Digital/commercial (in)visibility: The politics of DAESH recruitment videos

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Abstract
This article explores one aspect of digital politics, the politics of videos and more specifically of DAESH recruitment videos. It proposes a practice theoretical approach to the politics of DAESH recruitment videos focused on the re-production of regimes of (in)visibility. The article develops an argument demonstrating specifically how digital and commercial *logics* characterize the aesthetic, circulatory, and infrastructuring *practices* re-producing the regime of (in)visibility. It shows that digital/commercial logics are at the heart of the combinatorial marketing of multiple, contradictory images of the DAESH polity in the videos; that they are core to the participatory, entrepreneurial, individualized and affective processes of contagion determining whom the videos reach and involve; and that they shape the sorting, linking, flagging and censoring of the videos that define their accessibility on the internet. The theoretical and political cost of overlooking these digital and commercial characteristics of DAESH visibility practices are high. It perpetuates misconceptions of how the videos work and what their politics are and it reinforces the digital Orientalism/Occidentalism in which these misconceptions are anchored.

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Over 5000 European citizens have purportedly joined DAESH (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) in Syria and Iraq (Harris, 2015) and it is impossible to know how many have joined the organization while remaining in Europe. There is growing concern over the appeal of DAESH for Muslims in Europe, heightened by the terrorist attacks of the summer of 2016. The appeal is widely attributed to the DAESH media strategy and its capacity to create an imaginary community online. As one of many statements reflecting this preoccupation with radical politics on the web, a recent EU Parliament resolution

> notes with concern the increasing use of the Internet and communications technology by terrorist organizations in order to communicate, plan attacks, and spread propaganda; asks that the Internet and social media companies work with governments and law enforcement authorities and civil society in order to combat this problem. (EP, 2015: §20)

Not surprisingly, European states have therefore launched, and are intensifying, online counter-campaigns (Denis, 2016).[1] They have also expanded their surveillance and control over online activities with far-reaching implications for privacy, rights and the freedom of speech (e.g. CPJ, 2015). However, even if there is consensus that the DAESH web-presence matters for recruitment, there is little insight into how it works, why it is so successful and what form counterstrategies should therefore take. Indeed, the observation of a correlation between the DAESH web-presence and successful recruitment tends to take the place of detailed exploration of the mechanisms linking them. Drawing on and combining existing research with focus on radical Islam and digital media politics, the present article addresses this gap. It reflects on how to theorize, and therefore better understand, the mechanisms through which DAESH web-strategy works. It does so by analysing one genre of video – the DAESH recruitment video.[2]

The article claims that attempts to understand the politics of DAESH recruitment videos focus too much on their radical, religious and violent aspects, thereby neglecting how they mobilize the mundane and the normal (e.g. Farwell, 2014; Kepel, 2015; Napoleoni, 2015, Adida et al., 2016; Hamid, 2016; Power, 2016; Rudner, 2016). In particular, I argue that the focus sidesteps the way the intertwining of digital and commercial logics characterizes the politics of DAESH recruitment videos. These intertwined logics make it possible to generate multiple and contradictory versions of the DAESH political community, to involve (potential) recruitees in their creation and circulation and to ensure that the videos are and remain accessible online. This substantive claim is accompanied, indeed, made possible, by a theoretical argument. The intertwining of digital and commercial logics and their significance is made visible and probed by close and situated observation of how (in)visibility is re-produced, a method characteristic of approaches that theorize in terms of practices. Such approaches focus on what is there for all to see to but still overlooked, since it jars with the dominant point of view: in this case that DAESH appeal rests on a *sui generis* web-presence and the digital Orientalism/Occidentalism this point of view re-produces.[3] In other words, the article relies on theorizing in terms of practices, claiming that it paves the way for a 'counter-visibility [. . . a] decolonial politics that claims the right to see what there is to be seen

and name it as such' (Mirzoeff, 2014: 330; also Mitchell, 2005). In the case of DAESH recruitment videos, this includes the intertwining of the digital/commercial elements.

To advance these ideas, the article begins by arguing that practice approaches are helpful for theorizing the politics of recruitment videos. Indeed, the politics of the recruitment videos is constituted by practices re-producing regimes of (in)visibility where invisibility is core. Visibility is most political, when its politics shows least. Subsequent sections elaborate this argument by tracing the place of the digital and the commercial elements in aesthetic, circulatory and infrastructuring practices that reproduce the regime of (in)visibility pertaining to the DAESH recruitment videos. They show that the intertwining of the digital and commercial elements facilitates a malleable marketing of DAESH politics that is co-created by potential recruitees and enhanced by the infrastructure of the web. The conclusion recalls that overlooking this regime of (in)visibility is a condition both for turning DAESH into a political alternative *and* for turning it into a radical threat, as the dominant points of view do. Countervisibility is therefore just as politically salient as it is methodologically challenging.

Digital/commercial practices re-producing regimes of (in)visibility

Images do not speak by themselves. Nor do videos. Rather, their significance emerges as they are made sense of in situated contexts (e.g. Mitchell, 2002; Alexander, 2011). Approaching DAESH recruitment videos, watching them and distilling their themes independently of the specific audience that provides the actual meaning, is therefore not particularly conducive to understanding them, their role in recruitment or the politics this generates.[4] This raises the question of how to theorize the processes through which this sense-making is taking place. The answer to that question often focuses either on processes of mediation, with qualifiers such as re-, inter- or trans- (e.g. Bolter and Grusin, 2000; Chouliaraki, 2012; Bachmann and Beyes, 2013), or on processes through which images and videos are tied to other cultural texts, i.e. to their intertextuality (e.g. Böhme, 1995; Mitchell, 2011). These processes are essential also for understanding how meaning is produced by DAESH recruitment videos. However, as scholars working on online Islamic radicalization have argued; to understand intertextuality and mediation in this particular context requires a willingness to engage practices more broadly, and, in particular, lay practices (e.g. O'Loughlin, 2011; Crone, 2014; Atwan, 2015; Conway, 2016). I build on this insight, arguing that this broad range of practices re-produce 'regimes of (in)visibility'. I then proceed to argue that there are good reasons to expect commercial and digital logics to characterize these practices, including visibilizing DAESH recruitment videos, with far-reaching implications for how we theorize these videos. I pursue this reflection by tracing their place in the aesthetic, circulatory and infrastructuring practices re-producing the visibility of DAESH recruitment videos.

