Achieving Security by Suicide – A Way of Ensuring a Forever Jihad?

A narrative analysis of the Islamic State's perception of identity and security

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze how identity and potential ontological insecurity are expressed in the Islamic State's narrative and how this may explain the use of suicide attacks. This is done by analyzing the language in the Islamic State's official magazines between 2014 to 2017 through a theoretical lens of ontological security. The theory of ontological security centers around the threat to an organization's identity rather than a physical threat, which can lead to existential anxiety and result in irrational behavior. The study uses narrative analysis to structure the empirical material, which focuses on how story-telling shapes our understanding and meaning of the world we live in. Based on the theory of ontological security, four themes are structuring the analysis: the construction of "the other" and "the self", gender roles, religion as an identity, and chosen traumas and glories. The results show that the Islamic State's ontological insecurity results from an increase in liberal views and thoughts that differ from Islam. To regain their ontological security, the organization creates an identity based on war and conflict at the expense of their physical security. This shows that suicide attacks are used to strengthen their identity and ontological security by creating a continuous conflict.

Keywords: Terrorism, the Islamic State, identity, suicide attacks, ontological security, narratives

Word count: 9998

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1   Introduction

The threat of terror attacks from Islamist terrorism organizations has intensified in the twenty-first century. On September 11th, 2001, the world witnessed al-Qaeda's ability to shock the entire world, sparking the "war on terror" with the goal of eradicating Islamist terrorism worldwide. Since the September 11th attacks, however, new terrorist organizations with an Islamist ideology have emerged. In the 2010s, the Islamic State spread fear and terror in many parts of the world, and the group continues to have followers worldwide that continue to execute attacks against both governments and civilians. The Islamic State has become notorious for their brutal methods, with suicide attacks serving as a vital strategy in their warfare (Fishman, 2021). Suicide attacks increased dramatically during the most intensive years of the Islamic State's conflict. In 2015, when the Islamic State was at its peak, there were an average of 76 suicide attacks per month around the world. This can be compared to an average of 17 suicide attacks in 2011 (Global Terrorism Database). According to Winter (2017: 24), the Islamic State "has been perpetrating suicide attacks at a higher rate per month than all other groups combined". However, during this time, the organization also aimed to establish a legitimate state for all Muslims worldwide, governed according to Islamic thought and law (Fishman, 2021: 59). The question that arises is how the idea of establishing a legitimate state with a well-functioning government structure can be compatible with the frequent use of suicide attacks against civilians and whomever they perceive as their enemies?

This thesis examines the Islamic State's rhetorical justifications for using suicide attacks against their enemies, specifically by focusing on themes such as identity perception and ontological insecurity. This is done by deploying a narrative analysis and studying the Islamic State's rhetoric in their official magazines from the theoretical framework of ontological security. By doing this, the intention is to examine how the perceived threat to their identity can explain their frequent use of suicide attacks as a strategy in warfare.

1.1 Purpose and research question

This thesis aims to look at how identity, and specifically the perceived threat to the identity, here referred to as ontological insecurity, is visible in the Islamic State's narrative and how this, in turn, can explain the organization's behavior.

This has resulted in the following research question:

- *How are perceptions of identity and ontological insecurity evident in the Islamic State's narrative, and how can this explain the organization's frequent use of suicide attacks?*

Based on previous research in the field of ontological security, which is further explained in sections 3.2. and 4., the hypothesis suggests that the Islamic State's use of suicide attacks is a strategy resulting from ontological insecurity rather than motivated only by religious or ideological objectives, and that this can be found in the Islamic State's narrative. The study will examine the Islamic State's notion of identity and the threat against them by analyzing the language used in their propaganda to test this. The goal of examining the organization's narrative is to better understand the motivations behind terrorism and violent behavior, such as suicide attacks, so that future attacks might be prevented.

2 Background of the Islamic State

This chapter explains the Islamic State's history in order to put the organization's foundation and ideology into context, as well as how they use media to promote their message.

2.1 Foundation

The Islamic State's history dates back to 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The invasion sparked a wave of Muslim fighters to join various insurgency movements, with mainly one organization, called al-Qaeda, that rose and attracted numerous followers, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who later would lay the foundation for the Islamic State. After the terrorist attacks in New York City on September 11th, 2001, al-Zarqawi established al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). This resulted in a conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq, with AQI carrying out multiple attacks against the Shia community as well as declaring war on the American invaders. In 2006, al-Zarqawi was killed in an air raid by the United States, leading the organization to transform from an insurgent movement to a terrorist organization that primarily operated underground (Fishman, 2021).

In 2011, during the Arab Spring revolution, the organization seized a great opportunity to recruit new members and conquer territory. Between 2011 and 2014, thousands of foreign fighters worldwide traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the organization now called the Islamic State. In March 2013, the organization captured the city of Raqqa in Syria, which became their official capital, and in June 2014, the organization achieved one of their most significant victories with the seizure of Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. This led the organization's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to declare their territory as the official Islamic State (ibid.). At the peak of their power, in the fall of 2014, the Islamic State controlled an area of approximately 100.000 square kilometers and over 11 million people (Jones et al.,

2017: xi). The idea of the Islamic caliphate has for a very long time been an essential part of Islamic thought, and for many Jihadists, the declaration of the Islamic State in 2014 by al-Baghdadi was perceived as a major success (Edwards 2019: 14).

During the 2010s, the Islamic State also carried out multiple attacks in Western states, such as the Paris attacks in November 2015 (BBC, 2015) and the attack on the subway and airport in Brussels in 2016 (BBC, 2016). There have also been several attacks in Western states which were not officially orchestrated by the Islamic State but were carried out by individuals that sympathize with their ideology and cause, such as the attack in Nice in July 2014 and the attack in Stockholm in April 2017 (Anderson & Selsoe Sorensen, 2017). Despite the Islamic State's advancement abroad during this time, the organization suffered significant setbacks domestically after 2015, and in the spring of 2019, the American president Donald Trump declared the organization defeated after years of intense warfare (Trump, 2019). In October 2019, the leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in an air raid, marking the end of the Islamic State as it once was (Fishman, 2021).

