

THE ISLAMIC STATE, RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE, AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF BRUTALITY

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ABSTRACT

The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has sparked debates among scholars on the connection between religion and violence. ISIS provides Islamic-based justifications for its violent acts such as beheading, burning alive its prisoners, enslaving its female captives, stoning adulterers, cutting off the hands of thieves, killing homosexuals and those whom ISIS considers heretics, destroying statues and tombs believed by ISIS to be sources of *shirk* or idolatrous act, and many others. How should, then, one assess an answer to the question of whether ISIS's violent acts are caused by, or at least have something to do with, religion (i.e. Islam, in this case)? To answer this question, this paper examines such justifications through the established theories of the discourse on religious violence. It takes four examples: (1) ISIS's theology or creeds; (2) the practice of burning captives alive; (3) the destruction of tombs; and (4) the revival of slavery. Data are taken from ISIS's pamphlets distributed through particular websites or social media platforms that advance its justifications behind its violent acts. I argue that the religion of Islam (as interpreted by ISIS) has a significant role in ISIS's violence. ISIS's creed and violence echo what Mark Juergensmeyer calls "cosmic war", a battle perceived by ISIS to symbolically represent war between God and devil and, as such, elevates mundane battle to a more deadly and beyond this-worldly level. Further, some of ISIS's violent acts, as seen through its justifications, are most likely caused solely by its interpretation of Islam; thus viewing ISIS's religious violence through an instrumentalist perspective (i.e. that religion is just a tool or a disguise to cover ISIS's 'secular' agenda) fails to capture the whole phenomenon. I propose that ISIS's ideology functions as an intervening variable in that it escalates the level of violence and defines who is friend and who is enemy.

Keywords: Islamic State, religious violence, theological justifications

INTRODUCTION¹

The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)² has sparked debates among scholars on the connection between religion and violence. The fact of the matter is that ISIS provides Islamic-based justifications for its

¹ A version of this paper has been submitted and presented at the 11th Asian Graduate Forum held by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 12-14 July 2016.

² In Arabic: al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah fi al-'Iraq wa al-Sham (abbreviated as Daesh). Technically "ISIS" no longer exist; the official name for the state since June 2014 has been the Islamic State (in Arabic: al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah). In this paper, I prefer to use ISIS purely for the sake of convenience.

violent acts such as beheading, burning alive its prisoners, enslaving its female captives, stoning adulterers, cutting off the hands of thieves, killing homosexuals and those whom ISIS considers heretics, destroying statues and tombs believed by ISIS to be sources of *shirk* or idolatrous act, and many others. How then should one assess whether ISIS's violent acts are caused by, or at least have something to do with, religion (i.e. Islam, in this case)?

To borrow Hasenclever's and Rittberger's classification, three views are relevant in the discussion of religious violence: (1) the "primordialists", which contend that religion should be seen as an independent variable, i.e. as a real source of violence; (2) the "instrumentalists", which insist that religion in violence is only utilized in rethoric but has no real, objective role, and that the basic of conflict is actually non-religious; and (3) the "constructivists", which acknowledge that the origin of conflict is socioeconomic decay and/or political injustice, but religion can play strong role in amplifying the conflict and, as such, religion constitutes an intervening variable.³ There is another classification made by Hafez and Wiktorowicz whose paper, which deals with the case of the Egyptian Islamist movement, addresses the question why Islamist movements utilize violence as contention despite other available repertoires.⁴ From Hafez and Wiktorowicz, three kinds of analyses on Islamic activism and violence are offered: (1) "the ideational school", which tends to point out that the textual sources or ideology behind Islamism is what must be first addressed in dealing with Islamist violence; in other words, this school favors ideological aspects; (2) "psychosocial model", which tends to privilege the socioeconomic background of violent activists by understanding the demographic roots; and (3), which Hafez and Wiktorowicz mostly stress on, "political opportunity structure" model, derived from social movement theory, which sees violent activists within a context of opportunities and constraints that inform decision about appropriate tactics.

Despite the frameworks and explanations, however, I am trying to point out in this paper that religion (or religious justification) is of great importance in analyzing ISIS's violent acts. I shall show that in explaining ISIS's religious violence we cannot neglect the "constructivist" framework which argues that, despite the premise that religion may not be the original source of ISIS's violence, religion has a power to escalate conflict and, more importantly, brings about violence beyond worldly matters. Further, ISIS echoes the notion of "cosmic war" developed by Mark Juergensmeyer, that is, a battle between good and evil, or God and devil, stemming from divine metaphysical war, enacted in this-worldly affairs in which the perpetrators of violence portray themselves to be representing God's will in eradicating those evil forces⁵. In this framework, religion has a power to divide people into friends and enemies, good and evil, us and them. And when religion is involved in war, it will be very deadly as a result of combination of two things. First, war provides a

³ See Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, "Does Religion Make a Difference?: Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict," *Journal of International Studies* (Millenium Publishing House: 2000), vol. 29. no.3. pp. 641-674.

⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement", in Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 61-88.

⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (California: University of California Press, 2000).

reason to be violent. As Juergensmeyer points out, “War suggests an all-or-nothing struggle against an enemy whom one assumes to be determined to destroy.”⁶ Besides, war erects the dichotomy between we versus they, good versus evil, truth versus falsehood. Second, religion makes the all-or-nothing war much worse as religion provides justification for “satanization” of the other—while in dealing with satan, there is no negotiation or compromise. In short, religion elevates mundane battle into “cosmic war”. Juergensmeyer says, “Though religious ideas do not initially provoke the conflicts... they play an important role. The conditions that lead to conflict are typically matters of social and political identity—what makes individuals cohere as a community and how they are defined... At some point in the conflict, however, usually at a time of frustration and desperation, the political and ideological contest becomes ‘religionized’. Then what was primarily a worldly struggle takes on the aura of sacred conflict.”⁷

That is an element of religion worth taking into consideration when we discuss the link between theological basis and “religious violence” (or violence in the name of religion). As for ISIS’s violent acts discussed in this paper, scriptural justifications are thus seen as playing a significant role in providing the basis of the “satanization”. I am, therefore, going to examine what kinds of theology and Islamic justifications for ISIS to do its violent acts. The method I employ in this paper is simply similar to that of Juergensmeyer when he examined the case of Mahmoud Abuhajima (who was behind the 1993 WTC bombing) and Abdul Aziz Rantisi (one of the founders of Hamas).⁸ He conducted interviews with the subject under examination based on which what they want and the way they perceive and opt for violent means can be represented. In the same way, I shall take ISIS’s religious justifications, especially from its own publications, to represent ISIS’s position in regard to its own violent acts. Yet, given many available data, I will not examine all publications of ISIS; I will limit my focus on ISIS’s pamphlets.⁹ Also, as the main purpose of this paper is to point out how ISIS justifies its violent acts, given many of its pamphlets, I will only take four examples: first is on ISIS’s creed/doctrine to give an overall worldview of ISIS; second on its justification of burning alive its captive; third on its acts of destroying tombs; and fourth on ISIS’s justification for reviving slavery.

ISIS’s Creed/Doctrine

ISIS has deployed few publications presenting its creed/doctrine (*‘aqeeda*). Some of them are in a booklet format. One is in a pamphlet format. The pamphlet can be said as the most concise form in summarizing ISIS’s creed as most of its paragraphs are started with the words “we believe...” The pamphlet is titled “*Hazihi ‘Aqidatuna wa Haza Manhajuna*” (This is our Creed and This is our Manhaj—“*manhaj*” literally means path or ideological

⁶ *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 148.

⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State from Christian Militias to al-Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 23. I cite this passage through William T. Cavanaugh’s *The Myth of Religious Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 35.

⁸ See, *Terror in the Mind of God*’s chapter IV titled “Islam’s Neglected Duty”.

⁹ They can be accessed, among others, at <http://justpaste.it/matweat>

direction), so that it literally conveys from ISIS's statements themselves what ISIS believes in.¹⁰

In overall view, the pamphlet generally reflects standard Islamic teachings, i.e. Sunni orthodox views, such as the oneness of God, the Qur'an as word of God, and obligation to comply with and implement *sharia*. Even the pillars of faith (*arkan al-iman*) stated in it are the same as what most Muslims would profess, i.e. belief in God, His prophets, His books, His angels, the Last Day, and fate (*qadar*) for better or worse. ISIS's monotheist view also reflects Sunni orthodoxy: that God is one, there is no deity besides Him, and no one has the right to be worshipped except Him; affirming for Him what the words of Tawhid (i.e. *shahadah*) have affirmed, taking away from Him idolatry (*shirk*) and defamation. Even ISIS states that its Islam is a middle path or moderation between two extremes: the *Kharijites* and the people of *Irja'*. Further, ISIS's definition of who is a Muslim is generally similar to that of Sunni orthodoxy: a Muslim is one who testifies the *shahada* (no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger) and fulfil its consequences. ISIS also says that it will not do *takfir* (declaring a Muslim a disbeliever, having been leaving Islam, and hence an apostate) to a Muslim as per its definition. The pamphlet says, "We do not declare *takfir* on a man from the monotheists (*muwahhidun*) or on those who pray to the *qibla* of the Muslims for sins like fornication, drinking alcohol, and theft—so long as he does not deem them permissible."

