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THE AUTHORITY OF
THE ISLAMIC STATE

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The Authority of the Islamic State¹

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Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of the sources of authority that the Islamic State employs locally and globally in order to further the establishment of a worldwide caliphate. To allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the propositions the Islamic State makes towards its audiences, we argue that it can be regarded as a sociopolitical movement and a de facto state with different sources of authority and means of power pertaining to each. Both realms of authority guarantee and reinforce each other, thus providing the Islamic State with a stability that is often overlooked in public debates about its prospects.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review and analysis of the various sources of authority that the so-called Islamic State employs on a local and global scale in order to further the establishment of a worldwide caliphate.³ The Islamic State developed since 2003, out of a Jihadist group that constituted a small part of the Sunni resistance to the US-led occupation of Iraq. The devastating social, political, and economic effects of this military intervention and the outbreak of the uprising against Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria enabled the movement to not only temporarily seize significant parts of Iraqi and Syrian soil, but to also make political gains. Both current popular accounts of the Islamic State and incipient scientific research tend to focus more or less exclusively on the aspect of physical violence and terror. In contrast, we will broaden the picture to show how physical and non-physical means of establishing and maintaining authority interact and reinforce each other. We will provide an analytical context for the violent actions of the Islamic State by looking at the movement's genesis and position in its immediate environment. This also allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the propositions the Islamic State makes towards different audiences and constituencies and helps explain its perseverance.

In particular, we argue that the Islamic State can be regarded as both a sociopolitical movement and a de facto state with different sources of authority and means of power pertaining to each of these two roles, hence constituting a process wherein the Islamic State seeks to fortify its power by accumulating 'basic legitimacies' (*Basislegitimitäten*) (Trotha 2000: 260). Both these levels of authority guarantee and reinforce each other, thus providing the Islamic State with a stability that is often overlooked in public debates about its aspirations and prospects.

In the first part of this paper, we take up Max Weber's sociology of domination and demonstrate the extent to which the Islamic State, as a sociopolitical movement, appeals to its adherents and its potential followers by means of traditional, charismatic, and rational sources of authority and domination.⁴ Following Weber, we define domination as "the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (Weber 1978: 53). For Weber, domination is a special case of power, which he defines as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (*ibid.*). In the first part of this paper, we engage in an analysis of the bases of probability of the Islamic State's claims to domination. On a local level, the movement exerts brutal violence, but also attempts to forge alliances with various individuals and groups in Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East at large. It exploits the alienation of Sunnis from the political process in Iraq after 2003 as well as the disintegration of the Syrian state after the suppression of the Syrian uprising in 2011. It contests both these national states by presenting itself

³ From among the variety of names given to the movement, we choose *Islamic State* for reasons that will become clear in the course of the analysis of the movement's state-like character. Although the movement changed its title in June 2014 to *dawlat al-Islām* (*Islamic State*, IS) and also refers to itself as *dawlat al-khilāfa al-islāmiyya* (State of the Islamic Caliphate), particularly in Anglo-American academia it is still referred to by using its former title *dawlat al-islāmiyya fi-l-'Irāq wa-l-Shām* (The Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria/the Levant, ISIS/ISIL). However, the variety of terms that refer to the Islamic State in Arabic ranges from the abovementioned over *tanẓīm al-dawla al-islāmiyya* (Organisation of the Islamic State) to the colloquial abbreviation *dā'ish* [and variations of it such as the diminutive *dā'ūsh* (cf. Barnard and Arango 2015)], which carries a derogatory meaning and is rejected by the Islamic State itself.

⁴ In the English version of Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Weber 1978), both "domination" and "authority" are being used to translate the notion of *Herrschaft*. Following this convention, we do not distinguish between domination and authority in this paper.

as an alternative that shoulders state functions, guarantees stability and security in the territories it controls, and engages in identity discourses, making use of particular imageries and symbols. Fuelled by a prolonged downscale of the reach of national power centres beyond Baghdad and Damascus, this contestation aims at further reducing the sovereignty of these governments and their acceptance among the Iraqi and Syrian people by adding another dimension to the Islamic State's authority: It exerts regulatory functions in a range of social spheres in the areas that it covers.

In the second part of this paper, we will show that these regulating activities are part of an effort of the Islamic State to institutionalise power relations, thus creating a distinct form of statehood. Our analysis of *the statehood of the Islamic State* is placed within a current anthropological framework of state analysis that posits that “empirical rather than judicial statehood constitutes the analytical point of departure” (Hagmann and Péclard 2011: 19). We use the notion of state as a regulating force to bracket together numerous ways of the Islamic State of imposing its administrative authority in areas as diverse as the economy, welfare, public safety, education, and of course religion. While ultimately rooted in the Islamic State's ability to exert physical violence, these measures constitute a form of authority of its own kind. While the multiplicity of power relations, structures, resources, actors, and symbolic repertoires which altogether affect ‘negotiations of statehood’ (see Hagmann and Péclard 2011) cannot be covered here in their entire complexity, the focus on regulatory activities still makes visible an important facet of the establishment of statehood. For this, we rely chiefly on Bourdieu's analysis of the modern state. Just as Weber dissolves the concept of power into a multitude of social relations with varying motivations, Bourdieu makes clear that “the notion of ‘state’ makes sense only as a convenient stenographic label” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 112) that sums up a body of “work of normalization and codification” (Bourdieu, Wacquant and Farage 1994: 2) that is the main characteristic of the state. Hence, the state is ultimately a bureaucratic force, which removes debates about its workings from judicial and otherwise normative analyses. We regard this approach especially fruitful when it comes to the Islamic State, since it removes our discussion from the ongoing debates about the normative status of the group and places it more firmly within an empirically oriented setting. To deny the Islamic State its status as a state in a judicial sense among or within other existing states says nothing about its functionality as a state in the sense of a symbol-producing, meaning-creating, life-regulating force.

The Islamic State as a Sociopolitical Movement

In order to comprehend its dynamical nature, we argue that the Islamic State is best understood as a sociopolitical movement that contests its various opponents on a military, political, social, and religious level by deploying “extra-ordinary, extra-usual practices which aim, collectively or individually, institutionally or informally, to cause social change” (Bayat 2005: 893–894). These activist practices include the commitment to an ever expanding territory, as well as an attempt to establish a religious code of conduct. By looking at the Islamic State from this perspective, we emphasise the movement's ability to mobilise particular networks and groups on a local and global scale around a common cause and to create a shared identity and shared interests among those groups. We also highlight the movement's attempt to collectively bring about, hamper, or reverse social and political changes. There exists, however, considerable inner diversity of aspirations and objectives among the various constituencies of the Islamic State which is not always conspicuous.

