Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Terrorist Identity

A Qualitative Comparative Case-study on the Strategic Self-Presented Identities of the Global Jihadist Groups

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Abstract

This study focuses on the Strategic Self-presented identity of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, two global militant Islamic groups. Parallels are often drawn between the two groups creating a generalized image of global jihadists. This thesis argues that although certain comparisons may be made, the two groups differ in their identity and tactics. Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the violent groups it is key to analyze and compare how the two groups wish to be perceived. Through a qualitative comparative case-study this thesis sets out to recognize the strategic self-presented identities of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. By combining the Terrorist Identity by Arena & Arrigo (2006) and Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation via a theory building method this thesis argues that Al Qaeda encompasses a victim role to legitimize their cause. To the contrary, The Islamic State upholds a martial role, building on a sense of wrongdoing, violently reclaiming a geographical and social arena which they claim is rightfully theirs. The Strategic Self-presented identities of the two jihadist groups stand contrary to each other. The Islamic State proudly stands for a state which they claim deserves to be legitimized and welcomes new members to join them within their borders. Al Qaeda on the other hand continues their decentralized struggle against their suppressive opposition. The research behind the paper is a desk-study method, which practically has taken form by gathering photos, videos, interviews, statements, magazines and other outward directed documents released by Al Qaeda and the Islamic, hence, the messages which the jihadist groups wish to share with outsiders.

*Eric Hartshorne May 25th, 2015*

Key Words: Terrorism, Identity, Strategic Self-presentation, Al Qaeda, the Islamic State
Table of Contents

Common terms in Jihadist texts .................................................................................................................. 2
1.0 Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 3
   1.1 Purpose and research questions ............................................................................................................ 4
   1.1.1 Relevance ........................................................................................................................................ 5
   1.2 Methodology and Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................ 5
   1.3 Definition of Terrorism/Terrorist group ............................................................................................... 6
   1.4 Historical Background .......................................................................................................................... 8
   1.4.1 Al Qaeda ......................................................................................................................................... 8
   1.4.2 The Islamic State (IS, Daesh, Formerly ISIS) ............................................................................... 9
2.0 Previous research and research gap ...................................................................................................... 11
   2.1 Al Qaeda and the Islamic State ........................................................................................................... 11
   2.2 Identity and Strategic self-presentation .............................................................................................. 13
3.0 Analytical framework/ Theoretical framework ..................................................................................... 15
   3.1 The Terrorist Identity .......................................................................................................................... 15
   3.2 Strategic Self-Presentation .................................................................................................................. 17
4.0 Methodology .......................................................................................................................................... 19
   4.1 Comparative case-study ....................................................................................................................... 19
   4.2 Data collection .................................................................................................................................... 20
   4.3 Limitation and Delimitations .............................................................................................................. 22
   4.4 Reliability and Validity ......................................................................................................................... 22
5.0 Findings .................................................................................................................................................. 23
   5.1 Al Qaeda ............................................................................................................................................ 23
   5.2 The Islamic State ................................................................................................................................. 27
6.0 Theoretical application and comparison ............................................................................................... 31
   6.1 Symbols .............................................................................................................................................. 31
   6.2 Educational Socialization and Roles ................................................................................................ 32
   6.3 Generalized other ............................................................................................................................... 36
   6.4 Strategic self-presentation .................................................................................................................. 38
7.0 Conclusion .............................................................................................................................................. 40
   7.1 Analytical summary and research questions ...................................................................................... 40
   7.2 Implications ....................................................................................................................................... 43
   7.2.1 Methodological discussion ........................................................................................................... 44
   7.2.3 Theoretical discussion .................................................................................................................. 45
   7.4 Future research ................................................................................................................................. 45
8.0 References .............................................................................................................................................. 46
   Appendix 1.0 - Usama Bin Ladin ........................................................................................................... 51
   Appendix 1.1 – The Islamic State ........................................................................................................... 52
   Appendix 2.0 Dabiq *Graphic* ............................................................................................................. 53
   Appendix 2.1 Dabiq ................................................................................................................................. 54
Common terms in Jihadist texts

**Al Qaeda** – The original Al Qaeda, also known as AQ central previously under the leadership of Usama Bin Ladin and now Ayman al Zawahiri.

**Al Qaeda in Iraq** – Branch of Al Qaeda central founded by Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the predecessor to the Islamic State.

**Caliphate** – A form of Islamic government, often controlled by a *Caliph*, a leader of the entire Muslim community.

**Fatwa** - The learned opinion on Islamic Law

**Jihad** – Often translated to Holy War, refers to a *struggle or resistance* and is often claimed as a religious duty for Muslims.

**Mujahidin** – Is a person engaged in Jihad. Plural; Mujahedeen.

**Sharia** – The Islamic moral code and religious law.

**Shia** – One of two major branches in Islam, follows Muhammeds son-in-law Ali as rightful leader.

**Sunni** – The largest of the Islamic branches, referred to as the *common, original* Islam, follows Muhammed.

**Tawhid** – Stands for the “*oneness*” of God, the monotheistic base of Islam that there is only one God.

**Ummah** – Refers to a collective Muslim nation or community.

(Terminology gathered from: Burke, 2004 and Stern & Berger, 2015.)
1.0 Introduction

On March 7, 2015 the Nigerian terrorist group Bokom Haram, through its leader Abubakar Shekau, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS). The fact that the two radicalized Islamic groups are now aligned is not especially surprising (Boko Haram has earlier been linked to co-operations with Al-Qaeda). However, what stands out is how Boko Haram used their official Twitter account to launch the news (Muir, BBC 2015). Twitter being one of the world’s largest social media websites with close to 300 million active users has as its mission: “To give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers” (Twitter, 2015). It has become common practice for groups and individuals to spread their opinion through social media forums. With its accessibility and ability to connect people world-wide, the amount of users on these types of social media sites is constantly growing; Facebook alone has over one billion active users a month (Facebook, 2015). Given the accessibility and size of these internet-based networks more and more groups and organizations are being drawn to the “new” media platform.

Today’s terrorist groups are utilizing these possibilities, by using the global reach of modern media jihadist groups use media outputs to create an overreaction from its enemies (Weimann, 2006a:34). Al Qaeda has been referred to as the “Phoenix of the Internet” (2006a:64), what this refers to is how Al Qaeda used the internet to change the face of terrorism. By spreading large amounts of information and propaganda, such groups have the ability to reach their followers around the globe and affect their enemies at home and on the battlefield (ibid, 2006a:65). Today, the Islamic State (IS) is using the internet to spread fear and terror through well-directed videos with the idea to shock and frighten their enemies. The predecessor to IS, known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, originally pledged their allegiance to Al Qaeda through the internet, much like Boko Haram now has to IS (ibid, 2006a:101). However, as Al Qaeda and IS are using modern media outputs to spread messages we, on the outside, are offered a glimpse into the otherwise distant and disclosed groups. Just as individuals use online profiles through the likes of Facebook to create and present an idealized version of them self, so too may global actors (Ellison et.al.2006:425). Radical Islam is arguably the most active religious military wing in today’s society, at the forefront of the movement is
the rise of the Islamic State. The tactics and goals of IS has changed the image of global jihadist groups. No longer is it a single leader sitting in a cave, reading a message and being recorded. Today’s jihadist groups invite us into their struggle through publications, videos and photos in a well-directed strategic self-presented identity. Who are these groups and what image are they trying to portray through their outwards directed messages? Much research has been conducted on how terrorist groups use social media as a weapon to spread fear across the globe (Weiman, 2006. Klausen, 2014. Maher, 2007). Yet little has been studied on how these groups choose to present their collective identity outwards. How are these groups using the tools available to present such an identity and how do groups sharing an ideological background differ in such an identity presentation? These are a few of the questions that this thesis sets out to answer.

1.1 Purpose and research questions
The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the research around the global Jihadist groups known as Al Qaeda and The Islamic State in an attempt to gain a stronger understanding of the groups. Much research is focused on the methods and history of the groups, yet little has been researched regarding the identity and sense of belonging that the groups portray. The objective of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the image that IS and Al Qaeda are portraying outwards. By conducting such research it might be possible to gain a deeper understanding for the recruitment patterns to such jihadist groups. Nevertheless, in order to obtain the purpose and objective for the study at hand the research questions are the following:

- How is it possible to recognize Al Qaeda and The Islamic States identities through the separate groups outwards directed messages i.e. interviews, film clips and photos?
- What similarities and differences may be identified in the strategically self-presented identities of Al Qaeda and The Islamic State in comparison to each other?
1.1.1 Relevance
With the rise of the Islamic State, the idea of global jihadist groups and their goals has changed dramatically. As will be presented in this thesis, the Islamic States challenge to the geographical and political claims of the region (Iraq and Syria) has changed the face of Islamic radicalism. No longer is it the classical counter-occupational jihadist approach, instead, groups are challenging the local governance and creating a state within other states. As these groups continue to develop it is key to gain a deeper understanding of whom these modern jihadist are and how they wish to present themselves collectively to the rest of the world. Much research has been conducted on the tactics used by global jihadists. However, much prior research sets out from a generalizable standpoint, this thesis argues that jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and IS must be studied separately in order to draw reliable conclusions and further develop the knowledge surrounding the violent Islamic groups.

1.2 Methodology and Theoretical Framework
The study will set out from a comparative case study approach. By examining documents, videos and pictures, the idea behind the study is to focus on material released by Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Viewing documents and the words of a purposely-selected site and/or group offers the opportunity to analyze the language of the person. In addition, more subtle symbols and messages in pictures and videos may also be recognized. Therefore allowing an analysis of how the person or group deliberately decide to present themselves (Cresswell, 2014:191).

The analytical framework presented for this thesis will be a collaboration between Michael P. Arena & Bruce A. Arrigo’s (2006) theory of the Terrorist Identity and Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation. Their inter-disciplinary approach focuses on the process of educational socialization and the use of symbols and a generalized other in the role and identity building of a group (2006:237, 231). The theory is built upon four main points and will be complemented by Goffman theory of self-presentation in a theory developing approach. The theoretical framework developed as a result of this thesis consists of five main points:
1. **Symbols** used by the groups to create recognizable points for outsiders.