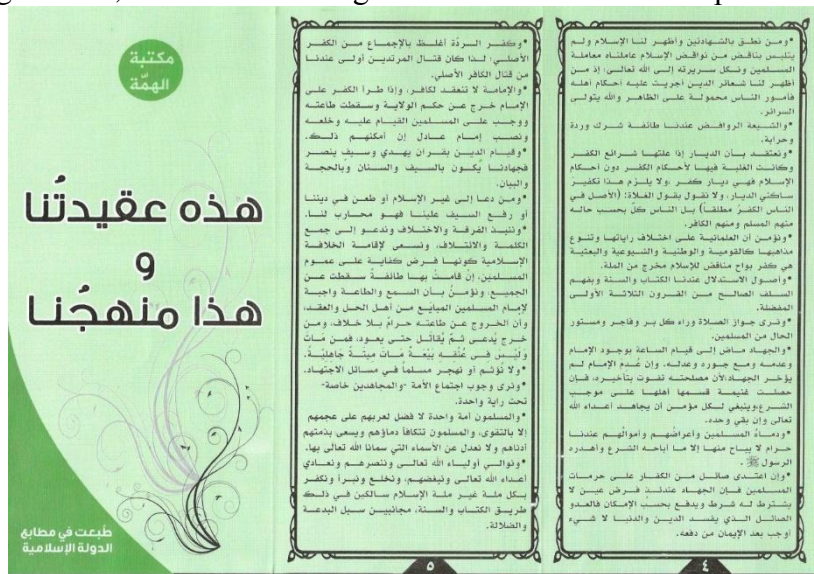


Figure 1. ISIS's pamphlet entitled *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna wa Hadha Manhajuna* (This is Our Creed and This is Our Manhaj). Source: <http://justpaste.it/matweat>

If there is one issue in the pamphlet on ISIS's creed that is worth paying more attention, it is on its having the idea of the "nullifiers" of Islam (*nawaqid al-Islam*), a concept Aymenn Jawad considers to be quite identical to Wahhabism.¹¹ Nullifiers of Islam are, as Jawad defines it, "things that take one outside the fold of Islam and into disbelief." With regard to this, the pamphlet says, "Whoever does not bear its conditions (i.e. of the *shahada*) or commits one of its nullifiers is a disbeliever even if he claims that he is a Muslim." In

¹⁰ To read the pamphlet's translation in English by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, go to <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/10/this-is-our-aqeeda-and-this-is-our-manhaj-islam#continued>. All quotes from the pamphlet in this section is taken from his translation.

¹¹ See Aymenn's footnotes in *ibid*.

another paragraph, the pamphlet says it again, “Whoever has professed the two *shahadas* and shown to us Islam and not taken up a nullifier from the nullifiers of Islam, we deal with him as Muslims are to be treated and we refer his conscience to God Almighty.” Crucial to this issue is what counts as nullifier of Islam; and as a consequence this permeates ISIS’s conceptualization of *takfir*.

In several paragraphs, the pamphlet has statements implying what counts as nullifiers of Islam. Among them has been stated earlier, that is, a Muslim who declares something Islamically forbidden (e.g. fornication, drinking alcohol, theft, etc.) as permissible. Another is even touching not only person but also political system. The pamphlet says it clearly, “We believe that secularism in its various banners and distinction between its schools of thought like populist, nationalist, communist and Ba’athist is manifest disbelief nullifying Islam, taking one outside the path.” In other words, as the pamphlet states in another part, “The abode over which the laws of disbelief are supreme and in which the rulings of disbelief dominate without the rulings of Islam is an abode of disbelief”, even though the pamphlet gives a limitation that “this does not necessitate *takfir* on the inhabitants of the abode.”

