Mobilizing to Martyrdom: A Narrative Theory of High-Risk Mobilization

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ABSTRACT

Why do some individuals engage in high-risk mobilization in support of foreign militant groups, willingly sacrificing their possessions and even their lives as "martyrs", when there is no imminent threat to the community within which they live or strong ties to the communities for which they sacrifice? We develop a new theory of high-risk mobilization rooted in the use of narratives that explains high-risk mobilization and identify the revolutionary use of multiple martyrdom narratives among modern Islamic militant groups, especially a heroic narrative specifically tailored to Western audiences, that can explain the group's broad appeal beyond traditional pools of recruits. We demonstrate the existence of the heroic narrative in the video propaganda of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and apply our framework of narratives of martyrdom to the universe of ISIS recruitment videos. We conclude by discussing implications for scholarship on mobilization and counter-radicalization/recruitment policy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Why do some individuals engage in high-risk mobilization in support of foreign militant groups, willingly sacrificing their possessions and even their lives as "martyrs", when there is no imminent threat to the community within which they live or strong ties to the communities for which they sacrifice? Westerners traveling to fight for militant groups in the Middle East and Africa or committing acts of violence in the name of such groups in their home countries are paradigmatic examples. Over the past decade, there has been a surge of high-risk mobilization in Western countries for Islamic militant groups fighting abroad. For example, experts estimate that 4,500 Westerners traveled to Syria to fight for ISIS in the four years from 2013 to 2016 compared to a total of 10,000 Western fighters for all Islamic militant groups from 1980 to 2010, more than a three-fold difference per annum. Demographic studies of these recent Westerners mobilized for ISIS and other Islamic groups reveal a much wider range of ethnic and religious backgrounds compared to the past, including a much larger fraction of individuals with weak ties to Islam and established Muslim communities.

The growing phenomenon of high-risk mobilization in the absence of strong ties to a local community under threat is as theoretically puzzling as it is empirically extraordinary. Scholars of political violence have long studied high-risk mobilization, but mainly in the context of civil wars, social movements, and other internal conflicts where individuals share pre-existing strong ties and the threat to the individual's community is direct and imminent[1], conditions that do not exist for many of the Westerners mobilized for Islamist groups today. Scholars of domestic radicalization and terrorism have engaged our question, mainly arguing that such

[1] Parkinson 2013; Petersen 2001; Loveman 1998; McAdam 1986

mobilization is explained by the transnational ideology of Salifi-Jihadism and unusual small group dynamics[2], but these factors have not significantly changed in recent years nor would these factors explain mobilization among individuals with weak ties to Islam and established Muslim communities. What has changed is the use of propaganda by militant groups and its availability via social media and the internet to audiences anywhere in the world.

The key puzzle we seek to explain is not the formation of ISIS or any militant organization, rates of recruitment for Islamic groups, or specific individuals' decisions to take action for their causes, but rather the categories of individuals that are mobilized at all. We argue that the growth of Western mobilization in support of ISIS and other Islamic groups is due to a revolution in online militant recruitment and propaganda that strategically deploys narratives tailored and targeted to specific audiences to enhance the chances that individuals exposed to these narratives will assume the highest risks in the name of the group and its cause.

The conventional wisdom is that the key mechanism explaining support for ISIS is religion, specifically Islam, and having deep ties to established Muslim communities. However, the evidence is clear that coming from a Muslim background is an extremely poor predictor of support for ISIS and other foreign Islamist groups. In the United States, for example, over one-third of those arrested for terrorism in the name of ISIS were converts with no deep ties to Islam or established Muslim communities. These converts, moreover, were significantly more likely than those with deep ties to plan and carry out attacks, accounting for half of all such cases. Nearly all those arrested for ISIS-related offenses – converts and non-converts – report that the group's high-quality videos contributed significantly to their actions. However, the link between exposure to propaganda and action is largely assumed rather than theorized.

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[2] Hegghammer 2010; Pape and Feldman 2010, chap. 2

To close the theoretical gap, this paper develops a narrative theory of mobilization for political action to explain recruitment by contemporary Islamic militant groups, and especially those like recent converts with weak ties to a community under threat. The theory explains how the narratives in propaganda videos work to inspire individuals to willingly sacrifice for the benefit of a community, acts commonly called "martyrdom" by Islamic groups. Narratives are distinct from conventional arguments and "framing" not only in their form but also how they are processed by audiences. The key mechanism is not persuasion through rational argument, but rather the forging of identification with a narrative's protagonist in a given video, which research shows is a not a function of factual portrayals or rational arguments but instead a function of the fit between a given narrative and the and specific circumstances of a viewer. As such, narratives – their plots, characters, and embedded moral messages – that are likely to mobilize individuals with deep ties are thus unlikely to work on those with weak ties.

What makes ISIS propaganda revolutionary is not as much its quality or quantity, but instead its sophisticated use of distinctive narrative forms designed to appeal to a wide array of audiences, including those like converts might be least expected to find risking their life for the group appealing. The first and most commonly represented in ISIS propaganda, is what we call the "Social Narrative," comprises plots in which protagonists consisting protagonists identified through dress, language, and other signs as hailing from established Muslim communities, realize their duty and obligation to defend Muslim communities from existential harm and are hailed as martyrs. This narrative, also commonly called the "Islamic Narrative," is ubiquitous in the propaganda of Islamic militant groups from Hezbollah to Al Qaeda, and seeks to mobilize by constructing an identify of a "good Muslim" that viewers will internalize. Its primary appeal, we argue, will be to individuals who already have strong ties to Islam and the specifically threatened

communities, who typically constitute the largest potential pool of recruits and the majority of members in ISIS and other Islamist militant groups overseas.

The second narrative form in ISIS propaganda, which we call the "Heroic Narrative," represents a significant innovation in the group's efforts to mobilize outside the main group of most likely supporters. The Heroic Narrative is comprised of plots and characters to appeal to Westerners, and especially those with weak ties to Islam and established communities such as recent converts.

This new logic of martyrdom stresses personal identification with the journey of a hero – individuals with rare personal qualities, unable to reach their fulfillment in the current world, but through heroic deeds personally empower and transform themselves into laudable individuals worthy of recognition and praise in the new world that militancy offers. By connecting sacrifice to personal empowerment, this new logic of heroic martyrdom can appeal to those with little or even no long-standing established connections to Muslim communities, such as individuals who are recent converts to Islam, those with criminal backgrounds, and those generally lacking a prior social basis for altruism towards the militant's community.

What makes this new culture of martyrdom surprising, particularly for Islamic groups, is that it is rooted more in the archetype of a hero as developed by Joseph Campbell and Hollywood screenwriters such as Christopher Vogler than the more altruistic cultures of martyrdom typically associated with Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam. For Campbell, by contrast, a hero acts "in diametric opposition to that of social duty…[where] meaning is in the group," but instead stems from extreme individualism, where one seeks to demonstrate special qualities – the individual's "own potentialities, not someone else's" – and so sacrifice for others is an opportunity to fulfill exceptional personal endowments that "signifies

that the hero is a superior man."[3] In effect, Islamic groups are replicating narrative structures that are common and intelligible in the West to awaken individuals in the West who have no obvious basis to accept appeals based on altruism motivated by duty and obligation, thereby opening the door to new categories of individuals for high-risk action.

To substantiate our theory that propaganda by Islamic militant groups is producing new categories of recruits in the West, we conduct two empirical investigations. First, we demonstrate the existence of the heroic narrative in the video propaganda of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, in order to show that modern Islamic militant groups are generally using their greater capacities for online propaganda to establish a new culture of martyrdom. We analyze prominent two prominent militant videos in depth to show that they fit the detailed, 12-step narrative sequences of the archetypal heroic journey as identified by Campbell and formalized by Vogler.

Second, we apply our framework of cultures of martyrdom to the universe of recruitment videos by one major contemporary militant group, ISIS. Our goal is to identify whether there is evidence to show that a major militant group is using the heroic culture of martyrdom to appeal to a distinct category of individuals in the West, particularly those with weak pre-existing ties to Islam and the communities in conflict. To do this, we collected the complete set of ISIS videos – those officially branded as such by the group – from 2013 when the group began until August 2017, over 1400 videos in all. With a research team, we coded all the videos to identify a) those targeted toward Western audiences (using primary language and other indicators); b) individual "martyrdom testimonials" within the Western videos (to ensure comparable units of analysis); c) specific narrative structures within the martyrdom testimonials (social vs. heroic narratives); and d) the social identity represented within the martyrdom testimonials (established Muslims vs

[3] Campbell 1949, 148, 332

converts as proxies for the strength of pre-existing social ties). The results show that ISIS' propaganda strategy targets the new heroic logic overwhelmingly to individuals who recently converted to Islam, credible evidence that militant groups are developing new logics of martyrdom to expand their appeal beyond traditional audiences for militant propaganda.

Overall, this paper makes two main contributions. First, it develops a new theory of high-risk mobilization, one that explains high-risk mobilization among individuals with weak pre-existing social ties to embattled communities and to each other and the role of propaganda narratives in mobilizing them. Second, it identifies the revolutionary use of multiple cultures of martyrdom among modern Islamic militant groups, and especially a heroic narrative specifically tailored to Western audiences and that can explain the group's broad appeal beyond traditional pools of recruits. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate dispositively, we suggest that the use of multiple cultures of martyrdom and particularly the heroic narrative is a plausible explanation for at least some of ISIS's recruitment success.

II. EXPLAINING HIGH-RISK MOBILIZATION

Why do some individuals engage in high-risk mobilization in support of foreign militant groups, willingly sacrificing their possessions and even their lives as "martyrs", when there is no imminent threat to the community within which they live or strong ties to the communities for which they sacrifice?

In this section we first define high-risk mobilization and present a typology based on the local presence of recruitment infrastructure. Second, we present the main explanations identified by scholars to explain high-risk mobilization to political violence, which we argue cannot explain the appeal of groups like ISIS in the West. Third, we develop our theory of narrative

mobilization, which explains how militant groups like ISIS produce and sustain multiple mobilization frames – we call them "cultures of martyrdom" – to expand the opportunities for mobilization to include individuals less likely to be mobilized by appeals to duty and obligation.

Defining High-Risk Mobilization

High-risk mobilization means that an individual undertakes political action knowing that the action will require significant risk of physical injury or death in addition to expenditure of time, money, and energy.[4] Examples include volunteering for the military in wartime, joining insurgent or terrorist organization, actively opposing authoritarian regimes, and pursing personal political objectives through violence. Our concept of high-risk mobilization entails a willingness for self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, commonly called "martyrdom" in Islamic and other cultures.

