

Theorising the Islamic State: A Critical Global South Decolonial Perspective

By

Nkululeko Majozi

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Supervisor: Mr Anthony Bizos

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ABSTRACT

This study critically engages with the current security debate on the conceptual understanding of the Islamic State (IS). The study critically evaluates the dominant Western view within the debate that conceptualises IS as an ‘Islamic’ terrorist organisation and a product of the ‘backwardness’ of Islam. By conducting a critical review of the literature on IS, the author argues that such a conceptualisation of IS is rooted in a racist, orientalist and Islamophobic Western epistemological narrative which seeks to create a ‘natural’ link between terrorism and Islam. Through a conceptual discussion on terrorism and a critical assessment of the Eurocentric nature of security studies theories, both traditional and critical, the study shows how hegemonic Western epistemologies are able to conveniently ignore the European roots of terrorism in the foundation of Western modernity. The result of this is that hegemonic Western epistemologies are able to appropriate the concept of security as an exclusive domain of Western states and their societies. This whilst carving out the non-European world, particularly Islamic societies, as the exclusive sources of potential terrorist threats. The study therefore advances the decolonial theoretical concept of global coloniality as a means of reframing the debate and shifting the point of enunciation from dominant Western views of IS to a more critical Global South decolonial perspective. As such, the study places emphasis on the European origins of terrorism as a constitutive element of the foundation of Western modernity, whilst addressing the cognitive confinement of security studies theories. In this light the study concludes by asserting that the Islamic State is a creation of the constitutive violent logic of Western modernity/coloniality, which has terrorism as its foundational core.

Keywords: Islamic State (IS), Terrorism, Islam, Modernity, Coloniality, Epistemology, Discourse

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AQI – Al-Qaeda in Iraq

CIP – Critical Indigenous Pedagogy

IS – Islamic State

ISI – Islamic state in Iraq

ISIS – Islamic state in Iraq and Al-Sham

JN – Jabhat al-Nusra

JTWJ – Jama’at al-Tawhidwa’l-Jihad

MSM – Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin

RAF – British Royal Air Force

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CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Modernity: modernity is a complex political and epistemic narrative arising out of Europe that celebrates the rise of Western civilisation in Europe and its subsequent exportation to the non-European world through colonialism and imperialism as the point of arrival of human existence on earth (Mignolo, 2011: xiv). Modernity is a narrative that is defined through a dialectical relationship to a non-European reality that it brings into being, i.e. coloniality.

Coloniality: coloniality refers to the darker and violent side of Western modernity that is epitomised by the violent conquest of Latin America, the kidnapping of Africans to be sold off as slaves in America and the colonization of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This is a process that not only involved the subordination and colonisation of the cultures of the indigenous people of these regions to European culture, but also the absolute colonisation of the imaginations of the indigenous people. Thus as a global power system, coloniality “operates as an invisible power matrix” characterised by a series of modern heterogeneous systems of dominance and exploitation (political [Westphalian state-centric], economic [capitalist], social [Eurocentric], and cultural systems [Christian-centric]) which work in tandem to entrench Euro-North American dominance over all aspects of human life (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014).

Orientalism: orientalism is a process through which Western society flexes its political and epistemic dominance and power over the non-Western world. Orientalism involves the number of ways in which the Orient or the non-European (non-Western) Other is represented and imagined in the West as an absolute and systemic contrast to the West. In this schema, the Orient is stuck in time as a primeval and exotic being that is to be feared or mastered (Sayyid, 2003: 32).

Caliphate: a caliphate is an Islamic state that is governed through the leadership of a *caliph*, a political and religious leader who is considered successor to the Islamic prophet Muhammad and a leader of the entire Muslim community (the *ummah*).

Epistemology: refers to the nature and scope of knowledge and justified belief. It deals with the nature of knowledge and how it relates to similar notions such as truth, belief and justification. Epistemology also refers to the means of production of knowledge, as well as skepticism about different knowledge claims.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH THEME

Ever since its declaration of a caliphate in June 2014 in territory stretching between Syria and Iraq, the group known as Islamic State (IS) has risen into the media spotlight as an important actor in the Middle East and in global political affairs. IS's infamous rise into global prominence has also been a source of much debate in the ambit of security and strategic affairs. Led by the United States (US), the international community along with the media and international security experts around the world have all been at pains to formulate a clear understanding of the group and its project in the Middle East.

Significant attention has been cast on IS's extremist and violent acts in the region which have seen Western journalists, humanitarian aid workers and human rights activists viciously murdered. The group has also contributed to the massive devastation in Syria and Iraq and the displacement of civilians as a result of the conflict and resistance. Consequently, IS's atrocities have prompted Western governments to galvanise into action to try and fashion a coordinated strategic response geared towards defeating the group. The logic generated for popular consumption by Western governments and political analysts through the media is that the defeat of IS will lead to the restoration of peace and stability in the region.

As such, Western governments, the media, and international security scholars have sought to understand IS on a conceptual level first in order to be able to formulate the desired strategic response with which to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the threat posed by the group (White House, 2014). Hence, the debate on IS has grappled with the fundamental questions of international security that the organisation presents, namely: (i) what type of an actor is IS in the international system? (ii) What type of security challenges does it present? (iii) And what are the best (strategic) ways of dealing with it? (Lister, 2014: 1-3; Bunzel, 2015: 4; Schmit, The New York Times, 2014).

More specifically, the debate around the conceptualisation of IS (what type of an actor is IS?) has been framed around three key questions: (i) Is IS a terrorist organisation? (ii) Is IS a state? And lastly, (iii) is IS Islamic? All three questions have elicited ambivalent responses from various scholars, world leaders and media commentators. However, most of the current attempts at conceptualizing IS view the group as a 'terrorist' organisation (Gulmohamad, 2014: 1; Lister, 2014: 2; Saltman & Winter, 2014: 11; Schmid, 2015: 1) with a more extremist apocalyptic worldview, informing its unique approach to jihad which sets it apart from other 'terrorist' organisations such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates (Woods, 2015). These views deny that IS is a state (Cronin, Foreign Affairs, 2015; Laud & Masters 2016; Maan 2015; Woods, 2015), although it controls vast amounts of territory where it governs over millions of the local civilian populations (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 11-12). And some even go as far as questioning whether it is Islamic (Saltman & Winter 2014; Lister 2014; Open Letter to Baghdadi 2014; Awad, Time Magazine, 2014). Whilst others assert that it is precisely because of its belief in the archaic early laws of Islam that the group operates with such unprecedented violence and brutality (Woods, 2015; Muir, BBC, 2016).

Nonetheless, what remains clear is that the debate on IS has had devastating consequences on the lives of Muslims across the world, particularly Muslims in Syria, Iraq, and the immediate Middle East region in general, as well as those living in the West. This is because the manner in which the debate has been framed has been fraught with Islamophobic and orientalist assumptions. That is, by focusing squarely on IS the debate has had the effect of attributing the civilian suffering in Syria and Iraq to IS alone whilst conceptualising the group as an actor of 'Islamic' terrorism.

Such a conceptualisation of IS strategically frames the conflict in Syria and Iraq within the ambits of religious extremism and terrorism. At the same time it also ignores the role played by the West in the political destabilisation of Iraq and its secular society following the illegal invasion of the country by the US in 2003. The US invasion of Iraq paved the way for the creation of an environment conducive to the formation of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other militant radical Sunni groups in the country. The formation of these groups would later lead to the formation of IS.

However, by slanting or skewing the perspective to focus on religion alone, what the debate on IS has effectively done is to depoliticise the political, dislocate history and render the socio-economic context in this region an inconsequential consideration. As such, IS violence has been presented as being unprecedented in modern history and therefore portrayed as the inherent 'backwardness' of Islamic culture. This is the sort of thinking that has been exemplified by a number of Western leaders including the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron. In his speech to the British House of Commons in the aftermath of the Paris attacks in November 2015, Cameron called for MPs to support his call for the British Royal Air Force (RAF) to start bombing the "woman-raping, Muslim-murdering, Medieval monsters" (Schofield, Politics Home, 2015).

It is such statements which many view as being directly responsible for the dehumanisation of Muslims worldwide. It is also such statements which others argue have resulted in the dismissal of the deaths of innocent Muslims in Syria and Iraq from coalition bombings as "'collateral damage' or 'disposable life' and not granted the status of victim" (Sooliman, 2015: 3).

Additionally, such statements are also seen in some quarters as fuelling the rise of Islamophobic sentiments in Western societies thus leading to violations against the basic freedoms and liberties of Muslims in the West. In this regard, consider the recent ban imposed by numerous French mayors against the wearing of the burkini on public beaches in France. The ban on the burkini follows a series of bans on the burqa, niqab, and headscarves by the French government in French schools since 2004 (Siddiqui, The New Arab, 2016).

In the US, in particular, the rise in Islamophobic sentiments has been followed by an increase in anti-Muslim violence. This is hardly surprising given the consistent anti-Muslim rhetoric of US President, Donald Trump, for over 18 months of his election campaign. Many have viewed Trump's call for increased surveillance of mosques and the banning of Muslim immigrants in America as contributing to emboldening those sections of white America harbouring prejudicial attitudes towards Muslims and other people of colour. This has therefore been seen as having led to the creation of an environment ripe for violence and attacks against Muslims in the US (Bayoumy, The

Huffington Post, 2016). As a recent special report compiled by researchers at the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University on incidents of Islamophobic violence during the US elections campaign season concludes:

After examining a six-month period from November 2014 through July 2015, we found fifty-two (52) violent attacks against Muslims and Muslim organizations. These included eight (8) murders; six (6) physical assaults; ten (10) threats to mosques; seven (7) acts of vandalism against a mosque; and eleven (11) acts of vandalism involving Muslim homes... In fact, there were more attacks against Muslim homes than communal property during this particular period. While attacks against mosques convey a symbolic message to Muslims that they are unwelcome, attacks against homes are arguably more traumatic and threatening. Such incidents communicate that Muslims are not safe even in the most intimate of American settings (Abdelkader, 2016: 9).