Practices generating (in)visibility

Islamic radicalization videos are made sense of through the place they occupy in the everyday practices of lay people, including in their re-mediation of the images and the

way they link these images to other texts. To understand how images work as 'weapons of war' therefore requires engagement with the multiple layers of visual language, including how it is spoken by lay people (as argued by e.g. O'Loughlin, 2011: 83, and passim). While this does not contradict the argument that mediation and intertextuality are significant, it marks a shift in how their significance is conceptualized and hence studied. Instead of focusing primarily on (media) networks and (cultural) texts, it shifts the emphasis to the diffuse, multiple, situated practices making sense of the videos, including intertextually and through mediation processes. Engaging with the multiple layers of visual language also involves a shift from a focus on (high) culture to the wide range of affective and aesthetic sensibilities at play in these practices. Hence, in her work on the radicalization of young Muslims in Denmark, Crone (2014) critiques the 'intellectualist' tendency to marginalize or misrecognize the aesthetic quality of images, and therefore to misunderstand *how* they matter, as well as *how much* they matter in the production of political subjectivities. As she puts it:

> [A]esthetic technologies currently sidetrack traditional intellectual technologies of the self as the Koran, the fatwa or Islamist doctrine. In contrast to intellectual technologies that primarily work through the intellect and make use of linguistics, aesthetic technologies are 'assemblages' in which speech, visualities, sound and materialities interact in ways that produce specific 'frames' of violence. (Crone, 2014: 292)

Crone analyses two Danish brothers, who filmed themselves mimicking a beheading carried out by Zarkawi, to show how these 'frames' become integral to the 'techniques of the body' or the '*habitus*' through which radicalization takes place (Crone, 2014: 302–3).[5]

This emphasis on the place of practices highlights not only the plurality of sense-making processes, but also the tensions and hierarchies this plurality generates. Arguably, the shift to emphasize practices is motivated precisely by a concern that, unless this hierarchy is accounted for, the interpretation of sense-making processes is bound to obscure more than it clarifies. It is indeed a critique of those who disregard the lay and low culture, and fail to recognize that the observer's (intellectualist, as Crone puts it above) sense-making may differ fundamentally from that of those observed; that is, of the 'scholastic fallacy' of assuming that one's own point of view is universal.[6] This point can be taken further, as it not only concerns the distinction between the observer and the observed: it furthermore underscores the general point that videos and images are not visible in the same way to everyone.[7] On the one hand, this refers to the idea of perspective: the form their visibility takes – and what consequently remains invisible – depends on where they are seen from. On the other hand, it refers to the active practice involved in seeing: 'To say that the visual is visible may seem banal. However, less trivial is the corollary that *the visual itself needs to be visibilised*' (Brighenti, 2010: 33, original italics; see also Lisle, 2016). Brighenti proceeds to argue that visibilizing is 'prolonging the visual by impregnating it with the symbolic', that is, by making it part of the relations of symbolic power and violence in a specific 'field' (in a Bourdieu-inspired sense, see Brighenti, 2010: 38–45). Visibilizing practices, in other words, re-produce – with emphasis placed both on the continuity of *re*-produce and on the performativity of

re-*produce* – 'principles of vision and division' and the associated power relations (Chouliaraki, 2012: 272).[8]

Consequently, the plurality of practices that re-produce (in)visibility are not only hierarchical, they are hierarchical in deeply political ways, as they systematically re-produce 'principles of vision and division' in which blindness and overlooking have a central part. As Mirzoeff provocatively suggests, 'aestheticized looking' is coupled with a loss of sense and sensibility for that which is ignored – or 'anesthetized'. It systematically blocks out the perspective of the dominated, as Mirzoeff (2011: 220) shows in analysing the place of visibility in military strategy, the running of plantations, and prison regimes. Even seemingly innocuous visibility, such as that produced in works of art, will tend to re-produce this blindness. Hence, when contrasting nineteenth-century depictions of urban life in London and in the colonies, Mirzoeff argues that the former depict 'imperial smoke as a positive sign of the energy and vitality of the modern métropole, whereas the smogs of developing world capitals are miasmas, threatening to health and vitality' (Mirzoeff, 2014: 220 and 226 respectively). In this context, overlooking is essential, as it makes the questioning and resisting of relations of power less likely, and therefore facilitates their continuity. It shapes political imagination, including the capacity to imagine alternatives. The practical co-constitution of visibility and relations of domination can be called a 'regime of (in)visibility'. Such regimes are not closed, but open: they need to be constantly reproduced in practice and may become objects of contestation and resistance in their own right. As Brighenti puts it: 'the field of visibility presents itself as arranged in various consensual, or contested, "regimes"' (2010: 45). Regimes of visibility (or 'complexes of visibility', as Mirzoeff (2011) terms them) are hence the set of hierarchical practices that not only give visibility, or do not give it, to images, but, in a stronger sense, make the (in)visibility of those images – and therefore also their politics and place in power relations.[9] The article will conceptualize such regimes of (in)visibility to elucidate the politics of DAESH recruitment videos.