To count as an instance of high-risk mobilization, its is sufficient that an individual demonstrated through his or her actions the willingness to accept the personal costs of becoming a martyr even if they did not pay these costs in the end. We define mobilization as the initial decision to undertake political action, not subsequent decisions to take risks that follow from the initial decision. Mobilization decisions are high-risk even if events (such as arrest) prevent the intended actions from occurring. Decisions to take risks after initial mobilization, such as participating in a specific battle or engaging in a suicide attack if doing so was not part of the original decision, are outside of the scope of our concern. An individual who volunteers to fight during wartime – whether for a militant group or a state military – is, by our definition, mobilizing for martyrdom whether ultimately killed in action or not.

[4] McAdam 1986; Loveman 1998; Parkinson 2013

As is clear from the example, our theory presumes the existence of a group or organization engaged in high-risk political activities that individuals can choose to join and in doing so, accept the risks of martyrdom. However, self-mobilization for a cause independent of any pre-existing group is also possible.

In principle, high-risk mobilization for political action can occur in three forms, depending on the degree of centralized organization of the mobilization process. The first is **direct mobilization**, involving sustained recruitment over time for a political cause directly organized by an organization or pre-existing social groups associated with the organization physically present in the area of mobilization. Direct mobilization may involve bloc recruitment from pre-existing social groups or atomized recruitment of individuals. A locally present organization is the key feature of this model and is necessary to build-up and sustain political action over time – especially critical for violent non-state actors. Most large-scale social movements and militant organizations fit this category.

The second is **idiosyncratic self-mobilization**, involving incidents of isolated, solitary political action where the individual is not linked to a specific organization. Idiosyncratic self-mobilization only involves isolated instances of atomized recruitment of individuals. The Unabomber, Washington DC shooter, and Las Vegas Shooter are examples here.

The third is **remote mobilization**, involving sustained recruitment over time for a specific political organization that is not physically present in the area of mobilization and where there are no pre-existing social networks that drive recruitment. Remote mobilization involves no bloc recruitment from pre-existing social groups but does involve sustained and repeated atomized recruitment of individuals, most of whom have no prior connections to each other, the

organization, or the same pre-existing social networks facilitating the mobilization. This is ISIS in the West, particularly in the United States

Existing Explanations for High-Risk Mobilization

High-risk mobilization has long attracted the attention of scholars because it appears to run against the expectations of standard collective action theory. Even under normal circumstances, collective action is a puzzle, because individuals have incentives to free ride on the actions of others rather than bear even low personal costs and risks for outcomes that benefit communities as a whole. Under conditions of personal high-risk, participating in collective action is still more puzzling since any incentives that might compensate for individual costs are counteracted by the risk of the ultimate cost, death.

The primary explanation for high-risk mobilization focuses on the role of strong social ties leading to altruistic self-sacrifice on the behalf of others that an individual has come to value for their own sake.[5] As McAdam argues, "Isolated individuals do not emerge, band together and form movement groups.[6] Rather, it is within established interactional networks that social movements develop." Strong ties matter, as Fireman and Gamson explain, because "a person whose life is intertwined with the group …has a big stake in the group's fate. When collective action is urgent, the person is likely to contribute his or her share even if the impact of that share is not noticeable."[7]

The core logic is that social integration, working through the micro-mechanism of emotional affinity, makes it personally painful for the individual not to help fellow members of

[5] McAdam 1986; Loveman 1998; Parkinson 2013
[6] McAdam 1982, 15
[7] Fireman and Gamson 1977, 22

the community. As a risk-taking human rights activist in Chile explains, "For me, the suffering of the people I was helping was intolerable, the persecution of my students, their disappearance and death still cause me pain today. I believe that one commits oneself to things because of who one is…I would have lost my own dignity and self-respect if I hadn't done the work I did."[8] Put simply, strong social ties – defined as sustained, face-to-face interactions with others – encourage individual self-sacrifice for political acts that benefit them.

The strong ties theory of high-risk mobilization has a compelling logic, especially for direct mobilization. The more integrated is an individual in a local community, the more the individual is likely to identify with and value the welfare of fellow members of the community, and the more the individual is willing to sacrifice for the community in times of need. This theory also has compelling empirical evidence to support it. A remarkable number of studies of high-risk mobilization to support an embattled community find that fighters and active supporters typically arise from the segments of the community with high levels of prior social organization.[9] In short, there is both compelling logic and strong evidence that the strong ties theory accounts for large-scale campaigns of direct high-risk mobilization, where the mobilizing organization or pre-existing social networks that contributed to the organization are physically present in the area of mobilization.

However, the strong ties theory also has an important limitation. It is not well-equipped to explain campaigns of remote high-risk mobilization for a specific political organization where that organization or pre-existing social networks linked to the organization are not physically

[8] Quoted in Loveman 1998
[9] Petersen 2001; McAdam 1982; Wickham-Crowley 1987; Loveman 1998; Parkinson 2013; Shesterinina 2016; Bonnell 2021; E. J. Wood 2003

present in the area of mobilization. Absent a systematic source for strong ties related to the mobilizing organization, the theory cannot operate.

Remote high-risk mobilization is of central importance. ISIS and other Islamic militant groups are increasingly using the internet to mobilize individuals far from the lands where the organization operates and in Western countries where there is little evidence of pre-existing social networks producing recruits. This is especially so in the United States where detailed studies show little systematic connection between ISIS recruits and local Muslim organizations (e.g, mosques, CAIR, or community centers) and, indeed, these organizations are actively opposed to the militant groups. Moreover, over a third of individuals who perpetrated or were indicted for ISIS-related offenses are converts to Islam, not emerging from established Muslim communities, some converting only months prior to their mobilization for the group.

Empirically, we know that ISIS and other militant groups rely on social media to convey propaganda as their principal mobilizing tool. What we lack is a theory to explain how this propaganda inspires people to sacrifice, often their lives, in the name of the group's cause.

The phenomenon of foreign fighters has attracted significantly attention among scholars, particularly in the context of Islamic groups. The dominant explanation follows closely the model of strong ties driving social movements elaborated above. The core argument is that individuals already organized in strong tie networks often for a religious or non-political cause are subsequently mobilized for a new, often political cause. Doug McAdam locates the primary source of recruitment for the US Civil Rights movement as from numerous pre-existing black churches, universities and other civic organizations loosely connected across the southern states.[10] Similarly, the primary explanation for Islamic foreign fighters is located in mosques and

[10] McAdam 1982

universities in the Arab world, particularly Salifi organizations that over time established pan-Arab linkages. As Thomas Hegghammer says, "The Hijazi pan-Islamist community itself owed its existence to …Muslim Brotherhood activists in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, and the establishment of international Islamic organizations and several new universities in Saudi Arabia….With limited prospects for domestic political influence and an opportunity to work internationally, these activists devoted themselves to transnational activism and vigorous promotion of populist pan-Islamism."[11]

To be sure, numerous scholars have called attention to the use of propaganda and ideology to recruit foreign fighters. David Malet, for instance, argues that strategic framing is important, when he says, "insurgencies try to recruit foreign fighters by framing distant civil conflicts as threatening a transnational identity group with which the recruit is closely affiliated. The nature of the relationship between the insurgents—shared ethnicity or some other tie such as religion—is irrelevant to the logic of transnational recruitment, in which recruiters consistently frame distant conflicts as threats." However, even these arguments typically hinge on the role of strong ties, as Malet explains: "Among these transnational groups, the most receptive audiences are individuals who are highly active in the institutions of that community and identify with it closely, but tend to be marginalized within their own polity as part of a minority group. These social bonds, therefore, provide both the means and rationale for participation."[12]

The social tie explanation is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. The assumption that the strong ties are already present prior to the actual mobilization of individuals for high-risk participation in activities in the name of Islamic militant groups leaves out the phenomenon that

[11] Hegghammer 2010, 57
[12] Malet 2010, 100

we observe in the United States and elsewhere in the West: the willingness of individuals with weak ties to each other, Islam, local Islamic institutions, and overseas communities experiencing conflict choosing to sacrifice livelihood and lives for ISIS and other Islamic groups.

So, existing explanations of transnational Islamic terrorism account for direct mobilization but are not accounting for remote mobilization as in the case of ISIS in the United States and much of the West where there are no indigenous pre-existing Salfi networks to originate mobilization in the first place.

III. A NARRATIVE THEORY OF HIGH RISK MOBILIZATION

This paper develops a narrative theory of mobilization for political action to explain recruitment by contemporary Islamic militant groups of individuals with weak ties to a community under threat. Among the most important cognitive and ideational dimensions of collective action are appeals for sacrifice for the sake of a community, which we call martyrdom. We use martyrdom to mean high risk political action that involves deliberate sacrifice for the benefit of a community, which is the kind of political action that we wish to explain. Although the word "martyrdom" has religious origins, secular resistance movements readily embrace the idea of individuals sacrificing for a community and publicly recognize their losses to commemorate the struggle and encourage costly action by others.[13]

This social construction of martyrdom is important. For individuals to expect social recognition for sacrifice, it is important to know what qualifies as sacrifice worthy of respect and how individuals are recognized for this. Accordingly, militant groups have long sought to

[13] Pettigrew 1997

distribute materials glorifying those they consider martyrs through a variety of statements by leaders, "martyr testimonials" and other social practices to publicly brand particular acts of self-sacrifice as contributing to the goals of the group and the communities the groups claim to represent.[14]

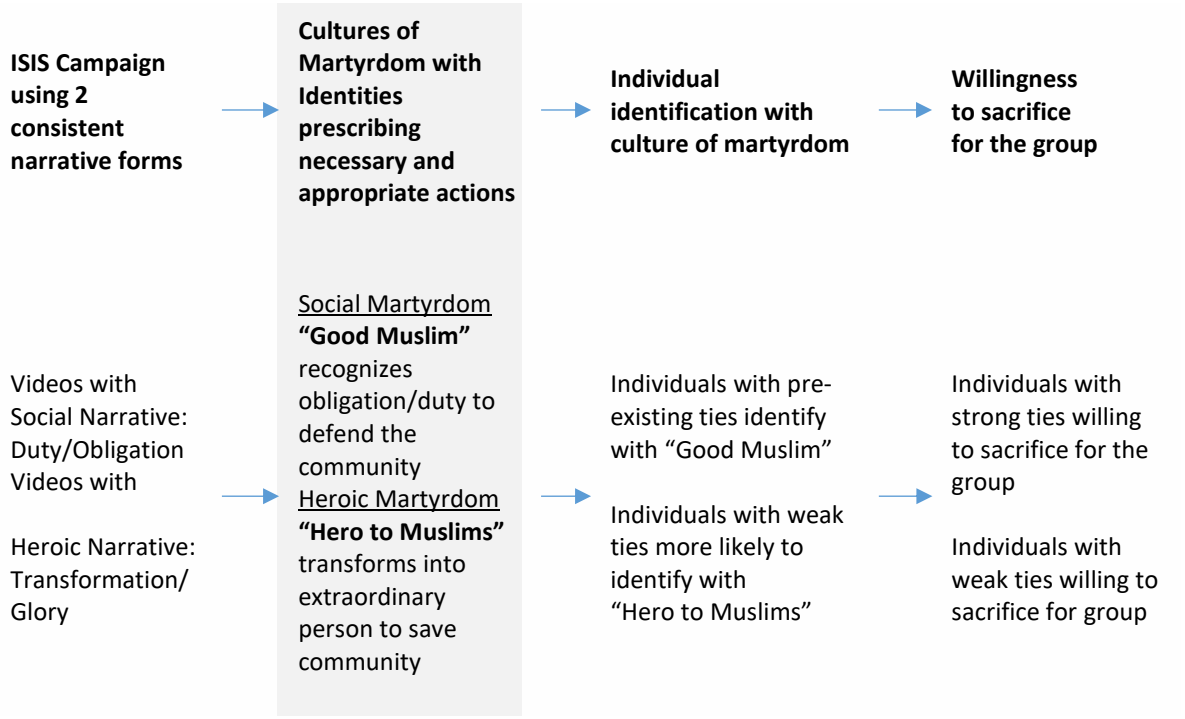
Scholars have long recognized that militant groups consciously and strategically construct shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate individual participation in collective action.[15] In direct mobilization, the militant organization is able to leverage its physical local presence to promote mobilization and so propaganda is part of broad-based mobilization efforts that may include material incentives and coercion. When mobilizing for action remotely, the benefits of the physical presence of the organization are not there and so propaganda necessarily carry more of the weight. The question is how.

