dividing the Christian and the Muslim world, the "rich Global North" and the "poor Global South". These binaries result in specific 'economic, ethnic, gendered, historical, and racial subjectivities' that shape the perception and experience of the border on both sides (Leite and Mutlu, 2012, p. 38). In the Western context, the Arab or sub-Saharan migrant is often perceived as a threat to EU identity, security and wealth and when facing a threat, any 'ethic of hospitality' is abandoned in a space that is governed by the 'Machiavellian virtue of security' (Salter, 2008, pp. 371–372). Consequently, the state takes actions that make it difficult for the "other" to enter its territory, actions that take place in the borderscape and can be described as exceptional.

Using discourse analysis, Linke and Smith examine how this development is justified and reinforced. They evaluate the construction of fear through a securocratic language used in global public post-9/11 discourse, which affects and facilitates political decision-making in the contemporary Western state. They argue that the fear created through the media and political rhetoric encourages proactive military action, legitimates war as a surgical intervention, diminishes civil society and abandons human rights. The neoliberal global order, which requires economic mobility, flexibility and de-territorialisation, collides with the state's political commitment to securitise space. In that sense, national security restructures the biosocial by an appeal to racial hierarchies and creates a 'regime of borders', 'a nation form founded on fear, in which policing, surveillance and militarism have become companions to normal life' (Linke and Smith, 2009, pp. 3–4). This discourse is not unknown

to those facing the immediate consequences of it, namely those who are migrating to the North. From the perspective of a European government or indeed a European citizen, this discourse might make sense while being inside their own “bubble” because they “know” or perceive the migrant only as the “unknown” and/or the “unknowing other” – mainly due to the lack of interaction in the first place. Yet, it is in conversation with this “other” that a mirror is held up to our society and indeed ourselves, and the hypocrisy of such an idle attempt to distract from inherently internal problems by focusing on the exterior is disguised:



Figure 3. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. ‘There are French terrorists too.’
<https://vimeo.com/313709089/833f20bba2>

The clarity of T’s understanding of the situation questions common beliefs about who these people making their way to Europe *really* are. After all, is he not one of those young, less educated, low-skilled, religious African men who are not actually refugees but are, in fact, merely economic migrants searching for a better life in Europe? Does he, thus, threaten the economic and cultural integrity and indeed safety of European states (cf. for example Flood, 2017; Strauss, 2018)? Yet, having met him, having had tea with him, having spent time with and talked to him, it turned out that reality is not as clear-cut as popular opinion would like to make us believe. Certainly, what he says is nothing “new”; this is a discourse often embraced and discussed by figures on the left in the Western world too. Returning to Rancière’s aforementioned ‘redistribution of the sensible’, however, it matters who says what to whom. Usually, in the European context, these discourses are dominated by white people talking to white people about persons of colour, but here a black voice is not only taking part in the conversation, but speaks to a white person about his experience as a person of colour. Seeing and hearing a black man who wants to come to Europe say that terrorism is not only an external problem that the EU can solve by securing its borders, is a first step towards an adjustment of power dynamics within the discourse because a usually suppressed voice is being heard. It is a sober realisation, but it was through direct confrontation, a conversation and the simple act of listening to the ominous non-white “other” that she/he became a face with a name, a story, an opinion and, thus, a human being with agency. Surely, I do not mean to overestimate the impact of a conversation between two people for the whole world, implying that it can or will completely change the discourse. Yet, it is a start, from the bottom up. Visually recording this encounter ensures that it does not have to remain my own personal experience but that I can make



it accessible and comprehensible, tangible in the broader sense, for others as well. Thus, while the impact of a reproduced image is likely to be less strong than a face-to-face meeting, it remains strong enough to constitute a crucial political intervention in the way we think about the “other” and, indeed, our own society.

Representatives of the state, however, often do not have or cannot make time for such interactions. When it comes to securing the state’s (territorial) integrity, all nuances in the discourse seem to vanish and a clear distinction between us/them, inside/outside is being made. Drawing on Carl Schmitt’s conceptualisation of sovereignty – ‘[s]overeign is he who decides on the state of exception’ with the ‘sovereign [being], at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order’ (Agamben, 1998, pp. 11, 15) – Agamben suggests that the fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is that of bare life/political existence, and exclusion/inclusion in a constant state of exception. Here, bare life is the life of *homo sacer*, who ‘may be killed and yet not sacrificed’ (ibid., p. 8). In this state of exception, the normal laws of the state remain in place and most people still have to follow them; however, the sovereign is able to use violence without consequence whenever they perceive their authority to be threatened. What takes place in the borderscape, then, is the differentiation between kinds of life that resembles the Greek distinction between *zoê* and *bios*, i.e. the simple fact of living, bare, biological life, and a political, qualified life (ibid., pp. 1–2). In other words, the state creates a legal void at the border in which it decides who is granted political rights and who – for the well-being of others – may be killed without consequence because he/she is not part of the ‘internal’, national citizenry, but part of the ‘external’ international ‘other’ (Doty, 2011, p. 605). In that sense, the concept of biopolitics with its growing inclusion of man’s natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power is what determines political decision-making and the granting of rights in contemporary Western democracies. Here, the border constitutes the materialisation of the state of exception and the creation of a space in which bare life and the juridical rule enter into a realm of indistinction, where exceptional violence is not only possible but also the rule (Salter, 2008, p. 365).

In Ceuta, the state of exception is realised through the extensive border installations present in and around the exclave: an 8.4km-long and 6m-high double fence topped with barbed wire, surveillance cameras and a radar system surrounds the exclave to prevent irregular entry from Moroccan soil. In order to prevent irregular entry into the exclave from the sea, the Integrated System of External Vigilance (SIVE) has been introduced by the Spanish Guardia Civil to monitor the Strait of Gibraltar, the entire Andalucían coast and the coasts of the Canary Islands. It consists of fixed and mobile detection devices like radars and infrared cameras that identify the small vessels migrants use to cross the sea, as well as units composed of helicopters, boats and cars that intercept the migrants once they are spotted (Carling, 2007, p. 325). Additionally, more than 300 Spanish national police officers and almost 700 Guardia Civil officers, one military command headquarter, three armed infantry battalions, an armoured regiment, an artillery regiment and other logistic military units are deployed in Ceuta (Leite and Mutlu, 2012, p. 34).

Finally, and rather paradoxically given Morocco’s refusal to recognise Ceuta officially as a Spanish city, Moroccan border and police authorities increasingly cooperate with the Spanish Guardia Civil in managing the migration flow towards the Spanish/EU border by monitoring and raiding the woods around Ceuta (Españeira and Ferrer-Gallardo, 2015, p. 254). It, therefore, seems appropriate to speak of the Spanish-Moroccan borderscape as a highly militarised space that is without equal among the inner-European borderscapes (cf. Vaughan-Williams, 2015). This is again not unknown to “those who jump”,⁴ who learn about the different deterrence and detection mechanisms around Ceuta through their informal networks and personal experiences when trying to cross into the exclave. As T recounts:



Figure 4. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. 'There are radars everywhere.'
<https://vimeo.com/313709120/218dd0e1d4>

These measures of securitisation have proved to be successful in detecting migrants, although the numbers of irregular entries have remained relatively stable over the past 15 years due to changing migrant routes and sudden political events like the Arab uprising (cf. Frontex, 2015; Carling 2007, p. 336). Simultaneously, however, they also have severe consequences for the migrants who – being almost always denied the right to legal entry – have no other chance to get into Europe except by entering Ceuta in an irregular fashion. Crossing the border irregularly, however, has its price as it comes with high risks of getting injured or even dying due to the many natural obstacles as well as man-made measures taken by the states to prevent that. For example, the “structural violence” of the border controls’ (Weber, 2010, p. 41), i.e. the fence and surveillance systems, is not directly killing people, but it increases the risk of their injury and death. With the enhancement of security measures, the migrants (and certainly smugglers and traffickers as well), in turn, further elaborate their methods of escaping the reach of the state. The expansion of SIVE led migrants to take longer and, thus, more perilous routes than before, which increases the likelihood of capsizing, motor failure or getting lost at sea and dying of thirst or hypothermia (Carling, 2007, p. 327). While it is difficult to claim that these control measures are directly responsible for fatalities, the geographic location of the border provides the state with a space of moral alibi that enables politicians to deny responsibility for migrant deaths when they occur in the sea, for in these circumstances nature simply takes its course (Doty, 2011, p. 608). Moreover, through this increased usage of technologised surveillance techniques, the people trying to cross the border are dematerialised, since the border guards mainly look at them through an intermediary, namely the camera (Rosière, 2013). This means that migrants are not primarily seen as “real people”, but merely as figures on a screen, which makes it easier to strip them of their humanity and, therefore, regard their potential death as the “collateral damage” of a combat against illegal migration’ (van Houtum and Pijpers, 2007, p. 299). Hence, footage captured from the Spanish Guardia Civil’s infrared CCTV cameras tells a very different story about the people trying to cross through the borderscape than the footage that I shot, for example. In the latter, the human beings behind the multitude of migrants are revealed while in the former, their number merely translates into radiating stick figures in a non-place.



Figure 5. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. CCTV.

<https://vimeo.com/313709033/896cf6a272>

Juxtaposing the security footage and my footage makes it possible to understand that making sense of the borderscape is inherently linked to the perspective from which one looks at the border; that is to say, the theoretical claim that the borderscape is multi-faceted is proven by *showing* it. Seeing the CCTV footage of the Guardia Civil, it becomes understandable how migrants can be dehumanised and mainly perceived as a threat: they are nothing more than black dots that move, in big groups or alone, towards you. Especially being in a position of defence, it is easy to have a very physical reaction to these images, for not few of them resemble the view through a hairline cross in a video game. For the Spanish state and the EU, these images suggest that their territories are being invaded by hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants unless they implement preventive measures to stop them. On the contrary, the footage that I shot indicates that these same migrants are people who are actually not so different from us and who ‘come to help Europe move forward in order to help [them] to go forward too [as they also] want [their] piece of the cake’, as J said. Rather than being passive objects of their circumstances, they are active, if sometimes only reactive subjects in the situation they – at least from a certain point onwards – decided to face. Thus, what this audio-visual depiction of the different perspectives and their interplay does is that it complicates rather than simplifies the narratives about the borderscape and, therefore, comes closer to reality. The contradictions are apparent, as is the fact that there is no single answer or simple solution to facing Morton’s fork here because both sides have valid arguments at their disposal. This is even acknowledged by R and T, although their testimony further complicates the already complex conflict situation.



Figure 6. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. 'You have to respond to violence with force.' <https://vimeo.com/313709156/a0cfd31f2c>

The complication I alluded to above, which I only have the space to touch upon here briefly, arises from these questions: has the physical violence started from migrants trying to get to Europe and, thus, are European state policies of securing their borders simply a reaction to an external threat? Or, is this threat merely a distorted perception of reality and the measures taken by states to secure their borders are disproportionate and, in consequence, fuelling the violence coming from migrants? Arguably, being denied any kind of possibility to migrate legally through measures of symbolic violence (not being able to obtain a visa, for example), the migrants have nothing left to resort to than their bodies to claim their rights, let alone their dignity. Thus, their bodies are used simultaneously as a weapon and a shield and become both object of and subject to physical violence from the authorities. On the flip side, the border around Ceuta was only fortified since the number of migrants trying to get into Europe started rising in the early 1990s. Regardless of the "correct" answer, however, the borderscape around Ceuta is territory in which violence regularly takes place and death is part of everyone's calculations, although the exact number of injuries and deaths occurring in the Spanish-Moroccan borderscape is almost impossible to verify, especially regarding those drowning in the sea. Thus, the figures provided by the Spanish or the Moroccan government, the media, NGOs like "United for Intercultural Action" or "Fortress Europe" and international organisations like the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) vary significantly (Brian and Laczko, 2015, pp. 92–97). Nevertheless, it seems likely that thousands of African migrants have died trying to reach Spain from Moroccan soil since the late 1980s (*ibid.*). What leads to these deaths is again difficult to validate given the absence of reliable data. Yet, there is cause to believe that in addition to those deaths caused by the structural violence of the borderscape discussed above, a minority of border-related deaths results directly from the 'deliberate actions or negligence of others', i.e. border guards, policemen or other officials (Weber, 2010, p. 41). Some of these actions that have resulted in fatalities around Ceuta include shootings and beatings by both Spanish and Moroccan officials during interventions on irregular border-crossings, raids of unofficial migrant camps in Ceuta's hinterlands by Moroccan forces, as well as arrests and deportations of migrants by the Moroccan police to the Algerian border or further into Morocco's South and to the borders with

Mauritania and Western Sahara (cf. Salmi et al., 2014, pp. 3–4; No Borders Morocco – Blog, 2016). This is confirmed through the testimonies of R and J:



Figure 7. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. ‘It’s like in a film.’
<https://vimeo.com/314358985/18f35ebd3d>

Despite contrary assertions then, in the borderscape, humanitarianism seems to be given precedence over human rights, inadvertently finding itself complicit in human rights abuses. Rather than including the (potentially) threatened or deprived person (i.e. the migrant) into their laws and granting them rights, ‘only the suffering or sick body [i.e. that of the refugee] is seen as a legitimate manifestation of a common humanity, worth of recognition in the form of rights’ (Ticktin, 2009, p. 138). The institutionalisation of structural and indeed physical violence can thus be interpreted as what Arendt famously called the ‘banality of evil’ (Arendt, 2006). Violence, “the evil”, becomes normal, i.e. “banal”, because it is legalised – though not justifiably legitimised – by the state. In addition to the material securitisation measurements financed and provided by the Spanish state and the EU, Spain introduced an Amendment to the Law on Public Security in 2015, which provides the legal basis for immediate pushbacks of irregular migrants at its external borders without identifying those among them who might be in need of international protection (Galán, 2015). This Amendment has been approved by the Spanish Congress even though it violates the migrants’ right to asylum, the principle of non-refoulement, and other laws and rights established in treaties like the Geneva Convention or the European Convention of Human Rights, all ratified by Spain. Paradoxically then, the exceptionality of the borderscape lies in the fact that the exceptional violence used by the state to secure its sovereignty and integrity is actually no longer exceptional, but banal. What is shunned in the international, and indeed the national, realm becomes the rule in the “zone of indistinction”, the borderscape.



Figure 8. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. 'The border is like a wound that needs to be healed.' <https://vimeo.com/314144106/45ee7643a0>

Visualising the Spanish-Moroccan Borderscape as a Space of Limited Sovereignty and Exceptional Refusal



Figure 9. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. '-Where is Ceuta? -In Africa. -So you're African like me.' <https://vimeo.com/314147590/879fd32c1f>

It is evident that the borderscape constitutes an exceptional space with regard to the state's use of violent measures to secure its territorial integrity. Yet, returning to Wendt's contention that sovereignty does not simply exist 'out there', the power states use only emerges out of social interactions and is itself also producing social subjectivities. Hence, it makes more sense to speak of 'power relations rather than of power per se' (Edkins, Pin-Fat and Shapiro, 2004, p. 2) being at play in the borderscape, which additionally emphasises the possibility of counter-discourses from the



margins that challenge the hegemonic power rhetoric (Schimanski, 2015, p. 36). The above episode recounted by A shows that small acts of defiance enabling these counter-discourses take place on a day-to-day basis. While they do not necessarily change the status quo per se, they question Agamben's one-dimensional and monothetic conceptualisation of the state of exception, which leaves no space for modes of resistance in light of the absolute power of the sovereign. Indeed, this is an important and oft-mentioned limitation of Agamben's work (cf. for example Ziarek, 2008; Edkins and Pin-Fat, 2005; Colatrelli, 2011; Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014). While A might have had to stop speaking Arabic in the presence of a police officer, he certainly still speaks his mother tongue with his friends away from the presence of policemen. Thus, he challenges and undermines the idea that Ceuta is 'as Spanish as anything can be', and indeed the concept of what it means to be Spanish and on what territory Spain actually is.

Yet, instead of abandoning Agamben's concept altogether, I suggest that an ideographic examination of the borderscape expands the notion of exceptionality to one that also encompasses exceptional modes of non-compliance to the state's authority performed by the inhabitants of the borderscape. In other words, the border is simultaneously a space of exceptional violence exercised by the state *and* the space where the state is most vulnerable to practices subverting its sovereignty. Not least, it now becomes apparent why the concept of the borderscape is a helpful paradigm and its visualisation is a practical method to analyse the multi-faceted borderscape realities (re)shaped and (re)imagined by different actors in the borderlands. Then, what should we call these subversive non-state practices? Speaking about modes of resistance in the borderscape is somewhat misleading, as it either suggests an ongoing revolution against the state from below or implies the romanticised idea of a political struggle of the powerless against the authorities (Jones, 2011, p. 687). Certainly, the state usually gains the upper hand. Power relations in the borderscape, however, are characterised by partiality and constant reconfiguration, notwithstanding that they are never really turned around and indeed not necessarily questioned at all, as will be discussed below. I therefore adopt Jones' terminology of 'spaces of refusal' to describe those zones in the borderscape in which people 'disregard the rules of the state' through their 'everyday actions' (ibid.). Crucially, these actions 'are not [a] politically motivated resistance to sovereignty' demanding systemic change but are undertaken to achieve immediate personal gains (ibid.). Thus, the overall power relation between state and individual remains undisputed, even though the individual might gain a short-term advantage through his/her non-compliance. In the Spanish-Moroccan borderscape in and around Ceuta, at least two distinct fields can be discerned in which acts of everyday refusal are constantly performed: irregular migration and the cross-border economy.

The most obvious form in which migrants disregard state law is their very attempt to cross the border without a visa and, if they are successful, their survival and arrival at their desired destination (cf. Doty, 2011, p. 609). Since 2000, around 23,000 migrants have crossed the Spanish-Moroccan border around Ceuta irregularly, thus successfully refusing to obey the authority of the state (Espiñeira and Ferrer-Gallardo, 2015, p. 258). By trespassing the borderline drawn by a state, they transgress the state's law that has declared them "outsiders", simultaneously subverting the state's sovereignty. The means migrants employ to do so range from subtle evasion and deception, to identity stripping and the forceful physical climbing of barriers like border fences. Importantly, these attempts to escape the reach of the state are "acts of desperation", born out of the circumstance that they have already been rendered 'bare life', stripped of their rights, thus having nothing left to lose (Ellermann, 2010, p. 410). This is exemplified in R's disbelief over the fact that black people rarely have any chance to enter Europe other than irregularly and, as a result, validates her and T's assertion that they will find a way in, no matter what:



Figure 10. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. 'We will find a solution to arrive.'
<https://vimeo.com/314366651/76c435a3d2>

Paradoxically then, it is the migrants' 'extreme powerlessness' that is the source of their refusal to uphold the law and that 'presents a potential threat to the exercise of state power' (ibid.). This, in turn, is only possible because liberal states like Spain are, at least theoretically, 'forced to operate within the constraints of the international legal order – making repatriation contingent on the possession of identity documents – but [...] also constitutionally limited in [their] exercise of coercion against the individual' (ibid., p. 408). In other words, with their official devotion to human rights, liberal states' exercise of sovereign power is constrained to the extent that migrants remain powerless, but not without rights, and thus cannot be treated as standing 'outside the law' and simply killed, as Agamben argues. With respect to migration, then, the state's exercise of sovereignty is not absolute but partial, constrained by international law and the refusal of migrants to recognise the state's jurisdiction. The use of violence might even be interpreted as a sign of the state's weakness and inability to control the borderscape completely (cf. Jones, 2011, p. 689).

These considerations about the limitations of the exercise of sovereignty in the borderscape are reinforced in the cross-border economy that takes place in Ceuta. Despite the official discourse of a hermetically sealed border where only goods and people that are declared "legal" by both Spain and Morocco can cross, every day some 15,000 Moroccans are involved in what is locally known as *contrebande tolérée*, tolerated smuggling.⁵ They leave Morocco to buy commodities in Ceuta, carry them through the border and resell them on the Moroccan side. This is possible due to the exceptional circumstances of this particular borderscape. Firstly, Ceuta (as well as Melilla) is a tax-free zone under Spanish law, exempted from all custom rules and not subject to EU fisheries and trade policies (Gold, 2000, p. 151). Secondly, given that Morocco does not officially recognise the existence of Spanish territory in Ceuta, no commercial frontiers exist between the Spanish exclave and its Moroccan hinterland. Finally, a special amendment to Spain's Accession Protocol to the Schengen Agreement of 1991 allows Moroccan citizens from the provinces adjacent to Ceuta (Tetouan) and Melilla (Nador) to enter the exclaves without a visa on the condition that they return again before midnight (Buoli, 2014, pp. 303–304). What takes place in the borderscape every day is hard to imagine unless it is seen with one's own eyes. Chaos seems to take precedence over sovereignty, or at least a version of sovereignty that is not managed by either state but by those individuals or groups of people controlling the flow of goods from Spain into Morocco and vice versa:



Figure 11. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. 'Theatre without a director.'

<https://vimeo.com/314448554/66771d4341>

These official prerequisites already suggest that the border around Ceuta resembles more a semi-permeable membrane than the entirely regulated double-door system that the Spanish state in particular would like outside observers to perceive. Furthermore, the Ceutans and Moroccans living in the borderscape naturally 'attempt to exploit this unique locational ambiguity by building their lives and livelihoods around particular resources which borders offer' (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, p. 87). On the Moroccan side, this is a result of the state's inability to take care of its citizens properly, as A tells me:

Would the cat leave if there's a wedding in the house? Of course not because the house is full of food. If the Moroccan government provided us with what we want, we would be just like tourists. Like German, French or Belgian tourists. We would cross just to visit since we have work in Morocco. But we do the opposite. We go to Ceuta searching for work. And all these jobs are in the black market.

Consequently, a 'subversive economy' has developed, that is, 'a highly organised system of income-generating [legal and illegal] activities that deprive the state of taxation and foreign exchange' (MacGaffey, 1988, in Donnan and Wilson, 1999, p. 88). Here, the notion of a 'space of refusal' is at play again. Although they might accept that the political division between the countries materialises through the physical border, people living in the borderscape do not necessarily think in terms of the sovereignty and territory (and, on another level, also the identity) framework the state has set (Jones, 2011, p. 696). As a result, apart from the cross-border trade, they take part in practices like prostitution, undocumented labour migration and smuggling, which do not play by state rules. Crucially, it has to be emphasised again that these modes of refusal do not aim to overthrow the state. Certainly, these activities defraud Morocco in particular of its revenue through tax evasion, and they challenge the state's attempt to regulate all flows into and out of its territory. Yet, it is not in the interest of the cross-border merchants and their accessories to harm the state in the long run. Whether their cross-border trading practices are considered illegal or not is not important as long as they gain a personal advantage out of them. Indeed, this subversive, black-market

economy even contributes to the wider economy through ‘smooth[ing] the workings of the system by offering employment where otherwise there may be very little’ (ibid.). This is clearly visible in the Spanish-Moroccan borderscape, where, due to lack of other opportunities, around 45,000 people live directly off the informal cross-border trade and 400,000 people are indirectly involved in it (Buoli, 2014, p. 304; figures for Ceuta and Melilla, author’s note). In a way, then, the livelihood of Ceutans and Moroccans alike depends on the existence of the border, although they constantly challenge its legal validity. As A put it: ‘Ceuta would be nothing without the Moroccans. Like Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries without oil. And the Moroccans would be nothing without Ceuta as well.’



Figure 12. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. ‘It’s as if you were entering paradise.’
<https://vimeo.com/314140076/2818155193>

A final consideration concerns the state agents who control the border. While it is the central state bureaucracy that decides on border policies, the responsibility of the practical implementation of these policies mainly rests on the shoulders of the border guards and immigration officers. These state agents are the ‘petty sovereigns’ of the borderscape: they manage everyday practices of border regulation and embody sovereign power on behalf of the state, for they ultimately decide who and what is allowed to cross the border and who and what is not (Leite and Mutlu, 2012, p. 37). Hence, rather than directly abiding by the sovereign power of the state, border-crossers submit to the authority of the border guards first. This, in turn, means that the border guards take on an ambiguous role at the border since the subversive cross-border traffic described above – both irregular migration and trade – would likely not be possible without their consent or feigned ignorance. Once more, this complicity of the border guards in the illegal cross-border activities is probably not driven by their desire to overthrow the state system, but by their desire for personal gains such as bribes or other favours (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, pp. 103–104). Indeed, they need the symbolic power of the border to sustain their “additional income”. Either way, the state’s theoretically absolute sovereign power in the borderscape remains incomplete in practice, for it is both perpetuated and simultaneously undermined by its own agents.

This discussion of irregular migration, subversive economies and “border-guard regimes” has shown that the borderscape is not the exclusive playground of state authority, but the scene of continuous re-negotiations of the power relations between the rulers and the ruled, a space of sovereign exception as much as of exceptional refusal. Paradoxically though, migrants, everyday crossers and state agents attest to the significance of the border through their activities, which ‘reaffirm the very borders [...] they seek to subvert, for without borders these activities would cease to exist’ (ibid., p. 105). In the final part of this article, I reflect on the benefits and limitations of my aesthetic analysis and visual representation of the borderscape around Ceuta.

Reflections



Figure 13. Still from *the wound that needs to be healed*. ‘One thing I don’t understand.’

<https://vimeo.com/314365919/8fbadd90f0>

Spending time in the borderlands and making this film was a highly personal experience. Many times, my encounters left me unsettled and awake at night. Ironically, it was at the border that I realised that there were also “borders” between myself and the people I met – not in terms of our humanity but in terms of our rights and status. We all knew that I could leave the area at any time, while they remained in limbo and uncertainty about their future. We all knew that I could make this film in the convenient knowledge that their reality was not mine, while they never chose to live a life that needed to be captured on camera. I increasingly felt that I enjoyed membership in an exclusive club I never actively chose to enter. My membership came with my EU passport. It was a strange realisation because I had never thought of the EU as something of which I did not want to be part. Here, however, I felt I was betraying my ideals. Suddenly, Europe became a private club, a gated community, the incarnation of a conservative neoliberal world. Ceuta was its lobby that could only be peeked into, and the border fence became the materialisation of a highly racialised, discriminatory door policy that only allowed in those people who conformed to the taste of the border guards and their bosses – European states. I did not feel guilty, yet somewhat complicit nonetheless. Most of all, I felt helpless. There was hardly anything I could do to improve either



their or the general situation. In doing this film, I was afraid I would reproduce the very power relations they were criticising and that I had wished to overcome. Here I was, a white male from a middle-class family, pretentiously pointing my camera on a black African woman and allegedly illegal immigrant, who unfolded the truth about the structure my privilege is based on. In other words, my positionality as a researcher in this very particular context highly influenced the way that I was seeing and making sense of the microcosm of the Ceutan borderscape, but crucially also the way that I was being seen and made sense of within it. Consequently, this project, like any other qualitative research, is not exempt from issues surrounding the positionality and power relations of the researcher to informants and research material in general: 'a researcher's social, cultural and subject positions [...] affect the questions they ask, how they frame them; the theories they are drawn to' (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts and Whatmore, 2009, p. 556). By focusing on particular themes, characters and sceneries, something will always remain outside the frame, i.e. there is always something that cannot be seen. While that does not mean that it is irrelevant to the topic or not part of the truth, with a camera one can only capture a *part* of reality, never reality as a *whole*. A documentary therefore does not portray an objective truth, but is a reflection of the director's perception of reality. The final film, then, is a 'creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson in van Munster and Sylvest, 2015, p. 233), the result of deliberate choices, even if they were made under the aegis of practical limitations.

In my case, the time I spent in the Spanish-Moroccan borderlands was limited to two weeks, which presented difficulties in finding informants and building trust to interview *and* film them, not least given the sensitivity of the topic. Therefore, ethical considerations were of major importance given that I was filming in a highly politicised research setting. I attempted to respect and protect my informants as much as possible by not filming things, events or people when I was told not to or when I thought that it could have negative repercussions for my informants later on (Jessee, 2011, p. 288). For example, I anonymised one of the interviews by blurring my informant's face, although this certainly is not visually pleasing. It was also impossible to film and interview one or more Moroccan women working in the cross-border trade. They feared that if they were recorded and border guards were to hear what they had said, they would not be allowed to cross the border anymore, consequently losing their jobs and becoming unable to sustain their families any longer. This, in turn, is the reason for the film's gender-bias in its under-representation of women. Hence, what the people I filmed said – or dared to say – was determined by many factors, including their sentiments towards me and the potential consequences for them once the interviews were to be published. Certainly, the interviews in my film are not less valuable or true than unfiled interviews would have been. Yet, it has to be kept in mind that the presence of a camera may influence the way people behave and present themselves, as 'what we can say is affected by what we say it with' (Freudenthal, 1988, p. 126). Thus, and not least because these interviews were not chosen from a large pool of narratives, my informants' views remain highly subjective and their testimonies may not be viewed as representative of every possible permutation. Moreover, while I conducted interviews in English, French and Arabic, my knowledge of Spanish was not sufficient to interview Spanish Ceutans. Thus, I had to focus on the border experience of Moroccans and sub-Saharan Africans only, which leaves an important aspect of the borderscape reality unexplored, namely that of the Ceutans.

Finally, and this deserves more detailed attention than I can devote here, but could perhaps form the kernel of another article, the biggest obstacle for realising a true 'redistribution of the sensible' is the fact that it was I who posed the camera on my informants, not they at themselves. This means that, rather than being active narrators in a participatory film, they were the objects of my observation. The former constellation would have had a much more empowering effect on my informants, as this would have actually meant to re-vocalise the language of border crossing and



migration with which I am partly concerned (cf. Brambilla, 2012). Unfortunately, given the short amount of time I had for my fieldwork, this was not possible to achieve.

Having raised these important limitations, I want to conclude by briefly highlighting the benefits of this approach once more. Describing the phenomena taking place in the borderscape in words is effective on a cognitive level, fostering our intellectual understanding of the situation. Having tested it with audiences and indeed myself, however, the act of viewing footage collected from NGOs or CCTV cameras has a much more emotional effect on the viewer, hitting home even more. Seeing images of migrants being beaten by border guards or hearing their testimonies of how they experienced climbing the fence gives audiences and me a sense of helplessness, maybe even hidden complicity, but also stimulates a momentum of “let’s do something about it”. I have no illusion about how many people follow that impulse and actually do something about trying to change migration policies – including myself – but that is a separate discussion, which goes beyond the scope of this article. What I am trying to say is that as long as something happens far away from you without any tangible personal effect, it will be less interesting/concerning/stimulating than if you had some kind of relation to it, albeit only through images. Film has the power to bring those faraway places and people closer to home, create emotions and affect us as only art can do. When used appropriately, film can reveal a crucial truth that might otherwise remain hidden from sight.

Conclusion

The borderscape is the ‘exemplary modern subject’ (Downey, 2009, p. 109), for it is here where the contradictions of our time are most clearly revealed. In the borderscape, the state’s stasis collides with dynamic processes of globalisation: state sovereignty with international law; national security with human rights; territorial integrity with economic de-territorialisation; national culture and identity with transnational migration flows. Moreover, once we leave a nation-state to enter another, a distinction is being made between us, the people, that goes beyond our shared humanity. At the border, we are categorised by the state we want to enter as citizens or non-citizens, as regular travellers, asylum-seekers or illegal migrants, as being included in or abandoned by the state’s jurisdiction. Ultimately, we are rendered either political or bare life. This biopolitical performance of sovereignty and “b/ordering” practices has grave real-life implications (cf. van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer, 2005), especially for those people who are abandoned by the law (e.g. sub-Saharan “economic” migrants) or who receive extraordinary treatment (e.g. Moroccans from Tetouan). Simultaneously, it is in the borderscape where the state appears not as a monolithic entity, but as partial and conflicted, undermined by and dependent on what its agents, citizens and “the other” make of it. While far from denying the existence of spaces within the borderscape in which exceptional violence is exercised, we should be cautious about generalising claims regarding the ubiquitous existence of the Agambian ‘state of exception’ and the all-encompassing claim of sovereignty at borders. Instead, I suggest that the exceptionality of the borderscape lies in its multi-faceted and contradictory character: on the one hand, it ‘represent[s] a legal exception to [international] norms on rights and freedoms, [however,] the exceptional practices of these border crossings are no exception to the norms of global border management’ (Leite and Mutlu, 2012, p. 38). On the other hand, borderscapes are amalgamations of both difference and sameness that rest on the legal and political differentiation between insiders/outsideers and inclusion/exclusion, e.g. EU/non-EU identities, while simultaneously relying on interactions with this “other” for its very constitution (cf. *ibid.*, p. 36).