This conceptualization has two far-reaching consequences for the status of theorizing. First, it reinforces and confirms the – conventional – point that theoretical knowledge is neither independent nor aloof of the practices producing (in)visibility. It is directly implicated in them. Theorizing is robbed both of its political innocence and of its claim to be a privileged vantage point from which to observe and understand.[10] Second, the situatedness of practices, hierarchies and regimes of (in)visibility defies the theoretical ambition to grasp the general, let alone universal, 'behind and beyond' of structures or domination processes (e.g. Boltanski, 2014 or Stengers, 2008). Instead, practice theory gives space to the object of theorization as a precondition for not obliterating it through the 'violence of writing' (Bourdieu, 1999: 608). This is reflected in the calls for a 'descriptive' turn (Savage, 2009), an 'empirical turn' (Thrift, 2011), a 'complex method' (Braidotti, 2013: 163–9) or a 'close description' (Johns, 2016). As Latour (P) formulates the point in his imaginary discussion with a PhD student (S):

> S: So why is it called a 'theory' if it says nothing about the things we study?
> P: It's a theory, and a strong one I think, but about how to study things, or rather how not to study them – or rather, how to let the actors have some room to express themselves. (Latour, 2005: 142)

In the next section, I outline why and how I give space to something that is often overlooked: the digital and commercial practices in the regime of (in)visibility related to DAESH recruitment videos.

Tracing the place of the digital and the commercial practices in the DAESH (in)visibility

In debates about the politics of DAESH recruitment, the place of normal, profane, mundane and unspectacular digital and commercial logics is mostly marginal. Even accounts that do give them space often accord them a place subordinate to that given to violence, brutality and religious propaganda (STNT, 2015; Alagha, 2016; Marcotte, 2016; Power, 2016; Stern and Berger, 2016). This section begins by arguing that such marginalization seems unwarranted and then proceeds to suggest that the significance of digital and commercial logics can be traced by focusing on the aesthetic, circulatory and infrastructuring practices that re-produce the regime of (in)visibility related to the recruitment videos.

In the same way as other observers of the internet, observers of DAESH recruitment videos are prone to overlook the place of the commercial. I use 'the commercial' as a shorthand denoting the complex and contextually articulated neo-liberal governmental logic of steering conducts through 'quasi' markets. *Commercializing* refers to the spread of this logic to activities and spheres previously not governed by it. This spread of commercial logics 'that no one denies' (Rosa, 2013) extends the 'competition principle' (Dean, 2013) to all areas of social life, including to 'communicative capitalism' in which internet communication plays a central role (Cardon, 2015). Paasonen (2010) attributes reluctance to engage the themes of the commercial to the emergence of a 'second' wave of critical 'post-media' internet researchers, who differentiate themselves from a first wave who explored media networks in a way that included their commercial aspects. In this context, directing attention to the commercial is to run the risk of being critical in an old-fashioned manner. Consequently, even when concepts that evoke the commercial are brought in, they are transformed in ways that obscure it. For example, one analysis shows that 'gatekeeping' around radical Islam has taken a novel form, more focussed on political pressure (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2011: 213). It is exercised through self-monitoring, that 'trans-edits out the original context of consumption' in a way that makes 'Western media reports retain the parts where the speaker makes specific threats and incites violence against a country or group of people, even though such threats constitute a small part of the whole message.'[11] This leaves out the commercial rationale for the choices as well as the blindness they produce.

Even if political processes are more exciting to study, the overall marginalization of the commercial comes at a high price. As Paasonen argues with reference to pornography: 'the tendency to overlook commercial porn and its role in the development of the internet risks leading to voluntary blindness toward online economies and popular uses alike' (2010: 418). Likewise, excluding the commercial from the analysis of DAESH videos is likely to produce a voluntary blindness. Although we may not be in a 'Brand Society', where meaning and values are defined mainly through commercial media (*pace* Arvidsson, 2006), the commercial is deeply inscribed in social and biological relations, especially when they involve the online (Chollet, 2001; Boutang, 2007;

Braidotti, 2013: 62). This is also, and perhaps particularly, true in the military/security area, which is of specific relevance for DAESH recruitment videos. Here the merging of public and private sectors has produced what has been termed among other things a Military-Entertainment-Complex (Lenoir, 2000), Militainment Inc. (Stahl, 2009), a Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network (Der Derian, 2009) and the Security-Entertainment-Complex (Thrift, 2011). There is thus *prima facie* reason to question the mostly implicit assumption that the commercial is somehow marginal to the (in)visibility of DAESH recruitment videos.

Similarly, while online videos are obviously digital, analysts of Islamic radicalization often assume that the specificity of digital logics does not need to be belabored in theorizing. However, the complex, multiple, and situated digital logics associated with the expansion of computer technology – and the affordances related to it – have profoundly altered knowledge, thinking and government (Rosenvallon, 2006; Hayles, 2012; Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier, 2013; Harcourt, 2015). In spite of this, when it is brought up, it is often seen as secondary and relevant only for something else. For example, that digital photos can be 'doctored' is brought up to discuss the possibility of manipulating the real (O'Loughlin, 2011: 79). Along similar lines, the speed and ease of digital online communication are discussed primarily as something that is exploited to facilitate the spread of the videos. In neither case is the digital logic explored further in its own right. This may be an expression of the general difficulty of locating materiality in theorizing. Doing so requires moving beyond the understanding of the material as something that is merely exploited, shaped, reflected or made sense of in social relations and instead giving it the status of something like an actant,[12] that is part of these relations and makes things happen (e.g. Hansen, 2000; Callon, 2008). Yet, difficult or not, neglecting the digital in theorizations of the politics of digital videos appears at best unwarranted, considering the extensive theoretical work that has gone into endogenizing materiality in our frameworks of analysis, for example, through notions of 'cyborgs' (Haraway, 1991), 'intra-action' (Barad, 2007), or more generally 'symmetrical ontologies', that give materiality space on a par with discourse, and the influence of this work on theorizations of digital communication and the production of (in)visibility in it (e.g. Lenoir, 1998; or Hansen, 2015).

