Spectacles of Sovereignty in Digital Time: ISIS Executions, Visual Rhetoric and Sovereign Power

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The ISIS videos staging the executions of James Foley and Steven Sotloff are usually understood as devices to deter, recruit, and "sow terror." Left unanswered are questions about how these videos work; to whom they are addressed; and what about them can so continuously bring new audiences into existence. The evident durability of ISIS despite the imminent defeat of its state, coupled with the political impact of these particular videos, make these questions unusually urgent. Complete answers require analysis of the most understudied aspect of the videos that also happens to be vastly understudied in US political science: the visual mode of the violence. Approaching these videos as visual texts in need of close reading shows that they are, among other things, enactments of "retaliatory humiliation" (defined by Islamists) that perform and produce an inversion of power in two registers. It symbolically converts the public abjection of Foley and Sotloff by the Islamist executioner into an enactment of ISIS' invincibility and a demonstration of American impotence. It also aims to transpose the roles between the US, symbolically refigured as mass terrorist, failed sovereign, and rogue state, and ISIS, now repositioned as legitimate, invincible sovereign. Such rhetorical practices seek to actually constitute their audiences through the very visual and visceral power of their address. The affective power of this address is then extended and intensified by the temporality that conditions it—what I call digital time. Digital time has rendered increasingly rare ordinary moments of pause between rapid and repetitive cycles of reception and reaction—moments necessary for even a small measure of distance. The result is a sensibility, long in gestation but especially of *this* time, habituated to thinking less and feeling more, to quick response over deliberative action.

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Ask Mosul, city of Islam, about the lions—

How their fierce struggle brought liberation.

The land of glory has shed its humiliation and defeat

And put on the raiment of splendor.

—Ahlam al-Nasr, "The Poetess of the Islamic State"[1]

Setting the Stage

On August 19, 2014, the group of radical Islamists calling themselves *al-dawla al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic State, hereafter ISIS or Da'ish) posted a video demanding the cessation of United States air strikes against them in Sinjar, Iraq.[2] President Barack Obama had authorized the attacks earlier that month in an attempt to save what remained of Iraq's Yazidis from massacre and sexual enslavement by ISIS.[3] The video culminated in a dramatically staged beheading of American journalist James Wright Foley, who had gone missing in 2012 while covering the emergent civil war in Syria. Despite the instant infamy of the video, the air strikes continued unabated. On September 2, Da'ish then posted a video featuring captive American journalist Steven Sotloff,

repeating the demand, and re-enacting the grisly drama of a "live," though edited, beheading. So began a macabre dance of demand and denial that, by November, included a threat to British Prime Minister David Cameron about his country's "evil alliance with America," accompanied by videos with carefully choreographed decapitations of British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning.[4]

ISIS had been years in the making, its progenitors and architects deeply implicated in the waves of sectarian violence that had nearly ripped Iraq apart several times over in the years since the American-led invasion of 2003. And it was two months prior to these videos, in June 2014, that Da'ish had declared a caliphate in territory carved from Iraq and Syria, shortening its name from *al-dawla al-Islamiyya fi'l-Iraq wa'l-Sham* (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) to *al-dawla al-Islamiyya*, demanding that devout Muslims around the world swear an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to it and its ruler, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[5] But it was these slickly produced beheading videos, circulated instantly, endlessly, and everywhere by way of digital technologies, that made ISIS a household name globally.

The immediate purpose of these videos seemed to require neither translation nor interpretation: the executions were acts of retribution for American attacks on Da'ish, each hostage leverage to make it stop. Given official US rhetoric eschewing all dealings with terrorists, however, there seemed little chance that these videos and threats, individually or collectively, would secure an end to the air strikes.[6] For many, this has served as reassuring evidence that ISIS leaders are detached from reality, humanity, or both, in thrall to self-destructive delusions of grandeur, addicted to the pornographic "pleasures of killing" that will be their undoing, or, like demons from the netherworld, driven to an unprecedented savagery by an "insatiable bloodlust."[7]

Yet this leadership, comprised primarily of well-trained former Iraqi military men and experienced radical Islamist fighters, has proven fairly savvy, as evinced by a strategic assessment of Da'ish as remarkably resilient and highly adaptable.[8] Moreover, interviews with released European hostages who had shared Foley's internment reveal how quickly their captors learned of US (and UK) refusal to "play ball" in ISIS' profitable hostage-for-ransom ventures.[9] It's probable, then, that Da'ish—from guards to the former Ba'athist officers well-acquainted with the strategies and habits of Washington, which had once trained them— already suspected that American officials would not comply, even at the time that the videos were made.[10]

If these arguments are persuasive, what may have once seemed a straightforward question with an easy answer is neither. At a minimum, this points to the need for renewed inquiry into the meaning and purpose of these meticulously staged and filmed executions.[11] On the one hand, such an inquiry seems more rather than less relevant now that the macabre dance from fall 2014 has metastasized into a seemingly endless war with proliferating fronts, multiplying sites of carnage, and an ever expanding security state in the name of protection from terrorists at home and abroad. On the other hand, one might sensibly ask: wherein lies the importance of revisiting what some no doubt consider remote visual artifacts of a protean war against one radical Islamist organization whose long-term survival seems increasingly doubtful?

The answer is threefold. The first reason lies in the incomplete account of the videos that currently prevails. The extent to which the "raison d'être of terrorism studies remains tied to raison d'état" means that experts tend to translate knowledge of "jihadi" tactics, propaganda, doctrine, and membership into the terms of military strategy in the service of national security, even when their grasp of the subjects far exceeds such terms and the logic that undergirds them.[12] This helps explain the notable degree of consensus and consistency among experts both prior to and after the appearance of the videos that propaganda of this kind constitutes a tactic, a strategy to obtain a particular outcome—in this case, deterring US air strikes, recruiting new fighters and "sowing terror" among enemies.[13]

Already overdetermined, this conclusion has been stated so frequently and with such certainty as to make further examination of the particular features of the videos seem not only unnecessary but perverse. But perhaps perversity is underrated. After all, this explanation doesn't provide an account of *how* these videos work; to *whom*, exactly, they are addressed; and *what* about them hails new audiences out of disparate peoples from which they can draw new recruits, or among whom they can "sow terror." Instead, it moves immediately from cause to consequence, rendering invisible or irrelevant avenues of inquiry not susceptible to the logic of instrumental rationality. Perhaps the most notable area of inquiry foreclosed by such logic is the visual mode of this violence, including the operations that constitute its visceral power and the rhetorical techniques designed to conjure, exhort, and provoke specific audiences. For example, questions about why the executions in these videos are so very carefully scripted, staged, and edited, while the actual beheadings are off-screen and unfilmed remain unexplored, the purposes they disclose unrecognized.

The second argument for a renewed inquiry is that the demise of Da'ish is unlikely anytime soon, despite the apparently imminent destruction of its current "Islamic State" in Iraqi and Syrian territory, and the sharp reduction in revenues from oil and taxes that has come with the loss of territories and subject populations.[14] There's already evidence that ISIS' ability to summon new fighters (*muqatili*) from across Europe, Asia, and beyond has not been significantly diminished by these changed circumstances.[15] This is in part because Da'ish had already

pivoted in anticipation of shrinking territory, refocusing its energies and resources on loyal members and thwarted travelers to Syria emplaced elsewhere, from Bangladesh to Belgium.[16] It's also due to the complex conditions that contributed to the appeal of ISIS' savvily marketed vision of Sunni restoration to specific sectors of Muslims across diverse societies in the first place, and that remain largely unaddressed. These conditions have only been exacerbated by a range of responses to Da'ish attacks, state and popular, legal and extralegal, directed and diffuse.[17] The ascendance of right-wing, nationalist populist parties and leaders from the US to Europe has become a vital part of this cycle: seemingly outraged by each new attack, they are politically parasitic on "terrorist" violence they convert into electoral strength through expert rhetorics of bigotry, becoming at once symptom and legitimation of intensifying animus toward Muslims and Islam generally.

Much as intended, these reactions and their effects continue to play to ISIS' advantage, though they do not themselves constitute a full picture of its evident durability. Essential to any complete picture is the time, energy, and resources Da'ish has devoted to establishing an elaborate media organization at the heart of what Atwan characterizes as the organization's "recruitment machine"—one that primarily operates online.[18] This has included hiring professional filmmakers, journalists, editors, photographers, and IT specialists whose combined expertise has fashioned radio broadcasts, print and online publications, video games, and video "films" of unusually high production quality. Along the way, they've also devised a tech-savvy system of networks and social media innovations that has facilitated rapid global dissemination of ISIS messages, manuals, and videos, and circumvented ongoing efforts to terminate such networks permanently. The significance of such digital agility is suggested by a study showing that those most likely to be drawn to ISIS are between 18–29 years old and that, within this age range in the global North alone, 89% are active online, 70% use social networks daily, and spend 19.2 hours per week online.[19]

Jacques Rancière has pointed out that, while images "do not supply weapons for battles . . . [they do] help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently a new landscape of the possible."[20] This captures the approach of a growing body of scholarship in Critical Security Studies that demonstrates how images can and do refigure the politics of war.[21] Such work does so, not by establishing direct causal links, but by documenting how visual images can reshape interpretive frameworks that, in turn, reconstitute the realm of what is politically thinkable and doable.[22] This provides the context for my third argument for reopening this inquiry, that is, the sheer political impact of the videos. "Political impact" here refers to the outsized role they played in refiguring the terms through which Americans and Britons constituted Da'ish, and in cementing the association among Islam, violence, and threat, both of which helped establish the framework for a range of policies and perceptions at the time that continue to reverberate in the current moment.

Simone Molin Friis has shown, for example, how the sequence of videos from Foley to Henning functioned as "visual facts" within the transformation of British and American state responses to ISIS.[23] Her study specifically tracks how the videos operated as pivots from Obama's January 2014 likening of the group to a Junior Varsity version of al-Qaeda,[24] to depictions of it in September of that year as a "cancer" and "growing threat" to the region requiring containment, and finally to American and British representations of it as "savage, inexplicable, nihilistic", the "embodiment of evil" that is "beyond anything we have ever seen," requiring no less than complete destruction.[25]

Friis also notes that, as the videos and still images from them began circulating widely in the media, an NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll indicated a sharp increase in the number of Americans who saw the US as less safe in the wake of the videos than at any other period since 9/11.[26] Even more striking is the contrast between the results of this September 2014 survey and a POLITICO poll of battleground voters conducted in July 2014— before the videos circulated—in regard to views about foreign military intervention.[27] The July poll found Americans from both left and right skeptical of military engagements overseas and opposed to further US entanglements in both Eastern Europe and the Middle East by large margins. The September survey, by contrast, reported that two-thirds of Americans were convinced that aggressive military action against ISIS was necessary for US security.[28] A contrast between PEW Research surveys in 2002 and 2014 is similarly instructive: while 25% of Americans' viewed Islam as more encouraging of violence than other religions in the wake of 9/11, that figure rose to 50% following the circulation of the ISIS videos.[29]

Arc of the Argument

I've adduced these three arguments to make the case for a fresh inquiry into the meaning and purpose of these videos. Through them, I've also indicated the particular route this inquiry will take to provide preliminary answers to the questions foreclosed by the dominant explanation. Toward this end, I approach the videos of Foley and Sotloff as communicative acts in need of interpretation rather than as tactics solely legible in terms of an instrumental rationality framed by strategic objectives. The word *solely* is a critical qualifier, for the following analysis is not a replacement for explanations of the videos as devices of deterrence, retaliation, and recruitment. The problem with such accounts is not that they are wrong, but

rather that they are structured by a logic that at once renders them incomplete and conceals the absences they contain.

Deterrence, retaliation, and recruitment are surely among the more credible objectives of the videos, yet they do not exhaust all possible or even plausible purposes. By homology, however, such accounts render the clips weapons in which all parts are assumed to contribute toward a single end. What the videos *do*, then, flows logically from what they *say*. The only information left to determine is the "fit" between the means and ends, that is, between the tactic deployed and the outcome it achieves or fails to reach. The question never arises about whether and to what extent the verbal rhetoric and the visual rhetoric—that is, matters of composition, production techniques, symbolic and dramaturgical features, religious and pop culture references, narrative structure, pacing, choices of casting, clothing, props, and the like—may actually be different.