Thus, the borderscape is an exceptional space in which exceptional things happen, and where exceptionality, especially if it appears to be the norm, is always in urgent need of representation



(Downey, 2009, p. 110). This representation, however, must not only be an academic one. Without doubt, as this article has shown, academic conceptualisations and analyses are vital for the understanding of the borderscape's (bio)political, economic and cultural nature. Yet, part of the novelty of the borderscape paradigm in critical border studies is its call for the bridging of political analysis and aesthetics (dell'Agnese and Szary, 2015, p. 11). Indeed, the very notion of "performance" seems to demand a visualisation of the borderscape, for this allows the immediate grasping of both de- and re-bordering processes in the making. Moreover, to show the border, to connect stories, faces and places with it, in other words, to make it a real rather than an abstract space, evokes emotions and thus fosters an understanding of the borderscape that is unique to visual and literary art forms. Following this proposition, I decided to make a documentary film about the Spanish-Moroccan borderscape around Ceuta in order to render its theoretical and conceptual analysis, as it is presented in this article, more tangible. There are crucial limitations to this approach – and to this research in particular – that need to be addressed and explored further in order to overcome or acknowledge them in more depth during the fieldwork. I believe, however, that an ideographic aesthetic and visual exploration are valuable contributions to the analysis of and debate about borderscapes in general and the Spanish-Moroccan one in particular, offering an insight into a tranche of borderscape reality that would otherwise likely remain hidden. Rather than aspiring to synthesis and totality, the documentary makes an integral contribution to the assemblage of 'justifiable knowledge' about a multi-faceted, exceptional space by presenting narratives that challenge conventional and hegemonic discourses (cf. Campbell, 1998, pp. 280–281).

About the author

Vincent Förster is interested in personal stories that engage and evoke public debate. Vincent is an Edinburgh-based documentary filmmaker from Berlin. He gained his first experiences in documentary filmmaking while living in Alexandria, Egypt, where he documented the societal division in post-revolutionary Egypt between winter 2011 and summer 2012. The result was the documentary "For Bread, Freedom and Social Justice" (2013). Since then, Vincent lived, studied and worked in Morocco, Sudan and Scotland. In June 2016, he graduated from the University of St Andrews with an MA (Honours) in International Relations and Arabic. In his second documentary "the wound that needs to be healed" (2016), he explores the lived realities of sub-Saharan migrants and Moroccans at and around the Spanish-Moroccan border in Ceuta. His latest short documentary "some of these days" (2018) features his grandparents and reveals the jazzy sound of Germany's history in the 20th century. Vincent just finished his MFA in Documentary Film Directing at Edinburgh College of Art.



Endnotes

- 1 In order to ensure the safety and anonymity of the people I interacted with and filmed, I will not disclose their real names.
- 2 Brecht, B. (1979), *Poems – 1913–1956*. Edited by John Willet and Ralph Manheim. London: Eyre Methuen, pp. 318–320. The English title of the poem is 'To those born later'.
- 3 For an important discussion on the politically loaded terminology used in migration research, see Gerard, 2004, pp. 6–8.
- 4 The people trying to cross the fence into Ceuta or Melilla are often referred to as “les sauteurs”, those who jump, cf. *Les Sauteurs* (2016).
- 5 These people, mainly women, are known as *porteadores* (carriers) or “human mules”.



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Infographics and their role in the IS propaganda machine

by Michael Glausch



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Abstract

Although infographics form only a small portion of Islamic State (IS) propaganda, they provide an insight into the organisation's self-perception, strategy and long-term plans. This research paper analyses more than four hundred infographics published by official IS media units using Winter's (2018) thematic framework to categorise these images beyond the violence for which IS has become known. The three principal IS propaganda themes that Winter identified – Victimhood, Utopia and War – define the core themes of these IS infographics. This paper's analysis shows that Religious Life and Summaries make up the majority of infographic sub-themes, while the primary theme Victimhood exists in the background, ultimately demonstrating that IS uses a combination of religiously based justification and state-building to solidify their position as a lasting power in the region.

Keywords: *Islamic State, ISIS, Infographics, Propaganda, Media, Terrorism*

Introduction

As a West Point report on the Islamic State (IS) summarised, 'a new "long-war" narrative is emerging in Islamic State propaganda that portends the media network's future trajectory' (Munoz, 2018). As one of the most prevalent extremist regimes, the Islamic State (IS) regularly deploys symbols, typefaces and slogans in an effort to trigger emotive responses in their body of propaganda.^[1] In much of the media studies literature about contemporary propaganda, scholars, such as Baines (2013), have underlined the power of images in building states and waging war. For example, Belousov (2012) identified how present-day Russia utilises propaganda to reinforce Putin's 'vertical power' in state-building, while MacDonald (2002) showed how a unified conception of victimhood helped to build nations in the Balkans. Indeed, the power of political propaganda rests in its ability to transcend language, class and culture to communicate deeply nuanced meanings of governance, unity, shared mythologies and more. In the hands of IS, propaganda has become a useful tool of war.

IS's propaganda, which has transcended borders to spread their messages of extremism, has attracted a great deal of internal and external attention. At first, witnessing the brutal violence for which IS has become famous, scholars and analysts frequently reduced IS propaganda to a tactic for frightening their enemies and demonstrating merciless strength. While that interpretation may indeed be the case, there are other aspects of IS propaganda completely unrelated to violence that transcend its use of brutality. Given this, many scholars have begun to move beyond a focus on violence in IS propaganda. As the most important example for this research, Winter's (2018) analysis of IS propaganda displays a nuanced picture, enabling a more accurate and useful examination of

[1] Simply defined, propaganda is 'an amalgam of myth [which Barthes (1957/1992) usefully outlines as a false signifier commonly accepted as fact], symbolism [when signs express meaning beyond their obvious content], and rhetoric [mixing wordplay and persuasion].' For more information, including specific categories of propaganda, see: Baines and O'Shaughnessy, 2014.



IS's message. This research draws upon this analysis and, attempting to follow suit, examines the more unwieldy messages of IS propaganda.

In particular, infographics have become a critical component of IS's propaganda as it has developed. Alongside other forms of propaganda, such as images, the production of infographics has increased since their emergence in 2014.^[2] Therefore, their examination goes beyond ascertaining the validity of the information that the IS presents, but rather shows how the organisation sets priorities, creates narratives and, ultimately, perceives itself (Bilger, 2014). Although IS's ideology differs from that of other rivals, such as Al Qaeda, Aly et al. (2017) argue that IS's sophisticated use of propaganda has built on Al Qaeda's example. In developing its style, IS first imitated Al Qaeda before adopting its own version of propaganda machinery to replace and exceed the outreach of its competitors. The effective use of propaganda, and especially data-driven infographics, renders a noteworthy subject for further investigation.

Given this context, this research critically assesses four hundred previously unstudied infographics that IS has created and disseminated using Winter's (2018) analytical framework on propaganda. This research argues that, instead of mere brutality directed towards its adversaries, IS also relies on a combination of utopian promises and religiously inspired imagery to justify its actions, implement policy and project longevity as a state, in order to communicate with its constituents.

Why infographics?

As the rapid transmission of information has increased due to the burgeoning use of the Internet and social media around the world, the deployment of infographics has also increased, notably among political and extremist groups such as IS. Their popularity can be ascribed to an infographic's ability to present information in a visibly appealing and informative manner. While media and governments have often used infographics as a form of propaganda, their impact as a medium of mass communication has recently grown in importance because of their use of images to offer unifying information and rally action. This has allowed both legitimate and illegitimate organisations, states and companies to communicate important and complex information to internal and external audiences simply and effectively.

Infographics are powerful because they allow their producers to convey an immense amount of information using symbols, visual data and images that resonate with the experiences, culture and emotions of the viewer. The visual aspect of infographics simplifies convoluted information in an intuitively understandable manner, capitalising on the fact that around fifty per cent of the human brain is directly or indirectly devoted to visual functions. As such, the brain responds more readily to infographics, allowing viewers to process and synthesise visual information more efficiently than textual (Smiciklas, 2012). Due to their use of symbols, colours and motifs, infographics convey content-laden information using a streamlined design. The use of infographics in politics has been on the rise recently, in a trend Amit-Danhi and Shifman (2018) term 'digital political infographics'. As these scholars highlight, 'digital infographics constitute new ways of discussing and understanding politics' because of their ability to 'facilitate data-based and easily accessible political discourse' (p. 3541). Infographics, and the worldview for which they provide evidence, propel IS's message to the fore and may attract more 'slivers of attention' than conventional formats (Smiciklas, 2012).

In this way, infographics have stood out amidst the deluge of IS propaganda. IS focuses on content production, particularly by saturating its audience with a large volume of daily content. From 17

[2] An infographic can be defined as 'a larger graphic design that combines data visualisations, illustrations, text, and images together into a format that tells a complete story' (Krum, 2013, p. 6).



July to 15 August 2015, Winter (2015) recorded over one thousand separate events produced by official IS media outlets, which averages out to over thirty eight unique propaganda events per day. This includes, but is not limited to, photo essays, videos, audio statements, news bulletins, posters and theological essays. In addition to the barrage of information from official channels, pro-IS supporters posted an estimated 133,442 messages per day on Twitter alone during IS's peak operations in 2015 (Berger and Morgan, 2015). Although infographics are just one of many types of images that IS uses in its propaganda, they present internally created data and simplified information to solidify the organisation's image and instruct its constituents.

Literature on IS media production and propaganda

As IS evolved out of the complex context of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan and has its origins in many pre-existing organisations, the academic literature on IS extends beyond the scope of this research (Mabon and Royle, 2017). There are two bodies of study on IS propaganda, however, that ground this research. The first began shortly after IS's rapid expansion in 2014, with the majority of academic analyses focusing on the brutality of IS propaganda, its impressive production techniques, the sheer quantity of its media output and its use of social media in marketing its particular brand (see Hall, 2015; Stern and Berger, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2016). While these publications provide a comprehensive assessment of IS's communication strategy, the research remains limited to content released by IS's central media units and, therefore, does not contribute a framework of analysis for better understanding the actions of IS outside of its ability to make war (Ingram, 2015) wilayat information offices and broader supporter base, this study examines the strategic logic of IS information operations (IO).

The second wave of literature on IS propaganda emerged using the first body as a foundation, but expanding to focus on the organisation's use of communication technologies, its political goals and the development of its media operations (see Al-'Ubaydi, Lahoud, Milton and Price, 2014; Winter, 2015; Berger and Morgan, 2015; Fisher, 2015). This trend of analysing themes other than violence became a tenant of the second body of literature. For example, Zelin (2015) analysed one week of the entire IS official media output and discerned eleven different focal points in IS's media releases. Out of these focal points, six comprehensive main themes emerged but, in spite of this, Zelin concluded that his sample was not representative of the entirety of IS's media output over longer periods and urged future researchers to adopt a more holistic view of IS media over time.^[3] Similarly, Milton (2016) examined more than nine thousand IS visual products that IS operatives had embedded on Twitter from January 2015 to August 2016. Milton presented similar findings to Zelin and also identified six themes in the infographics and images of IS.^[4] Both studies allude to the notion that the majority of IS media focuses on non-military themes, such as governance and religious activities, rather than solely focusing on violence. Nonetheless, and despite the great detail of their analyses, Zelin and Milton delve on IS's propaganda strategy at a single moment in time, instead of implementing a comparative analysis over an extended period. The present research, thus, responds to Zelin and Milton's recommendations by analysing an entire body of IS infographics, rather than merely a subset.

Adding to the discussion on IS propaganda, Winter (2018) fills several of these gaps by sorting the content of IS into six distinct categories of analysis, which constitute the basis of this study. In order to understand better the structural and thematic shifts in IS propaganda, Winter uses a propaganda archive compiled in mid-2015 as a baseline comparison for an identically structured

[3] Zelin's (2015) categories: Military, Governance and Hisba, Da'wa, Promotion of the Caliphate, Enemy Attack.

[4] Milton's (2016) categories: Military, Commercial, Governance, Religious, Lifestyle, Other (p. 30).



propaganda archive compiled in January 2017. Contrasting the six themes in his own 2015 research, he categorises IS propaganda into three umbrella themes: *Victimhood*, *Utopia* and *War*, with multiple sub-themes. His comparative analysis reveals significant structural and thematic rearrangements within IS propaganda over time and challenges basic assumptions about how IS attracts followers. Winter's findings are also consistent with Milton (2016), who identified a decline in overall IS propaganda output due to territorial loss, collation operations and cyber warfare. Due to this, Winter concludes that IS's Central Media Office ordered an emphasis on military over utopian narratives with the objectives being to sustain internal moral affiliations and attracting external support.

It is important to note that, while Winter's three central themes enable an accurate and efficient examination of the intricacies of the objectives of IS propaganda, many of the sub-categories of *Utopia* and *War* are either not relevant to IS infographics or too general for any practical application. In particular, the sub-theme *Religious Life* would benefit from further division into more nuanced sub-categories. Since religious infographics touch on multiple facets of the teachings of the Qur'an, one option would be to categorise them in accordance with the ten major themes outlined by Rahman (2009). Not only would this enable a better understanding of how IS justifies and legitimises its war as built upon religious principles, but doing so would also provide opportunities to investigate potential overlap with other non-religious themes. In spite of this, however, Winter's categories remain the most cutting-edge in the literature and provide the strongest theoretical basis for this research due to the greater categorical detail that they offer as opposed to Zelin (2015) or Milton (2016).

Although many political scientists and media studies experts have conducted extensive research on IS's official media production and propaganda output as a whole, only a few articles discuss IS's infographics. The author of one such article, Adelman (2018), argues that infographics remain a valuable tool for IS because they weaponise unassuming information in a way that rivals its enemies in the United States (US). Due to her background in media and communication studies, Adelman employs an epistemological examination of infographics as a shared mode of warfare between Western governments and IS. She demonstrates how US media uses infographics to reduce the brutality of IS into numbers and to transform the organisation into a knowable enemy. She continues to explain that IS incorporates infographics as a technique to do the same to the US. She disregards the fact, however, that a substantial proportion of IS infographics are predominantly directed at internal audiences. This is especially true for infographics released in the weekly newsletter Al-Naba. Although Adelman's findings are an indispensable starting point in understanding IS infographics, this research will take them further, arguing that they are also used to address internal audiences.

As a foundation for this research's investigation of these internal audiences, Winkler's data (2016, p. 16) argues that IS 'relies much more heavily on infographics in its publications targeting internal audiences than it does in those aimed at external audiences'. Winkler examines infographics published in Dabiq, a multilingual magazine focused on attracting external viewers, as well as in the weekly Arabic newspaper, Al-Naba, that targets an internal Arabic-speaking audience. Both publications are media outlets under the direct control of the Central Media Office. While the former lacks any strategic message, Winkler observes that Al-Naba provides a clear strategic intent for IS's internal audience with a particular focus on physical and psychological security. Winkler's categorisation of Al-Naba infographics into just two sub-groups remains insufficient to provide a granular assessment of IS propaganda. Although Winkler conducts a preliminary examination of IS infographics, he did not study their evolution over time nor did he provide a comprehensive overview of all Al-Hayat Media Centre infographics, specifically neglecting Rumiyah literature. The



exclusion of Rumiya is particularly promising for further investigation, since Dabiq released only a single infographic across all of its fifteen issues.

This paper attempts to fill these research gaps by assessing IS publications using Winter's (2018) thematic approach and findings on both internal and external target groups. While Winkler's analysis, however, focused on fewer than twenty Al-Naba issues in addition to the one Dabiq infographic, this research paper adds to the literature by assessing all known released issues, which currently total more than one hundred and twenty Al-Naba publications. As such, this research expands on the goals of Winkler, gaining crucial insight into how the infographics of IS speak to its constituents as members of the burgeoning IS state.

Methods and Methodology

The publication sample comprised 122 issues of Al-Naba, 15 issues of Dabiq and 12 issues of Rumiya, as well as more than a hundred Amaq News Agency publications, dating from mid-2013 to early 2018. The researcher chose the sample based on three principles: 1) popularity, 2) representation and 3) completeness. As these publications are all considered core pieces of the IS propaganda machine, they represent the ideology, beliefs and strategy of the organisation. Further, by examining three different publications, it is possible to analyse the many different sides of IS portrayed. A total of 412 infographics were extracted using the principle of universality, as opposed to a randomised or case-study sampling strategy, which represents the most comprehensive analysis available.

Winter's (2018) theoretical framework underpins the analytical approach. He identified three principal themes in effective IS propaganda: *Victimhood*, *Utopia* and *War*, which were used to sort and classify the infographics. While *Victimhood* stands alone as a theme, *Utopia* and *War* are each divided into seven sub-categories. For *Utopia* these are: Combination, Economics, Justice, Governance, Social Life, Landscape and Nature, and Religious Life. For *War*, the sub-categories are: Preparation, Offensive, Defensive, Deterrence, Aftermath, Eulogy and Summary. This categorisation assesses and defines the objectives of the infographics and their respective impact, demonstrating the intent and strategies of IS.

The three main categories encapsulate the nuanced strategy of IS to evoke a bond with or a reaction from its audience. First, the category of *Victimhood* identifies infographic information that puts emphasis on the damage caused by the international coalition against vital IS infrastructure, such as the demolition of bridges. In this, IS is presented as the victim. Interestingly, IS infographics do not include statistics regarding human collateral despite the heavy use of such visuals in IS propaganda imagery. Second, *Utopia* captures efforts made by IS to display the most basic elements of statehood, such as education and health services or the collection of taxes. Infographics in this category also focus on religious teachings, such as the *hadith*, to legitimate the actions and laws of IS. By manipulating the views of supporters through the use of religious texts in ways that many argue are misconstrued, IS grounds and justifies its actions and methods in pre-existing belief structures (Boutz et al., 2017). Significantly for this research, this category defines the beliefs and promises of IS outside of simply brutalising or violent tactics, showing its use of culture and religion to boost its moral image. The final category, *War*, focuses on IS battlefield exploits, which include mainly statistical summaries of IS martyrdom and military operations. Some infographics also provide practical advice in this aspect, such as how to prepare suicide missions or how to survive a sarin attack. This research builds upon these three categories to construct a more informed portrayal of IS. In addition to analysing the occurrence of these three primary themes among IS infographics, this research paper also identified the twelve most common types of infographics, according to



Krystian (2017).^[5] This categorisation aimed at blending Krystian's study on infographics with the larger body of work on IS propaganda, discussing infographics that fall into both categories.

The sorting of infographics into themes and types as discussed above was achieved using a qualitative reading of each infographic. Following Winter (2018), the researcher used keywords to identify into which category each infographic fell. Some level of subjectivity was exercised in order to categorise the data.

During the research, three main challenges arose: accessibility, language and verification. Accessibility was an immediate barrier, as these sources were not published in a readily accessible manner outside of the region. Luckily, the complete run of all three publications – the Al-Naba newspaper and the Dabiq and Rumiya magazines – has become available through a comprehensive and verified database on Jihadi primary source material (2018) hosted by the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo. Conversely, Amaq infographics are not readily accessible via open-source databases and their dissemination is often limited to encrypted messenger channels for IS supporters. Accessibility issues were overcome as users with access to such channels frequently forward releases via open-source social media platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr. While it is possible that some sources have been overlooked, a relatively complete set of infographics from the Amaq News Agency from late 2015 to early 2018 was compiled (to the best knowledge of the researcher).

The language barrier presented the second challenge. While all Dabiq and Rumiya infographics are in English, only slightly more than half of Amaq infographics are released in English. To the contrary, Al-Naba infographics are exclusively published in Arabic. In order to bridge this gap, the researcher assigned a native speaker to translate the titles of the infographics. Further translation would be too costly and extend beyond the focus of the research, as the titles of the infographics alone were adequate for the researcher to assess the general topic. This was done in accordance to the objective of the research, which has always been to provide a set, rather than an archival presentation of all translated graphics. The risk of misunderstanding or miscategorising some of the infographics is offset by their number, which should compensate for this margin of error. Adding to this, in order to verify the accuracy of this work, the researcher compared a randomly selected sample of thirty Al-Naba infographics, which had been translated for the research, with the officially IS-translated counterparts in Rumiya. The translated versions were found to be similar in meaning to the official translations provided by Al-Hayat.

Finally, the third challenge was to verify that IS had produced each of the infographics used. In order to do so, the researcher identified and verified that each infographic carried one of the three official publisher logos, in particular with regards to the Amaq infographics that were collected via an open-source platform. Considering that IS supporters and sympathisers produce and disseminate their personal IS propaganda, including infographics, this research ensured that all infographics included in the dataset were validated as IS-produced through the use of the official publisher's logo.

Thematic and Content Analysis

This section provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes found in IS propaganda, and also shows the type of infographics published.

[5] Krystian's (2017) categories: Data Centric, Timeline, How-To, Geographical, Comparison, Hierarchical, Flowchart, List, Anatomical, Visual Resume, and Photo-Based and Interactive.

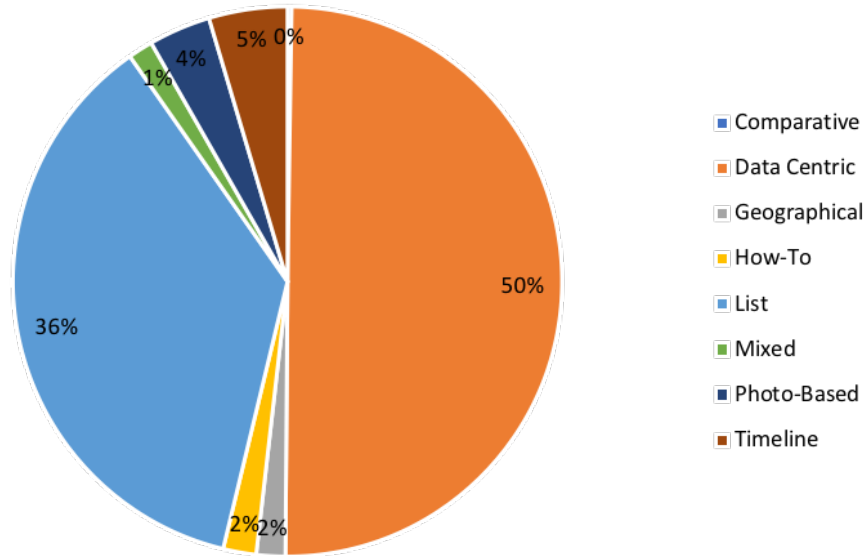


Figure 1: IS infographic types

While different types can and are often used in individual infographics to relay information, this research concentrates exclusively on the types that are most predominant across the sample as a whole. Figure 1 shows that *Data Centric* and *List* are the principal infographic types preferred by IS media distributors. While the former is primarily used to present complex statistical information, such as IS military operations (see Figure 2), the latter is commonly used to provide religious information and guidelines (see Figure 3).

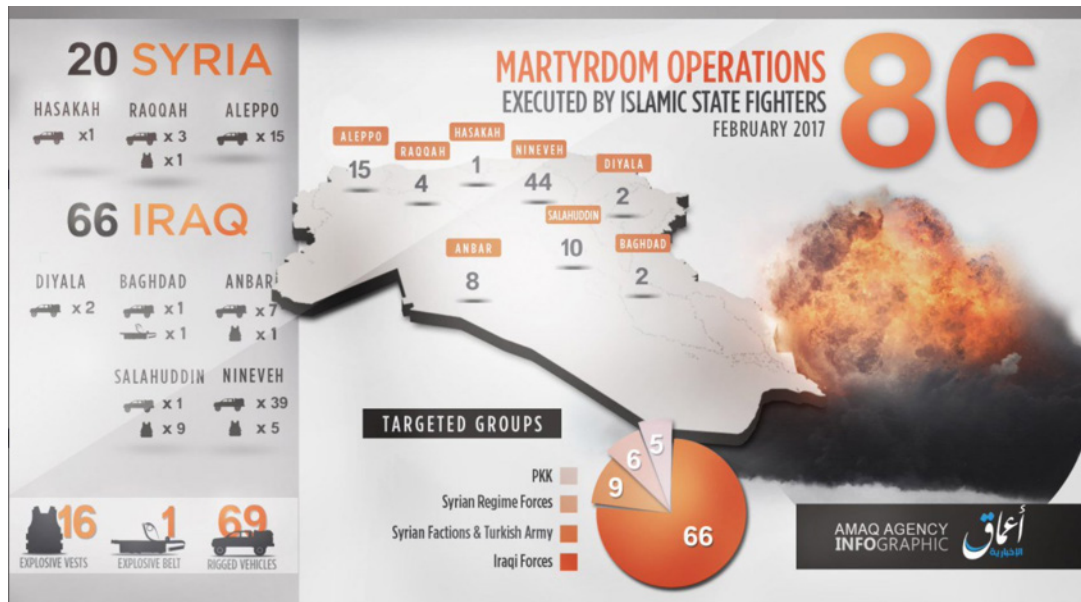


Figure 2: Data Centric (Amaq, March 2017)

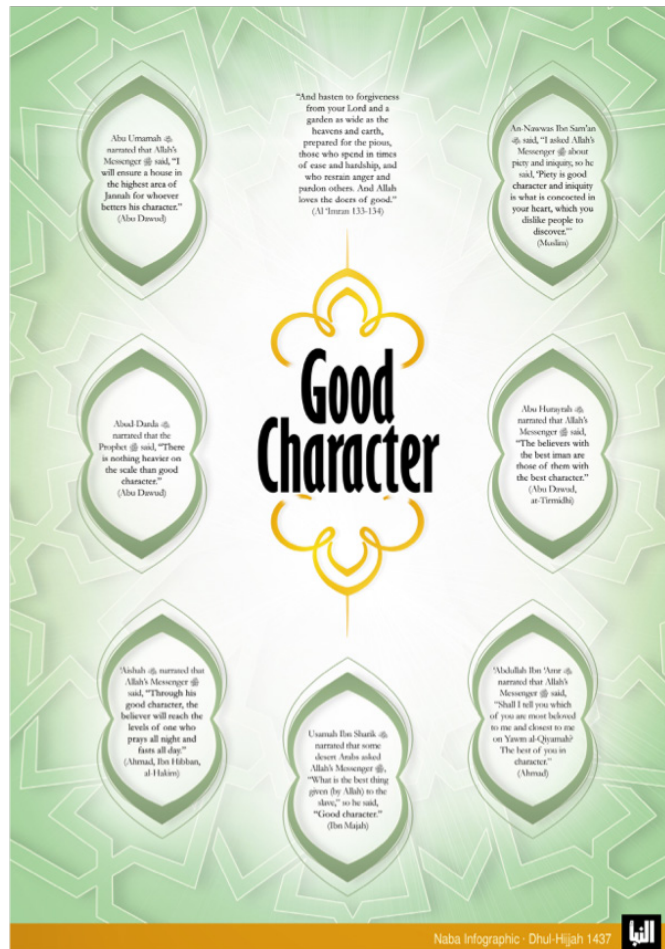


Figure 3: List (Rumiyah #2)

The Central Media Office of IS is primarily responsible for the creation and distribution of official IS content, of which infographics are a component (Al-'Ubaydi et al., 2014). Out of the many media distributors and producers reporting directly to the IS media office, only the Al-Hayat Media Centre and the Al-I'tsam Foundation produce infographics. While the Al-Hayat Media Centre publishes the monthly English language magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah, the Al-I'tsam Foundation issues the weekly Arabic newspaper Al-Naba. In addition to these outlets, the Amaq News Agency is an auxiliary organisation operating quasi-independently from the IS Central Media Office (Al-Tamimi, 2017). Despite its self-proclaimed objectivity, it echoes the official IS stance on many topics. Al-Hayat and Al-I'tsam infographics are published in magazine and newspaper format. In contrast, Amaq infographics are distributed as individual files via encrypted messenger platforms.

Publisher	Number of Infographics
Al-I'tsam Foundation	252
Amaq News Agency	93
Al-Hayat Media Centre	67
Total	412

Table 1: Total number of IS infographics per publisher

The 412 infographics considered in this analysis are classified by publisher in Table 1. Considering that the Al-Hayat Media Centre did not create independently the only infographic ever released by Dabiq, it is excluded from the following content analysis, thereby reducing the total number of Al-Hayat infographics to 66. Also, while over 84 per cent of Rumiyah infographics are English language duplicates from the Al-Naba newsletter, this paper considers these documents as lying outside of the scope of this research because they aim to appeal to an external, English-speaking audience, rather than internal followers. Table 2 shows the distribution of the analysed infographics according to source.

Infographics	Original content	Duplicated content
Dabiq	0%	100%
Rumiyah	15.2%	84.8%
Al-Naba	100%	0%
Amaq	100%	0%

Table 2: Original and duplicated content between publications

Figures 4 and 5 show the three main themes identified by Winter (2018) – *Victimhood*, *Utopia* and *War* – as they are represented in different IS media publications. Figure 4 clearly shows that *War* is a topic rather evenly distributed throughout publications, whereas Amaq infographics focus mainly on *Victimhood* and *War*, and Rumiyah prioritises *Utopia* and *War*. Conversely, Al-Naba touches on all three main themes.

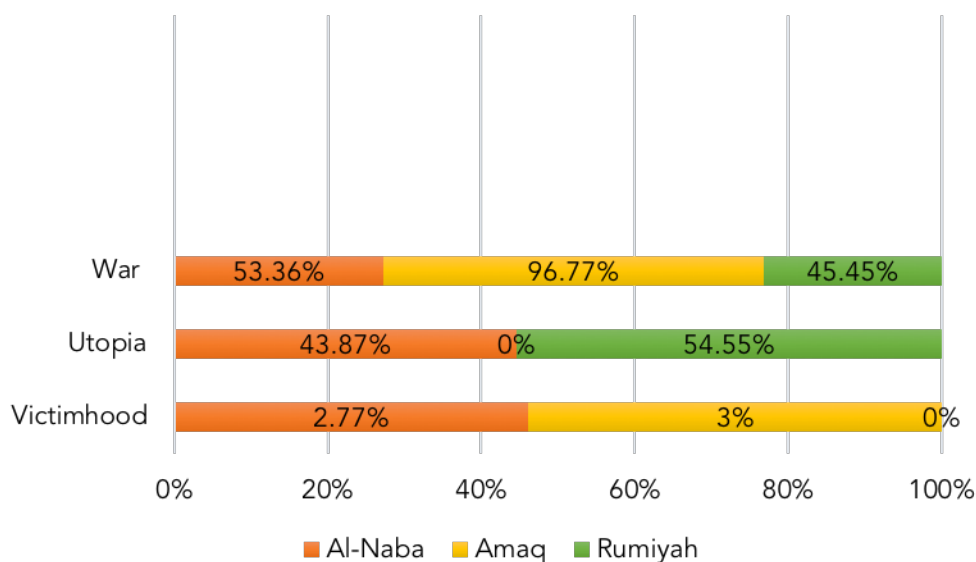


Figure 4: Presence of Winter's themes in the different IS media publications

In Figure 5 it becomes evident that within the infographics analysed, *Utopia* and *War* are almost equally represented in Rumiyah and Al-Naba publications. Al-Naba published a small number of graphics on *Victimhood*, while Rumiyah published none. In contrast to Rumiyah and Al-Naba, Amaq has no infographics on *Utopia* but a rather small number on *Victimhood*.

