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DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY: ISLAMIC REPRESENTATIONS AND THE DEMOCRACY OF INTERNET



Master Thesis

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the recent discussions in anthropology, regarding internet and the new digital infrastructures, the present paper will focus on the role and nature of the Social Network Sites (SNSs) and especially on their effectiveness in shaping and/or influencing public attitude on a number of areas of social life. This I will do through focusing on the theoretical perspective developed by scholars like Daniel Miller, John Postill and Gabriella Coleman, and the way that they conceptualise the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The first part of the paper shall present a short overview of the recent discussions on the matter and create the background for the second part.

In the newly formed tradition of *digital ethnography*, the second part of the paper will elaborate ethnographically on certain issues discussed in the aforementioned theories. The ethnographic example will be the digital imprint of the Islamic State (IS). In this context, on the one hand I will examine how the mainstream SNSs articulate the global discussion regarding events in Iraq and Syria, projecting Orientalistic and mostly Western representations, and marginalising Islam as a cultural category. On the other hand, I will observe how the SNSs can turn out to be useful for the organisation of and the information about the operations of the ISIS, such as recruitment and planning.

KEYWORDS

Digital Media, Social Networking Sites, Islam, Muslim Youth

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PART I

1 INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades many scholars and analysts across different disciplines seem to exhibit a growing concern, imprinted in various theoretical approaches, about the social impact of the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW), especially as it becomes more and more embedded in the daily life of people worldwide. Sociology has produced an early and interesting sample of former analyses on the internet; Manuel Castells (Castells, 1996) was one of the first who has argued about a *new information era* which emerged through the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Media Studies, Urban Studies (Mahizhnan, 1999; Zook & Graham, 2007) and Journalism have, as well, generated literature about the internet and the new infrastructures, while anthropology was not ready to produce a solid theoretical approach for the new technologies of WWW. Anthropology was not concerned until the rise of the millennium. 2000 was the year that two of the most crucial and influential analyses of the Internet took place: Christine Hine's *Virtual Ethnography* (Hine, 2000) and Daniel Miller's and Don Slater's *The Internet an Ethnographic Approach* (Miller & Slater, 2000). Although anthropology, as a discipline, had nothing to show until then, after this "threshold", many anthropologists started studying the

internet world with great interest and attempting to apply anthropological methods (ethnographic research, participant observation) in order to make sense of it.

This is what the first part of the present paper is going to examine: the anthropological discourse about the digital milieus and more importantly the increasing realisation of the interrelatedness of the physical and digital world. In this part of the paper, I will attempt to be as comprehensive as possible: I cannot claim to cover the great range of the anthropological literature on the internet, but in order to better understand the large impact of the net on societies, I shall focus on one of the many aspects of it in the present: the Social Networking Sites¹ (SNSs). Based on the work of anthropologists like Daniel Miller, John Postill, Gabriella Coleman and others, I will try to examine what the SNSs are, how they work and how they became such a central part of the everyday life of million people. The first part of the paper will constitute a general overview of the theoretical approaches and a guide for the second part which will focus on the Islamic State and the usage of SNSs by its members.

¹ Also referred to as social media and social networks.

2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES OF INTERNET

There are many approaches that one could find in the former and present literature about the internet with the majority of them confirming a specific pattern: the difference between the utopians (or else the internet *evangelists*) and those who are more sceptical about the new technologies and usually construct a picture of dystopia as their analytical axis. This distinction has led to a great number of papers trying to defend not their authors' standpoints about the social function of the internet, but their political view of the world. This division between scholars came as a consequence of a former distinction which is almost alleviated by now, that of the real world versus the virtual world. I am going to start from this in order to see how the same ideals have passed into all the other dichotomies constructed around the analytical subject we call *digital*. Some of the most common dichotomies are, at short, the analytical scheme community versus network, the political approach of an internet democracy against the one of the digital surveillance and as a result of a former discussion, the rise of individualism (which some scholars argue that is an obvious consequence of the

internet era) against a new form of community seemingly generated through ICTs. These dichotomies will be analysed as part of the process that formed to some extent, the field of Digital Anthropology nowadays.

2.1 The establishment of Digital Anthropology

Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller are the first to give a solid manual about the subfield that we now, thanks to them, call digital anthropology (Horst & Miller, 2012). In their introduction they give a primary definition about the *digital* and also they establish six basic principles² of the new subdiscipline. Digital anthropology emerged

² “The first principle is that the digital itself intensifies the dialectical nature of culture”, the “second principle suggests that humanity is not one iota more mediated by the rise of digital”, “the commitment to holism, the foundation of anthropological perspectives on humanity represents a third principle.”, “the fourth principle reasserts the importance of cultural relativism and the global nature of the encounter with the digital, negating the assumptions that the digital is necessarily homogenizing and also giving voice and visibility to those who are peripheralized by modernist and similar perspectives.”, “the fifth principle is concerned with the essential ambiguity of digital culture with regard to its increasing openness and closure, which emerge in matters ranging from politics and privacy to the

to complete the (not only anthropological) literature which was trying to encompass the digital onto ethnographic practices. The authors try to define the *digital* in a clear way in order to establish a firm starting point for later discussions. They say that they define *digital* “as everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to, the binary – that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s” (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 5). This definition is not exhaustive, but helps to start a discussion about the human abstraction and the reduction of communication and information to a binary code. The conceptualisation of abstractions will not concern me at this point, but the basic perspective of a definition of digital that could be read from a Hegelian scope, will do. They argue that we could conceptualise the digital through dialectical thinking, as developed by Hegel, and to “theorise this relationship between the simultaneous growth of the universal and of the particular as dependent upon each other rather than in opposition to each other”.

I use the work of Horst and Miller in order to define the digital and also to argue, following them, about the necessity of a subfield of *Digital Anthropology*. Christine Hine’s book, *Virtual Ethnography* (Hine, 2000) was one of the first that acknowledged the *digital* as part of our every day reality and it actually predates the emergence of the subfield of digital anthropology. Hine proposed an anthropological method,

authenticity of ambivalence.”, “the final principle acknowledges the materiality of digital worlds, which are neither more nor less material than the worlds that preceded them.”.

ethnography, as the core practice in the examination of the *digital* and although there was no similar field to contextualise her proposal, Hine managed to write a very influential and multi-cited analysis that helped the establishment of the field. Hine did not argue, though, for a digital ethnography but for a virtual one. The usage of the word *virtual* unlike that of *digital*, was very popular in the past decade and used to refer to unreal, unauthentic and mediated environments constructed from technicians and articulated by virtual elements. This conception of new media as unauthentic took many years to eliminate, while some of the prejudice of that time has lasted until today. Horst and Miller arguing against the “unauthenticity” of the *digital*, felt the urge to establish, among other principles, the principle of False authenticity (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 11), making clear that the digital world is neither more nor less mediated or unreal than the other parts of the world.

In addition to Hine’s book, Daniel Miller’s and Don Slater’s *The Internet an Ethnographic Approach* (Miller & Slater, 2000), is the second book that initiated the consistent production of anthropological literature regarding *digital* and therefore it constituted the bedrock of Digital Anthropology as well. Miller and Slater from the first page of the book, make crystal clear the fact that “the internet is not a monolithic or placeless ‘cyberspace’, rather it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real world locations” (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 1), and although this statement makes a lot of sense in today’s world, they could not avoid to refer to the physical milieu as the real one, confirming the distinction of real versus virtual. Oddly, this becomes invalidated a few pages later, with the two scholars arguing for the inseparable condition of the real and the digital and constructing an ethnographic site where the digital is not able to generate spaces or places “apart from the rest of social life”. Miller’s analysis though, does not focus on the universal aspects and the general function of the internet, but tries to dig deeper towards an “ethnographic particularity” which could be “a solid grounding for comparative ethnography”. So, he

never refers to the *Internet* but rather to *their* internet (that of the subjects under analysis), as something constituted and generated by people. His work on Trinidad has been his grounding for a comparative research. He later used, in his most recent work, the same paradigm for SNSs (Miller, 2012).

2.2 The internet as place

The superficiality that has been ascribed to Internet by some scholars and mostly by the dominant public discourse of the past decade, is not dominant in anthropological literature. The aforementioned early approaches to internet treat internet media as “continuous with and embedded in other social spaces” (Miller & Slater, 2000), and therefore they envisage internet as an interactive “place”. The “place”, in those analyses drawing on the work of Doreen Massey, is defined by a so-called openness (Massey, 2005). Massey refers to what she calls ‘place’ as open and constituted by relationships and processes. There are many scholars that based on the work of Massey and Tim Ingold³ pictured digital media as places (Postill & Pink, 2012) involved

³ Ingold speaks of clusters, in a non bounded and open space in which both localities and socialities are elements. Through the conceptualisation of clusters, he leaves behind the terminology of the community versus network approach (Postill & Pink, 2012).

in social space. But the metaphors of place, or else the *virtual-place metaphors*⁴ as Paul Adams calls them (Adams, 1997)⁵, are not exactly innocent and despite the fact that they are very convenient analytical tools, especially for ethnographers, we should take a closer look at them. The metaphors of place, even the open ones, are not something that was enshrined by anthropologists or social scientists, but something derived from the computer science itself⁶. This topology, which is very discerned in some internet activities, helps not only the analysis of the internet, but also the administrators of the biggest part of the internet infrastructure, entrenching, through the technique of familiarity, concepts which otherwise would be strange to the public sense. A software environment, constituted by intimidating lines of code, is not something that could be easily established in our colloquial discourse, but a digital “place” that hosts conversations with our friends and other forms of familiar activities is far more acceptable in our common experience.