2. **Educational socialization, socialization**, is the process in which the leaders of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State educate its members in what values and beliefs are related to the identity of the group.

3. **Roles** are the result of the socialization process and are the fundamental base for the identity and sense of belonging within the groups.

4. **Generalized other**, meaning a preconceived image of an opponent group which is seen as different and/or alien.

5. **Strategic Self-presentation**, Goffman’s (1959) theory represents the collective roles which groups and individuals strive to obtain by presenting an ideal image of themselves towards others in order to establish their own identity.

1.3 **Definition of Terrorism/Terrorist group**

The definition of terrorism in itself comes down to a few crucial points. Terrorism is founded in a struggle regarding power and politics and the tool used is violence (Hoffman, 2006:2f). However, terrorist groups will often avoid direct military conflict with their enemy, engaging in acts of violence towards specific targets, often civilian to spread fear (Hoffman, 2006:35). Such violent acts are what define a terrorist group, terrorism is violence or the threat of violence, often directed towards a psychological aspect of the enemy (Chaliand & Blin, 2007:227). For example attacking the enemy on their own soil as in the 9/11-attacks on the United States in 2001. The basic principles for terrorist groups is that of creating power where there is none, fighting up from below while using publicity as a tool and weapon (Hoffman, 2006:40).

In today’s vast information sharing society the modern version of terrorism is dependent on which group an author sympathises with. For example, terrorist groups rarely refer to themselves as terrorist groups, instead terms such as Mujahidin, Guerrilla and freedom fighters are used (Hoffman, 2006:22, 35). However, a generalized other will often refer to a group as terrorists in order to justify their own actions and demine the actions of the original group. An example of this is how former U.S. President George W. Bush legitimized the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as a war on terror and terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and terrorist leaders such
as Bin Laden (Kepel, 2004:209). Through this perspective it may become difficult to draw the line between who is a guerrilla fighter and who is a terrorist. As mentioned, one group might refer to an organization as freedom fighters while other will claim them to be terrorists. The difference often being in the end that guerrilla groups often display visible uniforms and engage in direct military combat. For example, the Colombian group FARC, the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party, use the internet and websites to portray a transparent and collective identity (Weimann, 2006a:75). FARC, which is labelled as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the United States, have an official website, even a website specific for the ongoing peace negotiations (http://farc-epace.org/) Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and Boko Haram do not have a specific website for their organization. Instead they must work discreetly through their members and supporters on the internet (Weimann, 2006a:67). In order for such groups to be successful, their terrorist tactic must be connected to a political agenda otherwise running the risk of losing sympathy from its followers (Migaux, 2007:259).

Although the Islamic State fulfill many of the requirements to be deemed a terrorist organization there are other aspects pointing to the opposite. The strongest argument against IS being labelled as a terrorist group is the fact that they are fighting in an open territorial war. As Hoffman (2006) states, terrorist groups rarely fight for a specific geographical area and seldom use uniforms and open warfare. The Islamic State are fighting for the creation of a state, to be controlled and ruled by an Islamic caliphate and are challenging the present territorial claims which are remainders of the former colonial borders drawn during the Stylkes-Picot agreement (Phillips, 2014:496). It is vital for this study to remember that a Terrorist Identity and being a Terrorist group are two separate ideas. The fear and propaganda tactics of today’s Islamic State share many of the points presented by Hoffman in his analysis of a terrorist group. Nevertheless, the Islamic State is working hard to remove their stamp as a terrorist organization. The group has used methods of terrorism in its geographical conquest and is now trying to reshape and adapt the idea of a religious and military based state. Hence, it is difficult to establish if the Islamic State truly may be deemed a terrorist group or not, the fact is that identity is an ever changing process and is seldom a static achievement (Hevern, 2004:332).
1.4 Historical Background

1.4.1 Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda’s history can be traced back to 1979 and two particular events, the Shia-radical revolution in Iran and the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan (Chaliand & Blin, 2007:221). Yet the Al Qaeda that is most famous around the world is that of the post 9/11 group under the leadership of the charismatic Usama Bin Ladin. Al Qaeda originally had a very local geographical conflict policy, located mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, with the death of Abdallah Azzam, the leader of the mujahidin in Afghanistan in 1989, Bin Ladin would raise to power amongst the organized jihadists in Afghanistan (Migaux, 2007:315). With that change in leadership so too would the direction of the jihadist group. Bin Ladin, who had fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, originated from a well-respected family in Saudi Arabia was not afraid to state his opinions publicly. One issue that really concerned Bin Ladin was that the Saudi regime allowed foreign troops within their sovereign territory. Bin Ladin was revoked of his Saudi citizenship in 1994 after making several critical statements regarding the presence of roughly 500,000 foreign troops in Saudi Arabia, a majority of them American (ibid, 2007:318f). Bin Ladin felt that the presence of foreign armies so close to Muslim landmarks (Mecka and Medina) was an insult to Muslims around the world. The global alliance of Muslims was a vital key in the regional conflicts of the time. Between 1982-1992 an alleged 35,000 Muslim radicals travelled to Afghanistan to fight in the war against the Soviet Union (Rashid, 2010:176). Moreover, Al Qaeda, under the leadership of Bin Ladin, has been linked to the financing and assisting of several Islamic military-coup attempts globally (Rashid, 2010:185). The focus of uniting Muslims in a global jihad was vital for the success of Al Qaeda, the exact geographical position of the war was not as important as the fact that the global struggle for Muslims against a common enemy must continue (Gardell, 2005:221f).

After Azzam’s death in 1989 and Bin Ladin’s rise to leadership within Al Qaeda the group moved its focus from a local to an international struggle against foreign powers. At this time the group reorganized and decentralized to the point where Al Qaeda had known operating bases in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. This not only led to a larger geographical area in which Al Qaeda could operate, Bin
Ladin would furthermore improve the efficiency of the organization, adapting to the changing times and relying increasingly more on computer-based networking (Migaux, 2007:326). Readapting to the modern tools available led to Al Qaeda being able to train, fund and communicate with its members globally (Hoffman, 2006:214. Weimann, 2006a:123). Around this time, the global focus on Afghanistan had returned after being forgotten post-Soviet Union. Oil and gas would once again turn the world’s eyes on the central-Asian state (Rashid, 2005:49).

Just before the deadly attacks of 9/11 Bin Ladin had gathered other Mujahidin movements in an attempt to strengthen and reunite what they refer to as the “Muslim community”. The idea was to reunite the separate Muslim groups in order to establish a political and religious Caliphate, all united under the Tahwid flag towards a common enemy, the west (Migaux, 2007:325). During the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, Al Qaeda used their presence to unite Muslims and strengthen Bin Ladin’s arguments against the west (Karlsson, 2005:48). Whether this tactic was successful may be debated. As American forces maintain a regional presence in the Middle-East and with the death of Bin Ladin in 2011, Al Qaeda is not as strong as they were around the time of their attacks on 9/11. It is important to recall that neither they, nor the Taliban were defeated in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2005:54). However, with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 as part of the war on terror, the Shia majority of the country would rise to power (Kepel, 2004:197). This led to the Hussein-favoured Sunni majority being left out, resulting in the Sunni based Al Qaeda in Iraq’s own growth (Kepel, 2004:200). Nevertheless, Al Qaeda global has now been surpassed by another Sunni militant group as the world’s global jihadist leader, The Islamic State, formerly known as Al Qaeda in Iraq (Cockburn, 2015:2).

1.4.2 The Islamic State (IS, Daesh, Formerly ISIS)
The Islamic State is a militant Islamic organization with a Sunni-Muslim ideological foundation. IS has grown out of the Iraqi Sunni insurgency that was active during the American invasion of Iraq, also referred to as Al Qaeda in Iraq under the leadership of Abu Musab al Zarqawi (Stern & Berger, 2015:13. Cockburn, 2015:135). Since IS uprising in 2011 the organization has gained control over a large geographical area in northern Iraq and eastern Syria and is taking advantage of the remaining displaced Al Qaeda supporters in the area, absorbing them into the Islamic State (Phillips,
The fact of the matter is that IS birth came at the perfect time for it to succeed. With a failing government and inadequate reconciliation process in Iraq, a distracted Washington and the chaotic state of neighbouring Syria, IS with a large amount of funding from international donors has surpassed Al Qaeda as the world’s largest Jihad group (Phillips, 2014:495, Cockburn, 2015:2). The Islamic State is now challenging regional authority and territorial claims. By building on a, according to IS, Sunni religious standpoint, the Islamic State has gathered an alienated Sunni population in northern Iraq governed by a corrupt Shia government (Cockburn, 2015:69). Contrary to Al Qaeda’s more classical terrorist warfare, attacking civilian and military goals away from their home soil (Hoffman, 2006:28), IS are fighting for, and holding, a significant piece of geographical land. Due to IS violent tactics and their control over their territories there is very little western coverage from within IS borders. The Islamic State have not been afraid to kill foreigners in a public and viscous way, leading to many journalist staying out of IS controlled areas (Cockburn, 2015:2). A result of this is that IS oversee the media inside their territory and now control what is directed outwards, specifically towards western states. Hence, the Islamic State is in a position where they have the possibility to control the shaping of their external identity through media. As mentioned under the definition of terrorism, the Islamic State can in many ways be defined as a terrorist group, yet their geographical conflict approach differs from the modern definition of a terrorist. Furthermore, IS are allegedly attempting to legitimize their organization through symbols such as identification cards and uniforms (Vice News, 2015). These steps symbolize how IS are trying to differ themselves from previous global jihadist groups. However, the methods of IS has terrorism experts such as Hans Brun comparing the group to the likes of the Nazis and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, two governments responsible for two of the most horrific genocides in modern times (DN, 2015). Although there are parallels to be drawn between the Islamic State and the likes of Nazi Germany there is one important difference. The Nazis attempted to hide their atrocities, the Islamic State on the other hand proudly present their brutality to the outside world (Stern & Berger, 2015:115).
2.0 Previous research and research gap

This chapter will first present the current research on Al Qaeda and the Islamic State and will thereafter present research on identity and the presentation of self in a broader context.

