



Speaker: Dr. Aaron Anfinson, Critica Research, Washington DC

Discussant: Prof. Richard Fitzgerald, Department of Communication, University of Macau

Convener: Dr. Feifei Zhou, Department of English, Lingnan University

A visual projection of sovereignty was central to the unprecedented appeal of the Islamic State's territorial project. In this paper, I establish that choreographed spectacles of punishment were utilised to denote an efficient, functioning system of governance. Images were used to 'prove' that the Islamic State had the capacity to enact a form of justice informed by religious doctrine. Using an affordance driven approach, I analyze a corpus of official propaganda materials, their reception on the wider mediascape and victim testimonies from 2014 to 2019. I conclude that the Islamic State invested considerable time and resources into visualising a highly regulated populace. In contrast to the chaos within its occupied territory, the bureaucratic documentation of everyday life was used to project a monopoly of violence. This realisation has implications for our understanding of non-state actors operating in an era of intense mediatisation. It offers insight into how contemporary technologies are affecting traditional hierarchies, challenging the power and practices of conventional political representation.



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(No registration required)

Dr. Aaron Anfinson is the Director of Analysis at Critica Research in Washington DC. He publishes on issues of counterterrorism, post-conflict humanitarian assistance, migration, enslavement and human insecurity. He received his doctorate from the University of Hong Kong and has over a decade of experience teaching and working in the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the United States.