⁴ Virtual Place Metaphors are the colloquial language we use when we refer on the internet and it reveals a sense of place. For instance, “chatrooms”, “surfing”, “enter”, “dwell” and the concept of *site* itself.

⁵ Adams is drawing on the work of Lakoff and Johnson, and examines the reified way that we speak of the internet (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

⁶ The building metaphor is a dominant metaphor for computer scientists: “building software” requires planning and construction and in the end creates a “software architectural design”, similar to an architect’s or a constructor’s work (McConnell, 2004, p.17).

The place-metaphors, though, are not only a trick by administrators, towards a most direct approach to the common consciousness, but also a valuable tool which outlines the imaginary boundaries within which the distribution of users is taking place. Boellstorff has argued that there are no blurring boundaries between the digital and the physical (Boellstorff, 2008), in contrast with many other scholars who argue for the opposite, as, for example, Andy Crabtree and Tom Rodden who examine the new technologies as the generators of hybrid, unbounded places (Crabtree & Rodden, 2008), or Rob Shields who sees the domestic space not as a private realm, but as an open space which is interfering through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to the public realm (Shields, 1996). The digital has created a spatial fluidness and has made possible the linkage of, traditionally separated, practices but that does not mean that there are no boundaries. Besides, the boundaries are not topographic lines separating two concrete places; they usually need the imaginary concept of place in order to be valid. This imaginary concept is served by the place metaphors that are enshrined to *digital*. Our perspective about digital has the boundaries that we create and continue to create in our everyday lives and not material lines that separate actual places.

3 SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

The first attempt of describing the emergence and growing popularity of the Social Networking Sites (SNSs) was danah boyd's⁷ and Nicole Ellison's article "Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship" (boyd & Ellison, 2007) and by now it has become a highly referenced article among internet-oriented scholars. This article is actually a condensed work of the past dialogue about the digital and also a presentation of the SNSs in a time when they had not gained much ground. It is a historical approach with some ethnographic references and of course it is an extremely helpful first step for the present review of the literature regarding the emergence and

⁷ danah boyd chooses not to capitalise her name.

expansion of the SNSs. The work of boyd and Ellison, however influential it may have been, has some blind spots, mostly due to the period of its writing. The authors define Social Network Sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.”. Drawing from the work of Miller, former (Miller & Slater, 2000) and later (Miller, 2012), SNSs, as well as internet, are not easy to define; they do not have a “nature”, but they are constructed and regenerated by the people who use them. boyd’s and Ellison’s definition is a definition of a given nature and apart from this, the writers use controversial concepts such as “public”, to delimit something that by design cannot be bounded.

An instant criticism of boyd’s and Ellison’s work was by David Beer, who seems to argue against the definition of these sites as Social *Network* Sites and he proposes instead the term Social *Networking* Sites (Beer, 2008). Although literature about SNSs is growing rapidly, this argument has not come to an end, neither by scholars nor by the public discourse. To be more specific, on the one hand, boyd’s and Ellison’s explanation of this distinction is the following:

“We chose not to employ the term ‘networking’ for two reasons: emphasis and scope. ‘Networking’ emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC).” (boyd & Ellison, 2007)

and on the other, Beer’s criticism is that the term *network*, as used by boyd and Ellison, stands for “something quite broad, whereas the term *networking* allows us to think about a particular context, where the networking is the main activity”. Although I cannot see any fundamental analytical debate here, I have to pick a term in order to

imprint the concept onto the present paper, so I chose the term *networking* for two main reasons: first, the gerund has a sense of continuous interaction that actually is what differentiates the SNSs from other forms of communication, and second, it is the colloquial term and therefore preferable in a field that analyses socialities⁸ and relationships of subjects.

3.1 Ethnographic approaches on Social Networking Sites

To analyse socialities and relationships, anthropologists usually choose an ethnographic approach and they, as Pink puts it, construct their “ethnographic places” (Pink, 2009) which in the case of social media ethnography “traverse the online/offline contexts and are collaborative, participatory, open and public” (Postill & Pink, 2012) and they could also be represented by the concept of *cluster* the way Ingold has analysed it. John Postill and Sarah Pink have done a very interesting work towards a matching of ethnography and digital practices. Based on their ethnographic work in activist movements in Barcelona, they did not follow Hine’s suggestion for a remote

⁸ “The core to the study of social science is the way in which people associate with each other to form social relations and societies. This is called sociality.” (Miller, et al., 2016)

internet ethnography (focused on an “Internet event” (Hine, 2000, p. 50)), but they travelled there physically in order to capture the continuities and the discontinuities “between the digital and the locality-based realities” (Postill & Pink, 2012). The tension between scholars who believe in a remote ethnography, collaborative enough to balance their apparent distance, and those who vouch for a digital and at the same time physical presence of the ethnographer, has produced many interesting works that actually helped the discussion of the digital ethnography to move forward. Some examples are the work of Tom Boellstorff and his ethnography on the internet-based game *Second Life* (Boellstorff, 2008), where he argues for unambiguous boundaries between the physical and the digital, as he made the entire ethnography online and in contrast to this, the work of Miller and his combined digital and physical ethnographic research in Trinidad (Miller, 2000) (Miller & Slater, 2000). Both scholars, as well as Pink and Postill (Postill & Pink, 2012) make some solid arguments in defence of their work, but as the debate is still ongoing, we cannot predefine a paradigm for a “right” digital ethnography. On the contrary, as anthropologists always did, we have to look for the distinct features of any ethnographic case-study. This will lead the field to a more mature encounter with digital media, towards an approach which will allow us to see them as producing and reproducing elements of socialities and therefore, of cultures in the contemporary era.

A very comprehensive book that seems to define a series of central concepts in this new branch of social and cultural research, is the *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* and more specifically its first chapter: “Ethnography in a Digital World” (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis, & Tacchi, 2015). The book tries to reshape the standing anthropological methods and to expand our perception for the contemporary world that we are living in. Like Horst and Miller did in order to define the subdiscipline of Digital Anthropology (Horst & Miller, 2012), this book attempts to establish the digital ethnography as a core method, outlining five key principles: multiplicity, non-digital-

centric-ness, openness, reflexivity and unorthodox. These principles are not non-negotiable but they are effective in the way that they present the digital as part of our society and as part of, even researchers', everyday lives. An interesting principle that may need some further explanation is that of *non-digital-centric-ness* which is following a former idea of media studies scholars, the non-media-centric approach. This approach is based on the notion of the anthropological ethnographic research which, very often, does not learn about something through direct and immediate ways, but through the context and the participatory experience that often produces much more interesting insights for the researcher. The *digital*, as well as other aspects of our everyday lives, is not an autonomous field of inquiry, but it intersects with other activities and processes that are not to be diminished.

Digital Ethnography, as a way of practicing research in the contemporary world, is the tool that anthropologists could use in order to contextualise the kind of activities that are related to digital media. Robert V. Kozinets, although not an anthropologist, has argued for another kind of ethnography that could be helpful in the inquiry of new socialities in today's world: Netnography (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography is meant to examine online communities and cybercultures. Kozinets uses the term "cybercultures" as something that characterises the online practices and online communities. Therefore, he discerns symbol systems, ways of behaving and norms that are distinctive in the online world (Kozinets, 2010, p. 12). This means that he actually makes a distinction between two kinds of culture, that of the internet and that of the physical space, but is this bifurcation legitimate? Juxtaposing the culture of physical and that of digital, may make an analysis about an online group easier, but this definitely leaves out of scope the valuable characteristics of an approach that actually takes into account the multisided and diverse life of the subjects, ergo the context. Apart from that, Kozinets makes many structuralistic distinctions in order to justify his approach, such as how many members should a community have for it to be

considered as a community. Thus, the analysis of Kozinets is not advancing the anthropological inquiry, but gives us some insights, such as what is online normative behaviour.

As a matter of fact, within digital sites, some normativities (Horst & Miller, 2012) or as Slater and Miller said (Miller & Slater, 2000), the “dynamic of normative freedom”, has developed. Slater and Miller think of the internet promise as something that manifests a freedom which eventually has to take “the form of a normative structure, a social order” in order to maintain itself. From language to appropriate online behaviour, the digital has its own normativities, which are related with the offline social order. Oddly, this new norms and practices became quickly embedded to subjects’ online behaviour, in a way that actually makes analysts think about a kind of “Habitus”⁹ (Bourdieu, 1977) as appropriate analytical tool for this new situation.

Kozinets’s type of analysis may not be very helpful in an anthropological inquiry that has in its core the contextualisation and the historisation of the situations and processes of everyday life in a given society, but it may be a useful perspective regarding the boundaries that have to be placed afterwards in order for the analysis to

⁹ “One of the main impacts then of digital anthropology is to retain the insights of Bourdieu as to the way material culture socialises into habitus, but instead of assuming this only occurs within long-term customary orders of things given by history, we recognise that the same processes can be remarkably effective when telescoped into a couple of years.” (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 28)

reach its specific interest. Epistemologically speaking, Kozinets's account, could provide a theoretical distinction for the analysis of the *digital*, that always, in the end, should be problematized.