2.1 Al Qaeda and the Islamic State

Al Qaeda, under the leadership of Usama Bin Ladin, quickly understood the potential of different media outputs to portray a picture of their group and spread its messages. For most of the early 2000’s, the Taliban would use the news agency Al Jazeera to share their homemade videos (Klausen, 2015:3). The use of propaganda as a tool and weapon in times of war is nothing new, what is different from the earlier cases is that today Jihadist’s have direct access to their media outputs. Hence groups no longer need to go through channels such as Al Jazeera to release their statements. The accessibility and reach of the Internet is ideal for delivering large-scale psychological acts of war and affect people around the world (Maher, 2007:146. Klausen, 2015:4. Weimann, 2010:48). This creates a situation in which Al Qaeda, using their decentralized approach, barely needs to physically exists according to Jason Burke, an experienced journalist with many years in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2004:1). By decentralizing their organization, Al Qaeda are not only more difficult to trace, they may also fund, radicalize and train new members and groups all around the world, without having to be psychically present (Burke, 2004:273, Weimann, 2006a: 134) Al Qaeda are deploying a long term strategy for their global jihad, recruiting new members and targeting civilians purposely as a method of psychologically warfare (Burke, 2004:272).

Aaron Y. Zelin, an expert on Jihadist movements, believes that Al Qaeda is in a competition with the Islamic State and this conflict can be seen in the media surrounding the two radical Islamic groups (Zelin, 2015). In Zelin’s article: “The State of al-Qaeda” (2015) he quotes Aymen al-Zawahiri, the former second in charge and Bin Ladin’s successor after his death in 2011:

“We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of media”. (Zawahiri, 2005:10)
What Zelin means to highlight with this quote is that Al Qaeda and The Islamic State understand the importance of the media’s role in their conflicts. As The Islamic State continues to grow and gain ground in the Middle East so does their activity in different media forums. According to Zelin (2015) The Islamic State has released the same amount of announcements in a ten day period (April 3-13, 2015) compared to Al Qaeda over a six month period (June - November 2014). It is vital for decentralized groups such as Al Qaeda to take full use of the media if they are to remain strong. Al Qaeda have since Bin Ladin’s rise to power used the Internet, the modern media platform of choice, for more than propaganda and fundraising, terrorist training, most importantly the modern communication tool allows the jihadists to retain contact with members in other locations (Hoffman, 2006:214). However, in order to remain relevant in today’s media, groups must hold a shock and awe tactic, the competition for the media’s attention is too much for smaller groups (ibid, 2006:181). This is where the Islamic States execution videos play a vital part.

Al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin understood from an early point the important role the media would play in their Jihadist war. When looking at Bin Ladin’s videos and statements it is possible to see how the Terrorist leader created an organizational policy adapted to the modern versions of information sharing (Saghi 2008:28). By recording short messages with strategic importance and set in rural and simple locations such as caves, Bin Ladin was able to separate himself from the western way of life (Saghi, 2008:29/). It is this final Bin Ladin example that leads to the research problem for this future thesis. These different “clues” to symbols in social identity is what offers the possibility to make an argument for how Al Qaeda and the Islamic State portray a group identity through different media platforms. Gabriel Weimann (2006), a leading communications and terrorism researcher, argues that terrorist groups use what he refers to as “The Theater of Terror” to portray a chosen identity and direct it towards specific groups in acts of terror, but also in recruitment purposes (2006b:383). The videos, photos and messages that are being shared by terrorist groups are doing so in a structured and controlled manner and directed to a targeted group (Klausen, 2012:17). The Islamic state, which many suggest as the ideological heir to Bin Ladin, have quickly understood the perks of using the modern media tools and are continuing to develop the field (Phillips, 2014:498).
2.2 Identity and Strategic self-presentation
Regarding self-presentation and identity, there are countless definitions of identity and large amounts of research conducted on the subject. On may look upon identity as a result of interactions with other groups (Elias & Scotson, 1999) or as a social category, in no way personal (Lawler, 2008). This thesis will however focus on group identity and how identities may be presented through the modern tools available. Bo Nilsson’s, a professor in ethnology at Umeå University, research on politicians and how they use blogs to portray a strategic self-presented identity offers an insight to a different political group’s behaviour. In Nilsson’s study (2012) politicians use blogs in order to portray a more relatable side to their personality in an attempt to create a link between the reader and themselves (Nilsson, 2012:261). Nilsson found that the politicians are active in maintaining a distance between themselves and the reader. By doing so the politicians openly display who is a member of the dominant group and who is not. A result of this is an urge from outsiders to be a part of the more exclusive group, controlled by the politicians (Nilsson, 2012:263).

Continuing on the research regarding strategic self-presentation, the presence of the internet has created a new area in which an individual may present their self. Although it is still “offline” norms that control, there is an ongoing competition for self-promotion taking form in the publishing and distribution of symbols, mostly photos, this is key for the individuals self-presentation towards others (Rui, 2012:110ff). No matter which circumstance it may be, the ability to create an ideal self through self-presentation is utilized. Likewise to Nilsson politicians, individuals on dating sites (Ellison et al. 2006) and social media forums (Young, 2013) actively partake in a process of identity presentation through online forums. By manipulating a profile an individual has the possibility to, through pictures and messages, create a link between the online and offline person, representing a potential idealized image of the persons self (Ellison et. al, 2006:425. Young, 2013:6ff). The most common tool in creating such an idealized self is through pictures on social media sites. By controlling which pictures are posted and the contents of the picture, the individual/group has the ability to create an idealized image of their self towards a public audience (Hogan, 2010. Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). As can be seen though the presented prior research, much has been written on how and why Al Qaeda
and The Islamic State use the media to spread messages. But the question relevant for this study is linked to self-presentation; what is the image that they are trying to portray through these messages?
3.0 Analytical framework/ Theoretical framework

When conducting a theory driven study there is always a risk that the research may focus on proving the theory instead of examining the research problem (Shapiro, 2002:601). In order to gain an understanding of the strategic self-presented identity of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State it is necessary to focus on the groups subject to study. During the data collection process it became clear that the theory of the terrorist identity would not in itself be sufficient in describing Al Qaeda and the Islamic State from a deductive perspective. Therefore the thesis took the shape of a theory-building study. What such a research method offers is a collaboration between the findings and the theoretical aspects of the thesis. By searching for complementary theoretical factors during the research process it is possible to develop theories in an abductive method related to the findings of the study (Esiasson et.al.2012). Next, the terrorist identity by Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo (2006) will be presented followed by the complementary theory of Ervin Goffman’s (1959) self-presentation. The chapter will be concluded with a module summarizing the theory developed through this study.

3.1 The Terrorist Identity

The term identity has to this point in the text been referred to at several times. Yet what identity is can be interpreted in many different ways. Therefore, in order for the idea of identity to be relevant for this study, the interdisciplinary theory of The Terrorist Identity by Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo (2006) will be applied. By combining classical Psychological (Aho, 1990. Berbie, 1990. Knutson, 1981) and Sociological theories (Mead, 1967. Hewitt, 1976. Stryker, 1987) Arena and Arrigo test their interdisciplinary theory of the terrorist identity on five separate terrorist groups. What they found was that identity can be seen as a product of socialization (ibid, 2006:236). The socialization process focuses on preparing an individual for a specific role. The roles of terrorist groups are often dependent on two different attitudes. First is the victim, the victim is in a state of persecution and may therefore not be questioned when using violence (ibid, 2006:234). The second is known as the martial role and refers to a sense of having to reclaim something that has been lost or stolen through a violent response (ibid, 2006:235). The main difference between the victim and martial role is that the first is based upon a defensive standpoint while the
latter is based upon aggression. As individuals grow accustomed and learn more about their roles, they find a feeling of self-meaning within the roles, they form an identity (ibid, 2006:240). Educational socialization will focus on younger generations and new recruits in order to pass on a specific idea of the groups in questions and other groups, these others are known as a generalized other (ibid, 2006:237f). The generalized other may be seen as a product of the relationship between two groups. Arena and Arrigo use the example of Israelis and Palestinians and how social interactions such as identification cards and checkpoints act as a reminder of the identities of the two separate groups (ibid, 2006:147). Furthermore, symbols are vital in the creation of the identities, these symbols may be aspects of the social relationship and can show vital clues when analyzing identity presentation. For example, the already presented need to carry identification cards when crossing Israeli-Palestinian borders or as in the case of Bin Ladin’s tapes from caves. By removing himself from western influences and symbols Bin Ladin separates himself from the west and creates an identity for others to join him in (Arena & Arrigo 2006:231 & Saghi, 2008:29).

The strength of Arena and Arrigo’s terrorist identity theory is that it is grounded in different types of research logic, hence it has been tested over several disciplines and field studies (Danemark, 2002:147). To summarize how the theory of the Terrorist Identity will be used in this study, when conducting the analyzes of Al Qaeda and the Islamic States the cornerstones of Arena & Arrigo’s theory will be used, they consist of four main points:

1. **Symbols** used by the groups to create recognizable points for outsiders.
2. **Educational socialization, socialization**, is the process in which the leaders of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State teach its members what values and beliefs are related to the identity of the group.
3. **Roles**, are the result of the socialization process and are the fundamental base for the identity and sense of belonging within the groups.
4. **Generalized other**, meaning a preconceived idea of a different group which is seen as different and/or alien.
Arena & Arrigo’s theory of Terrorist Identity through its interdisciplinary viewpoint offers a broad entry in understanding the data collected regarding the two groups. By applying the main points of the Terrorist Identity to the messages, photos and videos released by Al Qaeda and the Islamic State the idea is to identify patterns within the global Jihadist groups outward presented identity. These patterns may offer a glance into how the radicalized Islamic groups prefer to present their collective image outwards. However, theories must be open to critic and further development. Therefore a study focusing on the problem, while simultaneously pushing for further theoretical development within the field is ideal (Shapiro, 2002:598. Danemark, 2002:148). Consequently, in order to gain a further understanding of the groups reasoning and presentment of their identity, the theory of Strategic Self-presentation will be applied.