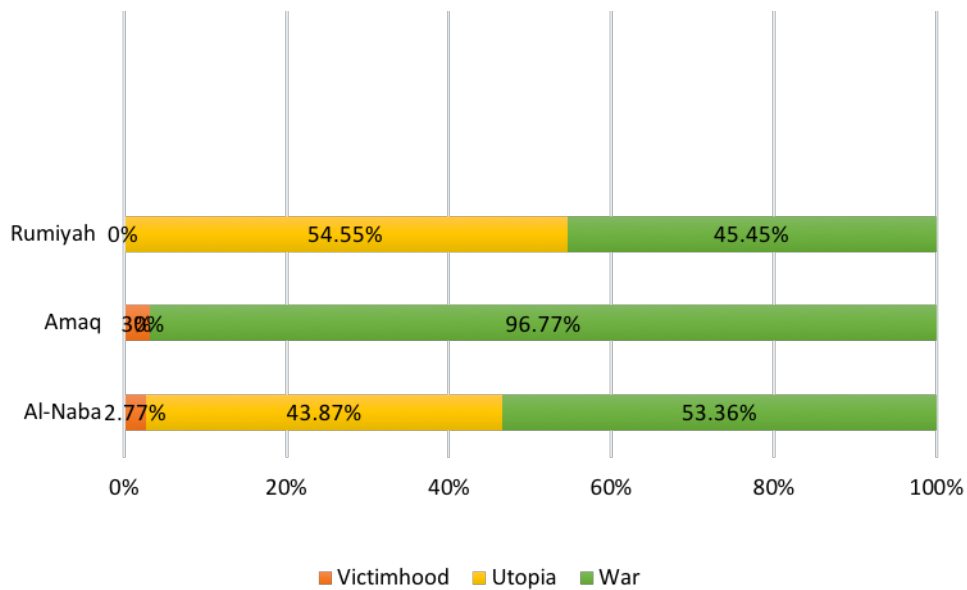


Figure 5: Distribution of Winter's themes in the different IS media publications

Figures 6, 7 and 8 give more details about the distribution of sub-themes, sorted by publication. In Rumiyah, as outlined in Figure 6, the main sub-themes identified were *Summary* infographics, as well as those focusing on *Religious Life*. Out of the ten infographics exclusively produced by Rumiyah, three are summative, five fall under *Religious Life* and two under *Preparation*. As shown in Figure 7, Al-Naba's sub-themes are more diverse than those of Rumiyah and reflect the broad scope of coverage of the publication. Figure 7 also shows that despite the wide variety of sub-themes, *Summary* and *Religious Life* emerge as dominant, with the remaining sub-themes accounting for only five per cent of the total content. Finally, Figure 8 shows that in Amaq publications there are only two sub-themes: *Summary* and *Victimhood*.

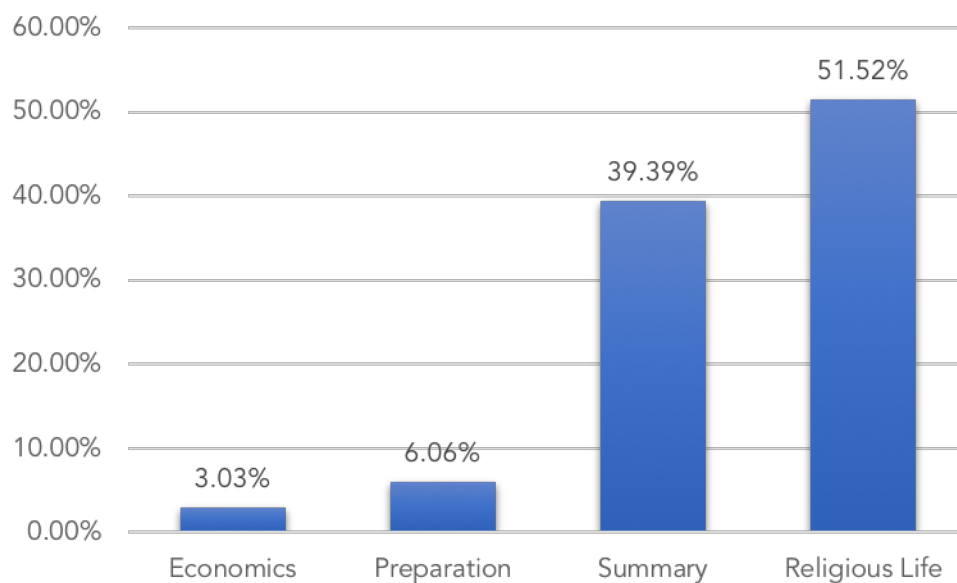


Figure 6: Rumiyah Infographic Sub-Themes

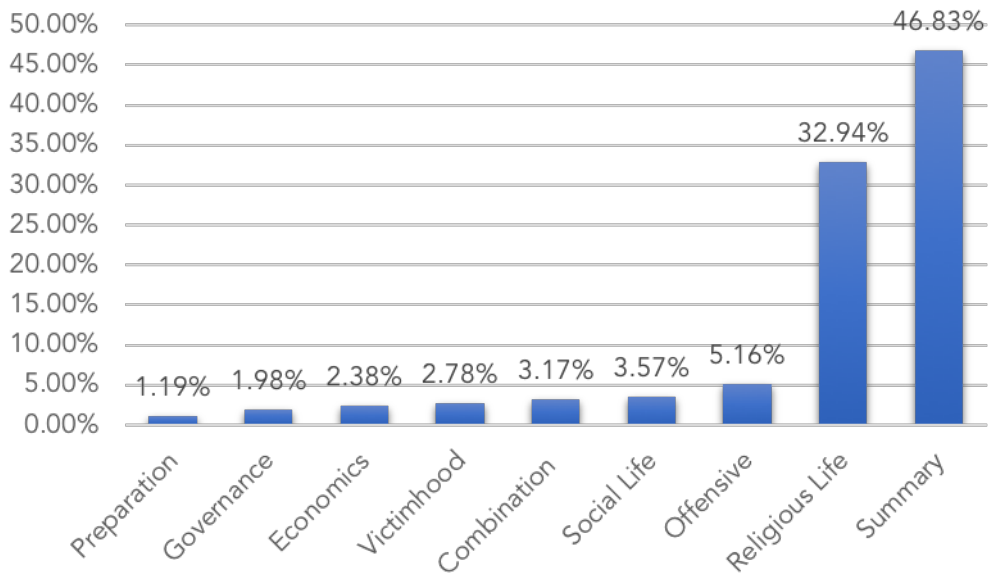


Figure 7: Al-Naba Infographic Sub-Themes

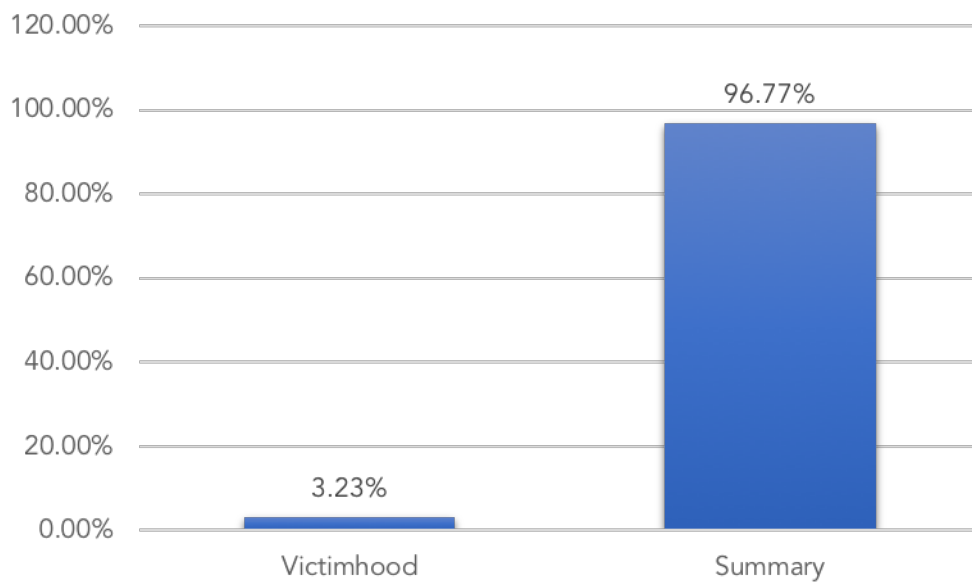


Figure 8: Amaq Infographic Sub-Themes

Discussion

The analysis provides support for the relevance of Winter's (2018) framework to IS's propaganda. The interplay of the main themes of *War*, *Victimhood* and *Utopia* illuminate the ways in which IS speaks to its internal audience about matters that are essential to everyday life. The infographics demonstrate a tendency towards religious messaging, as well as summative works that reinterpret military reports and findings, which are then presented to target audiences in a manner aligned with the overarching IS narrative. Content in Al-Naba and Rumiya is more closely aligned with the themes of *War* and *Utopia*. *Religious Life's* role as a sub-theme, therefore, appears to be an important supporting pillar to the other two more dominant themes legitimising war, as IS portrays its use of violence as the carrying out of religious principles. To the contrary, Amaq infographics draw upon

War as the main theme, which can be interpreted as seeking to instil a “correct” interpretation of the war among IS constituents.

Amaq infographics’ heavy utilisation of the *War* and *Victimhood* themes manifests itself as an almost exclusive focus on military summaries. A plausible explanation for the complete exclusion of the theme of *Utopia* is that Amaq seeks to establish itself as being quasi-independent from the IS Central Media Office (Al-Tamimi, 2017). As such, it concerns itself largely with arguably “objective” statistical data rather than any subjective narrative. The *War*-themed infographics map includes, amongst others, territorial gains, attacks and the types of weapons used, as well as categorising so-called martyrdom operations. In a similar vein but featured to a much lesser extent in IS propaganda, *Victimhood* infographics depict the damage to vital IS infrastructure in numbers.



Figure 9: Just Terror Tactics (Rumiyah #9)

Human collateral, such as dead or dying civilians, are limited to IS propaganda imagery and are not statistically represented. Although *War* overshadows *Victimhood*, it acts as a core tenant of IS propaganda and provides a thematic atmosphere within which the idea of IS operates better (Winter, 2015). By providing audiences with figures, statistics and images that condense the overall

devastation of war into an easily digestible infographic, the propaganda of IS remains effective. Adding to this, infographics in this category challenge assumptions about IS's self-presentation as a brutally violent organisation, since they focus the audience's attention on tragedies warranting revenge. IS's use of imagery depicting murdered civilians goes beyond banal explanations of medieval violence, instead showing the emotional justification and daily operations of the organisation.



Figure 10: The Spain Attacks (Rumiyah #13)

Additionally, research can gain deeper insights into IS propaganda by studying the subtleties of infographic content that *prima facie* appears to be similar. As a large number of infographics published in Rumiyah are copies from Al-Naba, it comes as little surprise that the principal themes found in infographics produced by the Al-Hayat Media Centre and the Al-I'tsam Foundation are almost identical. Without further scrutiny into the seemingly minor, but potentially significant, differences between the infographics published by the two, one might be led to believe that while both media outlets target different audiences, the IS Central Media Office follows a similar propaganda strategy for both internal and external audiences. While this could be the case, this paper's examination of the subtle differences between Rumiyah and Al-Naba infographics, especially as far as the *Utopian* main theme and the respective sub-themes are concerned, focuses attention instead on the internal conversation that infographics push forward amongst those whom IS governs.

Interestingly, there are some infographics that extend outside regions that IS controls, but still speak to internal audiences. Although only ten of Rumiya's infographics are original productions, the majority seems to focus exclusively on internal audiences in Europe and the US. For example, the infographics series entitled 'Just Terror Tactics' gives how-to advice on planning knife and truck suicide attacks in these contexts (see Figure 9). Moreover, *War* infographics focus predominantly on military operations that took place in Europe and North America rather than in the Islamic State itself and other IS territories, as compared with the infographics in Al-Naba and Amaq (see Figure 10). These small but deliberate divergences indicate impressive awareness of differing interpretations of current affairs and strategically bridge the gap between re-interpreting and rectifying them through religious means. It also indicates how IS might operate in the future, as it continues to lose territory in Syria and Iraq.



Figure 11: TV Antenna: An Enemy In The House; some of the hazards of TV antenna (Al-Naba #11)

Some of the *Utopia*-themed infographics published in Al-Naba but not in Rumiya appear to be predominantly intended for citizens of IS, and highlight the notable role of infographics in the transmission of information in IS society in recent times. For example, the government department



responsible for the enforcement of public morality, also known as the Islamic police, published a statement in 2015 which ordered the banning of satellite TV receivers in all IS territories (Al-Tamimi, 2016). Within the same month, issue 11 of Al-Naba (2015) featured an anti-satellite infographic (see Figure 11). Mirroring policy initiatives, infographics often show audiences how to carry out IS mandates. Thus, these infographics extend beyond recruitment, representing a form of state-making by IS.

Al-Naba infographics that fall within the *Utopia* theme explain basic, but essential, quotidian processes. Some examples that appear in these infographics include guidelines for the collection of taxes, how to provide medical services, and the broadcast frequencies of the Al-Bayan radio station. These instances show how the IS uses infographics, not only to draw sympathy to its cause from its constituents, but also to explain critical, albeit mundane, aspects of governance. This internal view of how the IS disseminates instructions in much the same way as many other governments, through infographic public service announcements (PSAs), illustrates both how it governs and how it views itself as a long-term government.

This research, which focuses on how IS uses infographics for emotional messaging and governance, expands upon Adelman's (2018) findings to show how IS speaks to its proponents. Similar to Adelman's argument that the IS directs its propaganda towards external audiences, this research shows that IS infographics are also explicitly used for internal communication. While the audience of Amaq infographics is arguably ambiguous, as they are predominantly distributed via the encrypted mobile app Telegram that has a worldwide user base, the Al-Naba newsletter's target audience is remarkably clear. The newsletter is not only made available in soft copy like Amaq infographics, but is also distributed via hard copy to local residents at so-called 'media points' located in the areas controlled by IS (Stalinsky and Sosnow, 2015). Al-Naba exclusively publishes in Arabic, and supporters of IS only sporadically produce unofficial translations in English or other languages. Furthermore, Al-Naba infographics often address social issues that are only relevant to residents of the Islamic State. Therefore, only a fraction of IS infographics are actually intended for consumption by Western audiences, while the majority is still reserved for an internal audience. Such an understanding of the target audience of infographics is in line with Winkler's (2016) findings that Al-Naba infographics are meant for IS's internal audience with an emphasis on physical and psychological security.

Conclusion

Informed by existing literature on IS propaganda and utilising a thematic analysis of infographics present in IS publications, this paper has demonstrated that the IS uses infographics for explicit internal consumption, instilling religious justification for their use of violence, and communicating vital information for their governance. Although infographics form only a small proportion of the overall IS propaganda output, they provide useful insight into the internal communications of IS governance and culture. Winter's three main themes – *War*, *Victimhood* and *Utopia* – are present in the different media outlets, communicating more than IS's willingness to use extreme violence. Within these categories, *Religious Life* and *Summaries* are the most popular sub-themes, while the IS draws upon the primary theme of *Victimhood* less frequently. Taken together, it appears that the primary objectives of IS infographics are to communicate military summaries, religious interpretations of Islam and seemingly mundane information on daily life to IS citizens.

Building upon the established notion that Al-Naba, Amaq and Rumiyah are each designed to appeal to different demographics (Winkler, 2016), it is suggested here that the infographics found in the respective publications are indeed tailored to suit the interests of the identified target audiences.



In this way, only a fraction of IS infographics are actually intended for consumption by Western audiences, with the majority reserved for an internal audience. Regardless, IS infographics seem to be an instrument of propaganda that extends across their territories and goes past the simple desire for war.

Although some barriers or inherent assumptions most likely limited the findings, ultimately this research built upon the second body of literature focusing on IS propaganda by investigating the ways in which seemingly mundane information has become a central theme in IS infographics. To date, IS stands as the only terrorist organisation that produces and publishes infographics, rendering it ripe for study. As such, future research should verify further the findings of this study by translating the entire infographic text of this dataset, validating whether it significantly alters the categorical meaning on offer. Further qualitative research should also focus more closely on whether the instructional and daily infographic information passed on necessarily translates to IS's objectives for further governance in the region and, if so, how. Finally, research should focus more attention on the differences between internal and external infographics, questioning how IS uses both of these types for recruitment, justification and the conduct of successful warfare.

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Music, identity and national cohesion in Mali: The role of music in the post-colonial era

by Samantha Potter



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Abstract

This article analyses the function music has played in the construction of identities in Mali, arguing that these constructions have directly impacted the process of national cohesion since independence in 1960. The link between this idea and the implications of the 2012 crisis - involving the prohibition of music under Shari'a law - will then be explored. The absence of music, a crucial mechanism for social cohesion, contributed to the complete breakdown of social relations and brought into question the concept of a "Malian" identity. Therefore, amidst ongoing Islamist activity, music's ability to reconstruct national cohesion has been impaired.

Keywords: Music, Constructivism, Fundamentalism, Islam, Mali, Cohesion

Introduction

Despite being a small and landlocked West African nation regarded as one of the poorest in the world (UNDP, 2015), Mali is internationally renowned for its rich musical culture. The country has produced such famed artists as Ali Farka Touré, Tinariwen and Oumou Sangaré, each of whom have been Grammy Award winners. As testament to this, when in April 2012 an ethnically motivated conflict evolved into a religious one as Islamists captured Mali's Northern Region, reports of the crisis in international media centred on narratives of musical loss (Skinner, 2016, p. 155). Music was banned under Shari'a law and the country's vibrant musical culture was silenced, as it became a target of religious attacks. The uniqueness of this specific target in a situation of conflict merits analysis as to *why* music was perceived as a threat by the Islamic fundamentalists, thereby entailing an evaluation of the historical role of music in Mali since its independence in 1960.

This article seeks to analyse the function music has played in the construction of identities in Mali, in order to understand better the implications of its proscription during the 2012–13 conflict. It will be argued that musical constructions of identity have been a central means of building a national identity and propagating unity among the diverse population of Mali. Music has, therefore, made an important contribution towards cementing national cohesion. Such music-based constructs, however, have also been used as a tool of division in certain contexts by reinforcing notions of detachment among marginalised groups in the North, and promulgating a competing Tuareg national identity. The most recent manifestation of this was the unilateral declaration of the independent Tuareg state of Azawad in Northern Mali in April 2012. Prior to this date, though, Mali had been widely regarded by western aid donors as a successful and stable low-income democracy since its transition in 1991 (van de Walle, 2012, p. 1). Though an ethnically diverse population, the vast majority of whom practise Islam, Mali remained committed to its constitutional secularism, and extolled the values of religious tolerance and cultural diversity. Thus, focus must be drawn to the effectiveness with which music-based constructions contributed to at least a fragile cohesion in Mali. As Morgan (2012, p. 15) states, there are many Tuaregs, Arabs and Songhoi who have



become accustomed to the idea that Mali is one nation that can include all its diverse peoples. This observation will be substantiated by arguing that the prohibition of music in 2012–13 contributed to the complete breakdown of social relations, due to the questions of identity raised during the crisis. In the context of ongoing Islamist activity and instability in the Northern region, it will be concluded that the role of music in reinforcing national unity since the crisis has been impaired.

This argument is premised on the constructivist notion that identities are not “given” but are rather a mobile phenomenon, produced by processes of construction. Musical performance and the act of listening provide one such means by which identities can be constructed and mobilised (Stokes, 1994, p. 5). An identity is ‘how one understands oneself in relationship to another’ (Hopf, 2016, p. 5). Frith (1996, p. 110) argues that music – through the act of music-making and listening – is key to identity because it offers a strong sense of both self and others. The significance of music for scholars of international relations, however, has been a peripheral topic of study, only receiving particular attention in recent years. This article is not to suggest that music was the sole component in the construction of identities and the development of the crisis in Mali. It will attempt to bridge the gap between the considerable attention that Malian musicians have been given by the international media following the music ban, and the absence of scholarly work analysing how music has actually contributed to the dynamics of unity and division in Mali.

Since this study seeks to analyse the role of music for national cohesion in particular, research has been delimited to the post-colonial era, starting with independence in 1960 and the construction of a national identity. The media’s focus has been almost solely on internationally acclaimed Malian musicians, many of whom reside outside Mali. Such representations, however, are insufficient to understand the position of music in the country today. As stated, this observation has largely informed the direction of this article. The qualitative research methods employed here, therefore, reflect this effort to discern the role of music in Mali itself, in order to understand better the implications of its proscription. Primary resources, especially documentaries and short films involving interviews with Malian musicians, have provided valuable on-the-ground insights into the crisis. Further, throughout this study, excerpts from song lyrics will be given in order to demonstrate the role of music. Lyrics are of value to substantiate arguments claiming music’s importance in identity-construction, since they constitute a vital medium of expression for artists seeking to describe their experiences. In order to gain an insight into the role of Malian musicians in the spotlight, an interview was conducted with Aliou Touré, lead singer of Malian band Songhoy Blues, who formed whilst in exile from the North of Mali. Predominantly secondary sources were employed to analyse the period between 1960 and 2012, during which a substantial amount of literature – particularly drawing from the disciplines of anthropology and ethnomusicology – provided detailed insights into how music has become entwined with the Malian social fabric. Regarding the period during and after 2012, the existence of scholarly work dealing with music’s position in Mali has been largely absent, owing to the recent and ongoing nature of the crisis. In this respect, newspaper articles have provided details on certain aspects of post-conflict musical life and security in the North.

Background to the 2012-2013 conflict

Mali is a multi-ethnic nation consisting of a great diversity of peoples and cultures: there are over twelve ethnic groups, each speaking a different language (Schulz, 2012, p. 3). Owing to the high mobility of the Malian people throughout history, ethnicity as a marker of social and cultural identity is highly fluid in Mali (Schulz, 2012, p. 4). A general divide, however, is often drawn between the identities of the country’s North and South, consisting of nomadic or semi-nomadic people and sedentary agriculturists respectively. The largest and dominant ethnic group, the Bambara, reside



in central and southern Mali and speak Bamanakan, a language which has been promoted as the country's *lingua franca* since independence. This reflects the political and cultural dominance of the South, as the majority of the country's Northern population either do not know or refuse to speak Bamanakan, which they associate with the South's political and cultural hegemony (Schulz, 2012, p. 7). Indeed, this mirrors the construction of a "national" identity based on the traditions of the dominant Southern ethnic groups, from which minority groups of the North are excluded.

There are numerous ethnic groups in the North of Mali, including the Fulani, the Moors and Berbers, such as the Tuareg. Although there are deep diversities between and even within these groups, there has been a historical general divide between the 'North' and the 'South', whereby the Northern desert regions are seen as problematic and unwilling to embrace the concept of Malian national unity. Historically, the Tuareg in particular have shown resentment towards their political and cultural marginalisation within the central state. In their longstanding struggle for autonomy, a fourth Tuareg rebellion against the Malian state was launched in Mali's Northern region in January 2012 by the Tuareg-led National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). In March 2012, the MNLA declared the independence of Azawad in Mali's Northern region. Despite this, the ethnic groups of the North do not collectively recognise this as their common land, and they possess differing political agendas, cultures and identities. It is therefore difficult, given these divisions, to construct the 'North' as one general identity marker. The MNLA soon began to lose influence and the nature of the rebellion transformed when the Tuareg separatists formed an alliance with Ansar Dine, an armed Islamist group. While Ansar Dine, however, had initially supported the MNLA with the shared desire to push the Malian Army out of the North, fractures emerged as the Islamists sought to implement Shari'a law (Lecocq et al., 2013, p. 348). Aided by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Oneness and the Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar Dine rapidly took over control of the rebellion, abandoning the nationalist claims to Azawad and instead advocating the implementation of Shari'a law across Mali (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 11). A French-led intervention in January 2013 ousted the Islamists from their control of the North and uplifted Shari'a law; however, armed groups retain a presence and the region remains highly insecure.

The politics of culture and identity

Questions of identity were at the core of the emergence of the conflict in Mali and remain crucial in its complex and destabilising aftermath. The interplay of competing identities – ethnic, national and religious – undermined official representations of a "Malian" national identity leading up to 2012, allowing for the manifestation of alternative visions of belonging in this multi-ethnic state. In order to understand the development and intersections of multiple identities in Mali, this article will use constructivist theory as a framework, arguing that national identity is not innate or "given" but rather constructed through ongoing processes of interaction.

Anderson (1991) conceptualised the nation as an 'imagined community' – a social construction – since members of a nation will never know most of their fellow-members 'yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). This concept, however, stipulates that the nation is an ideological, top-down construction. Critical of the assumption of 'congruence between the political and national and often the cultural unit', Askew (2002, p. 9) finds fault with this focus on the political elite, especially in the context of the post-colonial state where ethnic identities retain significance within arbitrarily imposed borders. Rather than assuming the passivity of the citizenry, Askew contends that nationalism is a dialectic construction involving the state and its citizens. Askew's work underpins this article's argument, as it accounts for the simultaneous



construction of multiple, often opposing identities within the nation. Therefore, the construction of national identity is characterised in terms of how citizens respond to state-orchestrated visions of the “nation”. In particular, this approach accounts for the vital role of culture in the construction, articulation and mobilisation of those identities; for example, Askew focuses on the role of musicians in ‘performing the nation’, placing great importance on how musical performance is used to articulate national representations. This theoretical approach, thus, allows for an in-depth exploration of the musical constructions of identity in Mali. Further, this will offer important insights into how such constructions have impacted the political process of national cohesion, by virtue of the population’s adherence to state-orchestrated ideas of the nation.

Music and nation-building

The following section will provide an account of the ways in which music has been used by political regimes in Mali as a vital tool to construct narratives of the nation. Such an analysis is key to understanding how music has shaped visions of the nation, with implications for the current crisis, since it underlines the role music plays in giving substance to, or offering critique of, relations between the state and its citizens (Skinner, 2012, p. 512). The importance of music in cementing national unity during nation-building will be highlighted, as music was a crucial means through which a national narrative was constructed and a nationalist sentiment disseminated.

Immediately following independence, the cultural policies of President Mobido Keita’s “First Republic” (1960–68) were primarily focused towards nation-building efforts, and music in particular was a salient means of propagating national unity. In order to understand *why* the creation of a national identity was engaged primarily through music, one can trace the historical political role of the musician in Mali. The tradition of the *jeli* – a noble caste of oral historians and praise singers – played a crucial role in the articulation of the new nation. Since the founding of the Mali empire (c. 1230), the *jeli* have acted on behalf of their rulers and wealthy patrons to ‘maintain and support the values which underlaid [...] the political structure of society’, thereby legitimating authority (Cutter, 1968, p. 74). They did so by acting as the oral repository for customs, traditions and the principles of government. Following independence, Keita sought to create a national identity through the valorisation of “traditional” culture, drawing from a celebration of the distant (pre-colonial) past and the downplaying of the immediate (colonial) past (Cutter, 1968, p. 76). The prestige of the *jeli*’s historical knowledge, therefore, endowed them with official authorisation to narrate the history of the new nation following independence, acting as ‘emblems of an unbroken continuity with the past’ (Schulz, 2007, p. 194).

The desire to affirm national cohesion by evoking historical continuity with the pre-colonial past meant that colonisation was presented as ‘a short and disturbing interlude to the natural course of history’ (Lecocq, 2010, p. 72). As such, musical repertoires were permeated with the symbolism of traditional legends, particularly Sunjata Keita – founder of the Mali Empire. For example, the *jeli* celebrated President Keita as a descendant and namesake of Sunjata Keita, thus legitimising his authority with ideas of primordial ties and an ‘imaginary timeless antiquity’ (Rowlands, 2007, p. 132). Charry (2000a, p. 41) notes that ‘the role of the Sunjata epic in forming [...] the national identities of Mali cannot be overestimated’. The centrality of the *jeli* tradition and the musical recounting of the Sunjata epic in the nation-building project, however, fundamentally privileged a narrative that excluded parts of Mali’s Northern population (Rowlands & de Jong, 2007, p. 26). The story of Sunjata, of which the tradition of the *jeli* forms part, concerns the struggle of the Mande people against oppression (Suso, 1999, p. vii). The Mande, comprising several linguistically and historically related groups including the Bambara and Malinke, are the largest ethnic group in Mali. Most



elements used in the nation-building process were taken from Mande culture and history (Lecocq, 2002, p. 72). The construction of a national identity was, therefore, based on a historical myth that favoured the dominant ethnic groups of the Southern region, formulating a national past based on the silencing of alternative political imaginaries (Schulz, 2007, p. 195). In sum, the construction of a Malian national identity by political elites related to the historical and cultural concepts of the country's largest ethnic groups (Lecocq, 2002, p. 66). Therefore, nationalist sentiment was adhered to by a substantial portion of the population, fostering a strong sense of national cohesion among this majority whilst fuelling resentment among a minority.

Under Keita's socialist regime, musicians became subject to state patronage through the formation of national ensembles and orchestras whose role was, to borrow Askew's phrase, to 'perform the nation'. In this way, music was one of the primary means adopted for the propagation of this new national identity. One example is the *Ensemble Instrumental du Mali* (EIN), a state-sponsored national group whose function was to preserve and validate the past 'through selection and adaptation, for the exigencies of the present' (Cutter, 1968, p. 75). As such, the ensemble's compositions were imbued with nationalist themes "borrowed" from the *jeli*, aiming to evoke national pride and a shared identity. The repertoire of the EIN was mostly propagandistic, for example, *Maliba* (*Great Mali*) compared the modern nation-state to pre-colonial Mali (Skinner, 2014, p. 250). Another example is the formation of local *troupes artistiques* by the regime to perform "national" music. To the Keita regime, however, "national" folklore equalled Mande folklore and, thereby, the Tuareg *troupe artistique* of the Kidal region was forbidden from singing in their Tamasheq language (Lecocq, 2002, p. 73). It is, therefore, evident that the role of music under the socialist regime was to foster a nationalist sentiment based on Mande idealisation. Further, as the ruling party obtained greater control over music-making, all musicians became subject to the cultural politics of nationalism. For example, Afro-Cuban influenced orchestra *Pionnier Jazz* were recruited by officials to compose songs in support of the nation-building project, such as *Exile Is Bad*, whose lyrics state: 'Dearest! Come back to our Mali' [...] 'There is unity in the homeland' (Skinner, 2016, p. 47). Musicians in the "First Republic" were, therefore, clients of the state as crucial proponents of nationalism, and music was a salient means of reinforcing national cohesion as widely as possible.

The complexities underlying this official nationalism in Mali echo Askew's observation that nationalism is a dialectic process. As O'Flynn (2007, p. 24) reiterates, the socially constructed relationship between music and national identity does not entail that all people in a particular society will respond in the same way to music that is deemed "national". The cultural manifestations of the nation facilitated cohesion among the dominant ethnic groups resonant with those "national" musical traditions, though it simultaneously fostered notions of detachment among minorities who were not represented. It is undeniable that this discourse did foster a strong nationalist sentiment, owing to the invocation of Mande traditions to which the majority of the population could adhere. Parallel and in response to the "official" national identity, however, at least one competing national idea was being constructed among those who did not resonate with the Malian nation. Although this marginalisation was not specific to the Tuaregs, the most vociferous dissent has been that of Tuareg nationalism, a by-product of the official nationalism 'that threatened the newly found and still unbalanced political order' (Lecocq, 2010, p. 29). Thus, the promotion of a Malian national identity, largely through the medium of music, simultaneously contributed to antagonism against the state. The manifestation and spread of a distinct Tuareg political identity, in which music played an absolutely central role, will be discussed in detail later on. The following section will outline music's role under the democratic regime from 1992, which espoused an alternative vision of the nation.