By contrast, I want to embed the seemingly straightforward question—what is the meaning and purpose of these violent videos?—in an inquiry that also asks the following: What analytic tools can make both the verbal and visual rhetoric of these videos legible? What does such legibility disclose not only about what these videos *say* but also what they *do*, that is, how they work? Questions about how they work require taking account of the unprecedented networks of interconnectivity, simultaneity, ubiquity, interactivity, recursivity, and user-generated content into which these videos have been inserted by way of digital technology.[30] This, in turn, raises the crucial question: how does the networked delivery of these particular enactments of visual violence constitute the relation between the images repetitively circulated and the audiences addressed?

In referring to what these videos do, then, I mean to inquire into what the violent acts depicted perform in two senses that may be distinguished temporally and spatially. The first entails examining what the violence performed in the videos enacts, which includes not only what is seen but also what is outside the frame and unfilmed. The videos refer backward in time to what was done earlier to make them, as well as to what is usually envisioned as the main event—the beheadings—that are marked not by presence but by absence, by the temporal ellipses *in* the narratives. The second entails moving forward and out temporally and spatially, to speculate about how this particular combination of content and digital delivery can intensify a new form of witness, conjuring a far more specific, personal, and viscerally immediate modality of experience out of the foreshortening of space between audience and event already characteristic of our "heteropolar media landscape."[31]

While it's not possible to fully answer all of the questions I've posed here, it is nevertheless crucial to raise them together, and at the outset. They collectively make clear the extent to which grasping the purposes of such violence requires not only asking different questions but drawing upon different analytic tools to render such purposes legible. Both the concept of "performative violence," and the lens of "the performative" are particularly helpful in this regard. *Performative violence* refers to the visual, symbolic, and communicative dimensions of political violence, serving as a crucial reminder that violence can be both an act of "communication and dramatization" as well as an instrument that aims at injury and death.[32] Borrowed from speech act theory, the *performative* in this context signals not that such violence is somehow unreal or simulated, but rather that its meaning and purpose are simultaneously articulated and accomplished in its very enactment.[33]

Performative violence brings into focus a previously unrecognized disjuncture between the verbal and visual rhetoric in these staged executions. While much of the verbal rhetoric largely hews to the logic of instrumental rationality, the visual rhetoric conveys a different message that also *works* differently. More specifically, I argue that the visual rhetoric is an enactment of retaliatory humiliation, a concept and practice whose meaning is rooted in a radical Islamist discourse on humiliation that I've analyzed in detail elsewhere.[34] In this discourse, humiliation is defined as the imposition of impotence on Islam and Muslims by those with greater and undeserved power, while retaliatory humiliation both performs and produces an inversion of this relation.[35]

As I'll show in the following section, such retaliatory humiliation is elaborated not by way of explicit argument, but through the visual inscription of impotence upon male bodies whose public subjugation and abjection is symbolically converted into that of the American nation. This performance simultaneously constitutes the ISIS executioner, and the sovereign power he represents and serves, as fearless and dominant, its march toward primacy inevitable. I further show that the doubled roles of man/nation produced by this enactment of retaliatory humiliation also effects a symbolic transposition of status between the US and ISIS, enabling Da'ish to perform and publically display its invincible sovereignty.

In the next section, I locate these arguments in relation to scholarship on visuality, political violence, and sovereignty on which my analysis draws and to which it most directly speaks. In the course of this discussion, I specify the conception of sovereignty entailed in these arguments to differentiate it from a range of competing or complementary definitions that populate distinct disciplinary debates and at times differentiate political science subfields from one another. For the purposes of this analysis, sovereignty primarily refers to the power over life and death that has consistently been a central prerogative of sovereign authority past and present, even as it has increasingly been concealed by modern liberal states in

particular, whether behind thick prison walls, euphemistic rhetoric, or sanitized images of war.

The final section turns to the question of how these enactments of performative violence work once circulated instantly and everywhere by way of digital networks. I argue that this specific combination of content and digital circulation revivifies the experience of (retaliatory) humiliation for untold numbers of watchers, easing the way for "users" to interpellate themselves into the enactment, either as humiliator or humiliated. This phenomenon also makes clear that thinking forward and outward requires explicit consideration of the temporality that conditions it: what I want to call *digital time*. Unhinged from human perception, digital time has accelerated cycles of reception and reaction to unprecedented speeds, heightened the intensities of online engagements with them, and steadily attenuated those ordinary moments of pause necessary for even a small measure of distance. Yet digital time is not just another name for the additive effects of repetition, reach, and speed in online interactions. It refers to a set of interlocking processes that have cultivated a particular sensibility, one habituated to thinking less and feeling more, to quick response over deliberative action. I conclude with the suggestion that such a sensibility is very much of *this* time, a moment of both terrorism and Trump.

As is evident, these arguments do not culminate in a set of policy prescriptions, a common expectation and feature of certain genres of scholarship on terrorism and its cognates in social science. It seems to me that there's no dearth of policy recommendations on what should and should not be done about ISIS and its affiliates in particular and "Islamic terrorism" in general. Independent scholars, security experts, military personnel, intelligence analysts, government officials, and journalists issue new policy prescriptions almost daily, leaving very little terrain that has not been worried over and over like a wound that will not heal. By contrast, the arguments here are concerned with what has been ignored or overlooked by the most common accounts of Da'ish violence and the structuring logic that (re)produces them.

This entails approaching the videos with questions couched in terms that render legible practices and operations hidden, as it were, in plain view. This also means bringing into focus purposes to the violence they depict entirely independent of the success or failure of any tactical maneuver. This detaches the matter of what this rhetoric performs and the audiences it seeks to address from questions of reception among diverse constituencies; the intentions of the videos' writers, directors, producers, and circulation strategists; and the motivations of ISIS members who participated in production and dissemination. While findings from such inquiries would benefit any study of the videos in particular or Da'ish propaganda in general, neither the

coherence nor the persuasiveness of the following analysis depends upon them.[36]

This does not mean that my account is only imaginatively connected to such matters. While large-scale and precise empirical data documenting the uptake and reception of each video by clearly defined individuals is unavailable, an abundance of evidence, both anecdotal and general, shows that the videos have been widely circulated, watched, and reposted. Focusing on what the rhetorics of these videos say and how they work reveals how such practices seek to actually constitute their audiences through the very visceral power of their address. More than that, the following account of what such performative violence enacts offers plausible answers to the *how, whom,* and *what* questions that the dominant explanations hide in plain view. Such answers, however provisional, offer a missing hinge between the videos and the "recruitment and sowing of terror" they are said to magically produce.

Visuality, Violence, and Sovereignty

The arguments advanced here draw upon and participate in several broader, overlapping streams of inquiry. One is the ongoing effort to theorize the ways in which new media technologies have not only redefined the scale and speed by which visual images are circulated, but also reshaped the conditions and intensities of human engagement with them.[37] Another is the growing literature on visuality among scholars of politics, a somewhat belated corrective to the striking fact that, as Mark Reinhardt puts it, while the "saturation of politics by visual technologies, media, and images has reached unprecedented levels, this development scarcely registers in American political science."[38] Finally, this inquiry is part of longstanding efforts by scholars and writers located in diverse fields to articulate meanings and modalities of violence that the logic of instrumental rationality occludes, as well as to develop terminology and tools to capture them.[39] As Lee Ann Fujii rightly points out in her analysis of what she terms "extra-lethal violence," while political science research into violence has become increasingly sophisticated and nuanced in recent years, much of it remains wedded to rationalist assumptions that render matters of *how* violence is performed, displayed, and circulated beside the point.[40]

Critical Security Studies is exemplary in addressing such scholarly lacunae, but despite fairly recent publication dates, many of these studies focus on still photographs or, in the case of Hansen, cartoons, rather than moving images.[41] Friis' otherwise excellent article is a case in point. Given the framework of her study, the videos register as primarily iconic—and still—images rather than as staged and unfolding performances.[42] In other words, as the inquiry is concerned with how these videos work as visual icons—circulating as screen grabs, for example—in

the reframing of American and British responses to Da'ish, the matter of what's performed *within* them is relevant only to the extent that it bears on the analysis of which "facts" of war they help enable or occlude, and the range of responses that will subsequently appear rational and legitimate.

Yet taking the measure of these videos requires recognizing critical differences among visual genres and how they work, even when, as in the case at hand, the subject matter defies easy categorization. It is helpful here to consider Hansen's theorization of how various visual genres—from art to photojournalism, cartoons to documentaries—are constituted very differently in relation to "reality," the political, audience response, and temporal engagement.[43] Clearly, these videos have an uneasy relationship to the "real." The scenes are obviously staged, the shots edited, the speeches apparently scripted. Yet the clips can't be exclusively classified as fiction,"reality", nor even agitprop, strictly defined. Entrapped within the camera frame are unwilling performers who are not actors; their capture, degradation, and decapitation are all too real, although they are also staged. In this ambivalent relation to the real, they mimic the photographs from Abu Ghraib they were intended to echo (more on this later). At the same time, the temporal requirements of watching the videos are entirely unlike viewing even the most horrifying still image or offensive cartoon: at least part of the ordeal of the hostages appears to unfold before our eyes in real time, and there is no shortcut through it still capable of registering the performance. This is critical to grasping their visual power —particularly, as will become clear, when they travel forward and outward by way of digital technologies.

While the execution segments contain a visual unfolding, the entire arc of the videos trace a wholesale transposition of power and status. More specifically, I argue that the retaliatory humiliation enacted on the bodies of the condemned men in these videos performs and produces an inversion of power in two different registers. First, as the visual components convert the symbolic, psychic, and physical humiliation of Foley and Sotloff into that of the American nation, it performs ISIS' dominance through the symbolic emasculation of the United States. In this way, their bodies become the tableau upon which American humiliation and guilt are literally and publically inscribed. Importantly, the *mode* of dominance is not random brutality; it is scripted to ritually enact the signs and practices of sovereignty, that is, the power over life and death central to the conception of sovereignty in the work of Thomas Hobbes and Michel Foucault, among others. Herein lies the second register: the videos as a whole stage a familiar confrontation between sovereign state and violent outlaw only to invert the symbolic relation between them, a transposition that places the United States in the structural position of mass murderer, regicide, rogue state, terrorist.

Given the extensive scholarship on sovereignty, as well as on Foucault and Hobbes, it's necessary to be clear about what this analysis does *not* aim to do. This is not intended to address the extensive debates among political theorists about the nature of sovereignty in general, the virtue or demerits of liberal or democratic variants, or conceptions associated with specific theorists such as Schmitt or Hobbes. Nor is it an evaluation of ISIS' brief exercise in state building in light of such theories. What's crucial to my argument is this familiar, if now less frequently invoked, conception of sovereignty, particularly as famously thematized in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Here sovereignty as the power over life and death is rooted literally and symbolically in the body of the king, whose will throughout a given territory may be imposed and punished with the kind of public, ritualized, and excessive violence by which "injured sovereignty is reconstituted."[44]

My analysis draws upon a specific aspect of Foucault's argument for clearly circumscribed purposes. This largely entails setting aside the evolution of sovereign power— monarchical, panoptic/disciplinary, and biopower—delineated in his work as a whole, with one crucial exception. Precisely because of this evolutionary account, to even invoke Foucault's anatomization of monarchical sovereignty here positions ISIS as a kind of pre-modern revenant before the argument has even begun. Yet in his March 17, 1976, lecture, Foucault depicts what elsewhere appears as sequential stages in a historical evolution of sovereign power as complementary and coexisting modalities of power. In Foucault's phrasing, new techniques do not replace, erase, or exclude those that currently exist, but rather penetrate, permeate, infiltrate, and dovetail into them.[45]

Without overstating the case, I want to suggest that the excessiveness of reprisal Foucault associates with monarchical sovereignty is similarly at work in these videos, albeit for different reasons and elaborated under radically different circumstances. The executions are ostensibly justified in the name of a caliphate whose leaders have sought to drape both its founding and policies in Islamic legal cover.[46] Moreover, there's a large body of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) devoted to deriving from the sacred texts different categories of crimes, offenses, and penalties that mediate between Allah's will and the shifting needs and circumstances of His community. But as with the executions Foucault analyzes in such graphic detail, the "theater of hell" in these videos ultimately has little to do with the Islamic juridical tradition or with the restoration of balance.