3.2 Towards a universal approach

Anthropologists might have been slow to enter the discussion about the digital, but when they did, they outlined some broad categories of inquiry that had not been studied until then. Gabriella Coleman (2010) has divided these areas of interest into three overlapping categories, but we are going to examine only two of them, which seem to point at opposite directions. The first category “explores the relationship between digital media and what might be called the cultural politics of media. [...] examines how cultural identities, representations, and imaginaries, such as those hinged to youth, diaspora, nation, and indigeneity, are remade, subverted, communicated, and circulated through individual and collective engagement with digital technologies.”. The second category, outlining a universal aspect, examines what she calls “prosaics of digital media”, and explores the mutation of the dynamics of other social activities like economic exchanges or religious worship. These two categories seem to be quite oppositional (if we take into account the distinction of a

local versus a more universal approach) but they are also overlapping. The overlap of the local and the universal is going back to the aforementioned dialectical thinking and the interdependence of these two poles.

Anthropologists before and after Coleman's survey have a tendency to insist on matters which are subject to the first category of inquiry¹⁰ (such as kinship, affinity, local imaginaries etc.), while they tend to leave out matters that are related to more general and universal spaces, like economic exchanges. On the one hand, the analysis of small scale societies and places, goes back to ethnographic particularism that is constitutive of the anthropological practice, and on the other, it is anthropologists' distinguishing trademark, it is what makes them a different discipline from, let's say, sociology or cultural studies. Sociologists, on the contrary, have focused and developed more universal models for the function of digital media. The most typical sample is the work of Manuel Castells (Castells, 1996) and the work of Barry Wellman (Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Wellman, et al., 2003). Castells's book *The Rise of the Network Society*, influential as it was, presents an analysis of the new "spaces of flows" in global organisations and attempts to outline a new form of political economy that

¹⁰ The anthropological literature seems to focus on the research of small scale societies that could produce general patterns. From Michael Herzfeld and his ethnography on the Mediterranean region (Herzfeld, 1984) to Yael Navaro-Yashin and her ethnography in Turkey (Navaro-Yashin, 2001), anthropologists were not concerned with the universal as their initiative context.

encompasses the role of “informational capitalism”. He makes a systematic distinction between the “Net” (Network) and the “Self”, in order to describe the process within which powerful networks of global forces impose a ‘culture of real virtuality’ onto the self. Castells’s standpoint, although contributing to a better understanding of neoliberal processes, specifically with the introduction of “informational capitalism”, generalises towards a distinction of an active power against passive localities that welcome and consume the products of a global force (Castells, 1996). Anthropology has shown, even in situations that power is manifested, that there is no such thing as passive locality; on the contrary, localities and subjects have agency and they participate in the construction of their lives. Digital milieus are not any different as they are addressing and operating to and through users with agency.

Wellman’s work gives a similar emphasis on the rapid change of the world brought by communication and information technologies. The differentiating feature of Wellman’s work is that he emphasises on the subjects, on the individuals and on that that he calls “scalable sociality”, unlike Castells who seem to attach almost no power to the subjects. To understand better the work of Wellman, we should focus on a former article he co-authored: “The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism” (Wellman, et al., 2003) and the term “Network individualism” that he introduces. The authors do not make a distinction between the Network and the individuals, but argue for an elimination of collectivities and groups and a shift to lonely individual networks. As they put it: “The Internet through its entertainment and information capabilities draws people away from family and friends.” which for them means that people no longer care for their localities and their local relationships, but tend to be isolated dots in a wide network. From a political point of view, they warn us about the rise of what he calls “mass societies”.

Is this dystopian picture, though, representative of the situation that today’s individuals live in? Many anthropologists would argue that this is not the case. The

work of Madianou and Miller in migration is indicative (Madianou & Miller, 2011), as well as the work of Postill for activist communities, and of many others (Postill, 2008) (Juris, 2012). But this argument of Wellman consists a grounding for the work of Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg and the “connective” instead of “collective” action that they propose (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The authors say that we are individuals and not communities, therefore we cannot act as a collectivity but as dots interacting with each other, thus creating a big public network.

Although these examples give a universal aspect of the work on digital media, I should not miss out to present two papers that argue for the “local”. Lee Humphreys recognises three kinds of places: the private, the public and the parochial and she claims that “mobile social networks can help to turn public realms to parochial realms through parochialisation” (Humphreys, 2015). Parochialisation for Humphreys is defined “as the process of creating, sharing and exchanging information, social and locational, to contribute to a sense of commonality among a group of people in public space. Social Networks can create a familiar environment through the information sharing between friends and the parochialisation of the place.”. Her ethnography is based on a SNS (Dodgeball¹¹) and is mostly digital. Gabriella Coleman also tends to

¹¹ Dodgeball was a location-based social networking site provider for mobile devices. Users texted their location to the service, which then notified them of crushes, friends, friends’ friends and interesting venues nearby. It was discontinued in 2009.

cashier the analysis of the big universal picture and she uses the term *provincialisation* (Coleman, 2010). “Provincialising” digital media allows us to rethink about the centrality that they have in our daily lives. It also shows how media culturally matters and more importantly, as Coleman puts it, why they matter which “is necessary to push against peculiarly narrow presumptions about the universality of digital experience.” (Coleman, 2010, p. 489). Both authors, if we follow the categorisation of Coleman regarding fields of inquiry, are interested in the social media as they are imprinted in the daily life of the subjects. They do not, as Coleman says, deny their universal aspects but, following Horst and Miller, they prefer to have a solid background, which can only be gained from small scale inquiry and ethnographic particularism.

3.3 The construction of a dystopic picture

In this section, I am going to examine the “nature”, if there is one, of Social Networking Sites, in order to see how this ethnographic particularism works in actual conditions of digital ethnography. As a starting point, I am going to discuss the very recent book *How the World Changed Social Media* (Miller, et al., 2016). This book is a study of “what people post and communicate through platforms”, a study that “turned out to be as much about how the world changed social media as about how social media changed the world.”. The promise of this book is of great interest as it goes beyond the question of how social media and internet in general changed the world and tries to discover the agency of the people as co-producers of the new environments. However tempting, this approach tends to overlook that the technologies we call social media platforms (or SNSs) have a very specific structure, which allows users to interact and produce content, not in general, but in certain ways. The authors of this book seem to

be indifferent to the very meticulous design of these platforms and to concentrate only on the content, but is possible for such an approach to leave behind many crucial aspects of how people interact not only with each other but with the structure itself? Could we argue that this kind of structure is the one that defines the content as much as the content defines it? Daniel Miller has many times argued that we cannot speak about the “Internet” or the “Facebook¹²” as a whole, but we should pay attention to those qualities that these means gain by the users, and he proposes instead to speak about *their* Facebook (Miller, 2012). Although such an approach is user-centric and therefore more anthropological, we have many anthropological examples of ways that the infrastructure affects the everyday life of subjects.

The design and structure of SNSs constitute one of the most characteristic features that the internet’s next generation, namely Web 2.0, has to demonstrate. Web 2.0, in contrast to the first generation of the WWW which was analysed by the majority of the aforementioned scholars, is based on the so-called, user generated content. For instance, the structure of the SNSs itself, is one that by design cannot function without user content; the content is essential for their operation and therefore more wanted than ever. Miller argues, that due to these features, we can speak about SNSs as

¹² www.facebook.com is the most popular SNS with almost 1,6 billion users worldwide: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/> (accessed: May 1st, 2016)

something that is altering all the time and is reconstructed by users; he attaches to users not only agency but the ability of reforming and coproducing environments that are produced with the purpose of reproducing and coproducing. To clarify that, I shall present, at short, some of the work done in surveillance studies¹³ that could actually answer some questions about the structure and the infrastructure of SNSs.

Bart Simon in his article “The Return of Panopticism: Supervision, Subjection and the New Surveillance” (Simon, 2005) is drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and especially on his very influential book *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) to argue that new technologies are the epitome of surveillance. The usage of the metaphor of Panopticon¹⁴ has been a key concept for surveillance studies and especially when we speak of an international system, such as SNSs which are turning out to be of the most

¹³ “Surveillance studies is described as a cross-disciplinary initiative to understand the rapidly increasing ways in which personal details are collected, stored, transmitted, checked, and used as means of influencing and managing people and populations. Surveillance may involve physical watching, but today it is more likely to be automated. Thus it makes personal data visible to organizations, even if persons are in transit, and it also allows for comparing and classifying data. Because this has implications for inequality and for justice, surveillance studies also have a policy and a political dimension” (Lyon, 2002).

¹⁴ Simon uses the Panopticon metaphor to parallelise the infrastructure of digital environment with the panoptical building and the inmates with the users that willingly have conformed to the new normativities and are under continuous surveillance.

profitable corporations in the global landscape. Although I will not present this dystopia as the real picture, we have to take a closer look at how SNSs actually function. Christian Fuchs made a clear point about the criteria that users should be able to fulfil in order to have an attractive and “strong” profile online (Fuchs, 2011). He describes the form that every user is expected to fill out when becoming member of Facebook (something like an application form) which in short contains name, gender, residence, hobbies (such as music, movies, sports), religious beliefs, political views, relationship status and many more. This form is the representation that one person should carry during his online activities, is what his friends are going to see about him and of course should be as “attractive” as possible; for this purpose, Facebook provides metrics about the profile that inform the user of how strong his/her profile is. These representations of the self are constructing what Gilles Deleuze calls “dividuals” (Deleuze, 1992), a division of the self between the physical body and its digital representation. For similar reasons, Simon is using the term “databased self” (Simon, 2005), while Roger Clarke is using the – quite influential in this area of study – term “digital persona” (Clarke, 1994). Clarke also introduces the term “dataveillance” as more appropriate to describe the rise of a digital surveillance or else as Deleuze argues, the swift of the disciplinary society to the society of control.