Music and the politics of belonging

With Mali's transition from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy, President Konaré's "Third Republic" (1992–2002) sought to distance itself from the highly centralised, socialist ideals of the preceding regimes, with ramifications for the renewal of a national narrative. National culture again became a priority, as the democratic government was implicated in the deconstruction of a nation characterised by Mande ethno-political hegemony, and the construction of a new national narrative that embraced 'unity in diversity'. Mali's political landscape was significantly restructured with the implementation of decentralisation and liberalisation measures from 1992 onwards, facilitating an upsurge in the prevalence of discourses of local and cultural belonging. It will be argued in this section, however, that music fundamentally provided an important means for Konaré's regime to cement national unity within the context of a fragmented political landscape. This was enacted by embracing expressions of local identities and appropriating them in the national context.

Decentralisation policies – entailing new structures of political clientage and resource acquisition – encouraged claims to rights and entitlements based on ethnic or local identities. With competition for shrinking resources, greater significance was placed on both symbolic and material claims to local identity. Further, with the onset of multipartyism, the freedom of Malian citizens to create political groups and the explosion of associational activity coincided with the ability to express those diverse interests and political opinions. This is demonstrated by the proliferation of independent radio stations throughout the country, broadcasting in diverse local languages and musical traditions, and attenuating the uneven representation of cultural diversity on national radio. The overwhelming success of local radio stations in Mali was conducive to the growing importance of local identities, since they constituted ideal platforms for self-expression and the articulation of listeners' changing perceptions of belonging in the nation (Schulz, 2012, p. 62). Further, as the media landscape was privatised, the state no longer held a monopoly over musical output, and a greater variety of musical genres gained exposure on both state and private radio stations. As a result, regional musical traditions, such as that of the *Wassoulou* genre, gained popularity and challenged the privileged position of the *jeli* as the linchpin of "Malian" music (Maxwell, 2002). The process of democratisation, therefore, disrupted the highly centralised and controlled policy of promoting a single unified national culture, and encouraged the manifestation of local identities as the regime came to embrace cultural diversity.

In order to integrate the newly centrifugal socio-political landscape, various cultural initiatives were organised by the state to facilitate the narrative of national unity. The rich musical traditions of the country mean that music is seen as something beyond entertainment, since it carries complex social and moral meanings (Schulz, 2012, p. 160). Thus, musical performance served as an ideal medium for intercultural understanding and, in turn, for facilitating national cohesion in service of the government's 'unity-in-diversity' narrative. One example is the organisation of the *Biennale Artistique et Culturelle* by the Ministry of Culture. This involved competitions between ethnically or regionally based music groups to perform their local traditions at a national festival, facilitating encounters and exchanges among the youth of different regions (De Jorio, 2016, p. 16). Rather than hosting the national festival in the capital, Bamako, rotating the finals between regional cities reflected the government's commitment to decentralisation and the rhetoric of unity. Another example is a television programme, *Terroir*, which displayed local musical traditions on a national platform and proved a remarkable success. Schulz (2007, p. 185) notes the great importance viewers attributed to the national broadcast of their local traditions, arguing that the programme fostered the notion of communal belonging in the nation via references to 'authentic traditions' (Schulz, 2007, p. 185). Thus, these government initiatives to foster a collective identity through the celebration of local musical traditions served to bolster national cohesion, not by invoking a communal past as Mobido Keita's socialist regime did, but by embracing Mali's cultural diversity.



Music, Tuareg identity and competing nationalisms

Following on from section one, which demonstrated the inability of “national” culture to represent all segments of Malian society, this section will outline how this contributed to the intensification of a distinct Tuareg identity. The emergence of a revolutionary Tuareg music in the 1980s, *al-guitara* (‘guitar music’), will be discussed, as it directly crafted a Tuareg national identity and propagated visions of an autonomous nation, culminating in the rebellion of the 1990s. It is important to note that such nationalist aims did not represent all Tuaregs. Many did not support the rebellion, and some felt more integrated into the sedentarised farming communities of the South (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 638). Since Tuareg separatists have proved a principal threat to Mali’s national cohesion, however, the means of constructing this separate national identity are of utmost importance to understanding the role of music as a contributor to divisions.

The Tuareg are a nomadic pastoralist tribe inhabiting a vast area of the Saharan desert in North Africa. Once controlling the trans-Saharan caravan trade routes, the Tuareg prospered and acted autonomously. The impact of colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century, however, profoundly changed their social, political and economic structure (Kohl & Fischer, 2010, p. 4). The imposition of colonial frontiers restricted the nomads’ freedom of movement, thereby compromising their traditional economy and fostering antagonism against the central government. The process of decolonisation cemented this economic hardship, as the Tuareg automatically became marginalised minorities within the newly created states. Since Mali’s independence in 1960, the relationship between the central state and the Tuareg people has been characterised by periodic uprisings against Malian authority by Tuareg nationalists. At the heart of these insurgencies has been the desire for cultural recognition and autonomy.

The Tuareg people have a distinct musical culture that is deeply rooted in historical traditions, occupying a prominent position in social, political and ceremonial life. Tuareg instruments, including a one-stringed fiddle (*anzad*) and a mortar drum (*tende*), each provide the focal point for particular social events (Card Wendt, 2000, p. 207). Verbal arts and oral history, of which epic poetry is a central component, are seen as an extension of music. Themes of such poetry uncover the ‘past and the inner workings of [Tuareg] society’, and explain values, customs, ideals and sentiments (Gattinara, 2006, p. 32). The poetry is, thus, a reflection and expression of cultural identity, and its transmittal through the medium of music is a crucial means of expressing a unique Tuareg identity. Such musical styles, however, never became a component of Mali’s “national” musical traditions. For example, the National Instrumental Ensemble comprised only “traditional” instruments monopolised by the *jeli*, such as the *kora* (a 21-stringed harp). Further, many Tuaregs saw injustice in the fact that their musical traditions were rarely represented on national television, and in the absence of Tamasheq language programmes (Morgan, 2014).

The refusal of the central government to recognise Tuareg culture during the nation-building period heightened resentment and feelings of detachment towards Mali’s central powers. Indeed, the lack of Tuareg representation on national media reflected their persistent exclusion from positions of political influence and economic advantage (Schulz, 2007, p. 191). As a society proud of their culture, striving to demonstrate this pride to each other and to outsiders (Seligman, 2006, p. 28), the inability to do so served to intensify notions of difference vis-à-vis Malians, reinforcing a separate Tuareg identity. In sum, the policies of the Malian government posed a threat to the authenticity of the unique Tuareg culture, thereby leading to efforts to ensure that their identity would not be subsumed. It will be demonstrated that music, as a means through which ethnicities and identities are constructed and mobilised (Stokes, 1994, p. 5), was vital in this pursuit.

A revolution in Tuareg musical culture: Al-Guitara

The period following Keita's "First Republic" and before the second Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s was marked by radical transformations in Tuareg society, which in turn informed a transformation of musical culture. The marginalisation of the Tuareg by the central government was exacerbated by severe droughts in the 1970s and 80s, resulting in the collapse of the pastoral economy and the migration of much of the population to Southern regions or neighbouring countries (Lecocq, 2002, p. 173). The new way of life for those labour-seeking migrants in Libya and Algeria became known as *Teshumara*, and its adherents were mostly male youths called *ishumar* ("unemployed"). Many of the *ishumar* accepted Libyan ruler Muammar al-Gaddafi's offer of military training, which was deceptively advocated as a means towards creating an autonomous Tuareg nation named Azawad (Morgan, 2011). It was within such "rebel camps" that a new political Tuareg identity was forged, and a formal nationalist movement was created directly through the music of the *ishumar*. The origins of this music lie in 1979 when a guitar was gifted to one of those exiles, Ibrahim ag Alhabib, who began transposing traditional Tuareg music onto this new instrument. He was joined by other musicians in the Libyan training camps, thereby forming the band *Tinariwen* ("people of the desert") and pioneering the revolutionary genre of *al-guitara*.

What was so revolutionary about this music for Tuareg society was the shift from lyrics concerning traditions and history, to lyrics about current political issues and the problems facing their deteriorating culture. A prevalent theme of *al-guitara* was *egha*, a concept roughly translating as hatred and revenge. This was particularly in relation to the First Tuareg Rebellion of 1962–64, which was brutally repressed by the Malian Armed Forces (MAF) in a campaign involving the massacre of civilians and livestock. ag Alhabib witnessed the execution of his father for taking part in the rebellion, which is reflected in 'Soixante Trois':

1963 came, and goes on...

It killed the elderly and the newborn children

...Only graveyards and loneliness came of it (ag Alhabib, 2007a)

An important feature of the lyrics here is the invocation of memories, linking the events of 1963 to the moment of composition by asserting that 1963 'goes on' (Lecocq, 2010, p. 269). In doing so, the song serves as a potent reminder of the barbaric acts of the MAF against the Tuareg, inciting feelings of *egha* towards the state of Mali and encouraging action. By conveying such memories and the courage of resistance, *al-guitara* initially served to foster mutual encouragement and cohesion among the early rebel performers (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 645). The impact and reach of the genre, however, soon increased exponentially, as expressions of *egha* became justification for lyrical calls to arms:

Together, let us rise and let us join up

Please my brothers; let us unite in order to uprising (quoted in Belalimat, 2010, p. 163)

This capacity for mobilisation constituted the greatest revolutionary impact of *al-guitara*, as rebel leaders realised the benefits of the music to promote their cause and began providing money for guitars and equipment. *Al-guitara*, thanks to tape recorders and cassettes, soon spread beyond the intimate circle of rebel fighters, becoming the 'musical cult' of the youth in exile, spreading to the migrants' native Mali (Belalimat, 2010, p. 163). With no Tamasheq newspapers, radio or television stations in existence, the songs of the *ishumar* carried messages of hope, struggle and exile throughout Tuareg society (Morgan, 2011). Essentially, the music became 'a political news bulletin for propaganda and mobilisation' among the Tuareg (Borel, 2006, p. 132). In fact, the cassettes were so influential in rousing Tuareg youth to rebellion that the possession of one was deemed an



act of sedition (Gill, 2007). Accordingly, due to its political critique, *al-guitara* was officially banned by the Malian government during the early 1990s, giving rise to a clandestine circulation network. *Al-guitara* music, as a highly efficient means of disseminating Tuareg nationalist discourse, was a pivotal tool for the construction and propagation of a Tuareg national identity. Thus, these musical constructions of identity undermined Malian national unity and intensified societal divisions.

By 1990, the Tuareg rebels in exile had become disillusioned with Gaddafi and his unfulfilled promises, and returned to Mali to pursue their aims of independence. The political nationalist movement, propagated by the music of the *ishumar*, then found expression with an uprising against the Malian state. It can therefore be said that *al-guitara* directly shaped Tuareg political identity and planted the seeds for the “Second Tuareg Rebellion”, disrupting Mali’s fragile national cohesion. In the context of the rebellion itself, *al-guitara* constituted a ‘locus for resistance’ (Castelo-Branco, 2010, p. 245), as a space for the Tuareg to critique the political hegemony. For example:

We are mangled [...] by Mali against whom we fight
I have a question for my brothers in my nation
Consider the situation you are in (ag Alhabib, 2007b)

These lyrics reflect the Tuareg nationalists’ view that central government policies threaten their culture and identity, and that only independence can guarantee a future for the Tuareg people and their culture (Morgan, 2014). The political aims of the *ishumar* were transposed to Tuareg society through *al-guitara* music, thereby providing the cultural space for the articulation of a Tuareg national identity. These musical constructions of identity impacted Malian national cohesion by propagating Tuareg detachment from the central state and advocating a competing nationalism.

Ultimately, internal divisions hindered the Tuareg nationalist insurgency. Agreements between the Malian government and Tuareg leaders in the Tamanrasset Accords of January 1991 and the National Pact of April 1992 laid the groundwork for the cessation of hostilities and decentralisation efforts in the North. The political position of the Tuareg then markedly improved, and decentralisation served to deflect calls for independence (Seely, 2001, p. 516). With these developments, *al-guitara* performers lost their clandestine and subversive character, new groups were formed, and guitar music became a popular musical genre among Tuareg youth (Belalimat, 2010, p. 165). Rasmussen (2006, p. 647) discusses such changes, demonstrating that many performances became oriented toward peace and reconciliation efforts. This can be seen in the advent of the *Festival au Désert* (FID), an annual event located in the remote outskirts of Timbuktu organised by Tuareg Manny Ansar, members of *Tinariwen*, and various other French and Malian funders and supporters (Morgan, 2013a, p. 42). The Festival, it will be argued, emphasised notions of belonging and collective identity through musical performance, thereby contributing towards the sentiment of national unity in the post-conflict environment.

The festival in the desert: peace and reconciliation

The FID was originally organised to further the goals of the post-rebellion peace accords: reconciliation, revitalisation and “development” of the Northern region, as well as to promote international awareness of the Tuareg predicament (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 646). Ahmed ag Hamama (2009), the Festival’s co-founder, stated that after the war ended, there was need for a forum for peace and a place of exchange between the communities in order to re-establish trust. The Festival served as an important symbol and means of reconciliation and unity: an explicit aim was to ‘celebrate “La Flamme de la Paix” (The Flame of Peace)’, the ceremony held in 1996 where over three thousand firearms were set alight, symbolically marking the end of the rebellion. Modelled



on traditional nomadic gatherings, it was precisely the culture of the Tuareg that was harnessed to extricate themselves from years of rebellion and under-development (Morgan, 2006). The Festival was attended by local inhabitants, Malians from the South, as well as foreign visitors. It showcased Tuareg music and culture to an increasingly global audience, as it garnered international renown in the decade after its inception. As such, Tuareg participants saw the Festival as 'a way of reaching out to the global community, creating intercultural dialogue, and building bridges between cultures' (Montague, 2016, p. 19).

The FID can, therefore, be seen as an alternative means toward pursuing the wider aims sought in the rebellion itself: gaining recognition of the Tuareg culture, as well as better integrating the Tuareg in Mali. The integral role of *Tinariwen* in organising the FID is crucial, since it demonstrates how ex-fighters turned to music to pursue their goals. As their spokesperson stated:

In the past they did fight with Kalashnikovs for the recognition of their cultural identity, but today they use guitars to try and promote the cause of their people and to promote peace (Dicko, 2009).

At the core of this transformation is *al-guitara's* divergence from themes of militancy and political critique, to broader themes including social issues, love and friendship. With this, many performances sought to promote a shift from protest to dialogue (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 634), therefore aiding the FID's goal of reconciliation. Gray (2015, p. 64) states that music can function as a 'bridge between the past and reconciliation' since it allows for the understanding of society in terms of its own interpretations of reality. Indeed, the presentation of Tuareg musical culture provided a platform to dissociate *al-guitara* from its militant and subversive nature, towards interpreting it as an assertion of Tuareg identity in a changing environment. Certainly, on a higher level, the Festival allowed the Northern desert region to be perceived not as a sinkhole of "bandits", but as a peaceful and tolerant asset (Morgan, 2006).

For the local performers themselves, playing on stage served to legitimise their cultural and musical practices, but for the Festival's attendees, listening to the music essentially created a space for encounter (Amico, 2014). One of Mali's most famed musicians from the Timbuktu region said of the Festival:

Every group in West Africa is here [...] With this spirit, people will not be divided again, but united (Farka Touré, 2003)

Thus, the Festival created a space in which cultural differences were overcome. By creating new forms of social cohesion and cultural exchange through music, the FID enabled participants to achieve a sense of collective Malian identity, envisioning a community unbound by divisive identities. It can, therefore, be concluded that the FID yielded a symbolic power, serving as an indicator of tolerance in the Northern region and, on a national level, contributing towards the goal of national unity in the aftermath of the rebellion.

With the imposition of Shari'a law in the North of Mali in 2012, however, the annual festival was forced into "exile". In the context of ongoing insecurity, the Festival in its original form has not been held since. The symbolism of FID's absence vis-à-vis the dynamics of national unity will be discussed in the final section. What follows will examine the impact of music's prohibition in Northern Mali and its detrimental implications for social cohesion in the country.



'We do not want Satan's music': the imposition of Shari'a Law in Northern Mali

Since the post-independence nation-building period, music has been a vital tool in the construction of a national identity and the propagation of national unity, with varying levels of adherence among the population. Musical constructions of identity also highlighted divisions, as they shaped concurrent opposing national identities, which culminated in the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s. Following this, music was at the core of reconciliation efforts and served to foster a collective identity in the context of the FID. Focusing on Mali as a subject of study poses an interesting case for wider debates about the relationship between religion and democracy, in which liberal democracy's perceived requirement of secularism is deemed incompatible with Islam (Hashemi, 2009, p. 1). Indeed, the acceptance of music is one component of debates about religiosity in the Islamic world; thus, its proscription under Shari'a law in Mali can be analysed as part of this wider debate. It has been demonstrated that music is a vital device through which Malians have come to understand and express identities, and it has been instrumental in fostering inter-cultural exchange. How, then, would Malian society be impacted in the event of music's absence? This section seeks to answer this question by discussing the issues of identity that came to the fore when Islamists captured the North and imposed Shari'a law, banning music. Before doing so, the co-existence, even intertwinement, of music and Islam in Mali prior to 2012 will be demonstrated. Prohibiting music, therefore, fundamentally raised questions regarding Malian identity, situated within a wider debate about religiosity and secularism.

On 22 August 2012, the following announcement was made by a spokesperson for MUJAO:

We, the mujahedeen of Gao, of Timbuktu and Kidal, henceforward forbid the broadcasting of any Western music on all radios in this Islamic territory [...] We do not want Satan's music. In its place there will be Quranic verse. Shari'a demands this. (quoted in Morgan, 2013a, p. 21)

Despite a secular constitution, Islam is integral to Malian national identity and has been one of the few unifying factors among the population. The complex and gradual spread of Islam in Mali goes beyond the scope of this discussion. In broadly simplistic terms, Le Vine (2007, p. 77) states that it was not until the twentieth century under French colonial rule that Islam became the religion of most Malians. At this time, the cross-pollination of religious practice with local cultures and traditions resulted in a broad range of Islamic interpretations, and while most Malians broadly identify as Sunni (Bell, 2012), such practices have been substantially shaped by animism, as well as by loose affiliations to major Sufi brotherhoods (Peterson, 2012). Indeed, certain practices closely tied to Sufism remain key to what it means to be Muslim for many Malians (Soares, 2007, p. 79). Of significance is the centrality of music in Sufi religious practice, particularly in the context of the *dhikr* (remembrance) ritual – the rhythmic chanting of the names of God – which can include singing, dancing and musical instruments (Charry, 2000b, p. 556). Here, religious music is emphasised as a means of becoming closer to God (Denny, 2016, p. 252).

In fact, Skinner (2016, p. 110) speaks of how musical expressions of Islamic praise in Mali have been popularised and consumed through a variety of media. Further, he emphasises the influence of Islam on Malian popular music, and further argues that 'the broad appeal (or call upon) Islam is part of what makes music "popular" in Bamako'. Musical forms of religious expression can be seen in the frequent insertion of Qur'anic verses or the inclusion of praise, into popular song texts. Skinner (2016, p. 116) uses the example of live performer Tata Diabeté, who at a wedding party sang 'God! Who created the earth, The almighty'. As such, the combination of sacred themes with secular popular music is evident. We can, therefore, see the use of music as a major platform for Islamic expression and identification, and the intertwining of a "Malian" and "Muslim" identity.



Significantly, this prevalence of Islam in the public sphere is emphasised by Soares (2005, p. 238) as being instrumental in fostering a 'supralocal sense of shared Muslim identity' in Mali. Thus, it is evident that music has been a vital mechanism through which Malians have practised Islam and expressed religious praise. Crucially, music has also contributed to the construction, among the majority of Malians, of an identity including being both Muslim *and* Malian. Why, then, did the Islamists ban music?

The music ban can firstly be situated within the wider debate about Islam, secularism and politics in Mali (Soares, 2007, p. 212). Such a debate came to the fore in the 1990s, when political liberalisation allowed for an explosion in Muslim voluntary associations. Many of these were supported by Middle-Eastern interest groups, who were particularly focused on proselytising a specific interpretation of Islam – Salafism – to counter the Sufis' syncretic innovations, which they abhorred. One of these was the Pakistani Da'wa al-Tabligh, with whom Iyad ag Ghali – a key proponent of the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s – is reported to have become involved in the early 2000s, leading to his adherence to the fundamentalist cause (Lloyd-George, 2012). Salafist groups follow the original path of Allah, as set down by the Prophet Mohammed in the Qur'an and the *hadith* (Morgan, 2013a, p. 107). Such a strict interpretation vastly differs from the majority of Muslims in Mali, who practise a form of Islam that is characteristically moderate. Thus, the espousal of Salafist doctrine in Mali, 'provoke[d] Malians to ask fundamental questions' about religion, morality and society, and the extent to which religion should govern everyday life (Morgan 2013a, p. 34). On a wider scale, the ban reflects increasing questions across the Islamic world about religiosity and the correct practice of Islam (Soares & Otayek, 2007, p. 17). One aspect of this debate is the lawfulness of music in Islam, on one side of which is the discussed Sufi principle of music's spiritual qualities. On the other side of the debate is the Salafi doctrine espoused by ag Ghali and the Islamic fundamentalists, which criticises the Sufis' elaborate musical practices as "heretical", fearing the intoxicating power of music (Salhi, 2013, p. 4).

Essentially, then, musicians in Mali have been on the "front-line" of a war between two different religious philosophies (Morgan, 2013a, p. 55). The imposition of Salafist doctrine was incongruous with the "Malian" Islam of syncretism and tolerance that characterised the country's culture and identity. Especially given the religious significance of music in Mali, justifying music's proscription on the grounds of Islam ultimately brought the very identity of many Malians into question. Musician Toumani Diabeté expressed such confusion:

I grew up with the Qur'an and the *kora* [...] that I would be in trouble for playing a traditional Malian instrument, a part of culture, I would never have imagined this in Mali (quoted in Höije, 2016)

The general perplexity of Malians towards the prohibition of music also reflects the way in which the Islamists were perceived as "alien". Notwithstanding the locally rooted MNLA movement, MUJAO and AQIM were generally seen as "foreign" organisations, despite the fact that some of their most prominent members were Malian nationals (Lecocq et al., 2013, p. 346). The alien form of Islam that quickly took control was fundamentally not *Malian*. With religion being one of the few unifying features of Mali's diverse ethnic landscape, the diffusion of new ideologies undoubtedly added another layer of tension and misunderstanding between the country's North and South (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 9). Thus, these events unsettled Mali's fragile cohesion and further questioned its already contentious national identity.

In terms of a blanket ban of music in a country by religious extremists, the only parallel from recent history can be drawn from the Taliban's extreme censorship of music in Afghanistan in 1996. This was justified by officials who argued that music has a 'corrupting influence [...] distracting [Muslims]



from their real duties: to pray and to praise Allah' (quoted in Baily, 2001, p. 39). Attributing music's proscription entirely to fundamentalist Islam, however, raises issues since there is no clear injunction within Islam against it. Different Qur'anic verses have been cited as being implicitly for and against music, and interpretations of the *hadith* in the debate have drawn varying conclusions from the same passages (Charry, 2000b, p. 554). Accordingly, Baily (2001, p. 41) argues that in the case of Afghanistan the ban was not directly related to Islam; rather, the Taliban were against any form of enjoyment or entertainment outside the sphere of religion. Similarly, many commentators on Mali see the music ban as aiming to destroy the country's rich culture and to destabilise the society that comes together around it. Morgan (2013a, p. 55), for example, emphasises that Malian musicians are, or are perceived to be, the conjurers of love, sensuality and joy – all the emotions the Salafi Islamists most revile and fear. The uniqueness of the circumstances whereby musicians were specifically targeted by militias gives much indication as to the role and power of music in Mali, which presented a threat to the Islamists' desire to impose authority.

Islamists threatened that they would cut out the tongue of famed Timbuktu musician Khaira Arby when they captured her (Coghlan, 2013). Tuareg musician Ahmed ag Kaedi was absent when militiamen ransacked his home and said they would 'cut all those fingers he uses to play that guitar'. The militiamen then proceeded to:

...Drag all [Ahmed's] musical equipment [...] into the courtyard. Amps, speakers, mics, a drum kit [...] a mixing desk and several guitars were heaped into a pile which was then doused in petrol and set alight (quoted in Morgan, 2013a, p. 54)

This account is typical of what happened to many musicians' homes, as well as live music venues and radio stations across the North of Mali. Such testimonies highlight the particularly dangerous position of musicians in the conflict, leading to the region becoming almost entirely devoid of music, musicians and indeed, in large part, people (Morgan, 2013a, p. 51). Altogether, over 350,000 Malians were displaced either internally or to neighbouring countries as a result of the conflict in 2012 (OCHA, 2013). These profound socio-cultural changes impacted the country's social fabric and weakened social cohesion. Having discussed the integral role music has played in constructing identities in Mali, and particularly in impacting national unity, it becomes evident that with the absence of music came the loss of a major force of cultural coherence and reconciliation.

In sections one and two, the role of the *jeli* and Tuareg poetry was discussed vis-à-vis their oral repertoires through which Malians and Tuareg alike have come to know their history and identity. It was through music that these oral histories have been retained and, thus, without music, Malians had lost an essential link to their past. Indeed, Bamako rapper Amkoullé (quoted in Morgan, 2013a, p. 94) sees this as a tactic of the Islamists, to 'destroy all reference, all memory and history' in order to replace it with their proposed Salafist doctrine. Further, the use of music as a tool to foster inter-cultural dialogue in Mali was discussed earlier, with reference to government initiatives (such as the *Biennales*), as well as more local initiatives (such as the FID). Essentially, music provided an excuse for people to come together in these contexts and fostered a collective Malian identity. Musician Vieux Farka Touré highlights this:

[Music] is our meeting place, where we're happy, where there's friendship and companionship... (quoted in Morgan, 2013a, p. 95)

It is evident, then, that in such an ethnically divided country, music was one of the most effective tools of socialisation and communal cohesion. Threatening this, as the Islamists did, inhibited a primary means through which ethnic groups in Mali articulated their own identities, as well as understood the identities of others. In a conflict that involved widespread violence and human rights



violations, relationships among the population were transformed and characterised by feelings of fear and distrust, resurrecting and deepening older divisions (Allegrozzi & Ford, 2013, p. 24). By obstructing the powerful role of music as a means of dialogue and unity, the ban deconstructed vital possibilities for national reconciliation and cohesion. In fact, sociologist Sujatha Fernandes (2013) uses the music ban in Mali to reflect on the power of music itself in a more general sense, stating that the loss of music as a means of social bonding, as a voice of conscience and as a mode of storytelling has 'taught us [that] music matters'.

What emerges from this discussion is that the ban of music in Mali, by unsettling the country's core values of religious syncretism and tolerance, has ultimately raised questions as to what it means to be "Malian", thereby undermining national cohesion. Identifying oneself as Malian or Muslim now entails complexities, such as: 'Who belongs to this nation? Who represents Islam?' (Skinner, 2016, p. 201). If music is deemed "un-Islamic", yet has historically been at the core of religious life in Mali, are religious identity and national identity in the country mutually exclusive? Such complexities persist following the uplifting of Shari'a law in February 2013, when Mali's Northern territory was liberated by a French-led operation. Islamists retain a lingering presence and musical performance, therefore, remains a hazardous activity. Building on this, the final section will discuss whether music can still play a role in cementing national cohesion in the aftermath of conflict.

The role of music after the conflict

Since the French-led intervention in 2013, Human Rights Watch (2017) have reported a steady increase in abuses against civilians in Northern Mali by Islamist armed groups, as well as rising inter-communal clashes. Further, Tuareg civilians remaining in Mali have often been stereotyped as suspected supporters of Islamists, and are fearful of reprisals by the Malian army and civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 42). As one woman from the Gao region concluded, 'the crisis has made everybody afraid of other people' (Oxfam International, 2013). The previous section highlighted the absence of music as a factor in exacerbating divisions between ethnic communities. As a result, the musicians who have been at the core of this largely ideological crisis have been led to consider the role they should play going forward. Given the centrality of music in constructing identities and impacting national cohesion in Mali, what role can music play in the country today, particularly for the purposes of national reconciliation and cohesion? This section will seek to evaluate this by firstly discussing the efforts of the Malian "A-listers", the focus of the international media, who portray a positive and optimistic vision of musical life in the country today. The post-conflict musical life in the North will then be discussed, as an aspect that has been largely sidelined by onlookers and which reserves a less optimistic position for music in national cohesion.

One reaction of musicians during the crisis has been to revitalise Malian music in order to re-build a nationalist sentiment (Skinner, 2016, p. 174). Since the music ban and the widespread media attention it generated, several Malian artists gained international exposure, as Western musicians sought to bring attention to the crisis. For example, the organisers of Glastonbury Festival in 2013 invited Malian acts to open its most renowned stage on each day in an act of "solidarity" (Morgan, 2013b). In another "show of solidarity", Western music collective Africa Express travelled to Bamako in October 2013 to 'revitalise the music scene' there and source new talent (Toledo, 2013). The greatest success story to come from this has been Songhoy Blues, a band formed of four musicians from the North who met in exile in Bamako. Since being scouted by Africa Express, the band have released two critically acclaimed albums and have toured internationally. The band, much like those other Malian artists in the international music scene, have used this platform as a means to raise awareness of Mali's conflict and to promote the country's culture. When I spoke to Aliou Touré, lead



singer of Songhoy Blues, he affirmed that the band's challenge was to 'spread Malian music and the Malian culture' and 'to talk about our story'. In doing so, these musicians have ensured that the global reaction to the crisis has been a particularly captivated and empathetic one (Morgan, 2013a, p. 76). Rather than the country being defined in terms of violence and disorder, the role of music in raising awareness has helped to define the country in terms of its musical richness.

A prominent theme among popular Malian artists in general has been to urge peace and reconciliation in their home country through their lyrics. For example, in Songhoy Blues' 'Désert Mélodie', the lyrics encourage a nationalist sentiment among Malians:

Today in Mali, they want to divide us...
We are the same people...
Mali we are all the same (Touré et al., 2015)

In their album notes, the band state that the purpose of this song is to 'call on people not to take sides' and to 'ask people to think of peace and find solutions'. Thus, by condemning violence and encouraging unity, it is hoped that the expressions of the musicians will motivate others. Another example is the recording of 'Mali-Ko' (Peace) by a collective of over 40 of Mali's most renowned musicians – Voices United for Mali – in response to the conflict. The song, in its 'multi-ethnic and multi-lingual display of artistry' (Whitehouse, 2013) encourages cohesion among the ethnic groups and frequently references the 'fatherland' and 'our ancestors', extolling traditional values of harmony. Affirming national unity, the lyrics repeat: 'Mali United, Mali Indivisible' (Voices United For Mali, 2013).

'Mali-Ko' exemplifies what Morgan (2015) labels the 'collective altruism' among Mali's musicians in response to the crisis. It carries a message of defiance, demonstrating their willingness to defend their country and its values (Whitehouse, 2013). The song also highlights the effort to revitalise Malian music in order to foster a sense of nationalist urgency. 'Mali-Ko' and other such examples of musical activism, however, gained their popularity from a 'new location of culture' (Skinner, 2016, p. 174), namely social media. Further, Aliou Touré told me that, since Songhoy Blues were launched straight into an international career, they do not have a large audience in Mali. At the same time, he underlined the importance of live performance in their home country, since people of all ethnicities convene to hear the music:

Music is one of the only ways that we can bring these people together and say something to them

Malian music has evidently been revitalised online and internationally, and such examples of musical activism have been the focus of international media regarding Malian music post-2012. As Aliou suggests, however, it is the ability of live music to bring people together that is of key importance for national cohesion. Indeed, as demonstrated earlier, live musical performance creates space for trust and the articulation of a collective identity. Whilst it is undeniable that these responses of popular musicians have raised the profile of Malian music and sent out powerful messages, little attention has been paid to those local artists who remain in the country. In order to determine the role of music in cementing national unity since the ban, it is important to survey the post-conflict musical culture in Mali itself.