In the remainder of the article, I will expand the argument by exploring the place digital and commercial logics in DAESH (in)visibility. I will do so by tracing how they characterize three types of practices central to re-producing the regime of DAESH (in)visibility: (1) the aesthetic practices through which specific form combinations are included and weighted for sense-making, and that hence re-produce the images of what DAESH is and the political imagination associated with these (Rancière, 2000; Mitchell, 2011); (2) the circulatory practices through which the images are mediated by news networks, re-mediated by internet users and trans-mediated from social networks into other practices and that thus define the scope of the visibility (Chouliaraki, 2012; see also Bolter and Grusin, 2000; Weber, 2008); and (3) the infrastructuring practices that go into 'the design, use, and maintenance' of 'the pervasive enabling resources in network form' on which both circulation and aesthetics practices depend (Bowker et al., 2010: 98; see also Hunsinger, 2010; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013).

There is indeed ample reason to expect the digital and the commercial to intertwine to characterize these practices: *Aesthetic practices* are likely to be characterized by the

Table 1. Digital and commercial logics characterizing the practices re-producing (in)visibility.

Logic practice	Commercial	Digital
Aesthetic	Marketing	Combinatorial
Circulatory	Entrepreneurial	Contagious
Infrastructuring	Company promoting	Algorithmic

thorough commercializing of aesthetics generally (e.g. Goldman and Papson, 1996; Lury, 2004). They are also bound to be characterized by the digital, which affords infinite re-combinations of the audio, visual, chromatic and textual, and in so doing, widens the range and repertoire of possible communication (Andersen, 2015).[13] Similarly, *circulatory practices* online are likely to be characterized by commercial logics. Entrepreneurial individuals produce, but also promote and market their identities online by actively enrolling in the participatory culture characteristic of the web (e.g. Dean, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Heinich, 2012). The circulatory practices are also likely to be marked by the 'contagion' involving material and embodied processes, through which the – also techno-material – possibilities of online communication are woven into 'affective networks' (e.g. Sampson, 2012), characteristic of online circulatory practices generally. Finally, the *infrastructuring practices* are inherently and obviously digital in ways likely to fashion the (in)visibility of DAESH, for example, through the work of the algorithms and codes that sort and link, select and filter the videos through their 'little analytics' (Amoore and Piotukh, 2015). They are also likely to be characterized by commercial logics, since companies own, operate and regulate a large share of the web (Chollet, 2001; Cardon, 2015).

These are theoretical arguments – founding 'hypotheses'(as Foucault [1997: 18] would put it), summarized in Table 1 – regarding the place of the commercial and the digital in the practices re-producing the regimes of (in)visibility in general. To gauge their significance for the politics of DAESH recruitment videos, but especially to specify them further, it is indispensable to explore the videos more closely. As argued above, theorizing the politics of DAESH recruitment videos as generated through practices re-producing regimes of (in)visibility presupposes an acknowledgement of the necessarily situated, multiple and hierarchical dynamics of practices, and also that theorizing inescapably takes place in context and not in a universal abstract. Below I therefore continue my argument in a discussion of the DAESH recruitment videos.

The digital/commercial aesthetics: malleable marketing

Analyzing the practices re-producing the aesthetics of DAESH (in)visibility confirms that they are characterized by malleable, mundane marketing. Even more strongly, it shows that commercial, digitally afforded, combinatorial aesthetic practices frame the overall (in)visibility of the videos and hence the imaginaries associated with them.

The combinatorial characteristic afforded by the digital occupies a central place in the (in)visibility of DAESH recruitment videos (also Atwan, 2015). Friendship, play and community are recurring and prominent themes, as the collage of Mujatweet pictures in Figure 1 illustrates. More significantly, the recruitment videos give ample space to

Figure 1. Collection of pictures from Mujatweets.
Note: This picture is a snapshot from videos available on YouTube.

Figure 2. Music video picture.
Note: This picture is a snapshot from videos available on YouTube.

activities and values that are presented as directly incompatible with life under DAESH by mainstream media, documentaries and insider groups such as *Raqqa is being Slaughtered Silently* (http://www.raqqa-sl.com/en/? cat=5) alike.[14] This includes Western amusements, games and music (Lister, 2014: 26). Hence a recruitment video circulated in Canada shows the unlikely scene of recruited Canadians playing hockey and fishing.[15] Recruitment videos feature rappers from Germany, France and the UK (for an overview, see e.g. *NY Daily News*, 2014) and/or adopt the style of the Western rock music video, as shown in Figure 2.[16] Gaming videos have been produced that echo recruitment strategies

Mujatweets Episode #7 Raqqah Market   AlHayat Media presents: Mujatweet episode 7

Figure 3. Raqqa Market scenes.
Note: This picture is a snapshot from videos available on YouTube.

of public armed forces also in the West.[17] One recruitment video is a version of the
'Grand Auto Theft' videogame with figures, music and landscapes promoting the idea of
fighting for DAESH.[18] The video game begins by proclaiming that life with DAESH will
be an online gambling reality relocated to the real world: 'Your games which are
producing from you, we do the same actions in the battlefields!'[19]

These aesthetic practices, where a digitally afforded combinatorial characteristic is
pivotal, grant commercial themes considerable space. This is perhaps not particularly
surprising. Like music or gaming, Western capitalism and consumerism are among the
things and values DAESH is reputed to reject, condemn and repress. Like gambling or
music, they nonetheless, or perhaps therefore, feature recurrently in the recruitment videos.
An example is the Mujatweet #7.[20] It is entirely focused on the market in Raqqa (see
Figure 3).[21] The video shows market scenes where shoppers buy from well-filled stalls.
Food and consumer goods are obviously available. They are bought and sold in an orderly
fashion. There are no queues and no signs of shortages. People go about their everyday
food shopping in a leisurely and comfortable way. Another example is the Mujatweet #4:
'Life in Mosul prospers under DAESH'. It shows a shopping center, well-kept cars running
on well-maintained roads, and shopping scenes.[22] The significance of the commercial is
captured also by the effort that goes into signaling its limits. These limits are indeed not
dissimilar to prevailing understandings in the West. For example, in one video, an Aus-
tralian doctor explains that DAESH offers 'free healthcare'. He does so in a modern-
looking maternity ward (AN, 2015). The logo of the Islamic State Health Services (ISHS)
mimics that of the British NHS.[23] Markets, consumerism and shopping are visibilized in
the recruitment videos to an extent where it seems important also to visibilize their limits.