Even though the organization no longer holds any territory in Iraq or Syria, their ideology still lives on. Several insurgency groups in African states have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and continue to execute attacks against both governments and civilians; for example, the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP), which is a branch of the terrorist organization Boko Haram (Zenn, 2020). Many former members of the Islamic State are still being held in prisons and camps in Iraq and Syria. There is a worldwide concern growing that the inability to deal with the imprisoned members will lead to further radicalization and threats against many states, especially regarding the many hundreds of children who are currently living and growing up in an environment where the Islamic State's ideology is still very strong (Vianna de Azevedo, 2020). At the beginning of 2022, the Islamic State orchestrated an attempt to free their captured and imprisoned members in the city of Hasakah in northeastern Syria, resulting in over 500 people killed (Loveluck & Cahlan, 2022). This shows how the Islamic State continues to be a threat today and why it is vital to research their motivations further.

2.2   Ideology

The ideology that the Islamic State is based on derives from *Salafi jihadism*. Salafism is one branch of Islam that adheres to a literal interpretation of the Quran, where the Salafis "claim to be engaged in the process of purifying Muslim society in accordance with their teachings and the designation Salafi is prestigious among Muslims because it denotes the earliest and therefore authentic version of Islam" (Haykel 2009: 33).

The Salafi movement can be divided into three categories: the purists, the political, and the jihadists. They all acknowledge that *tawhid*, the notion that God is supreme and is the universe's sole creator and sovereign, is at the heart of the religion (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 208). To protect this notion, Muslims must adhere to the Quran's teachings and live as the Prophet Muhammad did throughout his lifetime. However, the difference between the jihadists, such as the Islamic State and Salafism's other divisions, is the issue of *manhaj*, which refers to the "path or method they live and implement their beliefs and call" (Haykel, 2009: 47). For Salafi *jihadists*, this method involves using violence against the existing political order, with the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic State (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 225; Haykel, 2009: 47).

2.3   Media organization

The use of both traditional media outlets such as magazines and newspapers, and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, has been a central part of the Islamic State's strategy during the last decade. Using media to spread propaganda to radicalize and recruit new followers has been a vital method for the organization since its founding (Kaati, 2017). According to several studies, the content of the Islamic State's media distribution consists of several themes, such as military, governance, commercial, religious, and lifetime propaganda (Milton, 2016). In traditional Western media, brutal killings and beheadings often get the most attention (Kaati, 2017). However, according to Milton (2016), only 9 percent of the

organization's media releases depict this brutality. The organization's purposes with the media production are to gain support and sell the notion of a successful, thriving caliphate where the word of God is what governs the state (Gates & Prodder, 2015: 109). The majority of the material produced by the organization is in Arabic, although they also publish material in other languages, such as English, French, and Russian. Between 2014 and 2017, the organization launched its English-speaking magazine Dabiq, which later got renamed to Rumiyah (Milton, 2016: 49).

3 Previous research

This research incorporates ideas from several fields within security and conflict, with narrative research, ontological security, and suicide attacks being the focus. When combining the research and literature in these three fields, a gap in the literature is visible since the research on motivations behind suicide attacks based on the narratives of terrorist organizations together with ontological security is minimal. A hypothesis is also derived from the previous research, which is further explained below. This section will present the existing literature and explain how these different fields are relevant to this thesis, as well as how this study fits into the previous research.

3.1 The narratives of terrorist organizations

Edwards (2019: 13) stated that "understanding the rhetoric ISIS uses to communicate to its supporters, to the Islamic community and to the world in general offers an opportunity to ultimately combat the group's message". This is especially essential at a time when the Islamic State might be territorially defeated, but when the ideas of the organization still live on. According to Zelin (2015: 90), the primary theme of the organization's propaganda is the presentation of themselves as competent winners while the enemies are unjust unbelievers. Most of the propaganda is about the greatness of the Caliphate and the good parts of the state, such as the surrounding nature and the institutional services they provide (ibid: 92). This plays into the bigger narrative of "the myth of the Caliph", a myth that became strengthened when al-Baghdadi declared the Islamic Caliphate in 2014 (Edwards, 2019: 14). The research about narratives of Islamist terror organizations singles out the legitimacy narrative as the most important one, that the organization is justified in its violent deeds because of the injustices that Muslims have endured throughout history (Schmid, 2014; Scott & Podder, 2015). According to Schmid (2014), who

has studied the narrative of Al-Qaeda, they portray a Zionist-Christian alliance as the reason for the problems in Muslim countries, urging for the replacement of the political system in these countries with a system based on Sharia laws and theocracy. This narrative can be found in other Islamist terror organizations, where concepts such as liberal democracy and freedom of speech are unachievable and unjust (Gunaratna & Hennessy, 2012: 3). To achieve an Islamist society, all Muslims must adhere to violent jihad, legitimized through the perception of the enemy as an existential threat (Choueiri, 1996: 31; Gates & Podder, 2015: 113).

However, these narratives are not exclusive to Islamist terror organizations; they can be found in all violent organizations in various forms. According to a study by Marcks and Pawels (2020: 3), far-right extremist organizations have similar rhetoric, and they state that "far-right propaganda centers on depicting threats and orchestrating myths of victimhood while simultaneously promoting slogans of cultural superiority and physical strength". Two fundamental themes emerge from the far-right narrative: insecurity, referring to a physical threat, and extinction, referring to threat to the group's identity (ibid.) In some far-right narratives, religion also plays a role, but instead of Islam, Christianity legitimizes the conduct of violent acts (Castle, Kristiansen & Shifflett, 2020: 261). The Bible, in this case, provides a religious justification for the members of Christian far-right organizations in their call of violence and enables dehumanization of the enemy (ibid.: 263) in the same way as the Quran does for Islamist organizations.

There has for a time been a debate within terrorism studies regarding the focus on Islamist terrorism compared to the increasing threat from far-right terrorism. According to Schuurman (2019: 476), this has resulted in a perception of terrorism as being solely tied to Islam. However, as shown here, the narratives of terrorist organizations share common features in both Islamist terrorism and far-right terrorism. This means that by not solely focusing on the religious motivations behind suicide attacks, the framework of this research could also be adapted to far-right terrorist organizations, mitigating some of the potential criticism of the continuous focus on Islamist terrorism.

Identity is clearly perceived as a central theme in the research on terrorist organizations' narratives. This demonstrates the importance of examining identity narratives to comprehend the motivations underlying violent action. Ontological security can further help with this, as explained in the following section.