A deeper elaboration of what counts as nullifier of Islam according to ISIS can be read in other publications of ISIS, in the form of booklet titled *Muqarrar fi al-Tawhid* (Course on Tawhid or Monotheism).¹² Yet its summary is also published in a particular pamphlet, part of which is titled literally *nawaqid al-Islam* (nullifiers of Islam) and contains ten points along with their respective textual proof (*dalil*) from either the Quran or hadith. The ten points are: (1) *shirk*; (2) doing *tawassul*, i.e. making mediation between a prayer and God in his/her prayer; (3) not declaring *takfir* to those whom God has declared as *kuffar* or disbelievers and this even includes being merely doubting whether they are *kuffar*; (4) having belief that there are other teachings better than the teachings of Prophet Muhammad; (5) hating the teachings of the Prophet even if he/she is practicing the teachings; (6) taunting or ridiculing Islamic teachings; (7) doing magic or witchcraft; (8) helping the idolaters or the Mushrikun against the Muslims; (9) having belief that some people are allowed not to obey the *sharia* of the Prophet; and (10) turning away from Islam by not learning nor practicing its teachings. A Muslim who has or does just one of these ten is enough for ISIS to be declared as a *kafir*/disbeliever, and hence an apostate, even if he/she is still claiming to be Muslim. Besides, as stated in the pamphlet on ISIS’s creed, ISIS maintains declaring *takfir* on “whomsoever God and His Messenger have declared to be a disbeliever; and everyone who professes something besides Islam is a disbeliever, whether the proof has reached him or not” though the torment of the Afterlife is still dependent on whether the proof has reached. Furthermore, as reflected in the pamphlet, ISIS embraces two kinds of *takfir*: first is *takfir ‘amm* (general *takfir*), directed to a particular belief, word, and/or deed, and second is *takfir mu’ayyan* (specified *takfir*) directed to a specific individual whose ruling rests on proving the conditions of *takfir* and lack of obstacles to it;” and that *takfir mu’ayyan* will

¹² Its translation by Aymenn Jawad in English can be accessed online at <http://www.aymennjawad.org/17633/islamic-state-training-camp-textbook-course-in>.

not be sentenced “until the required evidence for which there is no obstacle arises in that regard.”¹³



Figure 2. ISIS’s pamphlet titled *Nawaqid al-Islam* (Nullifiers of Islam). Source: <http://justpaste.it/matweat>.

Other three points worth paying attention from the pamphlet is, first, that ISIS considers the Rafidite Shia to be “a sect of idolatry, apostasy and *hiraba*” (i.e. as Aymenn gives notes “a people waging war on Islam and sowing corruption in the land; Qur’an 5:33-4”), and as a consequence of this, as the pamphlet says, waging war against disbeliever of apostasy is prioritized over original disbeliever (*al-kafir al-asly*)—this may explain why most of ISIS’s victims are Muslims (who have been declared apostates by ISIS, of course). Second is ISIS’s understanding of jihad, on which the pamphlet explicitly states, “The establishment of the religion on the Qur’an that guides and a sword that gives victory; for our jihad will be by the sword, the spearhead, proof and evidence.”¹⁴ Third, the pamphlet states that it is an obligation “to gather the *Ummah*, and the *mujahideen* in particular, under one banner”, which implies that the ultimate goal of ISIS is to establish a global Islamic caliphate that unifies all Muslims across the globe under one ruler and one centralized regime.

Burning Alive

In early 2015, ISIS was burning alive a Jordanian pilot named Muath al-Kasasbeh. He was burned to death while trapped inside a cage after his F-16 fighter aircraft crashed over Syria and he was then captured by ISIS. The video of burning alive was released by ISIS in February 2015, followed by a one-page document issued by ISIS’s al-Ifta wa al-Buhuth committee, spread through the internet, containing ISIS’s Islamic textual justification for the terrifying act. As the document does not contain long explanation, in the following I quote all the translation by Aymenn Jawad of the document along with his footnotes contained in it needed for clarity:¹⁵

¹³ According to Aymenn Jawad, this quotation is actually from Ibn Taymiyyah (*Majmu’ al-Fatawa* 28/50), yet the pamphlet quotes it without proper citation.

¹⁴ This statement, according to Aymenn Jawad, is from Ibn Taymiyyah and popular in the discourse among Salafi jihadists.

¹⁵ This translation can be read online at Aymenn Jawad’s blog: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/02/islamic-state-justification-for-burning-alive>.



Figure 3. ISIS's pamphlet on justification for burning alive. Source: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/>.

Question: What is the ruling on burning the kafir [disbeliever] with fire until he dies?