Our argument is that remote high-risk mobilization is largely a product of strategically deployed narratives that contribute to cultures of martyrdom to inspire individuals to not only see the world in specific ways (e.g., the victims and perpetrators of harm, the source of conflict and the necessity of action to remedy it) but also to define specific identities for individuals to emulate through their own actions. Militant groups like ISIS employ narratives in their propaganda that seek to produce and reproduce collective action, doing so to create and sustain cultures of martyrdom that generate "desirable identities" that will resonate with target audiences whose mobilization the group deems critical but, because of variation in cultural experiences, are unlikely to be swayed by the a single homogenous cultural appeal. Instead, distinct narratives are deployed to create distinct cultures of martyrdom with different desirable identities designed

[14] Pape 2005; Hatina 2014; Mitchell 2012
[15] Snow and Benford 1988; Polletta et al. 2011

to increase the likelihood of resonance and subsequent action in support of the group and its goals. The argument is summarized in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Narrative Theory of High-Risk Mobilization



Relying principally on mobilizing narratives presents significant challenges, since any material incentives that the militant organization can offer in the context of remote mobilization are inherently more diffuse and uncertain than with direct mobilization. Accordingly, even though the actual number of individuals choosing to join the group through this process is likely to be limited, even relatively small numbers of sustained recruitment over geographically dispersed areas remote from the militant organization's area of lethal operations is indicative of success. Our challenge is showing that narratives contributed significantly to the mobilization of these individuals.

How do narratives generate costly collective action? Narratives have long been understood to play a role in direct mobilization, particularly as local organizations present narratives linking the identity of their members to political action, but the role of narratives in remote mobilization has received similar theoretical and empirical attention.[16] A narrative is essentially a story that links elements and sequences together to imply specific meanings that help us to interpret the world. Narratives have one or more central characters with which viewers can identify and plots that connect sequences of events that convey, through this sequence, a point or moral that the author of the narrative seeks to convey though always subject to interpretation by the viewing audience.[17]

Our theory starts with the assumption that what drives the willingness of individuals to sacrifice for others is the expectation of social recognition for these acts. This is the same assumption underneath the existing, strong tie explanation for high-risk mobilization, ie that individuals within pre-existing social networks willingly pay costs for others because they expect that fellow members in their social networks will respect their actions. Our claim is that this assumption is applicable to situations of weak as well as strong ties, because all individuals may value social recognition. Hence, there are two categories of individuals – those with strong ties and those with weak ties – and both are composed of individuals who value social recognition, at least to some extent.

In our theory, it is important to underscore that it is the *expectation* of social recognition that matters. Social recognition for a specific individual's sacrifice may or may not occur and, in the case of individuals dying for a cause, the individual cannot change future decisions based on

[16] Polletta 1998a; Polletta 1998b; Polletta et al. 2011; Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Byrd 2007; Snow et al. 2014
[17] Patterson and Monroe 1998; Polletta 1998b; Polletta et al. 2011

a failure to receive social recognition in a specific instance of sacrifice. However, the expectation that a community will provide recognition – make the person a "martyr" – is a pathway for gaining the respect of others and for oneself, giving purpose and meaning to life.

Narratives create the expectation for social recognition by what social scientists call a "demonstration proof" – using the narrative to identify the path for individuals to gain social recognition. In militant propaganda, narratives of past martyrs – those who have willingly sacrifice for a cause – identify the circumstances of a person's life story that qualify according to the community producing the narrative as grounds for according the individual respect. Narratives are excellent for this purpose because, by their nature, they can link a description of the identity of an individual to an action undertaken by the individual to actual images of others respecting the individual for taking the action. As a result, narratives can establish the features and characteristics of individuals that would lead to social recognition in a coherent way that viewers can understand.

However, communities may accord social recognition to more than one type of person who provides collective benefits. Individuals with either strong or weak ties to the community can receive social recognition for acts that benefit a community. From the perspective of a community, what matters is that the community receives benefits. This may occur if an individual is already a member in good standing with the community. However, communities may also decide to accord social recognition to those who are "outsiders," individuals who benefit the group but previously have weak ties to it. For instance, Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial to the Holocaust, honors not only Jews who perished in World War II, but also thousands of non-Jews (the "Righteous Among the Nations") who helped save Jewish lives. Oskar Schindler, a non-Jewish German who expended his entire fortune and risked his life to

save thousands of Jews from Auschwitz, is honored there and is the main character in the narrative Hollywood film *Schindler's List* that accords him social respect for his actions.

Different narratives – those for strong ties and those for weak ties – can provide a pathway for social recognition for sacrificing for a community. The key to using narrative to mobilize martyrs is not that the narrative is locked into an historical, scriptural, or other idea of "martyrdom" divorced from contemporary experience, but exactly the opposite. Mobilizing narratives must be fit to current circumstances to identify pathways to social recognition if they are to generate expectations of social recognition by specific categories of individuals from currently existing communities.

Hence, if organizations create multiple narratives for how individuals gain social recognition they can mobilize multiple categories of individuals, those with strong or weak ties. Specifically, mobilizing narratives can be fashioned to appeal to the "in-group," established members of a community, as well as to the "out-group," those without established ties to the community, provided they identify the pathway for social recognition in both cases.

Why are individuals drawn to opportunities for social recognition, particularly so strongly drawn that they willingly make great sacrifices for this purpose? The deep psychology of the desire for social recognition is beyond the scope of this paper because an elaborated theory of individual psychology is not necessary for explaining how different narratives can mobilize different categories of individuals. For our purpose, it is sufficient to identity the linkages between different identity narratives (in-group versus out-group) that may be accorded social recognition by the in-group community.

However, it is important to point out that our narrative theory of high-risk mobilization does not depend on a strong assumption that individuals only care about social recognition.

Individuals may value social recognition differently and to varying degrees over the course of their lives. Further, the value for social recognition may be overwhelmed by other values, such as power, achievement, and hedonism independent of recognition for such values by others (e.g, anonymous gifts to charity). Moreover, the basic psychological processes of individual attachment to narratives – frame alignment and immersion—may well account for whether individuals are "striving to experience vicariously the events and emotions that the protagonist experiences." [18] These further considerations are relevant to theories that would seek to predict the rate of recruitment through narratives, but not ours that is limited to predicting the categories of individuals recruited based on strong versus weak social ties.

In sum, the core logic of our theory has five steps:

1. High-risk mobilization is motivated by social recognition.
2. Narratives can create an expectation of social recognition for acts that benefit the community, the key is using the narrative to identify the path for individuals to gain social recognition.
3. Individuals with either strong or weak ties to the community can receive social recognition for acts that benefit a community.
4. Different narratives – those for strong ties and those for weak ties – can provide a pathway for social recognition for sacrificing for a community.
5. Hence, if organizations create multiple narratives for how individuals gain social recognition they can mobilize multiple categories of individuals, those with strong or weak ties.

[18] Polletta and Chen 2012, 493

IV. CONSTRUCTING CULTURES OF MARTYRDOM

ISIS and other militant groups have produced recruitment videos whose narratives chronicle, not the lives of those with strong pre-existing connections to Muslim societies, but, instead, a logic to inspire those with little or even no long-standing established connections to Muslim communities. This new culture of martyrdom stresses personal identification with the journey of a hero – individuals with rare personal qualities, unable to reach their fulfillment in the current world, but through heroic deeds personally empower and transform themselves into laudable individuals worthy of recognition and praise in the new world that militancy offers. By connecting sacrifice to personal empowerment, this new logic of heroic martyrdom can appeal to those with little or even no long-standing established connections to Muslim communities, such as individuals who are recent converts to Islam, those with criminal backgrounds, and those generally lacking a prior social basis for altruism towards the militant's community.

To explain the heroic culture of martyrdom, we begin by building on the theories of altruism by Emile Durkheim and the archetype of a hero by Joseph Campbell to develop a new framework to understand martyrdom. Although all conceptions of martyrdom involve individual sacrifice for a community, the moral justifications for such individual sacrifice vary substantially because they may rest on different ways that the individual identifies with that community. For Emile Durkheim, altruism – e.g., individual sacrifice for others – is largely a product of excessive social integration, where the weight of society compels individuals who are already

"almost completely absorbed in the group" to sacrifice as an obligatory duty.[19] For Campbell, by contrast, a hero acts "in diametric opposition to that of social duty…[where] meaning is in the group," but instead stems from extreme individualism, where one seeks to demonstrate special qualities – the individual's "own potentialities, not someone else's" – and so sacrifice for others is an opportunity to fulfill exceptional personal endowments that "signifies that the hero is a superior man."[20]

Social Culture of Martyrdom

Within the Social Culture of Martyrdom, the identity of "social martyr" is characterized by a deep integration of their personal categories into the larger, social categories that comprise the fabric of the community. The social categories can be encapsulated as these dimensions: injustice; need to correct injustice; duty and self-abnegation; and empathy. Here, Emile Durkheim's altruistic suicide provides a useful basis of understanding for the social martyr identity. In cases of altruistic suicide, Durkheim wrote that there is "insufficient individuation," which leads to self-abnegation, the most acute form of "social integration": "He feels that he exists in [the group] and in it alone, and strives so violently to blend himself with it in order to have being. He must therefore consider that he has no life of his own. Impersonality is here carried to its highest pitch."[21] In this, the one who performs an altruistic suicide primarily identifies with the group, and puts their national, ethnic, or religious identity before a personal identity. Durkheim wrote,

> "Though public opinion does not formally require [suicide], it is certainly favorable to [the act]. […] A social prestige thus attaches to suicide, which receives encouragement from this fact, and the refusal of this reward has effects

[19] Durkheim 2005, 221
[20] Campbell 1949, 148, 332
[21] Durkheim 2005

> similar to actual punishment, although to a lesser degree. What is done in one case to escape the stigma of insult is done in the other to win esteem." [22]

Applying this logic to militant violence, the social martyr is necessarily outraged by harm to an embattled community of which the individual is a member and acts to defend the community out of a sense of duty. Belonging to the community, the martyr empathizes with those within the community who suffer and seeks to alleviate the suffering of the community with the act of individual sacrifice for the cause of community defense. Under these circumstances, individual sacrifices could be viewed positively by the community, and the social martyr could expect recognition for those acts.