The heterogeneous motivations of these constituencies might coincide with the leaders' utopian claims of the unification of mankind under the black banner. Generally, however, these diverse groups will be motivated by a range of existential, economic, moral, social, and political interests (cf. Bayat 2005: 901).

This inner diversity rarely features in the Islamic State's official media, which emphasises unity and homogeneity among its adherents (i.e. 'true' Sunni Muslims) on the textual and visual level as part of its creed (*aqīda*) and programme (*manhaj*). It separates its adherents from its opponents, provides a charter that outlines a code of conduct and sociopolitical practice, and proposes a societal model that regulates the relationship between authorities and subjects within the framework of a divinely revealed order. Individual and collective commitment to this framework, and the subsequent narratives that the Islamic State spreads through its various media outlets, are crucial to the movement's politics.

Analysing the Islamic State: a Weberian perspective

In order to better capture the highly fluid situation in which the Islamic State finds itself in terms of its means of authority, we will employ an analytic framework that is based upon the sociology of domination as developed by Max Weber (Weber 1978: 212–301). We present the basic assumptions and terminology of Weber's approach before we apply it to the specific situation of the Islamic State.

First and foremost, Weber does not have a substantialist definition of domination, but he defines the power and means of domination of social actors as dependent upon the obedience of the subdued. Thus, he defines domination as “the *probability* that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Weber 1978: 212; authors' emphasis). With regard to the Islamic State, this means that instead of looking for established and uncontested power relations, it is necessary to identify and weigh the movement's various ties to the groups it rules and that lend support to its rule, taking into consideration substantial variation over time. At present, this can only be achieved in a very tentative form.

Weber differentiates between two subgroups within the ruling group: the ruler or rulers themselves and the staff that is necessary to exert its claims to power. The reasons the staff members have for adhering to the rulers vary, and determine to a large extent the type of domination that is exerted by the ruling group: “The members of the administrative staff may be bound to obedience to their superior (or superiors) by custom, by affectual ties, by a purely material complex of interests, or by ideal (*wertrationale*) motives” (ibid.: 212–213). We regard the recruits and fighters of the Islamic State, as well as its clerics and the personnel it employs within its bureaucratic apparatus who adhere to the caliph and his commanders, (*umarā'*) as the “administrative staff” in Weber's sense. This means that the appeal the Islamic State exerts over its staff may differ from its appeal to the group of people it dominates in the areas it covers.

Weber distinguishes between three pure types of domination that are characterised by the reasons the subdued have for regarding the authority as legitimate. Whereas *rational domination* is based upon “a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands”, *traditional domination* is “resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them”. Finally, *charismatic domination* is “resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary

character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (Weber 1978: 215).

While in reality these typical modes of domination always occur in a specific mix, it is still possible to sort the various sources of legitimacy that the Islamic State taps into according to their predominant mode of domination. This reveals a surprisingly multi-faceted spectrum of sources of legitimacy.

The Rational Appeal of the Islamic State

From the vantage point of a sociological theory that employs a wide notion of rationality, every conscious human act might in one way or another be termed rational given that a certain goal is to be attained. Thus, the actions of the Islamic State’s fighters might be deemed rational insofar as they accept the exertion of violence and the prospect of being killed as a plausible means to the attainment of salvation goods (*Heilsgüter*). In other words, the Islamic State’s ideological framework provides them with “spiritual selective incentives” and “strategies for fulfilling divine duties and maximizing the prospects of salvation on judgment day” (Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler 2013). While we do not dismiss the analytical value of such a theoretical perspective altogether, we still think it prudent to employ a narrower notion of rationality that sets rational action apart from such behaviours that are specifically oriented towards otherworldly goals. This restriction enables us to pay attention to “unlikely alliances” of groups with the Islamic State that are not defined by their religious allegiance to the movement’s goals. Such instances are described in the following section.

Local Alliances with Sunni Tribal Fractions

The Islamic State and its predecessors have frequently sought to coalesce with local Iraqi tribes.⁵ Aligning with tribal factions promises to enhance the movement’s credibility and legitimacy on a local level, while it benefits from the tribe’s manpower and offers local leaders protection against other (mostly Shiite) militias and governmental forces. However, these pragmatic relationships are of a highly erratic nature and cannot gloss over the potential for economic rivalry and conflict between several Sunni tribes and the Islamic State, let alone ideological differences.⁶ The background for these alliances was formed in the course of the disintegration of the Iraqi nation-state during the 1990s. During this period, national identity decreased in favour of sub-identities – a development that rapidly grew after Saddam’s ouster in 2003 – and strengthened political and economic autonomy of Sunni tribal factions in central and western Iraq. With the Sunni opposition

⁵ We use the terms ‘tribe’ (*ashīra/qabīla*) and ‘tribal’ to describe social structures that rest on bonds and solidarity of kinship which both have considerable impact on and play important roles in discourses around identity and politics in Iraq and Syria. However, we are aware that using these terms implies an oversimplification since some of the tribal confederations such as Dulaym, Shammar, and others that the Islamic State seeks to coalesce with consist of tens of thousands of people and are, of course, not entirely aligning with or fighting against the Islamic State. We neither think that it makes sense to regard *all* Sunnis or Shiites in Iraq and Syria as a singular group, nor do we imply that ‘Sunni tribes’ are a homogeneous and relatively stable entity. We share some of the reservations about the applicability of the term as an analytical category. See González 2009; Tapper 1990.

⁶ Arguably, both the tribal factions and the Islamic State assess the character of these coalitions differently which might lead to a fundamental misunderstanding: Tribal fighters might deem the Islamic State legitimate due to a convergence of interests while the latter might want to exploit the former’s manpower to stabilise its power and eventually seek the former’s total submission under the Islamic State’s creed and domination. Still, the actors involved in this inherent misunderstanding can be regarded as a rational coalition insofar as their differing motivations overlap to the extent that they share common interests.

to the reorganisation of the state taking its strongholds in these regions, al-Qā'ida in Iraq (*tanẓīm qā'idat al-jihād fi-bilād al-rāfidayn*, AQI) and its leader Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī made it clear that it strove for the integration of tribal forces into its ranks, under the condition that they would unquestioningly subscribe to the Jihadist's ideology and aspired societal model (Günther 2014: 144–145). Equally, the *Islamic State of Iraq*, which was announced in late 2006, presented the “noble tribes” (*ashā'ir aṣīla*) as an essential constituent of its project and emphasised the necessity of integrating tribal authorities into its hierarchy (Günther 2014: 276). Although individual motivations to enter an alliance with the Islamic State may not be disclosed publicly, security-related and political motifs seem to prevail. This accounts for the importance of debates around power sharing and the provision of security to the assertiveness and interpretation of regulatory practices (Al-Jazeera 2015; Cockburn 2015; Spencer and Malouf 2014).