Answer: [...] The Hanafis and Shafi'is¹⁶ have permitted it, considering the saying of the Prophet 'Fire is only to be administered as punishment by God' as an affirmation of humility. Al-Muhallab said: "This is not an absolute prohibition, but rather on the path of humility." Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar¹⁷ said: "What points to the permissibility of burning is the deeds of the Companions, and the Prophet put out the eyes of the Uraynians with heated iron while Khalid ibn al-Waleed¹⁸ burnt people of those who apostazied." And some of the Ahl al-'Ilm have been of the opinion that burning with fire was prohibited originally, but then on retaliation it is permitted, just as the Prophet did to the people of Urayna, when he put out the eyes of the Uraynians with fire—in retaliation—as is related in Sahih [reliable] tradition, and this brought forth the words together among the proofs.¹⁹

How to explain this brutal act of ISIS? First of all, this religiously sanctioned act of burning alive cannot be said as distinctly identical to Wahhabism; ISIS backed it with references shared by most Muslims, particularly the Sunnis. In fact, at least as stated in the traditional texts of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), burning alive was done by and thus has precedence from some of the Prophet's companions, like Khalid ibn al-Waleed who is cited in the document or even Abu Bakr while dealing with the

¹⁶ Two of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence, the other being Maliki and Hanbali.

¹⁷ Fifteenth century imam and jurist from Egypt.

¹⁸ Companion of Muhammad who participated in early Muslim conquests in the Levant.

¹⁹ Note added by Aymenn in February 5, 2015: For clarity, 'retaliation' is in the literal sense of 'eye for an eye'. Consider this explanation on the burning of the Jordanian pilot from an ISIS source in Ninawa province: "They say that IS burnt Muadh the apostate alive, and have forgotten that Muadh is the one who was burning children of the Muslims alive. [This is when] he was bombing them with heat missiles."

apostates (*murtaddun*) at the time of his reign as a caliph. This should not be a problem of Wahhabism as in the previous case of ISIS's creed, but rather a problem, if necessary, of Muslims in general. Second, ISIS does not do its brutality without calculation; it has some sort of reasoning and in fact ISIS's clerics can provide a justifications for even a savage punishment in the eyes of modern people.

Having said that, however, following an analysis by Hassan Hassan in his article published by the Guardian,²⁰ merely relying on religious texts, as what many leading Muslim scholars who have issued a "letter to al-Baghdadi"²¹ or fatwas to deligitimize ISIS do, would "miss the mark unless they understand the invigorating nature of this violent ideology", and that is, as Hassan argues, "savagery is part of ISIS's ideological DNA." In other words, ISIS uses brutality as a deterrent strategy. This is the reasoning that, Hassan argues, can explain ISIS's horrifict punishment. In fact, while acknowledging that immolation of burning alive is "forbidden in principle", ISIS allows it in purpose or "reciprocity" or, in the word of the document, "retaliation" (*mumathalah*). Further, Hassan explains that ISIS's savagery can be understood through the book *Idarat al-Tawahhush* (translated in English as *Management of Savagery*),²² written by an anonymous jihadi ideologue using *nom de guerre* Abu Bakr Naji. According to Hassan, ISIS members have confirmed that the book constitutes a kind of manual book for ISIS's jihad strategy. The book contains reasonings why such brutal act as beheading is not only religiously allowed but even encouraged for the sake of deterrence. The book basically conveys that violence and even brutality is the nature of jihad and this is among the reason why jihad must be distinguished from Islamic tenets in general. Naji writes, as Hassan quotes it from the translation of McCants, "I am talking about jihad and fighting, not about Islam, and one should not confuse them. He cannot continue to fight and move from one stage to another unless the beginning state contains a stage of massacring the enemy and deterring him." This kind of ideology, Hassan continues arguing, has manifested in ISIS while it justifies its massacre of hundreds of Shaitat tribesmen in Deir Ezzor, Syria, as *tashreed*, a word which can be translated as "deterrence". In this case, Abu Moussa, a cleric affiliated to ISIS, echoed Naji's ideology while saying, as quoted by Hassan, "The layman who learned some of his religion from [mainstream] cleric think of jihad as a fanciful act, conducted far away from him. In reality, jihad is a heavy responsibility and requires toughness."

In short, ISIS utilizes brutality as a deterrence strategy, and it is believed to be an inherent part of jihad (or the realistic jihad), and religious backing from textual sources comes later. ISIS conducts brutal acts to send a message to global audience, and in particular to humiliate the international

²⁰ "ISIS has reached new depths of depravity. But there is a brutal logic behind it." *The Guardian*, February 8, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/08/isis-islamic-state-ideology-sharia-syria-iraq-jordan-pilot> (retrieved December 28, 2015)

²¹ Can be read online at <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/>

²² To download the book in its original Arabic version: https://pietervanostaeyen.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/idarat_al-tawahhush_-_abu_bakr_naji.pdf; and in its English translation: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>; The translation was done by William McCants of the Brookings Institution in 2006.

coalition being the enemy of ISIS. In line with this understanding, “political opportunity structure” framework is helpful to explain why ISIS opts for such a brutal act: it is likely that, besides such purposes as retaliation, deterrence, and sending a message, the repertoire surrounding ISIS is quite fertile for ISIS to do brutal violence given the context where ISIS seeks to survive and the enemies ISIS is facing.