Harm to One's Community

For social martyrs, the main issue in the world is the possibility of harm to one's community. In testimonials, they commonly list a stack of grievances afflicting their community and express keen concerns about "fairness" as it pertains to their family, local groups, and larger communities to which they belong. Although religious martyrs have famously sacrificed rather than allow their communities to be harmed, this idea of community is not necessarily limited to religious groupings but can apply to any ethnic, clan, social, political, or any other boundary that has historically defined communities.

Action to Benefit One's Community

The social martyr's justification for violence is based in the idea that injustice must be answered, to right the wrong, and re-establish a more just order. The motives of social martyrs are rooted in a belief – either spoken, or unrealized – that their self-sacrifice will help correct the injustice

[22] Durkheim 2005, 227

done to their community in a meaningful way. The stack of grievances is thus answered with a hoard of attackers, if that's what it takes, giving their lives because "their bodies are all they have to use."[23] Providing benefit to their own community by correcting injustice on a moral and physical scale is the taproot of the social martyr's actions.

Attack the Perpetrator of Harm

These grievances are perpetrated by the "other," a specific actor or force creating calamity for the community. The perpetrator of harm is commonly identified as a powerful state that is viewed as taking advantage of weaker victims, often over and over again. Social martyrs thus focus on "defying the oppressor" gives a locus for enduring anger surrounding a fraught and "unjust" situation, which primes the martyr for action.[24]

Social Duty and self-abnegation

The social martyr is motived to action by the recognition of obligation and duty as a good member of the community to act in defense of the community. Durkheim believes that "doing one's duty" to defend the community is at the center of an altruistic suicide. In the cases of an "obligatory altruistic suicide," the community frowns upon those who do not commit suicide, according to Durkheim. However, in cases where the loss of one member benefits the whole group for the "common good," the suicide is committed out of an obligation to the group, but not in a punitive sense. Rather, a social martyr's connection with the group is so strong, that he or she sacrifices, because the act itself is for the good of the group, an act which comes to be looked upon with favor. As Durkheim said, "But it even happens that the individual kills himself purely

[23] Turner 2002
[24] Hatina 2014, 19

for the joy of sacrifice, because, even with no particular reason, renunciation in itself is considered praiseworthy." Here, fulfilling obligations is bound up with notions of the loss of a sense of self distinct from the community and are applauded as acts of selfless sacrifice.

Static Identity

Since a social martyr's action springs from integration in the social norms and structures of the community, social martyr is largely a reflection of pre-existing shared understandings of the identity and boundaries of the embattled community, even if those shared understandings are contested, allow for multiple interpretations, and themselves constructed by elites. Social martyrs emphasize the unchanging nature of their commitment and bonds to the community, not highly malleable and fluid transitions from one social identity to another since this would imply that the duty to sacrifice for the community is not in fact obligatory. Accordingly, the social identity of the social martyr appears as static and immutable.

From Hezbollah to Hamas to Al Qaeda and other Islamic militant groups prior to ISIS, al-Nursra and other groups today, the social logic of martyrdom in recruitment propaganda is so common that it is often thought of as "the Islamic narrative."[25] For instance, the video testimonial of Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the Al Qaeda suicide bombers who attacked London in July 2005, depicts an individual who appears to keenly feel the wounds of a kindred community, a high level of outrage over perceived grievances and injustices, and so a duty to act against the perceived oppressor. Khan declares:

> "This is how our ethical stances are dictated. Your-democratically-elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible – just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters.

[25] Pape 2005; Hafez 2007

> Until we feel security, you will be our targets, and until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment, and torture of my people, we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a soldier." [26]

Heroic Culture of Martyrdom and the "Hero to Muslims" Identity

The principle defining feature of the heroic culture of martyrdom is the identity of the "Hero to Muslim" who takes pride in differentiating him or herself from other members of their own community to achieve extraordinary feats. Unlike the "Good Muslim" identity promoted by the social culture of martyrdom, heroic martyrs are presented as not wholly integrated into the community, but are set apart from it. Heroes are deemed to be special people, approaching demi-god status by virtue of their extranormal capabilities or qualities. In mythology, this is Oedipus, Hercules, Theseus, or Odysseus. It is difficult to define heroes by specific qualities, however, as their communities designate them as such only after the hero performs what are considered "heroic deeds" in specific circumstances. Instead, Joseph Campbell outlines the circumstances that reveal the hero, broadly known as the "Hero's Journey." This is the nut of what Campbell calls the "monomyth:"

> "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons upon his fellow man."[27]

Applying this logic to militant violence, a "heroic martyr" is one that views him or herself working in extraordinary circumstances to achieve a spectacular victory, expects that they and their communities are transformed by this process, and so could also expect social

[26] Pape and Feldman 2010, 55
[27] Campbell 1949

recognition for their acts of sacrifice toward these aims. The Campbellian hero inhabits a kind of "special world" of "supernatural wonder" that requires "special people" who think themselves capable of performing the extraordinary, concepts that can be applied to sacrifice by militants and even socially constructed in propaganda for the purposes of militant groups. As with the social martyr, the heroic martyr categories can be encapsulated as these dimensions: glory; special world; answer the call; personal empowerment; and possessing a dynamic identity.

Opportunity for Own Glory

Upon hearing about a community's distress, the heroic martyr sees the possibility of taking action for a definable objective that can be meet with success. In contrast to the social martyr who identifies with the distressed community, the hero martyr identifies with his or her personal abilities. Hero martyrs feel confident that they alone, because of their special qualities, are capable of successfully answering the distress call of the community, and that their actions are part of a larger, righteous battle. Further, they anticipate and even welcome costly set-backs, because these contain crucial information that help them adjust and increase the likelihood of future success, ultimately bringing glory to their memory through commemoration and emulation.

Experience Personal Transformation by Entering a Special World with New Rules

If a community is in distress, the heroic martyr has encountered a disruptive situation; norms have been broken, and a way of living has been greatly altered in some way. Violent situations present the possibility of agonizing deaths and destruction of property. In this situation of social disruption, new "rules" are established and recognized in response to the threat, and these new rules often require people to behave in ways they likely would not under before disruption. The

establishment of new rules also allows for martyrs and other fighters to justify violent behavior and risk taking within the special circumstances of time and place. In this situation, heroes justify their violence and sacrifice as working to reestablish norms, or at least more favorable conditions for the community. The call of the community dictates the terms of the special world.

Face One's Supreme Ordeal

The hero martyr is characterized by responding to a distress call of the community mainly because this helps the hero to overcome his or her own personal challenges, not because they identify with fellow community members. The hero feels uniquely qualified to render assistance and doing so confronts doubts about personal incompetence, low self-esteem, and misgivings about personal character and steadfastness under pressure that have suppressed superior abilities kept latent until "called to action." As a result, heroic martyrs believe themselves to be a special sort of person and that they are able to render a specific kind of aid. Whereas a social martyr's actions are motivated by empathy and outrage for the community, the hero martyr's actions are generated by an intuitive understanding that they are "chosen" to perform the martyrdom act.

Personal Empowerment

In this crucial step, the martyr gains personal knowledge and growth beyond simply being recognized by the community for answering the distress call. To be sure, the hero is encouraged by the prospect of gaining social prestige, but potential of gaining greater self-respect is the main motive.[28] Before answering the call, the individual may be disaffected from social surroundings, without experiencing social recognition, but the hero's journey is first and

[28] Kruglanski et al. 2009

foremost a search for personal meaning that the hero did not have the opportunity to achieve before.[29] For the heroic martyr, helping a community in distress offers real world evidence of the hero's ability to have an impact on relationships and social surroundings, a meritorious achievement for all to see. For the individual, this meritorious achievement is both enlightening and empowering, all the more the more costly is the achievement. Hence, heroic martyrs volunteer because they seek personal empowerment by demonstrating to others and themselves that they are fully capable of achieving a meaningful goal and thereby gain actual influence within an important sphere of life.

Identity Reconstruction

A hero martyr's relationship with his or her community sees their individual identity as occupying a greater place than their community identity. They consider themselves as the "best" of their communities, not just another member of the community. Because they do not view themselves as necessarily beholden to all of the constraints and norms of a community's definitions, hero martyrs feel they have more latitude to change and grow. A hero martyr's fluid, dynamic nature allows for a process of transformation where at last they can achieve a heroic status.

The logics of social and heroic martyrdom are ideal types. Actual individuals may only approximate each, have multiple and overlapping identities, and mixed reasons for acting, including motives such as revenge that are distinct from community versus egoistic motives for martyrdom. Further, the ideal types are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since an individual with strong pre-existing communal ties can also have strong egoistic motives for sacrificing for

[29] Gelles, Borum, and Palarea 2005

the community. As Table 1 displays, however, the two types do represent coherent and distinct logics of individual sacrifice for a community, and separating these types is important because some individuals may be attracted by one more than another and militant groups may seek to exploit these different types in their recruitment strategies.

Table 1. Dimensions of the Social and Heroic Cultures of Martyrdom

DIMENSIONS	SOCIAL	HEROIC
World Issue	Harm to One's Community	Opportunity for Own Glory
Justification for Violence	Benefit One's Community	Experience Personal Transformation
Action Plan	Attack the Perpetrator of Harm	Face Own Supreme Ordeal
Individual Motive	Social Duty	Personal Empowerment
Identity Variability	Static, hardened	Fluid, reconstructed

V. THE HEROIC NARRATIVE IN MILITANT PROPAGANDA

Using this framework, we evaluate specific ISIS and Al Nusra martyr videos to show that the new logic of heroic martyrdom is a general phenomenon, present in multiple contemporary militant groups and capable of spreading to more. The purpose of this analysis is not to count or track themes or clusters of words, but to identify the sequences of the elements of the narrative that convey meaning to viewing audiences. Since the core issue is the identity of the individuals portrayed in the videos, we rely on narrative analysis using the methods of Paul Ricoeur, a methodology that focuses on how the structural sequences of a given narrative constructs the meaning of the identity of characters.[30] In this way, we can identify whether there is a fit between the logics of martyrdom and the narrative structure of actual martyr videos.