According to these approaches, subjects are capable of creating a “databased self”, but they do so by exploiting the design social media provide them with. Users are co-producing social media, since without them, the design of social media could not be complete and the surveillance of data or “dataveillance” could not be operating (since there would be no data). This kind of approach, confirms both the *evangelists’* and the dystopian perspective, as users are able to reform something that has the reformation inherent in its own design.

3.4 Ethnographic particularism as a way to examine the *digital*

Criticism of new technologies often misses to see why the subjects embodied the digital practices in such a short amount of time, and how they actually use them. Besides, the Foucauldian Panopticon, however inspirational, fails to see what in anthropology is called agency and practice. In order to see that, we have to present some of the reasons why anthropology should take a closer look at SNSs and the socialities that are produced through them. SNSs, somehow, as Miller argues, “turned out to be something much closer to older traditions of anthropological study of social relations such as kinship studies” (Miller, 2012). Based in his work in Trinidad, Miller examines the way that Trinidadians use the Facebook as something local, and not as something which is related to global forces. So, the Facebook in the work of Miller is reinvented by the Trinidadians as well as the Trinidadians are changing through their use of Facebook. Pink and Postill reached a similar conclusion through their work in Barcelona, where they examine how collectivities act through the Twitter¹⁵ for activist purposes (Postill & Pink, 2012). Postill, also, conducted ethnographic research in a Malaysian suburb, in which he realised that we should leave behind the fruitless distinction between community and network and go beyond that, toward a

¹⁵ www.twitter.com

contextualised and, in a way, multisided approach that achieves to examine people in their many social fields (Postill, 2008).

Deirdre McCay conducted a very interesting ethnographic work in northern Philippines, and she actually managed to encompass two different aspects of the Filipino identity and their representation on Facebook (Mckay, 2010). Through study on photographs that her informants had uploaded on Facebook, she noted the difference between the people who remained in Philippines and those that had migrated. The author theorises using the work of Marilyn Strathern¹⁶ and she shows that through Filipino's representations we could actually see a kind of personhood, not related with individualism, but with an extended family and a sense of community. Another ethnographic approach worth mentioning, is that of Madianou and Miller, on Filipina migrant mothers and their "left-behind children" (Madianou & Miller, 2011). The authors noticed that many of the migrant mothers that are now in the United Kingdom learned to use SNSs not for the reasons that the individualistic approach of Wellman suggests, but to communicate with their kin. The strong relationships and some of the practices that mothers used to have back home, could be maintained

¹⁶ McKay drawing on the work of Strathern in Melanesia argues that "anthropological explorations of Facebook draw on theories of the person developed, specifically in the work of Marilyn Strathern [...] social networking sites offer technologies that exhibit Western individuality but in forms that mirror forms of sociality prevalent in Melanesia." (Mckay, 2010).

through Facebook, Skype and other SNSs¹⁷. SNSs as Madianou and Miller say, are able to give to the migrant mothers a stronger feeling of motherhood; for instance, they can lead to “closer surveillance” and control over the children’s activities, girlfriends, boyfriends and so on. This kind of usage is the key element for anthropologists regarding research on social media. The personal and the global, the local and the universal, as well as the digital and the physical are interrelated in practices performed by individuals in an everyday basis. The digital has altered the way that we conceptualise time, place, entertainment, friendship, public space etc. as well as we have changed the digital through our personal usage and also have altered the patterns that scholars had tried to ascribe in the term “cyberculture”.

¹⁷ Madianou also introduces the concept of polymedia as a term which does not characterise only the computer-based media, but also the mobile media and their interchangeable usage by the Filipino migrant mothers. These new possibilities to communication changed the concept of migration in general. For further information, see (Madianou, 2014).

4 SUMMARY OF FIRST PART

To sum up, anthropology has a lot more to offer to the study of internet and especially SNSs. Self-presentation, the nature of friendship, kinship, migration, state and surveillance as power technique, are only a few areas that are examined by anthropologists. But anthropologists have to dig deeper in order to understand what is so distinguishing about internet and especially about SNSs, that has turned our perception of the world as we know it. By that, I do not mean that internet has the apocalyptic quality that some of the scholars have attached to it; instead, I propose a more historical and contextual examination method. Is it really the internet era that generated individualism? Are internet and SNSs a new public space? I think that it is time to take our distance from the very idea of the new and to watch closer the lives of people who actually use these technologies. For them, they are not new, they are just innovative tools for everyday activities. Besides, “the most astonishing feature of digital culture is not actually this speed of technical innovation, but rather the speed by which society takes all of these for granted and creates normative conditions for their use.” (Miller & Horst, 2012). These normativities developed rapidly; within a few years we incorporated the digital technologies as part of what we are. The internet has

turned out to be, in the contemporary era, a prerequisite condition of our existence and as the second part of the present paper will, hopefully, show, not only the Western one.

The aforementioned scholars, and many others not referenced here, have done a lot of work towards a perception of internet as part of our “real” world, and have created the conditions for more thorough analyses. Besides, the subdiscipline of Digital Anthropology has only begun and therefore, we cannot view it as static area of study; it needs to be enriched with new approaches and conceptualisations which are not stuck in the terminology of the past decades.

In the second part of the paper I am going to focus on the specific usage of digital media and SNSs by the members and supporters of the Islamic State (IS). I shall examine how they are using SNSs as part of their daily lives, as well as in the context of propagating their organisational purposes. According to this dual usage, I shall re-examine concepts such as surveillance and control, as well as the so-called internet democracy. The case study that will lay the ground for arguments will be the way young generation of the community of believers (*ummah*) uses digital media, internalising normativities and incorporating them in their everyday lives. The impact of SNSs on the community of the IS will support a proposal for anthropological research that encompasses the principles and the methods of the subfield of digital anthropology.

PART II

5 INTRODUCTION OF SECOND PART

The second part of the present paper will focus on examples of the usage of SNSs in Islamic communities, both virtual and physical. More specifically, I will examine the community of supporters of the Islamic State (IS), applying some of the concepts introduced in the first part regarding SNSs, as well as reviewing the literature related to this case study¹⁸. This work is based on the hypothesis that SNSs have facilitated a

¹⁸ This paper is not an outcome of personal data collection but mostly a critical review of the existing literature regarding the use of SNSs by IS.

concrete *ummah*¹⁹ that is now much more than an imaginative abstraction. The members of the community of believers are now able to communicate and share content with each other, as well as feel part of a community that actually exists in a “material” manner. Just like an update in Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983), the images and the narratives that are generated and regenerated in the digital media environment create a sense of belonging and a concrete relationship between the members with each other (communion) and with the state, in this case the IS. SNSs, digital as they are, are capable of materialising concepts and imaginaries such as the *ummah* or even the concept of Islamic State itself.

The relationship of Islam and technological innovations was described in literature as something new and paradoxical, while sometimes, especially, in the case of the IS, the Western media and some scholars have doubts for “*their* right to use *our* internet” in general. Yet this paper shall go a little back in time in order to identify some connections between Islam, and more importantly, Islamic movements, with the digital, in the past decade. This flashback can historicise the analysis, and also help avoid the danger of a digital orientalist approach that presupposes that media is a Western product, which Islamic communities and organisations are currently taking advantage of.

¹⁹ Arabic word meaning the whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion.

The current literature regarding the IS and digital media, tends to focus and highlight those aspects that are relevant to recruitment, planning and organising attacks. Also, a lot of papers outline the economic value that digital technologies provide to the IS, like bitcoins and other forms of digital currency²⁰. This kind of literature, initiated by non-anthropologists, has cast attention to social media as something that could be a weapon in the hands of the wrong person, or, in this case, the wrong organisation. The IS in all of these papers is portrayed as the “big bad wolf” that stole the western toy and uses it for evil purposes. To find out if this is the case, we have to go back and re-examine the famous internet democracy, which is supposed to have room for everyone (as the scholars representing it, claim).

The IS is a very new entity that for the purposes of this paper will be considered as both a state²¹ and an organisation. As a state, the IS has (temporary) boundaries and

²⁰ “Virtual currency is an electronic cryptocurrency used to purchase both virtual and actual goods and services. It is not contractually backed by assets or legal currency laws, it is not controlled by a central authority and it is not a tangible good. Bitcoins can be sent to anyone who has an Internet connection.” <https://securityintelligence.com/isis-are-they-using-bitcoins-to-fund-criminal-activities/>

²¹ “The international law framework determining whether or not a new entity does or does not constitute a state, and whether an existing state no longer exists, can be understood to comprise: Criteria concerned with the practical viability of the state or claimant state, such as a permanent population, existing in a defined territory, over which there is an effective government operating independently from external control, in the sense that it purports to govern the people and the territory

also social acceptance in the territory that dominates, while as an organisation, it has a strategic plan for digital and physical self-representation which is intentionally used for recruitment and support gaining. Those two identities that I attribute to the IS are related to relevant theoretical approaches. Focusing on the state side, I shall examine some aspects of the life of the subjects as imprinted onto digital media. In order to capture the continuities between the state-like identity and the organisation one as two aspects of the same thing, I will focus on one specific field of inquiry: youth as part of the community of supporters. The young population of the state as well as the young foreign supporters and fighters are the key example in order to see both how IS uses them for the purposes of propaganda and how the present literature on the subject constructs them as passive victims of a vicious group, unable to engage in practices in their own will.

on the basis that it, and they, constitute an independent state” (Wilde, 2010). Typically, IS fulfils the criteria.