Therefore, it is in the context of such Islamophobic violence against ordinary Muslims that the debate on IS, particularly the manner in which the group has been conceptualised, needs to be critically reviewed. As the above demonstrates, the debate on IS has provided some in the West with the excuse and 'justification' to seek to dehumanise and hold a vast community of more than 1.6 billion Muslims across the world accountable for the actions and crimes of a few extremist militants. And this can in part be attributed to the fact that Western governments, the media and international security scholars have conceptualised IS as a product of the 'backwardness' of Islamic culture and an actor of 'Islamic' terrorism. Such a conceptualisation of IS only serves to create a direct and problematic link between Islam and terrorism. This then perpetuates the prevalent stereotype, particularly in Western societies, that all Muslims are potential terrorists.

1.1 PURPOSE STATEMENT

This study contributes to the current security debate around the conceptual understanding of IS by debunking present dominant Western conceptualisations of the

group as an actor of 'Islamic' terrorism and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islamic culture. The study achieves this by grounding itself in decolonial theory so as to unmask the problematic Eurocentric epistemic basis of current dominant conceptualisations of IS. Far from denying that IS is indeed a terrorist organisation, the study highlights the inconsistencies and hypocrisies generated by Western epistemologies in framing the conceptualisation of terrorism.

The study shows that terrorism is a Western creation which has been at the core of the constitution of Western modern society from the formation of the nation-state through to its violent exportation to other parts of the non-European world. However, Western epistemologies have continuously and successfully managed to dissociate Western society and the nation-state from terrorism. Western epistemologies have succeeded in conceptualising terrorism as a term or crime that is only applicable to non-European, non-state actors, particularly those using Islam to provide justification for their cause. Such groups use and abuse Islam to justify their cause when fighting for grievances rooted in modern political, social and historical circumstances in the Middle East arising from the region's historical encounter with the West.

The study's use of decolonial theory therefore allows for a much-needed epistemic intervention from a non-European, Global South perspective which will be used to reconceptualise IS as a product and embodiment of the 'darker side' of Western modernity. This will allow the study to disentangle the difficult issues of conceptual complexity involved in dealing with IS and the failure of Eurocentric security studies theories to sufficiently conceptualise and explain IS and the threat it poses.

2. FORMULATION AND DEMARCATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The aim of this study is to provide a much more critical, historically accurate and politically rigorous conceptual understanding of IS. Therefore, a critical scrutiny of the problematic and essentialist Western conceptualisation of IS as an 'Islamic terrorist' organisation and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islamic culture is required. Such an analysis will allow us to interrogate the epistemic basis of such dominant

conceptualisations of IS. This will then allow for an alternative epistemic intervention in order to produce a much more rigorous conceptual understanding of the group.

The main research question that this study seeks to interrogate is: *What are the limitations of current dominant Western conceptualisations of IS, and how can a critical decolonial analysis provide a more historically accurate and politically rigorous conceptual understanding of the group?* The proposition and therefore the thesis statement is that current dominant conceptualisations of IS are informed by a powerful, and yet, problematic Eurocentric epistemology that seeks to create a direct link between Islam and terrorism.

So as to demystify such an epistemology, an epistemic intervention from a non-European, Global South perspective is employed in the form of decolonial theory. Decolonial theory will allow us to demonstrate that terrorism is not a direct result of a so-called inherent 'backwardness' of Islamic culture and that no natural link exists between Islam and terrorism. Hence, decolonial theory will also allow us to illustrate that terrorism is an integral constitutive element of the darker side of Western modernity, i.e. coloniality. As coloniality is a product of Western modernity, IS is therefore not merely a terrorist organisation but represents the ultimate embodiment of the violent logic of the darker side of Western modernity/coloniality.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- I. Identify current dominant conceptualisations of IS as produced by Western governments, mainstream media, and international security scholars.
- II. Interrogate the epistemic basis of current dominant conceptualisations of IS, which serve to limit the understanding of the group as an 'Islamic' terrorist organisation and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islamic culture.
- III. Provide an alternative, historically and politically rigorous conceptualisation of IS that is based on a critical decolonial analysis.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study lends itself best to a qualitative research design that is both descriptive and analytical. As Brikci (2007: 2) explains, “qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life” as opposed to quantitative methods “which aim to measure something”. Thus, the issue here is not to test a hypothesis as one would do with a quantitative approach. But it is to get a deep insight as to by whom, how, why, and/or for what reasons is IS conceptualized as an ‘Islamic’ terrorist organisation and a product of the ‘backwardness’ of Islamic culture.

Hence, methodologically, decolonial theory best lends itself to this study as it raises questions of power around the process of knowledge generation: “Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated” (Mignolo, 2009:160)? These are the questions we are most interested in here in our quest to demystify dominant Western conceptualisations of IS. As Mignolo (2009:160) notes, “asking these questions means to shift the attention from the enunciated to the enunciation.” By doing this, we draw attention to the power structures and power dynamics that determine who has the authority and ability to define what terrorism is and who can be labelled a terrorist.

Therefore, our use of a qualitative approach as our mode of inquiry in this study will take on a different meaning from its traditional hegemonic Eurocentric use. That is, both qualitative and quantitative methods of research have traditionally been used and represented as ‘value-free’, ‘apolitical’, ‘scientific’ and ‘evidenced-based’ modes of inquiry allowing the White European world to produce ‘objective’ knowledge about the dark-skinned non-European Other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014: 5). Under this schema, the White European researcher assumes “a universalistic, neutral, objective point of view” that allows him¹ to produce a Truthful universal knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2011). Such a scheme is informed by a hegemonic Eurocentric paradigm that is based on an ontological dualism that assumes that a researcher and his inherent bias can be

¹ Gender term used intentionally here.

separated from the research context.² This therefore enables him to produce an impartial and value-free, scientific analysis on the research subject. As Grosfoguel (2011) argues, “in Western philosophy and sciences the subject that speaks is always hidden, concealed, erased from the analysis. The ‘ego-politics of knowledge’ of Western philosophy has always privileged the myth of a non-situated ‘Ego’. Ethnic/racial/gender/sexual epistemic location and the subject that speaks are always decoupled.” This is how hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge generation are able to create the myth of a truthful universal knowledge.

However, as numerous critical and indigenous scholars from the Global South (Fanon, 1967; Dussel, 1977) as well as Black and Chicana feminist scholars in the US have shown us (Anzaldúa, 1987; Haraway, 1988; Crenshaw, 1991), no researcher can escape the confines of global cultural, linguistic, geographical, class, gender, sexual, and racial hierarchies of the modern world system. Our knowledges are always situated in a specific locus of enunciation, i.e. the ‘epistemic location’ (Grosfoguel 2011). This is what Enrique Dussel has called the ‘geopolitics of knowledge’ or to use Fanon’s term the ‘body-politics of knowledge’.

Nonetheless, one should not confuse ‘epistemic location’ with ‘social location’. Being socially located in the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that one is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic perspective. In fact, it is quite possible for one to be socially located on the dominated side of the colonial power divide and think epistemically from the position of the ones on the dominant side (Grosfoguel, 2011). Thus Grosfoguel (2011) provides a very particular definition of subaltern epistemic perspectives as “knowledge coming from below that produces a critical perspective of hegemonic knowledge in the power relations involved.” It is within such a subaltern epistemic perspective that our research methodology for this study will be grounded in decolonial theory.

² Bias stemming from his own cultural, linguistic, geographical, racial, class, gender, and sexual background, etc.

3.2 Research Methodology

The use of a qualitative research design in this study will therefore follow the dictates of critical indigenous pedagogy (CIP). As Denzin & Lincoln (2014: 2) explain,

[CIP] understands that all inquiry is both political and moral. It uses methods critically, for explicit social justice purposes. It values the transformative power of indigenous, subjugated knowledges. It values the pedagogical practices that produce these knowledges, and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering. It embraces the commitment by indigenous scholars to decolonise Western methodologies, to criticise and demystify the ways in which Western science and the modern academy have been part of the colonial apparatus.

Thus, contrary to Eurocentric methodologies, qualitative research for this study is understood as a critical, political and moral tool of inquiry. This is because we reject Eurocentric methodologies' assumption of an objective, god's-eye view of reality. What is therefore left for us is critical qualitative research as our tool of analysis. Critical qualitative research locates the gendered, sexualised, classed and racialised researcher within his or her locus of enunciation or 'epistemic location'. As Denzin & Lincoln (2014: 7) state, "critical qualitative research embodies the emancipatory, empowering values of critical pedagogy." What this means is that critical qualitative research for this study will also be used for explicit political and social justice purposes so as to decolonise the debate around IS and the group's conceptualisation in the West.

To borrow from Shor's (1992) definition of critical pedagogy, our use of critical qualitative research in this study will be geared towards looking beyond surface meaning and demystifying dominant myths around the debate on IS. This approach will be applied to official pronouncements and expert opinions encompassing the current process of knowledge production around IS and its conceptualisation in the West as an 'Islamic' terrorist group and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islam. This conceptualisation is limiting because it assumes a link between Islam and terrorism thereby leading to the false notion that all Muslims are potential terrorists. Therefore, our use of critical qualitative research in this study is aimed at combating this kind of

epistemic violence and political reality that Muslims have been subjected to as a result of the kinds of ideas that have been generated around IS.