Narrative Analysis

In recent decades, narrative analysis has been increasingly used in political science as a way to understand how perceptions of political reality shape the construction of political behavior.[31] Our specific approach builds on the work of Paul Ricoeur who emphasizes that narrative structures are composed of a synthesis of elements and sequences of elements that create characters and plot that takes place within a unique "world." These "emplotments" – as Ricoeur called the specific structural sequences of a given narrative – allow the author to develop meaning as the characters move along the plot in sections called "episodes." Episodes create an "illusion of sequence" and it is this causal structure that imparts meaning for the actor. Accordingly, this narrative analysis goes beyond basic content analysis that focuses on lexical and grammar usages

[30] Ricoeur 1991a; Ricoeur 1991b
[31] Patterson and Monroe 1998

or counting themes[32] and instead focuses on the sequences that the author uses to reveal how the characters conceive of themselves and of themselves in relation to others.

Identifying the causal sequence of a narrative structure is particularly good for tracking the character transformation of actors as they move along various points of the story. Indeed, Ricoeur came to think that narratives help to constitute identity, wherein notions of self (what he termed "ipseity") intersect with permanent things that constitute the world and appear within space and time. In short, plot points construct the character, both of the individual self and as the protagonist of the narrative.[33]

Videos and films that have been edited consist primarily of episodic emplotment. This emplotment dictates the meaningful transformation of a character within the world he or she inhabits. This holds true for ISIS and al-Nusra videos, allowing us to demonstrate the existence of a heroic narrative in specific videos focusing on foreign recruits.

ISIS: The Heroic Narrative in the Abu Muslim Video

One of the most successful and popular foreign fighter recruitment videos is based on the heroic story of Abu Muslim (718-755), a Persian propagandist who led the Abbasid revolt against the Umayyad dynasty in 747 and who was the first to use the black standard, similar to the flag currently employed by ISIS. The ISIS video is entitled, *Al-Ghuraba (The Stranger) - The Chosen Few of Different Lands: Abu Muslim from Canada* released July 11, 2014.[34] Adding to the idea that ISIS is creating a historical analogy, the film's hero, Abu Muslim (*aka* Andre Poulin), was likely given his *nom de guerre* only after he arrived in Syria and joined ISIS[35] and

32 Winter 2015; Winter and Bach-Lombardo 2016
33 Lawler 2002; Ricoeur 1980; Ricoeur 1991a; Ricoeur 1991b; Reissman, 2008
34 Tharoor 2014
35 Aubé 2014

the video was released just in July 2014, just after ISIS declared the Caliphate on June 29. *Abu Muslim* is routinely reposted in forums across the web, with well over 50,000 views in the first year alone and available in at least 11 languages, including German, Urdu, French, and Tamil.

In *Abu Muslim*, we see a fleshed-out version of the heroic narrative, involving Poulin performing glorious battle feats in a special world, victories made possible because of his special qualities and which lead to a sense of personal empowerment, revealing the transformational nature of the heroic narrative. The video chronicles the story of Poulin, a Canadian convert to Islam. In real life, Poulin lived in Timmins, Ontario prior to performing the "hijra" to join ISIS in Syria. He converted to Islam in his early twenties, and subsequently moved in with a common-law couple who were also Muslim. He started an affair with the woman and made threatening comments to the man with a box cutter, accusing him of not being a "good Muslim."[36] Poulin was in and out of jail in the next few years before finally disappearing in 2010, later emerging in Syria.

The video reconstructs his story through the battle for the Aleppo Minnigh airport in 2013, where he died. In contrast to Poulin's rather turbulent life in Canada, *Abu Muslim* is structured to put him in the best, most heroic light. The a-chronological narrative is centered on "episodes" constructed with the intent to establish Abu Muslim's heroic identity. The video begins with high-quality aerial footage of the Canadian Rockies, a decision that initially seems perplexing, but is purposeful, as we shall see. As the video continues, the viewer is taken through interviews with Abu, a discussion of his past "tests" in Canada, and narration that recounts his heroism in battle. The video places special emphasis on Abu as a "good person," and that he made significant sacrifices for his new pregnant wife, community, and Caliphate. The video

[36] Schmidt 2014; Aubé 2014

shows Abu Muslim killed in battle, which is the final piece of his transformation as a hero. After death, Abu then returns to the frame in a soft, golden glow, and asks others to join his cause. His sacrifice and transformation give his words weight. Abu Muslim reveals his heroic nature, and he becomes an example, a role model. A "role martyr."

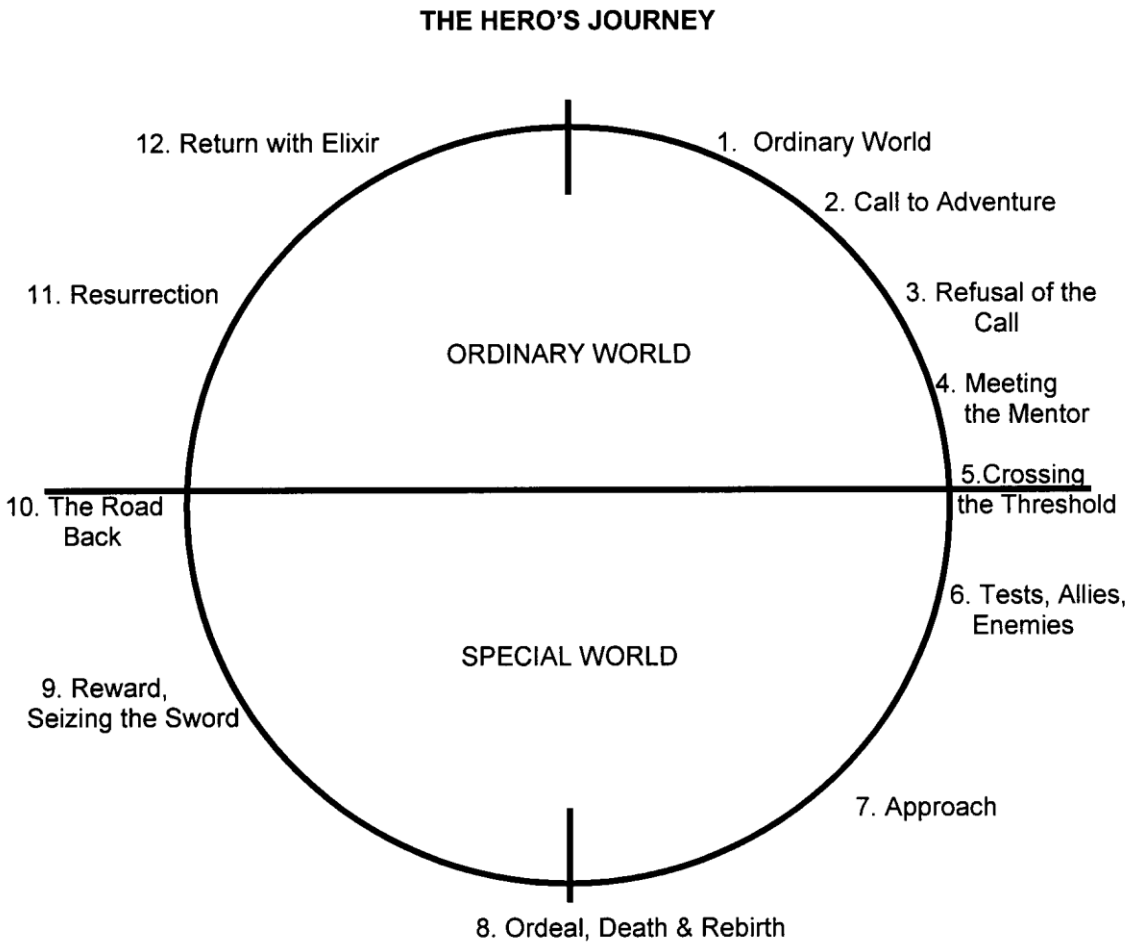
The episodes of Abu Muslim's emplotment as constructed by the video producers at Al Hayat share commonalities with a Hollywood twelve-step screenwriting prescription. This screenwriting guide on what was known as the "Hero's Journey," was developed by then Disney Executive, Christopher Vogler, in the 1980s. Vogler's outline was circulated around Hollywood where it became known as "The Memo." It consolidated Campbell's mythology along the plot points of George Lucas' *Star Wars*, which Campbell's work had influenced.[37] In 1992, Vogler turned "The Memo" into a screenwriting handbook called, *The Writer's Journey* now in its third edition.[38] While we cannot say with any certainty that Al Hayat producers used Vogler's twelve-step guide, it is a deliberately edited production and it contains all of Vogler's twelve steps of hero development, in order.

Broadly speaking, "The Hero's Journey" is a succession of steps that launches the hero into the unknown where he or she goes through a process of education, and then returns to the beginning after gaining wisdom and experience (graphically depicted in Figure 2). The rough structure of this "journey" is the introduction to the hero in his or her "home," where the hero receives a "call to adventure." The hero is reluctant to go, but he or she receives encouragement from a mentor. The hero then enters the "special world" where the adventure occurs. In this special world, the hero encounters many tests and trials that are often life threatening, before

[37] Henderson 1997; Campbell and Moyers 2011
[38] Vogler 2007

finally reaching a place of metaphysical death. The hero then is "resurrected," and returns home with special knowledge or new abilities, which is shared with his or her community.

Figure 2: Christopher Vogler's "Hero's Journey"



Indeed, we can chart how *Al-Ghuraba (The Stranger) - The Chosen Few of Different Lands: Abu Muslim from Canada* closely follows Vogler's 12 step process.

1. Hero is introduced in his ordinary world (00:07)

The video opens with Abu Muslim sitting in a verdant, dappled environment, clearly at ease. This open presents two "ordinary worlds" for Abu Muslim: the lush, green world of his new home in Syria contrasted with the magnificent natural settings only found in his Canadian birthplace. Muslim even talks about himself as being like "any other, regular" Canadian, who enjoyed doing "regular" Canadian things like watching hockey, fishing, and being outdoors. While the viewer might be initially puzzled as to why this glorious (and oddly edited) b-roll of the Canadian Rockies is used, its *intent* is to situate Abu Muslim in his ordinary world.

2. The Call to Adventure (00:48)

Here Abu Muslim speaks of his call to Islam as being guided from the darkness of *kafir* [disbelief], to the light of *'iiman* [belief], to Islam." While the statement is typical of any convert to Islam, Abu Muslim's statement is followed by a shot of an ISIS *muezzin* performing the *adhan*, the Muslim "Call to Prayer" while on the battlefield. The *muezzin* is singing in the open next to muddy trucks, ISIS flags and rifles-toting *jihadis.* The video is suggesting that conversion to Islam leads to a life of adventure (with ISIS).