Castelo-Branco (2010, p. 243) highlights how musical performance can provide a platform for dialogue among conflicting factions, stimulating communal feeling and, therefore, leading to reconciliation and peace. Reflecting this, and testament to Mali's rich musical culture, international and local actors in Mali have sought to utilise music to heal social relations following the 2012



conflict. One example is the concert portrayed in the documentary *They Will Have to Kill Us First* (2016), arranged by musician Khaira Arby in Timbuktu. The local population were invited, free of charge, to enjoy live musical performances to 'reconcile hearts' and 'erase the pain' of the conflict. The concert, by creating a space for people to come together and overcome differences, allowed Malians to imagine conflict resolution. It also demonstrated the role musicians assumed in the context of ongoing tensions, as Arby stated herself in the documentary that 'it's up to [...] the musicians to hold the country together'. The uncertainty and nervousness surrounding the organisation of the concert, however, must be remarked. Several security measures, such as maintaining the secrecy of the concert's time and location until the last minute, were taken in apprehension of Islamist attacks. Indeed, Morgan (2015) speaks of the Islamists' effect on local attitudes in the North, finding that there is continuing fear of outward displays of joy and music-making. Thus, the musical culture in the North remains harmed, contradicting the optimistic portrayals of the media. Music's role in rebuilding national cohesion in this context cannot be seen in such a straightforward way.

Further, as previously mentioned, the FID has been in "exile" from its desert home outside Timbuktu since 2012 due to the continuing instability in the North. Since 2013, the Festival's director Manny Ansar has reconceptualised the Festival as a travelling 'Cultural Caravan for Peace', showcasing Tuareg culture throughout Southern Mali and elsewhere in North Africa. The project seeks to provide a platform to meet and exchange ideas through music (Cultural Caravan for Peace, 2015). Optimistic of the caravan's role for national cohesion, its organisers envisioned it as being 'an important moment for national conciliation' (Maxwell, 2012). The efficacy of the original FID in achieving this has certainly been demonstrated, as discussed earlier. In fact, President Boubacar Keita – elected in August 2013 – and the UN have both named the FID as a priority in their strategy for reconciliation in the North (Morgan, 2013c). The inability to host the FID in its original form and location, however, points to the difficulty of national reconciliation following the 2012 events. Prior to the crisis, efforts to foster national cohesion involved, in very broad terms, reconciling ethnic groups. The FID was able to facilitate this goal by creating a space for ethnic groups to coalesce and imagine a collective Malian identity. The 2012 conflict has added a complex religious dimension to this, inhibiting music's ability to shape a Malian identity and, thereby, to effect cohesion. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the caravan's role as a discursive tool in the context of continuing insecurity, its stated aim in impacting national conciliation has become entangled in questions of religiosity.

To sum up the precarious position of music since 2012 in Mali, Baily's (2001, p. 45) contention in relation to Afghanistan that the absence of music was 'symptomatic and indicative of an *abnormal* life' can be transposed to the situation in Northern Mali. The FID's website (2013) affirms that the Festival will be in exile 'until the music can return to its roots with freedom of expression and dignity'. Here, Mali's musical *freedom of expression* within the context of Islam, of which the FID was a key signifier, can be labelled as a situation of "normality" in the country. In this state of affairs prior to 2012, the very *dignity* of music contributed to its importance in constructing what it means to be Malian and, thereby, impacted national cohesion. The continuing portrayal of music, however, as illegitimate or dishonourable in the eyes of Islamic fundamentalists, inhibiting the freedom of musical performance and resulting in the absence of the FID, indicates a situation of "abnormality" in Mali. In this context, the power of music for national cohesion is hindered due to the continued threat of Islamists. In sum, the FID represents "normality" vis-à-vis Malian musical freedom and its contribution to national cohesion.

The FID had been secretly scheduled to go ahead in late January 2017, but was again cancelled following a suicide attack in Gao two weeks before, killing at least 77 people (Maclean, 2017). Thus, there is an ongoing situation of "abnormality" as the crisis endures, and the ability of music



to foster cohesion in the North has been hindered by the continued presence of armed Islamist groups and the precariousness of musical performance. Until musical freedom can return without the threat of religious animosity, this situation will likely persist. Contrary to the media's optimism regarding Malian music, which has been largely focused on internationally famed musicians, the musical culture in the North today reveals a less optimistic role for music in cementing cohesion whilst instability persists. According to Høyer (2013, p. 4), for Mali to progress as a peaceful and democratic state, a process of national dialogue needs to take place, which can discuss the nature of the Malian nation and, in particular, the place of Islam within it. Perhaps once this has occurred, the role of music as a tool to construct identities and foster national unity could become vital once more in order to re-shape Malian identity.

Conclusion

Throughout the post-colonial era, music has been a key mechanism through which identities have been constructed in Mali. This article has demonstrated that these musical constructions of identity have fostered national unity, and are a crucial way in which regimes have created a "Malian" identity and propagated national cohesion. The marginalised representations of Tuareg culture in this national narrative resulted in manifestations of Tuareg separatism, widely spread through the medium of *al-guitara* music, which reinforced divisions among a minority of the population. The nature of multi-ethnic tolerance and co-existence that prevailed until 2012 in Mali, however, points to the widespread adherence to the concept of national unity. Although this article has only discussed one component of these processes of identity construction, music, its position at the forefront of efforts to cement national cohesion points to its power and capacity to shape identities.

The implementation of Shari'a law in 2012 and the proscription of music restricted a vital means of national cohesion and contributed to the breakdown of Mali's social fabric. In the final section, it was concluded that the ongoing insecurity in the North following the 2012–13 crisis and the still precarious nature of musical performance has impaired music's capacity to rebuild national unity. This is due to the religious complexities underlying the conflict and the consequent uncertainty about what it means to be "Malian", restricting music's ability to shape a collective identity. Though this presents a somewhat dismal projection of music's role for national cohesion, it is not to say that music will not be a vital medium to foster unity going forward. Music remains a crucial platform for inter-cultural dialogue in the country, and can play a role in changing attitudes toward ethnic groups in the context of ongoing inter-communal tensions. An elaboration of this concept was not explored in this article, although the ways in which Tuareg music can be used as a means of education to overcome negative stereotypes is worthy of further research.

Prior to conducting in-depth research for this article, a somewhat straightforward argument was anticipated regarding music's importance for national cohesion in Mali, thereby advocating its value post-2012. Such an impression was derived from the way in which the media have optimistically portrayed the prosperity of Malian music in response to the crisis. As discussed in the final section, however, these portrayals have focused on internationally renowned musicians who have raised the profile of Malian music, rather than those musicians in the country who can contribute to national cohesion in practice. Uncovering the reality of the ongoing insecurity and inter-communal strife affecting the musical culture of the Northern region led to the questioning of this positive conclusion.

Ultimately, this article has underscored the historical importance music has held for Mali's multi-ethnic population. The events of 2012 made clear the cohesiveness that the country's music fostered, especially as the once vibrant musical culture has yet to return fully to the population who remain divided. The music ban and its effects are just one component of an ongoing debate about Islam



and secularism in Mali, in which, as Morgan (2013a, p. 48) states, musical life can be interpreted as the 'barometer of social well-being'. Indeed, when musical freedom is allowed to return to the North, this will mark the beginning of a process in which Mali's multi-ethnic cohesion and peaceful co-existence can be reconstructed.

About the author

Samantha Potter graduated from the University of St Andrews in 2017 with a 1st class degree in International Relations. In her final year, she focused her studies on the relationship between music and politics, particularly the impact of music on social change. She is now looking to start a career in the music industry with a particular interest in world music.



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Empirical perspectives on religion and violence

by Joshua David Wright and Yuelee Khoo



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Abstract

The 'religion as cause' argument implies that religious faiths are more inherently prone to violence than ideologies that are secular. Following an evaluation of the scientific literature on religion and violence, we argue that wherever evidence links specific aspects of religion with aggression and violence, these aspects are not unique to religion. Rather, these aspects are religious variants of more general psychological processes. Further, there are numerous aspects of religion that buffer against aggression and violence among its adherents. The most distinct feature of religion, supernaturalism, is not often the focus of researchers of religion and violence. Despite this, the paucity of research that has been conducted on this key feature suggests that supernaturalism is associated with reduced aggression and violence. There appears to be very little support for the notion that there is something uniquely religious that causes violence among followers.

Keywords: Religion and Violence, Religiosity, Threat, Aggression, Religious Orientation, Secularism, Religious Identity, Fundamentalism

Empirical perspectives on religion and violence

On 7 January 2015, Islamic fundamentalists murdered 12 people at the offices of Charlie Hebdo. Nicholas Kristof, of the New York Times, asked, "Is there something about Islam that leads inexorably to violence" (2015: January 7)?" This reflects the broader view in modern discourse that religious groups are more prone to violence than secular groups (Avalos, 2005; Kimball, 2008). Religious studies scholar Charles Kimball (2008) claims "... more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history" (p. 1). Likewise, Hector Avalos claims that religions, as opposed to secular groups, are "inherently prone to violence" (2005, p. 347). Not only do academic scholars propagate this view, but popular writers have also argued for the inherency of religious violence (Dawkins, 2003; Harris, 2005). Even early figures in psychology observed the violent nature of religious groups. Sigmund Freud stated, "Religion, even if it calls itself of love, must be hard and unloving to those who do not belong to it. Fundamentally indeed every religion is in the same way a religion of love for all those whom it embraces; while cruelty and intolerance towards those who do not belong to it are natural to every religion" (1921; p.128).

Karen Armstrong suggests, "The popular belief that religion is the cause of the world's bloodiest conflicts is central to our modern conviction that faith and politics should never mix". In the 18th century, God was replaced by secular liberal ideals and the nation-state, making it "admirable to die for your country, but not for your religion" (2014). Of course, under certain conditions religion can contribute to violence; however, "what is implied in the conventional wisdom that religion is prone to violence is that Christianity, Islam, and other faiths are more inclined toward violence than ideologies and institutions that are identified as 'secular'" (Cavanaugh, 2007; p. 1). We examine



two general questions in this review. First, to what extent are religion and violence related? Second, is this connection between religion and violence specific to some feature of religion or part of a more general social psychology of group identity, which also applies to the secular. Our interest is in a scientific examination of these questions. We are interested in systematically collected data that are both reproducible and objective. As such, we examine correlational, experimental, and longitudinal research in the science of religion and violence. Through this review we argue that, despite evidence linking specific aspects of religion with aggression, these aspects are not unique to religion. These aspects are religious variants of more general psychological processes. The key feature that distinguishes religious groups from secular groups—supernaturalism—has been ignored in studies of religion and aggression. Ultimately, the literature reveals the role of general psychological processes inherent to aggression and violence but provides no evidence of a unique role of religion.

Religion and intergroup relations

Religion follows general social psychological principles of group behavior. The existence of groups and related social processes cause ingroup solidarity and outgroup derogation under conditions in which these group differences become salient. Additionally, strong beliefs are often related to greater defense of beliefs when threatened.

Ingroup solidarity and outgroup derogation

Social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) developed out of realistic group conflict theory (RCT) (Campbell, 1965), which argued that conflict emerged over competition for resources. The foundation of SIT argued that RCT ignored discussions about how group identity developed and how group identity could be maintained or changed (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Social identity refers to “those aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging” (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; p. 283). In describing the religious identity and violence link, James Wellman and Kyoko Tokuno state, “The symbolic and social boundaries of religion (no matter how fluid or porous) mobilize individual and group identity into conflict, and sometimes violence, within and between groups” (2004, p. 291). The minimal group paradigm (Sherif et al., 1961) suggests that even minimal similarity between individuals is a sufficient mechanism for ingroup solidarity to form and for antagonistic behavior toward outgroups to develop. SIT posits that a primary goal of group behavior is to maintain positive distinctiveness (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). When this positive group distinctiveness is threatened, conflict may result. Terrorism in the Islamic world may be a result of a loss of personal identity and the development of a collective identity through joining a terrorist group, and the expression of “a chronic orientation to intergroup conflict” stemming from minority status and collective identity salience (Taylor and Louis, 2004, p. 180). Collective identity salience and perceived threats to that collective identity may enhance intergroup conflict and cause retaliatory behaviors (Fischer, Haslam and Smith, 2010; Wright, 2017, 2015).

Threats to social and religious identity

Before the Charlie Hebdo murders, the paper had just published provocative cartoons of the Islamic prophet, Muhammad (Bilefsky and de la Baume, 2015). They did the same thing in 2011, for which the magazine was bombed (Jolly, 2011). These and similar instances can be viewed within this social



identity approach wherein perceptions of threat, which can lead to reduced positive distinctiveness, can result in reactive aggression as a mechanism of retaining positive distinctiveness (Wright, 2015).

Threats against the collective may imply a threat to the self, especially if the collective identity of the target is salient (Fischer et al., 2010). This effect is succinctly stated, "When individuals experience an event as threatening their identity, they may react emotionally and may be easily mobilized by leaders to react violently" (Beit-Hallahmi, 2015; p. 54). Wright and Young (2017) demonstrated that the experimental manipulation of religious identity salience affected the extent to which anger and hostility were increased in response to a threat towards one's religious identity.

Aggressive responses to threats exist as ways of bolstering the positive value of one's social identity when the group's value is impeded in some way (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Threats to the positive value of a social identity can lead to high identifiers responding to threats with outgroup derogation, perceived ingroup homogeneity, and increased self-stereotyping (Branscombe et al., 1999). Branscombe et al. (1999) further suggest that threats to the value of social identity will lead to defensive reactions. Researchers demonstrated this effect in a sample of Christian and Muslim students (Ysseldyk, Matheson and Anisman, 2011). Participants were subjected to a manipulation intended to threaten the participant's religious group, followed by assessments of emotions and action intentions. Stronger religious identity was related to increased anger in response to threat and greater intentions to engage in confrontation.

An analysis of perceptions of threat among Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Muslims in the United States suggested that greater perception of threats toward one's religious identity was linked to more negative outgroup attitudes among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (Pasek and Cook, 2018). Threats from Muslims toward Norwegian and American Christian identities have been linked to support for collective action against Muslim immigrants (Study 1 and Study 2; Obaidi et al., 2018) and threats toward Muslim identity were associated with anti-Western hostilities (Study 3 and 4; Obaidi et al., 2018). Similar results were found in a study assessing reactions to threats towards one's gender and national identities (Fischer et al., 2010), suggesting that this process is not an inherent aspect of religion, but an aspect of social identities in general. In one study, participants engaged in a conversation where either a participant's national identity or religious identity was denigrated, or participants had a neutral conversation. Denigration of participant's national identity resulted in greater aggression relative to both denigration of religion and the neutral control (Wright, Agterberg, and Esses, 2019).

Following the terrorist attacks in New York City on 11 September 2001, researchers had individuals report the extent to which they perceived the terrorist attacks to be a violation of sacred values (Mahoney et al., 2002). They found that the greater this perception was, the more individuals endorsed the use of nuclear and biological weapons as a response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Similarly, the more Christians perceive Jews as desecrators of Christianity, the more prejudice they exhibit toward Jews (Pargament et al., 2007). More government restrictions on religious groups are associated with more religious hostilities and the most violent regions in the world reflect the most government restrictions toward religion (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2013). However, research on identity fusion (i.e. a family-like bond) suggests that fusion with Judaism, rather than fusion with Israel, was linked to greater endorsement of extreme retaliatory actions against the Palestinians following the 2015 Intifada (Fredman, Bastian and Swann Jr., 2017). This would seem to indicate a specific effect of religion within the Israeli-Palestinian case, except other work similarly links secular identity fusion with extreme pro-group behaviors (Bortolini et al., 2018) and violence (Newson, 2017), suggesting that the effect is not religiously specific.



Additionally, some research casts doubt that threat will always result in ingroup solidarity and outgroup hate. Ysseldyk et al. (2011) found evidence that an experimental condition of threat caused increased positive feelings toward the ingroup but had no effect on feelings toward the outgroup in a sample of Christians and Atheists from Britain. Despite this, the consensus across the literature appears to be that, under condition of threat, hostility toward outgroups is generally the result. Karen Armstrong states, "Every fundamentalist movement that I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is rooted in a profound fear of annihilation, convinced that the liberal or secular establishment is determined to destroy their way of life" (2014, p. 1). While threat perceptions toward individuals' religious identities may institute aggressive or violent responses, these effects are a product of a general social psychological process of group behavior, rather than anything inherent to religion. Is there uniqueness to religious identity that leads to violence beyond an overall effect of group differentiation, ingroup solidarity and outgroup derogation that is shared by secular social groups?

Religious fundamentalism

Following the Charlie Hebdo massacre, and as a response to Nicholas Kristof's question, Wright (2016b) examined why Islam is overrepresented in religious terrorism (Ben-Dor and Pedahzur, 2003; Piazza, 2009). In a study of over 52,000 religious individuals across 59 countries, Muslims reported more fundamentalist beliefs than did adherents of other religions including Protestants, Catholics, Hindus and Jews (Wright, 2016b). The link between fundamentalism and hostility is well established: the higher the level of fundamentalism, the more outgroup animosity is exhibited (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992; Henderson-King et al., 2004; Hunsberger, 1996; Johnson, Rowatt and LaBouff, 2012; Rothschild, Abdollahi and Pyszczynski, 2009). It is clear that majority Muslim countries have seen a rapid rise in the overall share of civil wars, peaking at one hundred percent of all civil wars in 2012 (Gleditsch and Rudolfsen, 2016). However, is fundamentalism a direct cause or might fundamentalism simply exacerbate responses to threats toward one's social identity? This is one argument described by Wright (2016b), who suggested that Muslims might be more susceptible to religious calls to violence via this heightened fundamentalism. However, studies have yet to empirically examine this idea.

Secular groups can also exhibit fundamentalist beliefs and react violently, in part, due to these beliefs. For example, fundamentalist thinking is exhibited in both extremes of the political spectrum (Toner et al., 2013) and eco-terrorism is not linked to a religious ideology (Eagan, 1996). Dogmatism (lack of openness in beliefs) is associated with hostility and aggression (Heyman, 1977) and dogmatic atheists act with prejudice against value violating outgroups (Kossowska et al., 2017). In fact, non-believers may actually be more dogmatic than believers (Uzarevic, Saroglou and Clobert, 2017). In part, religious violence in Muslim countries may be a result of pressures from secular nationalism (Juergensmeyer, 2010) and reactance to interventions by major powers (Gleditsch and Rudolfsen, 2016), rather than some unique fundamentalist character of religion.

Conflicts over religious values and religious beliefs

Perhaps one underlying difference between religious groups and others are the values that form out of a belief in the supernatural and the practices developed to express these beliefs and values. Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000) describe three reasons that conflicts over values are more likely to be violent than conflicts over interests. First, conflicts over values place one's deeply held values in threat of being extinguished and replaced by outgroup's values. Second, values are related to morality and the defense of values may be seen as morally justified. Third, religious values passed



on by supernatural authorities are absolute, meaning that compromises are not possible without implying a non-absolute nature to these values. We examine three areas in which empirical research has addressed potential links between beliefs/values and violence: the relationship between religious practices and aggression, the relationship between religious orientation and aggression, and through cognitive priming studies.

Religious involvement and aggression

Blanket statements about religion causing violence assume that religious people are equivocal in their engagement with their religion, in the importance of their religion and in their interpretation of religion. Yet, different religions place different emphases on different aspects of religious practice (e.g. prayer, service attendance, reading of scripture) and highlight different values and beliefs to different degrees (Wright, 2016b). For example, a greater percentage of Jews report attending religious services at least once per week relative to Christians, Muslims, and Hindus (Wright, 2016b). In the United States, Jehovah's witnesses pray more often than any other religious group, including Protestant and Catholic Christians, Muslims, and Jews (Rosentiel, 2009). We noted at the outset that the quantitative research in this area has failed to account for differences in content expressed in different houses of worship within the same religious group. While some researchers have investigated the impact of religious content on aggression (Bushman et al., 2007), this work has not been incorporated into studies of frequency of involvement.

Greer et al. (2005) reveal the complexities in evaluating religious practices to aggressive behavior. They tested whether church attendance, engagement in church activities, or donation pattern affected self-reported vengeance in Christian participants, finding that greater frequency of church attendance and greater frequency of engagement in church activities was associated with less self-reported vengeance (Greer et al., 2005). However, a more consistent donation pattern was related to greater self-reported vengeance. Based upon the church attendance and prejudice relationship (Allport and Ross, 1967), there appeared to be a relational inconsistency between frequency of church attendance and the outcomes of vengeance compared to prejudice. Greer et al. (2005) explained this finding as a problem of church attendance reflecting social pressures of parents in their sample, which they argued made donation pattern and engagement in church activities better indicators of religious involvement. However, in a similar study, American Christian participants were measured on frequency of prayer and frequency of church attendance, followed by an assessment of attitudes towards violence against terrorists in the Middle East (Shaw, Quezada and Zárata, 2011). Prayer was unrelated to attitudes towards violence but did strengthen the relationship between moral certainty (belief that one's morals are absolute) and attitudes towards violence against terrorists in the Middle East. The same effect was found for church attendance (Shaw et al., 2011).

In a study of 600 men in the Arkansas correctional system, Benda and Toombs (2000) found a combined measure of religiosity (frequency of prayer, bible study, church activity, talking about religion and attempts to convert others) related to lower self-reported acts of actual violent behavior over one's lifetime. A negative relationship between frequency of church involvement and number of violent crimes committed nationally in Sweden has also been documented (Pettersson, 1991). Longitudinal work confirms the relationship between greater involvement in religious activities and less aggressive behavior across the lifespan (Huesmann, Dubow, and Boxer, 2011).

Another way to evaluate the link between religion and violence would be to compare religious versus non-religious people rather than relating degree of religiousness across religious people to these outcome variables. Landau et al. (2002) compared aggression between religious and secular Israeli Jewish school children. Religious Jewish school children engaged in significantly less



indirect aggression than secular Jewish school children; however, religion did not affect physical or verbal aggression. A study in Indonesia indicated that religious practice (measured as a function of mandated prayer, optional prayer, fasting and religious activities) was associated with less agreement with violent jihad (Muluk et al., 2013). This finding is in line with the argument that many religious Islamist radicals are recent converts, not steeped in their religious tradition (Stern, 2010). Other results, however, suggest that religious involvement is unrelated to aggression (Hardy et al., 2012).

Religious involvement is comprised of a number of unique factors and lumping various indices of religious involvement together may lead to inaccurate findings. Ginges, Hansen and Norenzayan (2009) indicated that frequency of Mosque attendance was associated with Palestinian Muslims supporting suicide attacks against Israeli Jews, but prayer frequency was not. In a similar manner, Wright (2014) found that the inverse relationship between a combined religious involvement measure and anger could be independently attributed to frequency of reading scripture. Under condition of cognitive activation of religious identity, high frequency of scriptural reading related to decreased anger in response to a threat to religious identity. Likewise, the inverse relationship between religious involvement and hostility could be independently attributed to frequency of prayer (Wright, 2014). In this case, when religious identity was cognitively activated, high prayer frequency related to decreased hostility in response to a threat toward one's religious identity.

Aspects of the religious experience are each unique and can have independent, and even opposite, effects on aggression and violence. This is reiterated in a cross-national sample, which suggests that higher frequency of religious service attendance may be the only religious involvement variable associated with greater agreement that violence against others is justified (Wright, 2016a). This supports the coalitional commitment hypothesis suggested by others (Ginges et al., 2009; Ginges, Hansen and Norenzayan, 2010). In general, frequency of attendance at religious services has been most associated with increased hostility toward outgroups and greater intentions to harm outgroup members. However, this variable represents a general commitment to a coalitional identity and is not religious specific. The link between religious service attendance and aggression or violence may be a byproduct of collective ritual (Ginges et al., 2009; Ginges et al., 2010), which can exist outside of religious contexts (Jackson and Masters, 2006, Jones, 2000). Additionally, activation of religious identity may play a role in moderating the effects of involvement (Wright and Young, 2017). This activation is accomplished through cognitive priming.

Cognitive priming

Cognitive priming is utilized to activate a particular identity-based response. It is assumed that attitudes and behaviors are guided by the salient identity. In one study, religious and non-religious participants were primed with either a passage framed as coming from the bible or framed as coming from an ancient scroll (Bushman et al., 2007). Furthermore, participants either read an inserted two sentences, in which God sanctioned the violence in the passage, or did not. Results indicated that exposure to violent scripture that is also supported by God can cause readers to act aggressively in a later competitive reaction time game (Bushman et al., 2007). This finding occurred in both religious and non-religious participants, suggesting that the priming effect of scriptural violence paired with priming a deity's justification of this violence can induce aggression even in non-believers. Additionally, this effect mirrors the broader effect of engaging in harm when this harm is sanctioned by an authority figure (Burger, 2009). It matters not whether this authority is religious or secular.



Other work on the religiosity-aggression link utilizes priming of specific religious practices (e.g. prayer). Leach, Berman and Eubanks (2008) found no differences in aggression across groups engaged in different religious practices. Participants engaged in either reading of biblical scripture, meditation, or secular reading for five minutes. Participants who engaged in biblical reading or meditation/prayer showed similar aggression levels in a later competitive reaction time game. Similarly, Ginges et al. (2009) utilized a synagogue priming condition, a prayer priming condition (asking participants about their frequency of prayer), and a no prime control to determine that Israeli Jewish participants in the synagogue prime condition were more likely than those in both the prayer prime and the no prime condition to support suicide attacks against Palestinian Muslims. Ginges and colleagues (2010) argued that the perceived relationship between religion and violence may be due to the role religion plays in binding communities of believers and facilitating parochial altruism (Choi and Bowles, 2007; Ginges and Atran, 2009; Graham and Haidt, 2010).

The studies of Leach et al. (2008) and Ginges et al. (2009) indicate that different aspects of religion may have different behavioral correlates and priming one aspect of religion does not necessarily activate religious identity as a general construct. The activation of religious identity may be context specific and while priming prayer may activate connectedness with God, priming service attendance may activate coalitional commitment and parochial altruism.

Activating one's religious identity through an experimental manipulation moderates the relationship between religious involvement and anger, as well as hostility, such that religious involvement is inversely related to anger and hostility when one's religious identity is activated (Wright and Young, 2017). The opposite effect appears to occur with religious commitment, whereby religious commitment relates to increased anger when one's religious identity is activated and religious identity threat is present (Wright and Young, 2017). However, some work questions whether religious identification and threat necessarily promote intergroup hostility (Ysseldyk et al., 2011). These researchers manipulated group-based threat by either exposing Christian participants to negative images (Dawkins's book, *The God Delusion*) or exposing participants to positive images (hands praying and candles burning). Results indicated that among those exposed to the group-based threat images, positive feelings toward the in-group increased. However, negative feelings toward the out-group (i.e. atheists) were unaffected (Ysseldyk et al., 2011).

Religious primes may actually act as moderators between an experience (e.g. perceived threat or social exclusion) and aggression against others. Aydin, Fischer and Frey, (2010) assessed whether priming participants' religious identities acted as a buffer against aggressive behavior as a response to social exclusion. Participants were primed on social inclusion or exclusion via a hypothetical vignette (Aydin et al., 2010). Afterward, participants either described their perceptions of religiousness and how religion affects their own lives or described their perceptions of environmental protections and how environmental protection affects their own lives. Participants then completed the ice water aggression paradigm, in which participants allocate how long another "participant" must insert their hand in ice-cold water as part of a separate research study. Exclusion primed participants were more aggressive toward the other participant than inclusion primed participants. More importantly, priming religious identity effectively buffered exclusion primed participants from any increased aggressive behavior (Aydin et al., 2010).

These results support arguments that religious beliefs generally promote peace in human relations (Nepstad, 2004; Shepperd, Miller and Smith, 2015) and corroborate other empirical research (Bremner, Koole and Bushman, 2011; Schumann et al., 2014). For example, Bremner et al. (2011) suggests that praying for others results in decreased anger and aggression toward an insulting stranger. In Study 1 of Bremner et al., (2011), participants wrote a five-minute essay, which was



rated poorly by another participant. Following this, participants read a story about a student who suffered from neuroblastoma and were asked to either think about the student or to pray for the student. Participants in the prayer condition reported less self-reported anger relative to those in the “thinking” condition. In Study 2 of Bremner et al., (2011), participants either wrote an essay about an event that made them angry or wrote a neutral essay. As in Study 1 of Bremner et al., (2011), participants were provided either negative feedback or positive feedback. Participants then either engaged in prayer for the partner who graded their essay or simply thought about their partner. Participants in the prayer prime exhibited lower aggression compared to participants in the thinking prime (Bremner et al., 2011).

That prayer reduces aggression in response to provocation may be because religious beliefs are generally non-hostile and promote peace and forgiveness, not violence. Schumann et al. describe religious beliefs as magnanimous and demonstrate that priming religious beliefs buffers negative effects of mortality salience; participants have reduced accessibility of revenge-related words and exhibit less vengeful reactions to an offending group (2014, p. 432). However, participants’ endorsements of revenge against an offending group depend upon the tone of a religious prime. If the prime enhances the eye for an eye mantra, then revenge is enhanced; if the prime enhances the turn the other cheek mantra, then revenge is reduced (Schumann et al., 2014).

Specific beliefs about heaven and hell have been divergently related to national crime rates such that higher belief in hell at the national level is related to lower national crime rates (Shariff and Rhemtulla, 2012). Beliefs about whether religion serves purposes within the physical life or the afterlife also moderate the relationship between religious service attendance and the extent that believers justify violence against others (Wright, 2016a). Among people who see religion as a supernatural meaning system, the association between greater religious service attendance and increased justification of violence against others is attenuated (Wright, 2016a).

Supernatural punishment theory suggests that divergent beliefs about a punishing versus a forgiving God should affect both prosocial and aggressive behavior (Johnson, 2011; Johnson and Krüger, 2004). This has been examined via priming specific God concepts, such as authoritarian images of God or benevolent images of God (Johnson et al., 2013). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four priming conditions, in which an image of one of the following was shown: an angry God (Authoritarian), Jesus (Benevolent), symbols of the spirit (Benevolent), or abstract art (Control). Increased aggression toward a hypothetical other only emerged for those primed with the authoritarian God image. This was further moderated by religion, in which the effects only applied to non-Catholic Christians. These results are important in light of evolving and infinite conceptualizations of God (Johnson et al., 2013). In contrast to a generic “religion as cause” perspective, priming benevolent conceptualizations of God did not induce aggression relative to the secular abstract art condition (Johnson et al., 2013).

The cognitive activation of religious identity is not unitary. Rather, the content, context and specificity of priming religious identity have important implications for assessing hostile cognitions and aggressive and violent behavior. Another avenue of research on the religion and violence link addresses the motivations of people who engage in religious activities.

Religious orientation and aggression

People have different motivations for engaging in religious behaviors and conceptualizations of extrinsic versus intrinsic religiosity were developed to differentiate between those who engage in religion for personal gain (e.g. to feel good about oneself) versus those who are motivated to live



out their faith in their daily lives (Allport and Ross, 1967). To explain the curvilinear relationship^[1] between church attendance and prejudice (Streuning, 1963), Gordon Allport and J. Michael Ross suggested that high frequency attenders (i.e. more than 11 times per month) are less prejudiced than both non-frequent attenders and non-attenders because these persons “receive something of special ideological and experiential meaning” (1967, p. 434). Casual members regard religion and religious contacts as less binding in their personal lives, while frequent attenders see religion as intricately connected to their daily lives, including their behaviors, and self-conception. Thus one’s motivations for attending religious services may be more explanatory than frequency of involvement. C. Daniel Batson (1976) developed a third motivation, quest religiosity, which involves “religion as an endless process of probing and questioning generated by tensions, contradictions, and tragedies...” (1976, p. 32). Quest believers are not necessarily aligned with particular religious creeds, but continually question the nature and structure of religion and life itself. Thus there is no absolute truth in religion for quest believers. In other words, there is no fundamentalism.