As a non-European researcher sharing a common colonial history with Muslims around the world, our interest in this study is to deal a blow to the Eurocentric neo-colonial project of continued epistemic violence against Muslims and other dark-skinned people across the world. This is because, irrespective of where it occurs, the process and patterns of Euro-American colonial and neo-colonial dominance of indigenous people the world over are similar. What is happening today to Muslims and the Western onslaught on Islam is nothing new. It follows a long history of European colonialism where all non-Western cultures are labelled as pre-modern and anti-modern civilisations that are inherently opposed to progress and all virtues associated with Western modernity. As Mamdani (2002: 2) reminds us, in Africa, anti-colonial political resistance to European indirect rule was also characterised by the European colonisers as a cultural lag and as a traditional cultural resistance to modernity. However, this is not to argue that IS and other so-called Islamic extremist groups operating in the Middle East and elsewhere are involved in an anti-colonial struggle against the West.

3.3 Summary and Structure of the Thesis

In sum, given the problematic conceptualisation of IS in the current security debate around the group, this study will take the form of a critical review of the literature available on IS and its development in the Middle East. The review, which will constitute Chapter Two of the study, will focus specifically on the literature that has been produced around the history of IS's emergence in the Middle East and the development of its ideology. The review will highlight the limitations and biases of the narrative which has been fostered by the dominant conceptualisation of IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist organisation. For this purpose, the study will rely mainly on secondary sources comprising of scholarly research articles, media articles and opinion pieces written by journalists and international security scholars and experts. Official pronouncements on

IS by Western governments, including speeches and official documents, will also form part of our review analysis.

Chapter Three will comprise a critical assessment of security studies theories, both traditional and critical, which shape the meaning behind the concepts of security and terrorism, and thereby current dominant understandings of IS as a terrorist organisation. Such an assessment will show how these theories are inadequate in producing a conceptualisation of IS that is both historically and politically rigorous. Mamdani's (2002) notion of 'culture talk' will be introduced in this section to analyse the manner in which Eurocentric epistemologies have succeeded in creating a direct link between Islam and terrorism. Chapter Four will then provide a discussion on decolonial theory and how it can be used as a means through which IS can be reconceptualised as the darker side of modernity.

CHAPTER TWO:

1. A Critical Review of the Literature on the History of the Development of IS and its Ideology

Current mainstream conceptualisations of IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist group and as a product of the 'backwardness' of Islam have to do with the racist, orientalist, and Islamophobic narrative emanating from the West around the historical roots of IS and its development in the Middle East. As a result, they have less to do with the actual history of Islam and its teachings. This narrative portrays IS as adhering to a distinct interpretation of Islam so as to revive the early glory days of the religion by returning civilisation to a seventh century legal code and ushering in a new world order.

This represents a racist, orientalist, and Islamophobic narrative because it singularly focuses on IS's religious motivations, whilst ignoring the role of the West in the emergence of the group. The effect of this is that Islam is represented as the only religion in the world with a tendency to produce groups who routinely use violence in the service of faith. This therefore renders Islam as a 'backward', pre-modern and anti-modern religion and civilisation. However, as Gray (The Guardian, 2014) has argued on numerous occasions, Western modern history is littered with religious prototypes of IS.

The Western narrative on IS takes its cue from IS propaganda and the directive issued by the former spokesperson of IS, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani. In one of his official statements in May 2012, al-Adnani proclaimed that: "If one wants to get to know the program of the [Islamic] State, its politics, and its legal opinions, one ought to consult its leaders, its statements, its public addresses, its own sources" (quoted in Bunzel, 2015: 4). IS propaganda has consistently made the claim that the group is engaged in a struggle against all unbelievers, particularly Western infidels and their allies in the Middle East. This is to cleanse the world of impurity by returning to the so-called early teachings of Islam through the formation of an Islamic caliphate so as to usher in the impending apocalypse.

Following from such propaganda statements, Western governments, mainstream media and international security scholars have all been responsible for producing this narrative on IS. We are told that this is a narrative that has been pushed in the West with the intention of gaining some insights into the nature of IS as a terrorist organisation and how it differs from other well-known terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Such insights are regarded as important in supporting efforts by Western governments to try and fashion a strategic response to the threats posed by IS.

Amongst Western governments, the US was the first to officially describe IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist organisation. In his early remarks on IS, former US President Barack Obama used the analogy of IS as being a "JV [junior varsity] team of Islamic terrorism" (Remnick, *The New Yorker*, 2014). This initial announcement led to others lamenting the government's confused and contradictory approach to its conceptualisation of IS (Wood, *The Atlantic*, 2015). This is because, following widespread international condemnation of IS by Muslims and Islamic scholars around the world, Obama would later attempt to do a major U-turn on his earlier remarks linking Islam with terrorism. Instead, Obama would make an effort to discredit IS's claims to being Islamic and to being a state whilst continuing to maintain his stance of the group being a terrorist organisation. "Still, we continue to face a terrorist threat", stressed Obama, "and one of those groups is ISIL – which calls itself the "Islamic State" (White House, 2014). However, this time Obama was careful to avoid referring to IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist group arguing instead that "ISIL is not 'Islamic.' No religion condones the killing of innocents. And the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim. And ISIL is certainly not a state" (White House, 2014).

Obama's remarks however came a little too late as the people of America and the West in general had already by that time (with the help of the media) made up their minds that what they were facing in IS was a fanatical group of killers whose main source of motivation was their religion of Islam. Compounding such views was the subsequent media backlash that Obama would face in the days and months following his speech. Many a media pundit would blast Obama's reluctance to make, in the words of one CNN journalist Peter Bergen, "the connection between Islamist terrorism and ultra-

fundamentalist forms of Islam” (Bergen, CNN, 2015). On the issue of denying IS state recognition, Obama found it imperative not to give IS the ‘legitimacy’ of being referred to as a state so as to ensure that the group’s image as a terrorist organisation would persist. This would ensure that his strategy to “degrade and ultimately destroy” IS succeeded in the long run (White House, 2014).

Amidst the increased equation of Islam with terrorism in the media, the British government would also move to denounce IS’s Islamic credentials and its claim to being a state. In an effort to degrade IS and thwart its propaganda machine, Prime Minister David Cameron would use the name ‘Daesh’ in his speech to the House of Commons when referring to IS (IBT, 2015). This change in terminology followed the Western coalitions then agreed policy to use the name ‘Daesh’ – which is said to have negative connotations – in their official pronouncements when referring to IS. An article in the *Independent* news website explained a day after Cameron’s speech that Daesh is sometimes used in Arabic to refer to “‘the sowers of discord’ (Daehes) or ‘one who crushes underfoot’ (Daes)” (Stone, Independent, 2015). Thus, Cameron would advise the House:

I feel it is time to join our key ally France, the Arab League, and other members of the International community in using as frequently as possible the terminology Daesh rather than ISIL. Because frankly this evil death cult is neither a true representation of Islam nor is it a State (IBT, 2015).

However, far from condemning IS’s claims to being Islamic or the media’s equation of Islam with terrorism, it seems Cameron played directly into the hands of IS propaganda by referring to the group as an “evil death cult” that is not a “true representation of Islam”. That is because Cameron’s use of such language perpetuates the unscrupulous, narrow, and racist narrative that IS is a religious group following an old, sacred, and stringent interpretation of Islam in its quest to return to the ‘purity’ of the early days of the religion. In the end, Cameron’s statement works counter to his assertion that “far from an attack on Islam we are engaged in a defence of Islam” (IBT, 2015).

Various Western media outlets, political commentators and international security scholars (Gulmohamad, 2014; Saltman and Winter, 2014; Wood, 2015; Muir, 2016,) have also contributed to creating the narrative of IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist organisation and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islam. The portrayal of IS by the latter constitutes a branch of the broader narrative on IS that differs slightly from Western governments' pronouncements on IS. Although not encompassing a seamless and homogenous approach, this branch of the narrative has been very direct and intentioned in its linking of Islam with terrorism.

This narrative traces the beginnings of IS to its first leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi's derision for Western modernity coupled with an extremist interpretation of Islam is said to account for the group's ideological and strategic outlook. This is a tale that historically traces Zarqawi's early training and development in Jihadi-Salafism and how he would later develop his own stringent interpretation of the ideology and engrave it into IS. The result of this, according to this narrative, has been the kind of violent approach that IS currently espouses. An approach that we are told even al-Qaeda has been vocally opposed to.

However, similarly to Western governments' pronouncements on IS, this narrative also fails to take into account the West's role in contributing to the emergence of IS and other jihadist groups in the Middle East through failed Western interventions in the region. Examples of this include the US training, arming, and funding of the Afghan mujahideen in the 1980's, the failed US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the US funding of Syrian rebel groups since 2011. As Gray (2014) argues with regards to Syria and Iraq:

By dismantling Saddam's regime the West broke the Iraqi state. There were no jihadist groups operating in Iraq before regime change. Now the country has been torn apart by one of them...Western intervention played an important role in the rise of Isis. By backing the Syrian rebels against Assad – another secular despot – the West gave the group an impetus it would otherwise not have had. With jihadist forces including Isis being funded from Saudi and Qatari sources, there was never much chance of a "moderate opposition" taking over in the event of Assad's defeat (Gray, The Guardian, 2014).