3.2 Ontological security

By looking at actors' narratives in international relations, it is possible to detect themes such as identity perceptions and experienced threats. This is related to the theory and research about ontological security, which stems from Anthony Giddens (1991) theory of human existence, which focuses on the individual's self-identity. According to Giddens, one's self-identity is founded on routine and relationships with others, where trust is the most basic requirement for maintaining one's ontological security, i.e., the belief that the world is what it appears to be. Suppose the individual's identity becomes questioned or shaken, that would lead to a feeling of ontological *in*security, which results in existential anxiety, causing the individual to make irrational choices and actions (Giddens 1991).

Since Giddens, the research about ontological security has progressed from focusing solely on people to addressing collective and state behavior. Kinnvall and Mitzen (2016) argue that thinking about state behavior from the standpoint of ontological security rather than just physical security can help us understand conflict and war in new ways. Forces such as globalization can cause states to experience ontological insecurity, which may explain the increasing nationalism in many states (Kinnvall, 2004). In India, the search for ontological security in relation to India's role in the world, affected by rapid socio-economic and political changes, has resulted in the securitization of female bodies. The idea of "the Mother nation" has led to the belief that Hindu women need to be protected while violence against minority women is justified, which ultimately led to the Delhi rape case in 2012 (Kinnvall, 2017). The refugee crisis in 2015 was portrayed as an existential threat by some states and groups in the European Union, leading to an increase in nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments by large parts of the population, "despite the contrasting fact that Europe has been thriving for the longest peace period since WWII (Kaunert, de Deus Pereira and Edwards, 2020). Another example of state behavior tied to ontological insecurity is the US response and actions following the terrorist attacks on 11th of September 2001. The fear and existential anxiety resulting from the terror attacks were instead channeled into anger, leading the United States and the CIA to torture and abuse their detainees in the so-called "war on terror" (Steele 2008). According to Steele (2008), these

measures, along with the invasion of Iraq, were considered necessary to secure the United States' identity and protect them from an existential threat.

What is evident here is that much of the research on ontological security in international relations has focused on how states perceive their ontological security and what strategies and actions they employ in response to their experience of ontological (in)security. However, the perspective of violent organizations has not been researched as much, particularly not by looking at their narrative and rhetoric. This study's hypothesis suggests that suicide attacks are used by the Islamic State in the same way that the United State used torture and the invasion of Iraq, to regain ontological security (Steele, 2008). To further understand this, next section will review how suicide attacks are used as a strategy.

3.3   Suicide attacks as a strategy

The use of suicide attacks has become synonymous with certain terrorist organizations, particularly the Islamist terror branch, which has been overrepresented in the statistics since the beginning of the 21st century (Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2009: 549). The use of suicide attacks by terrorist organizations has been extensively researched with studies both on the motivations behind them and how they are used as a strategy for violent organizations. According to Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman (2009), the perpetrator's cultural identity significantly impacts the motivation to commit violent acts in general and suicide attacks in particular. This is partly why the Islamist organizations are overrepresented in the statistics since the defense of the faith is a crucial incentive behind the acts. The belief that the families of suicide bombers are offered rewards after an attack reinforces the belief that suicide attacks are heroic and honorable (Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2009: 550). Kruglanski et al. (2009: 333) also identify the ideological motivations as fundamental causes, as well as personal experiences and a sense of social duty and obligation. Individual traumas can lead to the person looking for significant restoration, ultimately leading to the person committing a suicide attack in the name of a terrorist organization to find a collective significance. Social pressure may also play a role in the motivations,

where the collective forces become so intense that a person commits a suicide attack to satisfy others (ibid: 348-349).

Other studies have looked at suicide attacks from a more strategic standpoint. Terrorist organizations' use of suicide attacks, according to Acosta (2016: 181), strengthens long-term support for the group. The strategy "directly enhance the likelihood of organizational survival" (Acosta 2016: 181) by increasing recruitment and support. Low-level organizations tend to use this strategy to gain publicity and attention, while older organizations utilize it to "keep up with the times" and avoid losing supporters and status. The study by Acosta (2016) showed that out of 310 militant organizations active between 1980 and 2013, organizations that adopt a strategy of suicide attacks survive longer than those that do not.

The previous research in all these fields clearly demonstrates the importance of identity, both in narratives, ontological security, and as a motivation for suicide attacks. Therefore, identity is also an essential aspect of this thesis, which aims to incorporate these fields into one study. Identity has clearly been included in the previous research about suicide attacks. This demonstrates the importance of individual identity in motivating suicide attacks, which is also a core aspect of this thesis. However, no research has been done regarding ontological insecurity (which clearly is part of the identity) as a driving force for suicide attacks. This thesis aims to fill a gap within these fields by looking at terrorist organizations' narratives from an ontological security standpoint in order to understand the motivations behind the strategy of deploying suicide attacks. Based on the previous research, this study will be guided by a theory-derived hypothesis that emphasizes that the Islamic State's use of suicide attacks results from an experience of ontological insecurity which is visible in their narrative.

4   Theoretical framework

In order to answer how the Islamic State is motivating suicide attacks by drawing on their perception of identity, the theory about ontological security is utilized to articulate the identity-creating mechanisms that the organization is using in their language. The theory of ontological security and the different identity-strengthening mechanisms will be further explained in this section.

4.1   Ontological security

Ontological security can be defined as "security as being, a sense of confidence and trust that the world is what it appears to be" (Kinnvall, 2004: 746), and ontological (in)security is something that all units of society; individuals, organizations, and states, can experience. This thesis aims to examine the Islamic State's experience of ontological insecurity, therefore, it is the organization that will be the primary focus. The routinized behavior and relationships with others maintain the ontological security of the group, and events occurring outside the group's control can shake the group's identity, resulting in existential anxiety. As a result, the group is forced to seek and adopt a new, stable identity (Steele, 2008: 3). Overturning events that impact the group's identity can be one-time occurrences like the terror attacks or a more long-term condition that increases over time, like globalization (Kinnvall, 2017: 99).