3. The Hero is Reluctant at First (01:06)

In this section, Abu Muslim talks about how he was just fine being "ordinary": he made good money, he had friends, he had a supportive family, and he was "making it." But, "at the end of the day," Abu felt he could not be Muslim and practice in the land of the *kufr* (disbelievers). Abu also wants to make clear that he wasn't a disaffected youth, anarchist, or even that he had any mental issues that would raise questions as to the purity of his conversion and reasons to join ISIS. Most tellingly, perhaps, Abu refers to himself in the past tense here: "No, I was a very good

person." This interesting use of tense reveals an important change in his personal identity has already taken place, and the process of transformation has begun.

The Hero's reluctance section is also meant to demonstrate the ordinariness of Abu, as well as that of his *bon amis* in ISIS. It is a persuasive device to get the viewer to begin thinking of him or herself as a *jihadi.* "Am I the kind of person who could be an ISIS *jihadi*?"

4. The Hero is encouraged by the Wise Old Man or Woman (02:20)

The video fades out on Abu Muslim's commentary about his utter ordinariness, and we fade in on a supposed quote from the Prophet, "You shouldn't live so close to the *kufr* to even see their lights." Verbal haranguing of the audience is common to social martyr videos; the martyr admonishes their fellow Muslims, family, and friends who have not yet joined the cause, and martyrs routinely cite scripture to make the target audience feel shame and hopefully incite their fellows to action. This element of social martyr videos is repurposed here within the fourth step of the Hero's Journey. According to Vogler, this step is sometimes utilized in storytelling as the "swift kick" to the Hero that gets the adventure going. Abu Muslim has been encouraged by the "wise man," but he is also quoting the passage to encourage others. The images of the Canadian military at the end of this section are also meant serve a similar purpose; they are meant to connote foreign occupation. The use of these images is intended to create the conditions for retaliatory action and the prospect of heroism.

5. The Hero Passes the First Threshold (02:43)

Abu Muslim tell his audience that one must "live as a full" Muslim, and presumably, there is only one place on earth to do that, *Sham* (the Levant, or Syria) under the Caliphate. This is Abu entering the "special world" of the story where his adventure can start to take shape. He is now

"on board" with the adventure and there is no turning back. Abu's statements are even capped with beautiful shots of the mountains in Syria, and a time lapse of the galaxy in motion behind a tent under the stars. This is the special world of ISIS, which is both historic and outside of time. The Hero's adventure has begun.

6. The Hero Encounters Tests and Helpers. (03:03)

As with step 3, this section serves multiple purposes: Abu Muslim acknowledges that he has met helpers and encountered tests, while simultaneously making a plea to the audience for help of any kind. He asks for potential donors and participants to engage with the Islamic State, from sending money or working within the municipalities to keep the basic functions of ISIS in operation. Martyr testimony often speaks of *jihad* as a "duty" or "obligation," in that all Muslim are obliged to support it in some way. By joining the *jihad*, Abu has completed an important test, and he is making an appeal for other helpers to join.

7. The Hero reaches the Inner Most Cave (03:58)

This is the place where the Hero finds the Grail, the supreme object of his quest. For Abu Muslim, he will find his grail in "the Land of *Mubaraka* [blessings and peace], the land of *Sham*." Interestingly, for Abu Muslim, this offer seems to last for a limited time only. He compares it to a gold rush, and a race to empty the market. Abu argues that if someone comes to *Sham* now, they can "easily earn themselves a high station in the afterlife," by participating (and ultimately dying) for the cause. It's "trading something worthless for the most precious diamond in the world."

8. The Hero Endures the Supreme Ordeal (05:10)

This is not, as one may initially presume, the epic battle scene in the story's progression. It's a lot messier than that. In this step, the Hero needs to seem to die and then return after a harrowing near death experience. For Abu Muslim, we are told that his epic struggle begins when he "accepted Islam in the land of the *kufr*," and it cumulates in the bowels of an Ontario jail.

It is in Step 8 that we encounter the place in the story where it becomes possible to derail the Hero's Journey; here, we can separate fact from fiction, or turn the hero into a quixotic fool.

9. The Hero Seizes the Sword (05:47)

According to the video, Andre Poulin's trials in jail made him into a proto-Abu Muslim, and after release he "seized the sword" of his adventure. This is where the Hero takes possession of his special treasure or gains some kind of special knowledge or experience. After his "near-death" experience, Abu Muslim was a changed person, and this is why he could easily begin to refer to that life in the past, where he "was a good person." We are told that as soon as he was released from jail, Abu Muslim "performed *hijra*" and came to Syria, despite all the static he was getting from the police and counterintelligence agencies. As the narrator says, he came to ISIS "to play a role in reviving the *khilafah*." In short, Abu went to *Sham* to save Islam.

10. The Road Back (06:19)

This step is typically action packed. In many cases it is visually explicated as a car chase or a fierce battle. Specifically, this is where the Hero tries to escape with his most valuable treasure. For Abu Muslim, his ultimate treasure is to be "accepted as a martyr." Abu is not one that explicitly self-martyrs as in the case of a suicide bomber, but instead he is of the sort that dies fighting "on behalf of a cause." Earlier in the video, Abu made clear that the "most precious

diamond" for a foreign fighter is to die while performing *jihad* in *Sham*. All these things come together in a singular way in step 10, which is the point where Abu Muslim is killed in battle at the Minnigh Airport in Aleppo.

The graphics that accompany Abu Muslim as he prowls around the battlefield are reminiscent of the graphics in video games, or the technique used by Stephen Spielberg in *Schindler's List* to draw the eye of the viewer. ISIS routinely employs these video game tropes in their graphics and propaganda. For certain, ISIS is targeting younger people who wish to "level up" their video game playing experience.

11. Resurrection (08:12)

The hero is transformed. For Abu Muslim, he has been transformed into a martyr. The role of death and the corporeality of the body are culturally significant for delineating transformation and for the transference of knowledge and wisdom. The death of Abu Muslim seems to be at odds with traditional heroic narratives. However, it is perfectly in keeping with the mythology that ISIS wishes to perpetuate: That a hero is someone with special qualities and their death is somehow proof of it. The "victory" evident in the death of the hero is his transformation to "paradise." For the makers of the video, for the martyrs, "resurrection" does not mean death and rebirth in the "ordinary" or even the "special" world. Instead, he is resurrected in the afterlife.

12. Return with the Elixir (08:33)

Here, Abu Muslim returns in the soft, hazy glow and with an echoing, heavenly voice – he is speaking to us from the beyond and has special knowledge because of his heroic transformation. Abu claims that he is not the smartest or the most educated Muslim – noting that he wasn't even born one. However, his new status as a "martyr" who died on behalf of the cause grants him

special insight that requires attention and respect. Abu uses his new status to beseech others to come, to fight, and to die for the land. "Apply this knowledge to yourself and you will be rewarded." Abu has won the precious diamond, and he has been transformed by the experience in a special and profound way. He is now untouchable.

Jabahat Al-Nusra: The Heroic Narrative in the Abu Basir Video

Al-Nusra has followed in ISIS footsteps, releasing a Western foreign fighter recruitment video in March 2016 that closely follows the heroic narrative and even Volger's specific emplotment almost identically. Just as the Abu Muslim video that involves the testimony of a Canadian who traveled to Syria and died fighting for ISIS, the Abu Basir video features a young man from Great Britain there who traveled to Syria and died fighting for al-Nusra there. It is in English and so easily accessible to Western audiences. The narrative contains 10 of Vogler's 12 steps of the hero's journey, all in Vogler's order with one exception. Since ISIS and al-Nusra are well-known for competing with each other over interpretations of Islamic doctrine, this case stands as a hard case for the diffusion and emulation of innovative ideas across militant groups.

7. Hero reaches the inner most cave, striving for martyrdom, the Grail. (00:14)

We open with Abu Basir in battle, active and confident. Then, the scene shifts to his dead body, as the narrator explains that what makes a real man is not defined by his stature, wealth, or fame, but by his creator. This opening defines, from the beginning, that the hero's journey is one that will elevate and transform the Britain from ordinary to extraordinary. Abu Basir has achieved the supreme object of his quest, the Grail of martyrdom. The story that follows is about how.

1. Hero is introduced in his ordinary world. (01:08)

Now we are transported back in time. Abu Basir is introduced as coming from the ordinary world of central London, living a normal life as a graduate of law and a teacher by profession. He is presented as a practicing Muslim, as defined by word and deed in worship, manners and ethics. He has no personal troubles.

2. The Call to Adventure. (01:30)

Here we are told that Abu Basir "answered the call to *jihad"*, and came to Syria in 2014.

5. Hero Passes the First Threshold. (01:41)

Once in Syria, Abu Basir enters the special world and faces immediate challenges serving as a fighter on the front lines. We are told that he was "special ...brave, very intelligent, and creative at the same time" and that months of fighting made him patient, persevering and strong in ways that prepare him for his destiny.

6. The Hero Encounters Tests and Helpers. (02:42)

Abu Basir now engages is multiple battles with different sets of fellow fighters, all of which are tests with a variety of helpers. By joining the Jihad, he has completed an important test, and he and his helpers can now "see past the exhaustion, the pain, the agony, the injuries and dead bodies, the bullets, the missiles, the helicopters, the fighter jets. They see past all that …to victory."

8. The Hero Endures the Supreme Ordeal (03:10)

Just as Abu Muslim's epic struggle begins when he accepts Islam in a land of Kufr (disbelieve) in Canada, so too Abu Basir wages "an epic intense battle" against the Kufr in Syria, the soldiers

of Bashar Assad. Here Abu Basir demonstrates his superiority and prepares to take the next step in the Hero's journey.

9. The Hero Seizes the Sword (04:30)

Following his epic battles on the front lines against Assad's troops, Abu Basir discovers his true sword by "picking up the pen" against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. We are told that whether on his Twitter account, blogs or online magazines, "his words were sharper than a sword, slicing through the slicing through the *Khawarij* (al-Nusra's term for the followers of ISIS). His words drove his opponents insane, forcing them to write a 27-page repudiation, mainly focusing on his articles." Abu Basir is now a changed person, having survived near-death experiences while gaining special knowledge about himself and using his special talents in full.

10. The Road Back (04:59)

This is the action-packed episode of the video. Abu Basir joins the media wing of al-Nusra, "which linked his talent with his bravery." We watch as Abu Basir chronicles and videos many fighters and are told that "front line media work can at times be more dangerous than that of a soldier." The graphics show the many camera angles used by Abu Basir to present fighters in glorious battle, filming in "places no reporter or journalist dared to step foot in." Earlier the video made clear that Basir reached his goal of martyrdom. Here we listen to Basir contemplating the goal: "Of course, we all want *shahada* [martyrdom], but you can't be reckless about these things. If it comes, it comes," he says.