What follows below therefore is a detailed discussion of this branch of the broader narrative on the rise of IS and its development in the Middle East as told in Western media and by international security scholars.

1.1 Zarqawi's Early Days and the Development of Contemporary Jihadism

In order to understand Zarqawi one needs to contextualise the evolution of the concept of jihad which is said to have influenced his thinking. Born in Jordan in 1966, Zarqawi is said to have been one of the early Arab Muslims from across the world that travelled to Afghanistan in the early 1980's to join in the fight of 'defensive' jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The early 1980's marked the period of the development of the concept of jihad as a political tool placing a moral obligation on Muslims of all nationalities worldwide to "fight defensive jihad against any enemy invading a Muslim land that cannot defend itself" (Saltman and Winter, 2014: 14). As per Bunzel (2015: 13), it is during his time in Afghanistan that Zarqawi would meet Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. The latter was one of the most prominent ideologues of contemporary jihadism, from whom Zarqawi would receive his tutelage in Jihadi-Salafism.

Jihadi-Salafism is a combative branch of Salafism. Salafism is a traditionalist school of thought within Sunni Islamic jurisprudence which believes that tradition cannot be overridden by reason and circumstances in the interpretation and application of religious principles and imperatives (Souaiaia, 2015: 1). The central tenet of Salafism is the sacredness and preservation of religious tradition. As such, for the adherents of Salafism, religious principles are sacred and unchanging principles that must be strictly applied regardless of changing times and contexts or their effect on humans.

This is contrary to Reasonists who argue for greater consideration for reason and circumstances in the interpretation and application of religious principles and imperatives. According to Souaiaia (2015: 2), the foundation of Salafism is the belief that religious purity and authenticity can only be ascertained by relying on the literal interpretation of the early texts of the religion as written by the early ancestors of Islam (the Salaf). The Salaf are an organic chain of authorities and institutions which are

comprised of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sahabah*), the Followers of (or those who came after) the Companions (*Tabi'in*), the Followers of the Followers (*Tabi'i al-tabi'in*), and the masters of the schools of jurisprudence (Ayimmah, Mujtahidun) (Souaiaia, 2015: 2).

For Salafists, any deviation from the direct reading and literal interpretation of the writings of the Salaf constitutes a deviation from established understanding of religious norms and practices. Such a deviation therefore constitutes an innovation on the Qur'an – something which is strictly prohibited. Hence, Duderija (ABC, 2017), explains that:

the concept of Salafism...can be conceptualised in terms of the idea of the 'emulation-worthiness' of the first century religious and political authorities who were perceived as having remained faithful to the teachings of the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet in relation to 'aqida (beliefs), manhaj (methodology) and 'ibada (worship) in contrast to those who are deemed (from a perspective of a particular group of Muslims) to have deviated.

According to Saltman and Winter (2014: 13), Jihadi-Salafism is founded upon three Islamic concepts, i.e. *hakkmiyyah*, *jahiliyyah* and global jihad. *Hakkmiyyah* refers to the Qur'anic assertion of the ultimate sovereignty of Allah over all affairs (political, social and economic) from the heavens to the earth (Khatib, 2002: 146). Thus, the term creates enormous political implications in that, by acknowledging the sovereignty of Allah over all human affairs, it conflates Islam with political governance thus making it both religion and state.

Hakkmiyyah gives rise to the concept of *jahiliyyah*. The term *jahiliyyah*, as developed by Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb, refers to the perceived constant state of decline of Islam from its peak during the early centuries of its existence in all the affairs of the Muslim community (the *ummah*) (Moghadam, 2008: 2). This decline is attributed to the influence and effects of Western modernity on the *ummah*. Thus, according to extremist groups such as IS, this necessitates a "radical and violent change to the existing order" (Saltman and Winter, 2004: 13). Finally, global jihad refers to a program of action placing a moral obligation on all Muslims of the world to use political violence

as a mechanism to revolt against any Western enemies and Western allied governments in the Middle East.

1.2 Strategic Dichotomies – Far Enemy vs. Near Enemy

The principles outlined above (*hakkmiyyah*, *jahiliyyah* and global jihad) are the principles which are said to form the norm of Jihadi-Salafism that Zarqawi would learn from Maqdisi. These principles are also shared by many jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda and its affiliates. They dictate a brand of jihadism that is primarily concerned with attacking and destroying the Far Enemy (Saltman and Winter, 2014: 16). For Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the Far Enemy referred to Western countries and Israel. They viewed the Far Enemy as one of the major sources of the decline of Islam from its historic glory in the early centuries. Thus, it is this brand of jihadism, and its focus on attacking and destabilising the US and other Western countries, which would form the foundation for contemporary global jihadism. It is also this outward-looking brand of jihadism which has come to shape contemporary understandings of the nature of terrorism and terrorist organisations.

It is said that Zarqawi developed his more extremist and stringent interpretation of Islam during his time in prison in Jordan between 1994 and 1999. It is along this extremist interpretation of Islam that he would adapt the normative principles of Jihadi-Salafism to form what is now the basis of the Islamic State's ideology. Saltman and Winter (2014: 28) argue that Zarqawi's stay in prison under the tutelage of al-Maqdisi led him to stress the need for more faithful practice of religious teachings and principles over mere knowledge in theology. With this approach Zarqawi found it more imperative to rid Muslim societies of the immorality and un-Islamic practices that have come to plague the ummah first before attacking any foreign or Far Enemies. And he reasoned that the best way to do this would be to urgently establish an Islamic state (Saltman and Winter, 2014: 28).

This is what would therefore constitute Zarqawi's inward-looking brand of jihadism. His brand of jihadism stressed the need to attack and destroy the Near Enemy first. This took the form of all so-called 'apostate' Muslim states aligned to the US and Western 'infidel' countries and Muslims in the region considered not to be 'sufficiently' Muslim, especially Shi'ite communities (Bunzel, 2015: 14). Therefore, according to this narrative, Zarqawi's brand of jihadism deviated from bin Laden's outward-looking brand of jihadism – a point that would lead to the well-known tensions between IS and al-Qaeda.

1.3 The Birth of IS – From JTWJ to MSM and ISI

After his release from prison in 1999, Zarqawi is said to have left Jordan with a group of followers who shared a belief in his brand of Jihadi-Salafism whom he had recruited during his time in prison. Zarqawi and his followers returned to Afghanistan where he received seed capital from al-Qaeda to set up a jihadist training camp in the city of Herat (Bunzel, 2015: 14). By this time al-Qaeda had established itself as the leader of global jihadism promoting jihad against the Far Enemy as the most important form of jihad. This period would mark the rise of al-Qaeda as the foremost 'terrorist' organisation in the world. At this point al-Qaeda boasted all the necessary capabilities to mount deadly domestic attacks on major Western countries thus culminating in the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001.

During this time Zarqawi and his followers would continue working independently of al-Qaeda though maintaining sound relations as allies. This was due to Zarqawi's more stringent ideology which he found to be less compatible with al-Qaeda's approach. Even in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan which put immense pressure on both Zarqawi and al-Qaeda's operations in the region, the two groups would remain as separate entities. Zarqawi and his followers would move to Iraqi Kurdistan in 2002 where he set up camp and founded a group called Jama'at al-Tawhidwa'l-Jihad (JTWJ) (Bunzel, 2015: 14). Al-Qaeda would split its operations to form al-Qaeda Central in Afghanistan and a series of franchise groups operating in other regions of the Middle East.

It is only in late 2004 that the two groups would join forces with Zarqawi pledging his allegiance and loyalty to Bin Laden. This move would lead to JTWJ changing its name to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). However, the name change would not result in Zarqawi exchanging his more stringent inward-looking brand of jihadism for al-Qaeda's outward-looking brand of jihadism. Rather, he continued with his stricter ideology of focusing on the Near Enemy.

As per the narrative, what followed after this was an anti-Shi'ite strategy by AQI, which justified attacks on the Iraqi Shi'ite community on the basis that the Shi'a constitute a deviation from the purity of the practices of Islam. This belief is said to have been based on AQI's regard of Shiism as an innovation on the Qur'an, which goes against the holiness and perfection of the Qur'an (Bunzel, 2015: 14). Such deviation therefore qualifies as apostasy – a sin punishable by death. According to Bunzel (2015: 14) another charge that AQI levelled against the Shi'a is that the Shi'a have ambitions towards establishing Shi'ite control over the Middle East by forming a Shi'ite super-state in the region. In essence, Zarqawi viewed the Shi'a as encompassing a real and imminent threat to Sunni power in Iraq and the wider region (Lister, 2014: 7). Zarqawi feared that the the Shi'a would collude with American interests in Iraq in exchange for US assistance in order to seize power in Iraq (Bunzel, 2015: 14).

Hence, the main objective of Zarqawi's anti-Shi'ite strategy in Iraq was to deliberately spark a sectarian conflict which would bring chaos and instability to the country. To this end, Zarqawi and his militia would make use of beheadings, crucifixions, and enslavement as weapons of war geared towards instilling fear and guaranteeing speedy victory against their enemies rather than a prolonged conflict. They called this "policies of mercy rather than of brutality" (Wood, The Atlantic, 2015). According to Lister (2014: 7), Zarqawi's end game in sparking the conflict had two distinct objectives. The first was to cast his organisation as the champion of the Sunni community and its interests in Iraq amidst all the chaos and fighting. And the second was to pave the way for the establishment of an Islamic state.

In the end Zarqawi and AQL's anti-Shi'ite strategy would eventually drive a wedge between the group and the central al-Qaeda leadership. In the mean time, however, the two groups would remain united because of their common belief in the need to urgently establish a caliphate. Therefore, soon before his death in June 2006 Zarqawi would disband his group so as to join forces with five other Iraqi groups to form what would be known as Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin (MSM). This move was predicated on the need to accelerate the plans of forming a caliphate, a decision that al-Qaeda central endorsed.