Destroying Tombs

ISIS has destroyed tombs of prophets and revered figures in Islamic history which it considers to be source of *shirk* (idolatry). Reported in mid 2014, ISIS demolished the Prophet Yunus (Jonah) tomb, located east of Mosul city, as well as that of Prophet/Saint Daniel (Daniyal), following destructions of at least four tombs of Sunni or Sufi figures and six Hussainiyas located in and around Mosul, Iraq, as well as that in and around Palmyra in Homs, Syria (the last includes ancient statues of the world’s cultural heritage).²³ Certainly ISIS has a reasoning behind this act. Among ISIS’s pamphlets concerning it is that with the title “*Al-Qawl al-Fasl fi Mashru’iyyah Hadm al-Qubur al-Maz’umah li al-Anbiya*” (The Decisive Statement on the Legality of Demolishing the Tombs Alleged to be of the Prophets). The pamphlet explicitly mentions four tombs which, according to ISIS, have been wrongly attributed to prophets of Allah. These four are Yunus,²⁴ Jirjis, Sheth, and Daniyal.²⁵ The way ISIS claims of the wrong attribution is by quoting statements of early Muslim scholars and historians such as Ibn Taymiyyah,²⁶ al-Tabari,²⁷ Ibn al-Athir,²⁸ and Ibn al-Jawzi²⁹. The pamphlet quotes Ibn

²³ “ISIS destroys tomb of two prophets in Mosul”,

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/07/25/ISIS-destroys-tombs-of-two-prophets-in-Mosul.html>; “ISIS destroys triumphal arches in Palmyra, Syria”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/world/middleeast/isis-syria-arch-triumph-palmyra.html? r=0>; “ISIS militants destroy 2,000-year-old statue of lion at Palmyra

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/02/isis-militants-destroy-palmyra-stone-lion-al-lat>

²⁴ One of twenty five Messengers (*rusul*, and *rusul* are automatically becoming prophets or *anbiya*’) whose name is mentioned in the Quran. According to Islamic orthodoxy, the 25 Messengers are the ones that must be believed in as a ramification of one of the six pillars of Islamic faith, that is, believing in Allah’s messengers and prophets. Yunus or Jonah is also considered prophet in both Judaism and Christianity.

²⁵ The names of these last three prophets are not mentioned in the Qur’an, but they are considered prophets in Islamic tradition, at least as stated in the books written by early Muslim historians (*mu’arrikhun*). It is most likely that the *mu’arrikhun* were taking information from stories referred to in Islamic tradition as *Isra’iliyyat*, i.e. stories common to people of Banu Israel. Jirjis is likely to be the same figure as St George. Sheth is considered to be the third son of Prophet Adam. Daniyal is referred to in Hebrew tradition as Daniel; the Hebrew Bible has chapters called the book of Daniel.

²⁶ Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328). Of his opinions quoted in the pamphlet, ISIS relies on *Majmu’ al-Fatawa*, a kind of compilation of Ibn Taymiyyah’s fatwas. Ibn Taymiyyah is of Hanbali school in Islamic jurisprudence. His views on Islamic theology has the most significant influence on the so-called Wahhabism.

²⁷ Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839-923). It is his book of history titled *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* that ISIS cites in the pamphlet. Al-Tabari is one of the earliest Muslim historians.

²⁸ Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Athir (1160-1233). His book of history ISIS quotes in the pamphlet is that titled *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*.

²⁹ Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzi (1116-1201). His book quoted in the pamphlet is that titled *Al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa al-Umam*. He belongs to the Hanbali school in Islamic jurisprudence.

Taymiyyah’s statements cited from his Majmu’ al-Fatawa volume 27 concerning the tomb of Prophet Yunus. Ibn Taymiyyah says (my translation):

“The tomb that is agreed on (i.e. on its attribution to whom buried beneath—AAF) is that of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. On Ibrahim’s tomb there is a dispute, yet the valid opinion on which majority of scholars agree is that the tomb is indeed of his. As for the tombs of Yunus, Ilyas, Shu’aib, and Zakariya, they are not known.... Most accounts on these tombs and shrines are troubled and fabricated of which knowledge, after deep research, does not know except little. This is because knowing them and building masjids on them is not part of the sharia of Islam... The Prophet said, ‘Allah condemns the Jews and the Christians as they made the tombs of their prophets their masjids’ (i.e. place for worship—AAF). Leading scholars (*aimmah*) of Islam have had consensus that it is prohibited to build a building over tombs, to turn them into masjids, to pray beside them, and to go to them in purpose of doing such worship as *salat*, *i’tikaf*, *istighathah*(seeking help), *ibtihal* (invocation), and the likes.”