3.2 Strategic Self-Presentation
The father behind self-presentation research is Erving Goffman with his classic; “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”. Goffman’s theory is based upon the idea of roles, hence, how an individual is to perform within their role in order to be accepted by others. Through routines and social systems, teams, as Goffman refers to, work in order to establish an identity that is socially accepted between different teams. The creation of a role/identity is a process in which the individual/group presents an idealized image of their self (Goffman, 1959:22). Goffman states that a person has two specific identities, one that we keep to ourselves, back stage and one that we present to others, front stage (ibid, 1959:112). The final goal of the process is to be accepted as the identity the persons in question wish to present. It is the outsiders, referred to as the audience who perform this ritual of acceptance, cementing the identity for the persons (ibid, 1959:235). The audience are those that are observing the group, in the case of this study, it is the front stage presentation of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State towards outsiders, the global west, that we are interested in. Furthermore, it is possible to see how identity is an ever changing piece of an individual or a group. The identity presented by Al Qaeda and the Islamic State has changed over time and been affected by internal and external forces. Identity may be seen as a final achievement, a goal which groups seek to obtain in order to complete the group (Hevern, 2004:332). Moreover, portraying a specific identity and belonging is more than a few symbols in a picture. The time invested in the identity is often long
and strategically planned in order to obtain the wanted result (Goffman, 1959:42). What Goffman’s theory adds to the Terrorist Identity is the understanding of time invested in an identity and the importance of creating a strategic self-presentation in order to portray a collected identity of the group. Although it is difficult to analyze the time invested by Al Qaeda and the Islamic State into their identity without interviews, it is possible to search for clues within texts, photos and videos that show the importance and awareness of the groups strategically self-presented identity. The module presented in figure 1.0 represents the key steps in the creation of a strategically self-presented identity. The module will under the later parts of this thesis be applied to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State separately in order to highlight and clarify the process of a strategic self-presented identity.

Figure 1.0. How the terrorist identity’s main points lead to a role/identity creation which is then strategically presented in accordance to Goffman’s theory of self-presentation.

As presented in figure 1.0; symbols, socialization and the generalized others are vital segments in the process of creating a role and thereafter an identity within a group. Once an identity of a group is created it is possible to display it through Goffman’s theory of self-presentation. By deeply examining a few cases it is possible to find explanations that may strengthen already existing theories, hence develop the theories in accordance to the findings presented (Esiasson et.al.2012). The awareness of the groups identity is what leads to the possibility to present a strategic identity outwards. As mentioned, the purpose of spreading a specific identity is to gain acceptance from outsiders and to unite individuals around a sense of belonging.
4.0 Methodology

In order to understand how Al Qaeda and IS portray an outwards identity a qualitative approach will be applied. When conducting a study within the framework of social science, one path to take is to try and identify specific patterns within the material (Danemark et.al.2002:177). It is possible to try and understand how a specific group/individual elects to present them towards others by looking at the language of the person. Moreover, analyzing interviews, pictures and video clips offers an insight to how the groups in question see themselves, not only the language, but also subtle clues such as the symbols described in Arena and Arrigo’s identity theory (Cresswell, 2014:191). By conducting such an analysis it is possible to compare the actions of the groups to the theories in an attempt to understand their social position (identity) in relationship with other actors (Danemark et.al., 2002:92) The aim of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. By viewing material that the groups themselves have released we, as outsiders, are offered the possibility of glancing into part of their reality, or at least the reality that they wish to share (Cresswell, 2014:192).

4.1 Comparative case-study

The data collected will be put through a comparative case study method. Such a method highlights variables within the two groups that either are the same or differ from each other (Bennet & George, 2005:151ff). In the case of this study, comparing how Al Qaeda and IS portray their separate identities through different media outputs by applying the theoretical result presented in figure 1.0 (p.18) will display how the two terrorist groups decide to present an intentionally created identity outwards. The benefits of a comparative case-study are that it highlights details of the cases that might not have been lifted in, for example, a quantitative study. Therefore, such a method is the most affective when applied to a small amount of cases (Landman, 2009:14). As this study will focus on Al Qaeda and the Islamic State a comparative case-study has the means to push the search towards connections between the two groups at hand, both positive and negative (Landman, 2009:18). Such a comparative method may also be referred to as a Few Country Comparisons, the difference being that this study will focus on the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, not a typical sovereign state. From there, the goal is to isolate what separates the two groups, allowing for
different outcomes depending on the object being studied and when the study is taking place (Landman & Robinson, 2009:33). Additionally, such a study limits the amount of generalization possible and lowers the level of abstraction, hence, revealing key elements of the groups at hand (ibid, 2009:31). The main components that are to be compared and analyzed will be the statements in interviews and press-releases as well as more subtle symbols within videos and pictures in an attempt to isolate the key elements that differ Al Qaeda from the Islamic state and vice versa. This is also known as a most similar system design (MSSD), highlighting that a group that shares a host country, culture, religion and history may, in the sense of this thesis, not share the same identity moving forward (Landman & Robinson 2009:34).

4.2 Data collection
Practically, the data gathered has been collected primarily through internet sources. Conducting research with websites and other internet-based media forums as the main field, the Internet’s greatest strength, its endless size and possibilities, may become the researcher’s worst enemy. Websites and social media-accounts are created and removed daily (Bryman, 2008:584). What this leads to is further time being directed to the data gathering process in order to locate original photos and videos that have been removed from their original location. A practical example of this is the execution videos which the Islamic State posts predominantly through public sites such as YouTube. Due to the graphic violence of the videos they are removed by YouTube as they state that: “It’s not okay to post violent or gory content that’s primarily intended to be shocking, sensational or disrespectful.” (YouTube, n.d.). In turn, this forces one to search for such videos in other areas of the Internet. This proved to be relatively easy as many sites retain such videos for different purposes. Although the sites maintaining such videos and messages may have a clear political agenda the videos remain the original, released by Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. As a result, the data collected for this study has been from sites upholding a clear anti-Islam agenda (http://pamelageller.com/), http://www.barenakedislam.com/), websites promoting freedom of speech (http://leaksource.info/), professionals interested in the subject (http://jihadology.net/) and websites attempting to challenge extremism and promote dialogue (www.clarionproject.org) to name a few. An ethical issue regarding the collection of data from the internet is the question regarding what may be seen as public and what is private. Regarding the videos and messages distributed by the likes
of IS and Al Qaeda, these group spread their videos with the aim of gaining attention (Hoffman, 2006:181). Therefore, such documents are open to interpretation and use in this study (Bryman, 2008:610).

Terrorist groups have seen the potential of using the enormous information network in their favour. Anyone with an internet connection has the possibility to create websites and use them to display a chosen message (Bryman, 2008:500). For example, the Twitter-account used by Boko Haram to pledge their alliance to IS was removed shortly after the message was displayed (BBC, 2015). Bearing this in mind, certain areas of the written material is easier to access. For example, the interviews and statements of Bin Ladin, Al Zawahiri and Abdallah Azzam are gathered through published material that has been collected and translated (Lawrence, 2005. Kepel & Milelli, 2005). The same goes for the Islamic States magazine, Dabiq, written in English and directed towards English-speakers, the magazine offers an insight to how the Islamic State are presenting themselves outwards. When collecting the raw data for this study it is important to work through the data, removing areas that are not important for the study and instead focusing and analyzing portions closely related to the subject (Cresswell, 2014:195). The study at hand will hold an abductive mindset when collecting and examining the data. When conducting research within the field of social science it is important to remember that a study’s findings may always be analyzed from a different perspective, adding new light to a well-documented field (Danemark et.al.2002:92). Hence, this study will not attempt to explain the collected data from a specific theory in order to prove that theory. Instead it shall be used alongside the collected empirical findings to try and understand the phenomenon. During the research process the need for a theory developing aspect became imminent. The idea of a deductive identity analysis was complimented by the strategic self-presentation of an identity, evolving the theory during the research process and shifting towards an abductive study (Esiasson et.al.2012: 112/f). The abductive approach may be viewed as a means to examining a known phenomenon from a new perspective, also known as recontextualization (ibid, 2002:91).
4.3 Limitation and Delimitations
When conducting research at any level there will always be certain limitations and delimitations to what is possible. The obvious limitations that arise when conducting a study on global jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and The Islamic State is the accessibility of the organizations. Although it would have added a key element to understanding their presented identities, the possibility to hold interviews with the jihadists is difficult to say the least due to security and accessibility issues. Key delimitations to the study is language, due to my lack of knowledge within the Arabic languages used by the Sunni-militant groups this study relies on translated data and messages sent in English from Al Qaeda and The Islamic State.

4.4 Reliability and Validity
When conducting research with non-stable groups, such as militant organizations, different research methods and researchers may provide different finding regarding the same subject, complicating the reliability (Neuman: 185). It is therefore crucial to remove unnecessary faults during the data collection process (Esiasson et.al. 2012:63). As the majority of the data collected for this study has been produced and released by the groups themselves, it is fair to argue that by presenting the findings it is possible to retain an honest and balanced picture of Al Qaeda and The Islamic State. The result of building a thesis on the original messages from a group, along with a strong theoretical base, is a high level of reliability for the study (ibid, 2012:58ff. Neuman, 2003:185). To further strengthen the thesis it is important to maintain a high level of validity, referring to the accuracy of the data collected. A common means of examining the accuracy of the findings and to present a fair view of the collected data is to triangulate different data sources, meaning searching for and collecting data from several separate sources. By doing so it is possible to search for patterns within the material (Cresswell, 2014:201). As for this study, the data collected is from videos, statements, pictures, documentaries along with first and second hand literature published by Al Qaeda and IS. By presenting a detailed description of the findings one may strengthen the validity of the data presented (ibid, 2014:202). Although the explanatory theme of this thesis limits the amount of generalization, or the external validity, the internal validity is strengthened by the developed theory and fair portrayal of the groups (Esiasson et.al. 2012:58).
5.0 Findings

In this chapter the findings regarding the Islamic State and Al Qaeda will be presented separately in order to present a clear image of the two jihadist groups before the concrete comparison under the theoretical applications chapter.