Therefore, subsequent to the formation of MSM and the death of Zarqawi due to a US air-strike, the succeeding leader of the organisation, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, would carry on from where Zarqawi had left off. This would lead to the announcement in October 2006 of the formation of the Islamic state in Iraq (ISI) from the MSM coalition (Saltman and Winter, 2014: 29). Following this development, al-Muhajir would pledge allegiance to the new emir of ISI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, instead of bin Laden, thus signifying a breakaway from al-Qaeda.

1.4 Tensions between IS and al-Qaeda

As per the narrative, the breakaway of IS from al-Qaeda would only be fully cemented in February 2014 as a result of a culmination of events that occurred between the period 2011 and 2014. This is a period that would see the involvement of IS in the civil war in Syria. At this stage, al-Qaeda was led by Ayman al-Zawahiri who had succeeded bin Laden, after the latter was killed by US forces in Pakistan in May 2011. The fall out between IS and al-Qaeda is said to have been sparked by the extremist actions taken by IS to attack other jihadist groups who refused to recognise IS as the true caliphate and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the true caliph. According to Saltman and Winter (2014: 30), this follows Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's decision in 2011 to deploy a group of what were then ISI militants to join the war against the Assad government in Syria. The group of militants, now using the name of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), proved to be very effective under the leadership of the veteran military commander, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani. Seeking to take credit for JN's successes in Syria, al-Baghdadi would

announce his decision to disband ISI and assimilate JN back into its parent organisation so as to form the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS). However, this would prove calamitous as al-Jawlani would reject the move and consequently defy al-Baghdadi's authority by pledging his allegiance to the leader of al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 30).

These events would usher in a period of infighting between IS and JN which resulted in the death of thousands of jihadists, including a mediator who had been sent by al-Qaeda to mediate between IS and JN. And as per the narrative, this proved to be the last straw in the already strained relations between IS and al-Qaeda thus leading to an official announcement by al-Zawahiri in February 2014 excommunicating IS and al-Baghdadi from al-Qaeda.

1.5 Summary

As per this narrative, what this split between IS and al-Qaeda reveals are deep-seated differences in the interpretation of Jihadi-Salafist ideology between the two organisations. These differences are informed by the worldviews of their initial leaders in the form of Zarqawi and bin Laden, respectively. That is, Zarqawi's apparent stringent interpretation of Jihadi-Salafist ideology adopted by IS is what has been responsible for the tension, differences and eventual split between IS and al-Qaeda. These ideological differences are said to have further played themselves out in the two organisations' preferred strategic choices in the battlefield in Syria and Iraq, i.e. Near Enemy versus Far Enemy. As Woods (2015) argues:

Bin Laden viewed his terrorism as a prologue to a caliphate he did not expect to see in his lifetime. His organization was flexible, operating as a geographically diffuse network of autonomous cells. The Islamic State, by contrast, requires territory to remain legitimate, and a top-down structure to rule it.

Therefore, the most significant difference between IS and al-Qaeda is the relative importance attached to the establishment of an Islamic state by the two organisations.

For IS the formation of a caliphate is central to its bid to fulfil its mission of taking the world back to a seventh century legal environment and rekindling the early glory days of Islam. IS's mission of ushering in the End of Days cannot succeed without the formation of an Islamic state. Whilst for al-Qaeda the apocalypse is not something the organisation believes will happen in the immediate future or within its lifetime. Hence, al-Qaeda does not view it important or strategically significant to take over land and immediately establish a caliphate.

The discrepancies between IS and al-Qaeda's use of violence have also been highlighted as a major source of difference between the two organisations. IS is said to have been more indiscriminate and brutal in its use of violence. IS has unleashed its brutal methods of violence and killing (beheadings, crucifixions, and burning of victims, etc) on both Western citizens and Muslims in the Middle East. Whilst on the other hand, al-Qaeda is said to have preferred a more moderate and selective approach in its use of violence avoiding the violent targeting of Muslims and only focusing on Western targets. Again, Wood (The Atlantic, 2015) attributes IS's brutal use of violence to its belief in an impending apocalypse and its central role in ushering in the End of Days. Hence, his argument that this is what differentiates IS as a religious group from other terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

In sum, the Western narrative on IS casts the group as the most violent and dangerous terrorist organisation in the world and as the new global leader of 'Islamic' terrorism. Central to its tag as the most violent and dangerous terrorist organisation, are IS's use of what have been termed as unprecedented methods of killing and brutality in establishing its caliphate. This, along with the group's redefining of contemporary jihadism by prioritising the Near Enemy over the Far Enemy, is what has catapulted the group as the new global leader of 'Islamic' terrorism replacing al-Qaeda. Both these aspects of IS's modus operandi are said to be based on a strict religious interpretation of the early laws of Islam. IS is said to be following the example of Prophet Muhammad in taking the world back to a 7th century legal environment in order to form its caliphate and usher in the apocalypse.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Conceptual Framework: An Evaluation of the Limits of Dominant Conceptualisations of IS and the Eurocentric Underpinnings of Traditional and Critical Theories of Security

This chapter provides an evaluation of the ways in which IS has been conceptualised by Western mainstream media, Western governments, and international security scholars. Emphasis is placed on engaging the three key questions shaping the security debate on the conceptual understanding of IS: (i) Is IS a terrorist organisation? (ii) Is IS a State? And lastly, (iii) is IS Islamic?

The chapter argues that the framing of the debate around these questions only serves to constrain the conceptual understanding of IS and therefore the responses to the threats that it poses to a limited Eurocentric epistemology. This argument can be substantiated for the following reasons. First, the debate conveniently ignores the history of the concept of terrorism as rooted in the foundation of Western modernity and the formation of Westphalian nation-states in Europe. Second, it also ignores the contribution that security studies has made as a Eurocentric field of study to appropriating the concept of security as an exclusive ambit of nation-states. This results in the false notion that states cannot be guilty of terrorism and that terrorism is the preserve of Islamic, non-state actors such as IS and al-Qaeda.

Using Mamdani's (2002) concept of 'culture talk' it will be shown that such a framing of the debate is rooted in an essentialist, orientalist and Islamophobic discourse. This is a discourse that creates a direct link between Islam and terrorism by arguing that terrorism is a result of a very literal interpretation of Islam found in Wahhabism.

1.1 Dealing with Conceptual Complexity: The Modern History of the Concept of Terrorism

Whether it is in security studies or other sub-disciplines such as terrorism studies, the concept of terrorism is one of the most contentious political concepts today. Evidence of

this is that the literature on terrorism identifies more than 200 definitions of the concept (Matusitz, 2013: 2). According Walter (2003: 4-5), all definitions share some common threads. These are: (i) the “objective element, i.e. a crime of a certain scale, (ii) and a subjective element, i.e. a certain motivation or intention on the part of the perpetrators; and (iii) number of perpetrators, i.e. number of people who must collaborate in order to be qualified as terrorists.” Schmid and Jongman (1988) develop on this by adding the following characteristics: violence, political goals, causing fear and terror, arbitrariness and indiscriminate targeting, and the victimization of civilians, non-combatants, neutrals, or outsiders.³ Thus, Matusitz (2013: 4) argues that the most commonly accepted definition of terrorism is:

...the use of violence to create fear (i.e. terror, psychic fear), for (1) political, (2) religious, or (3) ideological reasons...The terror is intentionally aimed at non-combatant targets (i.e. civilians or iconic symbols), and the objective is to achieve the greatest attainable publicity for a group, cause or individual.

More importantly, the literature on terrorism associates terrorism with a crime committed by non-state actors rather than states. This is why Boaz Ganor (2002) dismisses the use of the term terrorism to describe the actions of states. For him, states cannot be found guilty of terrorism as there are already international conventions that prohibit the unlawful and deliberate use of force by states against civilians both during times of war and times of peace. Hence he argues that an objective and exhaustive definition of terrorism would be defined as “the deliberate use or the threat to use violence against civilians in order to attain political, ideological, and religious aims...” (Ganor, 2002: 289). This is the definition of terrorism that has been used in the literature to characterise groups such as al-Qaeda and IS as terrorist organisations.

However, Ganor’s definition of terrorism is flawed in a number of ways. First, the assumption that terrorism applies to non-state actors rather than states incorrectly

³ According to the results of a content analysis of over 100 definitions of terrorism conducted by Schmid and Jongman (1988), violence emerged in over three quarters of the definitions (83.5%); political goals emerged in two thirds of the definitions (65%); causing fear and terror in just over half of the definitions (51%); arbitrariness and indiscriminate targeting in almost a quarter of the definitions (21%); and the victimization of civilians, non-combatants, neutrals, or outsiders in just under a fifth of the definitions (17.5%).

assumes that terrorism is about the nature of the perpetrator instead of the nature of the act of terrorism itself. As such, Ganor's definition of terrorism is actor-based rather than action based. This is what constitutes the major flaw in dominant definitions of terrorism. As Blakeley (2010: 14) has argued, though the motivations and intended consequences of the use of terrorism by states and non-state actors may vary, the act itself remains the same. The reason for this is that the core characteristics of terrorism as an act do not change with the nature of the perpetrator. Second, Ganor's definition of terrorism stems from the widely accepted notion of states being the only arbiters of the legitimate use of violence. Hence his argument that terrorism does not apply to states because there are already international conventions prohibiting the unlawful and deliberate use of force by states. As Blakeley (2010: 14) notes, this argument would only be valid if in practice states did not violate such conventions, of which they do. Therefore states' claim to a monopoly over violence cannot exempt them from definitions of terrorism being equally applicable to them.