While some tribal representatives explained their restraint towards the Islamic State's intransigent ideology and tactics (Spencer and Malouf 2014), they still aligned with the movement while others sought to remain neutral or even took up arms against it, which caused intra-tribal and intra-communitarian rifts among Sunni Muslims (Solomon 2015). Moreover, alliances of Sunni tribes with the Islamic State offer security against Shiite militias. This further strengthens the movement's sectarian politics, which build on both 'social sectarianism' (Ismael and Ismael 2010: 340) and political discourses in the whole region about Iranian, i.e. 'Shiite', influence advancing on numerous levels (Günther 2015b). The Islamic State could thus easily capitalise on experiences and feelings of the Sunni population who had been affected by a continuing “de-Sunnification” of power positions in Iraq (International Crisis Group 2006: 9–12; International Crisis Group 2013), maltreatment by Shiite militias as well as American military and private contractors during raids and in detention centres (Fahim 2015; Khatib 2015a; Human Rights Watch 2015), or displacement in the context of ethnic and sectarian cleansing (Günther 2014: 184–187). In order to strengthen its position towards these people, the Islamic State offers protection against Shiite militias and national armies, carries out raids against state prisons such as the infamous Abu Ghayb and Tadmur jails, and frequently appeals to emotional motifs, as it presents itself as the restorer of Sunni honour and pride (cf. Barnard and Arango 2015). The fact that Sunni tribal factions also align with the Islamic State under this rubric affects and impedes efforts of reconciliation on a national basis. This is because these efforts necessarily involve surmounting the sectarian divide which dominates the political arena in both Iraq and Syria (cf. Khatib 2015b). Nevertheless, up until 2015, several tribal elders in both countries have publicly pledged allegiance (*bay'a*; see Günther 2014: 222–225; Wagemakers 2015) to the Islamic State and its caliph, thus placing their entire constituency under the movement's command (Orient News 2015). Oftentimes, the movement films and distributes reports on these ceremonies through its various media outlets with dozens of videos being available on YouTube and other video platforms (SyriaLeaks 2013; al-Furat Media 2015; Kirkuk Province Media Office 2015). Furthermore, the Islamic State explicitly states, as did its predecessors, its will and ability to strike hard against those tribal factions who fail to declare their allegiance to the caliph Ibrahim or openly rebel against him – the mass killing of members of the Shaytāt being the most recent prominent example (Dabiq 3: 12–14; c.f. Crowcroft

2015). The threat of physical violence against the tribes can hence be regarded as another rational motivating factor for them to submit to the Islamic State's rule.⁷

Alliances with Former Baathist (Military) Leaders

The Islamic State seeks to distance itself from the former Iraqi regime, which it considers apostate due to its secular-nationalist political orientation (Günther 2014: 141–142). Yet, the movement and its predecessors have been dependent on the knowledge and skills of former members of the Baath party and the Iraqi military. Thus, it has been of vital concern to the movement to consult with and integrate former Baath party members and loyalists, as another local source of power, into its ranks. Vice versa, by assisting the Islamic State's forces during their conquests in Iraq since June 2014, former Baathists might have expected to regain their power lost after the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003. Interpersonal ties between Jihadist and former Baathist leaders were knit in detention centres, such as Camp Bucca, where Sunnis accounted for the majority of detainees (McCoy 2014; Reuter 2015). They hence entered into a coalition with Jihadist forces, even though they might neither subscribe to the Islamic State's ideological framework nor aspire to establish a religious regime in Iraq in the long run (Sly 2015). The past twelve years thus saw the evolution of a pragmatic and strategic alliance based on the 'lowest common denominator' of overthrowing a common enemy, i.e. the Shiite-led government in Baghdad, which continued to keep Sunni representatives from power positions during this period. It utilises the intelligence and security service structures, as well as the military expertise of the former regime, as important means to make territorial and political gains. Although the Islamic State explicitly denied their involvement (Dabiq 7: 6), former Baath party leaders as well as officers of the military and security services have been part of the inner circle of the movement as it evolved and were co-opted into councils overseeing the restoration of basic services and the building of state-like structures in the territories conquered by the Islamic State (Fadel 2014; Harris 2014). Nevertheless, this alliance of supposedly mutual benefit is highly erratic and vulnerable to rifts, as Baathist and Jihadist factions within the Islamic State regard different means as appropriate for social and political changes in Iraq and beyond. Hence, the movement's rational appeal for forging these coalitions tends to collapse as soon as the calculations of its participants change with the achievement of rational aims. This can be seen from the developments after the conquest of Mosul in July 2014 which is of strategic importance to the Islamic State: Within one month after it had taken over the city, the Islamic State began to eliminate potential contenders of its recently acquired power, as dozens of former leaders of the Baath party, its security services, and the army disappeared (Reuter 2014: 189; Fick et al. 2014). At the same time, reports were released about influential ex-Baathists distancing themselves from the movement's cruel treatment of minorities and tribal members signalling their demerger from Jihadist forces in order to secure chances for future political reconciliation on a national level (Harris 2014).

In general, the alliance of Jihadist factions with former Baath party leaders and members of the military and security services followed a pragmatic rationale motivated by expectations of mutual

⁷ Of course, speaking of the threat of death as a factor within a rational decision-making process may appear cynical, and it does speak to the limitations of a broad notion of rationality. Still, the ability of tribal leaders to weigh the potential consequences of their decision to coalesce with the Islamic State, to resist it, or to try to forge alternative alliances evokes a decision-making process that differs substantially from a predominantly emotional and a predominantly traditional setting.

benefit. However, as the Islamic State seeks to consolidate its rule and establish a religious regime in the conquered territories, disagreements between the two factions come to the fore and it remains uncertain whether the disintegration of the movement and the withdrawal of nationalist forces will affect its hold on Iraqi society as the Islamic State would eventually replace former Baath cadres and take over their networks.