Instead, they are ritualized displays of disproportionate force over the condemned, whose purpose is to be meticulously, relentlessly, reduced to impotence. Once circulated across social media platforms increasingly functioning as virtual public squares, the executions come

to constitute the kind of public, ceremonial violence by which the domination and invincibility of ISIS is performed and produced for the horror and satisfaction not only of a general spectatorship, but of two differently situated audiences in particular: American men meant to be humiliated by the public emasculation of their male compatriots, and "Sunni Muslim men" meant to be summoned into existence as a community by vicariously sharing in the reclamation of power the ISIS executioner partly performs in their name. This is precisely why the affective power of these symbolic enactments and inversions of sovereignty do not require the continuing existence of the particular territorial state they were initially designed to serve.

There are overlapping narratives and logics that help constitute the executions in these terms. Foremost among them is Da'ish' determination to restore in the contemporary world what it regards as the Islamically just order of things. Any claim to restore in the present a paradigm or practice of the past is a remaking, and this one entails an appropriation of an especially partisan narrative about the distant past. In this account, the legacy of Sunni pre-eminence in Islamic history has been eclipsed by the rise and now global dominance of Christian, Zionist and godless forces. These have colluded to deprive Sunnis of their political power, lives, jobs, security, and a sense of place in the historic heartlands of Islam, now entirely under the thumb of the depraved Shi'i. Restoring the right order of things requires the unflinching courage to do whatever it takes to unmake what *is* in accordance with what *should be*, namely, a united and powerful Islamic state headquartered in lands that represent the historic pinnacle of Muslim rule; governed by Sunni leaders whose moral guidance, political acumen, and military might render the entire *umma* (Muslim community) invulnerable to predations from the outside and corruption from within; and in which righteous Sunnis are again ascendant and all others know their place.

These enactments of retaliatory humiliation are critical steps in this restoration, as they both demonstrate and symbolically produce the inversion of domination that will soon prevail not just on camera but throughout the world. At the same time, these displays suture ISIS' version of a just order of things to a masculinist logic of sovereignty, one in which the assertion of state power domestically (in both senses of the word "domestic") and against foreign enemies is constituted in terms of collective virility and impotence.[47] Not coincidentally, many analyses have shown that this logic has been particularly prominent in US rhetoric, policies, and military operations in the years since September 11, 2001, from the strutting "cowboy masculinity" of George W. Bush, to the patriarchal posturing of Donald Trump, who sees himself as the only "alpha dog" with the gonads to restore the dominance of an emasculated nation.[48]

In light of the current degradation of public discourse on Islam and Muslims, any responsible engagement must confront the misreadings it risks and the politics it may be re-purposed to serve. Toward this end, three brief caveats are in order. First, the definition of humiliation derived from radical Islamist discourse is less an accurate *reflection* of diverse Muslim experiences of powerlessness and injustice than a historically contingent rhetoric in which a variety of familiar images, experiences, and events have been *assembled* into a narrative about the "humiliation of Islam." Whether deployed visually or verbally, the symbols and rhetorical devices of this narrative aim to conjure the very collective humiliation it seeks to mobilize. In other words, it seeks to bind the "I" to the "we" of the *umma* and to the fate of Islam,[49] making it possible to persuasively refigure an individual experience of religious profiling by European airport security, for example, as an instance of the general humiliation of Islam. Such a construction can resonate[50] widely among populations either directly or vicariously familiar with the legacies of colonial domination and quotidian experiences of powerlessness but who might otherwise harbor little or no sympathy for radical Islamist objectives and practices.[51]

Second and relatedly, this understanding of humiliation encodes a number of historically specific grievances —gendered, socio-economic, local, national, geo-political, and historical, among others—that, while expressed in an Islamic idiom, are unique neither to Muslims nor to Muslim-majority societies. Such an understanding of humiliation and its gendered register are operative in rhetorics expressed in various idioms across diverse societies. Just one case in point is Trump's invocation of American national humiliation in the speech accepting his nomination as the republican candidate for US president at the party's national convention in July 2016. This is so despite the fact that each discourse is constructed out of a repertoire of self-images sedimented through an accumulation of historically and regionally specific experiences and perceptions of power and powerlessness. The argument, then, is not that humiliation is the only lens through which to read these images but rather that, in these particular videos, humiliation is the central visual grammar through which a number of these other subtexts are expressed.

At the same time, this analysis shows why each act of violence must first be read closely in context to unpack the rhetorics deployed, the audiences addressed, and the purposes in play. As a group with multiple aspirations, diverse affiliates, far-flung loyalists, and last-minute martyrs, there's no single meaning, purpose, or explanation to all violent acts associated with the name ISIS. What follows, then, cannot stand in for an account of every Da'ish beheading nor even of all its productions with staged executions, although it can illuminate other instances by parallel or contrast. Just as these videos are very

carefully cast and scripted to work in particular ways for specific reasons, as will become clear, such elements are differently constituted in other ISIS execution propaganda, whether it's a hi-tech production meant to establish Da'ish as the only remaining Sunni bulwark against Shi'i power, or a low-fi video message demanding ransom for two Japanese hostages.[52]

Third and finally: the disparity in attention given to, for example, the November 2015 attacks in Paris in relation to those in Beirut again occludes from view the extent to which those who have suffered most extensively from ISIS violence have been other Muslims as well as non-Muslim Arabs and Africans whose deaths have gone almost unnoticed by the same audiences understandably outraged by the Foley and Sotloff executions. In this context, analysis of these two particular videos risks reinforcing the conviction that Euro-American—and especially white Euro-American—lives are valued more than others, that ISIS' violence is enacted most significantly upon "Western" bodies whose deaths are again marked, in Judith Butler's words, as publically grievable, while the untold others who have died at the behest of Da'ish are unremarked, unnamed, and unmourned.[53] And what of all the other missing bodies, not only in the literal sense of all the others who are lost, but whose very absence is invisible, *affectively* missing?[54]

As will become clear in the following pages, the focus here is a reflection not of the greater significance of American lives, but of the power the United States both exercises and symbolizes in the region. The current geopolitical power of the United States and its recent violent and blundering entanglements in the Middle East have made it a specific source of grievance for Da'ish. At the same time, U.S. self-positioning as guarantor of global order and peace has enabled ISIS to depict it as just the most recent standard-bearer of a nation-state system whose legacy in the region is an unbroken chain of domination—one that links the American invasion of Iraq to the Sykes-Picot agreement, the pact whereby Britain and France divvied up the territories of the former Ottoman Empire according to self-interest rather than local affiliations, drawing the border Iraq and Syria in the process. As ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani argues in another Da'ish production, "Kasr al-hudud" (The Breaking of the Borders), the path to the future requires breaking down all such artifacts of domination wherever they are; such "borders of humiliation (hudud al-dhull)" are but the first of many to be destroyed.[55] Given this context, I'll argue that it is *precisely* the fact that these victims were Americans and, moreover, men, that constitutes a central element of what the videos say and do.

ISIS' Visual Rhetoric of Humiliation

The first video opens in silence. Arabic script gracefully unfolds against a black background: Bismillah al-rahman al-raheem (In the Name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate). This is the phrase that begins the Qur'an, and suggests an Islamic imprimatur for what follows. Then, in Arabic and English, the sentence: "Obama authorizes military operations against the Islamic State, effectively placing America upon a slippery slope towards a new war front against Muslims."[56] The sharp sound of an electric surge abruptly shatters the silence and the screen flares from darkness to a brightly lit press conference. There stands President Barack Obama, announcing two US operations in Iraq, "targeted airstrikes to protect our American personnel," and air strikes against ISIS in a humanitarian operation to prevent the takeover of Irbil. Arabic subtitles run along the bottom, the production roughed up to look rudimentary or the transmission compromised.

A quick cut back to the black screen and the sound of the electric surge—what a channel switch might sound like from inside an analog television—and the screen opens up on a blurry black, white, and gray aerial view of explosions rippling out over unidentified territory. The hum of an engine almost drowns out the sounds of a muffled American military transmission, but "air strikes standing by" can just barely be heard. Arabic and English writing in the left bottom of the screen explain: "American Aggression against the Islamic State." Then a gentle fade to black returns the screen to silence and "A Message to America" slowly appears, with the Arabic underneath.

At two minutes, the screen opens out to a crystal clear, high resolution shot of James Foley, shaved face and head, barefoot, wrists cuffed behind his back, dressed in orange, kneeling to the side of his executioner who stands, clothed all in black, a leather gun holster under his left arm. They are outside, on an almost painfully bright day, somewhere dry and arid that looks like it could be almost anywhere in Iraq or Syria. Foley has a microphone around his neck and he speaks what seem to be scripted words either memorized or delivered by hidden teleprompter:

> I call on my friends, family, and loved ones to rise up against my real killers: the U.S. government. For what will happen to me is only a result of their complacency and criminality. My message to my beloved parents: save me some dignity and don't accept any meager compensation for my death from the same people who effectively hit the last nail in my coffin with their recent aerial campaign in Iraq. I call on my brother John, who is a member of the U.S. Air Force: Think about what you are doing. Think about the lives you destroy, including those of your own family. I call on you John, think about who made the decision to bomb Iraq recently and kill those people, whoever they may have been. Think John, who did they really kill? Did they think about me, you, or our family when they made that decision? I died that day, John. When your colleagues dropped that bomb on those people, they signed my death certificate. I wish I had more time. I wish I could have the hope of freedom and seeing my family once again. But that ship has sailed. I guess all in all, I wish I wasn't American.

The screen fades to black. In the next shot, only the executioner speaks, and with a British accent. He brandishes a small knife as Foley grits his teeth. He addresses Obama directly:

> This is James Wright Foley, an American citizen of your country. As a government, you have been at the forefront of aggression towards the Islamic State. You have plotted against us and gone far out of your way to find reasons to interfere in our affairs. Today, your military air force is attacking us daily in Iraq. Your strikes have caused casualties amongst Muslims. You are no longer fighting an insurgency; we are an Islamic Army and a state that has been accepted by a large number of Muslims worldwide, so effectively, any aggression towards the Islamic State is an aggression towards Muslims from all walks of life who have accepted the Islamic Caliphate as their leadership. So any attempt by you, Obama, to deny the Muslims their right of living in safety under the Islamic Caliphate, will result in the bloodshed of your people.

When done, the shot shifts and the executioner moves swiftly, slicing at the front of Foley's neck with a sawing motion. The screen fades quickly to black before the knife draws blood, fading up again on a shot of Foley's prone body, stomach down, severed head resting on his back. The camera slowly pans down the length of his body, steady, then fades into a shot of the executioner holding the collar of Steven Sotloff. Then the man the press would dub "Jihadi John"—subsequently identified as Briton Mohammed Emwazi—instructs the president: "The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision."[57]

The rapid cuts, the clips of Obama promising vigilance, the aerial view of a bombing, crackling radio contact in which only the words "air strikes" are clear, shots with flickering light, rough transmission, and drained color will look oddly familiar—but only to some viewers, most likely a demographic that skews younger. These components deliberately evoke the opening credits to the Showtime series about terrorism, "Homeland," an echo that shades into mimicry in the opening to the Sotloff video.

The Sotloff video opens with a grim and graying Obama at a press conference announcing that "the United States of America will continue to do what we must do to protect our people; we will be vigilant and we will be relentless. When people harm Americans anywhere, we do what's necessary to see that justice is done, and we act against ISIL, standing alongside others." The sharp sound of the electric surge, a quick cut to black and in silence: *"Bismillah al-rahman al-raheem,"* followed by "A Second Message to America" in English and Arabic. Another quick cut and then the screen blazes open on Steven Sotloff, most of the ritualized elements of the Foley execution faithfully reassembled, with some critical variations: his head and face are stubbled with recent growth, and at first he's visible only from the chest up, almost dwarfed by a wall of black that looms to his right—the torso of the executioner, his hand in the bottom-right

corner tightly gripping a serrated knife gleaming brightly in the sun. Sotloff speaks the script of his killers:

> I am Steven Joel Sotloff. I am sure you know exactly who I am by now, and why I am appearing before you. And now, it is time for *my* message. Obama, your foreign policy of intervention in Iraq was supposed to be for the preservation of American lives and interests. So why is it that I'm having to pay the price of your interference with my life? Am I not an American citizen? You've spent billions of U.S. taxpayers dollars and we've lost thousands of our troops in our previous fighting against the Islamic State. So where is the American people's interest in reigniting this war? From what little I know about foreign policy, I remember a time when you cannot win an election without promising to bring our troops back home from Iraq and from Afghanistan, and to close down Guantánamo. Here you are now, Obama, nearing the end of your term and having achieved none of the above, and seemingly marching us, the American people, into a blazing fire.