In fact, the modern history of nation-states is littered with numerous examples where states have violated their legitimate right to use violence by engaging in terrorist acts. In effect, the term terrorism itself was first used during the French Revolution where it was used to refer to the actions of the French state against its own citizens. In just over a year of the civil war the Jacobins killed between 16,000 and 40,000 civilians (Chaliand & Blind 2007: 95, Matusitz 2013: 2).

The lynching of black men, women and children in the southern states of the US from the late 1800s to the 1960s provides another example of state terrorism in the modern history of nation-states. Lynching in America took the form of shooting, hanging, maiming, dismembering, castration, and other brutal methods of physical torture. Performed in public spaces, these acts served the purposes of instilling fear and terror in the hearts and minds of its victims. It is for this reason that a recently released report by researchers at the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)⁴ concludes that lynchings were terrorism (EJI, 2015). Similarly, other examples of state terrorism in modern history

⁴ EJI is private non-profit organisation in the US doing work focusing on the country's history of racial injustice.

include the heinous act of slavery imposed upon Africans and Native Americans through European colonialism and imperialism.

However, the fact that terrorism is no longer associated with the actions of states in the contemporary world demonstrates the bias of contemporary definitions of terrorism towards states. Such bias therefore illustrates the Eurocentrism of definitions of terrorism. That is, contemporary definitions of terrorism privilege the modern Westphalian nation-state, which is a European invention, as an entity that can never be guilty of terrorism but one which defends and fights against terrorism. This is notwithstanding the fact that the concept of terrorism has its foundations in the very violent history of the formation of the modern nation-state in Western society and its violent exportation to other non-European territories around the world through colonialism and imperialism.

Nonetheless, because of the dominance of Western epistemologies in global knowledge production and their function in power politics, terrorism can no longer be associated with the nation-state. This is why Butko (2006: 1) makes the assertion that definitions of terrorism carry no significant meaning due to their hegemonic Eurocentric conceptualisation. Part of this power of Western epistemologies can also be seen in the way in which security studies as a Eurocentric field has been able to forge a strong correlation between Western states and their societies and the concept of security.

1.2 Addressing Cognitive Confinement: The Limitations of Security Studies as a Eurocentric Field and its Role in Mystifying Terrorism as a Constitutive Part of the Modern State System

Realism and neo-Realism provide the central assumptions underlying security studies. As a neo-realist, Kenneth Waltz (1979: 36) instituted the idea of states as the primary units of analysis in international political systems and therefore the notion of states as the main referent objects of security. Central to Waltz's assumptions are that states exist within an anarchic system lacking a global sovereign power with a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Given this anarchy, war is thus seen as a permanent feature

of the international system as states use self-help measures, including the threat or use of military force, as a way of protecting their interests and guaranteeing their security (Snyder, 2012: 20). The period of the Cold War epitomised this kind of thinking around security wherein security could only be understood in the context of interstate conflict between the great powers.

However, after the Cold War, the role of interstate conflict is no longer the central existential threat. The proliferation of so-called 'weak states' in the Global South lacking the ability to maintain effective control over their territories has been said to result in the emergence of transnational non-state actors as the new existential threat to states. In this context, traditional Western approaches to security have been said to be ill-equipped to deal with the security challenges of the contemporary world. Barkawi and Laffey (2006: 332) therefore argue that the challenges posed by non-state actors to states' dominance in the international system have been characterised as terrorism. As such, the term terrorism is increasingly used to illegitimate the use of force by non-state actors whilst legitimising state power.

The post-Cold War era has also seen the emergence of critical approaches to security studies. Critical theories of security studies, such as the Welsh School and the Copenhagen School, differ from traditional approaches as they claim to deepen and broaden the concept of security in order to account for post-Cold War challenges to international security. By deepening the study of security, critical theories of security have argued that states are not the sole referent objects of security. This then gives rise to a definition of security that caters for individuals or human collectives as the main referent objects for security (William, 2008: 3). By broadening the study of security, critical theories have argued that the pre-occupation of traditional approaches with military threats to the survival of states is misleading. The reason for this is that threats may take other forms such as political, economic, societal, and environmental threats (Tarry, 1999: 1). As such, critical approaches to security, particularly the Welsh School, have been said to be concerned with security as a gateway to 'emancipation'. Emancipation in this sense refers to people being secure from the burdens of the threat of war, poverty, and oppression (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2010: 25).

All the same, scholars such as Ayoob (2002) and Barkawi and Laffey (2006) use a postcolonial approach to critique the Eurocentrism of critical approaches to security. The reason for this is that critical approaches share a fundamental common identity with traditional approaches to security as products of the work of Euro-North American scholars writing in Euro-North American societies for Euro-North American audiences. This is what maintains security studies as a Eurocentric field of study. As one critical security scholar Williams (2008: 2) has conceded, it is of utmost importance where the power resides of who gets to decide what security means, what constitutes security agendas, how those agendas should be negotiated, and significantly, what recourse should be taken should there be competing conceptions of security. This is the very sentiment that is expressed by Ayoob (2002: 27) when he argues that:

International Relations reflects and reproduces the inequality present in the disposition of material capabilities in the international system. Power translates into domination in the sphere of the manufacturing and reproduction of knowledge. Domination in the arena of knowledge further legitimizes inequality in the international system because it augments the capabilities at the command of dominant states and societies by adding “soft” power to “hard” power... Leading academic institutions in powerful countries have produced these theories and thus cater to the perceived requirement of the policymaking communities in major capitals.

And specifically, with regards to critical approaches to security and their emancipatory project, Barkawi and Laffey (2006: 350) maintain that:

The politics of critical and human security approaches revolve around the concept of emancipation, an idea derived from the European Enlightenment. In this literature, the agent of emancipation is almost invariably the West, whether in the form of Western-dominated international institutions, a Western-led global civil society, or the ‘ethical foreign policies’ of leading Western powers.

Therefore, as it stands, both traditional and critical approaches to security contribute to producing an understanding of security that is heavily reliant on histories and geographies which reproduce Eurocentric conceptions of world politics. It is this sort of Eurocentric understanding of security that we characterise as the cognitive confinement plaguing security studies as a field. The effect of this cognitive confinement in security

studies is such that conceptions of security continue to privilege powerful Western states and their societies as the primary objects of security. This leads Barkawi & Laffey (2006: 332) to argue that under this scheme the so called weak and powerless states in the world are thus regarded at best as potential beneficiaries of 'benevolent' foreign policies of powerful Western countries or at worst as potential sources of threats. Hence, it is against this backdrop that terrorism has been cast as the exclusive domain of non-Western actors, particularly 'Islamic' non-state actors, such as IS. This is also the reason why dominant conceptualisations of IS find it necessary to deny the group the 'legitimacy' of being recognised as a state.

1.3 Is IS Islamic?: Culture Talk and the Linking of Islam with Terrorism

As already stated in the introductory section of this chapter, the three questions shaping the conceptual debate on IS are designed to constrain the debate to a Eurocentric epistemology that can only reproduce limited Eurocentric conceptions of and responses to the threats posed by IS. The question of whether IS is Islamic is informed by a contemporary modern, orientalist and Islamophobic discourse that Mamdani (2002) identifies as 'culture talk'. Mamdani (2002: 766) defines culture talk as "the predilection to define cultures according to their presumed 'essential' characteristics, especially as regards politics."

Mamdani argues that in its earlier form culture talk is a discourse that has been associated with Samuel Huntington's (1996) essentialist theory of the Clash of Civilizations. As a total onslaught on Islam, Huntington's theory essentially argued that terrorism is a result of a fundamental clash between Western civilisation (modern culture) and Islamic civilisation (pre-modern/anti-modern culture). However, Mamdani identifies a new variant of culture talk that has come to take the place of Huntington's theory and which no longer demonizes the whole of Islam. Rather, this new version attributes terrorism to a strand of Islam known as Wahhabism, which is said to conform to a very literal interpretation of Islam. Wahhabi Islam, or Wahhabism for short, is a

variant and branch of Jihadi-Salafism founded by the 18th century Muslim Salafist scholar, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

As can be seen from the critical literature review, this new version of culture talk is the hallmark of current dominant Western conceptualisations of IS across the spectrum of Western media commentators, Western governments and international security scholars and experts (Gulmohamad, 2014; Saltman and Winter, 2014; Wood, 2015; Muir, 2016). That is, Western writers, analysts and world leaders from across all three fields all subscribe to the narrow view that IS is a result of a very literal interpretation of the old founding texts of Islam. These writers and experts do this without even considering the historical, political or social circumstances that might have led to the emergence of the group. Thus, as Mamdani (2002: 766) states, “culture talk has turned religious experience into a political category” therefore bringing about “the need to distinguish ‘good Muslims’ from ‘bad Muslims’”. It is within this scheme of reasoning that the former French President, Francois Hollande, has characterised all foreign trained imams in France as extremist and called for their removal so as to create a so called ‘Islam of France’ (Hume & Said-Moorhouse, CNN, 2016). Similarly, the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has argued that “they [IS] attack us because of who we are, not because of what we do” (IBT, 2015).