Greer et al. (2005) explored the relationship between religious orientation and retaliation. Participants were paired with a partner in order to compete in a reaction time game. Participants completed self-report measures of extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation, quest orientation and vengeance. Subjects were told they were playing a reaction time game against a “partner” (but wins and losses were predetermined). Participants selected a shock level before each trial and the loser received the selected shock. Shock levels increased throughout the experiment and topped at a level double the participant’s maximum tolerance. The highest-level shock was never delivered, because the participant would always win this trial, but acted as provocation. Retaliation was operationalized as the average of the last two participants’ assigned shock levels (i.e. those following the attempted delivery of the strongest shock by their “partner”). Extrinsic orientation was related to more self-reported vengeance and unrelated to retaliation. Intrinsic orientation was related to less self-reported vengeance and unrelated to retaliation. Only quest orientation was related to less self-reported vengeance and retaliation (Greer et al., 2005). Other studies have corroborated the negative relationship between intrinsic orientation and self-reported aggression (Storch and Storch, 2002; Abel-Cooper, 2001).

Leach, Berman and Eubanks (2008) extended these findings by investigating how religious orientation affects aggression, both via self-report and a behavioral task. Participants completed self-reported aggression and religious orientation, followed by the reaction time game. Intrinsic orientation was associated with less self-reported aggression but unrelated to behavioral aggression. Extending on the findings of Greer et al., Leach and colleagues divided extrinsic orientation into two subscales: extrinsic personal (EP) and extrinsic social (ES). The former focuses on personal well-being and protection (e.g. “I pray mainly to get relief and protection”), while the latter focuses on social benefits and rewards (e.g. “I go to church mainly to spend time with my friends”). While evidence had previously shown a positive relationship between extrinsic orientation and self-reported aggression, Leach et al. (2008) demonstrated that this relationship is due to the extrinsic personal subscale, which related positively to both self-reported aggression and behavioral aggression.

The evidence suggests that intrinsic orientation relates to less self-reported aggression, while at least one aspect of extrinsic orientation relates to more self-reported aggression. In addition, both do not appear directly related to behavioral aggression in laboratory tasks (Greer et al., 2005; Leach et al., 2008). Only quest orientation was related to less actual and self-reported aggression. Also instructive are the relationships between religious orientations and prejudice and between religious orientations and pro-sociality. Intrinsic and quest orientations are linked with less overt prejudice;

[1] A curvilinear relationship describes a relationship in which one variable increases as the other variable also increases up to a certain point before the relationship reverses. Subsequently, as one variable increases the other decreases.



however, intrinsic orientation has been found unrelated to covert prejudice while quest orientation has been found negatively related (Batson, 1978; Batson, 1986). No significant relationship was found between extrinsic orientation and prejudice. The relationships between religious orientations and prejudice partially mirror the relationships between religious orientation and self-reported aggression. Further, the literature suggests that intrinsically oriented individuals score higher on self-reported altruism and are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior than extrinsically oriented individuals (Batson and Florey, 1990; Watson et al., and 1984; Chau et al, and 1990; Hunsberger and Platonow, 1986; Benson et al., 1980). Additionally, quest-oriented individuals are more engaged in prosocial behavior although their approach may differ from intrinsically oriented individuals (Batson, 1976).

Religion as post-hoc justification

Here we focus on research addressing whether religion acts as a post-hoc justification for violence caused by other factors. Large international datasets provide some way of getting at these types of questions. Religious grievances do not appear related to mobilization of religious groups for rebellion, although they relate to mobilization of religious groups for protest (Fox, 1999). Fox further notes that political discriminations and grievances over autonomy must be present for a positive relationship to exist between religious institutions and mobilization for rebellion. He summarizes that “religious institutions do, in fact, support both violent and quietist tendencies, depending upon the situation” (1999, p. 130). When no other factors are considered, religious institutions are related to lower levels of protest and unrelated to rebellion, indicating that secular factors motivate religious institutions to mobilize for rebellion.

Some empirical laboratory work has been carried out to investigate the use of religion as a legitimizer of violence. Bushman et al. (2007) investigated whether scriptural violence and God-supported violence increased believers’ aggression in a competitive reaction time task. Participants who read a passage framed as coming from the Bible delivered a greater number of noise bursts at the highest level than did participants who read a violent passage framed as coming from an ancient scroll. Participants who read the violent passage with an inserted section about God sanctioning violence allocated a greater number of the highest-level noise bursts compared to those who read the passage without the inserted section about God sanctioning the violence. In a second study that included non-believers, noise allocation was increased in both believers and non-believers when they read the passage in which God sanctioned the violence, although this effect was still greater in believers. This series of studies suggests that scripture and the presentation of God as sanctioning violence may increase aggressive behavior in both religious and secular individuals. A similar study suggested that both religious and secular individuals administered increased shock levels in a competitive reaction time task if the fictitious opponent was not a member of the participant’s own group (Dor-Shav, Friedman and Tcherbonogura, 1978).

Selengut (2008) argues that doctrine is a cause of violence in the case of Palestine and Israel and concepts such as just war theory and liberation theology seem to use doctrine in order to justify violence in some cases (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000). In Christian theology, the book of Revelation is a rather violent collection of passages describing the end of the world when God comes to judge the world. Munson (2005) argues that passages such as this indicate the causal effect of religion on violence, and yet empirical evidence suggest that belief in hell (i.e. evidence of a punishing God) actually relates to drastic decreases in national crime rates (Shariff and Rhemtulla, 2012). Likewise, a multilevel and cross-national investigation indicated that high aggregated national level ratings of importance of God strengthen the negative relationship between individual



level importance of God and the extent to which people justify violence against others (Wright, 2016a). People who support the contention that religious belief causes violence rely on selected application of religious texts and ignore empirical investigations of this relationship. As Ginges et al. state,

“Insurgent political violence has been conducted in the name of any number of beliefs, including religion, human rights, freedom, and preferred forms of economic organization. That these various rationales are employed does not tell us whether the beliefs themselves—the tenets of religion, democracy, freedom—actually cause people to go to war, or whether they are merely epiphenomenal *post hoc* rationales to justify intergroup violence” (2010, p. 347).

People may utilize religion as a justification in order to ameliorate negative attributes of oneself that stem from engaging in socially unacceptable or morally questionable behavior.

Alternative explanations for religion and violence

Thus far, the major findings in the religion and violence literature do not support the notion that violence is inherent to religion or that there is something unique to religion that causes violence. Additionally, there are a multitude of well-supported alternative explanations to violence even when religious people or religious groups are involved in violent encounters.

Deprivation and marginalization

In considering alternative explanations for a link between religion and political violence, Zaidise, Canetti-Nisim and Pedahzur (2007) found that socio-economic deprivations underscored Muslim's support for political violence in Israel. Additionally, higher religiosity was associated with less support for political violence in both Muslims and Jews. Canetti et al. (2010) found Muslims to be more religious and more supportive of political violence. They also are subject to more discrimination in comparison to Jews in Israel. The relationships between religion being Muslim and support for political violence and between religiosity and support for political violence are mediated by factors of psychological and economic loss (Canetti et al., 2010). These same researchers found that loss of psychological resources has the greatest impact on support for political violence. Furthermore, feelings of marginalization and insignificance and perceptions of discrimination increase support for radicalism among American Muslims (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015) and feelings of being treated unfairly is linked to support for violent jihad (Muluk, Sumaktoyo and Ruth, 2013). Terrorists consistently reveal profound experiences of humiliation or shame brought upon them by external forces (Jones, 2010).

Avalos's (2005) theory of religion and violence reiterates realistic conflict theory (Campbell, 1965), in which “scarce resources, real or perceived, are a major factor in violence” (p. 93). Avalos's contribution is a series of resources that he claims are religiously specific and that religious groups engage in conflict over. His inscripturation is nothing more than conflict over ideas, sacred space as conflict over territory through hierarchical structures (i.e. social dominance theory; Pratto et al., and 1994), and group privileging as social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). These resources fit well within the category of cultural and symbolic resources incorporated in other models (Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998), which apply to both secular and religious groups. Avalos's concept of conflict over access to salvation is undermined by research suggesting that peoples' motives for violent collective action are bound by moral commitment to collective interests, not individual



incentives (Ginges and Atran, 2009). Avalos's claim that religions, as opposed to secular groups, are "inherently prone to violence" (2005, p. 347) relies predominantly on evidence of basic group processes, not any inherent aspect of religion. Canetti et al. conclude, "It is likely that the extent to which people suffer resource loss, predominantly psychological resource loss, explains support for political violence" (2010, p. 583), and this resource loss is not specific to religious groups.

Mobilization hypothesis

A second alternative mechanism to any inherent nature of religion that connects religion and violence is mobilization and politicization of religious factors (Basedau et al., 2011). If the mobilization hypothesis has merit, we should find that regions with diverse religious groups or rapid large-scale changes in religious groups, should inherently have more conflict than those that do not, and yet evidence suggests that this is not the case (Fox, 1999; Russett, Oneal and Cox, 2000; Tusicisny, 2004). However, some findings in conflict prone African countries suggest that the dominance of one religious group and an overlap between religious and ethnic identities may be two factors that directly contribute to increased risk of armed conflict, without any necessary politicization (Basedau et al., 2011). These researchers summarize that "one theoretical conclusion may be that socio-psychological intergroup processes are more important than religious ideas and their use by leaders" (Basedau et al., 2011, p. 766).

Moral certainty/moral identity

A third mechanism by which religion may relate to increased violence apart from a claim of inherency is through morality. All religions dictate a system of moral values and since supernatural authority creates morality in religious traditions, followers can feel certain that these morals are absolute. This can satisfy a person's need to feel moral and lessens any necessary concern for consequences of violence so long as the violence can be placed within the moral tradition passed down by the supernatural authority (Shaw et al., 2011).

Being certain about one's moral principles is related to greater support for violent warfare (Shaw et al., 2011). Additionally, religiosity variables moderate this relationship. For example, in those who pray more often, stronger moral certainty is related to greater support for violent warfare. This study also identified that greater moral certainty related to greater support for violent warfare primarily in conflicts that are framed as religious rather than geopolitical. It may be that religious identity enhances support for violent conflict only if a person's religious identity is connected to greater moral certainty. Additionally, there is no theoretical reason why this effect could not also exist in non-religious persons, if moral certainty is created outside the bounds of religion. Even atheists develop their own moral foundations (Simpson and Rios, 2016) and can express dogmatism in defense of their moral beliefs (Kossowska et al., 2017).

The binding motivations of loyalty, authority, and purity appear to underlie religious terrorist groups (Hahn, Tamborini, Novotny, Grall, and Klebig 2018). The PPT-US (Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism in the United States) dataset provides detailed information on all known terrorist organizations to have committed a terrorist attack in the United States from 1970-2016, including their philosophy statements (Miller and Smarick, 2012). Hahn et al. (2018) coded the most salient moral foundations depicted in the philosophy statements of these terrorist organizations and found that the binding motivations of loyalty, authority, and purity are the most common among religious terrorist groups. Purification rituals of sacrifice can expel the guilty and unclean, maintaining the purity of the community (Jones, 2008). The importance of authority can be seen through the centralized



structure and dynamic leadership of these terrorist organizations (Whitehouse, 2002). However, these same binding motivations underlie secular right-wing and separatist movements (Hahn et al., 2018), suggesting that they are not exclusively, or even primarily, religious.

In related work, moral identity is considered the extent to which people consider being a moral person as important to defining themselves (Hardy et al., 2012). Some research has found that intrinsic religiosity, but not extrinsic religiosity, positively relates to moral identity (Vitell et al., 2009). While moral disengagement strategies can be used to increase support for warfare, this effect may be eliminated when people place a high importance on moral identity or when moral identity is experimentally primed (Aquino et al., 2007). Hardy et al. (2012) found that greater religious commitment indirectly related to lower aggression by way of moral identity. In general, moral certainty relates to greater support for violence and aggression but holding a strong moral identity relates to less support for violence and aggression.

When religion merges with other identities

Real-world conflicts are often confounded by interacting identities. Two important identities in intergroup conflict are nationality and ethnicity, both of which may affect how religion relates to conflict. Historically, the indication that the crusades were religious wars is an over-simplification of a complex interplay between identification with the state and identification with one's religion. As Munson states, "National and religious identity tended to be intertwined, as remains true in much of the world today" (2005, p. 228). The predominant modern region in which an apparent national-religious identity has developed is the Middle East. Some explanations for the violence, dictatorship, and oppression in the Middle East focus on the theocratic nature of Islam.

But are Middle East conflicts more religious? The Middle East appears to have a high proportion of religiously differentiated groups, which should cause increased and more violent conflict than elsewhere (Fox, 1999). Furthermore, most groups involved in conflict seem to involve religious discrimination of a group and the discriminated group demanding more religious rights (Fox, 2001). While religion is important in the conflicts in the Middle East, they are similar to conflicts raging in other parts of the world that do not involve these religious dimensions. Fox (2001) finds that conflicts in the Middle East involve similar levels of political discrimination, economic discrimination, cultural discrimination, repression, desire for autonomy, and terrorism or rebellion as non-religious conflicts in other parts of the world. He summarizes, "It is easy to assume that the prevalence of religious conflict in the Middle East is due to the region's Islamic and autocratic character. It is also easy to assume that the region's high concentration of autocracy is due to the region's Islamic character. Yet neither of these assumptions appears to be correct" (Fox, 2001, p. 39).

It is important to remember that "When religious boundaries roughly align with boundaries between nation-states, religious competition may become the grist on which international conflict is ground..." (Hall, 2003, p. 15). These conflicts cannot be viewed as stemming entirely from one or the other identity. In sub-Saharan Africa, overlapping ethnic and religious identities are particularly influential in mobilizing groups for armed-conflict (Basedau et al., 2011) and former European colonies may be eager to use shared religion as a spark to form new governments based upon the indigenous ethnic culture (Juergensmeyer, 1996). In general, secular motivations for conflict are far more common than religious motivations (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2013), yet "Secular loyalty to nations and movements, leading to death on the battlefield, raises fewer questions than the loss of life for religious ideals" (Beit-Hallahmi, 2015; p. 151).



In the prior sections we have detailed the various links between religion and violence. This revealed that there are many aspects of religion that are associated with reduced aggression and violence. In addition, when aspects of religion have been associated with increased aggression and violence, these aspects do not appear unique to religion. These aspects are religious variants of more general psychological processes, such as social identity, coalitional commitment, dogmatism, and obedience to authority. The key feature that distinguishes religious groups from secular groups—supernaturalism—has been mostly ignored in studies of religion and aggression. Ultimately, the literature reveals the role of general psychological processes inherent to aggression and violence but provides no evidence of a unique role of religion. In the rare case that supernaturalism has been the focus of researchers' attention, supernatural beliefs in hell and the afterlife have been associated with reductions in violence (Shariff and Rhemtulla, 2012; Wright, 2016a). We now describe supernaturalism as the fundamental distinguishing feature between religion and secular groups and why this should be the focus of researchers' attention if they wish to make claims of the inherency of violence to religion.

Supernaturalism in religion

Religion entails many facets (e.g. Alatas, 1977; Sterelny, 2017). It has the dual function of a social identity and a system of beliefs (Ysseldyk, Matheson and Anisman, 2010). It involves communal experiences (Beit-Hallahmi, 1984), with shared beliefs, values, rituals, histories, stories, and sacrifice (Beit-Hallahmi, 2015). But these elements are not unique to religious groups if detached from their supernatural elements. In defining religion's distinctive quality that differentiates it from the secular, we find this to indispensably be the belief in the supernatural. In psychology, "religion is a belief system, which includes the notion of a supernatural, invisible world, inhabited by gods, human souls, angels, demons, and other conscious spirit entities" (Beit-Hallahmi, 2015; p. 3). Beit-Hallahmi further suggests that belief systems are religious only when those committed to them make reference to the supernatural. Other scholars adopt this same essentialist feature. Schaffalitzky de Muckadell (2014) defines religion as a system of beliefs and practices that *incorporate supernatural elements* and where these beliefs are internalized by the believer and have normative implications. Sterelny (2017) refers to these supernatural elements as "hidden agents or forces". Without these elements, religious groups would mirror secular social groups, such as fraternities and sports teams, which involve social identification, systems of beliefs, sets of rituals, communal histories, and stories (Goody, 1961; Jackson and Masters, 2006; Jones, 2000; Workman, 2001). Many religious and secular actions are similar but religious actions "appeal to superhuman or supernatural agency" (Barrett, 2007; p. 179).

Our adoption of religion as a belief system *distinct through belief in the supernatural, whether constituted by supernatural beings or supernatural powers*, is in line with the history of the empirical psychological tradition (Beit-Hallahmi, 1984; Bloom, 2007). It applies to the world's largest religious groups (Hackett and McClendon, 2017), to obscure traditions (Baum, 2009; Conklin, 2001), to religious groups across time (Sterelny, 2017), and is adopted by cognitive science, anthropology and sociology alike (Avalos, 2005; Barrett, 2017; Goody, 1961; Hall, 2013; Stewart and Strathern, 2013). The degree of supernaturalist elements may vary across religious traditions and traditions may account for supernatural entities in different ways (Boyer, 2001). For example, supernaturalism may be more important to Christianity, which requires a belief in an omnipotent, omnipresent God, relative to Theravada Buddhists, but supernaturalism is not relegated solely to theism. Theravada Buddhists believe in rebirth, supernatural power, and dryads (Jerryson, 2017; Nugteren, 2005) and engage in rituals to please the spirits (Collin, 1990). If researchers are genuinely interested in making



claims of the inherency of violence to religion, then studying the essential feature of religion, which distinguishes it from secular social groups, is necessary.

Limitations to our approach

We took an empirical scientific approach—we are interested in data that are objective and reproducible. We explicitly examined aggression and violence as potential outcomes of religion, whether as a result of beliefs, values, supernatural authority, identity, ritual, or some other aspect of religious groups. We dealt almost exclusively with Abrahamic religions by the necessity of the available scientific research (Hood, Hill and Spilka, 2009). This relegates our examination to doctrinal forms of religion and religious expression (Whitehouse, 2002). As can be seen throughout the review, operational definitions of religious constructs are study specific. For example, quantitatively examining *ritual* can be seen through measuring prayer or meditation frequency, reading of scripture, or through frequency of attending religious services. Beliefs have been examined through assessing agreement with fundamentalist doctrine, the importance of a set of institutional beliefs to one's life, or through manipulating passages of scripture. Even twenty years ago, there were already well over 100 measures in use within the psychology of religion (Hill and Hood, 1999). We largely took a nomothetic approach, which we believe is enlivened by the idiothetic approach elsewhere (Hood, Hill and Spilka, 2009). We examined believers in the contemporary world while avoiding the textual approach (Munson, 2005) because religious believers often know little about their scriptures (Bakker, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2010; Schuurman, Grol and Flower, 2016; Wright, 2016). These boundary conditions to our review reveal the limits of the scientific literature primarily published in psychology of religion and social psychology journals.

Concluding remarks on religious identity

The Chinese government oppresses Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims (Hernández, 2018; Kuo, 2019 Vanderklippe, 2017). Islamic countries are invaded by secular Western powers (Brands, 1994; Freedman, 2009; Smith, 1992). In Houston, TX, Mayor Annise Parker promoted legal constraints on biblical sermons (Driessen and Morris, 2014). In the Charlie Hebdo incident, retaliatory murders were the result of perceived threats to the sanctity of Islam (Bilefsky and de la Baume, 2015). The evidence discussed in this article suggests that these kinds of pressures on religious freedoms and religious identity have and will result in increases in aggression and violence as a result of religious groups defending their sacred identities. This is the general social psychological mechanism that protects ingroup identification and the positive distinctiveness that is derived from it. Religious groups can exhibit violence in defense of religious freedoms and in defense of a threatened group identity, but religion can also be used to reduce violence. Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000) conclude succinctly, "differences in religious creed are rarely, if ever, genuine causes of violent clashes in and between nations" and that "religious communities usually live in peace—understood as the absence of civil unrest or war—as long as the society as a whole prospers" (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000, p. 658).

Many aspects of religion appear to reduce aggression and violence. These include prayer and reading of scripture, which appear to activate moral beliefs and values (Bremner et al., 2011). Even the priming of religious identification more generally can buffer aggressive responses to exclusion (Aydin et al., 2010). Supernatural beliefs in hell and the afterlife appear to reduce crime rates (Shariff and Rhemtulla, 2012) and buffer the link between coalitional commitment and willingness to justify violence against others (Wright, 2016a). In cases where aspects of religion are associated with aggression and violence, these aspects have direct secular counterparts and cannot be said to be



unique features of religion. For example, the link between fundamentalism and outgroup hostility is the function of a more general process of moral certainty and dogmatism (Kossowska et al., 2017; Shaw et al., 2011; Uzarevic et al. 2017). Religious involvement reflects a more general process of coalitional commitment (Ginges and Atran, 2009; Ginges et al., 2009; Ginges et al., 2010; Wright, 2016a), and the general role of social identity is not confined to religion (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Beit-Hallahmi states, “religion does not involve unique processes, but a unique content” (2005, p. 236). Its processes are equivocal to all social groups. If social group processes are the primary ones engaged in the violence debate, then religion is not unique in its connection to violence.

What makes religion unique apart from generic discussions of social identity is a belief in the supernatural, the meaning of this belief to the individual and the group, and the internalization and integration of religious identity to the individual. Direct study of supernaturalism is noticeably absent in the literature. Where it does appear, belief in the supernatural appears to be associated with reduced violence. If we are genuinely interested in studying the effects of religion on violence, we must take Beit-Hallahmi seriously when he writes “Religion is studied by talking to believers, not reading scriptures, and the psychology of religion is the reality of believers and their beliefs” (2005, p. 234). Ignoring the reality of believers by examining religious texts or general social psychological processes do not move us further to answering the question, “is there something inherent to religion that leads to violence”? At least for now, the answer appears to be “no”.

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Book reviews

Rise and kill firstby **Emil Archambault**This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

On 6 August 2018, an article by David Halbfinger and Ronen Bergman appeared in the *New York Times*, reporting on the death of a Syrian scientist working on a missile program (Halbfinger and Bergman, 2018). Syrian sources were quick to blame Israeli agents for the car bomb which killed the scientist, accusations which Israel was quick to dismiss. Yet, as Halbfinger and Bergman note, this car bomb followed a suspicious pattern: 'Israel did not claim responsibility. It never does. But the Mossad has a long history of assassinating scientists developing weaponry seen as a threat' (Halbfinger and Bergman, 2018).

This long-standing pattern of targeted assassinations is the focus of Ronen Bergman – a correspondent for the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* and for *The New York Times*, author of the article quoted above – in his monumental book *Rise and kill first*. As Bergman notes, 'Israel has assassinated more people than any other country in the Western world' (Bergman, 2018, p. xxii). Accordingly, this book demonstrates the central – and constant – presence of targeted assassination in Israeli policy since the beginning of the twentieth century, before even the foundation of the state of Israel. To some measure, the result of a disadvantageous military situation, diplomatic isolation, the Holocaust trauma and path dependency, Bergman argues that targeted killing often became the default option for the resolution of diplomatic, political and military crises.

In this book, Bergman traces the use of targeted assassination by the Israeli Defence Forces and by intelligence agencies, noting broad shifts in doctrines, the means and restraints on the use of assassination, and strategic imperatives. The overall impression from Bergman's account is that Israeli counter-insurgency has largely been stuck on a path dependency of violent repression since the very beginnings of the state of Israel. 'Killing the driver', as former commando leader and Mossad director Meir Dagan put it (Bergman, 2018, p. xxi), has become the go-to solution for all kinds of political and military problems, often in place of other, less violent (or perhaps more effective) solutions.

The reasons for this preponderance of targeted assassination are multiple. The first identified by Bergman is the – not unwarranted – perception of an imminent threat of annihilation of Israel (Bergman, 2018, pp. 11, 49). As he explains, given Israel's acute perception of imminent menace from other regional powers – Egypt, Syria, Iran and Iraq – by overt means, or more recently by covert ones, Israel perceives itself justified in taking 'any and all measures, however extreme, to obtain security, and will relate to international law and norms in a marginal manner, if at all' (Bergman, 2018, p. 11) As such, Israel, according to Bergman, engages routinely in extralegal executions, which stand not only outside of international law – contravening fundamental tenets of sovereignty (and at times even targeting state officials of foreign countries) – but also of domestic law, as Israeli law does not allow for the death penalty (Bergman, 2018, p. 32).



Examples of such threats, which have led to extensive targeted assassination campaigns include, among others, the development of heavy armament by Israel's neighbours. Indeed, targeted assassination campaigns against foreign scientists bookend Bergman's study. Early in the book, he relates Israel's frenetic efforts to interrupt Egyptian missile development in 1962, resorting to the kidnapping and assassination of German scientists working on the project in Egypt and in Europe. Its intimidation tactics and diplomatic pressure on West Germany went as far as to enlist the help of Otto Skorzeny, a former Waffen SS colonel (Bergman, 2018, p. 61). Bergman notes that a 1982 internal Mossad report determined that the use of violence had been absolutely necessary in stopping the project (Bergman, 2018, p. 85). The book closes with a discussion of the elimination of Iranian scientists working on the development of an atomic bomb. Bergman alleges that Meir Dagan, head of the Mossad in 2010, launched an all-out campaign of targeted assassination of scientists working on the Iranian project, in part as an effort to forestall Benjamin Netanyahu's plan for a military invasion of Iran (Bergman, 2018, pp. 622–627). In the end, Bergman argues, the beginning of secret talks between the United States and Iran – culminating in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement – was due in large part to Iranian weakness due to Israeli pressure, including targeted assassination, and to American fear of Israel escalating military action (Bergman, 2018, p. 628).

Furthermore, Israel has often felt abandoned by other Western powers, leading it to believe in the need to resort to extreme measures on its own to ensure its protection. Two incidents in particular stand out in Bergman's narrative: the first is the disastrous intervention of West German police forces to resolve the kidnapping of Israeli athletes in Munich in 1972. After Israel was denied permission to lead the rescue intervention, culminating in the historically resonant deaths of Jews on German soil (Bergman, 2018, pp. 149–150), Prime Minister Golda Meir decided to expand targeted assassination to anywhere in the world, including in friendly European countries (Bergman, 2018, p. 152). The second incident is the discovery of an advanced Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007, and the United States' refusal to intervene to destroy it, leading to an Israeli air attack and a wave of Mossad targeted killings against Syrian officials (Bergman, 2018, pp. 589–595). Arguably, the United States' refusal to act comforted Israel's perception of being the sole actor responsible for its own security, notably through an expanded targeted killing campaign.

The final reason for Israel's preference for targeted killing, according to Bergman, is the presence of a tradition preceding the foundation of the State of Israel. Indeed, as he notes, nearly all Israeli prime ministers were intimately involved in targeted assassination or terrorist attacks prior to assuming office. David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Shamir and Menachem Begin had engaged in terrorist attacks against British and Arab leaders prior to 1948 (Bergman, 2018, pp. 17, 19). Shamir, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon commanded targeted assassination units (Bergman, 2018, pp. 42–46, 70, 141), and Benjamin Netanyahu served in Sayeret Matkal, the IDF's commando unit which engaged regularly in targeted killings. Several Mossad directors additionally rose through the ranks from backgrounds in targeted assassination units: the most prominent of these examples is undoubtedly Meir Dagan, who began his career in 1969 as the commander of a targeted assassination unit in Gaza (under the command of Ariel Sharon), before commanding a similar unit in South Lebanon in 1979, and later becoming the prime minister's counterterrorism adviser and finally Mossad chief from 2002 to 2010. In Bergman's account, Dagan represents one of the central influences in the development of the Israeli counter-insurgency doctrine, the core of which consists of the use of decapitation killings, along with the systematic degradation of enemy networks (Bergman, 2018, p. 127). According to Bergman, the heavy presence of former IDF commanders, as well as operatives experienced in targeted killing – combined with the perception of the success of these former operations – creates self-perpetuating pressure in favour of targeted assassination.



Bergman's history of targeted assassination contains a huge trove of details, drawing on publicly available sources as well as on numerous interviews – over 400 were conducted, most of which are anonymous. Accordingly, Bergman uses a very expansive definition of targeted assassination. *Rise and kill first* is really about Israeli counter-insurgency as a whole, a campaign which – arguably – has been going on since the state's foundation. Operations discussed include pinpoint discrete operations in Europe or in the Middle East, with munitions such as guns (Bergman, 2018, p. 181), car bombs (Bergman, 2018, p. 176), even poisoned toothpaste (Bergman, 2018, p. 212). The book also includes multiple examples of mail bombs (Bergman, 2018, p. 68), which are notoriously ineffective. Other operations include large-scale commando operations undertaken by IDF units – most often Sayeret Matkal or Flotilla 13 – outside of active warzones; operation "Spring of Youth", a raid in Beirut in 1973 to eliminate several commanders of the Fatah, is one such example. Later, Bergman discusses the transition to airborne strikes in the Occupied Territories and in Lebanon, either by armed drones or by attack helicopters (with drones often accomplishing surveillance). A final category of operations discussed consists in commando units actively combating terrorism with military force. These missions – notably those headed by Dagan in Gaza in 1969 and in South Lebanon in 1979 – included targeted killings, but also counterterrorist missions more broadly, as well as intelligence gathering (Bergman, 2018, pp. 133–135). Often, as Bergman relates, these operations devolved into outright war crimes, with torture, the execution of prisoners and the wilful killing of civilians being part of normal operations. In Bergman's account, the 'killing' element of 'targeted killing' is the most common, with operations being 'targeted' to quite variable degrees: the instruction 'kill them all', tellingly, recurs at several points (Bergman, 2018, pp. 234, 497; see also pp. 242, 272–275, 520–525).

One of the more recent debates within studies of targeted killing concerns the role of drones in enabling, encouraging and furthering the use of targeted assassination. In this respect, Bergman's book provides crucial insight. In much the same way as Eyal Weizman had described Israel and its Occupied Territories as a 'laboratory' for occupation and population control (Weizman, 2017, p. 241), Bergman notes that Israel's system of targeted killing directly inspired its American equivalent, which appeared after 2001 (Bergman, 2018, p. 515). The United States, following the September 11, 2001 attacks, went from considering Israeli targeted killing as 'illegitimate', if not an outright war crime, to seeking to replicate its killing infrastructure (Bergman, 2018, p. 512).

Bergman provides a direct account of the first drone-led air strike in Lebanon in 1992 (Bergman, 2018, pp. 383–396), targeting Hussein Abbas Al-Mussawi, the Secretary General of the Hezbollah. This strike highlights a number of problematic slippages in the decision-making often surrounding drone strikes. First, as Bergman makes clear, deliberation on this strike was extremely rapid and flawed. The possibility of killing Mussawi was presented as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, although no evidence supporting this assessment is present (Bergman, 2018, p. 393). Prior debates on whether Mussawi was a legitimate target (Bergman, 2018, p. 391) were forgotten once the concrete possibility of killing him was made manifest. The Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, was briefed for at most one minute before authorising the strike (Bergman, 2018, p. 395). Second, the lack of clear intelligence was forgotten in the pursuit of the target: several civilians, including Mussawi's wife and son, were killed along with him, without a conscious decision having been made on the acceptability of civilian casualties (Bergman, 2018, p. 396). In other words, the attractiveness of an air strike obliterated careful decision-making. Finally, the rapid nature of the operation made any kind of post-strike planning, which would have inscribed its effects in a wider strategic framework, impossible (Bergman, 2018, p. 399); indeed, IDF Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak, and Minister of Defence, Moshe Arens, later carefully admitted that killing Mussawi was a strategic error (Bergman, 2018, p. 408). This is symptomatic of many drone strikes, both Israeli and American: decision-making is



rushed, alternatives – including, most crucially, the alternative to *not* fire – are often discounted, and the killing is achieved with minimal attention to strategic effects (Carvin, 2012, p. 538).