As he speaks, a second camera is deployed for a wider shot, although Sotloff continues to speak to the first. The ritualistic echoes of the Foley spectacle are all now simultaneously visible: he's dressed in orange, hands cuffed behind him, kneeling at the feet of his executioner, as he speaks the words of his killers to accuse the president of his own country not only of his own death, but of all American deaths to follow. Sotloff's message is shorter than Foley's, and his killer's is also terse:

> I'm back, Obama, and I'm back because of your arrogant foreign policy toward the Islamic State, because of your insistence in continuing your bombings in [unclear] and the Mosul Dam despite our serious warnings. You, Obama, have yet to gain for your actions [unclear] another American citizen, so just as your missiles continue to strike our people, our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people.

With no fanfare, Emwazi moves to slice at Sotloff's neck, but his victim begins to struggle before the fade to black. The fade up reveals a familiar tableau, and the camera takes a swifter tour down Sotloff's blood spattered body, head resting on his stomach. This is quickly followed by a shot of the next hostage, Briton David Hawthorne Haines, along with the warning: "We take this opportunity to warn those governments that have entered this evil alliance of America against the Islamic State to back off and leave our people alone."

The last words Foley and Sotloff are forced to speak in these stilted, macabre dramas are all about means and ends, and lest we miss the point, the executioner spells it out repeatedly: the United States must cease its attacks on Da'ish, or its citizens and those of its allies will be butchered, one by one. But there's also a visual rhetoric at work here, one that conveys meaning sometimes in tandem with, sometimes independently of, the words spoken. As I argued earlier, this rhetoric is brought into sharp relief through the lens of the performative, and so it is through careful reading of the components of this performance that its meaning and significance are fully elaborated. This reading is necessarily recursive, to now

bring into sharp relief what had previously been subsumed into a sequential narrative in which words had primacy over images.

Crucial to the elaboration of this violence are the central players invoked and remade through both videos, along with the enunciation of the deeper stakes of the unfolding drama. In the first video, the executioner spells these out in no uncertain terms: addressing Obama directly—and gesticulating at oddly timed moments with his knife—Emwazi instructs the president that the United States is no longer fighting an insurgency, but a legitimate Islamic state, a caliphate that has been accepted by Muslims around the globe. The fact that the vast majority of Muslims globally had not, in fact, done so has little bearing on the semiotic parameters this declaration establishes for the visual spectacle to follow. For this claim of statehood functions as a declaration of equivalence between the United States and ISIS, serving as the ground on which the video then enacts an inversion of previous asymmetrical relations between a superpower that sees itself as a force of justice, order, and freedom against the savagery, nihilism and chaos of ISIS.

On the basis of this claim, ISIS' retaliation can be recast from a spasm of vengeance launched by a ragtag remnant of al-Qaeda in Iraq into a sovereign act of war authorized in principle by not one but two different traditions. First, the Islamic tradition not only justifies defense of a legitimate Islamic state, but there's a strong consensus among legal scholars that *jihad* is an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) that must be fulfilled by every single Muslim in such a situation. That this tradition also strictly prohibits the mistreatment of civilians and prisoners is, again, hardly of concern to an organization whose assiduous efforts to drape every policy in Islamic legitimacy is matched only by their contempt for both the normative principles governing the Islamic juridical tradition and its "parameters of operation".[58]

Second, it's authorized by an understanding of state self-defense grounded in a Westphalian conception of sovereignty. As is well known, the claims central to this conception made the "sovereign state the legitimate political unit . . . implied that basic attributes of statehood such as the existence of a government with control of its territory were now . . . the criteria for becoming a state" and, essentially, made the state's authority over its own territory complete.[59] Despite ISIS' rejection of *national* sovereignty in particular, this conception of statehood is largely consistent with its own, and underlies its presumption that retaliation is the prerogative of a sovereign state whose territorial integrity has been violated by another.[60] Such a presumption is a central premise of the very global order the United States claims to represent, and that Da'ish here implicitly turns against it, depicting America as aggressor, transgressor, outlaw.

The last words Foley was forced to speak, "I guess, all in all, I wish I wasn't American," say much about the role the hostages play in how the inversion is then performed. There is a profound sadness in these words, spoken in a video that opens with one of the most powerful leaders in the world, the president of the United States, announcing the unleashing of US military might against ISIS to protect American personnel and Yazidis in Iraq—then promising, in the beginning of the Sotloff video, to protect all American citizens wherever they are. As Foley and Sotloff quickly die in the ensuing scenes, these register not only as empty pledges, but as almost a mockery of the vaunted power of pledges and promises in "civilized societies." Then there is the person delivering them: are these opening clips meant to demonstrate the impotence of President Obama specifically?[61] Inasmuch as Obama repeatedly figures as the personification of US preeminence, it appears so, yet ultimately what's exposed for all to see is not simply the inadequacy of an individual or an administration but of a state: a basic failure to protect that Hobbes among others regarded as central to sovereignty.[62]

Foley's words also work on another register, as they draw attention to how each role in these dramas is carefully cast, and the particular significance of Americanness in the performances that ensue. For Sotloff and Foley are much more than expendable hostages leveraged for a threat that, once delivered, makes them detritus of a failed gambit in need of swift disposal. The visual rhetoric of the staged executions transforms their symbolic, psychic, and physical humiliation into that of the United States. Put slightly differently, these two men become the American body politic upon which retaliatory humiliation is literally inscribed. At the same time, their degraded and exposed bodies serve as public evidence and confirmation not only of the impotence of the enemy but of its guilt and failures, effecting a symbolic inversion in which the United States becomes violent outlaw, Da'ish the injured sovereign.

Consider the shorn heads of the captured men, wearing bright orange clothing designed to evoke the jumpsuits worn by inmates at Guantánamo Bay prison. They kneel in apparent submission at the feet of their executioner, who stands over them, legs apart, masked, clothed in black from head to toe. Positioned as if prepared for the rite of confession, the hostages are forced to use their last breath on earth to speak the words of their murderers: the deeds of their families, their nation, their president, are the "real" authors of their destruction—*they* are the criminals whose "rogue" violence has placed them at war with Muslims, has signed the death warrant of all Americans ISIS chooses to kill. The intense strain in their faces only hints at what had been done earlier, outside the frame and unfilmed, to get each man to follow this script, to play the designated role in the spectacle of his own murder, to lend his own voice to this grotesque performance of "consent."

Those details only began to emerge in the aftermath, pieced together from a variety of sources, including

interviews with freed European hostages whose governments had elected to meet Daʻish' ransom demands.[63] The picture that unfolds is of a long captivity in which control of the hostages changed hands several times, and treatment of them fluctuated dramatically as the Syrian civil war turned increasingly violent, various radical Islamist groups splintered, shifted allegiances, and jockeyed for primacy. The ascendance of Daʻish signaled the end of inconsistency—gone were the intervals of deprivation and torture interspersed with periods of relative leniency—and announced the arrival of a bureaucratized brutality with an American inflection. ISIS introduced a system of cataloguing hostages similar to that used by US forces at Camp Bucca, Iraq, where al-Baghdadi had been held.[64] The beatings, starvation, light deprivation, mock executions, threats and waterboarding reproduced the interrogation techniques of Muslim detainees pursued during the Bush Administration. But with one critical difference: it appears the torture was dispensed primarily to inflict suffering rather than extract information.

There is still much that remains unknown about Foley's and Sotloff's specific experiences in captivity, but it's unnecessary to know every gruesome detail to see a connection between the suffering endured off-camera and what they could be induced to do in front of it. Drawing on Elaine Scarry's work, for example, Richard Rorty has argued that the humiliation entailed by extreme physical torture constitutes an "unmaking," such that a person can "no longer rationalize—no longer justify herself to herself."[65] So understood, the ritual of retaliatory humiliation performed onscreen may be taken to both refer to and be predicated upon a psychic unraveling undertaken outside the frame, in circumstances of intense pain and fear largely unwitnessed.

The composition, blocking, sequencing, and editing of the scenes in and around the decapitations combine with these other elements to transform these "men of action" into immobile victims who—along with the viewer watching a sequence of events that have already transpired—are entirely powerless to influence or stop what is happening around and to them. There is a certain chilling mockery at work in the fact these two journalists, in Evans' and Giroux's words, "tasked to gaze upon atrocities elsewhere, providing some form of witness to the horrors of the human condition," have here "become the objects of our forced witnessing."[66] Aside from the scripted speech, the camera largely renders them akin to animals in a sacrificial ceremony, momentarily unmoving as the executioner abruptly makes the move to the kill. The *form* of execution further reinforces this symbolic entanglement of powerlessness and dehumanization. After all, as scholars have pointed out, beheadings target the part of the human body responsible for thought, personality, and expressiveness, while the face is the "site of figural unity of the

human being and the locus of the individual personality: the face stands for the uniqueness and the vulnerable humanness of a person."[67]

But just when death is imminent, the screen goes dark. Does Foley turn and attempt to strike at Emwazi, knowing he has nothing left to lose? Does Sotloff use his last words to plead for mercy, or curse his killers? Daʻish' dominion here is total, and the questions must remain unanswered; the deaths are constituted as ISIS wants them seen, an old-fashioned enactment of "sovereignty by exercising a traditional prerogative of the sovereign," the cutting off and display of the heads of those it designates enemies of the state.[68] Channeling the gaze of subjects at a public execution, the camera cuts back to contemplate the prone body, severed head resting upon it, slowly panning down its length, steady, to take in the cuffed wrists, the bare feet, the painful vulnerability. In the next shot, the killer grips the collar of the next kneeling victim, as if holding an unclean animal; the threat and promise of an encore performance whose ritualized elements we already know.

The hostages are forcibly and multiply exposed: their names, faces, fear, abjection, and dead bodies are there for all to see. By contrast, virtually all specific aspects of the executioner's identity are hidden by the black garb of Daʻish. Like ISIS' black flag, such attire follows the practice of other radical Islamist groups, but it also plays upon at least three different moments in Islamic mythology and history. The first is the widely repeated claim that the Prophet Muhammad flew black banners when fighting infidels. The second is a series of unreliable but widely circulated hadith (reports of the words and deeds of the Prophet) in which Muhammad reportedly foresaw the suffering of his family following his death, and predicted their liberation from tyranny and the restoration of justice by an uprising from the East, heralded by black banners.[69] The third is the adoption of black as the color of the ʻAbbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE) based in Baghdad—often considered the high-water mark in the history of Muslim rule—accompanied by efforts of ʻAbbasid propagandists to retroactively project as much Prophetic significance onto the color as possible.[70]

Questions of provenance and authenticity notwithstanding, the black garb now widely evokes Muhammad and righteous battle, entangling poetic prophesy and the heyday of Islamic sovereignty even as the overall aspect is far more Ninja by way of Hollywood. What the clothing doesn't cover, of course, is the executioner's British accent, which denies English-speaking listeners any of the usual comforting signifiers of distance. All that is left to see and know of him are his eyes, maleness, height, stance, stillness, stiff delivery, and the apparent calm——even casualness-——he brings to the execution.

Then there's the intimacy of the kill he's ready to perform so efficiently, a stark contrast to what Daʻish

depicts as the cowardice of US aerial attacks in a letter sent to Foley's parents.[71] As many have noted, it takes a particular kind of hardness to kill at close range and without a gun, where there's no escape from the pleas and screams of your victim, and far easier to kill at a distance with drones and bombs.[72] "Jihadi John" is in this way constituted as the ideal masculine Islamist militant, the organization he serves constructed as implacable, unstoppable, fearless, hard, dominant—the only Islamic force sufficiently potent to bring America, the standard-bearer of Muslim humiliation, to its knees, literally and figuratively.

I have suggested that aspects of the execution scene implicitly refer to what had been done earlier, off-screen, to stage them. There are other such moments of implied absence, some more obvious than others. Relative to several other hi-tech Da'ish productions, for example, the videos are verbally parsimonious, using images, quick cuts, composition, blocking, pacing, resolution, sound/silence, camera angles, dress, and casting, to "speak" as much as words. The executioner engages in no lengthy soliloquies, no impassioned invective about justice and evil. There are no references to Islamic law, no disjointed invocations of hadith or decontextualized Qur'anic fragments in the kind of explicit effort to justify the executions or how they are accomplished characteristic of other ISIS as well as al Qaeda publications. And there are no *anashid* (hymns, pl. of *nashid*) soaring on the soundtrack to serve as a Greek Chorus reframing the events in epic and poetic terms.