As Mamdani (2002: 767) rightfully argues, culture talk as a discourse or tool for explaining political phenomena is problematic for a number of reasons. First, cultural reasons used to explain political occurrences often neglect the historical, political and social circumstances that might have led to such occurrences. This often leads to solutions that only serve to exacerbate political clashes resulting in deadly outcomes for affected civilian populations. In this light, the war in Syria and Iraq can also be viewed as a form of collective discipline and punishment produced by the kind of reasoning which negates history in favour of culture in its evaluation of political occurrences. Second, and tied to the first reason, culture talk tends to dissociate the formation of the political identities of the protagonists behind terrorist attacks in favour of explanations that link the individuals’ political identities to the essential or traditional tenants of their cultures (Mamdani, 2002: 767). The same has happened with the conceptualisation of

IS in mainstream Western media, Western governments' rhetoric, and security studies literature. Too much emphasis is placed on IS militants' supposed backward religious beliefs without giving due attention to the historical, political, and social circumstances that have contributed to them developing an extremist religious and sectarian identity. Many Western analysts and commentators such as Anderson (2016: 5-6) continue to argue that IS is a "terrorist organization [which] seeks to fulfil idealistic aspirations promised by religious or ideological conceptions." Others such as Wood (The Atlantic, 2015) even go as far arguing that "the fighters of the Islamic State are authentic throwbacks to early Islam and are faithfully reproducing its norms of war."

In essence, culture talk is an exercise in what the late Palestinian-born postcolonial scholar Edward Said (1978) defined as orientalism. Following Said's work, Sayyid (2003: 31) states that orientalism is a process through which Western society flexes its political and epistemic dominance and power over the non-Western world. Orientalism involves the number of ways in which the Orient or the non-European (non-Western) Other is represented and imagined in the West as an absolute and systemic contrast to the West. In this schema, the Orient is stuck in time as a primeval and exotic being that is to be feared or mastered (Sayyid, 2003: 32). Similarly, this is the manner in which Western conceptualisations of IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist group and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islam can be characterised. As a result, the debate on IS ignores a whole plethora of historical, political and social factors that have contributed to the emergence of the group in the Middle East in favour of a racist and essentialist narrative.

However, the fact is that the development of IS in the Middle East is directly linked to the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 following the 9/11 attacks of 2001. The destabilisation of Iraq and its secular society that came with the US invasion of the country paved the way and created a conducive environment for the formation of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other militant radical Sunni groups in Iraq. These groups would resort to developing an extremist religious and sectarian identity in responding to the US invasion of Iraq as a means to galvanise support in the fight against an imperialist threat

to their country. AQI would later join forces with these other militant radical Sunni groups in order to form IS. As Bennis (2015) explains:

Among the first acts of the US occupation were the dissolution of the Iraqi military, the dismantling of the civil service, and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's ruling Baath Party. All three institutions represented core concentrations of secular nationalist interests in Iraq, and their collapse was part of the reason for the turn toward religious and sectarian identity that began to replace national identity for many Iraqis...Within months after the March 2003 invasion, militias and informal groups of fighters were challenging the US-UK occupation across the country. One of the earliest was al-Qaeda in Iraq or AQI, sometimes known as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, a Sunni militia created in 2004 by Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi.

As can be seen from the above explanation, the development of IS in Iraq is not a result of a supposed 'backwardness' in Islamic culture or a literal reading of any old Islamic texts. The development of IS in Iraq is a direct result of a political encounter between Iraqi Muslims and an aggressive imperialist Western power in the form of the US-led invasion of their country. This affirms Mamdani's (2002: 767) assertion that: "terrorism is not born of the residue of a pre-modern culture in modern politics. Rather, terrorism is a modern construction. Even when it harnesses one or another aspect of tradition and culture, the result is a modern ensemble at the service of a modern project." In other words, the use and abuse of Islam by IS to justify its mission in Syria and Iraq is a response to a modern political encounter that has its roots in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 rather than a supposed 'backwardness' of Islamic culture. Therefore, the discussion around IS needs to be reframed as such.

1.4 Summary

This chapter set out to provide an evaluation of the ways in which IS has been conceptualised by Western mainstream media, Western governments, and international security scholars. Emphasis was placed on engaging the three key questions shaping the current security debate on the conceptual understanding of IS: (i) Is IS a terrorist organisation? (ii) Is IS a State? And lastly, (iii) is IS Islamic?

The chapter thus argued that the framing of the debate around these questions only serves to constrain the conceptual understanding of IS and therefore the responses to the threats that it poses to a limited Eurocentric epistemology. This was demonstrated, first, by showing that the currently security debate on IS conveniently ignores the history of the concept of terrorism as rooted in the foundation of Western modernity and the formation of Westphalian nation-states in Europe. Second, it was illustrated that the debate also ignores the contribution that security studies has made as a Eurocentric field of study in appropriating the concept of security as an exclusive ambit of nation-states. It was then found that the result of these two elisions is the false notion that states cannot be guilty of terrorism and that terrorism is the preserve of Islamic, non-state actors such as IS and al-Qaeda.

Using Mamdani's (2002) concept of 'culture talk' it was then shown that such a framing of the current debate on IS is rooted in an essentialist, orientalist and Islamophobic discourse. This is a discourse that creates a direct link between Islam and terrorism by arguing that terrorism is a result of a very literal interpretation of Islam found in Wahhabism. Whereas it was demonstrated that IS's use and abuse of Islam to justify its mission in Syria and Iraq is a response to a modern political encounter with an aggressive Western power that has its roots in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 rather than a supposed 'backwardness' of Islamic culture. This therefore warrants the debate to be framed as such.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Reframing the Debate: IS as the Darker Side of Modernity

As the previous chapter shows, Western attempts at conceptualising IS as an ‘Islamic’ terrorist organisation that is a product of the ‘backwardness’ of Islamic culture are a result of the epistemic deception employed by Western discourses. This Western epistemic deception works to ensure not only the political and economic, but also the cultural, moral, and ideological dominance of Western society over the modern world system. It is for this reason that Ayoob (2002: 1) contends that scholars from the Global South should make serious attempts at breaking Western dominance over systems of global knowledge production by presenting conceptual alternatives that reflect our own experiences. This is precisely why decoloniality as an epistemic and political project becomes an important tool that can help us unmask some of the hidden workings of the epistemic apartheid that is Euro-North American scholarship as exemplified by security studies theories.

Central to decoloniality is the concept of ‘global coloniality’ or simply ‘coloniality’. As Mignolo and Wannamaker (2015: 2) state, the theoretical concept of global coloniality makes apparent what is hidden to the naked (or rather the non-theoretical) eye. It is a concept that was developed in the Global South and emerged out of the decolonial struggles (both theoretical and political) of the Global South, particularly in Latin America. The concept was first coined by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano in the late 1980s and early 1990s and later developed by other decolonial scholars such as Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo to name but a few.⁵ However, for one to be able to understand coloniality one needs to first understand the conception that is modernity. That is because coloniality is a product of modernity.

Modernity is a complex political and epistemic narrative arising out of Europe with the Christian conquest of Islamic Iberia marked by the final Fall of Granada in 1492 following more than 750 years of a series of campaigns by Christian states to recapture territory from the Muslims (Moors), who had occupied most of the Iberian Peninsula in

⁵ Others include the likes of Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Sylvia Wynter, and etc.

the early 8th century. Modernity is a narrative that celebrates the rise of Western civilisation in Europe and its subsequent exportation to the non-European world through colonialism and imperialism as the point of arrival of human existence on earth (Mignolo, 2011: xiv). Dussel (1993: 65) characterises modernity as a narrative that is defined through a dialectical relationship to a non-European reality that it brings into being. What this means is that with the rise of modernity emerges a non-European alterity that is a product of modernity itself. Thus, this non-European alterity is a means through which the identity and narrative that is modernity is established and reinforced. Consequently, this non-European alterity is critical as a 'periphery' that helps define modernity as the 'core' of a World History which it inaugurates (Dussel, 1993: 65).

The colonisation of history, time and space therefore plays a central role in the constitution of modernity. As Mignolo (2011: xiv) points out, the partitioning of history between the ancient and the modern constituted the colonisation of time. The division of humanity between the civilised (Europeans) and the barbarians (non-Europeans) encompassed the colonisation of space. And as Quijano (2007: 168) rightfully argues, this is a process that began with the colonisation of the Americas and the killing and extermination of entire Native American societies and their cultures and patterns of expression. This process further continued into the enslavement and colonisation of Africans and Asians and other non-European parts of the world – albeit in different degrees and scales.

Hence, as an analytical concept, coloniality is used to refer to this darker and violent side of Western modernity that is epitomised by the violent conquest of Latin America, the kidnapping of Africans to be sold off as slaves in America and the colonization of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This is a process that not only involved the subordination and colonisation of the cultures of the indigenous people of these regions to European culture, but also the absolute colonisation of the imaginations of the indigenous people. As Quijano explains at length:

The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by

the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural. These beliefs and images served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated, but also as a very efficient means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic (Quijano, 2007: 16).

This is the gruesome side of modernity that is often hidden from view by the fixation with the discourse of the success of Western modernity and its tropes about being the beacon of progress and civilisation. This means that coloniality is a constitutive albeit hidden part of Western modernity (Mignolo 2011: 3). Hence Mignolo asserts that modernity cannot exist without its underbelly of coloniality. Coloniality thus defines the violent logic utilised by Europe and its North American descendants in colonising, enslaving, and in many instances exterminating through genocide and epistemicide the non-European 'other' in constituting Western modernity and civilisation.