Figure 4. ISIS’s pamphlet, *Al-Qawl al-Fasl fi Mashru’iyah Hadm al-Qubur al-Maz’umah li al-Anbiya* (The Decisive Statement on the Legality of Demolishing the Alleged Tombs of Prophets). Source: <http://justpaste.it/matweat>.

It is only based on this view of Ibn Taymiyyah (given the title “Shaykh al-Islam” by ISIS, as many Wahhabist usually do) that ISIS declares the tomb of Yunus has been wrongly attributed. As for the tombs of Jirjis, Sheth, and Daniyal, the pamphlet refers to the statements and historical report by al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, and Ibn al-Jawzi to say that the respective tombs of the prophets have been wrongly attributed. In the end, the pamphlet states firmly that it is obligation for an Islamic state to demolish those tombs merely to comply with what Prophet Muhammad has commanded of flattening tombs, as reported by two hadiths recorded in Musnad Ahmad and Sahih Muslim. The pamphlet clearly identifies that those tombs, besides being wrongly attributed, have become sources of *shirk* and as such must be demolished. My take on this is that this act of violence of destroying tombs, is done purely for the sake of religion, at least according to ISIS’s interpretation. In fact, ISIS claims it to be

so. And I do not see any other ‘secular’ reason behind this. Therefore, as much as this destruction of tombs is concerned, the violence is caused by religion (or, to be more precise, ISIS’s religion or ISIS’s interpretation of Islam).

Reviving Slavery

ISIS has revived the practice of slavery it considers to be allowed in Islam. One of its main way to get slaves, which are mostly women, is from non-Muslim captives. When this paper is written there are more than a thousand Yazidi women who are still held and enslaved by ISIS; they are even sold at slave markets. ISIS’s formal introduction of systematic sexual slavery dates to Aug. 3, 2014, when its fighters succeeded invading the villages on the southern flank of Mount Sinjar home to the Yazidis. It is likely that the practice of slavery is directed to Yazidi women because, as Mr Barber of the University of Chicago argues, “they are seen as polytheists with an oral tradition rather than a written scripture; in ISIS’s eyes that puts them on the fringe of despised unbelievers, even more than Christians and Jews, who are considered to have some limited protections under the Quran as ‘People of the Book.’”³⁰ Responding the uproar that came out of this act of enslaving Yazidi women, the ISIS Research and Fatwa Department released a pamphlet on the topic of female captives and slaves. The pamphlet, dated Muharram 1436 (November 2014) and printed by ISIS’s publishing house, Al-Himma Library, is titled *Su’al wa Jawab fi al-Saby wa al-Riqab* (Questions and Answers on Female Captives and Slaves), written in the form of questions and answers (it contains 27 Q&A in concise statements). I quote here some of the content of the pamphlet (translation by MEMRI):³¹



Figure 5. ISIS’s pamphlet, *Su’al wa Jawab fi al-Saby wa al-Riqab* (Questions and Answers on Female Captives and Slaves). Source: <http://justpaste.it/matweat>.

³⁰ “ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html>

³¹ The translation can be read online at “Islamic State (ISIS) Releases Pamphlet on Female Slaves” <http://www.memrijtm.org/islamic-state-isis-releases-pamphlet-on-female-slaves.html> (retrieved December 29, 2015)

Question 1: What is al-saby? Al-Saby is a woman from among *ahl al-harb* [the people of war] who has been captured by Muslims.

Question 2: What makes *al-saby* permissible? What makes *al-saby* permissible [i.e., what makes it permissible to take such a woman captive] is [her] unbelief. Unbelieving [women] who were captured and brought into the abode of Islam are permissible to us, after the imam distributes them [among us].

Question 3: Can all unbelieving women be taken captive? There is no dispute among the scholars that it is permissible to capture unbelieving women [who are characterized by] original unbelief [*kufr asli*], such as the *kitabiyat* [women from among the People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians] and polytheists. However, [the scholars] are disputed over [the issue of] capturing apostate women. The consensus leans towards forbidding it, though some people of knowledge think it permissible. We [ISIS] lean towards accepting the consensus.