Such a privileging of deeds over words is a trope of much radical Sunni rhetoric, including arguments made by such influential Sunni Islamist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb, who wrote that jihad in the contemporary world requires deeds rather than words, struggle rather than contemplation, revolution at home as well as resistance abroad.[73] Not coincidentally, such an emphasis shores up the image of ISIS fighters as hardened men of action rather than "soft" men of words—or as the narrator puts it in another Da'ish video, "Although the Disbelievers May Dislike It/*Wa-Law Kariha al-Kafirun*," "hungry lions whose drink is blood and play is carnage."[74]

Another absence is suggested by the orange jumpsuits, which refer not just to Muslim inmates of US prisons abroad, but specifically to the sexual humiliation, torture, and assault of Muslim and Arab prisoners by American guards in the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib prison.[75] Unlike these notorious pictures, there is no explicitly sexual component to the degradation in these videos: there is no segment that involves raping the hostages, no film of them hooded, with electrical wires attached to their bodies, no staged clips of them lying naked on a dirty floor, leashed around the neck, the other end held by a (female) soldier smiling at the camera as if on holiday. As is now well known, that kind of sexual torture was reserved for the women and girls captured by Da'ish who were either non-Muslim or the wrong kind of Muslim.[76]

The implication seems to be that the public sexual torture of male hostages—involving the participation of a female soldier, no less—reveals the barely concealed savagery beneath American claims to embody and defend the forces of civilization and law. The humiliation and execution Da'ish carries out on film exhibits, by contrast, a certain decorum that is, moreover, *lawful*. While *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) sources do not mandate beheading for capital crimes, they do not forbid it either, and it was for some time a fairly prevalent form of execution.[77] In this way, the reference to the Abu Ghraib photographs in the videos implicitly sets up a juxtaposition that inverts the conventional allocation of roles: while the American photographs disavow all limits, the humiliation and violence in the videos proceed with *relatively* civilized restraint, operating within what ISIS considers the proper boundaries of law and gender.

Then there is perhaps the most striking absence of all, the executions themselves. Why are the beheadings off-screen? After all, in the language of pornography so often invoked to capture the prurient aspects of such radical Islamist "snuff" material, the actual decapitation is the "money shot."[78] Speculation on this particular topic abounds on the Internet where, in the absence of any verifiable information, every conceivable—and inconceivable—conspiracy theory has rushed in to fill the void. Leaving these aside, one might ask: did these particular executions prove so gory, unmanageable and inelegant as to ruin the aesthetics of the segment? Or were the architects of the videos themselves so steeped in violence —as perpetrators, victims, or as witnesses—they assumed that what could be imagined into that unmapped darkness would be far more horrifying than the reality? One thing is known for certain: the footage is not omitted because this particular *mujahid* hadn't the stomach for it. Emwazi turns up in another hi-tech ISIS production released in November of the same year, one of 22 executioners wielding knives who behead an equal number of captive Syrian soldiers simultaneously on film.

Given that the footage of this collective execution has been retained, the video of which it is a part, "Although the Disbelievers May Dislike It," is a particularly instructive way to pursue the question of absence in the Foley and Sotloff videos.[79] "Disbelievers" has many different parts, complete analysis of which is beyond my focus, yet the central thrust of the execution segment and what precedes it is the representation of ISIS as the sole and unwavering protector of the *ahl al-Sunna wa'l-jama'a*, the community of Sunnis. This is accomplished, in part, through a creative genealogy of radical Islamism in which Da'ish is depicted as the heir and final telos of all previous movements and moments. Beatific images of 'Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, bin Laden, Abu Hamzah al-Mahajir and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi smoothly fade into one another as the voiceover weaves a tale of continuity and unanimity

divested of all divisions and rancor between al-Qaeda and Zarqawi over his ruthless violence against Shiʻi Muslims, a campaign that Daʻish has pursued with equal fervor.

It is also accomplished by a confluence of visual and verbal rhetoric demonizing the Shiʻa—although they are never referred to as such. They are primarily referred to as *rafidah*, meaning renegades or repudiators, a term at times used by Sunnis to disparage Shiʻa. At one point in the video—in Arabic with English subtitles—they are casually described as the "filth of the *rafidah*," at another, spoken of as *rafidah* who have humiliated (*dhull*) the "grandsons" of Abu Bakr and ʻUmar (Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and ʻUmar ibn al-Khattab, the first two successors of Muhammad). When the narrator describes Shiʻi soldiers of Bashar al-Asad's Alawite regime, he uses the term Nusayri, after the Alawite founder, Ibn Nusayr. Accompanying such invective is a barrage of visual images designed to inflame anxieties about the spread of Iranian and Shiʻi control, and offer the fortitude of Daʻish fighters as solace and solution. This convergence of visual and verbal rhetoric appears to be geared almost exclusively toward a global Sunni audience that speaks many different languages on the one hand, and ISIS' existing membership on the other.

The elements of self-valorization and sectarianism are carefully elaborated for both spectral audiences in the execution segment, which begins with 22 ISIS fighters silently marching 22 Syrian soldiers clothed in blue uniforms through an olive grove, accompanied only by the sound of voices chanting a *nashid*. The camera lingers on the faces of the fighters as they each grab a knife from a bucket in passing, the pace occasionally downshifting into slow motion so that viewers may fully absorb what they see: facial features that form a veritable map of the geographical reach of Sunni Islam, from Africa to Europe to Asia. At the end of the procession, the captives kneel at the feet of the fighters; the camera lingers on each of their faces and then, more briefly, on the furtive glances of several jittery Syrians who do not speak, and are given no names.

The camera pulls back and is momentarily still, taking in the entire scene. The segment has so far proceeded without speech, but now the silence is broken. The only executioner who is masked—Emwazi—speaks, and they are the first words of English in the entire film: the words are addressed to President Obama, the "dog of Rome," and the message is brief and familiar. These "soldiers of Bashar" are the victims now, but your people will be next.

There is little in "Disbelievers" up to this point that has indicated anything other than a Sunni-sectarian theme, although Emwazi's words do prefigure a shift in focus—and reversal of Arabic and English linguistic primacy—in the segments that are to come. Here, however, they are quickly eclipsed by what follows: all 22 executioners proceed to calmly slit the throats of the condemned, the camera duly documenting the bloodiness of the work, along with the uniformity, efficiency and apparent equanimity of those who perform it. Then, as the voices of a fresh *nashid* soar on the soundtrack—*we bring corruption to light/we cushion lost families/we descend upon disbelievers delivering destruction/forget the words of those who shall inevitably die*—a series of heroic shots taken from slightly below the fighters captures them singly, then in twos and threes, hair slightly windblown, clean and untouched by the filth and blood on the floor, gazing into the middle distance, calm and cleansed. The camera pans down the line of Syrian bodies, severed heads resting upon them, and the narrator intones in Arabic: "Know that we have armies in al-Iraq and an army in al-Sham of hungry lions whose drink is blood and play is carnage."

What do these likely aims and audiences of "Disbelievers" say about the question of absence at hand? The collective execution in "Disbelievers" is not simply raw footage: the scenes that comprise and enfold it are as heavily edited as the Foley and Sotloff videos. One detailed analysis discerned over 4–6 hours of multiple takes of the procession scene prior to the final line-up that itself changed so many times that media reports have been unable to agree upon the number of fighters actually present at the final execution.[80] All of this suggests that it was most likely the matter of audience rather than either aesthetics or habituation to graphic violence that determined the exclusion of decapitation footage in the Foley and Sotloff videos. While "Disbelievers" is primarily geared to contemporary Sunni Muslims fluent not in Arabic but in Islamic terminology, figures, symbols, and touchstones, it's probable that the Foley and Sotloff videos were edited to suit American sensibilities, approaching but not crossing that invisible line of what is watchable to ensure the widest possible dissemination.

By "American sensibilities" here, I refer to public expectations produced by the increasing sanitization of war made possible by what Kaempf has called the "oligopolization" of the global media market over the course of the last few decades.[81] More specifically, state management of major media representations of war has produced what has been described as a "grammar of killing" in which American operations appear "precise, administrative, and clean," not to mention costless and humane.[82] These representations train audiences to take such sanitized images of war as reflective of "our own civilized tactics," implicitly suturing atrocities in war—from interrogation torture to abuse of prisoners, sexual violence to indiscriminate killing of civilians—to the barbarism of the enemy. In this way, such a grammar of killing not only establishes public expectations of what war does/should look like, but constitutes one of the techniques by which American atrocities in wartime are concealed.[83]

If this account of the absent executions is plausible, the fact that these specific videos played such a significant

role in constituting ISIS as a singularly savage and major threat to British and American interests and citizens—while understandable—becomes multiply ironic.[84] To begin with, the excision of the most explicit parts of the execution sequences mirrors and reproduces the very sanitization of "officially sanctioned" violence critical to establishing the American sensibilities to which ISIS here yields. In fact, both are exercises in sovereign power over death through control of what is seen and not seen, a longstanding prerogative of sovereign authority that modern liberal states in particular have taken increasing pains to conceal. Moreover, these images evince an almost methodical discipline relative to the unrestrained brutality of the Abu Ghraib photographs, are far more sanitized than Da'ish execution videos in which Arabs, Africans, and other Muslims are killed, and much less graphic than the beheadings—some taking more than two minutes to complete—circulating in the shadowy corners of the digital landscape.

As Friis points out, the "internet is overflowing with videos of human beings—especially non-westerners—being decapitated."[85] While frequently glossed as evidence of non-Western barbarism, such "snuff videos," and the prevalence of live beheadings among them, are anchored in forms of violence and entertainment much closer to home. Decapitation was often the preferred form of capital punishment at one time or another in the histories of European as well as Islamic societies. It's also worth noting that "leadership decapitation" is a well-known component of US counter-terrorism strategy. Euphemisms are frequently deployed to conceal the violence of US military operations, but in this instance, the language aptly describes what it means, namely "targeted killings" of those identified as leaders of terrorist organizations. Among those destroyed by such "decapitation strikes" include several leaders of al-Qaeda and its affiliates (e.g., bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki, both in 2011, and Nasir al-Wuhayshi in 2015) as well as Emwazi in 2015 and al-'Adnani in 2016, ISIS' powerful spokesman in charge of external operations.

Moreover, the entire genre of snuff films in which these execution sequences can be placed has its origins in a global culture and economy upon which a great deal of "Western" life and wealth is built. As writers and scholars from a range of disciplines have shown, this is a culture that normalizes extreme cruelty, cultivates the pleasures of vicarious violence, and profits from converting the graphic suffering of others into titillating spectacle. Such conversion is evinced in entertainment products ranging from torture pornography to Hollywood productions celebrating military machismo and the aesthetics of slaughter, to video games that hone skills in massacring fleeing, vaguely Asian figures in 3-D or, as in *Kuma/War*, entice American players to hunt down Sunni terrorist "infestations" as part of the coalition forces' 2004 ground attack on Fallujah,

Iraq.[86] Such suffering may be "real" or simulated, but praise and profits accrue most to those products that come closest to replicating the horrors of real war or killing. In this way, the cultivated pleasures in graphic cruelty become entangled with a fetish for realism that fuels—and perhaps reflects—the desire for videos of actual death, torture, and rape, readily offered up for purchase on the darknet market.

Aside from the question of *why* the footage is absent, I want to argue that its *effect* within the execution sequence is fairly clear. The very fixation on the question of absence attests to expectations of a narrative structure in which the moment of death is both dramatic pivot and denouement. The absence of the beheadings displaces the focus from that moment of death to the conditions surrounding it: the lead up and aftermath, along with the power that has directed, staged, and edited it. In other words, the ellipse decisively shifts the narrative focus onto what the hostages are made to say and do and suffer, how their bodies are positioned when alive and when dead. What is at center stage, then, is not the execution, but the humiliation—what it performs, inverts, and produces.

Conclusion: Complicity in Digital Time

Immediately after the Sotloff video was posted, President Obama vowed that "whatever these murderers think they will achieve by murdering innocents like Steven, they have already failed." Yet the purposes of such violence are not entirely reducible to a strategy, or a means to achieve some end beyond itself which can be evaluated in terms of success or failure. I've argued that each execution sequence—and its location/relation to the production in which it is embedded—must be understood, in part, as a performative event in which the purposes of the violence are both articulated and accomplished at the moment of enactment. This lens has brought into sharp relief a disjuncture between what these videos say and how they work. While the verbal rhetoric largely hews to the logic of instrumental rationality, the visual rhetoric enacts a retaliatory humiliation that performs and produces an inversion of power in two different registers.