Further implications can be drawn out from the subsequent implementation of targeted killing through drones by Israel. First, Bergman makes clear that the development of drones did not create the policy of targeted killing, nor did the appearance of drones radically change the nature of Israeli counter-insurgency. Targeted killing, as he demonstrates, has been perceived as an alternate means to war throughout the history of the State of Israel. Second, the policy of targeted killing – particularly in its systematic incarnation from the 1990s onwards – relied on the systematic collection of intelligence: Unit 8200, the military signals intelligence unit, was notably put to great use, being described as a ‘production line for targeted killing’ (Bergman, 2018, p. 502). Drones, as such, allowed for the dramatic expansion of the intelligence-gathering capabilities of Israeli intelligence agencies, allowing the country to expand its targeted killings. As Bergman notes, Israel conducted over 1,000 targeted killing operations during the Second Intifada (and over 800 since then), demonstrating the rapid acceleration of operations due to increased intelligence gathering and the streamlining of decision-making (Bergman, 2018, p. 480). Third, drones participate in warfighting and targeted killing in a variety of roles, not necessarily as hunter-killers (as Grégoire Chamayou (2013), for instance, presents them, or as ‘pure drone warfare’ according to Hugh Gusterson (2017)). Rather, they are embedded in a whole network of intelligence gathering, surveillance and execution, as targeters (Bergman, 2018, p. 385), signal relays (Bergman, 2018, p. 466) or surveillance for other aircraft (Bergman, 2018, p. 396).

Thus, while drones do not, in themselves, cause targeted killing to become systematic policy, their use enables the dramatic expansion of killing capabilities. In response to the introduction of drones, Israeli forces expanded their rules of engagement with the elaboration of a legal framework (Bergman, 2018, pp. 509–510), implemented a permanent war room to streamline operations (Bergman, 2018, p. 480), and found ways to diminish political oversight on operations (Bergman, 2018, p. 429).

Ultimately, Bergman argues, Israel found itself caught in a spiral where the possibility of targeted killing superseded the strategic imperatives which ought to guide it: ‘[IDF Northern Command officers] felt that the target, Haldoun Daidar, was minor and insignificant, and that there was no significant strategic gain to be had from killing him. But the Israelis had gathered enough actionable intelligence on him, and the system had proved itself so many times before, that in the minds of some, there was also no reason *not* to kill him’ (Bergman, 2018, p. 466). Bergman closes the book by noting the late conversions of Meir Dagan and Ariel Sharon – two of the strongest proponents of targeted killing – to political solutions to the threats to Israel, highlighting the irony of Israel’s most ruthless generals dispelling ‘the illusion [...] that covert operations could be a strategic and not just a tactical tool – that they could be used in place of real diplomacy to end the geographic, ethnic, religious, and national disputes in which Israel is mired’ (Bergman, 2018, p. 629). Bergman’s *Rise and kill first* is the story of a self-perpetuating tactic, which crowded out every other means of conflict resolution, leading to ‘impressive tactical success [and] disastrous strategic failure’ (Bergman, 2018, p. 610).

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Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919

by Florian Englberger



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Leonard's Smith's monograph on the implications of the Paris Peace Conference is indeed a timely contribution, most obviously because its publication coincides with the centenary of the end of First World War. However, the topicality of *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* also stems from its engagement with, as the title already insinuates, sovereignty as a political concept. In times of Britain's self-imposed removal from the European Union in order to restore a sense of popular sovereignty apparently lost to the 'diktat' of allegedly undemocratic, but definitely foreign, 'Eurocrats', the topic deserves full attention. Even more so as we witness that sovereignty has again become the watchword of the ethno-nationalist cabal throughout Europe. Smith brings us back to the 'laboratory of sovereignty' (p. 13) at the Paris Peace Conference that was going to shape nationalist politics for a long time to come.

Throughout his book, Smith chases the theme of sovereignty in the post-war years, elucidating in what ways the Conference, embodied by the 'Big Five' of Britain, France, Italy, the US, and Japan, redesigned not only the international system but also the agents populating it. Smith does not proceed chronologically, i.e. from the start of the Peace Conference in 1919 to the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, nor does he strictly follow the making (and unmaking) of the peace treaties that emerged directly or indirectly from its course – rather, the book unfolds conceptually, discussing a certain aspect of sovereignty in each of its chapters. The first topic that Smith turns to is 'justice', which is mirrored in the debates about reparations and moral responsibility at Paris. To invent 'justice' as a new political discourse meant to go beyond making the vanquished parties of World War I pay for their offences. It, for instance, opened the Pandora's Box of whether or not it was legitimate to arraign kings and emperor (p. 79). Here, Smith shows how the focus on Germany as a criminalised great power in the Treaty of Versailles made it possible for the German reactionary forces to turn Wilsoniansim into a discursive weapon deployed against so-called 'Allied justice' (p. 91).

Chapters 3 and 4 Smith devotes to the 'unmixing' of both lands and peoples. He meticulously shows how the Conference created new states with new identities that required territorial agreements settling the painstakingly complicated question of how the people inhabiting these new states could be classified. Smith describes in detail how policies such as plebiscites, racial classifications of mandate populations, and population exchanges fulfilled this task of the 'unmixing' of people. This is followed by a chapter on 'revolution': Smith outlines how the Peace Conference attempted to master the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, whose legitimacy was not endorsed but finally grudgingly accepted, and similar uprisings in other post-war states (the developments there were either rejected or, as in the case of Czechoslovakia, actively encouraged). Smith uses constitutive and declaratory theories of state recognition to illustrate the interplay between the Peace Conference and the often-recalcitrant agents of the international system (p. 197). Two more 'revolutions' Smith mentions: the first threat took the form of anti-colonialism, which the newly established Mandate System tried to defuse by offering some form of self-government to former colonial territories; the second threat, the spectre of Bolshevism in Central and Western Europe, was banished by establishing the International Labour Organization in an effort to master the dangers of workers'



unrest. In the final chapter, Smith gives an overview of how the League of Nations dealt with these questions of sovereignty in the years from 1920-23.

What holds the respective chapters together is Smith's concern with the spirit of Wilsonianism, which the Peace Conference invoked to transform the international system in a radical fashion. Smith shows how states and great powers would continue as the main agents within the international system, but in a way that would mitigate the power game "now forever discredited" (p. 20) by the catastrophe of the World War. In this promised land of Wilsonianism all states, old and new, would produce a new form of 'world sovereignty' (p. 11), taking its legitimacy from the liberal individual uniting in a global community of commensurable citizens. The Conference, according to Smith, acted as a provisional world sovereign by producing successor states carved out of the disappearing Hohenzollern, Habsburg, Romanov, and Osman empires. State sovereignty was thus constrained by the transnational citizen interested in world peace. The newly founded League of Nations was meant to be the apotheosis of this ideal.

Smith approaches the Peace Conference and Wilsonianism primarily from the perspective of the historian. He does introduce a general constructivist framework at the beginning of Chapter 1, presenting the Peace Conference as a formal structure which, using the discourse of Wilsonianism, created new agents and a new understanding of sovereignty beyond a narrow focus on the state. However, Smith only returns to this topic in the conclusion, where the intricate relationship between history and a constructivist perception of IR is once more foregrounded. His engagement with IR theory therefore remains rudimentary. Although the author is clearly aware of this – Smith concludes in the final chapter that his "eclectic approach to IR" might have merely "poached" (p. 263) insights from IR theory – a deeper conversation between history and IR theory seems possible. A reader who approaches the book from the point of view of IR, and not as a historian, might therefore wish for a different structure that would weave the two disciplines more closely together.

However, the focus on history is also one of the book's decisive strengths. Smith's rich historical descriptions convincingly capture the "then-ness" (p. 267) of the conference proceedings, restoring agency to the "Flesh-and-blood people staggering through confused times" (p. 267) in a way that bread-and-butter IR theory cannot. The reader is constantly reminded that the *dramatis personae* in Paris acted purposefully, seeking to redesign an anarchical international system in a meaningful manner. In the author's own words: "The Paris Peace Conference sought fundamentally to change the way the international system functioned, and did so in highly complicated and historically specific ways" (p. vii). Smith thus sides with, and repeatedly invokes, the Wendt-ian maxim that the workings of international relations are 'what states make of it'. His emphasis on the Conference as a historically conditioned enterprise 'to do something' about the prevailing anarchy in the international system puts Smith firmly into the constructivist camp, even if his theory disappears at times behind the unfolding historical drama. By restoring agency to the Conference as a provisional world sovereign, Smith argues against the perception of the post-war peace-making endeavours as preordained failures. The League of Nations following the meeting at Paris was, again, "always going to be what states make of it" (p. 266).

Smith paints, nevertheless, a rather bleak picture of Wilsonianism-in-practice, emphasising the degree to which Wilson's Elysium was inherently flawed. The reader is left wondering how much leeway existed for such a radical transformation of the international system and its agents. This becomes especially clear in Chapter 4, which is concerned with the 'unmixing of people' that followed the Peace Conference. By insisting on necessarily murky plebiscites and by tolerating – if not supporting – population exchanges in the name of national self-determination, the Great Powers wedded sovereignty to the worship of ethno-national aspirations. As Smith shows, this



externalisation of self-determination was a far cry from the Wilsonian idea, which saw sovereignty residing with the liberal, transnational individual – with grave consequences in regions like Upper Silesia and Teschen, where ethnic clarity did not exist and subsequently was established through inter-communal violence, as Germans and Poles began to retreat into clear-cut ethnic categories. Smith uses these examples to create a vivid example of Wilsonianism-gone-awry, introducing each case study with a certain clarity that makes it easy for the non-specialist reader to follow the overall argument.

Crucially, Smith also shows how Wilson's programme suffered from bouts of organised hypocrisy. For Wilsonianism to flourish, the Great Powers would have had to alter their own identities as great powers, subjecting themselves to a higher moral (and in the end) legal order. This, clearly, did not transpire. As he crisply points out, even Wilson did not take his Wilsonianism seriously; why, then, should Poland have accepted infringements of its national sovereignty by agreeing to the League of Nations as an external guardian of minority rights, when Wilson would have never agreed to take orders from the League regarding Jim Crow (p. 38)? How could the Mandate System, a concoction created to deal with the territories formerly occupied by the German and Ottoman imperial powers, hint at the possibility of self-determination for Black Africans, while the Allied powers fought hard to deny the same possibilities to the non-Europeans inhabiting their own colonies (p. 187)? Similarly, the 'unmixing of people' in the Middle East and Central Europe followed the dictates of petty national interest, as the Great Powers sought to rejuvenate their aging empires (p. 107).

By exposing the shortcomings of Wilsonianism, Smith demonstrates how the new international system designed, and the agents conjured, still bore the hallmarks of great power interests, those powers strategizing in Paris. The implementation of Wilsonianism was therefore far removed from the lofty idea of a new sort of sovereignty endeavouring to end great power politics. Although Smith explicitly renounces the narrative of the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations as stillborn entities with the carnage of World War II already written into them, it is difficult to image for the reader how the Conference and the peace treaties that emerged from it were not, in the light of the mistakes made, destined to fail. Smith's own constructivism would therefore benefit from an evaluation of the internal and external constraints that the agents of 1918 had to face. Societies cannot be constructed "any old way we like" (Eagleton, 2008, p. 69), and Smith's account of the botched transformation of the international system clearly shows this. An account of the boundaries which – at least at that point in time – could not be pushed, would give the reader a clearer idea of why the radicalism of Wilsonianism was spectacularly unsuccessful, but avoid the realist trap of a pre-determination in an international system irrevocably shaped by the invisible hand of anarchy.

In the end, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* constitutes a compelling plea for the constructivist paradigm of international relations. If the post-war order failed, then this was also due to the lack of the will of the people – the transnational, liberal citizens on which Wilsonianism as a political ideology rested – to build an international society that would look, for the benefit of all, beyond the petty interest of the nation state. One hundred years after World War I, as sovereignty is again increasingly linked to ethno-national vanity, Smith's book is a powerful reminder that popular sovereignty can, and indeed should be, imagined beyond nation and nation state. Linking the past to the politics of today, Smith concludes: "Understanding the 'then-ness' of the Paris Peace Conference would surely suggest a need to rethink its relationship to problems that afflict our world today. [...] But what the 'then' has to tell us about the 'now', must begin with a proper understanding of the 'then'" (p. 267). By reconstructing the complicated workings of the Paris Peace Conference, Smith indeed "tell[s] contemporary society some things it might benefit from, even if it is reluctant to learn them" (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 47). Smith himself remains reticent in regard to what these



lessons are. His book is therefore an open invitation to return to the 'laboratory of sovereignty' and to reconsider the implications of sovereignty for the international system in the 21st century.

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Extralegal groups in post-conflict Liberia: How trade makes the state

by Thomas Patrick Hinkel



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Christine Cheng's *Extralegal groups in post-conflict Liberia: how trade makes the state* is an ambitious undertaking that seeks to connect the emergence of order in post-conflict settings to one of the biggest issues of international relations: the nature of state-building in the 21st century. She argues that the need to establish a stable commercial environment leads profit-motivated groups, backed by their coercive capacities gained in the preceding conflict, to provide the essential governance mechanisms of contract enforcement and dispute resolution. In this way, Cheng presents a bold re-iteration of Charles Tilly's fundamental axiom regarding the emergence of the Western Weberian state (Tilly, 1975), as she concludes, 'it is trade, rather than war, that drives contemporary statebuilding' (Cheng, 2018, p. 17). This simple yet powerful assertion is grounded in a fine-grained analysis of the micro-processes that motivate individual actors in a post-conflict environment, as well as the historically rooted paths and global economic structures, such as the relative accessibility to international commodity markets, that organically promote the emergence of nascent governance groups out of the ashes of destructive conflict.

The first half of this review will outline the conceptual scaffolding around which she builds this argument, suggesting that it provides a fresh toolbox for understanding a field of inquiry, i.e. post-conflict reconstruction, that is in severe need of re-invigoration. It will then move to addressing areas that could benefit from a more nuanced investigation, and an appraisal of how these lessons can be applied in reconstruction projects that take non-state actors more seriously.

By focusing her research design on post-conflict Liberia, she examines a country that, by the end of a tumultuous period of nearly two decades of civil conflict, presented an acute deficit of formal governance. As such, 21st-century Liberia approximated, as much as possible, Hobbes and Locke's 'state of nature' that Cheng also takes as a first principle for analysing the emergence of social and political order. For Cheng, however, this state of nature is not an ahistorical *tabula rasa*, but rather an environment fundamentally informed by its immediate conflict past, as well as a longer history of economic exploitation and deep distrust of state institutions. In order to illustrate these legacies, she presents the concept of 'conflict capital' that describes the fresh capacities of certain groups to use or threaten violence to coerce populations into accepting their role as arbiters of disputes and enforcers of local order (p. 60). In addition, such capital allows for the efficient remobilisation of wartime social and smuggling networks to exploit natural resources that lay beyond the ability of the state – weakened by years of war and popular distrust – to regulate.

She designates these groups as 'extralegal' in order to distinguish them from their 'conceptual cousins': warlords, rebels, big men and mafias (pp. 52–53). This is done to emphasise their focus on profit over politics, as well as to begin the analysis 'with a blank slate, without assumptions or preconceived notions about who these people are, what they do, and whether or not we approve of their behavior' (p. 9). While some may consider this violation of Sartori's injunction against 'parochial' or redundant conceptual definitions (Sartori, 1991), she presents a strong case as to why fresh terminology is needed to overcome decades of myopic thinking and policymaking. Indeed, a common theme throughout the book is Cheng's sincere desire to re-orient international policy and scholarly communities away from what she perceives as antiquated and parochial conceptions



of state-building, particularly concerning who the legitimate and productive participants in the process are, and towards a more grounded understanding of where true political power actually lies. Following a particularly illuminating field visit to the Butaw Oil Palm Company plantation (BOPC) in 2005, a thriving diamond mine supporting a vibrant social and economic life far from the reaches of the Liberian state, Cheng notes, 'I came to re-evaluate my own ideas of what constituted "statebuilding" and indeed, to question whether key governance functions had to be performed by the state at all' (p. 6).

In order to explore how these groups – and the governance functions they provide – emerge and develop, Cheng presents a three-stage model based on the rational choices made by actors in the precarious post-conflict environment. The first stage focuses on the emergence of extralegal groups as a response to a local demand for third party conflict resolution and contract enforcement. With their fresh capacities to organise and exert violence (i.e. conflict capital), ex-combatant groups often emerge to provide these functions and, hence, form the kernel of the extralegal groups that ultimately perform the basic governance functions required to create and sustain markets. Following their emergence as the pre-eminent enforcers of order, extralegal groups then develop and entrench themselves by taxing a portion of the extraction activity in a way that develops their organisational capacities and aligns their interests with the local social base. The specific structures this taxation regime assumes depend on the nature of the economic activity in question, as well as the guiding 'time horizon' that limits how long the groups anticipate controlling the area (p. 61). For example, Cheng demonstrates how the BOPC Group, the extralegal group that developed to control a substantial diamond mine in southeast Liberia, taxed access to mining sites rather than the mined resources themselves due to the ease with which diamonds could be clandestinely smuggled from the area. In the case of other sectors, however, namely timber and rubber, resources are taxed and directed upwards through a more complex hierarchical structure that entails multiple steps of value exchange and organisational control.

Despite these apparent organisational differences, the essential similarity, Cheng maintains, is that these sectors are characterised by relatively low entry barriers and capital requirements: the requisite traits of a resource base that renders it fertile for extralegal governance. Here, she channels Ross, LeBillon and others' contention that it is not only access to resources, but the *types* of resources that inform how non-state actors attain control and are able to channel revenues towards their goals (Ross, 2004; LeBillon, 2001).

While this appeared to open a path for exploring differences between extralegal groups, it was an avenue Cheng did not take, at least in any robust way. Granted, she acknowledges that a high degree of variation exists between the organisation and behaviour of different extralegal groups, but she largely attributes this to the strength (or lack thereof) of social ties between the groups and the local population. Drawing on social psychology literature, she emphasises the importance of in-group/out-group thinking in determining the levels of exploitation and/or legitimacy that characterise the groups' relations with the surrounding community. For example, in speaking of the pre-eminent extralegal group managing Liberia's illicit timber industry, she notes:

General Kofi, the de facto leader of the Nezoun Group, maintained deep local ties to his area, was of the same ethnicity (Bassa) as local residents, and was enmeshed in informal local authority structures [...] over time, as peace took hold, Kofi responded to community activism, and a decline in his own legitimacy. It took time, but the in-group restraint mechanism later came into full effect (p. 257).

The extent, however, to which material elements, or the structural necessities of a particular political economic system, restrain extralegal groups in their efforts to exert control both over



local populations and within the organisation would warrant further exploration. Aside from merely granting a comparative advantage vis-a-vis the state, an interesting avenue of further research would explore how the varying entry and capital requirements across economic industries create extralegal groups with different structural and behavioural traits. For example, the tax regime of the timber trade was relatively centralised on the person of General Kofi, whom Cheng describes as 'the local Big Man' (p. 239). While one may view this centralised revenue stream as a function of Kofi's political power, flipping the equation around (namely, how this low-value, high-bulk resource facilitates the concentrations of political power due to its relatively high capital requirements and lower incentives to evade per unit taxation) would shed light on why various extralegal groups develop different organisational traits.

Indeed, as Cheng notes, understanding the different developmental paths of extralegal groups is crucial in determining how they should be viewed and dealt with by states and the international community alike. Following the development of taxation regimes and the organisational capacity to maintain economic and political arrangements, extralegal groups then enter what Cheng describes as the entrenchment phase. This is the point at which an extralegal group and the state are likely to come into their most intimate contact, as the former attempts to secure its long-term position via the corruption of local and national officials. Here, the central state faces a choice of whether to confront, co-opt or ignore the group, a choice based on the perceived balance of power between itself and the group.

While determining the feasibility of a successful confrontation or co-option will be significantly rooted in the groups' social base, how this social base interacts with, and is largely built upon, supportive material structures is equally vital to determining the nature of the glue that holds these groups together and, thus, their overall organisational strength. For example, while a group may maintain minimal social ties to an area, they may disperse resources in a way that grants them much more local support and legitimacy than simply analysing ethnic compositions would predict. In turn, if a nascent group were to oversee or inaugurate a significantly novel or dramatic economic transformation, we could then expect the emergence of new social groups whose allegiances to pre-existing hierarchies and group narratives would quickly fade in favour of the new socio-economic order. There is perhaps no other context like the conflict environment, where we witness such a flux in livelihoods and socio-economic systems. If we were to take Cheng's extralegal groups as an institutional manifestation of these changing orders, a more robust comparative analysis could reveal the mechanisms of social and economic rebalancing that takes place across various environments. While Cheng's approach, deeply rooted in historical institutionalism, tends to view these groups as re-iterations of the old, appreciating the destructive capacity of civil war to obliterate old orders could answer to a bolder question as to how they represent the new, either in the limited context of a particular country's post-conflict rebuilding process, or the state of contemporary conflict in general.

Cheng concludes her book with a bold attack on what she calls the 'The Myth of the "Good" State' and 'State as Saviour', which subsequently leads to a discussion of how extralegal groups are often better placed to fulfil vital governance mechanisms than impotent or abusive states in the Global South (p. 260). This stubborn state-centric approach to post-conflict reconstruction, she argues, is rooted in the Western conception of the necessary and benevolent state, itself rooted in Hobbesian/Lockean political philosophy, as well as the experiences of policymakers and scholars with their own liberal democratic states in the West. While this cultural and intellectual zeitgeist certainly matters in accounting for the hegemony of Western state-centric approaches, one would also need to unpack the existing international aid and development regimes that privilege the institutional form of the state. Aside from the philosophical biases of Western actors, the preference



for dealing solely with states, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, arguably has more to do with the way these states have developed to serve as “gatekeepers” between their domestic societies and international institutions. Until it becomes more efficient and secure to deal with more locally based groups than the state, such as extralegal groups, international actors will likely continue to centre their attention on national capitals as the only feasible channel for imbuing their preferences into the reconstruction process.

Of course, encouraging the international community to hold back on such interventionist approaches and allow for societies to regenerate organically is undoubtedly a necessary condition for sustainable reconstruction, an argument Cheng implicitly makes; however, the persistence of the particular form of international involvement that Cheng criticises has as much to do with the very real economic and political incentives that animate the global system as any lack of political philosophical imagination. Nonetheless, as we advance into an age of rapid global change, it is perhaps the ideal time to ask bold questions about the future role of states, both locally and globally.

Hence, Christine Cheng’s ground level analysis of extralegal groups in Liberia’s post-war order is an admirable and helpful contribution to our understanding of how political power emerges and solidifies out of a period of fundamental and violent change. By objectively considering the functions and roles, both good and bad, played by extralegal groups, she places the discussion of non-state groups on a new plane that is devoid of antiquated conceptual baggage. This potentially opens up a new era of research into the nature of governance that is rooted in the realities of the 21st century. Thus, this book is highly recommended to scholars and policymakers interested in grappling with the fuzzy lines between state/non-state, licit/illicit, political/economic, and even war and peace. Rather than considering these fault lines as hermetically sealed boundaries closing off our current approaches to understanding politics, Cheng effectively demonstrates how powerful forces in fact emerge from them. Indeed, I would argue the book’s greatest strength lies in its direct focus on these grey areas often characterised by conceptual and empirical fuzziness. In turn, the limitations discussed above are not weaknesses per se, but openings for future research, such as more robust comparative analyses and considerations of how international political economic systems can engage more effectively with locally embedded political actors. Such future research will certainly be heavily indebted to Cheng’s work on extralegal groups in post-conflict Liberia.

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Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The history and ideology of a militant Islamist group, 2005–2012

by **Anthony Mpiani**



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Al-Shabaab poses a security threat to the global community. The group's etiology, ideology, recruitment strategies and criminal activities have received some scholarly attention (Marchal, 2010; Menkhaus, 2008; Pape, 2010; Vidino, Pantucci and Kohleman, 2010). Although these studies offer valuable insights into Al-Shabaab, Hansen's (2013) book identifies and addresses some significant gaps in the existing literature. Contrary to the claims that Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia between 2006 and 2007 led to the formation of Al-Shabaab, that the organisation has a local focus, and that it has been static over the years (see Marchal, 2010; Menkhaus, 2008; Pape, 2010), the book argues that large-scale corruption and misuse of funds by the Western-backed government of Somalia created fertile grounds for the group's formation. It demonstrates that Al-Shabaab is a product of the import of Al-Qaeda's ideology into Somalia. It further shows that Al-Shabaab has not been a static organisation and that it has international connections with other terrorist groups. Generally, the author provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of Al-Shabaab's history, ideology, recruitment strategies, successes and failures from 2005 to 2012. This exceptionally well-researched book is divided into nine complementary chapters.

The first chapter introduces Al-Shabaab. It explains why the group is significant, provides insights into the circumstances that promoted its formation, justifies why the study was conducted and highlights some methodological challenges the author encountered. Employing a historical approach, the author shows that Al-Shabaab was started by 33 Somali–Afghan war veterans, who returned to Somalia with jihadist ideologies. He argues that the global Islamic rhetoric, the large-scale corrupt activities of the warlords and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), as well as the failure of the United Nations Development Program to pay the local people it recruited and trained as police, precipitated the formation of Al-Shabaab. He states that the group is attractive to foreign jihadists due to its religious (Islamic) rhetoric and financial motivation. The second chapter sets the stage by interrogating the political and religious developments that gave birth to Al-Shabaab. According to Hansen, Siad Barre's regime failed to provide political and social security to Somalis. Therefore, religious organisations at the time carried out charitable activities and assisted Somalis in fighting injustices. This created a positive image for religious leaders. Consequently, there was a religious resurgence marked by two developments: the resurfacing of new Islamist organisations and the increase in the use of religious titles and symbols.

Chapter three thoroughly examines the existing contradictory accounts on the origins of Al-Shabaab. While Hansen acknowledges that some of these accounts contain a few grains of truth, he argues that others are totally disingenuous. The confusion, he claims, stems from the fact that people could not differentiate the "real" Al-Shabaab from similar groups that existed during its formation. The first expansive phase of Al-Shabaab (2005–2006) is covered by the fourth chapter. It is shown that the political developments in mid-2000 contributed to the expansion of Al-Shabaab's network. The Western-backed TFG became unpopular and Al-Shabaab capitalised on its weakness to project its image. At the same time, ethnic divisions led to the conversion of extant Sharia Courts (IS) into the Islamic Court Union (ICU) in which Al-Shabaab members received high positions, became connected to the business community and acquired access to funding for the group's activities. The



fifth chapter examines how Al-Shabaab reorganised itself and executed fatal attacks in 2007. It also discusses Ethiopia's military intervention, which led to a temporary defeat of Al-Shabaab, restoring normalcy in Somalia in 2007.

Chapter six focuses on Al-Shabaab's governance of its controlled territories. Hansen notes that the group had regional administrative centres (Wilaayada) in the cities. Territories outside regional centres, however, were administered by clan militias. The governorate carried out development works and provided Islamic education to its members. The challenges faced by Al-Shabaab from 2010 and beyond are discussed in the seventh chapter. The author elucidates the extent to which the Ramadan offensive in 2010 created mistrust in the group and how that impacted on it afterwards. The eighth chapter captures Al-Shabaab's losses and successes from 2005 to 2012. For example, it is documented here that Al-Shabaab has established links in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Hansen finally concludes (in the ninth chapter) that Al-Shabaab still exists, that it holds some territories, that it is profitable, that it has international links, that it is viewed positively by some Somalis and that it will only collapse if it tarnishes its image by acting contrary to the expectations of its supporters.

A strength of this book is that it provides a detailed account on Al-Shabaab. It draws on a thoughtful triangulation of primary data sources (such as interviews) and secondary sources (including publications by Al-Shabaab and other relevant extant literature) to provide a holistic analysis, which helps readers obtain a nuanced understanding of the origin, structures, activities and current status of Al-Shabaab. Besides the in-depth information provided on the group, Hansen painstakingly chronicles the life stories of Al-Shabaab's core leaders (such as Robow and Shongola) for readers to understand how one's socio-economic circumstances could predispose them to criminality. Additionally, the book dazzlingly shows the extent to which cultural, political, social and economic factors shape the security landscape in Somalia. What is intriguing is how Al-Shabaab employs clan loyalty as a tool for maintaining its existence. The revelations about Al-Shabaab suggest that terrorism is a multi-causal phenomenon. Furthermore, the book demonstrates how technology (especially the Internet) promotes the activities of terrorist organisations. The findings on Al-Shabaab's use of the Internet are consistent with studies showing that technology has some impact on terrorism (Rudner, 2017; Adams, 2014; Janbek and Williams, 2014).

Despite the strengths discussed above, the book has a few weaknesses that are worth mentioning. Most notably, the author provides readers with few of the responses from his interviews. His endnotes suggest that he conducted over 40 interviews. Only a handful, however, are cited in the book. A few more citations would have strengthened his arguments. Also, Hansen notes that governance was problematic for Al-Shabaab. Yet, he does not explain how it contributed to the group's decline. If he had focused more on Al-Shabaab's governance structure, readers would have been able to compare it with the TFG and determine if Al-Shabaab was indeed an alternative. In addition, the role of women in Al-Shabaab seems not to have been afforded significant scrutiny by the author. Women perform several functions to ensure the continuity of Al-Shabaab (Donnelly, 2018). Nonetheless, readers are provided with little information on their contributions to the group. Accordingly, the book creates an impression that Al-Shabaab is an all-male terrorist organisation. Furthermore, the author sometimes appears to be speculative in some of his arguments. Aden Hashi Ayro and Muktar Robow were central members of Al-Shabaab, who established contacts with Al-Qaeda. In describing how they linked up with Al-Qaeda, Hansen writes: '[I]t is likely that international jihadists [Al-Qaeda members] fought side by side with them [in the Battle of Dolow city], and this might have been the occasion when the two first established contact with Al-Qaeda' (p. 22). This statement, however, is not backed by any evidence. Moreover, Hansen briefly analyses how Al-Shabaab generates funds internally for its activities. It would have been equally



interesting if he had examined the group's external sources of funding as well. March (2011) has, for example, documented that Al-Shabaab liaises with local importers, who receive goods from their sympathisers in the diaspora, sell it and give the money to the organisation. Finally, given the fact that Al-Shabaab controls some territories in Somalia, it would have been a good idea if Hansen had examined the possibility of power sharing between the (legitimate) government of Somalia and the insurgent group.

Overall, the book is very insightful as it provides answers to some of the questions that society asks about Al-Shabaab. It also unveils the power dynamics underlying the Somali security landscape and helps readers appreciate the multi-causal and multifaceted nature of terrorism. The book is a must-read for scholars and experts who are interested in contemporary conflicts, African politics and political Islam.

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On grand strategy

by Martin Skold



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The most challenging conceptual aspect of grand strategy is determining of what it consists. The second most challenging conceptual aspect is the question of how to practise it, and how to advise future practitioners. Two recent books, John Lewis Gaddis' *On grand strategy* and A. Wess Mitchell's *The grand strategy of the Habsburg Empire*, offer substantive direction in both these regards. Gaddis initially considers the first before turning to the second; Mitchell offers a rich contribution to the second and in so doing offers perspective on the first.