The Traditional Appeal of the Islamic State

The type of domination that features most prominently in the Islamic State's claims to power is its recourse to a past sacred order that it aims to re-establish. Hence, it attempts to exert traditional authority in the minds of its followers to the extent that they regard it as a legitimate representative of the proposed order. This aspect of the Islamic State's rule was recently emphasised by Hans Bakker (Bakker 2015) who regards Weber's concept of *patrimonial prebendalism* (Weber 1978: 235) as a form of traditional authority that fits the Islamic State's envisaged order. Bakker holds that the following features of patrimonial prebendalism apply to the Islamic State: its political legitimacy is concentrated within one group, which is itself organised around a leading figure; authority in peripheral areas is directly linked to the ruling group; the main sources of material wealth are land and labour with no, or very rudimentary, financial structures; individuals are treated as liable for their communities; the existence of slave labour; and "[d]ecision-making is ad hoc and there are no rational-legal administrative codes" (Bakker 2015). We doubt this latter aspect (see below the section on the Islamic State's statehood), but all other features of prebendalism seem to have been developed by the Islamic State in at least rudimentary form. While we agree that the traditional order envisaged by the Islamic State can indeed be described in the Weberian terms suggested by Bakker, we will in this section focus on the Islamic State's claims to being connected with legitimate traditional forms of authority. Hence, we do not attempt to identify an existing structure of traditional domination, but to focus on allusions to traditional authority by the Islamic State. To the extent that these allusions are regarded as legitimate by a sufficient number of the ruled, they can serve as the foundation for the legitimate establishment of prebendalism or any other form of traditional order.

Recognition as Legitimate Islamic Government (Caliphate)

The order envisaged by the Islamic State is, indeed, presented as a restoration of a "caliphate in the prophetic method" (*khilāfa 'ala manhaj al-nubūwwa*). The Islamic State is thus designed with recourse to an ideal-typical role-model of early Islamic history. In this sense, its legitimacy rests on "an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them" (Weber 1978: 215). To promote this legitimisation, the movement in its written, audio, and video statements draws on a wide range of traditional Islamic sources as well as accounts of medieval and modern Islamic scholars. These varied sources deal with the nature of an Islamic State, and are selected with the intention to support the Islamic State's claim to embody the authority to determine religious and mundane affairs, thus affecting all spheres of their subjects' lives. The movement and its predecessors published a number of detailed documents that provide the basis for an adaption of these sources to, and their integration into, its own creed and programme.

As early as 2007, the *Islamic State of Iraq* (*dawlat al-‘Irāq al-islāmiyya*, ISI), which was one of the Islamic State’s predecessors, published a document entitled “Message to the People about the Birth of the Islamic State” (*i‘lām al-anām bi-milād dawlat al-Islām*, al-Furqan 2007) that outlined the prerequisites for the establishment of a rightful Islamic State in a detailed manner (Günther 2014: 195–225). Its authors drew upon a variety of sources to expound that the formation of an Islamic State would realise the “submission of the people towards their lord” (*ta‘bīd al-nās li-rabbihim*, al-Furqan 2007: 7). It claimed to embody God’s will as an antithesis to natural chaos in this world, which is based on the assumption that the Muslim community is identical with an Islamic State and its institutions. In order for Muslims to fulfil their hope of salvation in the hereafter, a public order would be established, dedicated to regulating the relationship between God, authorities, community, and the social framework. This framework would be subject to the Quranic principle of “commanding good and forbidding wrong” (cf. Günther 2014: 215–218; Meijer 2014; Cook 2002) and provide welfare (*maṣlaḥa*) for the Muslim community. To commit oneself to Islam, in this view, includes strict obedience to God, the Prophet Muḥammad, and “those in authority among you” (*ūlū al-amr minkum*, Q. 4,59) as leaders of the community. The appointment of a commander in religious and mundane affairs, and the establishment of subsequent institutions, is deemed one of the revealed, legitimate, and necessary foundations of a society. Hence, in order to create a social framework that allows Muslims to live according to these principles, it is regarded crucial to appoint a leader who imposes his authority (*sayṭara*) on the community as a representative of divine will and at the same time both demonstrates his obedience (*sam‘iṭā‘a*) to God and demands allegiance from the people. The official public declaration of the caliphate, *This is the Promise of Allah* (*hādha wa‘d allāh*), which was issued in June 2014, presents similar arguments. It emphasises the inescapable religious obligation for Muslims to accept the authority of the caliphate and its other institutions and to obey (*sam‘iṭā‘a*) the caliph (al-‘Adnānī 2014). Both documents state that the caliph, as the spiritual and physical heir to the Prophet Muḥammad, heads the collective prayer and, being recognised as “commander of the faithful” (*amīr al-mu‘minīn*), directs the Muslim community in mundane as well as in spiritual affairs. The oath of allegiance to the caliphate, thus, is not a mere declaration, but rather is deemed a constitutive of an Islamic State, hence a covenant between authorities and the community regulating their relationship of reciprocal dependency with respect to God and the divinely ordained order. Muslims are, thus, obliged to pledge allegiance (*bay‘a*) to a man who is elected by consultation (*shūrā*) of a circle of “people who loosen and bind” (*[ahl al-hall wa-l-‘aqd]* cf. Günther 2014: 210–215), that accepts him as Caliph and Imam on behalf of the Muslim community at large by virtue of his personal qualifications. As a part of this circle, which was vaguely described as “consisting of its senior figures, leaders, and the shūrā council” (al-‘Adnānī 2014: 5), the *shūrā* council is supposed to control, guide, and advise the *amīr al-mu‘minīn* on several matters that concern his authority and the operation of the state. As an institution that traditionally negotiates conflicting interests surrounding political power, its integration into the formal structure of the Islamic State is meant to increase the potential acceptance of the movement by its audience on both a local and a global level. Beyond the abovementioned general description of the *shūrā* council members, it is not clear, however, who exactly qualifies for membership in this council or on what basis. It is this ambiguity, which is necessary in order to secure the Islamic State’s operability, that leaves room for criticism on the part of various Islamic scholars. They have not only been focussing on the Islamic State’s employment of violence as a political means but also

questioned the permissibility of announcing an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria according to Islamic law (cf. Ya‘qubi 2015; Letter to Baghdadi 2014). Interestingly, the movement only rarely explicitly reacted to this criticism, seemingly bluntly ignoring most of the recently published attempts to challenge its legitimacy and authority.