5.1 Al Qaeda

“But the Muslims realized that they were the main target of the Judeocrusading alliance; all the false propaganda about human-rights faded away behind the blows dealt to Muslims, add the massacres perpetrated against them in every part of the world”.

(Bin Ladin, August 23, 1996:47)

Although the history of Al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin goes further back then 1996, it is this statement that brought forward the Afghani-based terror organization. In the Declaration of jihad against the Americans occupying the land of the two holy sanctuaries Bin Ladin establishes from the start who the enemy of his organization is, and why. As mentioned under the Al Qaeda historical chapter; around this time, foreign troops, more then 500 000, where stationed in Saudi Arabia. Bin Ladin felt that having foreign troops so close to the important religious cities of Mecca and Medina was an insult towards Muslim’s, and this turned the previously national focused group towards an international struggle (Migaux, 2007:316ff). Bin Ladin continues in the Declaration of jihad:

“The only way of repelling the invasion is through the combined efforts of all Muslims…”

(Bin Ladin, August 23, 1996:49)

Here, in one of Bin Ladin’s first statements to the United States he sets the standard which is to follow for years to come, the fact that it is ALL Muslims against the “invaders”. He continues:

“..., and so the Muslims must ignore what divides them, temporarily, since closing their eyes to their differences cannot be worse than ignoring the capitol sin that menaces Muslims”. (Bin Ladin, August 23, 1996:49)
To say that Bin Ladin has had a crucial role in the creation of Al Qaeda and the identity surrounding the group is an understatement. During his first couple of years, Bin Ladin issued several statements primarily directed towards the United States. The year following the declaration of jihad, 1997, Bin Ladin was interviewed by CNN regarding, Al Qaeda, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. A vital element in Bin Ladin’s psychological strategy was to separate the values of the west to his jihadist fighters:

“We love this kind of death for God’s cause as much as you like to live”.

(Bin Ladin, May 12, 1997:50)

Terrorism, specifically in the Middle East, has been seen as an effective strategy for weaker states/groups to confront larger actors. Acts of terrorism may also be seen as a method to gain international attention and statements such as Bin Ladins, an attempt to gain international sympathy (Hoffman, 2006:17). To try and comprehend the impact messages sent from Al Qaeda, via Al Jazeera, may have on the region we must understand the size of Al Jazeera. The news agency when founded in 1996 would broadcast what the Middle Eastern elite attempted to hide behind closed doors, contrary to the other news networks at the time. The modern news agencies popularity was unheard of in the Middle East, at one point; a whopping seventy percent of those with a satellite connection in the region received their news from Al Jazeera (Gardell, 2005:211).

Returning to Al Qaeda, the terrorist group has stated that uniting Muslims worldwide is necessary and that every Muslim that is able should perform jihad.

“It is possible to track an American or a Jew, to kill him with a bullet or a knife, a simple explosive device, or a blow with an iron rod...With the means available, small groups can spread terror among Americans and Jews.”

(Al-Zawahiri, December 2, 2001: 198)

Al Qaeda’s terrorist tactics not only focused on intimidating the enemy, disregarding their small means available as presented above. Furthermore, the symbolic attack of 9/11 established the jihadist group as a global actor, able to carry out attacks on the
enemies own soil. Thereafter, Bin Ladin and Al-Zawahiri continued to adapt their propaganda strategy, developing a policy focused on internet based activity (Weimann, 2006a:123). Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Bin Ladin’s second in charge and the successor after his death in 2011, would after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 be the representative from Al Qaeda most present in the jihadist group’s homemade videos. Originally focused on regional issues, primarily Egyptian jihad, Al-Zawahiri is considered to be one of the masterminds behind the attacks on 9/11 and the Fatwa calling for the murder of Americans worldwide (Lacroix, 2008:148,158). In one of Al-Zawahiri’s more famous statements prior to his days in Al Qaeda, the Egyptian Al-Zawahiri stated that: “Democracy is the new religion”. (n.d:184). He elaborates:

“As you can see, my dear Muslim brother, democracy is based on the principle of the power of creatures over other creature, and rejects the principle of God’s absolute power over all creatures...”

The idea of setting democracy as a religion creates a situation in which Al Qaeda can justify and unite Muslims behind the flag of Tawhid in a holy battle. Furthermore, by connecting the western battle for democracy together with the Israeli government and the conflict with Palestine the cause of Al Qaeda may gain sympathy from likeminded:

“The masters of Washington and Tel Aviv use regimes to protect their interests and to fight the Muslims on their behalf.”

“Unity against the common enemy: the jihad must realize that half the road to victory is attained through union, rising above the minor matters, self-sacrifice, and putting the interest of Islam above personal conflict.”

(Al-Zawahiri, December 2, 2001: 202)

Now, the call for Muslim unification is nothing new for Al Qaeda, as can be seen, it is common practice in an attempt to unite Muslims against a common enemy. Yet, the quotes above from Knights under the Prophet’s banner (December 2, 2001) demonstrate the tactics implemented by Al Qaeda. Over the years Al Qaeda have
highlighted the importance of this specific jihad, this specific ummah and used that as a tool in their propaganda:

“The current Zionist-Crusader campaign against the ummah is the most dangerous and rabid ever, since it threatens the entire ummah, its religion and presence. “

(Bin Ladin, January 4, 2004:215)

The term crusader adds a level of threat to the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the connection between the U.S. and Israel is a call for further sympathy from likeminded groups in an effort to unite Muslims against a common enemy. It is clear that the presence of foreign troops is not accepted by Al Qaeda, Bin Ladin and Al-Zawahiri both come from backgrounds of struggling against foreign oppressors, the Soviet Union and the U.S. The presence of these troops echoes as call for battle, a call for unity amongst Muslims in the region and worldwide:

“Did they [United States] not say that they wanted to change the region’s ideology, which vents hatred against the Americans? What they mean by this is Islam and its peak. They know full well that they will not enjoy our wealth and land as we remain mujahid Muslims. “

(Bin Ladin, January 4, 2004:215)
5.2 The Islamic State

The world has divided into two camps:

“ The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hierocracy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews.”

*(Dabiq, Issues 1:10)*

The reference in the Islamic State’s English magazine, Dabiq, cites Amirul-Mu’minin and shows the basic principles of the Islamic State, either you are with us, or you are against us. With the publication and internet-based distribution of Dabiq, the Islamic State offers an insight to the group that has never before been possible. Ideally, such a document presents the strategic self-presentation in an accessible fashion, open for all. The main article for the first issue of Dabiq focuses on leadership, what IS refer to as *The concept of Imamah*. As mentioned under the historical presentation of the Islamic State we can see how IS are attempting to legitimize their state through the likes of identification cards. The Islamic State is seeking to establish just that, a state built upon their interpretation of Islam. VICE news is one of the few western based media groups that have gained access to the Islamic State. During a period in late 2014 VICE news was able to give an insight to the daily life within Raqqa, the un-official capital of the Islamic State. The member of IS showing the news team around was press officer Abu Mosa, when asked about the Islamic State he answered:

“*It [Islamic State] is a state and not a group. We aim to build and Islamic State to cover every aspect of life*."

*(VICE news, December 26, 2014)*

The Islamic State is clear with their intentions, and the means used are often brutal and intimidating. If Al Qaeda’s messages from a cave are the hallmark of the decentralized terrorist group, it is the execution videos that are the hallmark of the Islamic States strategy. The executions of James Foley *(Leaksource, 2014a)*, David
Haines (Leaksource, 2014e) Alen Henning (Leaksource, 2014c), Peter Kassig (Leaksource, 2014d) and Steven Sotloff (Leaksource, 2014b) all took place in the same manner. Kneeling in front of an IS member, wearing an orange jumpsuit much like those worn by the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Foley, Sotloff, Henning and Haines all read a message to the camera, followed by a statement from the IS members and then the decapitation of the prisoner. The videos are opened with statements from the leaders of the prisoners countries, in this case U.S. president Barack Obama and British Prime minister David Cameron. By connecting the prisoner to their leader IS create a link between their death and the actions of Obama and Cameron. In Foley’s statement, a prepared statement most likely written by the Islamic State, Foley condemns his country and that the reason for his death is his citizenship:

“I wish I could have the hope for freedom and seeing my family once again. But that ship has sailed. I guess all in all, I wish I wasn’t American.”

(Dabiq, Issue 3:40)

Foley’s statement was a direct attack towards what is often seen as being American, words as freedom and family play directly to the American people. Much like the statements made by Bin Ladin and Al-Zawahiri, the execution videos bring out who the Islamic State see as their main enemy. In a dramatically directed video the Islamic State show the execution of 14 Syrian men, allegedly officers and pilots in the Syrian army. The message, although containing the death of Syrian military personal, is once again directed towards the west and Obama:

“To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we slaughter the soldiers of Bashar and tomorrow we will be slaughtering your soldiers, and with Allah’s permission, we will break this final crusade and the Islamic State will soon, like your puppet David Cameron said: will being to slaughter people in your streets.”

(Leaksource, November 16, 2014d)
What separates this statement from the previous ones is the threat of bringing the battle to the land of the enemy. IS main claim has been to challenge the territorial claims of the Middle East, erasing borders and creating a geographical area controlled and govern by the group (Phillips, 2014:496). Furthermore, the amount of optimism in the Islamic State’s messages is centered on an idea that this is all something new.

“We have warned you that today we are in a new era, an era where the State, its soldiers, and its sons are leaders not slaves.”

