Review:

The Media World of ISIS

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Abstract

The Islamic State group (IS) has grabbed the world's attention as one of the most dangerous and gruesome terrorist organizations in history. The group has been studied from different disciplines such as political science, history, and theology. Michael Krona and Rosemary Pennington's edited volume, The Media World of ISIS, *is an attempt by media studies scholars to explore different aspects and dimensions of the IS usage of media.*

Keywords

IS, ISIS, ISIL, Islamic State, Syria, Iraq, Middle East, Media, Al-Qaeda

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The Islamic State group (IS) has grabbed the world's attention as one of the most dangerous and gruesome terrorist organizations in history. The group has been studied from different disciplines such as political science, history, and theology. Michael Krona and Rosemary Pennington's edited volume, *The Media World of ISIS*, is an attempt by media studies scholars to explore different aspects and dimensions of the IS usage of media.

The book is divided into three parts, each consisting of four chapters: Media and ISIS's Imaginary Geography, Mediating Terror, and Narratives of the Islamic state. The first part provides a deep dive into IS's rhetoric and the role it played in attracting new recruits, performs a comparative case study with the Mongol Hordes and the Khmer Rouge, and explores the group's search for a sense of both legitimacy and statehood. The first four chapters of the book are useful for contextualizing IS's rhetoric and its impact on the group's followers.

However, in the first chapter, *The Myth of the Caliph: Suffering and Redemption in the Rhetoric of ISIS*, one can find several historical and language errors.

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For example, the author does not differentiate between the terms describing the Islamic State group (IS, ISIS, ISIL), which refer to the group's name at different times. He uses ISIS, which was the group name between April 2013 to June 2014, instead of IS, which has been the group's name since June 2014 (p. 13). As for the language error, the author provides an incorrect translation of one of the Arabic names for the group, *Daesh*, which the author translates as "trample or crush" (p. 26). *Daesh* in Arabic has no meaning – it is a pejorative term used by other Muslims to degrade IS.

The second part of the book looks at two main themes: IS's media and branding strategies for disseminating its propaganda, and the impact of the images, icons, and colors used by IS. In chapter eight, *It is more than orange, ISIS's appropriation of orange prison jumpsuit as a rhetorical resistance*, the authors explore IS's use of the "iconic orange jumpsuit when executing its prisoners, as resistance rhetoric to Western intervention in Muslim countries" (p. 167). The chapter is theoretically rich and engaging, mainly drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of bio-power which is "the disciplinary and the fear aspects of society" (p. 172), and Robert Hariman and John Lucaites's work on visual iconography, which looks at the role of image in capturing historical moments and shaping individuals' perceptions on a specific issue. The authors provide a theoretical exploration of Foucault's concept of the docile body which, while enriching the chapter theoretically, does not help to answer its main question. Nevertheless, the authors employ Hariman and John Lucaites's work on visual iconography well to explain how the use of a specific image (photographs of IS's prisoners wearing orange jumpsuits) can activate strong emotional response and deliver ideas that are louder than actions.

The final part of the book provides an interdisciplinary perspective on how the strategic use of media by IS acts as a legitimation tool. Chapter nine analyses interviews conducted with twenty Western millennials to answer one of the most pressing questions in the last five years: why young millennial Muslims who grew up in secular Western countries "leave decent lives, good families … and so on in order to join a militant movement that was in direct opposition to their home countries" (p. 178)? Following this focus on

the role of media narratives, chapter ten *Monstrous performance, Mohamad Emwazi's transformation* stands out as an important analysis of the role of masculinity in inciting violence and reinforcing the notion of killing the 'other' as a means to prove one's identity.

Chapter eleven explores the notion of legitimacy and how it is maintained by terrorist groups, asking questions about how the co-optation of Western discourse provides a basis of legitimation. In this context, legitimacy is defined by the authors as discursive, mediated through IS ability to disseminate an English-language propaganda magazine. The chapter provides an important exploration of primary data such as IS's magazine *Dabiq*. The final chapter addresses the political debate over defining what constitutes 'genocide,' providing analysis of different media outlets and their role in disseminating terrorist groups' propaganda through sharing their materials. The author grapples with the questions of how to expose the atrocities committed by terrorist groups without being trapped in promoting the groups' agendas.

The book is thematically diverse and lucidly written, which makes it a useful read for those interested in how terrorist groups such IS use media to promote their ideologies, recruit fighters, and spread fear among their enemies. It is, however, theoretically dense, which might reduce its attraction for non-academic readers.