In the process of the group trying to adopt a new identity, a set of mechanisms emerges that helps the group to create their identity in relation to others. One of these mechanisms is the construction of "the other" (Kinnvall, 2004: 752), which is produced by a biographical narrative that establishes a sense of "us" and "them", which strengthens the identity of the group (Steele, 2017: 78). Movements such as nationalism and religion enhance this by reinforcing the notion of "the other" by creating in- and outgroups, people who share the same ideology or religion and

those who do not (Kinnvall, 2017: 97). This is often helped by the construction of a "chosen trauma" or a "chosen glory", a story that describes the "the mental recollection of a calamity that befell a group's ancestors and includes information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings and defenses against unacceptable thought" (Kinnvall 2004: 755). In times of ontological insecurity, a chosen trauma or glory is frequently utilized to provide comfort, where hatred for the enemy "becomes the link among the present, the future and a re-created past" (Steele, 2017: 72). By using a chosen trauma or glory, the group can refocus their attention and insecurity on something else by using the ancestors' history to create an identity around. This is especially effective in religious communities where religious history is utilized to demonstrate "how the nation used to be" (Kinnvall, 2004: 759)

Gender roles and masculinity also play a significant role in bolstering the group's identity, where a gender hierarchy in the global system shapes their perception and, therefore, also affects the strategies employed by the group to strengthen their identity (Steele, 2017: 73). This means that, according to Sjoberg (2012: 30), organizations with motivations stemming from a hyper-masculine perspective are expected to be more aggressive than those arguing for equality between genders and that are using a language that does not express hyper-masculine rhetoric. By examining autobiographical narratives and self-representations of the organization, the language about gender can therefore reveal a lot about the eventual ontological insecurities they might experience, which also serves as a basis for the use of irrational behavior or an increase in violence (Steele, 2017: 78).

It is also worth noting that organizations can experience stable ontological security but at the expense of physical security, where a more permanent state of conflict, for instance, is seen as a better alternative from the standpoint of ontological security than the ending of a conflict where the ontological security can be experienced as shaken (Mitzen, 2006: 347). This is because conflict resolution necessitates a shift in conduct and perception of "the other". This change could thereby lead to ontological insecurity, even if this means a possibility of physical security. According to Rumelili (2015: 59), the parts in a prolonged conflict securitize the perception of "the other" to ensure their ontological security, and when one of the parts changes this narrative, the feeling of ontological insecurity occurs.

Apart from the need to recreate a new, stable identity following traumatic or "identity-shaking" events, this can also result in the group reinforcing specific behaviors. These actions and behaviors can also be seen as increasing the national identity in order to re-establish a sense of ontological security (Innes & Steele, 2014: 24). On the other hand, these activities may not necessarily stem from a rational standpoint; on the contrary, these actions might instead worsen a group's physical security. This supports Mitzen's (2006) and Rumelili's (2015) claim that ontological security and physical security are not always mutually exclusive. Steele (2008: 95) states that "in pursuing self-identity needs, a state can completely jeopardize its own physical security" and that analyzing certain behavior from the perspective of ontological security can explain actions where conventional theories and explanations are inadequate.

This study will analyze how identity-creating mechanisms are expressed in the narratives of the Islamic State from the perspective of ontological (in)security by looking at the group's autobiographical narrative. It will also examine whether these potential ontological insecurities may affect the group's use of suicide attacks, based on the hypothesis which suggests that the Islamic State is using suicide attacks to strengthen their ontological security, in the same way as described by Steele (2008: 95) and Innes & Steele (2014: 24).

5 Method and research design

In this section, the methodological framework will be presented, and the selected method will be discussed in terms of validity and reliability.

5.1 Narrative analysis

The definition of *narrative* has been frequently debated, but Robertson (2012: 229) defines narrative as an *oral or written presentation of something that has happened, a structure of events into a plot*. Stories about various fates and the world around us are always present in our daily lives, and storytelling has been a consistent feature in every group and society for centuries. Stories, or narratives as they are referred to here, can help people gain a greater knowledge of other people's lives and hardships while also reinforcing group bonds and making the group more resentful of others. Narrative can also be used for political purposes, to convey a message and elicit emotional responses. However, the narrative is more than just a story; it helps the human brain capture and make sense of complex events and form identities (Oppermann, 2018: 272).

To research and study narrative, a structured analysis that focuses on specific narrative elements is required. There is no consensus within the academic literature on the best way to perform analysis; rather, there are a variety of approaches to studying narrative. Chatman (1987: 19) argues that a narrative is made up of two parts: (1) History - the "what" of the narrative, concerned with what the content of the narrative is and what is happening in the narrative; (2) Discourse – the "how" of the narrative, concerned with how the content is being delivered. This is significant because it demonstrates the broad reach of narratives, including both a series of events that form a story as well as emotions and actions. Within the first part, the history of the narrative, many scholars agree that the narrative should be examined from a perspective of the beginning, middle, and end, and that the overall

plot of the story should be the primary focus, regardless of the analytical framework used (Wibben, 2011: 45; Papadakis, 2003: 262). The second part is, on the other hand, more challenging to articulate easily. *Discourse* can be defined as language that produces meaning and offers legitimacy to events in the real world (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 309). In this part of the narrative, Papadakis (2003: 262) other two criteria are essential; "Self" and "Other". These are used to depict and frame both the own and adversary organizations, aiming to legitimize a particular behavior or event. However, it is also essential to consider the narrator's overall point-of-view, referred to as *focalization*. Focalization can be defined as "the relationship between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented" (Wibben, 2011: 48), and it produces subjectivity in the narrative. The emotions and potential existential anxiety based on ontological insecurity may be seen in the narrator's description of the character's emotions and thoughts. While "the other" and "the self" reveal how the enemy and the own group are explained, the focalization focuses more on the feelings in the history, how the group is experiencing different situations, and revealing the feelings behind the history (ibid.: 48).

5.2   Material

The material used for this study includes 1508 pages of English-speaking online publications distributed by the Islamic State between 2014 and 2017. The material is derived from Jihadology.net, a database for jihadi primary source material founded by Aaron Y. Zelin. The magazine "Dabiq" was published in 15 issues between June 2014 and August 2016, after which it changed its name to "Rumiyah" and published 13 issues between November 2016 and June 2017. The material is issued by Al-Hayat Media Centre, the Islamic State's media organization. They claim that the intention is to "convey the message of the Islamic State in different languages to unify the Muslims under one flag" (IS, Dabiq, 2014, 2:43). Every issue is approximately 40 to 80 pages long and contains debate articles, news from the Caliphate, reports, and other articles written primarily by members of the Islamic State. Some pieces are written by hostages, like the British journalist John Cantlie, who has been held captive by the group since 2014 (BBC, 2020).