Contesting Modern Borders in the Middle East

Among the main rationales that underlie the Islamic State’s claim to power in the areas that it covers, as well as worldwide, is its criticism of the effects political influence exerted by foreign powers on Arab Muslim countries since the beginning of the 18th century. The movement portrays the social and cultural dynamics that changed the Middle East since the beginning of its colonisation as being introduced by foreign powers with the intent to diminish the importance of Islamic values, norms, and beliefs in the operation of Muslim societies in order to further the ‘crisis of meaning’ (Berger and Luckmann 1995) that befell Arab Muslim societies. In other words, the Islamic State regards modernisation and colonialism as the same thing, the common element being their opposition to supposed traditional Islamic values and order.⁸ By contrast, the Qur‘ān and the Hadith figure as fundamentals on which the cultural sovereignty of the Islamic world are to be re-established, because they are supposed to be a response to “the generalized erosion of systemic ultimate meaning systems [and] the failure of non-religious ideology” (Geoffroy 2004: 39). The Islamic State thus presents itself as solely capable of countering these developments and offers its audience a societal model that is deemed to contribute to the restoration of a glorious past. An important part of this endeavour is the contestation and eradication of national borders in the region that are considered symbols of the physical and artificial separation of territories whose inhabitants are inseparable before God. Writing off these topographical constraints is thus deemed to create the basis for a unification of all mankind under the banner of an Islamic State. Both the “Islamic State of Iraq”, as well as its succeeding entity the “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant”, constantly used their media to promote this idealised historical motif by articulating and visualising their rejection and contestation of the Syrian and Iraqi borders (Günther 2015a: 39–42). But it was only in June 2014, that the recently-announced Islamic State erased and bulldozed the sand berm separating Iraq and Syria, terming it the demolition of “the barriers set up to enforce the crusader partitions of the past century” (Islamic State Report 4: 3). To showcase these military gains, the movement published videos both for Arabic and English audiences entitled “Breaking the Borders” (*kasr al-hudūd*) and “The End of Sykes Picot”, where one of their fighters claimed that “we did not recognize it and we will never recognize it. Insha’Allah this is not the first border we will break; Insha’Allah we will break other borders also” (Al-Hayat 2014, see also Al-I‘tisam 2014).

The Charismatic Appeal of the Islamic State

The strong emphasis on traditional authority the Islamic State claims to represent should not conceal the fact that there are aspects of charismatic domination in the Islamic State’s propaganda that are, to some extent, mirrored by the actions and self-images of its adherents. This is the case in at least two areas, namely, the way the Islamic State frames its leader, the caliph, and the way it portrays its fighters. Both are seen as being in possession of extraordinary personal qualities that

⁸ For a general description of the link between fundamentalism, modernity, and secularity, see Kaden 2014.

guarantee their respective claims to power, although the legitimacy of those charismatic qualifications is deeply linked with traditional authority.

The Caliph

For Weber, charismatic authority is exerted when it is based on a claim to “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber 1978: 241). The case of the Islamic State is somewhat special, since the order that is envisaged by its adherents is not, in fact, to be created by a charismatic leader, but already exists as a traditional order within which a designated leader exerts authority via his extraordinary, charismatic qualities. Whatever charisma is to be found in a traditional order of this kind is hence, in Weber’s term, “routinized” (Weber 1978: 246–254). Charisma can be routinised in various ways and, in its writings, the Islamic State employs two specific means to endow the caliph with extraordinary qualities while maintaining his connection to an established traditional order. Both can be found in the following quote from the abovementioned *This is the Promise of Allah (hādha wa ‘d allāh)*:

“Therefore, the shūrā (consultation) council of the Islamic State studied this matter after the Islamic State – by Allah’s grace – gained the essentials necessary for khilāfah, which the Muslims are sinful for if they do not try to establish. In light of the fact that the Islamic State has no shar’ī (legal) constraint or excuse that can justify delaying or neglecting the establishment of the khilāfah such that it would not be sinful, the Islamic State – represented by ahlul-halli-wal-‘aqd (its people of authority), consisting of its senior figures, leaders, and the shūrā council – resolved to announce the establishment of the Islamic khilāfah, the appointment of a khalīfah for the Muslims, and the pledge of allegiance to the shaykh (sheikh), the mujāhid, the scholar who practices what he preaches, the worshipper, the leader, the warrior, the reviver, descendent from the family of the Prophet, the slave of Allah, Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Awwād Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Muhammad al-Badrī al-Hāshimī al-Husaynī al-Qurashī by lineage, as-Sāmurrā’ī by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdādī by residence and scholarship. And he has accepted the bay’ah (pledge of allegiance). Thus, he is the imam and khalīfah for the Muslims everywhere. Accordingly, the ‘Iraq and Shām’ in the name of the Islamic State is henceforth removed from all official deliberations and communications, and the official name is the Islamic State from the date of this declaration.” (al-‘Adnānī 2014: 5).

First of all, the text makes clear that whatever the qualities of the caliph are, they have been determined within, and are guaranteed by, the actions of “people of authority” (i.e. the *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-‘aqd*) who gain their power from the traditional order in which they are embedded. The text then proceeds to name a number of personal qualities of the caliph, several of which are purely personal traits like “the scholar who practices what he preaches” or “the reviver”. It is notable, however, that these qualities are being mentioned before the caliph is referred to by name. This implies that while the caliph must have these qualities they still are the qualities of the (office of the) caliph, not the qualities of (the person) Abu Bakr. This then is the first form of charismatic authority the Islamic State ascribes to its leader, the “charisma of office” that is based on “a dissociation of charisma from a particular individual, making it an objective, transferrable entity” (Weber 1978: 248). It lends potential stability to the Islamic State’s rule since it provides a justification to replace the current caliph, should he fail or be killed, without damaging the ruling structure.

This dissociation of person and office does not seem to be complete for the text still refers to features of Abu Bakr that point to him as a specific individual. Namely, he is the “descendent from the family of the Prophet, the slave of Allah, Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Awwād Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Muhammad al-Badrī al-Hāshimī al-Husaynī al-Qurashī by lineage, as-Sāmurrā’ī by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdādī by residence and scholarship.” Hence, the “commander of the faithful” is presented as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and his grandson Ḥusayn in an Iraqī lineage (cf. Günther 2015a: 35). This qualification, which is signified by onomastic elements that place genealogical principles as a criterion for legitimate authority, points to a second way the Islamic State routinises charismatic authority, namely by framing it as “hereditary charisma”. The charisma of the Prophet as the prime authority is seen as being able to be “transmitted by heredity; thus that it is participated in by the kinsmen of its bearer” (Weber 1978: 248). Qualifying the caliph in this way is supposed to mirror respect to the Prophet’s house and places its bearers into a – albeit construed – line of continuity providing legitimation by representing all religious, social, and political meanings linked to this descent. The Islamic State thus employs numerous techniques of legitimising the authority of the caliph as an extraordinary, charismatically endowed person while still constraining his authority in a traditional framework.