(Dabiq, Issue 4.p.7)

While threats to the U.S. and its allies are nothing new, the creation of Dabiq has changed the way IS present themselves. No longer is it only the execution of enemies and videos/photos of war that are being spread. Now, next to graphic pictures of dead enemy soldiers are pictures of bridges being built, “...life goes on in the Islamic State.” (Dabiq, Issue 4.p.27, See appendix 2.1, Figure 6. p.54). The following pages highlight Services for the Muslims, pictures of children going through cancer treatment (See appendix 1.1, Figure 4 p. 52), roads being cleaned and a fully functioning seniors home. These images are a sharp contrast to those of decapitated soldiers, offering a completely different view of the Islamic State. If terrorism is based on actions in an attempt to create an overreaction, then these are the opposite (Weimann, 2006a:20, 34. Hoffman, 2006:3). These types of messages seem to bare the intention of legitimizing the Islamic State as an actual state, and not a group. However, the Islamic State is not open for everyone. In a video published by IS on February 15, 2015, several Egyptian Christians (Copts) are decapitated, while wearing the same orange jumpsuit as Foley and the other western citizens. The person speaking in the video states, in English, that these are The people of the cross, the followers of the hostile Egyptian Church” and that they are “..chopping the head off those who have carrying the cross that over time, filled with spite against Islam and Muslims.’(Infobae, February 15 - 2015). There are several examples of such mass execution of Christians by IS, in a video released two months after the Egyptian execution thirty Ethiopian Christians were executed, half by decapitation and the others shot from behind (Barenaked Islam, April 20 – 2015). Moreover, it is not only
non-Muslims that must be cautious. Within the areas controlled by the Islamic State, the rule of *Sharia* is upheld by *Hisbah* groups whose main goal is to “Enjoy good and forbid evil”. Abu Obida, a patrol leader in Raqqa explains how they work with the citizens of the city:

“*So, we advise in a nice way, but those who don’t obey will be forced*”

*(VICE news, December 26, 2014)*

For those who don’t obey, harsh punishment is often the consequence, for example a man being convicted of murder and punished by being publicly crucified in central Raqqa *(VICE news, 2014)* or the conviction and execution of two highway robbers *(Dabiq, Issue 1.p.45)*. The establishment of the Islamic State, no matter their brutal methods, has overcome two crucial points that have hampered jihadist groups from succeeding in the past. Groups prior to IS have not acted with a present political wing, confusing followers to what the goal of the group is. Furthermore, the sense of nationalism in areas has troubled the creation of a stable *umma* as locals refuse to break national borders *(Chaliand & Blin, 2007:253)*. The Islamic State has overcome these hinders, breaking borders while maintaining a political wing in the form of a *caliphate*, a religious state.
6.0 Theoretical application and comparison

In this chapter the theoretical framework, consisting of the Terrorist Identity and Goffman’s self-presentation, will be applied to the empirical findings. In addition to the quotes presented in the findings chapter further empirical data will be supplied. Under the symbols sub-chapter photos will be referred to in the appendix of this thesis in order to highlight key signs used by the two jihadist groups in their identity presentation.

6.1 Symbols

Both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State use symbols in their videos, messages and pictures. Much like the politicians who used local symbols to create a bond between the reader and the writer in Nilsson’s study (2012), so do the global jihadist groups. The most prominent symbol used by both groups is the Flag of Tawhid, what the flag represents is the oneness of God, that God is almighty and there is no other God (Migaux, 2007:262). The flag of Tawhid is the key symbol that global jihadist groups may gather around. Not only do IS and Al Qaeda use the black and white flag, other Islamic jihadist such as Al Shaabab and Boko Haram (Amnesty, 2015) gather around the symbol of Islamic fighters. Returning to the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, both groups are famous for their videos through which they spread their messages. As mentioned, the Islamic State spreads it messages through information videos or execution videos. The former, gaining large amounts of attention due to its graphic nature and ability to draw the media’s oversight towards the group (Hoffman, 2006:173). The Islamic State are very particular when it comes to clothing in their videos, out of the videos used for this study (seven execution and countless others), all had the members of the Islamic State wearing their all black uniform, often with the face mask covering their identity. This uniform is an important symbol for the organization, as presented in the findings chapter, the Islamic State are trying to portray an image of a state, not a terrorist group. One of the main differences between guerrilla/freedom groups and terrorist is the use of uniforms (Hoffman, 2006:35). Furthermore, those being executed in IS videos often wear the orange jumpsuit resembling those used at the United States prison at Guantanamo Bay. This symbol connects the deaths of the hostages to the generalized other, the United States (Stern & Berger, 2015:120). If we are to compare the outfits of IS to those used by Bin
Ladin in his speeches as Al Qaeda’s leader their as several differences. During the years that Al Qaeda was the most active Bin Ladin would often wear military clothing, yet not a specific uniform. However, as Al Qaeda were pushed further away from key military areas and into hideouts the clothing worn in their videos would change, signalling a change in time and tactics (See appendix 1.0 Figure 1 & 2. p.51).

The leaders of the two global jihadist groups may also be seen as vital symbols to the group’s identity. Both IS and Al Qaeda have connected their leaders to their religious standpoint, as the Islamic State Caliphate was born, so was its leaders status as Caliph. However, the status of Caliph may be strongly affected by other leaders obtaining the role of Bayah, also known as the oath of loyalty (Stern & Berger, 2015:179). The oath connects organizations to a leader, for many years Bin Ladin was this leader and other jihadist groups would pledge allegiance to him and in turn to Al Qaeda. An important note is that the oath binds a group to a leader, not to an organization (2015:190). Hence, with the death of Bin Ladin in 2011, groups that had pledged allegiance to the face of terrorism would now stand without a leader. Al Qaeda’s leaders often appear in videos released by the group, acting as a strategic symbol in the messages. The decentralized tactic of Al Qaeda has created a situation where there are more symbolic leaders compared to lower ranking members. To the contrary, the top leaders of the Islamic State rarely appear in videos and messages due to the security risk involved. IS have instead of releasing fewer videos turned the security issue to their favour. By celebrating members of the lower ranks of IS and by using symbolic persons such as western citizens as the executioners in their videos, the Islamic State demonstrate an image where the organization is more than its top leaders (Stern & Berger, 2015:124).

6.2 Educational Socialization and Roles

As mentioned under the theoretical presentation, Educational socialization is more difficult to present without conducting interviews with the groups. However, by viewing the historical background and data released by Al Qaeda and IS it is possible to gain an understanding of the socialization process and role-building of the group’s members.
Both Al Qaeda and the Islamic States are groups born out of war, Al Qaeda out of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the Islamic State out of the United States invasion of Iraq. The result is that both groups are heavily dependent on a generalized other in their identity building process. However, the socialization process that eventually leads to the identity building and feeling of belonging differs heavily between the groups (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:240). Al Qaeda and the Islamic State are equal to the two different roles presented within the terrorist identity. First we have Al Qaeda, the jihadist group have constantly referred to themselves as the victims of conflicts. They are the ones fighting up from below against a stronger power, using jihad as their defence against foreign powers (Stern & Berger, 2015:108). Al Qaeda uses their position as victims to portray a sense of persecution, not only of them but the entire Muslim community:

“We should therefore see events not as isolated incidents, but as part of a long chain of conspiracies, a war of annihilation in all sense of the word”.

(Bin Ladin, Crusader Wars: Nov 3 -2001)

Bin Ladin would often refer to the Crusader war to highlight how they and the rest of the world’s Muslims were persecuted by the United States and Israel. Furthermore, Bin Ladin would use the position of victim in order to justify their actions as they would claim that their role as victim would allow them to use any means necessary (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:234):

“And as I looked at those demolished buildings in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor in kind and destroy the towers of America, so that they could experience some of what we had experienced,…”

(Bin Ladin, Oct 30 – 2004)

The towers of America that Bin Ladin refer to are the twin towers of the World Trade Center that were destroyed in the 9/11 attacks against the U.S.. The tactics implemented by Al Qaeda were to gain the sympathy of the global community in an attempt to justify their attacks and strategy. Furthermore, by presenting the victim identity, Al Qaeda has the opportunity to attract individuals to the organization
through relatable causes and connecting them to the group’s symbols. After doing so, the new recruits would be more susceptible to radicalization (Stern & Berger, 2015:195).

The Islamic State on the other hand fulfill the *martial role*. What this refers to is a group who identifies with the need to reclaim something that has been lost or stolen and to do so through a violent response (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:235). Opposite to Al Qaeda, the Islamic State elects to present a view of a strong force, ready to battle the already weakened enemy/enemies (Stern, & Berger, 2015:109):

“I say to the American army, don’t be cowards and attack us with drones. Instead send your soldiers, the ones we humiliated in Iraq. We will humiliate them everywhere, God willing, and raise the flag of Allah in the White House”.

*(Abu Mosa – Vice News, Dec 2014)*

The Islamic State clearly is presenting an image of strength and optimism. Al Qaeda’s defence strategy is based upon a potential future that they might not see, the key to their strategy is the fact that the group does not have any governmental power and therefore must fight (Stern & Berger, 2015:195). Contrary to Al Qaeda, the Islamic State have declared a caliphate, a caliphate that is present and established today (ibid, 2015:118).

“*On the first of Ramadan 1435H, the revival of the Khilafah (Caliphate) was announced by the spokesman for the Islamic State...*”

*(Dabiq, Issue 1:7)*

The followers of the Islamic State are being prepared for a role that exemplifies the modern jihadist. Through the process of socialization, outsiders looking for a chance to join the group are being prepared for what is expected of a member of the Islamic State (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:236). An important aspect of socialization is the influence on future generations, also known as educational socialization. (ibid, 2006:237). Al Qaeda and the Islamic State both use children as symbols in their
propaganda machine, however, they do so if very different ways. Bin Ladin would often use children to gain sympathy and direct anger towards the generalized other:

“...the name of the American government and the names of Clinton and Bush directly bring to our minds the pictures of one-year-old children with their heads cut off.”