First, the literal inscription of humiliation on the bodies of Foley and Sotloff performs the dominance of ISIS through the symbolic emasculation of America. But I've also drawn upon Foucault's arguments to bring into focus a second register of this inversion. Here my suggestion is that the ritualized, vengeful, and disproportionate violence of these staged executions is meant to enact the dominance and invincibility of the "Islamic State" through the utter abjection of men forced to serve as standard-bearers for those who have humiliated Islam. Within the semiotic parameters of the videos, the impotence of the condemned at once demonstrates and confirms the final transposition of roles between the United States, now refigured as rogue state and failed sovereign, and Da'ish, recast as righteous and lawful sovereign power.

To make this argument, I've drawn on an understanding of humiliation as the unjust imposition of impotence by those who have more, and undeserved, power. Rephrased in experiential terms, this conception of humiliation emerges most sharply in contrast to shame, the emotion with which it has most often been conflated. As opposed to the "cognition of inadequacy" characteristic of shame, humiliation here lives in the rupture between one's own sense of significance and place in the social order, and acute awareness of where others with more power have forcibly placed us.[87] Among other things, this means that even a rehearsal of one's humiliation in front of others after the fact is rarely a simple recounting of events but a re-enactment of this rupture, one capable of revivifying the experience itself. The same is true of retaliatory humiliation, only in this instance what is enacted, re-enacted and potentially revivified is a deeply restorative experience: a reclamation of power from those responsible for one's powerlessness, a reinscription of humiliation on the humiliator that simultaneously recuperates and vindicates one's own sense of significance in the social order.

This experiential account suggests how the visual rhetoric of these videos works to address particular audiences in different ways. Perhaps most obviously, it seeks to hail American audiences generally in an effort to intimidate; yet it is also specifically designed to humiliate (self-identified) American men by the public emasculation of their male compatriots. This is to be accomplished, in part, by facilitating a visceral identification of American men with the abjection and pain of the hostages. Crucial to this move is the repetition of signs, verbal and visual, identifying Foley and Sotloff not in terms of religion (Catholic and Jewish, respectively), or profession (both journalists), but *Americanness*. The act of simply watching the videos then becomes a vehicle for the larger purpose: it potentially forces American men to *experience* the impotence and rage of being utterly powerless to intervene in a horrific event of the past that digital repetition offers up as an experience of the present.

At the very same time, this performance of American emasculation aims to conjure audiences from among the millions globally who harbor deep suspicion of or hostility to US power, offering them continual satisfaction, even pleasure. It also specifically seeks to hail a community of Sunni men where none currently exists, and invite them to *share* in the potency and invincibility performed by Emwazi. Such entrée is to be facilitated both by way of aspirational identification with him as the ideal *mujahid* (fighter of jihad), and by the restorative experience of watching, over and over again, the reclamation of power from symbols of American domination he claims to perform at least partly in their name.

This leads directly to the final question I posed at the beginning of this article about how these visual enact-

ments of retaliatory humiliation work once inserted into digital networks that circulate them globally and repeat them endlessly across multiple media platforms. While it's impossible to fully answer such a complex question here, I want to conclude by thinking about the ways these videos work forward and outward spatially and temporally, and what such effects augur for the possibilities of cultivating moments of either distance or disruption. This is also an occasion to speculate about what this specific combination of content and digital delivery might indicate about broader shifts in sensibilities and habits of mind in this time.

To begin with, as "celluloid heroes never really die,"[88] the figures and performances within the videos are forever preserved as they circulate continuously over time, even as changed conditions, differently situated audiences, or both will likely constitute their significance and purpose in altered terms. For example, the moments in these videos where the violence is meant to enact the primacy and invincibility of ISIS' sovereignty will begin to work differently when the defeat of Da'ish's "Islamic State" is no longer perpetually imminent but as decisive as conditions permit. Given that the caliphate is widely taken to refer not only to the historical institution of Muslim rule but also to a timeless ideal of an Islamic state that must again be realized, symbolic enactments meant to exhort spectators to join the epic project of building ISIS' Islamic State on earth can easily serve as repositories for aspirations to establish the next caliphate somewhere, somehow. Moments in other ISIS videos that once summoned and directed *mujahidin* from all over the world to travel to Syria to fight for the Islamic State now inspire would-be soldiers for Da'ish to fight the *kuffar* (unbelievers) right where they are, by whatever means available.

Particularly instructive in regard to the broader questions I've posed is the argument, made by several communication scholars, that the expansion of audiovisual media systems hasn't just augmented the experience of witnessing an event, but transformed it in ways enabling of moral engagement with the suffering of humans located thousands of miles away. According to these scholars, audiovisual media has multiplied exponentially the amount of witnessed events and the number of distant others to which watchers are exposed, not to mention the range of discourses in terms of which those others embed their lives. In so doing, they have provided avenues of perception beyond the immediate environment, promising ever more direct—if always mediated—access to faraway events.[89] When the events depicted are of atrocities and human suffering in particular, John Ellis (2000) contends that the audiovisual is itself a distinct form of witness constituted by feelings of separation and safety on the one hand and, on the other, an attenuated complicity that comes with an "aching sense that something must be done."[90] Paul Frosh goes even further,

arguing that the "screen acts as a barrier as much as a window," facilitating a distance conducive to precisely the kind of impersonal neutrality required to place strangers within a moral framework in which they can be recognized as equally human.[91] Ellis and Frosh may differ significantly in conceptualizing a response to such suffering, but both ultimately locate what Frosh terms the "morally enabling" potential of electronic media in the doubled effect of presence and distance.

Focusing on the shift to digital media, Kaempf contends that one of the major changes wrought by digital technology is the transformation of a structural division between sender and receiver he takes as the underpinning of all previous mediums, from television to radio to printing.[92] Whereas previous modes of media were primarily one-directional, "mass monologues" transmitted from producer to audience, the interactivity and fragmentation characteristic of new media technology not only reduces the distance between sender and receiver, producer and audience, but in many cases renders the distinction meaningless, as endless circuits make users simultaneously consumers, generators, and conduits of information. The conquest of distance and the democratization of information celebrated as among the triumphs of the digital age negate—by design—the sense of safety and separation, or of impersonal detachment, that Ellis and Frosh respectively identify with older forms of audiovisual media witness. By the same token, while photographs of suffering or documentaries of genocide may activate an attenuated and abstract sense of complicity, digital interaction has the capacity to connect, involve, and implicate users—as participants, targets, sufferers, or warriors.

Kaempf's claim is embedded in an analysis of new digital technologies, but it serves as a valuable reminder that atrocities or depictions of human suffering do not necessarily evoke a moral response regardless of delivery mode or visual genre. In fact, there may be no response of any kind. As Susan Sontag (in)famously argued, photographs of atrocities "transform history into spectacle," and consequently anesthetize and neutralize the emotions rather than create sympathy.[93] Digitalized evidence of atrocities circulating in cyberspace is often subjected to a similar critique but for different reasons. As Kuntsman points out, many testimonies and images of violence that "circulate online operate within a regime of suspicion . . . always already suspected of being photoshopped, madeup, fabricated—and, as such, these testimonies fail to move, cause annoyance or mockery instead of compassion."[94]

It seems to me that *both* the expectation that images of horror will produce mockery or "compassion fatigue" on the one hand,[95] or that they demand and will inevitably yield an ethical response on the other, presuppose more certainty in effect than there is. By contrast, there seems

more warrant to suppose that a potential ethical impulse minimally requires not just presence but distance, where distance is understood not as a metaphor for detached objectivity, but a precondition for a certain kind of thinking. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt implies that the ability to "think from the standpoint of somebody else" is closely connected to a kind of moral capacity, just as she argues in "Truth and Politics" that political judgment requires "representative thinking," that is, "being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not."[96] As Linda Zerilli points out, for Arendt, it is imagination that makes possible this art of seeing the world from another standpoint, but what is also critical to this "enlarged thinking" is distance, the "unique position of outsideness from which we judge."[97]

The point I want to make here is necessarily more modest than Arendt's, and less about political judgment or moral ability than about the basic capacities for thought enabled by a distance that can be achieved by a temporal, spatial, or even imaginative remove from the intensities and immediacy of the moment. This is not predicated upon some abstract opposition between affect and reason, emotion and reflection. It is, rather, a far simpler claim grounded in the quotidian experiences of human beings who live and work together under conditions ranging from voluntary intimacy to imposed proximity, and who must routinely navigate the terrain between reflexive reaction and critical thought out of sheer necessity. The pressures of intense animus in even ordinary settings can be eased by a measure of distance that just slightly lowers the heat of the engagement, its stakes, and then, the barriers to thought itself.

As philosophers frequently argue, this is precisely what is required to step back and "raise questions about causes and interdependencies . . . responsibility, rationalizations and redress," or to engage in the effort, as Rorty insists we should, of recognizing other human beings as capable of suffering pain and humiliation in the same ways that we do.[98] Yet such reflective distance need not—and likely will not—take the form of deep contemplation about matters of responsibility and recognition. It's in the more ordinary condition of pause, at times occasioned as much by distraction as by principle, that a space for thought opens between provocation and action—space even for thinking carefully, differently, or from elsewhere, whether that means taking account of the standpoint of another, the burdens of the past, or responsibility to the future. It is here, in this interval of stillness, that a visceral, reflexive response to the exhortatory power of visual enactments of humiliation may develop into more considered action–or necessary restraint.

If these arguments are persuasive, two questions necessarily follow. First, how do the structural transformations that Kaempf maps inform the way in which these enactments of performative violence work forward

and outward? A crucial implication of his argument is that the "power of the visual" delivered through digital networks also offers a form of (always mediated) witness, but one where the presumed safety and distance associated with electronic media have collapsed into a far more personal and viscerally immediate modality of experience. This immediacy is intensified by the particular content of these videos, given my account of how humiliation works affectively: as a rupture between a man's own sense of significance and where others have unjustly placed him, one that can be extended and revivified by repetitive enactments after the fact. This is especially so because, unlike a still image, these videos require more than momentary engagement to register. At least part of the ordeal of these men unfolds before our eyes in real time, and there is no shortcut through it still capable of registering the performance.

As such enactments cycle endlessly through ever widening circuits, the precipitating event—in this case, the US airstrikes against ISIS in Sinjar—becomes increasingly incidental to how their visual and visceral power works. This attenuation even broadens such affective power, making available to millions of people across the globe the vicarious experience of witnessing the humiliation–and, in an extended sense, being of virtually implicated in it. This is not the attenuated, abstract and impersonal experience Ellis and Frosh associate—rightly or not—with electronic media. On the contrary, these elements combine and through endless repetition constitute the events depicted as continually unfolding, part of an ongoing present rather than a completed past. In this way, watching can turn into a intense, personal, and immediate experience of witnessing, not in the sense of "bearing witness" to events that have already transpired, but in a simulacrum of eye-witnessing the violence *as it happens*. At such a level of affective engagement, it takes just a small step—or a few clicks—for a watcher-witness to interpellate himself into the enactment itself, *either* as humiliator or humiliated. This affective enmeshment of spectator and performance can entail taking on the humiliation and suffering of the victim—or alternatively, relishing a profoundly restorative experience.