The selection of material for the analysis is based on patterns in the language of the Islamic State. The pattern in the material is, in turn, based on the themes set out by the theoretical framework, which are further laid out by guiding questions derived from Papadakis (2003) and Wibben (2011), further explained in section 5.3. Using this framework and asking questions to the material makes it easier to detect the patterns in the Islamic State's language, which forms the foundation for the analysis offered in section 6.

5.3   Operationalization

To put the theoretical framework into practice, it must be operationalized into specific factors that will be employed in combination with the method of narrative analysis to analyze the material. Therefore, the operationalization will consist of the most prominent identity-creating mechanisms in ontological security (Kinnvall, 2004; Steele, 2008). The categories by Papadakis (2003) and the element of focalization (Wibben, 2011) will help structure the research and identify the identity-creating mechanisms in the empirical material. Based on this, these questions will guide the analysis:

- The construction of "the other" and "the self".

  - *What is the overall plot in the narrative?*
  - *How does the Islamic State describe "us" and "them"?*

- The description of gender roles and masculinity.

  - *How does the Islamic State's rhetoric produce gender roles and masculinity?*

- Religion as a source of community and identity.

  - *How is religion used to strengthen the organization and their identity within the Islamic State?*

- The portrayal of a "chosen trauma" and a "chosen glory".

  - *How does the Islamic State portray and use historical events in its language?*
  - *How does the Islamic State's rhetoric reflect focalization (the group's emotions and opinions regarding certain events)?*

5.4 Validity and reliability

Narrative analysis is a type of textual analysis typically seen in the same category as discourse and qualitative content analysis. However, narrative analysis is, in a sense, broader than the others. As previously noted, there is no consensus on the ideal way to conduct a narrative analysis since this is dependent on the material analyzed and the research's stated intentions. Because of the single-n case selection, which attempts to assess the message and story in the language in a specific case, the broader nature of narrative analysis serves the objective of this study well. This results in a high level of internal validity since the intensive focus on one case (in this study, the terror organization the Islamic State) leads to a thorough analysis of the characteristics that are unique to this case. However, because a single-n case selection does not make the conclusions generalizable, it also means a low external validity (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 172). This has to do with narrative analysis's "interpretation" aspect, which is sometimes criticized. Because of the broad nature of narrative analysis and the inability to find consensus among scholars on a more defined framework, the narrative analysis relies on the researcher's interpretation. The results of a narrative analysis will always be based on the researcher's previous experiences and thoughts, which implies that the outcomes may differ depending on who the researcher is (Wibben, 2011: 52; Robertson, 2012: 252). This has implications for reliability, which means that another researcher must be able to replicate the methodological process and obtain the same results. Because of the interpretation by the researcher, this test of reliability could be criticized when conducting narrative analysis.

However, even if some scholars criticize narrative analysis's interpretative aspect, this aspect makes it so valuable. As previously stated, narrative and storytelling are vital aspects of every human's life and studying narrative can help us comprehend power structures and the motivations behind certain behaviors (Robertson, 2012: 221). Robertson (2012: 225) also makes a point by arguing that the individual cannot be separated from the collective, therefore, we can comprehend the collective perspective by analyzing a person's narrative. The method's interpretative nature makes it particularly flexible in relation to nuances in the language, allowing it to visualize minority voices and illustrate things that

would be missed in a more technical approach (ibid.: 226). Having a detailed methodological framework with straightforward questions and concepts to look for when conducting the analysis increases the reliability and makes the empirical material easier to structure (Oppermann & Spencer, 2016: 688). By operationalizing the theory of ontological security and building a framework based on Papadakis's (2003) categories together with the element of focalization (Wibben, 2011), the intention is to mitigate some of the criticism concerning reliability since this articulate evident categories and questions to use when looking at the material. This is further laid out in section 5.4.

Another critical aspect of conducting a narrative analysis is having reliable primary sources, where it is visible for the reader and possible future researchers to look through the material to verify the results and arguments being presented (Robertson, 2012: 253). The use of primary sources in interpretative textual analysis improves the reliability of the study because the material has "minimal or no mediation between the document/artefact and its creator" (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 329). This study is based on material produced by the Islamic State itself in English, ensuring that no nuances in the language are lost when translating from Arabic to English. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that since the material originates straight from the Islamic State and was created to recruit and radicalize their followers; it cannot be considered "neutral" or "objective". This is nevertheless not the intention of this research; the subjective opinions and thoughts which are at the heart of narrative analysis are the focus of this analysis. Compared to a material selection of only a few primary sources from only one point in time, it is also easier to draw reliable and more general conclusions about the author from this large amount of material spanning over several years.

6 Analysis

This part will present the analysis of the empirical material in five parts: the construction of "the other" and "the self", the description of gender roles and masculinity, religion/nationalism as an identity definer, the portraying of a "chosen trauma" and a "chosen glory", together with an overall discussion regarding how the results relate to the use of suicide attacks.

6.1 The construction of "the other" and "the self"

O Americans, and O Europeans, the Islamic State did not initiate a war against you, as your governments and media try to make you believe. It is you who started the transgression against us, and thus you deserve blame and you will pay a great price. (IS, Dabiq, 2014, 4:8)

The construction of "the other", i.e., the enemy, is consistent across the Islamic State's texts and fits well with the overall plot in the narrative. The main message being presented by the Islamic State is that they are the ones being attacked by the "crusaders", i.e., the Western states and allies. The "other" in the eyes of the Islamic States is not just the West but also all institutions and individuals who refuse to join their organization by claiming that "there is the religion of Allah, which is Islam, and then the religion of anything else, which is kufr[1]" (IS, Dabiq, 2016 14:8). The Islamic State's enemies, according to them, include "[…] the Jews, Christians, atheists, Rafidah, apostates, and all the nations of disbelief […]" (IS, Rumiyah, 2016, 3:5). In a majority of the publications, the group paints a picture of a world

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[1] Kufr – A concept in Islamic thought which means "ingratitude" and the refusal to adhere to the Islamic faith (Oxford Reference)

divided into only two camps; supporters and opponents of the Islamic State, and states that those opposed are envious of the organization and their Caliphate:

Seeing the Muslims living in honor and security therein deprived them of sleep, and they were burdened by seeing one that they could see and live, whose shade they could seek, and whose goodness and blessing they could enjoy. And this is what they fear most, because it is the path to spreading the authority of Islam and expanding its territory, and the path to having people enter it. (IS, Rumiyah, 2016, 3:5)

The Islamic State's narrative regarding the enemy is generally focused on Western concepts and values, such as liberal democracy and LGBTQ rights, portraying the West and its allies as an existential threat to not only the group, but also their religion and identity.