(Bin Ladin – Interview with CNN: May 12, 1997)

“It was as if a crocodile had seized a helpless child, who could do nothing but scream.” (On Israel’s invasion of Lebanon 1982)

(Bin Ladin – Messages to the American People: October 30, 2004)

For Al Qaeda, children are not a part of the group, at least not publically. Instead, children are used more as a symbol for the socialization process and to gather sympathy and individuals around the identity of Al Qaeda (Arrena & Arrigo, 2006:231). The Islamic State on the other hand is keen on placing children within the identity of the jihadist group. The children of the Islamic State are a part of the conflicts, Abu Mosa, IS press officer:

“I told my children that I will not buy them sweets until the children of Daraa and Homs are able to celebrate too”

(VICE news – December 2014)

The entire VICE documentary, which is under the guidance of Islamic State officials, depicts children willing and wanting to join the Islamic State in their fight against the opposition. Moreover, in the first four issues of Dabiq, there is a constant presence of children. In Dabiq children are used in the classic Al Qaeda manner, by showing the bodies of infants and young children IS try to gain sympathy for their retaliation actions in accordance with the martial role. However, the majority of the photos in Dabiq are of young boys surrounded around the flag of Tahwid. One photo that is extra remarkable is that of a young boy, with a protective face-mask, apparently receiving cancer treatment in Ninawa, while holding up the flag of Tahwid (See appendix 1.1 Figure 4. p.52). The Islamic State have released videos of children,
known as “cubs”, being trained in a military fashion, all bearing the black and white headband with the flag of Tawhid and dressed in desert camouflage (Daily Mail, Feb 22 – 2015). Another video shows a single “cub” executing two hostages under the supervision of an adult member (Daily Mail, Jan 13 - 2015). Both videos are produced and released by Al Hayat, the same media production company that is behind Dabiq. Although the second video is argued to be staged and the hostages might not have actually been killed there are other videos showing combat training of young boys (Daily Mail, Dec 8 -2014). These videos and statements send a clear message, children are a part of the Islamic State and the process of educational socialization is ongoing.

6.3 Generalized other
As has been presented under symbols and the socialization chapters, there seems to be more differences than similarities between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. However, one mutual relation that the two global jihadists share is that of a common enemy. When Al Qaeda shifted their jihad from national to international they shaped the future for global mujahedeen campaigns. The focus has since then been the U.S. and the West, a path which the Islamic State have followed.

It is worth repeating, the Islamic State was born out of Al Qaeda in Iraq, a branch of Al Qaeda central in Afghanistan, whose main objective was resistance against the American invasion of Iraq, also known as The Failed Crusade by IS. (Cockburn, 2015: 135. Stern & Berger, 2015:177). As time has passed and the Islamic State has gained a stronger geographical position in Syria and Iraq the West has remained the public enemy of the group. Both Al Qaeda and IS refer to the United States and its allies as the Crusaders, each execution of western citizen has sent with it a message to the enemy. Furthermore, as presented under findings, it is possible to see how by connecting the execution of western citizens to leaders such as U.S. president Barack Obama IS establish an ongoing conflict with western powers. The special treatment given to western citizens develops the sense of identity from IS members towards their state, enhancing the separation between the two groups (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:241). However, it is not only IS who are actively separating themselves from the generalized other. George Bush Jr. well documented war on terror legitimized Al Qaeda’s role as the victim with the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (ibid, 2006:234).
Today, as the Islamic State strives to create a functioning Muslim state in the Middle East, western leaders such as Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron continue to condemn the group and refer to them as terrorists (CNN, 2015. International Business Times, 2015. BBC, 2014. The Independent, 2014). Social relationships act as a reminder of identities, Obama and Cameron referring to IS a terrorist group instead of a state establishes the different agendas of the groups (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:147).

Although the Islamic State and Al Qaeda share the same generalized other in the form of the western world the two jihadist groups are in a way each other’s generalized other. Al Qaeda in Iraq, the predecessor of IS, began from an early point spreading graphic videos displaying shocking brutality. The messages where not only directed towards the U.S. and its allies, but also to the Shia Muslims of Iraq (Stern & Berger, 2015:104ff). Al Qaeda has from the dawn of the Islamic State condemned their aggressive actions towards other Muslims:

> Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable - also- are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular by the favor and blessing of God.

*(Al – Zawahiri, 2005)*

The letter from Al – Zawahiri to Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq up to his death in 2005, continues by Al – Zawahiri stating, that although the attacks against Iraq are horrific, their followers do not accept the brutality used by Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al – Zawahiri claims that the way of sympathy is stronger and will gain a better response with followers and the international crowd (Al –Zawahiri, 2005). The martial and victim roles presented earlier in the text are connected to the generalized other in many ways. The legitimizing of these roles is through the actions of the group and their generalized other in this case Al – Qaeda, The Islamic State and the Crusaders (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:235). This in turn leads to the future divide
between Al Qaeda and what was to be the Islamic State. As Al Qaeda have throughout plead for the unification of all Muslims against the generalized other, the Islamic State are more focused on the Muslims that fulfill the rightful requirements and are prepared to move to the Islamic State, thereby becoming an active, fighting portion of the caliphate:

“There is no life without Jihad....The life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah”.

(Dabiq, Issue 3:31)

6.4 Strategic self-presentation

Goffman’s theory of self-presentation is in its own way a presentation of the main points in Arena and Arrigo’s terrorist identity. By combining symbols, socialization, roles and the generalized other we are left with the ideal picture of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, presented by themselves. In truth, it is possible to argue a type of younger brother versus older brother relationship between the two jihadist groups, with the younger Islamic State doing everything possible not to follow in Al Qaeda’s footsteps. Al Qaeda has since Bin Ladin’s rise to power in 1989 strived to portray a sympathetic cause as justification to their actions. A tactic that in the eyes of its leaders is deemed successful:

“And we would spare the people from the effect of questions about the usefulness of our actions in the hearts and minds of the general opinion that is essentially sympathetic to us.”

(Al-Zawahiri 2005)

The use of children as symbols of innocent and death from the enemy enhances the group’s plea for sympathy. The aim of the group, to unite Muslims world-wide in a collective jihad against the enemies of Islam:

“...the Zionist - American alliances was mowing down our sons and our people in the blessed lan of Al Aqsa, at the hands of the Jews but with American planes and tanks, and our sons in Iraq were dying as a result of the oppressive sanctions of America and its agents, while the Islamic world was a very long way from properly establishing Islam”.

(Bin Ladin, Among a band of knights – Feb14, 2003)
Bin Ladin and Al–Zawahiri have been painted as villains and resistance heroes, the perception of which is hard to tell (Gardell, 2005:217). What we can see however, is that Al Qaeda did in fact try to present a picture of a global Muslim community, gathered around Al Qaeda’s acts of jihad. This final point is often stated as typical behaviour of a terrorist network, the actions taken are for a greater cause, not just for the group performing the tasks (Weimann, 2006a:35).

The Islamic State have contrary to Al Qaeda held a position of strength and violence from the beginning. This path of strength and violence has been displayed through what has become the primary source for information regarding the Islamic State, their online videos (Stern & Berger, 2015:104). The videos that contain the footage of decapitated hostages depict how the Islamic State is not only targeting western citizens, but also enemy fighters and local Christians. Other videos show IS jihadist on the front lines, fighting enemy forces in Iraq and Syria. One specific video exemplifies the tactics of the Islamic State, in the video a truck covered in sheet metal is revealed while a member of IS explains its usage. The truck is filled with explosives and driven by a suicide driver right into an enemy camp. Thereafter, the driver detonates a charge, exploding the contents of the truck, along with himself and simultaneously wiping out the entire enemy base (Liveleak, 2013). These types of actions, along with the gory and shocking execution videos do hold a certain connection to terrorist tactics (Hoffman, 2006:181. Weimann, 2006a:45). However, in the strategic self-presentation organized by the Islamic State it is clear that they no longer identify with notion of terrorism. As much as Al Qaeda have strived to be perceived as a reduced terrorist group fighting against a global superpower, the Islamic State have worked to portray the opposite for themselves. Al Hayat’s publication of Dabiq and their many videos are presenting a society which is being built. A society which takes pride in its brutality, crucifying murderers in the streets (VICE News, 2014) and decapitating its enemies on film, urging Muslims to join their cause as they fight for the upholding of an Islamic State (Stern & Berger, 2015:113ff).
7.0 Conclusion

In this chapter the thesis analysis and findings will be summarized and re-connected to the research questions. Furthermore the chapter will contain a discussion regarding the empirical data, methods and theory along with the implications of the thesis and how future research may be possible.

7.1 Analytical summary and research questions

- How is it possible to recognize Al Qaeda and The Islamic States identities through the separate groups outward directed messages i.e. interviews, statements, film clips and photos?

Through the process of gathering and analyzing the messages, film clips and photos of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State it is possible to see how the global jihadist have strategically created an identity of their groups. Al Qaeda have over the years strived to be perceived as a resistance group, although terrorist groups will rarely admit to being a terrorist organization (Hoffman, 2006:22) as it is a negative term, Al Qaeda have used the image to vindicate their modern jihadist campaign. What is key to Al Qaeda’s identity is their position as a victim. By doing so, the group builds its identity and their actions are justified through a feeling of sympathy for their cause and relatability. By connecting the actions of Al Qaeda’s main enemy, the U.S. and Israel to all Muslims, they furthermore acknowledge that their violent responses are for the sake of all Muslims, in a state of defence. Al Qaeda have over the years produced an image as the centre for the Muslim struggle against the U.S. crusader war, although their charismatic leaders are the inspirational base of the group it is the actions of all Muslims around the world which will defeat the enemy. The defensive position of Al Qaeda removes any type of blame from their actions as the jihadist justify it by referring to the atrocities committed by their enemies. As highlighted under the symbols chapter we can see how Bin Ladin would separate the role of the military and religious positions of Al Qaeda as time passed. During the early years of Al Qaeda Bin Ladin would wear military clothing and carry an AK47, however, towards the end of his life Bin Ladin would instead bear civilian clothing to show a that they as a group are no longer a pure military group, it is their persecution from the U.S. and its
allies that pushes Al Qaeda into military actions (See appendix 1.0 Figure 1 & 2 p.51).