Turning first to Gaddis' work, there are at least two understandings, and possibly a third overlapping understanding, of grand strategy. The most limited in scope is purely military: the process of allocating military resources at the highest levels of command in a major war, in pursuit of the war's objectives. At the other end of the spectrum, grand strategy can also be understood as a near-synonym for statecraft: the process of determining a state's objectives in the international realm and aligning its material and non-material resources (including its policy decisions) in pursuit of those objectives. An overlapping understanding of grand strategy refers to peacetime defence decision-making: grand strategy can be about planning the next war or allocating national resources in preparation for war.^[1]

Gaddis has adopted the statecraft version of the concept in its broadest sense. In so doing, he begins to fill an under-explored gap in the literature. There have, assuredly, been works published in the field of grand strategy that do not simply discuss military preparation and actually engage with the higher levels of statecraft. They have tended, however, to fall short of the mark when it comes to actually addressing the principles of running a state in the real world.

Where grand strategy is concerned, the tendency has been to argue about politics. Barry Posen (1996–1997 and 2014) and Robert Art (1998–1999 and 2003) are typical examples, as are the works of the American former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997 and 2012 are two notable examples). Mitchell's own previous work, with Jakub Grygiel, *The unquiet frontier: rising rivals, vulnerable allies, and the crisis of American power* (2016), is another well-written example. All of these are valuable and often insightful works (and with which this author often finds himself agreeing), and they frequently offer useful contributions to American discourse on foreign policy. However, they are attempts to address America's world role (the authors generally being Americans) at a specific time in history, rather than advise a policy maker (one is tempted to say a prince) more generally about how to play the game of high politics in a broader sense. Notable exceptions that at least employ historical experience are Edward Luttwak's *The grand strategy of the Roman Empire* (1976) and *The grand strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (2009). As Luttwak notes in a jacket comment for Mitchell's work, it is fortunate that another scholar has picked up where Luttwak's own studies left off. Paul Rahe's *The grand strategy of Classical Sparta: the Persian challenge* (2015 – the first of a projected three-volume series) is closer to the purely military, as opposed to holistic, sense of the term, but is another example of an attempt to study the subject from a practical standpoint. Such examples are few and far between. When it comes to a manual for high politics in particular,

[1] An exhaustive review of definitions of strategy and the scopes thereof would fill an article twice this size; for a general range of opinion, see Luttwak (2001, p. 269; 2009, p. 409), Strachan (2013, p. 16) and Paret (1986, p. 3). The authoritative work on the subject in recent years is undoubtedly Freedman (2013), who discusses the full range not only of understandings but also of applications of the concept.



Machiavelli – mentioned below – is often cited as the best guide, but he is at the very least in need of an update, if not a sequel.

Gaddis is attempting to address this. As befits a work understood to have been derived from his famous undergraduate class on grand strategy, his book is a rich, sometimes chaotic, always thought-provoking mix of historical analysis and philosophical precepts. In putting all of this together, Gaddis – long known as the doyen of historians of the past century's greatest geopolitical competition – has articulated something like a personal political philosophy. He is attempting to show leaders, present and future (perhaps some of whom have taken his class) how a wise leader manages a state in the real world. 'Grand' for him, is what it appears: it is high-level decision-making that not only determines how to pursue state goals, but sets them. Gaddis is actually even broader on this point: any worthy goal can take on the need for a grand strategy. 'Strategies become grander even as they remain within the beholder's eye. It's wrong to say, then, that states have grand strategies but people don't' (Gaddis, 2018, p. 21). But his book is a study of statecraft, first and foremost, if not exclusively (readers looking for advice on running a business as opposed to a government should look elsewhere) – particularly as Gaddis expressly states (p. 22) that he is not limiting himself to the question of how to wage war well.

This advice – in some ways the work resembles a handbook – is a welcome addition to a discipline that too often appears to have difficulty setting a strategy for itself. A major criticism of the strategic studies field is that it appears to tend toward inanity. The business strategy theorist Richard Rumelt once famously opined that while it would take years to train a strategist to be an automotive engineer, a weekend's worth of study could transform an automotive engineer into a strategist (Stewart, 2010, p. 179).^[2] By this criticism, strategy is simply not that complicated, or at any rate is not susceptible of serious study. Anyone can do it; few, if any, do it well, and in any event it cannot be taught – and therefore, implicitly, it cannot be reproduced. It is at best an art, not a science, and at worst an art without aesthetic principles.

This, however, is a misunderstanding. Strategy is indeed an art, but it is most crucially a dark art. As the fate of Machiavelli famously illustrates, practitioners of high politics – and strategy is not far removed from high politics – expose their profession to the light at substantial professional and personal risk. As the famous saying has it, those who speak do not know, and those who know do not speak. The reasons for this are themselves often best left unremarked upon, but can be boiled down to the simple recognition that strategy, in a fluid, no-holds-barred game (be it politics, business or war) involves deception, mental manipulation, and moral sophistry, and that these practices are difficult to discuss among those without a firm grasp of their utility...and when known are secrets often best offered to a chosen few.

Strategists, therefore, are often reduced to commentators or even lexicographers. At worst, as in terrorism studies, definitional arguments hamstring discussion before it gets going. A famous instance in a business strategic context that can be extrapolated to questions of statecraft is probably Henry Mintzberg's 'Four "P"s' – strategy as 'plan', 'pattern', 'position', or 'perspective' (Mintzberg, 1994, pp. 23–32), each a different conceptual understanding of what a strategy does.^[3] One can thus see how discussions of 'how' are superseded by arguments about 'what'. Even Clausewitz was not immune to this, insofar as the more noted parts of his work – and far and away the most famous parts – concern a discussion of what war is and what it is about, rather than how to win it. In his discussion of military genius, Clausewitz in effect admits to this problem, noting that because

[2] Stewart, a trained philosopher and historian, has little patience for the concept of strategy writ large, an understandable reaction but not a helpful one for someone trying to run a state.

[3] Mintzberg (p. 27) draws for 'position' on the work of the corporate strategist Michael Porter (1980; 1985). One could also mention Porter (1996, pp. 45–59). Mintzberg alludes to the management theorist Peter Drucker with regard to 'perspective' (p. 32).



genius can never be truly comprehended, the rules by which it operates cannot be discerned. For a work famously inspired by a desire to learn from Napoleon's example, this is a discouraging beginning, which is not to say that it is not insightful (e.g. Clausewitz, 1993, p. 117). One may note, here, that skillsets diverge at this point: the ability to dissect what war is all about – or in a broader sense how statecraft is defined – does not necessarily exist in the same brain as the ability to win a war or run a government. One point often made across differing subfields of strategy is that the only true strategist is the organisation leader (cf. Andrews, 1980, p. 5 and Clausewitz, 1993, p. 207). Thus, the person who perfectly understands the rules of poker may not necessarily do well at the card table.

It is here that Gaddis has made a significant contribution to strategic studies, since he has offered his own prescription in the form of an elaborate conceptual analysis drawing on an ancient proverb. The proverb was originally a line of poetry ascribed to the quasi-mythical lyric poet and soldier of fortune Archilochus. As Gaddis notes, its context and even its authenticity cannot be known now. On face, however, it reads, 'The fox knows many tricks. The hedgehog knows one big one.' Gaddis invokes this line of poetry by way of the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin and the political forecaster Philip Tetlock. (Cf. Gaddis, 2018, pp. 8–9; Tetlock, 2005, pp. xi, 73–75, 118, 128–129, cited in Gaddis, 2018, pp. 8–9 and 316. See also Tetlock and Gardner, 2015, pp. 69–72. The original essay is Berlin, 1953.) As with any good aphorism, there is a great deal to unpack in such a simple and concise statement, and this author begs Gaddis' indulgence in advance if an oversimplification results. It is possible, however, to elucidate and analyse at least some of what is meant by this pithy statement, which drives a sizeable portion of Gaddis' teaching.

Briefly, to be a fox is to be at one with the present. It is to be constantly seeing what is going on, taking in not only bits of data from diverse sources but different ways of interpreting that data. It is to be constantly acting on those inputs, shifting course as necessary, blowing with the wind or at least adjusting course constantly as it shifts. As Gaddis notes, a person whom one would identify as a fox is at home in a fluid, dynamic, constantly changing situation (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 9, 309). The concept can be understood in a Jungian sense: a fox is engaging their mental perceiving functions, using their senses and intuition to absorb, understand and spontaneously adapt to an external environment (Jung, 1976, pp. 178–269, esp. 215–229). In short, a fox is a tactician. The archetypical fox is probably a fighter pilot in a dogfight or an infantryman assaulting an enemy position; the diplomatic equivalent is probably a survivor like Talleyrand or Bülow; the domestic political equivalent is perhaps the unprincipled and otherwise ineffective representative who nevertheless keeps getting elected. But a fox, as Gaddis points out, risks going nowhere in particular, giving up too much to obtain too little, or losing sight of the bigger picture by only seeing the pieces.

The hedgehog, by contrast, fixates on goals or received wisdom. Even if that wisdom comes from an internal conviction rather than tradition or external pressure, it is an internally embedded notion of how things are supposed to be. A hedgehog is a dogmatist, an inflexible and obstinate individual who refuses to be dogged by what they see as trivialities that come up (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 9–14). There is the way forward and one must batter on. In Jungian terms, a hedgehog engages their mental judging functions, using reason or raw emotion to form opinions about things: how they are, how they are going to be, how they should be, or what one should do about them (Jung, 1976, pp. 178–269, esp. 192–215). Archetypically, the hedgehog may be the politician who sets policy based on core ideology, takes a firm stand for or against a person or issue, demands the unconditional surrender of an enemy...or the 'château general' who sends his men over the top of the trench repeatedly despite horrendous casualties, believing they will win through eventually.



While it would appear that Gaddis prefers the fox, and while he notes (p. 9) that, in Philip Tetlock's formulation, foxes are better at prediction (because they absorb more information) and therefore potentially make better strategists, it would be very 'unfoxlike' to boil matters down to such simplicity. For, in fact, Gaddis appears to argue that the great strategist is that rare person who is *both* fox and hedgehog – the person who can see both the forest and the trees simultaneously, or, as Gaddis argues by way of a line from Steven Spielberg's film *Lincoln*, the one who has both an accurate compass for direction and who can successfully dodge obstacles while navigating (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 16–17). This mirrors an insight of the strategic scholar Colin Gray: strategy, in Gray's formulation, is neither policy (what must be done – perhaps the province of hedgehogs) nor tactics (what one does to get there – ideally a job for a fox), but the 'bridge' (Gray's famous term) between them (Gray, 1999, p. 17).^[4]

Gaddis quotes Berlin as initially arguing that fox and hedgehog were not to be sought in the same person, before admitting (from late retirement) that perhaps this was not so (Gaddis, 2018, p. 15). Echoing Gaddis' hedgehog-fox dichotomy, Clausewitz [1993, pp. 172–173] had also devoted a couple of paragraphs to noting that 'perception' – the province of foxes – and 'judgment' – what hedgehogs do – merge in warfare as in all art. If one translates strategy from the strict realm of warfare to broader politics, one readily sees the point.) Certainly, the person with this kind of mental balance is rare, something Gaddis repeats and returns to several times, but this is in fact the point. Gaddis may – though he does not quite say it – have come upon a working definition of political greatness.

To that point, and to return to the understanding of strategy in politics as fundamentally a dark art, the challenge would appear to be how to teach it. One does not teach any subject merely by defining it. Clausewitz, to whom Gaddis devotes a chapter, famously threw up his hands at the question of deriving fixed principles for strategy, and Gaddis hammers this point through to the reader in multiple places: a good theory will pertain to reality but never describe every facet of it, and strategy exists in the realm of dynamic, interconnected, chaotic environments that are not reducible to fixed laws as positivist social scientists might wish (cf. Gaddis, 2018, pp. 185–216, esp. 213–215; see also Clausewitz, 1993, pp. 172–174).

How, then, does one teach strategy? Gaddis (p. 22) asks this exact question. Assuredly, great statesmen have had mentors, although Gaddis points out that many of those he considers the best – Augustus Caesar, Elizabeth I, Abraham Lincoln – appear to have been self-taught (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 66–67, 126–149, esp. 132, 221–235). Whatever the case, the key seems to be learning pattern recognition – not learning fixed lessons from history (that would be too hedgehog-like), but learning when and how to apply knowledge gained from the past (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 32, 108). To that end, Gaddis takes his readers on a tour of world history, not trying to teach them everything that can be known about creating sound strategy, but giving them some idea of the mental processes of the people who have managed to pull it off. It is difficult to summarise all of these lessons, and it is better to read the book and savour them. Nevertheless, a few examples of Gaddis' approach will be useful here.

The first is what not to do. Gaddis begins with the classical world before moving forward to almost the present day (he stops where he began, with Isaiah Berlin and the Cold War political environment that drove his thought) (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 4–6, 295–305, 315).^[5] His first stop is at the Hellespont in 480 BCE, with Xerxes preparing to invade Greece. Despite his advisors' pointing out that his expedition's failure is overdetermined from the start, Xerxes is intent on invading, come what may.

[4] Gray is concerned with strategy solely in a military context.

[5] Gaddis wryly notes (p. 315) that he stopped at the Cold War because he had already written too much about the strategy of that competition.



A long string of Pyrrhic victories and unrecoverable defeats – famously, at Thermopylae, Salamis and Plataea – await him, and in the back of his mind he may know this, but he barrels ahead in any case, on a rendezvous with destiny if not with success. Xerxes, Gaddis summarises, is a hedgehog with no foxlike instincts to balance him. Whatever else one does, Gaddis hints, one should not do this (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 10–14, 25).

What does work? Learning from mistakes while keeping the final goal in mind, Gaddis suggests, using the political autodidact Octavian Caesar (later Augustus) as a model (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 66–91). Avoiding ideological purism and following one's principles over a cliff is also important – to oversimplify Gaddis' analysis not only of Machiavelli but, improbably, of St Augustine (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 93–119).^[6] Also important is keeping one's options open while playing enemies and even friends off one another – Gaddis' model is Elizabeth I, who mixed toleration with police state tactics and avoided following any one advisor or faction too much (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 132–149). So is the *coup d'œil* (here Gaddis borrows from Clausewitz): the act of choosing one's moment and taking advantage of a critical development, whatever that may be (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 201, 203, 239–240; see also Clausewitz, 1993, pp. 117–119). In this, he cites Lincoln, who time and again used unexpected developments to their utmost effect (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 239–240). The ultimate lesson, if there is one, is to be neither ideological nor cynical, but pragmatic. One cannot have everything, and one cannot be perfect by any definition of the term; one, however, can achieve a lot if one knows how to use what one has (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 112, 312).

The question of how it has been done before, however, is of vital importance. There is a real need for a compendium of case studies in statecraft that offer more concrete precepts and models for how to apply the intuitions collected in Gaddis' book. Until such time as a more comprehensive set of case studies emerges, we can make do with analyses of individual cases, particularly as they occur over time. This is what A. Wess Mitchell has done in his groundbreaking work, *The grand strategy of the Habsburg Empire*.

Unlike Gaddis, who often presents his insights in a Socratic manner and occasionally in tentative rhetorical questions (as befits a book drawn from a celebrated university course), Mitchell approaches his subject as one on a mission. (To borrow a metaphor from another essay on the great strategists [Peters, 2000], Mitchell is a 'seeker' looking for answers to the great questions of statecraft, while Gaddis is a 'sage', offering wisdom but also riddles.) Mitchell is a long-time resident of the policy world (he recently served as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs), and although he disclaims (p. xii) any application to present-day American policy, he is clearly approaching grand strategy as a person in search of answers. On this he delivers. While the insights he ultimately draws are open to some debate, they are the well-reasoned product of a look at history in search of applicable lessons.

Mitchell begins with a survey of his subject. The Habsburg Empire – whose story he picks up with the wars of Louis XIV and leaves off with the Empire's final demise in the First World War – is understood as a family enterprise: not a nation-state or even a typical empire, but a collection of possessions that an ancient royal family had agglomerated over the years (Mitchell, 2018, p. 2). For all this, as he shows with laborious and rigorous analysis, its existence was not happenstance and its form was not the product of chance: geography – particularly the placement of rivers and mountains – and ethnography – particularly the size, structure and location of various ethnic groups and especially their leaders – shaped the Empire, made it possible, determined to a great degree its internal governance structure and external security policy, and ultimately haunted its decision-

[6] In his discussion of divine commandments and a leader's relationship to ethics, Gaddis could also be evoking Sun Tzu, who asserts that the *dao* – the way forward or the sense that one is right – is a critical component of strategy but leaves the details open to interpretation (cf. Sun Tzu 1963, p. 63 and Sun Tzu 1993, p. 73.)



makers and drove its destiny (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 2, 21–81, esp. pp. 29–41, 52–58, 69, 60–61, 77, 304–305). For, as Mitchell shows, the Empire, as in any great story, was a tragic character living on borrowed time: its policy and strategy were principally driven by the need to forestall its doom, to kick numerous fiscal, diplomatic and military cans down the road – ultimately, to struggle against fate itself, to ‘rage,’ if we may borrow from Dylan Thomas, ‘against the dying of the light.’

In showing this, Mitchell reminds us of the time-honoured lesson (also alluded to by Gaddis) that geography is a major driver of geopolitics. He demonstrates with rich detail the degree to which mountains made the Empire possible by shielding it from invasion, even as they delimited its expansion; how river networks created trouble spots that the Empire had to guard, even as they brought in taxable riches; how the distribution of farmland and commercial zones among the various ethnic groups clashed with the degree to which the central government could impose effective taxation upon them and, in so doing, determined the degree to which they could cooperate (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 26–35, 57–67). The Empire was a river basin partially protected by mountain ranges, with an agricultural and food base dominated by one ethnic group (Magyars), a commercial hub dominated by a coalition of groups (Germans, Slovaks and Czechs), and a Byzantine governance structure left over from older systems of feudal governance, partially buffered by smaller states and peoples on its periphery – but not everywhere (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 21–33, 38, 55–61). It was perennially courting bankruptcy, less because it was poor than because it could not effectively collect tax revenue (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 67–69). It had a large enough population (effectively the second largest of the European empires of its time) but little military participation (again due to inefficient administration stemming from lack of social cohesion and the Empire’s geographic layout – Mitchell, 2018, pp. 77–81).

All of this, Mitchell argues, determined its strategy. Determinism is itself a difficult subject for strategists, because strategy is supposed to involve choices, and choice is the seeming opposite of determinism. Gaddis, invoking his favourite author Leo Tolstoy, argues in his book that even if free will is an illusion, it is real enough if one cannot perceive the drivers of choice (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 211–213). Mitchell, though, places us in the driver’s seat. The Habsburg Empire had been dealt a bad hand, and the rest of the cards were dealt one by one. For all that, it could play the hand it was dealt more or less badly or well. The fact that its decision-making occurred in an international social context did not mean that it did not matter or that – at least from the vantage point of all the information one could ever have on the matter – its decisions were inevitable. On this point, Mitchell is prepared to argue that the hapless Habsburgs did at least tolerably well with what they were given (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 327–329).

They did so, Mitchell argues, by carefully managing space, time, and limited resources – subjects to which Gaddis returns in his own analysis (e.g. Gaddis, 2018, pp. 250–252). In Mitchell’s view, space and time were not merely broad concepts for the Habsburgs – they led to habits of decision-making. The Habsburgs, Mitchell argues (though he presents the point somewhat piecemeal), were schizophrenic on the subject of the duration of wars: they were to be ended quickly and decisively if the state could not afford to prolong them; otherwise, the state would trade time for money, avoiding risks and expensive campaigns that it could not afford, trading off the prospect of decisive victory in favour of maintaining the existence of the army, and accepting less than ideal (in some cases tragically so) outcomes in exchange for enough security to fight another day. The Empire played allies and enemies off each other, used bordering states to absorb would-be invaders’ time and resources, pinched pennies shamelessly, employed informational advantages for everything they were worth (even as prosaic a discipline as map-making became a matter of high security, with detailed maps treated as highly classified information that could provide an edge in wartime), and



struck hard only when it was sure it could win (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 13, 40–48, 67–71, 88, 90, 91, 107, 113, 134, 138, 159, 307, 308).

Mitchell pursues an exhaustive analysis of Habsburg security policy, organised not merely historically, but by political and military theatres (three segments of the Habsburg frontiers, from Turkey, to Prussia and Poland, to France and Italy – Mitchell, 2018, pp. 119–121, 159, 194). Though the details are too involved to repeat in their totality, Mitchell's summation is elegant. Briefly, Austria behaved somewhat like Britain in its period of 'splendid isolation', except without the latter's geographic advantages and from a position of military and political weakness. The difference amounted to a question of options and resources: what Britain did opportunistically, Austria did fatalistically. Thus, famously, Austria backed Britain against France early in the eighteenth century, only to switch to backing France against Britain and Prussia by mid-century after the latter became its greatest territorial threat (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 101, 146, 167). It also employed very adroit court diplomacy, which often came down to personal relationships with individual foreign officials, to keep its running conflict with Ottoman Turkey at a low boil, and to play Russia and Turkey off each other (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 138–139, 149). Rather than merely wait out trouble, Austrian leaders repeatedly preempted it by making the best of gloomy situations and accepting imperfect outcomes. Austria sought alliances that would politically limit the damage potential rivals could do, as when, as Mitchell notes, it allied itself with Russia, not because the latter was a useful partner, but to forestall trouble. The alliance allowed the Empire to use the rhetoric of alliance to prevent Russia from moving too aggressively against Habsburg interests on the one hand, and to ensure that Austria would at least get something of the spoils of the retrenching Ottoman Empire on the other. The Empire's leaders reasoned that not doing so would risk being left out completely – an example of the Habsburgs' fatalistic minimalism (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 149–150). Where diplomacy alone was inadequate, Austria built border fortifications and exploited the willingness of border states to allow it to garrison troops on their territory, combined with a policy of sustained military readiness at whatever level the budget would allow (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 178–185, 189–190, 199–204, 220–221).

Gaddis would recognise this strategy for what it was: a fox taking advantage of hedgehogs. Austria was not attempting to accomplish a fixed goal or implement a preordained plan; it was manoeuvring, reading a situation, absorbing information as it came, modifying not only its ways but even its ends, seeking only to survive by going with the flow. It might have wished to do more, but, as Mitchell and Gaddis would both likely concede, an important part of strategy is knowing one's limits even as one watches for opportunities.

Mitchell's ultimate list of lessons attempts to crystallise specific material from a long and thorough study. In this he differs from Gaddis, who prefers to show his readers how to think about problems of statecraft rather than specifically what to do. As with any specific precepts, Mitchell's lessons are subject to analysis and debate, but they are insightful and offer would-be practitioners some 'news you can use'.

On occasion, Mitchell falls into the trap of strategy by wishful thinking. Notably, in criticising the final years of Austria-Hungary's existence as an empire, Mitchell argues that Austria's weak leaders allowed themselves to fall into less than ideal diplomatic, fiscal and military positions that could best have been avoided (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 297, 303, 313–314, 327). Whether they could truly have done so, as opposed to having encountered a perfect storm of external developments with which they could not contend, is debatable. As one example of poor strategy, Mitchell (p. 297) cites the rapidity of Austria's defeat by Prussia in 1866. Other factors, however, such as superior Prussian weaponry and command and control, were also at work, and far more than mere management would have been required to stave them off. Mitchell's citation (also p. 297) of the post-Napoleonic



coalescence of larger nation-states on the Empire's borders as a factor in the Empire's demise seems to assume that it would have been within the Habsburgs' control to buck powerful international social and economic trends. These are debatable points, and debate on them should not obscure Mitchell's central contention that leaders are not helpless and can make better or worse choices even *in extremis*. The question, however, ultimately goes to the heart of the agency–structure problem in international politics: clearly there are some situations for which no good option is available, and it is not always possible to avoid them.

In his analysis of the Habsburgs' long tenure of power, Mitchell offers substantive guidance: 'prioritize regions that give long-term economic or strategic benefit', '[a]ppease a rival to buy time, not outsource a problem' and '[m]aintain smaller states between yourself and your main rivals' are just a few examples (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 317–329). As for how to apply such guidance, one is back to the strategic mindset that Gaddis attempts to inculcate and cultivate in his readers.

Grand strategy, both Gaddis and Mitchell would likely agree, is not always about implementing a grand vision or achieving a high goal. Sometimes it is simply about taking the helm of the ship of state and steering as best one can. Gaddis offers general words of wisdom for those who hope to take hold of that helm; Mitchell is trying to tell those who already have that duty how others in a particularly tragic position have kept the ship off of shoals when they seemed to lie in every direction. Both offer a refreshing contribution to a sub-discipline that has avoided many of the hard questions of statecraft for too long.



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Mobilising the diaspora

by Daria Vorobyeva



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The attention of both academics and policymakers working in such broad areas of enquiry as international relations, anthropology, political theory and transnational politics to name a few, has long ago turned towards the relationship between diaspora and homeland. More recently, the importance of the diaspora's influence on the political life of the homeland has started to come more to the fore of scholarship. It has been acknowledged that a politically mobilised diaspora can challenge the homeland state by using political or material leverage (diaspora members often have developed links to their host states and so can influence the latter's policies towards the homeland). Yet, only limited scholarship has emerged in international relations, comparative politics or diaspora studies on the mechanisms and patterns of diasporic transnational political mobilisation (see Chapter 1 of the book).

Mobilising the diaspora by Alexander Betts and Will Jones is a fascinating and significant book for scholars and political analysts, who desire to understand why certain diasporas are politically mobilised, whether (and how) their activities influence politics at home, why they choose specific tactics to reach their goals, and which factors define the birth and death of a diaspora. The examination of these questions is the prime goal of the authors. The development of a theory of a diaspora's 'life cycle' and the classification of factors defining its strategies can be seen as the main theoretical contributions of the book. The authors define a diaspora's 'life cycle' as 'its birth, life, death, and afterlife' (Betts and Jones, 2016, p. 215), which is seen as a dependent variable, while 'animators' – the actors causing mobilisation and providing various resources for a diaspora – are seen as an independent variable. The work also adds to the scholarship on transnational political mobilisation and contemporary African history – particularly in the context of Zimbabwe and Rwanda – as well as to the scholarship examining the role of the church in assisting refugees, and political mobilisation in the Global South. Generally, the book pleasantly surprises the reader with the rationality and openness of the debates provided.

One of the most thought-provoking statements of the book is that the mobilisation of a diaspora, which is seen as a politically active group, is 'an inherently political process – it has an underlying political economy [...] [and it] is based upon an underlying set of interests and power relations' (Betts and Jones, 2016, p. 7). The nature of this process and the 'animators', who are seen as allocators of financial, ideological and networking resources, define the life of diasporic mobilisation (see Chapter 1). Animators can be host country governments and other relevant host country actors, government or certain political actors in home countries, third country institutions (such as the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the case of the Zimbabwean diaspora), international organisations or civil society members. Probably the most interesting inquiry of the work in this regard is the analysis of the role of external actors in a diaspora's political mobilisation. The authors state that where animators are primarily external (host governments, third countries, IOs, external political parties or actors etc.), the sustainability of diasporic political activity is weaker. The reason for this is that such activities are closely linked to external resources, and once external animators reach their goals or change their priorities, the funding decreases or disappears, leaving the diaspora drifting. In such circumstances, diaspora members can either try to continue humanitarian work with the limited resources available or try to attract external funding by emphasising goals that are



attractive to external animators. Additionally, external animators are interested in their goals rather than the goals of a diaspora, while cooperating only as long as these aims coincide. Meanwhile, in cases of primarily internal animation, the life cycle of a diaspora is likely to be more sustainable, as internal actors are less likely to disappear suddenly. Finally, the authors prove through their case studies that institutionalised diasporas are more likely to sustain their activities in the longer term than network-based ones, as activities of the former are more structured and less dependent on individuals who may lose interest or change their agenda. This is an important breakthrough for diaspora studies, as principally this theory allows one to foresee diaspora activities and their chances of success regarding homeland political influence in the short, mid and, to some extent, the long term.

The two case studies selected, the Zimbabwean diaspora – mostly concentrating on South Africa since 2003 (Chapters 2–4) – and the Rwandan – primarily in the UK and the USA (Chapters 5–7) – allow the authors to test their theory in practice. Applying the theory of diaspora mobilisation, Betts and Jones track and explain the specifics of the birth, growth, death and after-life cycles of diasporas. On the one hand, both cases represent diasporas from authoritarian states. On the other, key animators differed in the two studies: in the case of the Zimbabwean diaspora political activities were primarily supported by outside players, while in the case of Rwanda, the homeland government has played a key role in its activities. In both cases, the theory proved to explain correctly the political developments of the diasporas. In the case of Zimbabwe, once political changes took place and external animators shifted their priorities, largely network-based diaspora organisations started drifting, while the Rwandan diaspora has been largely animated by the Rwandan government and institutionalised, which, as the authors show, allowed it to become more durable.

The book has several minor shortcomings. Although it sounds very intriguing, the title does not precisely describe its content, which may reduce its potential audience. First, the book largely focuses on the role of ‘animators’, including their actions in relation to political economy, and how the type/nature of animators influences the life cycle of a diaspora. The first case study shows how external animators support diaspora claims as long as these coincide with their own goals, while the second shows how an authoritarian state, to a large extent, shapes diaspora political mobilisation. The book, therefore, extensively discusses how external players mobilise diasporas against or in support of an authoritarian home state, and not primarily how diasporic groups themselves challenge these states. Consequently, a more fitting title for the book might be ‘Diaspora political mobilisation: who and what defines the process?’.

It would further benefit the quality of the book if the part of the conclusion discussing the main arguments in modern diaspora scholarship (Betts and Jones, 2016, p. 214) was slightly expanded. At present, it does not exactly reflect the discussion in the introduction (Betts and Jones, 2016, pp. 20–25), where authors provide a well-structured and rather strong literature review. It is acknowledged in the introduction that, recently, diasporas have been primarily seen in constructivist standings, i.e. as socially constructed, developing and ‘imagined’ (in Anderson’s terms) entities, rather than fixed units. These arguments have been extensively discussed by such authors as Cohen (1997), Tölölyan (2007), Berns-McGown (2006; 2007) and Payaslian (2007). In the conclusion, however, it is claimed that ‘the literature on diaspora politics tends to take the diaspora as given’ (p. 214). This is a debatable statement and may, therefore, be confusing for readers who have only just begun working in the field of migration and diaspora studies, especially if they form their outlook by reading only the conclusion. These are, however, minor remarks, which should not distract the reader from the strong arguments provided.



The book contributes to several disciplines and fields of study, such as diaspora and migration studies, political science, international relations and the contemporary political history of Rwanda, Zimbabwe and central Africa in general. The book will be beneficial to scholars in the above-mentioned fields, as well as to political analysts and policymakers in state and non-state institutions. The theory on internal and external animation and its effect on the life cycle of a diaspora has the potential to be used to explain the life cycles of other political or even military groups. It would be interesting to examine, for example, the life cycles of prominent political and military opposition groups during revolutions and coups in authoritarian states. The best example that springs to mind here regards the Syrian war, and the life cycle of such primarily externally animated organisations as the Free Syrian Army, which had a prominent beginning but once the priorities of external animators changed, the political effectiveness of the organisations started to fail.

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Openings



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International relations are complex, intricate and messy. Often, however, the disciplinary (and disciplining) boundaries of International Relations (IR) as a field curtail our ability to account for these complexities and to depict, narrate and imagine international relations differently. We are therefore pleased to introduce a new creative section within *Contemporary Voices: The St Andrews Journal of International Relations* (CVIR). Building on CVIR's aim to transform what and how 'voices' are heard in IR, the *Openings* section provides a site to experiment with different forms of academic practice and to rethink how we 'do' IR.

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