11. Resurrection (07:42)

Abu Basir is now the hero transformed into a martyr. The episode follows Basir as he films his own last moments, while being shot during an exchange of fire while on the first line of an

assault force. We see his body displayed as proof that the death of the hero has given rebirth as a martyr worthy of glory and respect.

12 Return with the Elixir (08:24)

Like Abu Muslim, Abu Basir returns in a soft, hazy glow and with an echoing, heavenly voice – he is speaking to us from the afterlife, transmitting his special knowledge gained from his heroic journey. He offers his insight, saying Jihad is multifaceted, a "struggle against oppression and a struggle against one's own desires and a struggle to make the word of Allah the highest in the land." Abu Basir's message is clear: Allah calls individuals to Jihad and those who make the heroic journey are transformed and personally empowered. His final words hail "the path of *jihad*, the path of respect, the path of glory, the path of honor."

Summary

The close fit between *Abu Muslim, Abu Basir* and the heroic narrative in general and the Vogler emplotment in particular provides strong evidence that ISIS has pioneered a new kind of video and that other militant groups are following suit, using Western filmmaking techniques to emphasize the heroic acts of a superior individual.

VI. TARGETING NARRATIVES IN WESTERN-DIRECTED ISIS VIDEOS

Our narrative theory of high-risk mobilization expects that militant groups use different narratives to appeal to individuals with strong and weak ties, while our narrative analysis has found that Islamic groups are using narratives of social and heroic cultures of martyrdom. In this section, we systematically assess one militant group's propaganda – ISIS – to assess whether the use of the heroic and social logic narratives in their video propaganda are targeted toward

different audiences and, if so, whether those audiences represent individuals with strong versus weak ties to Islam and established Muslim communities. Our main hypothesis is that ISIS uses heroic narrative videos to appeal to individuals with weak ties, most prominently converts to Islam in the West, while ISIS uses the social logic to appeal to individuals with strong ties. The logic is intuitive. An individual with strong ties is more likely than someone with weak ties to be swayed by the social logic's call to duty and obligation to the Muslim community. For those with weak ties, especially converts to Islam living in the West, the promise of heroic self-actualization and glory on the battlefield will likely resonate more than social logic appeals based on a duty and obligation to the Muslim community to which they have few or no direct ties. Of course, individuals from established Muslim communities might too find heroism appealing, and so we cannot rule out that ISIS uses heroic narratives in their propaganda to appeal to both audience categories. However, on balance, we expect ISIS to use heroic narratives to target individuals with weak ties simply because the social logic will be relatively less effective in mobilizing this group.

To test our hypothesis, we first need to (1) identify the universe of Western-directed ISIS video propaganda produced; (2) identify martyrdom testimonials in these videos; (3) identify the audience category (strong/weak ties) for each MT; and (4) assess the narrative logic each MT (heroic/social). These steps are described in detail below.

Establishing the Universe of Western-directed ISIS Propaganda Videos

Using a large team of research assistants, we have identified 1,400 official propaganda videos released by ISIS between 2013 and August 2017. We defined an official propaganda video as a video released by one of ISIS's 37 official media offices, excluding those released by Amaq News Agency, which is not acknowledged by ISIS as an official media wing.

We are confident that our list approximates the universe of official ISIS videos released in the defined period. To create this list of videos, we cross-checked multiple publicly available sources such as Aaron Zelin's Jihadology repository of Jihadist propaganda (Jihadology.net) and the catalog of ISIS propaganda maintained at the ISIS-affiliated blog Khilafatimes (khilafatimes.wordpress.com). We also conducted systematic searches of news sites (e.g. Heavy.com, ZeroCensorship.com, TangentCode.org) and the Internet Archive (Archive.org).

Table 2. Total count of videos by source.

Source	Total
Jihadology.net	891
Archive.org	303
Khilafatimes	145
Heavy.com	29
Tangentcode.org	10
Other	22
Total	1,400

Of the 1,400 official ISIS videos we identified, we were able to locate and download 1,315 corresponding video files, accounting for 93% of the total. Of the 96 missing videos, two are from al Furqan Media, one of ISIS's four central media arms; the remaining 90 were released by one of the group's 33 provincial media wings. The missing video files are not randomly distributed across the four-year period; roughly two-thirds (66) are from the fourth quarter of 2014.

For each of the 1,400 videos in our database we recorded the date of release, the media wing, and the title. For the 1,315 with corresponding video files, we also recorded the length, languages spoken, and languages of subtitles if any. We also systematically coded each video for

the presence of 33 content elements, including suicide bombers, execution and other judicial punishments, battle footage, and testimony.

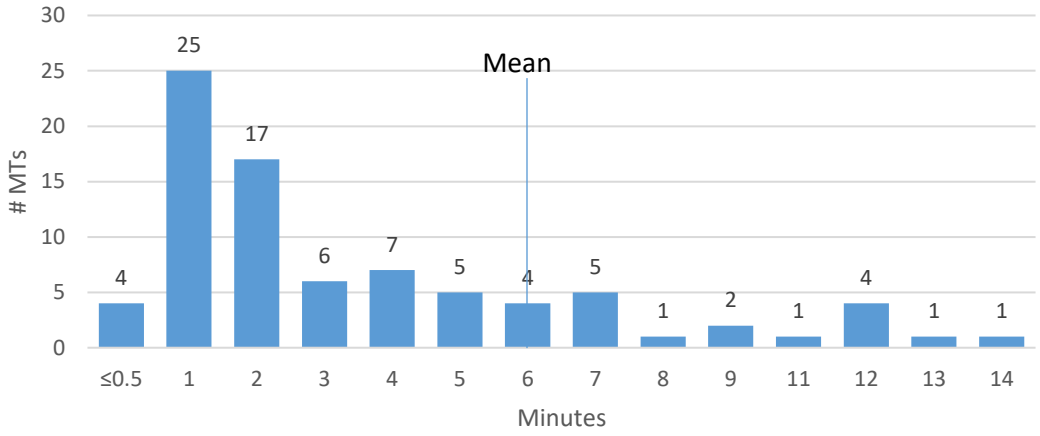
We defined Western-directed ISIS videos as the subset of videos which would be understandable to speakers of the primary languages spoken in Western countries. Specifically, we counted a video as "Western-directed" if it featured narration or testimony, or subtitling of narration or testimony, in a Western language. "Western languages" by our definition includes English, German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish. We also included Turkish in our operationalization of Western for this study, since Turkey has been historically Westward-leaning and allied with the United States in the war on ISIS. 113 of 1,315 videos meet the criteria of Western-directed by our definition.

Identifying Western-directed ISIS Martyrdom Testimonials

The unit of analysis for this study is the Martyr Testimonial, not the video per se. We define a martyrdom testimonial as a single instance of a clear *call to action* on behalf of the group by a specific and distinct individual or group of individuals. In the case of Western-directed ISIS propaganda, calls to action typically call for Muslims to (1) move to Syria to fight with the group or support its activities through non-military means; or (2) engage in violence in the name of ISIS at home. To be included in our study, an MT had to be greater than 15 seconds long. Videos in German, French, English, and Turkish or subtitled in one of these languages were assessed by analysts with native language fluency. All other videos were assessed by analysts with native Arabic fluency using Arabic subtitles included by ISIS on its non-Arabic videos to ensure comprehensibility to the group's Arabic-speaking base. Our analysis found 41 Western-directed videos containing at least one qualifying martyrdom testimonial.

We assessed the 41 remaining videos and identified and extracted 76 distinct Western-directed martyrdom testimonials. The vast majority of the 76 MTs (61) appeared in videos featuring multiple MTs; in only 15 cases did MTs comprise an entire video. Not surprisingly, MTs varied significantly in length, as shown in Figure 2 below. The average length of an MT is 6 minutes, but the majority of MTs fall below the mean (more than half are under 3 minutes). We included all MTs greater than 15 seconds, irrespective of length. While it is likely that the type of narrative in a given MT will be related to length – for example, heroic narrative MTs, because of their relative complexity, may be more likely in longer MTs that allow for more complex narrative structure and content – variation in length allotted to an MT is a conscious choice by ISIS and does not bias in favor of our hypotheses.

Figure 2. Distribution of MTs by Length (rounded to the minute)



All 76 MTs were translated into English and transcribed for analysis.

Identifying Target Audience (The Dependent Variable)

The dependent variable in this study is the audience to which a given MT is targeted, specifically whether the video makes an appeal to individuals with strong or weak ties to Islam and

established Muslim communities. Without access to ISIS's decision-making on this question, we inferred the intended target audience from the MT itself, i.e., how a subject's relationship to Islam and Muslims is represented in their dialog or in the dialog of third parties like a narrator or fellow fighter. Our assumption is that how ISIS represents the background of an MT subject is a deliberate and strategic choice to enhance the effectiveness of the effectiveness of their appeal by forging an identification between the subject and the intended audience. If the subject is presented as having weak ties, we assume the primary audience is individuals with weak ties, and subjects presented as having strong ties indicating the intended audience similarly has strong ties.

We coded each of the 76 MTs for the whether the subject's ties to Islam and established Muslim communities were represented as strong or weak using the stated religious status and country of origin of an MTs primary subject (individual or group) as a proxy: If an MT's subject was identified as A convert to Islam, we coded the MT as targeting individuals with weak ties. If the subject was identified as coming from a Muslim majority country and not otherwise indicated as a convert, we code the MT as targeting individuals from established Muslim communities. Subjects in 9 of the 76 MTs were explicitly identified as converts to Islam and coded as targeting individuals with weak ties. Of the remaining 67, 25 were identified as having backgrounds in Muslim majority countries and 31 as coming from non-Muslim majority countries (France, Trinidad and Tobago, the UK and Belgium account for 21 of these). We coded both groups as having strong ties. The remaining MT 11 subjects have no clearly identified background (whether through kunya or testimony) and thus coded as having an unknown target audience.