This leads to the second question, that is, what does this account augur for the possibility of pause, of imaginative, spatial or temporal remove from the affective enmeshment this combination of content and digital circulation facilitates? By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that this particular phenomenon exemplifies a restructuring of affective dispositions wrought not only by the speed and reach of digital circulation, but also of the temporality that conditions it, what I want to call *digital time*.[99]

Digital time has in many ways become the master tempo driving much of human life, transforming standards of efficiency, performance, and expectations of attention retention in everything from entertainment to education. But to what is this tempo tethered? It is not simply anchored in the processing speed of computer calculations perpetually accelerating as one technological innovation follows rapidly on the heels of another. The sheer abundance of visual information and the velocity at which it can now be circulated, consumed, and re-cycled is far more dependent upon increased connectivity and capacities to store information. It is the fiber optic wires now threading through homes and across oceans, combined with the plethora of inexpensive devices and servers that can store and transmit videos from any point on earth, which have brought the pace of communication to the speed of light.[100]

To begin with, then, digital time is "set" by the synergistic conjunction of increased global connectivity, light-speed communication, unlimited repetition, and the interactivity that constitutes "users" as virtual or vicarious participants. The complex dimensions and full effects of this conjunction are far beyond my focus in these pages.[101] For my purposes here, the critical point is how digital time has inexorably, progressively, quickened the cycles of reception and reaction, while simultaneously heightening the intensities of online engagements with them.[102] In these circumstances, what becomes steadily more anomalous is not the rapid succession of violent videos available to millions of users globally at any moment, but rather moments of stillness between them. Put slightly differently: ordinary moments of pause are increasingly out of sync with this rhythm and logic, reducing the occasions to cultivate even a small measure of distance, whether from the visual and visceral power of ISIS' violent enactments of retaliatory humiliation, or from Trump's exhortatory rhetoric to aggressively recuperate American virility abroad and forcibly restore domestic hierarchies of all kinds at home.[103]

Crucial to this process is the way in which it becomes a process in the first place. And this is ultimately less a matter of velocity than repetition. Viewed only once, the various kinds of visceral identifications and reactions such visual and verbal rhetorics aim to provoke might well occur in attenuated form, and fade quickly. *Accelerated repetition* signals the process by which aftereffects can be converted into dispositions. Such visceral responses are then cultivated, intensified and amplified, not just by networked circulation but by the diminished opportunities for thinking wrought by digital time, reinforced by the echo chambers of social media networks constituted by the like-minded.[104]

So understood, digital time is not simply a name for the additive effects of repetition, reach, interactivity, and speed in online interactions, but a set of interlocking processes that have produced a particular sensibility, one habituated to thinking less and feeling more, to quick response over deliberative action. Such a sensibility is in

some ways the logical conclusion of modern processes long in gestation.[105] But it is also very much of *this* time, a new century organized at the very outset by a "War on Terror" and the demand for uncritical unity in its name; punctuated by what are apparently unending cycles of attacks and retaliation; marked by rhetorics of retaliatory humiliation evinced as much by Trump and his sidekicks as by Da'ish and its media outlets; and saturated by discourses and debates about exigent circumstances, emergency powers, and exceptional sovereignty.[106] This is a moment where leaders are increasingly empowered and judged by their capacity to deliver immediate retribution rather than deliberative action, the latter of which registers not as a sign of political wisdom but of emasculated indecision. This is a time when an increasingly broad range of politicians across the globe, along with their policies, plans, and wars, rely for success upon diminishing opportunities for critical reflection among those they rule, all the way down.

Notes

1 Creswell and Haykel 2015.

2 ISIS stands for *al-dawla al-Islamiyya fi-l Iraq wa'al-Sham* (the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham). Al-Sham is an Arabic term that, depending upon speaker and context, is usually taken to refer either to Syria or "Greater Syria." At various times according to different sources, "Greater Syria" has been said to include the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, as well as the West Bank. After ISIS declared caliphate (refer to n. 5), it shortened its name to "al-dawla al-Islamiyya" (the Islamic State), but many have resisted the shortened name, arguing that it's neither Islamic nor a state, preferring to use Da'ish (داعش/*dal-alif-'ayn-shin*), the Arabic acronym for *al-dawla al-Islamiyya fi-l Iraq wa'al-Sham.* Use of the acronym signals a certain irreverence, and is just one letter away from the Arabic word داعس/ *dal-alif-'ayn-sin*, referring to someone or something that tramples down or crushes. I eschew "Islamic State" here, alternating instead between my preferred term, Da'ish, and ISIS. My preference for Da'ish is a small gesture of solidarity with those Muslims who intentionally refuse to repeat and legitimize their claim to the name "the Islamic State." The alternation between Da'ish and ISIS is more pragmatic, in the interest of accessibility and avoidance of repetitive tedium. There are, however, direct quotations in the following pages that refer to the group as either the Islamic State or ISIL, where the "L" renders *al-sham* as the Levant, the French term for the region.

3 Packer 2014. ISIS targeted the ethno-religious group as "devil worshipers." Yazidi origins are uncertain, but records of their persecution date back to at least 637 C.E. The link between such persecution and recurrent characterizations of Yazidis by Muslims as "devil-worshipers" also has a long history. Naby 2009.

4 The particular group of British and US hostages killed around this time would also include American aid worker Peter Kassig. Kassig is the least well known of this group of American hostages, and the precise circumstances of his execution remain unknown. It seems likely that Da'ish had intended to stage his execution in the same way as the others, but something seems to have gone very wrong.

5 The caliphate (Arabic: *khilafa*) is the institution of legitimate Muslim political rule. Historically the caliphate began with the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, when Abu Bakr became the new head of the Islamic community, and continued in one form or another until 1924, when it was formally abolished by the architect of the Turkish state, Mustafa Kemal.

6 Although there's a well-establish gap between rhetoric and practice. One study concluded that "no American president of the 20th century has effectively practiced no ransom/no negotiation; none has utilized swift and 'effective' retribution"; Buhite 1995, 199.

7 Filkins 2014; Reardon 2015. ISIS is invariably depicted as distinctively, uniquely savage, yet the extreme forms of violence for which it has become widely known are far from novel or unprecedented. See Ahram 2014; 2015, 59–60; Allen et al. 2000; Campbell 2004; and Fujii 2013.

8 McFate 2015; also Kilcullen 2016, esp. pp. 122–25.

9 Callimachi 2014.

10 Cronin 2015. Still others—e.g., Filkins 2014—contend that, because the execution videos were so obviously ill-suited to obtain the purposes ascribed to them, they *must* have been actively courting additional US attacks, perhaps to drive home to local populations the need for state order—even ISIS' bloody version of it. Yet it seems unlikely that veteran Da'ish strategists would risk so much to demonstrate what had become so obvious, especially to Iraqi and Syrian Sunnis who had lost so much to chaotic violence the state didn't/wouldn't control—or which it actively promoted.

11 To even pose such questions presumes that there *are* purposes to be identified and analyzed. There are many—recently, Anonymous 2015—who would regard both questions and premises as misguided, who take the videos to signal a nihilistic savagery at once antithetical to human existence and inimical to rational analysis.

12 Li 2016. The term "jihadism" obscures more than clarifies the subject it aims to name by reducing the Arabic word *jihad*, which can denote all kinds of

struggle and striving, to violence. I prefer the phrase "radical Islamism," which is perhaps the worst name except for all the others.

13 See for example O'Shaughnessy 2002; Campbell 2006; Lentini and Bakashmar 2007; Mosendz 2014; Siboni, Cohen and Koren 2015; Stern and Berger 2015. Even those who emphasize the distinction between, for example, the visual violence in such ISIS acts of communication and other kinds of radical Islamist violence focus on the "strategic media functions" of propaganda. See Tinnes 2015, 76.

14 *"Current"* is meant as a reminder that the imminent victory against *this* "Islamic State" may be pyrrhic, that Da'ish may well rebuild a caliphate elsewhere in Iraq, or in other places in which a weak central government is unable to prevent the rise of multiple claimants to authority. For like radical Islamists before them, ISIS fighters "long ago developed the technique of melting away from battles they cannot win only to reappear elsewhere where they can prevail"; Atwan 2015, 218.

15 Just two cases in point are the March 2017 attack in London, when a British-born convert to Islam drove a car into crowds of people on Westminster Bridge, and the April 20, 2017, shooting on the Champs-Élysées, Paris, by a man identified by A'maq, an ISIS publication, as Abu Yousef al-Baljiki (the Belgian). A'maq claimed both men as "fighters (*muqātilī*) of the Islamic State."

16 See for example, Witte, Raghavan, and McAuley 2016.

17 These include the rise in anti-Muslim animus and a sharp increase in hate crimes; intensified security surveillance and police profiling; and a rash of legal initiatives—from US state anti-Shari'a laws, to Trump's "travel ban" from six Muslim countries, to Slovakia's new law preventing official recognition of Islam as a religion, to bans on the *niqab* and *burqa* in a small but growing number of European countries —that seem to predicate a secure national identity on the juridical quarantine of every public sign of Islam. In the Middle East and North Africa, already soaring unemployment and reduced wages amidst a demographic explosion in the youth population, presided over by often corrupt authoritarian regimes nestled in elaborate patronage networks have been exacerbated by brutal security practices that are often as much about the efforts to stamp out the remnants of popular challenge from the 2011 uprisings as fighting terrorism (often depicted as synonymous).

18 Atwan 2015, 18–19.

19 Berton and Pawlak 2015. Comparable data regarding online usage in MENA (Middle East and North African) countries seems more elusive for a variety of reasons, many of which are traceable to uneven online access across countries with radically different resources, facing very different challenges. Recent studies, including a Pew Report from 2016, suggest that internet access in MENA hovers around 40%, far less than in 11 advanced economies surveyed. Once online, however, users across age groups in the MENA region as well as those in other emerging and developing economics are described as "voracious users" of the internet and of social media in particular; Poushter 2016.

20 Rancière 2011, 103.

21 See Friis 2015; Hansen 2011 and 2015; Campbell 2003, 2004 and 2007; Kaempf 2013; Williams 2003.

22 Bleiker 2014, 76; Friis 2015, 731.

23 Friis 2015, 734–6.

24 The correct transliteration of the Arabic for "the base" is al-Qa'ida. In the interest of accessibility, however, I use "al-Qaeda," the spelling adopted by the U.S. Government, the media, and many academic journals, including *Perspectives on Politics*.

25 Obama quoted in Remnick; Obama 2014; Kerry 2014; Cameron 2014; Hagel 2014.

26 NBC News/Wall Street Journal 2014.

27 Politico 2014.

28 A UK poll taken in the wake of the videos reported similar results: previous opposition to airstrikes in Iraq was swamped by a groundswell of support for destroying ISIS; Graham-Harrison 2014.

29 The PEW findings for 2002–2014, inclusive, are summarized and available at http://pollingreport.com/religion.htmPollingReport.com 2015.

30 Kaempf 2013, 599.

31 As Kaempf describes it, the emergence of digital new media technology has transformed a previously multipolar media landscape into a heteropolar one characterized by the "multiplication and simultaneous diversification of structurally different media actors." Ibid., 587.

32 Juris 2005, 415.

33 As Judith Butler explains it in *Bodies that Matter*, "within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names"; Butler 1993 13, 2.

34 Euben 2015.

35 Any argument that links Islam, humiliation, and gender risks reinforcing essentialist depictions of a dysfunctional Arab or Muslim hypermasculinity. Such representations have a long and pernicious history, and have also enjoyed a new lease on life since 9/11. Much radical Islamist rhetoric can reinforce such depictions, colluding with such essentialism to erase the fact that this version of masculinity and the resonances it can summon are constituted by, rather than prior to, global transformations beginning in the colonial era.

36 This precise information is simply unavailable. Robust data even on the extent and character of

general Da'ish support has been elusive, gathered from anecdotes; interviews with small numbers of "jihadi" recruits; Twitter analytics; the profiles and (possibly misleading) online posts of recent recruits to Syria from Europe and America; and attempts to track the roles of "soft-sympathizers" in ISIS social media strategies. That will no doubt change soon. Knight 2014; Berger and Morgan 2015; Veilleux-Lepage 2014; Quantum 2015.

37 Benski and Fisher 2013; Hillis and Paasonen 2015; Karatzogianni and Kuntsman 2012.

38 Reinhardt 2013. Reinhardt argues that "political theory is at best a partial exception" to this "professional deformation."

39 Just three examples are Arendt 1972, Blok 2000, and Fanon 1968.

40 Fujii 2013, 411.

41 Hansen 2015.

42 It is no accident that several of these studies invoke the language of the "performative" to shift the analytic frame from the instrumental to the communicative and visual; Fujii 2013, 413–14; Friis 2015, 731; Hansen 2011, 60. This is so despite the fact that they understand the lineage, presuppositions, and operations of "the performative" quite differently from one another. Friis, for example, appears to use what she calls the "performative approach" to visual imagery as a synonym for a post-structuralist approach, a recognition of the lineage of "performativity" from J.L. Austin (the philosopher of language who developed the conception of the "performative utterance"), through Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, among others. By contrast, Fujii refers to "performative analysis" in a fairly narrow way, largely stripped of this lineage and epistemological freight, as a framework that "focuses on the *process* of putting on a show," emphasis original.

43 Hansen 2011, 60–62.

44 Foucault 1995, 47–8.

45 Foucault 2003, 241–2.

46 From the moment the caliphate was declared, al-Baghdadi has claimed his legitimacy is grounded in (among other things) the principle of *bay'a,* the oath of allegiance Muslims have pledged to him, just as the first generations of Muslims pledged their loyalty to the first four caliphs (632–661) who led the *umma* (Muslim community) following the death of the Prophet.