We hate you because your secular, liberal societies permit the very things that Allah has prohibited while banning many of the things He has permitted. […] we wage war against you to stop you from spreading your disbelief and debauchery – your secularism and nationalism, your perverted liberal values, your Christianity, and atheism – and all the depravity and corruption they entail. (IS, Dabiq, 2016, 15:32).

Concerning the description of "the self", the organization uses the statement of others to describe their success in terrorizing the West. The magazine Dabiq routinely features an article called "The Enemy's Words", in which key government leaders in the West and their allies' comment on the success of the Islamic State. "We've never seen an organization like ISIL that is so well-organized, so well-trained, so well-funded, so strategic, so brutal, so completely ruthless", quoted by the former US Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 6:57). Another quote is from the former CIA Mission Commander Gary Berntsen, who states that "ISIS truly is the most successful Sunni terrorist group in history because they've carved out a space for a nation-state. […] And it is accepted broadly in these areas by individuals now that refuse to accept the concept of secular nation-states" (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 8:58). In the magazine Rumiyah, an article titled "Military and Covert Operations" was frequently published, in which they chronologically detail all the

Islamic State's missions and successes in the recent month. The following is how the article starts:

> *As the soldiers of Khilafah[2] continue waging war on the forces of kufr, we take a glimpse at a number of recent operations conducted by the mujahidin of the Islamic State that have succeeded in expanding the territory of the Khilafah, or terrorizing, massacring, and humiliating the enemies of Allah. These operations are merely a selection of the numerous operations that the Islamic State has conducted on various fronts across many regions over the course of the last few weeks. (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 6:28).*

Based on the theoretical framework, it is evident that the sense of "us" and "them" is a fundamental part of constructing identity for the Islamic State. By clearly defining two groups with either supporters or enemies, they portray the West and its allies as an existential threat, not just to the group but also to their religion and identity.

The overall plot described in their magazines can also be related to the events that lead to existential anxiety and the need for a strengthened identity. Democracy, LGBTQ rights, and other concepts, according to the Islamic State, endanger the religion and their goal of establishing a state based on Islamic principles. This can be seen as the long-term conditions, compared to the condition of globalization, that leads to a feeling of insecurity, as Kinnvall (2017: 99) mentions. They perceive these sorts of liberal movements as a threat to their collective identity, something that will eradicate the whole religion and their community, which is why they argue that war is necessary to secure their future and shared identity. This is enhanced by portraying themselves as strong and successful in their strategy of terrorizing their enemy.

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[2] Khilafah – The Romanized transliteration of the Arabic word for "Caliphate"

6.2   The description of gender roles and masculinity

In general, the Islamic State's publications take a masculine stance. Throughout the texts, only "He", "His", "Him", "Sons", and "Brothers" are addressed, with a few articles aimed toward "the Sisters" of the Islamic State. There is also a clear difference in how women and men are portrayed, where the Islamic State argues that "it is upon a woman who wishes to leave the house and go to the masjid to ask her husband for permission, and it is forbidden for her to go to the masjid[3] having put on perfume and beautified herself" (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 12:37), and also that "As for a woman who is either menstruating or is in the stage of post-partum bleeding, it is not permissible for her to stay in the masjid." (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 12:38). This is further entrenched by the controlling role of the man in the relationships in the Islamic States: "[…] the Muslim man must remember that his wives are part of his flock, for whom he is responsible. The man should not let his wife have free rein in this regard. Instead, he can prevent her if she goes out too often." (IS, Rumiyah, 2016, 3:41). They also advocate for the concept of *Saby*, i.e., taking female slaves through war, which they claim is inherited from the Prophet's use of slaves during the former Islamic Caliphate. The group argues that "[…] they were captured and enchained. Once they realized the truth of Islam they entered it voluntarily, and thus they entered Jannah[4]." and that "[…] all of those who accepted Islam had done so voluntarily, not against their will." (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 9:48). Kidnapping women is considered a worthy cause by the Islamic State, with the intention of converting them to Islam and therefore helping them become better people.

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[3] Masjid – The Romanized transliteration of the Arabic word for "Mosque"
[4] Jannah – Refers to "paradise" and the afterlife in the Quran

The role of the woman versus the man's role is also highlighted in the Islamic State's texts, with the woman viewed as the primary educator in the Islamic faith and responsible for the upbringing of the children (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 9:19). The man, on the other hand, is portrayed as a strong soldier fighting for Allah's cause. The Islamic State states that,

From among the greatest of Allah's blessings upon the lion cubs in the Khilafah […] is that they are raised in the home and under the wing of the mujahid father. So they grow up with their eyes becoming accustomed to seeing weapons and equipment, including rifles, tactical vests, bullets, grenades, and explosive belts. (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 9:20).

This clearly demonstrates the disparity in perception of gender roles and the tasks women and men should perform, with the woman overseeing the home and children while the men battle on the front lines.

This is consistent with the theoretical framework's consideration of gender roles in militant organizations, in which the language employed by the organizations to describe gender hierarchy can reveal potential ontological insecurities (Steele, 2017: 78). In this case, the Islamic State has a clear gender hierarchy in which the man is the family's head and controls the women and children, while the woman is not allowed to leave the house without her husband's permission and whose primary role is to care for the home and give birth to new soldiers of the Caliphate. This fits with their larger identity narrative, in which masculinity solidifies their image as a strong and successful group that cares for their wives and raises the next generation of soldiers. Therefore, their vision of themselves influences the perception of their ability to succeed in the war as a successful and strong group. According to Sjoberg (2012: 30) this is also connected to the behavior of the organization, where organizations with a gender hierarchy system and attitudes tend to be more violent than organizations that advocate for gender equality. The Islamic State's violent behavior can thus be explained by the lack of gender equality perspective in their narrative.