However, the commercial is not merely one theme among many. Rather, the visibi-
lizing practices of the recruitment videos mobilize the language, images and sounds of
branding as a frame for most videos. The Al-Hayat Media Company produces and
promotes most DAESH videos. This has triggered debate about the status of the Al-
Hayat Media Company (e.g. Kingsley, 2014; MEMRI, 2014; Fernandez, 2015; STNT,
2015). Is it a technologically advanced company, funded by wealthy states, organizations
or individuals to produce recruitment videos as part of a powerful propaganda machine?
Or is the 'company' actually nothing more than a few dedicated individuals, who enjoy

Figure 4. Al Hayat Media Center logo.
Note: This picture is a snapshot from videos available on YouTube.

imitating big media companies and who may not even be connected with each other, let alone with DAESH? However, little is ever said about the implications of this company branding strategy for the regime of (in)visibility pertaining to the DAESH videos. It is as if it were irrelevant that the Al-Hayat Media Company logo introduces and concludes most videos (see Figure 4). Its golden shape flies in and out of the screen amid gold petals or drops causing ripples on the black background. The scene is accompanied by the recognizable 'jingle' of the Al-Hayat Media Center. This very visual effect remains invisible in most commentary.

The aesthetics of DAESH re-produced through these practices allows for multiple lifestyles, values and preferences. It is also profoundly penetrated by commercial tropes (shopping, markets and branding). It is a malleable aesthetics, inviting multiple imaginings of DAESH. The infinite possibilities opened by the combinatorial characteristic can be selectively mobilized to imagine any and many versions of DAESH. The commercial framing imbues these many combinations with an unspectacular normality. The significance this may have for potential Western recruitees is captured by the response of a 15-year-old girl traveling to join DAESH: to the insistent questioning of a journalist[24] about whether she was not worried about the conditions of life awaiting her, she replied: 'I have seen videos. They go out shopping just as we do at home' (Erelle, 2015).

The place of the digital/commercial in the aesthetics of DAESH may be 'too obvious' to deserve mention.[25] It is certainly often passed over in silence and thus left invisible. However, the infinite combinatorial possibilities opened by the digital format makes it possible to imagine any political community, and the commercial gives each a reassuring stamp of normality. These are not marginal aspects of DAESH politics. Rather, they are important for broadening the range of potential Western recruits that the videos can speak to, and are crucial for enrolling them in circulating the videos. They therefore underline the limits of a politics focused mainly on engaging the violent, religious or terrorist aesthetics of DAESH (e.g. McCants, 2015; Smith et al., 2016) even if the spectacular and 'seductive beauty' of violence (as Kilby, 2013, puts it) makes this tempting.

The digital/commercial circulation: contagious and entrepreneurial

The digital/commercial is central also for the circulatory practices that define who circulates the videos and whom they reach and are seen by. Analysing the circulatory practices confirms that they are characterized by digital contagion as well by the active, creative and entrepreneurial political subjects making and marketing their own identities online. It also underscores the limits to conceiving of the videos as merely a form of propaganda (e.g. Farwell, 2014; STNT, 2015).

Circulation of the videos is nudged, encouraged, and invited, rather than hierarchically ordained and organized (Sunstein, 2014). Potential recruits re-mediate the videos themselves. They are not passive receivers, but part of the 'participatory culture' characteristic of the web (e.g. Jenkins, 2006; Burgess and Green, 2009). Their enterprising imagination is welcomed. They are not merely 'allowed', but are expected to draw on it. Promoters of the recruitment videos hence encourage others to spread the videos in making the most of the possibilities for contagion opened up by digital communication on the internet. During the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, hijacked popular football hashtags broadened the reach of the DAESH message (BBC, 2014a). In more general terms, the *Guardian* reported on the strategy by quoting the (now suspended) handle @Abu_Laila as posting 'we need those who can supply us with the most active hashtags in the UK. And also the accounts of the most famous celebrities. I believe that the hashtag of Scotland's separation from Britain should be the first.' The *Guardian* writes:

> [R]eplies from followers advised using #andymurray, #scotland, #scotlandindependence, #VoteNo and #VoteYes and linking to David Cameron's twitter handle. 'Please work hard to publish all the links,' Hamid urged. At the same time @With_baghdadi told DAESH supporters to 'invade' the #voteno hashtags 'with the video of the British prisoner'. (quoted in Shiv Malik, et al., 2014)

How many hashtags were 'invaded' is as uncertain as the effectiveness of the invasions. However, the example illustrates the extent to which circulatory practices rely on the potential for contagion. More than this, the combinatorial potential of the digital plays an important role in triggering and amplifying contagion on the web, expanding its scope. It makes it possible to relate to affective spaces around DAESH as well as open up new ones. The seemingly incompatible styles and personalities of the eclectic assortment of rappers, teenage girls, boy-scouts and gaming characters figuring in Al-Hayat Media Center recruitment videos are not only central to practices re-producing an aesthetic visibility for DAESH, but also to the circulatory practices defining the reach of this visibility.

The significance of digital combinatorial possibilities for the circulatory practices reproducing the (in)visibility of DAESH videos becomes even clearer when it meets the commercial. Entrepreneurial individuals making – and marketing – their own subjectivities online are at the heart of circulation. This confirms the central place of the type of embodied and affective practices feminists have long argued stand at the heart of subjectivity, as indicated e.g. by reference to Cyborgs (Haraway, 1991) or Maternal

computers (Hayles, 2005). But beyond this, the commercial logics turning innovation and change into core values in most contexts and relations make it a social advantage (or Bourdieusian 'capital') to develop and show – and indeed market – multiple, contradictory, subjectivities online (Wolin, 2008; Tiessron, 2011; Braidotti, 2013; Alagha, 2016). The possibility of producing and experimenting with multiple and contradictory images of DAESH, in a multiplicity of incompatible contexts, is probably an important aspect of how and why young Europeans edit, circulate and produce their own videos. For example, the Danish brothers were re-posting, re-mixing and posting their own videos in the making and marketing of their political subjectivities (Crone, 2014).