Coding Narratives (The Independent Variable)

As a final step, we coded each of the 76 translated and transcribed MTs for the primary narrative logic – social or heroic –it employed. Coding was conducted by a team of four analysis using coding guidelines and a standardized template prompting analyst to identify and substantiate the presence of the main components of both narrative logics in a given MT using evidence from presentation in the video and the transcript. Prompts in the template were balanced in nature and number of components for each logic (4) to minimize bias. Template questions are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Narrative Analysis Template

Social Logic	
Harm to Community	*Does the testimony portray the Muslim community as victimized, oppressed, and in need to be saved? How?*
Perpetrator of Harm to Community	*Are states or governing institutions identified as oppressive, tyrannical, or illegitimate? If so, what harm do they pose to the community?*
Religious Duty to Sacrifice	*Does the testimony emphasize a religious duty to sacrifice for the sake of the community, e.g., jihad or hijra? How?*
Benefit to Community	*Does the testimony identify the Muslim community as primary beneficiary if the call to action is answered? Will the failure to answer the call result in (further) harm to the community? How would the community benefit if the call to action is answered?*
Heroic Logic	
Individual Uniqueness	*Does the testimony emphasize inherent characteristics of the predominant speaker(s), e.g., courage, intelligence, faith, etc., make them stand out? How?*
Transformational Experience	*Do the attestor(s) undergo internal changes in their character? Transformation may be explicit or implied, but ultimately reflects a transition from the ordinary to the extraordinary. This could include initial reluctance before the call to action is heeded.*
Supreme Ordeal and Reward	*Do the attestor(s) face a supreme ordeal in the testimony? Does undertaking this ordeal lead to enlightenment and special knowledge that is shared with the audience?*
Benefit to Individual	*Do the attestor(s) benefit from answering the call by means of personal glory, a more meaning life or a "heroic" commemoration? Will the failure to heed the call result in a less meaningful existence? How would the individual benefit if the call to action is answered?*

After coders completed the template, an MT's primary narrative logic was assigned based on the greatest support as calculated by the balance of present components in the template. Each MT was independently coded by 2 coders, with 93% agreement the overall assessment of narrative logic. Of the 76 MTs analyzed, we found 13 used the heroic narrative and 58 the social logic. Coders assessed 5 MTs as ambiguous with respect to predominant logic, which were coded as

indeterminate. Three of the five indeterminate videos were under 30 seconds long and the three shortest overall, suggesting there may be a minimum length for MTs to present a clear narrative structure.

Results

We are now able to assess our hypotheses. Table 4 presents a cross-tabulation of the relationship between narrative logics (IV) and targeted audience (DV) along with a basic Chi Square test of association.

Table 4. Chi Square Analysis of Protagonist Ties and Narrative Logic

	Narrative Logic		
Protagonist Ties	*Heroic*	*Social*	**Total**
Weak Ties (converts)	7	2	9
Strong Ties	6	56	62
Total	13	58	71

Note: Pearson chi2(1) = 24.368 Pr = 0.000; excludes 5 cases in which coders were unable to assign narrative logic.

The table shows that 7 of the 13 heroic narrative MTs targeted audiences with weak ties, while 56 of 58 social logic MTs targeted audiences with strong ties. The Chi Square test finds these results to be statistically significant, i.e., there is a vanishingly small probability the results are a product of chance an instead reflect a meaningful relationship between the variables ($\chi 2$=24.386, p=0.000).

Turning to our hypotheses, the results indicate that ISIS uses predominantly uses heroic logic and not social logic MTs to target audiences with weak ties to Islam and established

Muslim communities. Of the 9 MTs targeting audiences with weak ties, 7 (nearly 80%) used the heroic logic. Hypothesis 1, that ISIS favors the heroic narrative when appealing to individuals with weak ties, is therefore confirmed. Hypothesis 2, that ISIS uses the social logic primarily to appeal to individuals with strong ties, is also confirmed: The vast majority (56/58, 90%) of social logic MTs are targeted at audiences with strong ties and are rarely used in appeals to weak-tie audiences (2/9, 22%). The heroic logic is not reserved for weak tie audiences, however. ISIS uses the heroic logic to appeal to strong-tie audiences at a nearly identical rate as weak tie audiences, confirming Hypothesis 3. Nevertheless, while heroic logic MTs target weak-tied audience only 60% of the time, ISIS uses social logic MTs do so only 4% of the time – a fifteen-fold difference. This is strong evidence that ISIS is applying a calculated logic in matching the structure and content of its video propaganda to the audience the group believes these appeals are most likely to resonate with.

VII. CONCLUSION

What is new about modern militant propaganda? For decades, persuasion has been central to the efforts by militant groups to mobilize fighters, resources, and other support particularly from beyond immediate zones of conflict where coercive means are rarely an option. Militant groups commonly use strategic framing and other interpretive processes in order to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.[39] Whether print, audio tapes, fax machines, video cassette recordings, or websites, militant groups routinely employ the mass communication technology of the times to project their messages.

[39] Snow et al. 1986; McAdam 1999

But, have modern militant groups gone further, not just adopting current technology but developing new strategic logics to mobilize supporters and recruit fighters? If so, can we identify which specific audiences are targeted by the new logics?

Explaining modern militant propaganda strategy is of central importance. Policy makers have called for new approaches to counteract the apparently growing appeal of modern militant propaganda, but better responses depend on understanding whether there are new strategic logics at work and, if so, whether these new logics are targeted to particular audiences. There are also crucial theoretical issues at stake. Scholars of political violence have long recognized that appeals for collective action based on altruism play a vibrant and visible role in militant propaganda strategies. The conventional logic has been to encourage self-sacrifice, personal risk, and even suicide attacks with an appeal to individuals who share a strong, pre-existing social identity to a community perceived as under immediate threat, thereby justifying acts of sacrifice and violence as a moral duty to defend a valued community.[40] Whether expressed in religious or secular terms, this "social logic of martyrdom" has been common in "martyr videos" and other propaganda by Islamic militant groups from Hezbollah to Hamas to Al Qaeda Central, and many non-Islamic groups as well.[41] Although some scholars have recognized that appeals based on individual excitement and personal gratification may also be at work,[42] the theory of non-altruistically motivated collective action is in its infancy.

This paper has sought to demonstrate that ISIS and other Islamic groups have constructed a new, heroic logic of martyrdom, one that is distinctly different from the social logic of martyrdom prevalent in the propaganda of many previous militant groups and one that

[40] Pape 2005; Hafez 2007
[41] Pettigrew 1997
[42] e.g., E. J. Wood 2003

corresponds to the dramatic growth of Western foreign fighter recruits for the group in recent years. This finding has important implications, but also limitations. In particular, the dualism community versus egoistic conceptions of martyrdom only begins to explore the complexities of the incentive structure for self-sacrifice, the reality that people often have multiple and overlapping identities, and the underlying cognitive and emotional reasons why individuals may feel attracted to various conceptions of martyrdom. Further, although the correlation of the new logic of martyrdom with the dramatic increase in Western recruitment for ISIS is consistent with the apparent success of this propaganda strategy and other militant groups may seek to emulate this strategy based on apparent success alone, more research is needed to identify the causal importance of this factor in producing sympathy for militant groups. Appropriately qualified, however, a richer understanding of conceptions of martyrdom can advance our knowledge about why individuals become sympathetic toward militant groups, the social processes of political violence, and the role of militant group propaganda in political mobilization.

Analysis of community versus egoistic conceptions of martyrdom contributes to three spheres of scholarship. First, it can enhance theories of high-risk collective action, particularly related to political violence. Scholars have long noted that standard models of collective action based on community – i.e., strong communal ties, political opportunity, class position, and club goods – account only weakly for insurgent and other high risk collective action, because the implied mechanisms – i.e., social sanctions, enduring bonds and selective incentives – are often too weak to account for many important cases. Indeed, empirical investigations have uncovered significant evidence of more self-centered explanations for high-risk political action. For instance, Doug McAdam highlights the importance of personal feelings of political efficacy as

crucial to many who engaged in high-risk activism in the U.S. civil rights movement.[43] Roger Petersen found that personal pride as distinct from grief or revenge was important among Lithuanians who carried out risky political resistance during occupation by the Soviets and Germans in the 1940s.[44] Elisabeth Wood shows that some *campesinos* who supported the FMLN in El Salvador particularly during the high-risk period 1979 to 1983 motivated by "pleasure in agency" in addition to revenge and moral outrage against injustice.[45] However, these valuable studies stop short of developing a new typology for the varieties of self-sacrifice and particularly the alternative logics for how the relationship between individual identity and the community may vary. Accordingly, future research can re-examine scholarly assessments of individual motives for risky collective action to see if they are congruent with the framework presented here or possibly modify it.

Second, understanding of the heroic logic of martyrdom can illuminate studies of transformation of identity. This logic is not only egoistic; it is also distinctively dynamic. The individual is engaged in a "journey" during which the individual's sense of self in relation to the community undergoes significant transformation, a process that recognizes the possibility of reluctance and tensions of identity conflicts and acknowledges personal agency. Scholars have begun to devote sustained attention to the transformation of social actors, norms and practices in the circumstances of insurgency, terrorism, and militant violence more generally.[46] Indeed, important work has already shed light on the complex social processes and conditions that can

[43] McAdam 1982
[44] Petersen 2001
[45] E. J. Wood 2003
[46] E. J. Wood 2008

lead political violence to polarize local identities[47] and to reverse polarity.[48] Informed by the typology offered here, further research can explore how individuals not only transform their communal loyalties in response to moral outrage and communal security concerns, but also identity transformations that do not necessarily map onto pre-existing communal cleavages, both their origins and reversals. To do so, however, we need to deepen our understanding of the appeal of this propaganda to know more about the link between individual sense of disenfranchisement, perceived lack of opportunity and other factors leading to support for the heroic narrative.

However, although ISIS is using a mixture of messages, this does not mean that the specific individual messages themselves are just a mixture of all of their ideas. Just as Toyota consistently tailors messages for corollas to working/middle class audiences and consistently tailors messages for Lexus to upper income audiences – without mixing the same message in the same commercial – ISIS and other Islamic groups are now using consistently different strategic messages for different audiences. The messages are all in support of ISIS gaining territorial control from states, but identifying the separate messaging strategies is crucial if we want to understand how the group is appealing to multiple segments of Western audiences more effectively than past groups. The internet has revolutionized targeted advertising for Amazon and hundreds of other virtual companies and the same strategies of targeted advertising are being adopted by militant groups.

Finally, analysis of the narratives in militant group propaganda can illuminate militant recruitment as a complex political process. In constructing narratives of martyrdom, militant

[47] Kaufmann 1996; Fearon and Laitin 2000
[48] Kalyvas 2008

groups are seeking to encourage, justify, and reinforce willing participation during uncertain and often tumultuous political conditions, where those participants and the narratives that surround them are political agents that can shape, as well as respond to, their environments. In recent years, scholars have devoted growing attention to the strategic use of public institutions by militants for governance and support, with emphasis on the provision of security, education, health, justice and other material benefits.[49] Thus far, less attention has been devoted to understanding when and why the considerable effort militants make to use narrative and symbolic power complement other institutional practices and structures, and why specific propaganda strategies may be used in different circumstances. Accordingly, the challenge of understanding militant political processes would be advanced by research designs that take advantage of variation in logics of martyrdom.

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[49] Arjona 2016; Mampilly 2012

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