The Fighters as Charismatic Warriors

Not just the caliph, but also the Islamic State’s fighters, representing the second subgroup within the ruling group (see above), are described as being charismatically qualified by the Islamic State’s media outlets. For instance, in an early issue of Dabiq they are characterised as being free of hypocrisy (Dabiq 3: 25–27). This is supposed to create a contrast to many people who self-identify as Muslims while they adhere to secular ideologies and lifestyles and do not remain faithful to ‘true Islam’, hence becoming hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). Another article in the same series describes the everyday work life in the West as being humiliating to Muslims and sets it against the honourable and powerful existence of the Jihadi whose life is referred to as “larger” and “fuller” than that of other members of the umma (Dabiq 3: 31). More generally, the faith of the mujāhidīn is being characterised as stronger and deeper than that of ordinary Muslims: “it is important to remember that the mujāhidīn are from the people with the most proper creed, especially concerning Allah’s names, attributes, and actions” (Dabiq 2: 23). Addressing America and with reference to God’s protection of the fighting force of the Islamic State an article summarises: “This is where the secret lies. You fight a people who can never be defeated” (Dabiq 4: 7). Here, too, charismatic authority is not detached from other forms of authority. Just as the caliph’s extraordinary qualities are embedded in a traditional order that guarantees their legitimacy, the fighters of the Islamic State are seen as endowed with charismatic abilities insofar as their behaviour conforms to the social, cultural, and military order that is envisaged by the Islamic State.

Weber makes clear that charismatic authority needs to be proven and successful more or less continuously in order to be accepted by those subject to it (see Weber 1978: 242). This constant test to prove oneself (*Bewährung*) can only partially be offset by the traditional or rational integration of charismatic authority. Given their number and important function, the proof of authority is at least as important to pass for the fighters as it is for the caliph. This is why the Islamic State pays special attention to setting up rules for the fighters that at the same time serve to support their

charismatic authority, undergird it with traditional authority, and set up high bars against any deviation on the part of the fighters themselves.⁹

These rules include “[s]incerity to Allah in both word and deed”, to “[a]sk the people of knowledge what is required of you when anything befalls you concerning the obligation of jihad in the path of Allah”, carefulness when accusing others of apostasy, avoiding “self-delusion and the love of being praised”, being just and honest, and to “[b]reak your inner self when it craves something, for not everything that one craves should be sought after” (Dabiq 6: 6–15). Many of the rules of soldierly conduct are presented as being directly sanctioned by God: “Be agreeable with your brothers in everything that brings you closer to Allah and distances you from disobeying Him. Smile at them a lot, and listen to those who are older than you.” – “Be truthful to Allah concerning any responsibility that you’ve been placed in charge of and do not burden yourself with something that you’re not responsible for, for Allah will not ask you about it” (Dabiq 6: 8).

In contrast to a rational order where compliance with external rules of behaviour would be emphasised, the fighters of the Islamic State are expected to display inner qualities that not only make them good soldiers, but that place them in a special relationship with God. In fact, their being good soldiers depends on this relationship, and conversely, their behaviour as soldiers is part of their relationship to God – even smiling at their comrades and being honest about their assignments has an influence on how God sees them. This means that they are permanently subject to *Bewährung* (proving oneself) of their charismatic authority not only by the traditional authority figures who describe the framework of action, but also by the supernatural instance that grants authority in the first place.

The Islamic State as a De Facto State

Through the means discussed in the prior segment, the Islamic State has managed to establish its rule over significant parts of Iraq and Syria. During the process of writing this paper, the borders of the area covered by the movement are all but secure, large swaths have been under the rule of the black banner ever since its large-scale expansion began in June 2014. The question arises whether the structure of this rule can be reduced to the forms of authority already discussed, or whether additional factors come into play. We argue that the exertion of power over the course of a relatively long time has led to a de facto statehood of the Islamic State, at least in its core areas.¹⁰ In the context of an increasing fragmentation of civil societies, which not only affects Syria and Iraq but also the whole region, the Islamic State is a prime example of movements that

“articulate the populations’ need for relative security, for an intelligible frame of political-cultural reference, and for representation when there is no trust in the state. They serve concrete interests in the context of an on-going process of decentralization, whereby power, notably state power, is ever more diffuse.” (Harling and Birke 2015).

⁹ It might be this allusion to the extraordinary that constitutes a major aspect especially for younger foreign fighters to join the Islamic State.

¹⁰ The Islamic State claims to hold at least partial control over considerable parts of Syria and Iraq which it arranges into 16 Provinces (See map at <http://kasmawi.net/?mod=articles&ID=114278&c=245>, 4/26/2016). Beyond these territories, the Islamic State announced its expansion into Libya, the Sinai, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen (Dabiq 5: 22–33) as well as to Khorasan and the Caucasus (Dabiq 7: 33–37), incorporating these areas into its caliphate. Yet, the movement does not seem to exert genuine control over these areas. Cf. Zelin 2015.

The sociopolitical movement that is the Islamic State successfully fills the existing power vacuum as it attempts to consolidate its rule by transforming this activism into “usual practices of everyday life” (Bayat 2005: 894). Since these attempts seem to have been partly successful, they constitute a separate pillar of authority of the Islamic State, making it necessary to analyse them separately.

In addition to the analysis of authority that the Islamic State exerts over its fighters, who function as the administrative staff in Weber’s sense, we must tend to the third relevant group in his sociology of domination, that is, the ruled. The authority structure described above is supplemented by other forms of authority when it comes to affirming domination over the general population. It is these other forms of *regulatory authority* that lend the Islamic State an identity that goes far beyond that of a terror militia. To the extent that the movement exerts regulatory authority we regard it as a quasi-state.