These imaginative practices, in which entrepreneurial individuals produce their subjectivities online, lend circulation a self-sustaining character. Circulation by one person invites further circulation by others, generating novel patterns of production and consumption of online images and information, including in relation to radical Islam and DAESH (Marcotte, 2016). We may even be seeing a double reversal of the relationship between the self and the online. First, 'in contrast to the idea of the romantic subject with a deep inner core, we now find subjects being built who rely on the onflow of information in motion to comprehend their place in the world' (Thrift, 2011: 16). Second, this shift in the temporality of subjectivities that become constituted by anticipation, as 'the onflow' itself, is shaped by the media platforms' anticipation of the subjects. The result is that 'subjectivity must be conceptualized as intrinsic to the sensory affordances that inhere in today's networks and media environments', recognizing that these affordances are marked by digitally generated anticipation or a 'feedforward' process (Hansen, 2015: 3 and passim).

The contagious and entrepreneurial characteristics of circulatory practices intensify the pace and enlarge the scope of (in)visibility. However, they do not necessarily generate a 'community' or even a 'network' among those involved in any conventional sense. Rather, the practices can remain thoroughly individualistic, namely, 'the odd loner', who has attracted so much attention since the attacks of the summer 2016. Those circulating the recruitment videos may belong to an imaginary community of one person: themselves. As a concerned mother explained, although her son had no direct links to DAESH or to radical Islamic networks, he was recruiting on the internet (Nabil, 2014). By liking, reposting, sharing, tweeting or blogging about their videos, he had enrolled himself in the process of diffusing DAESH visibility and, more seriously for juridical purposes, recruiting for it. The boy had engaged in (building) 'affective networks [that] produce feelings of community, without a community' (as Dean, 2013: 75 would put it). In the process, he had also circulated recruitment videos and contributed to the making of DAESH (in)visibility. His circulatory practices were making the videos available to others, some of whom will have acted similarly.

The digital and the commercial characterize the circulatory practices re-producing DAESH (in)visibility. Their intertwining is at the heart of the self-reinforcing, decentralized mobilization of entrepreneurial creativity that prompts people to produce their subjectivities online, including by circulating, editing and producing DAESH recruitment videos. They do so without necessarily belonging to a community and even less by following instructions from a leadership. Quite the opposite, authoritative imposition of clear lines and messages would probably hamper the affective, creative, diffuse, and

individual processes at the heart of this kind of circulation. Drawing attention to this form of circulatory practices therefore underscores the limitations of engaging the DAESH recruitment videos as if they operated according to the strategies of a tight leadership, implemented through a close-knit, well-organized and policed community (Fernandez, 2015; STNT, 2015; Power, 2016). Even if both the DAESH top leadership and a DAESH community do exist and do follow an online propaganda strategy, their grip on this range of circulatory practices is bound to remain misunderstood unless the theorization is geared to account for the place of the digital/commercial.

The digital/commercial infrastructuring: algorithmic surveillance and commercial priorities

Finally, I wish to trace the place of the digital and the commercial in the infrastructuring practices re-producing DAESH (in)visibility. Cables, switches, protocols, platforms and clouds are mandatory points of passage for both aesthetic and circulatory practices. Codes and algorithms read, sort, filter, organize and direct them (Galloway and Thacker, 2006; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013). The digital characteristic of these practices is therefore widely acknowledged. However, the extent to which the commercial is intertwined with it, and skews infrastructuring practices toward the commercial, is much less recognized.

The intertwining of the commercial in digital infrastructuring practices is often overshadowed by the focus on what appears to be a more pressing concern, namely, the rapid growth of surveillance on the internet. States are trying to establish themselves as authorities who ensure and define security also on the internet (e.g. Cavelty, 2015). The consequence is that intelligence agencies and other public security professionals are in the process of extending their reach to all (digitized) areas of life (Lagasnerie, 2011). The full extent of this expansion of state surveillance is only slowly emerging, in the wake of the revelations by WikiLeaks and especially Snowden (Bajaj and Data Security Council of India, 2014; Bauman et al., 2014; Moore, 2014). However, it would be misleading to conclude that commercial logic is disappearing. On the contrary, most surveillance takes place through market mechanisms. Companies are integral to the expanded surveillance system. They are hired or pressured to collect, analyse and transfer information. They are even pushed to encourage expanded communication by organizations such as DAESH, so that these can be more effectively monitored (e.g. Cavelty, 2015). Hence, companies are involved in the policing of digital infrastructures. They have become part of a 'universal surveillance and infrastructural imperialism' (Vaidhyanathan, 2011, the title of chapter 3).

This extension of (state) surveillance clearly does *not* limit the commercial characteristic of infrastructuring practices. Rather, the commercial moves into the public to the same degree that the public is moving into the commercial (e.g. Weiss, 2014). Although the companies are under pressure to participate in state surveillance, and even more strongly to devise and transform their practices in order to extend it, it does not follow that companies simply accept and adopt the surveillance priorities of security services. Rather, companies *also* continue to follow their own commercial interests. They depend on the continued presence of their users/customers online. An indication of the strong

attachment of companies to their commercial strategies is the information that emerged through the Snowden leaks. The US government tried to pressure Yahoo! into providing data it did not want to provide, by threatening the company with a $250,000-a-day (*sic*) fine if it did not comply (BBC, 2014b). This staggering amount shows what pressure the US government believed it needed to exert in order to convince Yahoo! to comply. Even more impressive is how, when the leak generated public outcry, Yahoo! publicly excused itself for having ceded to this pressure, indicating that perhaps the privacy protection of its customers could indeed have been worth the price.