Figure 2.0. The Symbols, Socialization and generalized other components that lead to the victim role and Al Qaeda’s strategically presented identity.

As we may see in figure 2.0, Al Qaeda has fully embraced the role of the terrorist identity, strategically using it to justify their actions and to call for action from their followers around the world. The Islamic State on the other hand is striving to create a state based on their view of Islam. The IS identity draws heavy parallels to the martial role as they are reclaiming what they see as their lands, and thereby creating the state that they believe is rightfully theirs. IS take great pride in their sense of being unique among the global jihadist community, with the establishment of IS there is now a state to which Muslims may travel and perform jihad, while living under Islamic rule. IS have through their videos and magazines presented their view, their idea of their future and present identity. This identity is fundamentally religiously ideological but practically based in a strong military culture promoting the strong. The Islamic State take great pride in their military tactics which draw resemblance to those of terrorist groups, however as presented by the bomb trucks used by IS, they are using the established terror tactic of the suicide bomber to win strategic military objectives, while simultaneously spreading fear and terror.
The connections to the generalized other and the execution of the opposition creates a divide highlighting the differences between being a part of IS and being an outsider. By joining IS, a member has the opportunity to live under their Islamic ideology and a state built upon such values. As IS continue to spread information on the social services provided within the state and their success on the battlefield against the enemy the division between them and the generalized others is becoming more polarized. The message being that if you join good will follow, if you stand up against IS, violence will follow.

- What similarities and differences may be identified in the strategically self-presented identities of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in comparison to each other?

The Islamic State, as we know, grew out of an Al Qaeda affiliate, Al Qaeda in Iraq. Both groups claim to be Sunni – Muslims striving for global jihadist cause. However, outside of these presented points, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State are more unlike than alike each other. Where Al Qaeda plea for sympathy and defence, the Islamic State call for strength and aggression, where Al Qaeda would claim their actions were for a future home for all Muslims, the Islamic State is creating such a state now, however only for their followers. The list may be made long of the differences between the two
global jihadists, nevertheless, the identities of the two differs just as much as their
tactics. IS strength is built upon their open brutality to their enemies and how they are
now creating an Islamic State for the allies. Although both groups distance themselves
from the western way of life, it is the Islamic State who is questioning the present
world order that has been heavily influenced by the west. The opposite roles of the
*martial* and the *victim* highlight the differences between IS and Al Qaeda. IS,
absorbing their martial role, are reclaiming what is theirs, their actions are to
strengthen their group and by inviting others to join them in the Islamic State they are
building and strengthening their identity as a group and a state. Al Qaeda has instead
chosen the path of the victim, justifying their actions as an act of defence for all
Muslims, not only themselves. The decentralized position of Al Qaeda creates a
situation in which identity building is more difficult compared to the present Islamic
State. IS are not only presenting a strong image of themselves through different media
outputs, they are also inviting the reader to join them in their struggle. One thing is
clear, we are now in a period in which the Islamic State has taken first place as the
leader of global jihadist, surpassing and leaving Al Qaeda far behind.

7.2 Implications

The two groups subjected to this thesis are but two jihadist groups out of many today.
With the likes of Boko Haram and Al Shabab causing havoc in Nigeria and Somalia
global jihadist groups remain active and present (BBC, 2014). As mentioned under
the introduction, Boko Haram is utilizing the media methods pioneered by Al Qaeda
and evolved by the Islamic State. The success of the Islamic State’s tactics are
frightening, recent reports claim that when 100 IS fighters take control over a
territory, five, sometimes ten times that amount join their ranks, leading to an ever
growing military force (Cockbrun, 2015:145). If other global jihadist groups are able
to copy the success of IS what is to say that such groups would not obtain the same
level of growth as the Islamic State?

The methods used in this thesis have led to findings regarding two specific groups,
this is partly the strength, being able to work through and analyze the most important
portions of the data that are related to the research questions (Cresswell, 2014:195,
189). However, this in turn leads to a very low level of generalization regarding the
question of global jihadist group’s identity. As presented in this thesis, the strategic self-presented identity of Al Qaeda differs from that of the Islamic State. The most probable outcome is that Boko Haram’s self-presented identity differs from both groups, even though they have strong ties to each other, and the same is for Al Shabab. Although the level of generalization is minimal the level of abstraction is therefore lower, giving a stronger insight to the groups actually being studied (Landman & Robinson 2009:31). The point of this methodological discussion is to argue that future research must continue to focus on the groups as individual actors in unique settings. How much these groups may seem to follow the same ideological path they all tend to differ in their identity, tactics and position in today’s global society. There is however a lesser level of generalization available to draw from this study. The tactics and strategic self-presentation of IS and Al Qaeda have been reprocessed, one example being the Boko Haram and their use of Twitter and other social media sites. By conducting future research on other groups, setting out from the perspective of this study, one aspect that may therefore be possible to gain a deeper understanding of is the recruitment patterns of global jihadist groups.

The implications of this thesis finding present a compliment to the argument stating that the Islamic State is not a terrorist organization. Although western leaders such as Obama and David Cameron continue to argue that the brutal Islamic State is a terrorist organization it is hard to ignore the fact that IS has surpassed that stage and is now building a functioning state with healthcare, police and judicial systems (Dabig, Issue 4:27ff; VICE news, Dec 2014. Stern & Berger, 2015:114f). As mentioned, the activity of modern global jihadist groups remains present and dynamic, now spread over a vast geographical area (BBC, 2014). If the situation is to continue what is not to say that there will be more Islamic States being established around the globe?

7.2.1 Methodological discussion
As mentioned, the method of a qualitative comparative case-study offers a strong analysis tool when conducting research with only a few cases (Landman & Robinson 2009:33). The low level of generalization is more of a strength than a drawback as it legitimizes the findings with a lower level of abstraction. However, the approach offers only a glimpse of the organizations; in order to gain a deeper understanding of the group and its members other qualitative methods should be applied. Ideally,
interviews would be the strongest method available in order to understand the group’s members thinking over time and their identity within the group (Miller, 2000:74f). However, as stated under the methodology chapter such interviews would be extremely difficult to hold and remains a challenge for future research on jihadist groups.

7.2.3 Theoretical discussion
It may seem odd that the theory of the terrorist identity has been applied to a group that is arguably not a terrorist group. The strength of Arena & Arrigo’s theory combined with Goffman self-presentation is however the analytical base that determines whether groups with a shared history tend to present themselves differently, as in the case of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda. There are countless theories on identity which may have been applied to the research problems, yet, considering the groups background it is hard to argue that their history is not laced with terrorism and all that follows, allowing for a strong analysis which led to the distinction of Al Qaeda upholding a victimized terrorist identity and the Islamic State growing into a martial state identity. Nevertheless, as has been mentioned, theories must be open to critique in order to develop and remain relevant (Danemark, 2002:148). The results of this thesis point to a change in how global jihadist groups identify, focusing now on regional, geographical conflicts highlighted by the Islamic States cause for legitimization. Arena & Arrigo’s terrorist identity theory is from 2006 and Goffman’s from 1959, as modern jihadist groups continue to develop their strategies and identities it is crucial that further theories are developed in order to understand the violent organizations.

7.4 Future research
The Islamic States relatively young age results in a limited amount of literature regarding the group in comparison to Al Qaeda. To clarify, both books regarding IS applied to this study were released in 2015. Therefore, future research should be pointed to understanding the Islamic State on a more detailed level. This in turn could lead to a greater understanding of why the organization is able to recruit members from all over the world. Therefore, it is plausible to recommend and anticipate that more academic research will be conducted in an attempt to understand the members of the Islamic State, rather than their tactics.
8.0 References


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Appendix 1.0 - Usama Bin Ladin

Figur 1: Bin Ladin delivering a message in 2001 from a rural environment bearing strategic symbols such as military clothing and the Kalashnikov rifle in the background (The Guardian, 2011).

Figur 2: Bin Ladin delivering a message in 2007, now bearing civilian clothing with no direct symbolic links to military activity. (The Guardian, 2011)
Appendix 1.1 – The Islamic State

**Figur 3:** The Islamic State’s execution video of U.S. citizen James Foley. Critical symbols such as the *flag of Tawhid*, the orange jumpsuit worn by Foley and the black uniform of the Islamic State are represented. Leaksource (2014a)

**Figur 4:** A young child allegedly receiving cancer treatment within the Islamic State shows off the *flag of Tawhid*. (Dabiq Issue 4 p.28)
Appendix 2.0 Dabiq *Graphic*

Figur 5 Excerpt of the Islamic States magazine, Dabiq. Images of IS military action against Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq. IS often display the bodies of their enemies in Dabiq to highlight their military success (Dabiq, Issue 4:26).
Appendix 2.1 Dabiq

A WINDOW INTO THE ISLAMIC STATE

In the midst of a raging war with multiple fronts and numerous enemies, life goes on in the Islamic State. The soldiers of Allah do not liberate a village, town or city, only to abandon its residents and ignore their needs.

When the Prophet (sallallāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam) would depart the city of Madinah to lead a military expedition, he would appoint a deputy to remain in the city and look after the affairs of the Muslim families. So just as it was the tradition of the Prophet (sallallāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam) to ensure that his followers were being cared for in his absence, so too has it become the practice of the Khilāfah to ensure that the needs of the Muslims are being met as much as possible, even in the midst of a fierce war and a relentless campaign by the crusaders to undermine the mission of the mujāhidīn.

Figur 6 Excerpts from Islamic State magazine Dabiq, following the previous display of military success IS choose to display the successful building of infrastructure within its borders. Following pages highlight functioning medical systems (Dabiq, Issue 4: 27ff).