6 BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE RELATION BETWEEN IS AND DIGITAL MEDIA

The use of SNSs and generally of digital technologies for political purposes, has become common knowledge in the past decade. Every organization and every political entity from Barack Obama to the Greek Communist Party, should have some kind of

digital presence in order to maintain its supporters and to address to new ones. The presence of an entity or a group on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube²² have become one of the most essential factors, not only for its expansion, but for its very existence as well. As a result, every group/organisation/party etc. in the Western world has a solid strategic plan for the digital field, long before it develops a similar one for the physical world.

In 1995 in Egypt, the government (of Hosni Mubarak) decided to shut down the headquarters of the newspaper of Muslim Brotherhood, one of the largest oppositional groups in the country. In a similar way, in 2000, the same government, banned *Al Shaab*, the newspaper of the Islamist-oriented labour party (Abdel-Latif, 2004). After these hostile actions, both organisations had to look for another means to communicate and inform their supporters. This void was filled by digital media. Digital media, especially in the past decade, worked as shelter to those who were not acceptable in their society. The exclusion of the public discourse led to a rapid development of digital communities in the form of forums, whose members are now able to communicate with each other without having to worry about the potential social consequences and state repression. Of course the establishment of the *digital* is not something that emerged overnight, but a process that took years. These processes

²² www.youtube.com

are not only the outcome of one hostile government, but they are also related to the global technological advancement, and the historical context that triggered them.

Literature that relates social media with the IS (and other organisations like Al-Qaeda) is growing rapidly, and the moment that validated the most this kind of literature was July 1st, 2014. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the new caliphate on that day via an audio recording released across websites and social media, in which he announced himself as the caliph (“caliph Ibrahim”). From that day on, the Islamic State was more real than ever; not because the caliphate had gained the necessary qualities for it to be a state, but because it gained the world’s digital attention. This was a firm point both for the supporters of the IS and for the oppositional discourse to start constructing what IS has become now in our consciousness.

In his book, Abdel Bari Atwan, describes the new-born IS as the “digital caliphate”, not only because its leaders use the digital infrastructure to expand and recruit, but because “without digital technology it is highly unlikely that Islamic State would ever have come into existence” (Atwan, 2015, p. 1). The term *digital* in this case could have many interpretations and serve multiple theoretical paradigms. The most common hypothesis is that of the concept of a digital-oriented war strategy: the digital is constructed in our perception as the tool that gives the IS access to global community as well as the means to recruit and terrify its supporters and its enemies respectively. This perception of the IS is neither unjustified nor a new one. The ISIS had already begun its online campaign in May, 2014 in order to herald the declaration of the IS; executions, suicide bombings and many other images of punishments became common thing on a variety of social media (Atwan, 2015, p. 119) creating slowly the profile of the IS. The images of violence, though, posted on social media before and after the declaration, were not only a means for the IS to hit the world headlines for its propaganda purposes, but they were also perceived as the legitimation that Western

media and scholars were looking for (since 9/11) in order to intensify their islamophobic discourses.

Although digital technologies and their relation to radical Islamic organisations like Al-Qaeda is not something new, there is a tendency to present it as a crucial advantage of the IS. Al-Qaeda, especially during Osama bin-Laden's leadership (and to a lesser extend during Ayman al-Zawahiri's, who is bin-Laden's successor) had not only digital media imprint, but also a steady presence in the mainstream media. Therefore, the smaller impact of Al-Qaeda (and other organisations) could not be attributed to lack of digital sufficiency. Digital media could not be as effective as they are now, had it not been for the certain historical moment derived from the Western policy and strategy regarding Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Egypt etc. and West's political manoeuvres for a violent "preservation" of peace in these regions. Although the present paper will not concern historical circumstances responsible for the emergence of the IS, it goes without saying that digital technologies are not an autonomous field of inquiry and their relation to the IS should be examined as a part of a wider historical analysis.

7 REPRESENTATION OF THE IS AND DIGITAL MEDIA IN THE CURRENT LITERATURE

Social media as presented in the first part of the paper, have been examined in various ways: as public space, as tools, as places etc., but in the case of IS, the usage of SNSs is examined almost exclusively as an aspect of warfare (Shamieh, 2015). The use of technological tools, and especially internet-based ones, has been analysed since

Osama bin-Laden's period of leadership²³ as tools of illegitimate and terroristic guerrilla war. The (mostly unofficial) websites of Al-Qaeda, IS as well as the (official) site of the Egyptian organisation Muslim Brotherhood have been under the scope of Western analysis under the rationale of discovering a starting point to unveil those organisations' whole strategic plan. After the websites, the analytical scope turned to online magazines such as the *Islamic State Report* and *Dabiq*, while during the same period the analysis of SNSs²⁴ arose as a bigger trend. Many papers examine websites of Islamic communities (located in various countries with a Muslim majority) and SNSs under the same hypothesis: any internet-based technology that has the Islamic belief in its core, is used by IS or Al-Qaeda as a tool for war, and every country that has a hard-core Muslim movement, must be under examination for potential malicious attacks on Western democracy (Greene, 2015). SNSs though, do not have the same "nature" as websites or online magazines, and therefore cannot be treated in the same way.

Harleen K. Gambhir's examination on *Dabiq*, though, is an exception (Gambhir, 2014) in that she does not concern herself with social media at all and she does not try to

²³ "Back in 2002 Osama bin Laden himself said that of the war that they were waging, 90 per cent of it needed to be fought in the media battle space, not in the physical battle space." (Obe, 2015)

²⁴ SNSs have much more content than online magazines and therefore could be the basis for more thorough analyses.

discover a fraudulent plan behind the words. Her analysis is thorough and meticulous and while it reproduces stereotypes, most of them are accurate in the case of this magazine. *Dabiq*, unlike social media, has a clear purpose of recruitment and terrorising and therefore its writers are using common narratives and discourse (such as the “clash of civilisations”) in order to do so. It is an illustrated well-written online magazine which is a perfect sample of the technological sophistication of IS and an indicator of well-educated and technologically versed members and supporters. IS chooses to propagate its goals through symbolic representations; the name *Dabiq* has symbolic value²⁵, as well as the execution of prisoners dressed in orange jumpsuits²⁶. *Dabiq* should be analysed in the same context not with social media but with movies and videos produced by IS; both are forms of propagation through symbolic meanings. *Dabiq* is a weapon in the hands of Islamic State inasmuch as the government media of all countries could be considered as such.

Most research articles are concerned with the idea of propaganda; therefore, they fail to capture the other usages that social media could have. The most common example regarding the IS, is the usage of social media for recruitment and terror. Indeed, the IS

²⁵ It is a place near Aleppo that is supposed to be the field that the battle between Rome (West) and Islam will take place.

²⁶ The same jumpsuits as those worn by inmates in Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

and one of its several media centres *Al-Hayat*²⁷ has created a meticulous strategy around social media and they use sophisticated techniques in order to promote their views; many of those techniques, though, are not innovative ideas of IS and its computer scientists. The largest corporations of the planet are using personal data and are targeting their audience through pages in social media created exclusively for promotion. These pages appear in the personal profiles of the users and usually are personalised (for each user) advertisements. So, targeting on specific audiences as well as collection of data for promotion and even recruitment, are not new nor illegitimate; the IS is doing the same thing that the Western media initiated, but in a slightly different manner, a manner that does not involve any kind of collaboration with Western media companies inherently opposed to the IS's goals.

7.1 Digital Orientalism

Raymond Pun and Kira C. Allmann speak about virtual and digital orientalism respectively (Pun, 2013; Allmann, 2014). Pun examines the way that the word *jihad* – a word with various meanings in the Quran – has been misinterpreted and represented

²⁷ al-Furqān Media (Official/central distributor/mainly Arabic), al-I'tisam Media, Ajnad Media (Islamic recitations/nasheeds), A'maq (official news agency) are some more institutions operating as media centres.

in the digital world as a monstrous aspect of the controversial religion we call Islam, while Allmann seeks to expand the term in order to encompass the ahistorical views of analysis regarding digital media and political Islam. The emergence of ISIS²⁸ and its images on digital media, are not a result of technological progress alone, but also a result that should be examined through historical research, not only in the region, but also globally.

The term “digital orientalism” makes even more clear the fact that digital media are not the only reason that the ISIS gained and continues (as IS) to gain support, rather they are another front that is used both in the Western and the IS’s discourse for their respective purposes. Donatella Della Ratta, in her ethnography on a village near Damascus, introduced the term “expanded places”, in order to capture the image of the village and the imaginative historical connections regarding it, before and after a successful television series (Ratta, 2015). The connotations of the village, after the series, have changed; so did the narratives about it in the public discourse. Ratta’s conceptualisation of place could be easily applied to the case of the IS, since the narratives of “the state” are produced through technologically mediated images which constantly create the idea of a concrete place directly related to the land of the great prophets and Ottoman empire; idea reproduced by public discourse both in the West and the IS.

²⁸ ISIS is the former name for IS.