The continued commercial characteristic of infrastructuring practices is now subject to open disagreement. The major commercial actors, including Google, Facebook, Yahoo! and Microsoft, joined by computer scientists and activists, have formed a 'coalition' advocating a 'Global Government Surveillance Reform'.[26] The public authorities, in turn, criticize the companies for their unwillingness to fully collaborate with state security agencies. James B. Comey of the FBI, for example, explained that: 'what concerns me about this is companies marketing something expressly to allow people to hold themselves beyond the law' (at a news conference devoted largely to combating terror threats from DAESH). The response from the companies has been clear:

> At Apple and Google, company executives say the United States government brought these changes on itself. The revelations by the former N.S.A. contractor Edward J. Snowden not only killed recent efforts to expand the law [regulating surveillance], but also made nations around the world suspicious that every piece of American hardware and software – from phones to servers made by Cisco Systems – have 'back doors' for American intelligence and law enforcement. (Sanger and Chensept, 2014)

Companies have not been subdued into passively accepting the growing encroachment of surveillance services. How far the companies (American and others) will succeed in resisting the intrusiveness of surveillance is an open question. However, as the above illustrates, they are also defending and imposing their own commercial priorities in their management of the digital infrastructure of DAESH visibility.

These commercial characteristics of infrastructuring practices are not merely involved in open disagreement about what ought to inform the governance of digital infrastructure; they are literally built into the infrastructure. Companies write the codes and algorithms that filter and direct circulation and contagion. They do so in a manner that tends to mirror the commercial rationale of the companies. This is true in the direct sense that companies promote their immediate interests and follow their commercial agreements. Sponsored content and agreements, shifting page rankings and links, are some much-discussed examples of how this shapes visibility. Of more immediate significance for DAESH (in)visibility is the more subtle effect generated by the companies' habitual privileging of markets and commercial values (Vaidhyanathan, 2011: 25–40 in particular). Filters will, for example, capture nudity and child pornography as well as violence and aggressive and/or religious speech that companies wish to spare their clients. This has far-reaching implications in filtering which DAESH recruitment videos are likely to remain visible: the more the videos are in tune with the commercial priorities of the companies, the more likely it is that they will *not* be blocked or singled

out for scrutiny and then potentially flagged (Mager, 2012; Beer, 2013). If the tropes of the videos themselves follow a commercial logic, their circulation on the open (as opposed to dark) web is likely to be unproblematic. In other words, the commercial logic embedded in the mundane infrastructuring practices of companies will facilitate – or even bolster – the commercial side of DAESH recruitment videos. It therefore comes as no surprise that one of the few Mujatweet videos accessible without interruption since 2014 is the video #7 about the market in Raqqa.

In sum, the intertwining of the digital/commercial characterizes also the infrastructuring practices that shape how DAESH recruitment videos are made visible. Companies cater for their clients and follow their commercial interests. Commercial content is systematically favored by the direct control of visibility through automatic filters, flagging and blocking of users and content. This bias in the infrastructure, in turn, ends up reinforcing the centrality of commercial aesthetics and their imaginative usage that characterize the aesthetic and circulatory practices re-producing DAESH visibility in recruitment videos. This again shows that commercial rationales and digital logics are fundamental to understanding the regimes of (in)visibility, as they unfold in the aesthetic, circulatory and infrastructure practices re-producing the regime of (in)visibility governing DAESH recruitment videos.

Conclusion: countervisibility and its discomforts

The article has argued that the politics of DAESH recruitment videos is not only manifest in 'exceptional' violence, brutality, religious zeal or 'apocalyptic vision' (McCants, 2015), but also very centrally in the normal, the profane and the mundane. More specifically, digital and commercial logics characterize the practices re-producing the regime of (in)visibility of the videos. Malleable marketing characterizes its aesthetic practices, with fundamental implications for recruitment processes. It widens the range of imaginable DAESH political communities and gives them an appearance of normality. Contagion and the entrepreneurial online production of subjectivities characterize its circulatory practices, that are consequently de-centralized, individualized, affective and self-sustaining as opposed to forms of propaganda that operate in a hierarchical, rational, centrally planned and implemented manner. Finally, algorithmic surveillance reflecting commercial priorities characterizes its infrastructuring practices, that consequently become biased in favor of videos of the banal, ordinary and unspectacular kind and further consolidate the sway of commercial aesthetics in the politics of the videos.

Rather than drawing on new material or proposing some new hidden structure, this argument is a re-theorization of the 'politics' of DAESH recruitment videos. This re-theorization rests on close observation/description of how (in)visibility is re-produced. The article has traced two invisibilities of particular significance for the politics of DAESH recruitment videos: the commercial and the digital. These invisibilities are important, as has been underlined, because they characterize the practices that re-produce the regime of (in)visibility, but their significance is arguably both deeper and broader. The continued invisibility of these invisibilities stands at the heart of the politics of DAESH recruitment videos: it obscures the commonalities between the DAESH politics of recruitment on the web and web-politics more generally. The obscurity seems

to confirm the dominant point of view that DAESH is radically different. To provide, as this article has, an alternative to this dominant point of view, by demanding 'the right to look' (Mirzoeff, 2011) at the usually overlooked and locate the commercial and the digital at the center of the account of DAESH recruitment politics therefore prompts a countervisibility. It opens up novel ways of 'dividing up the sensible' and constructing the 'fictions' that generate the 'capacity to act'.[27] It therefore also holds out promise of more effective engagement with web-politics.