6.3 Religion as a source of community and identity

According to Kinnvall (2017: 97), religion often works as an identity-strengthening mechanism in times of ontological insecurity. In this regard, religion is seen as an ideology or a movement that creates clear in- and outgroups, rather than explicitly focusing on the holy scripts and traditions that often constitute a religion. This is very evident in the narrative of the Islamic State, where religious motivations can be found throughout all the issues, in every article. The Islamic State is using religion to argue for their cause, as well as to strengthen identity and the community. The feeling of solidarity that the faith and the Islamic State give their members is a recurring topic in the story:

> *The energy behind this movement is fearsome. A single lion can kill an antelope but a pride that is hungry and cunning enough can, if they work closely together, take down an African elephant. As groups of mujahidin from around the world join forces, so the strength behind the Islamic State puts them in a position to devour much larger prey. (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 9:75)*

They further compare their openness to "American racism", referring to religion as a common factor that brings many people together:

> *A Muslim's loyalty is determined, not by his skin color, his tribal affiliation, or his last name, but by his faith." And that "it is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. […] The state is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims. (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 11:19).*

All of this is part of the larger narrative of the Islamic State's greatness, in which the flow of supporters from other countries has only one thing in common: a love for Islam and Allah: "They left their families and their lands to renew the state of the muwahhidin in Sham, and they had never known each other until they arrived in Sham!" (IS, Dabiq, 2014, 3:6).

The importance of religion is also apparent in the language when compared to people of other faiths: "The death of a single Muslim, no matter his role in society, is graver to the believer than the massacre of every kafir on earth" (IS, Dabiq, 2016,

14:4). This also relates to the message that being allowed to enter the Islamic State and fight the "kufr" is a blessing, as demonstrated by quotes like: "Congratulations on this blessing from Allah, the blessing of the Khilafah which your Lord and God has bestowed upon you, for indeed Allah has granted you a great gift, so do not forget this mercy and this tremendous favor." (IS, Dabiq, 2016, 13:54). This can be compared to how "disbelievers" are described: "[…] you are a target regardless of your status, whether you were a soldier or a leader, and whether you were poor or rich, because the reason for you being targeted is due to your religion […]" (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 11: 55).

Religion and nationalism, according to Kinnvall (2017: 97), are two concepts that serve to reinforce and strengthen a group's identity by providing a clear framework for who belongs in the in- and outgroup. In the case of the Islamic State, this is particularly evident since religion is used to bring people together and advocate for the state's beauty. By comparing it to the "American racism", they explicitly create two camps with "us" and "them", which is further cemented by the religious motives behind the war against the "crusaders". In this case, religion serves as an extra dimension to the use of suicide attacks as a strategy in war. Both the perspective of religion as a means of strengthening the group and community, as well as the belief in an afterlife, provide additional motivations for executing suicide attacks.

6.4 The portrayal of "chosen trauma" and "chosen glory"

According to Kinnvall (2004: 755), a "chosen trauma" is "the mental recollection of a calamity that befell a group's ancestors and includes information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings and defenses against unacceptable thought", which is used by organizations as a motivation for the cause that they are fighting for.

For the Islamic State, the quest for a new Caliphate and Islamic State is grounded in the history of the old Islamic Caliphate under the Prophet Muhammad.

They refer several times to the Battle of Ahzab[5] as a "chosen glory" wherein the Prophet Muhammad and his followers "defeated the confederates without any fighting taking place, but rather through the believers remaining steadfast against their enemy – likewise is the situation today in Raqqah, Mosul and Tal'afar, fully resembling that condition" (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 11:18). The parallel with present events is apparent here as a means of reinforcing the soldiers' and followers' confidence and solidarity, which is used by the group as a motivation for the cause they are fighting for.

The organization is also referring to "chosen glories" in current events as an attempt to justify their actions by claiming that similar things have occurred in the past. Following the burning of the Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kasasbeh, in the beginning of 2015, the group is justifying their actions by claiming that: "[…] the Sahabah […] punished people with fire in a number of incidents that took place throughout the course of the history of the rightly-guided Khulafa´." (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 7:7), as well as a list of incidents during the historic Caliphate in which similar activities occurred. It is apparent that history plays a significant role in the Islamic State's narrative, as prior triumphs are seen as successes that they should emulate:

> *Thus, the Islamic State not only followed the footsteps of Allah's Messenger*
> *[…] in his harshness towards the disbelievers, but also emulated the*
> *example of his righteous Sahabah by punishing with fire in retaliation, and*
> *for the purpose of terrorizing the murtaddin and making examples out of*
> *them. (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 7:8)*

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[5] Battle of Ahzab – Also called the Battle of the Trenches, refers to the battle between a coalition of tribes against the Muslims in 627 in the city of Medina (Naseem & Aijaz, 2021: 82).

Another thing that stands out is the Islamic State's portrayal of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916[6] as a trauma. In issue 4 of Dabiq, they describe their accomplishments as a "blow to nationalism and the Sykes-Picot-inspired borders that define it" (IS, Dabiq, 2014, 4:18) and later in issues 8 and 9 of Dabiq, they refer to Sykes and Picot as "crusaders" (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 8:11, 9:20). They further relate the Sykes-Picot Agreement to current events by declaring, "The crusaders rely upon the strategy of 'divide and conquer.' They break up Muslims' lands and through nationalism, partisanship, and other forms of jahiliyyah[7]" (IS, Dabiq, 2015, 9:22). The Islamic State's narrative aims to demonstrate that history repeats itself, stating that "this is the habit of the kuffar in every era, and this is because they measure all affairs based on material, dunya-oriented results, which is all that they know" (IS, Rumiyah, 2017, 6:9) by comparing the Battle of Uhud[8] to current events. During the Battle of Uhud, one of the enemy's leaders "boasted about killing the companions of Allah's messenger, seeking therewith to fill the remaining Muslims with sorrow" (ibid.). Parallels are drawn here to current events in the Islamic State, where "apostate agents and allies will not cease to spread lies about the heavily inflated number of Islamic State soldiers whom they claim to have killed in battles or in airstrikes" (ibid.).