Deborah Wheeler in an article about “Terrorism, Technology and the Ethic of Responsibility” (Wheeler, 2002) long before ISIS, examines the role that new technologies played for Al-Qaeda. She uses the term *responsibility*, becoming one of the first to envisage digital technologies as potential weapons, a paradigm that exists until today. The moral aspect was and continues to be one of the most crucial theoretical arguments about the usage of digital media, indicating and confirming the norms of an appropriate behaviour. This behaviour, though, is only highlighted by scholars in the case of radical Islamic movements and not for example in the digital campaign of Barack Obama for the elections of 2008 (Talbot, 2008). The amoral usage, as a paradigm, is usually combined with discourse about the paradoxical nature of the relationship between Islam and the digital.

When it comes to the IS, the public discourse and the academic approaches (of the disciplines of war studies or political science) are very similar: they reproduce and reform motifs and stereotypes that have been established since 9/11 (Poulimenakos & Dalakoglou, 2016). The work of anthropologists should not be any other than to stand by their theoretical principles and to historicise as well as focus in the life and the norms of subjects in this given situation. In doing that, they should confront the islamophobic discourse which is targeting not only the fighters of the Islamic State living in Syria and Iraq, but also the Muslim population in Europe and US. This islamophobic policy that put those people in target, has to be examined as one of the reasons why IS has gained actual and moral support in the Western countries.

7.2 IS and modern Digital media. A paradoxical Relationship?

An article at *The Guardian*²⁹, makes obvious the fact that public comprehension in Western countries is that the West has an inherent right in the use of social media and therefore Western democracies could enforce restrictive usage under the premises of national security or copyright (Karagiannopoulos, 2012). Additionally, the IS promotes the narrative of a return to the “golden past”, free of any kind of practices related to western modernity. Those two discourses constitute what is commonly described as the paradox regarding IS and digital media (for example, see (Atwan, 2015)).

This paradox has already been analysed by anthropologists. Yael Navaro-Yashin in her ethnography on Turkey has examined the notion of commodification as formative and transformative to what Islamic identity is today and how this identity is interrelated with secularism and its practices (Navaro-Yashin, 2001). Her ethnography about the fashion industry and the Islamic dress code (proposed by Sharia law) pointed out that Islam and what is commonly regarded as Islamic identity interweaves with modernity in an “Islamisation of modernity” or a “Modernisation of Islam”. The concept of modernity as something not necessarily inherently opposed to Islam, is something that could probably eliminate theories about the paradox in the case of the digital caliphate

²⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/11/cameron-call-social-media-clampdown>, accessed 2/5/2016

(Atwan, 2015), and also, it could be a confrontation to the very popular discourse for an upcoming “clash of civilisations”, a discourse that in the present serves both the IS and the Western states (of Europe and USA) well.

IS’s propaganda on SNSs is not only a means to easily diffuse content but it could be also analysed as a statement of “Islamisation”, that is, trying to reform modernity to a “cultural accepted form in Muslim contexts” (Ouis, 2002). This is more obvious in IS’s (and former organisations’) relationship not only with digital media but with the Western culture in general. The IS does not only diffuse material in digital media but also has produced its own phone applications, SNSs (e.g. Muslimbook³⁰) and war games. It also produces movies in English and illustrated magazines very similar to the popular Western ones. In the case of the youth, “Islamisation” constitutes not only a theoretical concept for researchers, but also a strategic plan. Young people who do not want to renounce the modern lifestyle, are not obliged to do so. The IS (as well as Al-Qaeda) has negotiated the terms of modernisation and unlike women in Yashin’s ethnography, managed to turn them into strategy. The Islamisation is a resistance technique as well as a conformity one, and it could actually resolve all the paradoxes; Islamisation is a theoretical alternative (and not a reified category of practices) for the Muslim countries for Pernilla Ouis, and at the same time it could be traced back to

³⁰Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has also launched its own version of SNS: Ikhwanbook.com, which distances itself from the Islamophobic discourse of the management of Facebook (Tartoussieh, 2011)

practices that serve strategic purpose. Gerasimos Makris has argued as well about the practice of Islamists to detach technological innovation and “progress” related with modernity from their context and to use them “for the improvement of their own societies as if they were mere tools” (Makris, 2007, p. 205) and introduces too, an islamisation practice.

7.3 The Emergence of Surveillance and Control

The IS has been constructed as the most extremist form of political Islam; usually the literature analyses it as a concrete and homogenised political entity. But the IS is an organisation with thousands of supporters, who are not exclusively fighters and not all of them want an epic clash of civilisations³¹. Many of them just do not see any other option available than turning to the IS for resistance. The analysis of the IS as an entity seeking to destroy the western civilisation is not only uninformed, but dangerous too, as it cultivates an ahistorical reading that overlooks the Western responsibilities for the events in Iraq, Syria or even Egypt.

31 A hypothesis by political scientist Samuel, P. Huntington, about an upcoming clash based on people's cultural and religious identities, more specifically expressed for the case of Islam versus West. For more information see Huntington, P. Samuel, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Under the pretence that through thorough analysis of digital environments they can find the strategy of IS which is trying to damage their democratic principles, Western scholars have helped a lot in activating controlling mechanisms of the digital. In the name of democracy, the so-called “democracy of the internet” has been backed down and of course the so-called freedom of SNSs has gone down with it. Jytte Klausen has written about Twitter that “while Twitter may give the illusion of authenticity, as a spontaneous activity [...] is managed more tightly than is generally recognised” and a little later she continues to argue that social media usage (by IS supporters) is not spontaneous at all, because the IS somehow controls communication through them (Klausen, 2015). However, the control that Klausen has accused the IS of, is no more illegitimate or “unethical” than the control that SNSs have started to impose after the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the the growth of its supporters. For instance, Facebook has a loophole in its policy rules that states that it reserves the right to ban accounts according to content. Facebook clearly states in its policy page that it “can remove content or disable accounts or work with law enforcement when we (its administration team) believe there is a genuine risk of physical harm or direct threats to public safety”³². This statement has led to numerous arrests of “terrorists” as well as

³² <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards>

to closer surveillance of some population groups³³. Twitter, on the other hand, seems to have a more open approach; it does not have in its policy terms the content-based account banning and to this day, only a small number of accounts (related to the IS) have been permanently suspended³⁴. Twitter is a very popular tool among IS's members and supporters. Its design can be exploited for propaganda purposes in many ways, such as the effective methods of "twitter storms"³⁵ and "Umm"³⁶ accounts (Klausen, 2015) that are usually held by women outside the conflict zone. Also, Twitter provides users with the ability to post news and statements in small texts (140 characters per post) which are easy to read and easy to upload. The uploaders can post a picture or a tweet in less than thirty seconds; very convenient for photos or newsfeed coming directly from the battle. This live information streaming, combined

³³ Examples of such kinds of arrests: <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/london-student-arrested-after-praising-paris-terrorist-attacks-on-facebook-a3116171.html>, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/659574/ISIS-brussels-attacks-video-police-jihadi-facebook>.

³⁴ Although, it has this policy term: "Violent threats (direct or indirect): You may not make threats of violence or promote violence, including threatening or promoting terrorism.", <https://support.twitter.com/articles/18311>. Twitter policy though, does not imply law enforcement.

³⁵ "The activists include high-trending hashtags in their own tweets, which then include a link to Islamic State material hosted on an anonymous, unpoliced platform". (Atwan, 2015, p.12). Another term is "hashtag hijacking."

³⁶ "'Umm' is an honorific name, used to address women as the mother of certain persons – usually the oldest son" (Klausen, 2015).

with tweets about Islam and religious instruction could provide an alternative to potential members or supporters who want to avoid extensive analyses in order to form their views and prefer bullet-point approaches. So, on the one hand, Twitter can be analysed through the concept of public space, in which debates over religion, culture and politics can take place, but on the other, this so-called “cyber publics” could sharpen the “censorial mechanisms of state surveillance and policing” (Tartoussieh, 2011).

The representation of the IS in academic papers and public discourse, is one of the main reasons that internet control and surveillance has been legitimate and even desired in some countries. Most of the members of the IS try to hide their identities and use many systems for encryption and protection while surfing the Internet, but, nevertheless, some of them, especially in the Western countries, have been exposed. Revealing their identities most of the times leads to captivity, prison-time, continuous surveillance and many more punitive techniques. These measures, though, are not applied only to the fighters who made the mistake of revealing their location or their server, but also to members of *ummah* who are stating their views and their sympathy towards organisations like IS, Al-Qaeda, AQAP (Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula) etc. The democracy of the internet seems to have an intolerance towards statements of this kind that are not approved by the western view of the world.

The representation of the IS as an “evil” organisation that we have to eliminate no matter what, has led to a series of measures on SNSs that make us all subjects to investigation. The internet surveillance techniques are not only applied to SNSs. Another commonly experienced technique is the denial of access to some websites, a phenomenon observed in Western countries that claim to have an internet policy of freedom and openness. Even when access to some websites is not restricted, the viewer is judged by his/her choices. For instance, downloading *Dabiq* or visiting Islamic websites (produced by IS) is not considered appropriate internet behaviour and can

result to the viewer being put under surveillance. This kind of internet usage is usually a hint for the state services, who also combine other characteristics like country of origin, ethnicity, age, gender etc. to judge the political views and potential acts of the subject.

The aforementioned examples do not always have negative results, but this surveillance condition has created a normativity for internet behaviour (Miller & Horst, 2012) which most internet users comply with, in order to avoid potential consequences. This is the reason that the IS's members keep their anonymity, supporters do not express themselves firmly and analysts should have a university IP that verifies that this behaviour is for the sake of research. The extent of control and surveillance differs from country to country; UK has a strict policy compared to Greece, and France (under the light of recent events) even stricter.