Question 4: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive? It is permissible to have sexual intercourse with the female captive. Allah the almighty said: '[Successful are the believers] who guard their chastity, except from their wives or (the captives and slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are free from blame [Koran 23:5-6]'

Question 5: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive immediately after taking possession [of her]? If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first].

Question 6: Is it permissible to sell a female captive? It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of [as long as that doesn't cause the Muslim ummah] any harm or damage.

This Q&A pamphlet is not full of quotation either from the Quran or the Sunnah (prophetic traditions); it is more like a manual. Yet for the most part it summarizes classical Islamic jurisprudence concerning female captives and slaves (*al-saby wa al-riqab*).

The fact that ISIS justifies its reviving of slavery with scripture and classical Muslim jurist views on the permissibility of slavery has sparked debates among many. Muslim scholars gave responding views on the status of slavery in Islam; some were trying to be defensive by saying that Islam moves gradually toward abolition of slavery while some others were admitting that as far as classical Islamic law is concerned, it does not prohibit slavery. Indeed, no textual evidence from both Islamic scripture and tradition that prohibits slavery. What is quite distinct to ISIS is that it employs the notion that what Islam states permissible, Muslims cannot forbid it. Precisely at the last point is that this problem, if any, of reviving slavery in the name of Islam constitutes the heart of the problem of how should modern Muslims deal with their textual traditions: to what extent and in which kind of cases or circumstances something that is prohibited/permitted in classical Islamic tradition can be declared otherwise in the modern era? No less important, this issue of slavery is not unique to Wahhabism, as classical Islamic law that does not prohibit

slavery is shared across schools of thoughts (*madhhabs*). Further, similar to the case of destroying tombs, ISIS's reviving slavery is highly likely to be purely motivated by its interpretation of Islam. In other words, this act has very much to do with religion; and religion, if not the sole cause, has become the major cause of it.

Concluding Remarks: Several Reflections

To conclude, there are three things worth reflecting. First, as far as the discourse within Islam is concerned, contrary to what some leading Muslim scholars suggest, not all the violent acts of ISIS are unique to Wahhabism. Yes, in terms of theology, ISIS is close to Wahhabism. This is indicated by its having ideas such as the “nullifiers of Islam” (*nawaqid al-Islam*), when a Muslim has or does one of which he/she is automatically becoming an apostate regardless whether he/she still claims to be a Muslim. In addition, as the points contained in the list of nullifiers of Islam show, ISIS's idea concerning *tawassul* (having intermediary in prayer considered by ISIS to be a form of *shirk* or idolatry) and its animosity toward worship before tombs are among manifestation of Wahhabism. However, other violent acts of ISIS, like burning prisoners alive as well as enslaving female captives, are not unique to Wahhabism; these practices are embedded in classical Islamic tradition and permitted by medieval Muslim jurists, though these are not mainstream view of today's Muslims. Add to these other practices such as beheading, stoning adulterers, death penalty for apostasy, and cutting off hand of thieves which are prescribed in either the Quran or the Sunnah.

Second, in terms of the discourse on religious violence elaborated in the introduction of this paper, ISIS's creed provides a basis fertile to “satanization” of the other, a creed that can lead to what Juergensmeyer calls “cosmic war”. ISIS's idea on *takfir* suggests so, and *takfir* is close to declaring the other as satan and defines who is “us” and who is “them” who are worth of eradication. By having such an idea as nullifiers of Islam, ISIS claims to be struggling for what God has commanded; ISIS acts as if it can access—to borrow Juergensmeyer's term—“the mind of God.” A battle conducted by ISIS against its enemy believed by ISIS to be representing satan is by definition a “cosmic war”, a war that will and must lead to all-or-nothing result, since with satan there is no compromise and negotiation but only annihilation. ISIS elevates what many see to be merely mundane battle into a battle it perceives to be a symbolic war between God and devil.

Third, concerning the question on how the relation between religion and violence in the case of ISIS as exemplified by the four cases above, I argue that its violent acts cannot be seen in the instrumentalist perspective. This is because many of ISIS's violent acts have highly significant religious reason, such as its acts of destroying tombs and killing and enslaving captives. At least, ISIS's violence must be seen in the constructivist perspective: its origin may not be religion, yet religion as interpreted by ISIS has been escalating the level of violence. In other words, violence becomes much more deadly when mixed with ISIS's interpretation of religion. Besides, some of ISIS's violence also reflects primordialist view to the extent that, especially when looking at its creed, it categorizes people based on religion and it is because of religion that ISIS and its enemy are having war. In other words, ISIS's creeds reflect, as primordialists claim, the notion that religion is inherently divisive.

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