Analysing the Islamic State: a Bourdieuan perspective

This view is based upon Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of statehood (Bourdieu and Clough 1996, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Bourdieu 2013). We are aware that the question of whether the Islamic State can be regarded as a state is itself a point of contention in the current public discourse surrounding the movement, with commentators usually denouncing the movement as a mere terror group or militia. Against this political backdrop, we emphasise that we use the category of statehood in an analytical and formal manner to describe features of the Islamic State’s authority regime that cannot be explained by reference to the abovementioned forms of appeal to the fighter staff. Hence we do not position ourselves with respect to the normative political order that overwhelmingly denies the movement the status as a state. Still, we take seriously the fact that the Islamic State aims at a “profound reorganization of how social life is lived” (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005: 4) across the territories it governs, which is reflected by its “concern for establishing a law-based political order [that] indicates that the group has aspirations for long-term governance” (March and Revkin 2015). In what follows, we present an approach that allows for an assessment of the fulfilment of those aspirations.

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of state, as developed by him in his analysis of the French state and elite schools (Bourdieu and Clough 1996, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), can serve as a useful means of analysis in our context as well. The reasons for this are much the same as for using the Weberian framework above in order to elucidate the power relations of the movement’s leadership with its fighters. A state is not “a well-defined, clearly bounded and unitary reality which stands in relation of externality with outside forces that are themselves clearly identified and defined” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 111).¹¹ Instead, what one finds is a heterogeneous multitude of “agents and categories of agents, governmental and nongovernmental” that exert to a varying degree “authority consisting of the power to *rule* via legislation, regulations, administrative measures” (ibid.). Hence, the extent to which actors possess a regulatory monopoly over material resources and symbolic repertoires determines the statehood of these actors. Given this definition it is not necessary (or even helpful) to look for instances

¹¹ For an overview on similar approaches in other academic disciplines, see Hagmann and Pélcard (2011) and Krohn-Hansen and Nustad (2005).

where the Islamic State is recognised as a state by other political and social entities. Rather, statehood is represented in acts of unopposed regulation of everyday life.

The Islamic State as a Regulatory Force

In the abovementioned atmosphere of political and social sectarianism, the Islamic State has managed to create a powerful and strict regulatory regime in various fields of life. This concerns, first of all, its regulations of everyday life according to the principle of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” so as to make it conform to the religious and ethical standards it prescribes to all people under its rule. These attempts, some of which are described below, are also being used by the Islamic State to garner further legitimacy beyond the fighting mission itself (cf. Dabiq 4: 28–29).

Reports from inside the areas occupied by the Islamic State, scarce as they are, repeatedly point to the Islamic State’s attempt at making political gains by filling the void that was left by the Iraqi and Syrian central government – sometimes long before the latter lost considerable parts of their territory to the movement. In doing so, the Islamic State aims to achieve a long-lasting effect on its subjects by replacing former governmental structures, regulating public life and morals, and providing civil services that support and further the populace’s acceptance of, and commitment to, the Islamic State on a personal and legal level. Regulating sectors such as the cities’ waste management, public transport (Naynawa Media Office 2014b), urban developmental projects (see e.g. al-Anbar Media Office 2014; Naynawa Media Office 2015), and other municipal services (Raqqqa Media Office 2014b), as well as medical services (Dabiq 9: 24–26; Aleppo Media Office 2015a), are seemingly ephemeral to the movement’s efforts, yet they constitute vital components of this state-building project and are explicitly justified as charitable work serving the prosperity of the Muslim community (Aleppo Media Office 2015b).

Among the areas that seem of particular importance to the movement’s regulatory efforts in order to achieve fundamental and long-lasting cultural changes are the juvenile labour and educational systems. In previous years, the Islamic State and its predecessors published footage of occasional instances of street festivals for children that would go along with religious activities. Yet, these efforts aiming at winning over the “hearts and minds” (cf. Dickinson 2009) of the youngest had not been undertaken in a systematic manner. This changed, however, with the movement’s rapid military advancement and the expansion of its territory. In the course of this shift, the Islamic State gained control over public schools and began to establish centres for religious learning (Raqqqa Media Office 2015c), where it imposed curricula that are already being taught in Saudi Arabia (Mamouri 2014). Shortly after its takeover of Mosul, the Islamic State released a decree introducing a new school curriculum coming into effect at the beginning of the new school year (Nabeel 2014; Spencer 2014). According to this document, similar versions of which were released in other cities in Iraq and Syria, any topic is banned from the syllabus that might be in conflict with the movement’s creed such as art, music, and subjects relating to the concepts of nationalism or secularism as well as social and natural sciences that contradict the literalist interpretation of the scriptures (Al-Tamimi 2014; see also Al-Khayr Media Office 2015). These prohibitions also affect the organisation and structure of institutions of higher learning in the territories under the Islamic State’s control (Nabeel 2014). However, protest against these changes was voiced by parents, as well as teachers, with the latter being, according to some reports, subjected to punishment and replacement by foreign adherents of the movement (Allawi 2015).

Reports on the public life in the territories conquered by the Islamic State also repeatedly speak of fighters who form the so-called *rijāl al-ḥisba* that, broadly speaking, oversee public morals in order to enforce the obligation to “commanding right and forbidding wrong” by interfering and punishing violations of religious law committed in the public realm (cf. Ghabin 2009; Klein 2006; Cahen et al. 2015). These men patrol the streets of cities like Raqqa, Mosul, and Falluja in search of nonconforming behaviour, sometimes wearing badges that identify them as *muḥtasibūn* (those who enforce *ḥisba*). This includes checking whether shops are closed during prayer hours and exhorting shop owners to join the community prayer (Naynawa Media Office 2014a), whether the weights used for scales at market stands are adjusted correctly (Falluja Media Office 2014), whether all men of age wear beards (Raqqa Media Office 2015b), and whether women and men are dressed and behave according to the Islamic State’s understanding of decency. *Muḥtasibūn* also search people at checkpoints for forbidden items such as alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes and engage in their public destruction (Raqqa Media Office 2014a; Raqqa Media Office 2015b). They even raid houses of suspected magicians in search for items that are supposedly used to bewitch other people and oversee the suspects’ public execution (Raqqa Media Office 2015a).