8 SPECIFIC USES OF DIGITAL MEDIA BY THE IS

The supporters and fighters of the IS use social media and digital media in general with more than one ways. Similar to the rest of the world, they use digital technologies not only to gain support, which by the way is a common desire among the users of social media worldwide, but also to express themselves following the new global normativities. In order for an ethnographer to be able to examine how and why fighters and supporters use social media and what is so important about this that

could make us form a picture of their everyday lives, we have to examine first the more official, non-personal usage of digital networks.

It is common knowledge that IS members have competency in operating digital technologies. The level of competency that they present, though, unlike simple familiarity with SNSs, is not something that anyone can obtain nowadays. On the contrary, it is a result of high-level education, most likely obtained via attendance to Western universities. They use tools such as Tor³⁷ (Klausen, 2015) (Atwan, 2015) for encryption and they have ways to maintain their anonymity in an era that digital control has become common place for policy makers. They also use digital technologies for financial transactions and are familiar with digital currencies, such as bitcoins. Their very sophisticated knowledge on technology and their education level could possibly inform us about some other aspects and characteristics of their background stories. They probably are young enough to know about cutting edge technology and well-raised in order to be able to learn from the best, since not all informatics students have the same level of competency and not all universities are capable to disseminate this kind of knowledge. Anthropological research is not supposed to generalise about the origins of the members but, in this case, it is feasible

³⁷ software and open network that helps defence against traffic analysis, a form of network surveillance that threatens personal freedom and privacy, confidential business activities and relationships, and state security. <https://www.torproject.org/>

to discern some patterns and make some justified presumptions which are, among others, an outcome of IS propaganda itself. The IS has made a clear invitation (*da'wah*) to all the global Muslim population (*ummah*) to migrate (هِجْرَة, *hijra*)³⁸ to its territorial basis. This invitation, although global, had a direct target towards the well-educated Muslims. The IS provides shelter, food, water, education etc. and most of all, it can provide a clean start to people who need it. It is actually very tempting for a Muslim family living in a Western country (probably not in the best conditions because of the anti-terrorist and quite Islamophobic discourse), to migrate to Raqqa and start over. But the campaign of the IS is not limited to this audience. In order for the IS to approach young people who probably do not have a family, it has to make its propaganda “cool”; that is, adapting and diffusing it in a way that is appealing to younger populations and has elements native to the ways they talk, have fun, play games, eat etc. The IS manages to do this via social media through the young generation of people, who already live in its territories. But while young generations using social media is quite convenient for propaganda purposes, it is also the actual way those people live their lives. As a matter of fact, many times, we see images diffused in the IS's networks, produced not from a well-presented and directed

³⁸ hijra is the migration or journey of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina. “*Hijra* to the land of Islam is obligatory” (Atwan, 2015, p.1).

performance act, but from actual people who through social media are presenting themselves and their daily activities.

Another way the IS uses technology is live-streaming moments of battle. Advanced cameras and drones as well as smartphones and tablets are in the service of the IS and through them, the IS can produce real-time videos similar to popular war games and RPG (Role Playing Games). These game-like videos are the lure that creates the desire of the real battle. This strategy, well-thought as it is, is very appealing to the Muslim (and sometimes non Muslim) youth and by now has attracted a great number of young fighters. Although, as with other strategies of propaganda, we are just able to conjecture them by context, as we do not have access to the organisation's office.

8.1 Recruitment and Propaganda

The IS also provides a vent to Muslim people, by a well-organised "recruitment network" established through SNSs which instantiates communication between IS members and potential supporters. The recruiters are people who are able to convince potential supporters about the high-quality and religious life that they will have if they migrate to IS and also operate as friends, by giving advice and engaging to casual

conversation. Angela Gendron argues that the bond between charismatic preachers and their audience has strengthened due to digital media (Gendron, 2016). Preachers, such as Anwar al-Alwaki³⁹, can be especially persuasive and address to large audiences around the globe. This form of distant leadership, which is the key aspect to remote recruitment as well, seems to maintain somehow a hierarchical structure (like that employed in past organisations), while at the same time, gives rise to individualistic and bottom-up networks. Gendron calls this type of organisation “leaderless Jihad” (Gendron, 2016), because of the high percentage of self-radicalisation and self-activation, going back to a “connective” approach of digital media. Malcom Gladwell in an article in *The New Yorker*, entitled “Small Change, Why the revolution will not be tweeted” expresses his disappointment about the digitally initiated activist movements, which form weak ties between people and are not able to involve them in high-risk situations, since they are not collective, but highly connective and ineffective networks (Gladwell, 2010)⁴⁰.

³⁹ Anwar al-Alwaki, a youthful cleric, born in US, suggested that in order for the Jihadist material to spread more widely, SNSs should be used. He was a very persuasive preacher especially when it comes to young people (Atwan, 2015). Alwaki was a member of AQAP, organisation that used to be akin to Al-Qaeda, but recently pledged its allegiance to Baghdadi.

⁴⁰ Probably as a reaction to Gladwell, Francesca Communello and Giuseppe Anzera are wondering in their article’s title “Will the Revolution be tweeted? A conceptual framework for understanding social media and Arab Spring” (Communello & Anzera, 2012).

This kind of generalisations towards a holistic approach of digital technologies and agonistic movements, though, seem inapplicable to all circumstances. It is true that the IS produces content and uploads it on social media with the most effective ways, while the diffusion of this content is not only their business, but it is also entrusted to users. The users of social media should share the content in order for it to reach a wider audience and achieve its goal, be it recruitment or intimidation. This is not the only kind of content, though, that the IS produces; sharing the IS's execution videos (for example the execution of James Foley and the letter accompanying it) or IS's well-directed battle videos is not left to users; on the contrary, these media items are diffused through various channels and are often directly displayed on mainstream media (television). This tactic indicates that IS uses both bottom-up and top-down techniques, related to their goal at the specific time. The videos or letters that are quite often displayed on mainstream media (such as the declaration speech of Baghdadi, or the executions of many key figures), are usually not the outcome of some amateur's work, but are derived from the appointed administrators of IS. At the same time, another network works alongside in social media and in digital "environments".

The recruiters are not a special group of people entrusted with recruitment duties; nearly everyone can be a recruiter, provided that he/she is capable of persuading the person on target. For example, women with children are more likely to be persuaded by other women with families living in the territory, or young people are more easily "manageable" by young fighters who speak like them and understand their problems. The work of the preachers is not to speak personally to everyone who wants to migrate, but to give rise to their desire to do so. So, under this scope, we cannot distinct the bottom-up network from a top-down hierarchy since the self-radicalisation, most likely, has been initiated by a speech of someone like Alwaki and the desire for migration, although self-activated, is probably mediated through discussions with appropriate recruiters before it becomes an actual flee.

9 AN EXAMPLE: SNSs AND ISLAMIC YOUTH

The lifestyle of the young population settled on IS territory, as presented in digital media, does not seem to be very different from that of their Western counterparts. They seem to enjoy similar things and self-present themselves as the “cool” kids that we usually meet in American movies. Atwan says that the IS tries to establish a “Jihadi cool” attitude as part of its propaganda (Atwan, 2015), but taking a closer look to the SNS accounts, we will not only see a form of propaganda, but also a spontaneous expression of identity and desires. This is not to imply that this kind of representation does not help IS’s propaganda, but that we must refrain from believing in arbitrary assumptions concerning the life of subjects in a given society.

Many of the young people now living in IS, used to live in Western countries and probably used to attend Western schools and go out with their European or American classmates. They probably had an image of what means to be “cool” and they also probably did not fulfil the characteristics of the “cool kid”. Even though we can not be sure about any of those assumptions, we could possibly conduct remote digital

ethnography by close examination of their accounts in order to see how they used to express themselves in social media before and how they do now, or the way that exclusively propagandistic accounts are different from the more personal ones. The length of this paper does not allow for a full digital ethnography, hence I am going to outline a possible methodology and demonstrate some of the unexplored aspects of the life of young population in IS.

9.1 A Brief Review of the Current Literature

There are many scholars who right now are working on devising a methodology which can provide us with a clear image of the use of digital media within the IS. Many of these scholars do not focus on one aspect of digital media but are trying to handle them all (Islamic websites, SNSs, economic transactions etc.), confirming the discourse about internet as a concrete entity. In their effort to collect data from many different sources, most of them use the snowball method⁴¹ (Klausen, 2015) and often a kind of discourse analysis. They collect a great amount of data and elaborate using quantitative methods to reach a conclusion with little or no coherence with the

⁴¹ Establishing starting accounts as the base nodes in a network, and based on the following accounts and the followers of these accounts, the sample grows as a snowball.

everyday life of the people under analysis. An other method is the creation of list of accounts (Twitter or Facebook accounts) that is monitored for a period of time. For example, J.M. Berger and Heather Perez analysed a list of English-speaking ISIS adherents for a short period of time, in order to reach some conclusions about the holders of the Twitter accounts and the IS itself (Berger & Perez, 2016). An other example of qualitative research that tries to simplify the relationship between ICTs and countries with a Muslim majority is that of Philip Howard (Howard, 2010). Howard argues that a comparative research across countries (75 countries) will solve questions about the internet democracy and dictatorship in Muslim countries. This approach (the “set-theoretic” approach, as he calls it), based mainly on ICTs, does not dig into details about each country, but it is concerned with the set of cases that the author has determined.

