

The Islamic State and its Implications on European Immigrants

Farinaz Aryanfar



Although scholars like Eriksen (2014) depict a colorful case about the globalization of mobility, which, in his opinion, has led to a more pleasant life for people through mass tourism and easy transportations, there is also a security issue rising for Europe when looking at the Islamic State's recruitment of Muslims in Europe. Declaring immigrants as threats (Grady 2014, Mansur 2010), on the other hand, is a form of generalization of all immigrants as 'security issues' that is not only simplistic, but also un-academic.

This article will therefore examine to what extent the Islamic State and its implications can be explained through globalization theories. In order to do that, first the Islamic State will be examined through theories. Thereafter, the issue of security will be looked into in the case of the European migrants' generations that join the Islamic State, while also looking at discourses of security theories. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn in order to answer this article's research question.

The Islamic State is not a local movement, but rather a movement that attracts members from around the world through electronic communication networks (BBC 2014). The message of the Salafist Islamic State was not spread traditionally, but through electronic communication networks such as the media and the internet. Here the significance of the information technologies becomes apparent, where there is not only an effect of the information age on a traditional movement, but also on the counterpropaganda by the western countries against IS membership, which is spread through the media as well. Furthermore, one can argue that IS is a Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) or a social movement, because of its globalism as well as the centrality of its ideals and values. However, IS is not advocating a cause for others, which Keck and Sikkink (1999) consider essential for TANs, and information is not the core of the relationship between the members with which they gain leverage over powerful governments or organization. Moreover, IS can be seen from a post-colonial perspective, where their movement depicts a post-colonial resistance trying to form an identity in contrast to everything that is considered part of the colonial powers that destroyed their golden age. However, it can also be seen from a different perspective, if we apply the dependency theory. In this case, IS' Salafist core can be seen as a materialist group that wants to go back

to the science-producing and developed 'golden ages' of Islam, by means of a return to tradition.

The Islamic State's recruitment of European Muslims has raised a security issue, one which is concerned about the European Jihadists possibly pleading acts of terrorism in their host countries (BBC 2014, Erlanger 2014). Terrorism in this case means taking people's lives, or properties, thus physical threats and economic threats (Buzan 1983). It can be argued that joining Jihad is a form of transnational activism, that these migrant generations participate in because immigrants' civil rights are not always fully granted, to which they respond by strengthening themselves; forming networks based on their religion or ethnicity (Eriksen 2014).

However, according to John Esposito, it is not looking for a strong network that is the key attracting factor for these European Jihadists, it is rather a case of searching for a new identity and belonging for Muslims (CS Monitor 2014). CS Monitor also concludes that host countries do not equip the migrants with a strong identity, therefore the migrants choose for a troublesome, hazardous identity. This line of thinking could be problematic since it might generalize any other identity than what 'European' countries provide as 'the other' identity and thus as a threat. Thinking in a dichotomy of a coherent and acceptable 'European identity' vis-à-vis any identity that is unacceptable and 'non-European' is what Said (2010) calls Orientalism. Furthermore, threats in this sense are not about the physical or economic aspect, but about power and control of people's identities. While physical threats by European Jihadists are real issues because of IS' tendency towards violence, Orientalist discourses can lead to other problems that divide the nation into segments of 'us' (natives) and 'them' (migrants), and even generate security measures towards 'all' Muslims or 'all' migrants. This is exactly the kind of behavior that gives incentives to the migrants to search for other, possibly violent identities.

Another way to look at the transnational networking of Jihadists is applying Levitt and Schiller's theory (2004) and analyzing the issue from a transnational social field perspective. From that perspective one can deduce that being a Muslim is the transnational way of being, but the moment these individuals join the Jihad, they are showing a way of social belonging which signals a particular identity. Migrants might

or might not have had this identity before, since the social belonging and being may ebb and flow across time. Moreover, there are many other Muslims in Europe denouncing the acts of the Islamic State (Markoe 2014).

Building on these theories, it can be concluded that the Islamic State is extremely inconsistent. It uses modern digital technology for its propaganda, but ironically wants to go back to traditional Islam. It seems to be a post-colonial movement, but is dependent on capitalist definitions such as 'development' to define its glorious identity. Furthermore, the rise of European recruitments of IS has led to articles with a dichotomist 'us' and 'them' mindset that goes back to the colonial style of thought, and assumes that migrants' generations having any non-western identity can lead to a security hazard. Here security transforms from a physical threat, which is legitimate, to a power controlling discourse of security that limits individuals' (that is Muslims' or migrants') freedom. This style of thought can lead to the problematic outlook that 'all' migrants or 'all' Muslims are hazardous to the national security. Instead, this essay suggests that the reasons that lead to the emergence of migrants' social belonging to violence be examined.



By Farinaz Aryanfar

Farinaz Aryanfar is a Dutch-Iranian researcher focusing on conflict analysis in the Middle East. She has a Bachelor's degree in Middle Eastern studies from Leiden University, and a Master's degree in Global Affairs from Gothenburg University. As an active analyst in media, she received the 'Most in the News Women' prize in the Netherlands in 2009. Ms. Farinaz has presented her papers at several conferences including World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (2014). Currently, she is studying the polarization threat of European societies as an effect of Islamic extremism (2015-2016).