Members of the *ḥisba* are not only concerned with the supervision of public morals, but also regulate everyday life as part of the Islamic State’s penitentiary network that consists of Shariah law courts, and police forces and the *muḥtasibūn*, both of which police public and private places and also execute the courts’ decisions (Raqqa Media Office 2015a; Homs Media Office 2015). Crimes and misconduct that would be punished by these institutions can be categorised according to March and Revkin (2015) into “crimes threatening the state and public order, including espionage, treason, collaborating with foreign interests, embezzlement of public funds; crimes against religion or public morality, including adultery, sodomy, blasphemy, apostasy, pornography, selling or consuming drugs and alcohol, and witchcraft; and crimes or torts against particular individuals, which include theft, burglary, home invasion, rape, armed robbery, and murder.” In general, it remains to be seen to what extent compliance with the juridical system of the Islamic State is brought about by sheer coercion, by acceptance of its personnel and contents, or by approval of the religious values behind the rules.

Press reports also speak of the rigid control the Islamic State exerts over public and private media. This concerns its content as well as its use. In order to prevent fighters from giving away their position to Western military forces, the Islamic State’s *General Supervisory Committee (al-lajna al-‘āma al-mushrifā)* issued an order that prohibits the use of Apple devices in battle (Buse and Kuntz 2015: 19). At various checkpoints cell phones are being checked for prohibited or otherwise suspicious content. The Islamic State has also developed a multifaceted media network of its own, whose organisation, evolution, capacities, and strategies cannot be discussed in detail here, but generated special attention among adherents and opponents alike (cf. Farwell 2014; Lombardi 2015; Winter 2015). Content is being provided by the “public relations agency” (Buse and Kuntz 2015: 17) al-Furqan media and several other ‘official’ media outlets¹² that produce sophisticated, high-quality textual and audio-visual media. Dissemination of these media in Arabic, English, and several other languages is organised on a global scale by a variety of channels, such as Twitter and Facebook accounts, archival databases, and internet forums. Moreover, it can be said

¹² Beyond its ‘central’ agencies such as al-Furqan, al-Hayat, and al-I’tisam, which produce and distribute media, the Islamic State established media offices in each of its provinces in Syria and Iraq and a *Sinai Province Media Office* also publishes communicational media.

that the Islamic State's control over its media output has reached a highly advanced stage to the extent that the movement itself has even managed to determine how the so-called "West" imagines it. As Christoph Reuter (2015: 245–246) writes, images which are used as symbolic images accompanying press reports about the movement are, in fact, often produced by the movement's own media agencies and are sold to international press agencies such as AP, AFP, or Reuters, who further sell them to various news sources around the world. It is the same images that illustrate articles in the Islamic State's own media outlets, such as the glossy magazine *Dabiq*, and concurrently accompany press reports and cover stories in *The Atlantic* or *Der Spiegel*. This practice, as Reuter (2015: 245–246) suggests, is a result of the movement's rigid control over media production and distribution, leading to a limitation of photographic testimonies from the Islamic State. As Reuter writes, other imagery mainly consists of blurry videos and photographs taken by activists on the ground with mobile phones under insecure circumstances. Consequently, editors within mass media who are responsible for images in an article about the Islamic State would tend to favour high-resolution images produced by the Islamic State itself over low-resolution images produced by civil-rights activists.

Hence, a particular form of partnership evolves between the movement and mass-media that is characterised by the latter's demand for information and visualisations, on the one hand, and the Islamic State seeking to distribute 'officially approved' content as widely as possible, on the other. Together with its news material, it thus manages to distribute its vision of the sociocultural reality in Iraq and Syria. This in turn lends it more credibility, even among people who are not potentially drawn to that vision. It also helps create an appeal to broader audiences, since the gruesome depictions of the Islamic State's destruction are very much attuned to modern viewing habits (see Harmanshah 2015).

The movement uses these communicational media to disseminate accounts on the "true reality" of its nascent religious regime and the extent to which it would change societies in the Middle East and beyond. It lays out theological and other aspects of its rule in books and brochures published on the internet in the series *al-Himma library (maktabat al-himma)* that primarily addresses Arabic-speaking audiences. Within this series, short versions and summaries of particular documents are published in the form of leaflets that are distributed by the *muhtasibūn* to the public (e.g. Falluja Media Office 2014). From among these leaflets, a brochure on regulating the treatment of female slaves gained widespread attention.¹³ On a local scale, media presentations are being used to spread news of the Islamic State's military advances and its vengeance against defectors and enemy combatants. An instance of this occurred in Raqqa, where in early 2015 video projections were shown of Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh's burning. These examples suggest that the Islamic State has achieved considerable success in establishing a "media system" in the occupied areas.

All of the above mentioned legal and judicial institutions and structures are part of the Islamic State's aim to not only fill the void left by the Syrian and Iraqi government but also to achieve a long-lasting effect on its subjects by replacing these structures and providing governmental services that support and further the populace's acceptance of, and commitment to, the Islamic State on a personal and legal level.

¹³ See <http://www.memrijttm.org/islamic-state-isis-releases-pamphlet-on-female-slaves.html> (accessed September 16, 2015).

Summary and Conclusion

A sociological perspective on the Islamic State's regime paints a surprisingly multi-faceted picture. Its appeal to a traditional order can be regarded as its most pervasive argument to garner obedience. But the Islamic State also manages to forge and maintain alliances on a rational, innerworldly, means-ends basis with various groups.

Our findings are of course tentative given that it is not possible to prove that the means of authority deployed by the Islamic State are, in fact, viewed as the legitimate grounds upon which its fighters and the people ruled by it adhere to it. Some of the Western adolescents that make their way to Iraq and Syria might be drawn to it not so much due to a theological pondering of their duties as Muslims, but because they identify their crises of adolescence with the Islamic State's cause of liberating Muslims worldwide. Many of the people under its rule might not so much conform because of their admiration for the Islamic State's measures of communal organisation, but because of the sheer threat of violence against any deviation.

Still, these means of authority exist as programmatic and practical features of the social movement and quasi-state that is the Islamic State. Its persistence in the face of military and political opposition suggests that the sources of authority described in this paper are at least in part salient. Explaining his basic sociological terms, Weber remarked that no power relationship of people over people is a one-way street. Rather, for a rule to be stable, the ruled need to develop a belief in the legitimacy of the order they are subject to. Naturally, the transition between obedience out of fear of punishment (itself a form of rational domination) and obedience out of a sense of legitimacy are highly fluent (Weber 1978: 31). From this perspective, the Islamic State's various claims to authority can be seen as legitimacy constructs that are offered to the population in order to increase the chance of their going beyond obedience out of fear. While it is still uncertain to what extent, and based upon which legitimating narrative, it is seen as legitimate by the ruled, each month that passes with the Islamic State being relatively uncontested makes it appear more plausible that it is, indeed, much more than a mere terrorist movement.

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