Call for proposals: Research Trainees 2015

1. Title: Realizing one's ideology: the rise of Islamic State

2. Coordinators dr. Jan Jaap de Ruiter (Department of Culture Studies) & dr. Bert van de Ven (Department of Philosophy)

3. Project Summary

Developing and formulating an ideology is one thing, actually realizing and implementing it is another. This nevertheless takes place in our days where the organization Islamic State (henceforth IS) is realizing and building its dreamed state in parts of Iraq and Syria. The ideology of Islamic State is based on her interpretation of Sharia, Islamic law, excluding other laws arguing that the last ones are man made, belonging therefore to the domain of 'kufr', or disbelief and thus by definition violating the divine law of Sharia. The interpretation of IS of Sharia has far reaching consequences. IS states that serving both Sharia and another law is kufr and can therefore not but be punished but by the death penalty. Iraqi and Syrian lawyers, unfortunately finding themselves living in IS-territory, were therefore told to look for another job as the Iraqi or Syrian laws they represent belong to the domain of kufr. To continue working as lawyers, which would be prevented anyway as only Sharia would govern the state of IS, would result in getting the death penalty. Lawyers started consequently working for example as merchants in fruits and vegetables.

The ideology of IS is a completely closed system based on a very strict division between the true believers, the IS supporters and the people of the rest of the world, who are considered infidels or non-believers. Muslims living in IS territory are given the option to join IS. They are by all means obliged to follow the IS rules.

Islamic State building its own dream society is not unique in the world history. De Graaff (2012) reports on the countless initiatives of ideological movements doing

the same thing in the course of time. The fanatics (as De Graaff calls them) all share the characteristic that they start enthusiastically but that in the end all initiatives fail and end in violence. Islamic State will not be an exception. The 'real' Islamic State is a very interesting case to study from the ideological perspective of realizing one's goal. The first research question of the proposed study is therefore formulated as follows:

1 How does Islamic State relate to earlier attempts to create an ideal state?

Related to this first angle of interest is the issue of public space in Islamic State. Public space is never neutral (Blommaert, 2012) and with the instruments the – recently established- discipline of Linguistic Landscaping (Blommaert, 2013) offers, we can describe the IS-version of public space. IS 'decorates' for example its territory with billboards preaching the blessings of a life following the Sharia, IS style. The second research question of the proposed study is therefore formulated as follows:

2 How does Islamic State control and 'furnish' public space?

A third angle of interest is that of the philosophical concept of immunity (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999, 2003). Islamic State announced in November 2014 the introduction of its own currency system arguing that it wanted to break up with the world wide financial system of 'Zionists and Crusaders' which fits perfectly with its goal to create a completely self sufficient independent state. This autarkic aim IS strives for, as well as the way it furnishes its public space, suggests that IS provides us with a unique case for studying the meaning and implications of the term immunity. Based on that the third research question of the proposed study is formulated as follows:

3 Can the way IS realizes its ideal be understood from the concept of immunity? That is to say, which immunological functions does Islamic State fulfill for its adherents?

The case of Islamic State fits well with the –recent- research focus of dr. de Ruiter and dr. Van de Ven. The first shifting his research interests from Arabic to Islam and Sharia, in particular jihadi Islam, state building and in that same context to Linguistic Landscaping, the latter shifting his focus to the concept of immunity. Furthermore dr. De Ruiter disposes of a vast network in the Middle East and even within the territory of IS of jihadis sympathetic to Islamic State and activists who oppose IS.

There is place for one student to participate in the project. He or she will participate actively in collecting –visual- data and texts, emanating from IS which is very active on the Internet. Subsequently the data collected, pictures, stills from IS videos and the like, and English language texts (the Arabic ones translated by dr. De Ruiter) will serve as materials answering the three research questions.

The research is expected to produce a three author working paper to be published as a Tilburg Paper in Cultural Studies and an academic publication in due time. Furthermore the student will be invited to present their findings in the NISIS (Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies) Autumn School that will be held in a Dutch university in October 2015.

Optional is the presentation of the findings in Aix-en-Provence in France (SciencesPo) on the occasion of a workshop on Islam, Leadership and State Building planned in the fall of 2015 as well.

In December 2015 a workshop will be organized in Tilburg in which the findings of the research are presented and to which key actors in the debate on Islam – worldwide- in the Netherlands are invited.

The budget will be spent for visiting workshops/conferences.

4. Project timeline and list of planned activities (possibly with milestones and intermediary results).

January-April 2015: data collection and reading of literature.

March-July 2015: categorization and analysis of data. Writing first draft of working paper.

August-September 2015: writing and finalizing working paper and first draft of article.

October-December 2015: preparing NISIS autumn school, Aix-en-Provence (optional) workshop and national workshop

December 2015: finalizing article

4. Research Trainee Profile

Students of TSH are invited to join this research. We opt for Bachelor students in order to make them acquainted with their first steps in doing research. It goes without saying that the candidate must take an interest in the diverse culturally and philosophically defined research questions. Essays written earlier by the candidates on subjects of the fields under concern are a prerequisite. Students are expected to profit from the research in order to possibly write their bachelor thesis on related topics. Students are invited to submit a motivation letter and their CV to the following email addresses: B.W.vdVen@tilburguniversity.edu and jj.deruiter@tilburguniversity.edu

References

J. Blommaert (2012) *Discourse. Key Topics in Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

J. Blommaert (2013) *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

B. de Graaff (2012). *Op weg naar Armageddon*. Amsterdam: Boom.

P. Sloterdijk (1998) *Sphären I. Blasen,* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

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