Narratives about chosen traumas and glories serve as justifications for the current war, which are employed to bolster the organization's identity and ontological security. The organization strengthens the notion of "us" and "them" by using history about enemies and emphasizing how the atrocities that happened to the collective group back then are still occurring today. This also implies that the group is relying on past traumas to avert ontological insecurity, which they fear will happen if the current soldiers do not continue their jihad. Similarly, they employ chosen glories to demonstrate how their ancestors reclaimed their ontological security through war to legitimize their current violent behavior. This, however, indicates that ontological security for the Islamic State is not a state of calm and peace, but rather a state of constant warfare:

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[6] Sykes-Picot Agreement – A treaty made between the United Kingdom and France in 1916 which ultimately divided large parts of the Middle East into countries under control of the two states (Bilgin, 2016: 356)
[7] Jahiliyyah – A concept in Islam which is referring to the pre-Islamic period before the Prophet Muhammad's revelation of the Quran. The word means "ignorance" or "barbarism" in Arabic (Britannica A).
[8] Battle of Uhud – Refers to the Battle of Uhud in 625 when an army of 3000 men was fighting the Prophet Muhammad on the mountain of Uhud in the city of Medina (Armstrong, 2013: 114).

The fact is, even if you were to stop bombing us, imprisoning us, torturing us, vilifying us, and usurping our lands, we would continue to hate you because our primary reason for hating you will not cease to exist until you embrace Islam. Even if you were to pay jizyah[9] and live under the authority of Islam in humiliation, we would continue to hate you. (IS, Dabiq, 2016, 15:33)

According to this quote, the only way to end the violence is if everyone embraces Islam. However, this argument contradicts what is occurring on the ground and what is observed in their autobiographical narrative in large, when even Muslims are attacked and viewed as the enemy. When examining their chosen glories and the description of the enemy, it appears that *ontological security* can only be achieved in a state of *physical insecurity*, i.e., in a constant state of conflict. This is evident in their rhetoric, which argues that the main goal is to return to an Islamic society akin to that which existed during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, a time marked by violence and war.

6.5   Discussion

According to the analysis of the material, The Islamic State appears to be employing multiple identity-strengthening mechanisms due to experiencing ontological insecurity. Long-term liberal concepts such as democracy, LGBTQ rights, freedom of speech, etc., are considered a danger to the Islamic State's identity according to themselves. The threat to their physical security further entrenches this since they claim that the Western states and their allies are fighting to eradicate Islamic thought and society. They also portray themselves as a reflection of their enemy in their autobiographical narrative by referring to the enemies' fear of the group and their own military victories, both domestically in Iraq and Syria and overseas. Their identity is further rooted in masculinity and a hierarchical perspective of gender, where women are considered subordinate in society, with responsibilities such as caring for children and obeying the spouse, while males battle against the enemy.

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[9] Jizyah – A tax that is paid by non-Muslims to their Muslim rulers (Britannica B)

The organization utilizes history to establish their identity and the causes behind their brutality by pointing to historical events, both traumas and glories. The previous success in history, therefore, motivates them to keep fighting, but historical defeats confirm the soldiers' hatred for the enemies when they perceive that the same defeats have occurred repeatedly throughout history.

As laid out in section 1.1. and 3, the hypothesis proposed that the Islamic State's use of suicide attacks results from experienced ontological insecurities. This stems from the literature about ontological security, which argues that the experience of ontological security often results in irrational behavior and the use of extraordinary measures as a response to the threat to the group's identity. In the Islamic State's narrative presented above, explicitly suicide attacks based on the threat to their identity are not mentioned. The Islamic State has adopted several strategies in the war against its enemies, not only suicide attacks, and the organization does not explicitly advocate for one strategy over the other. However, as previously stated, it has been a vital part of their warfare against their enemy. There might be many factors for this, with the religious justifications and the belief of an afterlife as particularly important for Islamist terrorist organizations. Nevertheless, the narrative analysis' results show that the group's ontological *security* is based on a state of physical *insecurity*, therefore implying that suicide attacks can be seen as part of this strategy in order to regain ontological security. All of the identity-strengthening mechanisms that the Islamic State are deploying – pointing to chosen traumas and perceiving the enemy as an extraordinary threat, portraying themselves as strong and masculine by referring to the enemy's fears while at the same time drawing on chosen glories of previous success, and strengthening solidarity and the collective identity by using religion as a common denominator within the group – is used as a way of justifying the brutal violence that comes with the method of deploying suicide attacks. The act of killing themselves and others in the pursuit of ontological security becomes legitimized by focusing on an extraordinary threat against the fundamental core of the group's identity, religion. Because their overall *ontological security* is based on *physical insecurity*, suicide attacks serve to prolong the battle, resulting in a regained ontological security.

7 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine how the Islamic State motivates the use of suicide attacks by drawing on the perspective of identity and the feeling of ontological insecurity. This was done by analyzing the Islamic State's autobiographical narrative, found in its official magazines in English. The thesis is based on the following research question: *How are perceptions of identity and ontological insecurity evident in the Islamic State's narrative, and how can this explain the organization's frequent use of suicide attacks?*

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the Islamic State's identity is constructed around the war against anyone who does not support them. For them, this includes anybody who does not follow the religion of Islam in the same way as they do. The group's identity is built on the experience of war by focusing on the conflict between "us" and "them" and pointing to the "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" of the past. This indicates that the conflict, rather than the goals of approaching a state of peace, is what reconstructs their ontological security. Their ontological insecurity stems from centuries of increasing nationalism, liberal concepts, and a general condition of peace in large parts of the world. To regain ontological security, they wish to return to the Islamic Caliphate as it existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, a time characterized by wars against the enemies. Rather than the other way around, the constant state of conflict makes the Islamic State ontologically secure. This implies that, in order to attain a sense of ontological security, a state of physical insecurity is required, justifying the use of suicide attacks. By executing suicide attacks, a strategy with a high success rate in terrorizing their enemies, the war against the enemy continues, and the Islamic State feels ontologically secure again. This confirms the thesis' hypothesis, which was based on previous research on ontological security, implying that the Islamic State's use of suicide attacks is a strategy derived from the perception of ontological insecurity, and a method of regaining their ontological security. The findings

therefore demonstrates that the Islamic State's primary objective and goal in using suicide attacks is to ensure that the jihad continues forever.

7.1   Future research

A suggestion for further research could be a more comparative approach, with comparisons between different organizations or time periods. This can be accomplished by broadening the material scope to include a more extended period of time or investigating other Islamist terror organizations. However, this approach can also study other branches of terrorism, such as far-right terrorists, who pose a significant threat to society today. It is possible to identify common denominators amongst different wings of terrorism by looking at identity, an important aspect for all individuals, which can have implications for countering such movements.

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