As a process, coloniality utilises a number of modern heterogeneous systems of dominance and exploitation which work in tandem in order to entrench Euro-North American dominance over all aspects of human life. Martinot (nd: 1-2) identifies these systems as consisting of the nation-state, capitalism, the nuclear family, Christianity, and Eurocentrism to name but a few. The result of these systems of dominance has thus been the birth of a world system that Grosfoguel (2007) has characterised as "racially hierarchized, patriarchal, sexist, hetero-normative, Christian-centric, Euro-North American-centric, imperial, colonial, and capitalist." In this schema eurocentrism is deployed as a mystical ideology that elevates Euro-American society in the eyes and imaginations of the colonised as the universal benchmark of all that is virtuous and worthy of being aspired to. However, in reality all that it stands for is white supremacy, capitalist profitability, and Euro-American self-universalisation (Martinot, nd: 1-2).

Therefore, by revealing this darker and violent side of modernity, coloniality as a concept is able to shift the geopolitics of knowledge or the geography of thinking from the dominant metropolises of Europe and North America to a critical Global South, decolonial perspective. This is a subaltern perspective which can help us produce a more nuanced, rigorous and decolonised understanding of IS. That is, coloniality allows

us to understand modernity from the perspective of the subjects of the Global South that have been the target of Western modernity's 'civilising', 'modernising', and 'democratising' missions experienced by those subjects through slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. From this perspective, the violent history and nature of Western modernity are brought to the fore, thus exposing as a sham Western society's exclusive claim to being the quintessence of noble values such as freedom, equality, human rights, and justice. From this view, Western modernity and its heterogenous systems of dominance and exploitation are revealed "...as an invisible power matrix that is shaping and sustaining asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and the Global South" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014: 181).

These asymmetrical power relations affect every sphere of life from the political to the economic, social, cultural, and more importantly, the epistemic. At an epistemic level, coloniality reveals the different ways in which the West has been able to claim a universal supremacy in its ability to produce knowledge of the world and knowledge about the non-European/Western 'others' whom it has deemed inferior. As mentioned before, Western hegemonic epistemologies have succeeded in claiming an exclusive universalistic, neutral, objective point of view for the West that allows Western man to produce a truthful universal knowledge. This whilst denying indigenous people's ability to produce any sort of credible knowledge about the world, and more importantly, about themselves. Thus, it is within this schema that Western hegemonic epistemologies have also been able to conceptualise IS an 'Islamic' terrorist group and a product of the 'backwardness' of Islamic culture.

However, by shifting the geopolitics of knowledge from hegemonic Western epistemologies to a critical Global South decolonial perspective, coloniality allows us to see IS for what it is, i.e. the embodiment of the darker side of Western modernity. From this perspective, IS ceases to be an 'Islamic' terrorist organisation that is a product of the 'backwardness' of Islamic culture as understood through Western epistemology. Rather, IS's ambition of establishing a caliphate in Syria and Iraq through terror and violent mass killings exposes the group's rootedness in the violent logic that is Western modernity/coloniality. The group also exposes its adherence to the racist logic of

Western modernity/coloniality as its caliphate is envisaged to be a sectarian society that only recognises Sunni Muslims as its only legitimate citizens.

IS's process of the formation of a caliphate in Syria and Iraq resembles more the violent history of the formation of modern nation-states in the West than it does its claims to being a throwback to the caliphates of the earlier centuries of Islam. IS's project of state formation in Syria and Iraq runs contrary to the process of forming a genuine Islamic state. As al-Turabi (1983: 241) argues, there are a number of characteristics that define a genuine Islamic state, and IS has violated all of them with its self-declared caliphate. First, the establishment of an Islamic state must have the support and consent of the Islamic community, or the *ummah*. However, IS's strategy of combining its violent military power with its political institutions to take over territory to enable itself to govern over reluctant populations in the territories it has conquered is not the appropriate or Islamic way of forming a caliphate. As al-Turabi (1983: 241) asserts, an Islamic state cannot be formed through the superimposition of laws over a reluctant population. Such imposition constitutes the violation of the basic principles of religious practice, i.e. sincere conviction and voluntary compliance. Second, al-Turabi (1983: 241) argues that an Islamic state has to be a state for all Muslims and cannot be defined along nationalistic or sectarian lines. This follows the fundamental principle that an Islamic state owes its allegiance only to God and his community of believers – the *ummah* (al-Turabi, 1983: 241). However, the IS caliphate is a racist and sectarian state that only recognises Sunni Muslims as its legitimate citizens. In this sense, the IS caliphate has more in common with modern nation-states, such as Hitler's Germany and the US, which both have a history of targeting and killing racial and ethnic minorities in an attempt to achieve racial purity.

Another point to consider about IS's so-called caliphate is its effective use of modern technology, which also serves to betray its claims to bringing about a reversion to the old days of Islam. More than any other jihadist group before it, IS has continuously and successfully used the internet and social media for its myriad of activities. These include spreading its propaganda messages, recruiting foreign fighters, and broadcasting its heinous acts of beheadings and killings so as to demonstrate its brutal approach to

those it deems as its enemies. As Gray (BBC, 2014) has pointed out, the professional manner in which IS runs its media and online activities resembles that of modern day companies. This is typified by the availability of documents such as annual reports and other information relating to on-the-ground operations and missions in the battle field in Syria and Iraq.

Even the manner in which IS has organised and funded itself demonstrates the group's roots in modern society as opposed to the so called old days of Islam it claims to be reawakening. As some analysts have noted, because of the manner in which the group has organised itself, IS resembles more of a pseudo-state, insurgent group or global criminal enterprise than it does an old fashioned Islamic state (Cronin, Foreign Affairs, 2015; Maan, 2015). This is a point highlighted by IS's impressive military capabilities; its army of an estimated 30,000 fighters⁶; its control of lines of communication and infrastructure; its looting of victims and demanding of ransom for kidnapped captives, etc. These are some of the things that have contributed to making IS the wealthiest jihadist group in the world boasting an estimated wealth well over \$2 billion (Pagliery, CNN, 2015). Hence, to reiterate Gray's (BBC, 2015) assertion, there is absolutely nothing mediaeval about this ruthless transnational business enterprise of brutality.

As such, IS's project of state formation in parts of Syria and Iraq dedicated to building a new society from scratch, is a modernist project in the service of modern political (and economic) goals. In establishing its caliphate, IS uses the same Euro-American violent and racist logic that has been used in establishing modern nation-states. The group therefore represents a mere mimic and inversion of Western systems of domination and oppression within the territory it controls in Iraq and Syria. Its stated ambition towards global domination through the expansion of its so-called caliphate to all corners of the world also reveals an imperialist bent which we have seen before and have become all too familiar with under the hegemonic system of Western modernity/coloniality. IS's use of violence and terror in an attempt to achieve its goals demonstrates its embodiment of the darker side of modernity.

⁶ 2015 figures

CHAPTER 5

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In conclusion, through a critical review of the literature on IS, this study has shown how Western media, Western governments and international security scholars and experts have conceptualised IS as an actor of 'Islamic' terrorism. This has helped entrench the idea of IS as a product of the 'backwardness' of Islam. However, as the study has illustrated, such a conceptualisation of IS is informed by a racist, orientalist and Islamophobic Western epistemology that only serves to vilify Islam and the entire community of Muslims as potential terrorists. Our conceptual discussion on terrorism, as well as our critical assessment of security studies theories and their hegemonic Eurocentric conceptualisation, demonstrates that terrorism is not a natural product of Islam. But that terrorism is a modern creation which at times, as Mamdani (2002: 767) states, harnesses one or another aspect of tradition and culture. The result of this is always a modern ensemble at the service of a modern project.

In particular, our assessment of the Eurocentric nature of security studies theories, both traditional and critical, reveals how Western epistemologies have succeeded in delinking terrorism from its Euro-American history. This then results in the successful and exclusive appropriation of the concept of security for Euro-American states and their societies. In doing so, hegemonic Western epistemologies have succeeded in appropriating for Western societies a moral, cultural and ideological high ground through enforcing Western hegemonic ideas on the conceptualisation of terrorism. From this point of enunciation Western states and their societies can never be guilty of terrorism, whilst terrorism is viewed as a threat and reality exclusively emanating from non-European societies – especially the Islamic world. Hence the dominant conception in the debate of IS as an 'Islamic' terrorist organisation that is a product of an inherent 'backwardness' in Islam.

However, coloniality, as a decolonial theoretical concept, allows us to expose the falsehood of dominant Western views of IS by revealing the darker side of modernity of which terrorism is a core constitutive element. The study therefore shows that terrorism

is not a natural product of Islam, but is a constitutive part of Western modernity/coloniality. Thus, with that process IS is uncovered as the quintessential embodiment of the darker side of modernity/coloniality. Our assessment of IS's process of forming a caliphate in Syria and Iraq clearly demonstrates the group's rootedness in the violent and racist logic that is Western modernity/coloniality. This is a logic that runs counter to the genuine process and principles of forming an Islamic state as well as basic religious principles of sincere conviction and voluntary compliance.

This study has therefore successfully utilised decolonial theory to expose the epistemic apartheid produced by Eurocentric security studies theories. This is an epistemic deception which works to conceal the Eurocentric roots of terrorism and the hegemonic conceptualisation of the concept of security. Such epistemic deception ensures not only the political and economic, but also the cultural, moral, and ideological dominance of Western society over the modern world system. In this scheme, Muslims and all other dark skinned people worldwide are perpetually viewed as potential sources of threats. That is why decoloniality as a Global South concept is important in challenging Western dominance over systems of global knowledge production. Decoloniality presents an alternative way of viewing the world from the experiences of the marginalised and dominated people in the world. Thus, the work of decoloniality in theory and in practice goes a long way in fighting the injustice and unfair victimisation suffered by non-European people the world over.

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