47 Scholarship theorizing the gendered dimensions of the modern state has disclosed multiple masculinist logics that derive from different models of masculinity (from dominative to protectionist) that do different kinds of work; Faludi 2007; Ferguson 2011; Mann 2014; Saurette 2006; Young 2003.

48 Ferguson 2011.

49 Ahmed 2004, 111.

50 Resonance here signals both the literal meaning of the word as "evoking a response" and an approach best captured by William Connolly's account of resonance as "energized complexities of mutual imbrication and interinvolvement, in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements *fold, bend, blend, emulsify and dissolve into each other*, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation," emphasis original. Connolly 2005, 870.

51 Drawing on Arab pollsters, Rami Khouri (2016) concludes that active and passive popular support of Da'ish—or "even just acquiescent understanding" of it—has been estimated at anywhere from 5–20% of Arab populations across a variety of countries. This estimate is very broad in range and quite small relative to the total Arab population in the world (around 400 million), but Khouri does not mince words about the implications he takes from it. The first is that 5–20% translates into about 20–80 million people who either support or understand ISIS. The second is that, while the "actual number of hard core supporters, financiers, admirers, members, and logistical facilitators of Islamic State (Daesh) in the Arab world is probably no more than a few hundred thousand . . . the pool of prospective adherents or sympathizers must realistically number in the millions"; Khouri 2016.

52 In January 2015, ISIS held for ransom and then executed freelance journalist Kenji Goto and private security consultant Haruna Yukawa. The messages issued in connection to these threats, demands, and killings are very different than the videos from Foley to Henning. There's no live video, no high tech production, no drawn out humiliation; one contains a still image and a recorded voice, the other an apparently manipulated image in which the victim is silent and both messages are shot against a white background, seemingly indoors.

53 Butler 2010, 75.

54 Caspar and Moore 2009, 3.

55 "Kasr al-Hadud" 2014.

56 "A Message to America/Risāla ilā Amrīkā" 2014. The following sections include close readings of this video, commonly referred to as the Foley video; the Sotloff video ("A Second Message to America/Risāla thāniya ilā Amrīkā" 2014); and the digital circulation of both. The citations here can be taken as authoritative for all subsequent references to these videos unless otherwise indicated.

57 Emwazi was born in Kuwait in 1988, moved to the United Kingdom in 1994, grew up in London as a British citizen, and graduated from the University

of Westminster with a degree in computer science. He reportedly experienced years of harassment by British security and intelligence agencies, as well as by comparable national agencies cooperating with the UK. Emwazi was to become the "star" of multiple Da'ish productions, featured in the beheading videos of Foley, Sotloff, Haines, and Henning—"Although the Disbelievers May Dislike It," and the like. He was killed on November 12, 2015, by a US airstrike in Raqqa, Syria.

58 Siddiqui 2015.

59 Philpott 1995, 264.

60 ISIS follows Islamist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb in rejecting nationalism, democracy, socialism, liberalism, and so on, regarding them all as expressions of "man-made sovereignty" in which human beings claim legislative authority; al-Baghdadi 2007; Qutb 1991. As only divine sovereignty is legitimate, such a claim is no less than a transgression of God's authority, requiring immediate redress. But there's more driving Da'ish's contempt for the nation-state. Created by colonial fiat, many Middle Eastern nation-states and the borders that mark them are not emblems of self-determination, but reminders of domination.

61 Given that Obama is America's first black president, such an implication can't help but evoke the racialization of black masculinity and its toxic partnership with humiliation long implicated in US. slavery, the international slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism, along with their contemporary legacies and counterparts.

62 For Carl Schmitt (see Schmitt 2008a, 2008b), there is perhaps no greater failure, for it is precisely the ability to protect subjects/citizens in exchange for obedience that constitutes the *sine qua non* of both political order and legitimate sovereignty.

63 Callimachi 2014.

64 Ibid.

65 Rorty 1989, 178; Scarry 1985.

66 Evans and Giroux 2015, 208.

67 Pollock 2013, 173; Cavarero 2011; Evans and Giroux 2015, 208.

68 Janes 1991, 24.

69 'Athamina 1989, 307–8.

70 As 'Athamina points out, it's quite likely that the prophetic hadith about "black banners from the East" was produced long after the Prophet's death by these propagandists, and even hadith about what color flag Muhammad had flown may be of such origin. As ISIS has shown little concern for the consensus of historians or of Muslim scholars, however, it's far less important to determine the authenticity of such hadith than to recognize the imaginative hold they likely have on ISIS members

and potential recruits—as well as on other radical Islamist groups who have embraced the color as a way of following in the Prophet's footsteps; 'Athamina 1989.

71 Atwan 2015, 130–1.

72 Grossman 2009; Collins 2011; Cottee 2014b.

73 Qutb 1991 67–68, 82.

74 "Although the Disbelievers May Dislike It/*Wa-Law Kariha al-Kafirun*" 2014. The title is taken from Qur'an 9:32, "They try to extinguish Allah's light with their mouths, but Allah insists on bringing His light to its fullness, even if the disbelievers may dislike it." The Qur'anic translation is from Jones 2007.

75 The impact of these photographs on radical Islamists, and its connection to the language of humiliation, should not be underestimated. In one very early response, a video was posted depicting the beheading of American Nicholas Berg. The execution was reportedly carried out by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi himself, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, as well as progenitor and inspiration for ISIS. In the video, the narrator asks: "How does the Muslim sleep, his eyelids at rest, while he sees Islam slaughtered and sees the hemorrhaging of honor (*karama*) and the pictures of shame (*al-'ar*) and the reports of satanic humiliation (*al-imtihan al-shaytani*) of the people of Islam, men and women, in Abu Ghraib prison?".

76 Da'ish has offered these women and girls, many Yazidi, some not, as enticements and use objects to ISIS fighters, endeavoring to justify such systematic sexual brutalization as an Islamically permissible practice of sex slavery based upon historical precedents and fragments from the Qur'an and hadith—much as the Bible had been used to justify the American slave trade. Callimachi 2015. But as Fatima Seedat argues, ISIS' sexual abuse of these captives is aberrant both in relation to historical concubinage practice, and in relation to the highly detailed norms, rules, and laws meant to govern both slavery and concubinage in Islamic law and thought. Such departures are not simply a matter of reviving an archaic practice in a contemporary content, but also of deploying modern technologies to vitiate the Islamic regulations meant to govern practices. A case in point is that Da'ish "sex slaves" have been forced to ingest contraceptive pills to avoid pregnancy, thereby circumventing one of the specified routes by which a concubine must be legally granted her freedom; Seedat 2017.

77 Decapitation is not strictly mandated as are other penalties for *hadud* crimes such as apostasy, theft, and fornication—that is, crimes that are considered to be offenses against Allah. At the same time, there are no prohibitions on beheading when the punishment required is death, as in the case of apostasy, or when it

was the penalty imposed at the discretion of a judge. Both *fiqh* and historical sources suggest that beheading was a common form of execution, to the extent that capital punishment was generally understood to mean decapitation, much as the guillotine became the default method to administer a death sentence in post-1789 France.

78 Cottee 2014a.

79 "Disbelievers" is not only instructive by contrast but in some ways represents the gruesome conclusion to the particular sequence of American and British hostage executions that began with Foley and ended in the fall of 2014. For tacked onto its end is an incongruous segment in which Emwazi inveighs against the United States while the severed head of the final hostage, Peter Kassig, lies oddly at his feet. In just one more of the odd twists accompanying these events, Kassig is now consistently referred to in print, online, and television media as "Peter (Abdul Rahman) Kassig," to reflect his conversion to Islam while imprisoned, and the names of no other American hostages are similarly modified. Yet released hostages and even a former member of ISIS say that a majority of "Western" prisoners converted to Islam, most in the understandable hope of receiving more humane treatment from their captors; Callimachi 2014. Sotloff was among the few who did not convert—even attempting to secretly fast on Yom Kippur—but Foley evidently converted to Islam very soon after his capture, adopting the name Abu Hamza. In the current US political climate, singling out Kassig in this way is a kind of implicit indictment, either of his bravery or loyalty. In sharp contrast to Kassig, both Foley's conversion and his Muslim name are largely erased from the public narrative, as if this death would be less horrific, less heroic, less grievable, if the world had lost James (Abu Hamza) Foley.

80 Quilliam 2014, 6–7.

81 Kaempf 2013.

82 Kaempf 2013, 597–8; Der Derian 2002; Campbell 2004, 58–61.

83 Foucault 1995, 48, 55–57. Such atrocities may be particular incidents of, say, "collateral damage" caused by drone strikes or the sheer number of people who have died since September 11, 2001, as a direct or indirect consequence of the United States' "War on Terror." Regarding the latter, there's a wide spread in the estimates, but the *lowest* assessment of those killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan between 2001–2015 is 1.3 million people; Physicians for Social Responsibility 2015; Ahmed 2015.

84 In the immediate wake of Sotloff's execution, for example, Obama declared that "[i]n a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality"; Obama 2014.

85 Friis 2015, 742.

86 Šisler 2014, 114–116.

87 Tarnopolsky 2004, 477. This is consistent with two crucial insights onto the structure of humiliation developed in some of the early and best scholarship on the subject by social psychologists. The first is that humiliation presupposes three distinct roles—humiliator, humiliated, and witness. The second is the extent to which humiliation as an experience is dependent upon publically available yet contextually determined standards; Klein 1991; Miller 1988.

88 Davies 1972.

89 Frosh 2006, 266–7; Ellis 2000, 9–10.

90 Ellis 2000, 9–11.

91 Frosh 2006, 281.

92 Kaempf 2013, 593. While Kaempf traces the collapse of previous distinctions between sender and receiver, producer and audience, to new media technologies, Rancière has argued that such a distribution of roles has long been grounded in a set of distorting oppositions between passivity and activity, viewing and acting; Rancière 2011.

93 Sontag 1990, 109–10. Sontag's later work appears to reject this early position, attributing passivity of response to conditions of reception rather than to photography itsel. Sontag 2002.

94 Kuntsman 2012, 3.

95 Moeller 1999, 35.

96 Arendt 1983, 49; 1987, 241.

97 Zerilli 2005, 176–7.

98 Johnson 2011, 640–1; Rorty 1989, 192.

99 What I mean by digital time must be distinguished from Robert Hassan's "network time," a phrase which he has, on recent occasions, used interchangeably with "digital time." Hassan uses it to refer to a "computer-driven and open-ended rate of acceleration within which people as network users become deeply implicated," but is brought into sharpest relief in contrast to what he calls "clock time" of the pre-digital era; Hassan 2012, 291. This periodization becomes the basis of his argument that network time is the tempo of a globalized, network society entirely out of sync with the politics of liberal democracy—an argument in many ways anticipated by Wolin; Wolin 1997.

100 Personal correspondence, Panagiotis Takis Metaxas, Professor of Computer Science, Wellesley College, May 2017.

101 A number of scholars have already sought to theorize the complex transformations in politics and social life wrought specifically by what is referred to as velocity, speed, acceleration, or the acceleration of speed. See, for example, the work of Paul Virilio, William

102 E.g., Hillis, Passonen, and Petit 2015.

103 In many ways inspired by Wolin's 1997 warning about how the rhythms of neoliberalism are engulfing a politics constituted at a deliberate pace, the analysis here can be at least partly understood as an effort to concretize and extend his arguments.

104 This argument does not negate the ways in which digital technologies and social media platforms have facilitated political organizing, constituted counterpublics, and served as sites of virtual refuge or resistance that have occasionally (if not inevitably) spilled over into material life; Hillis, Passonen, and Petit 2015. In this connection, it's worth remembering that the videos that are the subject of this analysis circulate out of the same region that, only a few years ago, had become the lodestar for joining new technologies to emancipatory hopes in authoritarian settings.

105 Hassan, for example, provides a periodization of history through the framework of temporality, arguing that the eighteenth century to the present has included not one but two empires of time; Hassan 2009, 12, 15.

106 One recent example involves Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's chief White House strategist, whose paranoiac harangue against the "elite" US media—the real "opposition party"—included the repeated claim that all American news organizations were humiliated and therefore rendered powerless by the failure to predict Trump's victory, and that they are now impotent because humiliated. Bannon's particular phrasing, the vengeful tenor of the rhetoric, and way he *enacts* the humiliation he invokes are strikingly similar to humiliation rhetoric in radical Islamist discourse; Bannon, quoted in Grynbaum 2017.

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