These kinds of methodology, quantitative or qualitative, are usually employed by scholars who want to capture all the aspects and continuities of digital spaces and outline practices which intersect space and time. These methodologies do not originate from anthropological literature, and although anthropology has not yet dealt to a great extent with the case of IS and its digital imprint, it could provide us with some starting analytical tools. The remote digital ethnography which many scholars propose is a method that could be very useful for not easily accessible spaces and conditions. A digital ethnography with a focus on certain aspects and certain means of communication and self-representation, could be ideal in this case. Digital ethnography, embracing principles such as participant observation, could give us a small fraction of the bigger picture; for example, we can focus on west-raised young people living now on IS territory, who imprint a very big part of their life on social media, especially on Facebook and Twitter. Both of these media have a chat option which seems to be overly important to users. Instant Messaging section of Facebook (which appears in the right side of the screen all the time) is usually the primary

concern of young people: there they chat with their friends, they send emoticons or pictures and they also form a way of writing with abbreviations which is not common knowledge for someone not familiar with this medium. Every generation in the past decade has developed an exclusive code for communication and our research should comprehend not only what young people say, but how they say it and how this way of communicating is expanding in most regions of the planet. To achieve that, we should not only talk to them via chat, but also become part of the inner circle (“friends” in terms of Facebook) which watches their daily posts and comments on them. Other digital means like Skype or Viber⁴² (or even e-mail) could aid in this direction, as they are part of the daily life of today’s youth, too.

9.2 Suggestions for Future Research: Proposal for a New Approach

The historicising of the situation in Iraq and Syria can alterate some of the current paradigms regarding the IS and more generally, regarding Islam. In order for researchers to get rid of the persistent images of terror attributed to Islam, they have to conduct anthropological research on the experience of people living in those countries. Manuel Castells, in an effort to convince the academic community that digital media are not a representation of reality, has proposed the term “real

⁴² Both Skype (www.skype.com) and Viber (www.viber.com) are instant messaging platforms.

virtuality” which Dale Eickelman (2011) embeds in his analysis of the global Muslim community (ummah) the meaning of home. He draws on the “Arab Spring” and says that digital images are not “just a channel through which the appearance of reality is communicated, but the experience itself”. The work of Eickelman, influential as it is, makes us realise that digital media could alter the norms of society and create powerful metaphors of belonging and sharing, in a way similar to that of Arab Spring.

The young population of IS have the same familiarity with social media as their western counterparts. Maruta Herding makes an interesting analysis of the Muslim youth in the UK, Germany and France, about the adaptation of the “Western coolness” in the context of the Islamic faith (Herding, 2013). “The idea of ‘bricolage’, regarded as a process of removing the object from its subjective meaning in context” (Abbas, 2015), plays a significant role in her analysis, which explores the ways that Muslim youth is fusing “elements of Western popular culture with Islamic symbols” (Clarkson, 2015). Religious hip-hop, street-wear with Islamic slogans, as she said, “have become meaningful forms of expression for young practising Muslims in Europe”, and although Herding has made some generalisations about the “youth”, has also created a background for Atwan’s example of “Jihadi cool” (Atwan, 2015).

The embodiment of Western norms in the new context is not an act of obedience in the norm, as it is formed by the Western capitalism and consumerism (as Navarro-Yashin says (2001)), but an act that shows both conformity and resistance. Young supporters of the IS have embodied the norms of Western societies, such as ways of entertainment and practices of everyday life (watching series on Western channels, practicing sports, reading youth magazines and of course familiarising themselves with digital media). However, the adoption of the norms of the “West” does not always imply a social acceptance motivation.

In SNSs one can see pictures uploaded by young boys in short military trousers and fashionable but angry enough t-shirts, shopping Nutella (hazelnut spread) and drinking

Red Bull (power drink) with the one hand, while the other hand holds a Kalashnikov. One could also read tweets in perfect American lingo and Arabic fortified with English words and phrases. They know the lingo and do not try to hide it, on the contrary they use the linguistic form to express different content (mostly religious or battle-related). Many of those boys have experienced a battle, despite their young age. This kind of accomplishment probably makes them prouder for themselves and may strengthen their feeling of achievement and the identity of the “cool kid” in *Jihadi* terms.

Many of the children that moved to the IS from Western countries were not even close to fighters. The same goes for children that are thinking of moving to the IS. After 9/11, policy makers decided to intensify the Islamophobic discourse and encourage xenophobic reactions. Nowadays’ Muslim youth on one hand is forced to live under a veil of stereotypes and “anti-terrorist” and many times “anti-Islamic” discourse that limits their choices and makes their living heteronomous⁴³, while on the other, they themselves (young supporters and members of IS) cultivate orientalist discourses about their religion and culture.

⁴³ I use the concept of heteronomy as proposed by Stewart Mutha, in order to show the contrast between what liberal Western countries perceive as heteronomy (mostly religious practices, and in the case of Islam the Sharia Law) and how this perception could lead to the enforcement of *autonomy* with Western criteria. This enforcement is what I call above heteronomous life (Mutha, 2007).

Expanding an argument by Makris mentioned earlier, one can say that the practice of detaching technological innovation from its context and use it as mere tool can be detected in youth, as well. Muslim youth, competent users of technological tools as they are, are able to detach digital practices from their context and to “Islamise” them in a way that shapes both the image of the Islamic State and their personal image. The anthropological discourse, in order to better understand the practices of the younger generation of the IS, should rise beyond stereotypes that victimise the subjects and consider the practices as formed both by historical conditions and by the agency ascribed to subjects.

10 SUMMARY OF SECOND PART

In this part, I tried to show the ways that IS is presented on the current literature and to confront some of the generalisations being made. Issues such as the emergence of surveillance, constitute a serious social consequence that affects us all, and it is initiated, not by the IS or its supporters, but by the Western public and academic discourse. Also I tried to re-examine the “paradox” that some of the scholars see in the relationship between the digital media and the IS, following the work of Pernilla Ouis (2002) and that of Gerasimos Makris (2007). Both scholars are elaborating on the concept of Islamisation of modernity. Makris is theorising about the distinction that Islamists make between the Western discourse and modernity itself, to conclude that we can not generalise about an inherent retrogressive “nature” of Islam. This orientalist discourse, though, is not generated only by Western scholars, but from the IS as well. The “Islamic State” is a concept and a state, that has its imaginative roots in the Islamic golden past, the age of the great prophets. Its narratives are diffused through media and create an imaginative community that feels bonds not only with the IS but with the past that the latter claims to carry.

To better understand the relationship between social media and the IS, we cannot rely on perpetuating stereotypes about the “nature” of Islam or the IS and the “nature” of modernity, but to examine the practices of the people, and seek for the intersections. Traditions are not static, but dynamic relationships, and an orientalist discourse about an “Islamic authenticity” or an “Islamic regression” (depends on the source) is nothing else but obfuscating. In order to better comprehend the practices of the subjects here, I focused on the example of the young population. This example could be very enlightening due to the distinctive characteristics of youth, such as clothing, linguistic patterns and most of all, familiarity with digital technologies.

In this part of the paper I proposed a closer examination of the young generation, based in anthropological principles and new anthropological methods such as remote ethnography. Anthropological discourse like that embedded in the work of Lila Abu-Lughod and Saba Mahmood in their ethnographies in a Beduin community in Egypt (Abu-Lughod, 2002) and in the Mosque movement in Egypt (Mahmood, 2005) respectively, provides an excellent sample of a historicised approach. Both of them have shown that women are not passive victims; they make voluntary choices based on their desires and their contextual identities, exactly like young people in our case. These two ethnographies, as well as others, like Navaro Yashin’s in Turkey (Navaro-Yashin, 2001) or Soroya Duval’s in Egypt (Duval, 2006) could be a sample of what is proposed here. Although these ethnographies are neither digital nor remote, they focus on a specific aspect and participate in the field; they are contextual and historical as well as reflexive and thorough. Young people are not to be examined in general, not even as fighters of the IS; they should be examined as subjects who are engaged to digital and political practices in a manner of self-representation, as well as in an agonistic manner. The concept of Islamisation as well as a historicised approach, that embodies postcolonial theories and political examination in the region, could shed

light to their digital practices and also could pave the way to an approach that is not subject to generalisations but to ethnographic particularism.

11 CONCLUSIONS

The present paper consists of two parts, both of the same importance. In the first part I tried to articulate a survey regarding the (mainly) anthropological discussion about internet, focusing on the Social Networking Sites. I presented some of the most crucial, to my mind, points about the way digital media are operating today and about the way that they are perceived by scholars. The relevant literature, articulated the essential background for the second part. Concepts like *Internet democracy* and *Internet control*, and methodologies proposed by scholars, such as the digital ethnography and the ethnographic particularism that should be applied in digital environments as well, introduced the approach outlined in the second part regarding the usage of SNSs by IS's members and the representation of this usage on the current literature.

In the second part, I elaborated on a yet not very popular among anthropologists issue, and I tried to conjugate two anthropological traditions: the newly born sub-field of Digital Anthropology, and the long relationship of anthropology with Islam. The examination of non-anthropological literature in this part, was triggered by my interest to confront persistent stereotypes that continue to exist through an orientalist

discourse in the analysis of the *digital*, confirming Islamophobic and “anti-terroristic” practices.

The focus on the young generation of the IS helped me delve into the everyday practices and propose a more anthropological approach that will not categorise and generalise based on pre-existing images. My hope is that anthropology will open a formal discussion regarding digital media and the IS, confronting the persisting orientalism and focusing on the subjects in the given society, in the foreseeable future.

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