Honoring this promise is a challenge of considerable proportions. Precisely because the established regime of (in)visbility re-produces the dominant point of view, challenging, let alone refashioning, it is a momentous task. This is true also with respect to DAESH recruitment videos. Not only DAESH, but also its supporters and Western security agencies, have vested interests in this form of (in)visibility, and so do many academic and non-academic observers. Even more challenging is acknowledging that there might be commonalities with what is widely understood to be evil. The hostile reception of Arendt's thesis about the banality of evil is perhaps the starkest illustration of the point. It was a refusal of her claim that rather than implicating exceptional madness, Eichmann's evil involved banal processes that might potentially make anyone evil.[28] The uniform presentation of DAESH as the evil similarly weighs against a counter-visibility revealing that aspects of its politics are familiar. But the stakes are high. DAESH and other radical Islamic movements show no sign of disappearing. It is therefore important to reconquer the right to look at what is there to see, including discomforting similarities. Doing so is a precondition for better understanding the politics of DAESH recruitment videos and indeed perhaps radical Islamic web-politics more generally.

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Notes

1. For examples, see the French campaign: www.stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr/ or the much debated campaign by the Danish city of Aarhus http://www.aarhus.dk/sitecore/content/Subsites/Anti radikaliseringsindsats/Home.aspx.

2. By recruitment videos I refer to videos produced with the aim of 'recruiting' young Muslims in the West to join DAESH or to make 'hijra', as many videos say with reference to the way the early Muslims followed the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina in 622. I have limited my focus to videos addressing people not already part of radical Islamist networks, that is, easily accessible videos in the language of their (Western) home countries.

3. For a discussion of the concepts, see della Ratta (2015) and Miyake (2010) respectively.

4. Yet this is how analysis often proceeds. Fernandez (2015), for example, organizes his analysis around the four 'themes' (urgency, agency, authenticity and victory) and suggests counter-strategies on this basis.

5. For this point formulated in general terms, see Sterne's Bourdieu-inspired argument about the place of techniques of the body (Sterne, 2003).

6. The perhaps most elaborate discussion is found in Bourdieu (2000: 49–84) under the section heading 'The three forms of scholastic fallacy'.

7. Images can of course be literally invisible to some, e.g. because they are hidden or part of a dreamworld. For a discussion about the significance of invisible images and approaches to studying them, see Hughes-Freeland (2004: 210–11).

8. Chouliaraki borrows Bourdieu's expression but then proceeds to contend that she needs Butler to account for what she terms the 'iterative' and transformative place of practices. This reiterates a critique of Bourdieu, originally formulated by Butler (1999) that is as ungenerous as it is common. According to this reading, his theory cannot account for the performativity of language in producing the condition of possibility for speech acts and hence tends to reduce the scope for transformative politics (for a discussio, see Guzzini, 2013: 83). Bourdieu is exceedingly clear, however, on the importance of language and categorization effects (especially Bourdieu, 1992b). Indeed, precisely the possibility of altering (the 'iteration') practices is the reason to engage in 'reflexive sociology' which, according to Bourdieu, is an 'emancipatory project' carried out as a 'combat sport' (Bourdieu, 1992a; Carles, 2001).

9. For related uses of the 'regime of visibility', see in particular Heinich (2012), Van Winkel (2005), or Rancière (2000: 30).

10. In anthropology where this realization is taken the furthest, the categories (or theorizations) of the observed are often allowed to revise those of the observers (e.g. Viveiros de Castro, 1992; Riles, 2001).

11. Of course this tendency is not new or specific to ISIS, as shown by Said (1997).

12. Bakhtin used this term to signal the someone *or* something that makes something happen in a plot. It has been popularized through the usage made of it by Latour (2005) and Actor-Network Theory more broadly.

13. Dean goes so far as to claim that: 'digitization erases the distinctions between visual, written, and acoustic media. It turns all data into numbers that can be stored, transmitted, copied, computed, and rearranged' (2013: 94). She is reformulating an argument that is often repeated and usually referred back to Friedrich Kittler's (2006) suggestion that the digital merges the imaginary, the symbolic and the real.

14. For examples, see the *Guardian* (2015), Cockburn (2015) or Erelle (2015).

15. This video is no longer available. But see Breitbart News Network (2014).

16. The video has a Western-styled visual clip overlaid with words in English which it blends with religious message and music. *Ya Junud Al Haqq Hayya* [Come soldiers of the righteous life] is

the song accompanying the images. This video is still available at the time of writing so I recommend listening, available at: https://vimeo.com/98078165.

17. As Stahl explains when discussing the US Army recruitment game 'America's Army: Rise of a Soldier': the game 'exists as a part of a larger military strategy to move from television ads to more cost-effective methods of recruiting such as games and NASCAR sponsorship' (2009: 107).

18. This video has disappeared from the Net, but see Mail Online (2014).

19. The linguistic formulation is not mine, it is/was in the original (Mail Online, 2014).

20. The Mujateweets are part of a series of short videos that were tweeted.

21. This video is one of the few Mujatweets available in the same form I saw in October 2014. See https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=OppfKBQ8T1I (accessed 9 April 2015).

22. This video is no longer available, but see Rose (2014).

23. As Joschka Wessels pointed out to me.

24. Insistent because of the ethical dilemma she was facing: reporting the girl and having her sent home would expose her and make it impossible to continue the work on DAESH from the inside.

25. As suggested by Kristin Bergtora Sandvik in her comments on this article.

26. See https://www.reformgovernmentsurveillance.com/ (accessed 29 December 2015).

27. As Rancière puts it in his book about politics and aesthetics translated as *The Division of the Sensible*:

> [L]a raison des histoires et les capacités d'agir comme agents historiques vont ensemble. La politique et l'art, comme les savoirs, construisent des 'fictions', c'est à dire des réagencements *matériels* des signes et des images, des rapports entre ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on dit, entre ce qu'on fait et ce qu'on peut faire. (2000: 62 original emphasis)

28. German Jews in particular reacted strongly to the implication that the Nazis might not have been radically different, which jarred with 'their individual appropriation of, and profound attachment to, a collective past memory' (Cohen, 2001: 260).

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