The Crusades All Over Again: Obama, ISIS, and Medieval Metaphors after 9/11

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Speaking at the U.S. National Prayer Breakfast in 2015, president Barack Obama took the opportunity to reflect upon contemporary violence conducted in the name of religion. "How do we, as people of faith," he asked the audience in attendance, "reconcile these realities—the profound good, the strength, the tenacity, the compassion and love that can flow from all of our faiths, operating alongside those who seek to hijack religions for their own murderous ends?"[1] Of course, his reference to religious "hijackers" pointed most directly to the insurgent terrorist organization that calls itself ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).[2] The group first rose to prominence through organized actions beginning in 2013, taking advantage of power vacuums resulting from civil wars and destabilized governance in Iraq and Syria over the previous decade.

In his speech, president Obama then drew from the past, the historical record, to argue that reconciling conflicting convictions of religious groups is a question that "humanity has been grappling with [. . .] throughout human history." Obama used this historical scope to caution against sanctimony or hypocrisy: "lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ." Of course, Obama isn't alone in his invocation of the Crusades to contextualize U.S. and Middle Eastern relations years after 9/11. On September 16, 2001, just five days after 9/11, President George W. Bush disembarked the "Marine One" helicopter on the White House South Lawn with his wife, Laura, close at his side. As press asked him questions, George Bush interjected (not in response to any question posed), "this, this, this, this, this [sic] Crusade, this war on terrorism, uh, is going to take a while."[3] A month later, former president Bill Clinton spoke to students at Georgetown University:

> Terror—the killing of noncombatants for economic, political, or religious reasons—has a very long history, as long as organized combat itself [. . .] Those of us who come from various European lineages are not blameless. Indeed, in the first Crusade, when the Christian soldiers took Jerusalem, they first burned a synagogue with three hundred Jews in it, and

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[1] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at National Prayer Breakfast," *The White House*, 5 February 2015, accessed 1 June 2016, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/05/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast.

[2] The organization also refers to itself as ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). The latter acronym broadens their territorial ambitions beyond Syria to the entire Levant, including Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. As these aspirations have not been realized to date by an actual ISIS presence in any of these countries, it seems prudent to me to stick to ISIS for the time being.

[3] George W. Bush, "Today We Mourned, Tomorrow We Work," *The White House*, 16 September 2001, accessed 4 June 2016, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html.

> proceeded to kill every woman and child who was Muslim on the Temple Mount [. . .] that story is still being told today in the Middle East, and we are still paying for it.[4]

One can argue as to whether or not George W. Bush was consciously referring to the historical Crusades when he used the metaphor. But Obama, like Clinton, intentionally and purposefully used the history of the Crusades in the months and years after 9/11 and in the age of ISIS. Rhetorically, their claims are not attempts to interpret the "historical" past. Rather, Obama and Clinton invoked the Crusades to reconfigure them as the "practical" past, something essential for decision-making in the present.

Traditional academic studies of "medievalism" focus on how the medieval past is imagined after the medieval period. In this way, scholarship on medievalism often draws on social and historical context or literary histories to explain why, how, and when the medieval past is posthumously re-imagined. Traditional medievalism, in this manner, does not need to be "practical" for present politics. Medieval re-imaginings are colored by the present circumstances of the creator and audience, to be sure. But in examples like those offered by Obama, Bush, Clinton, and others detailed below, the stakes are different. In these cases, the medieval past, even if invoked metaphorically, is called upon for the most practical of purposes: to ask contemporary citizens to consider their moral and ethical stances, to probe their decisions about supporting the ongoing War on Terror, and to interrogate the "clash of civilizations" rhetoric propagated by figures like Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington in the 1990s.[5] In this essay, I argue that we can best understand the political use of Crusade metaphors in the U.S. and the Middle East—and the critiques levied against this kind of discourse—by viewing them as either invocations of the "historical past" or the "practical past." In doing so, I hope to emphasize a unique kind of medievalism, one which may draw on the affordances of figurative language like metaphor to make the past "practical" for contemporary political concerns. Medievalism that draws on the practical past is not just shaped by the conditions of the present, but it actively seeks to make the medieval past essential for grappling with and acting in the present—and the future.

The Practical Past

For many non-historians much of recorded history may seem irrelevant to the daily realities of the present. Interesting? Sure. But something that one *needs* to reference on a daily basis for decision-making or comprehending the present? Probably not. Of course, the perception of different historical events as practically related to the present is constantly in flux. Studies such as those

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[4] William J. Clinton, "Clinton Address to Georgetown Students," Washington D.C., 2001, accessed 4 June 2016, https://www.georgetown.edu/admin/publicaffairs/protocol_events/events/clinton_glf110701.htm. Now available as text at http://www.salon.com/2001/11/10/speech_9/.

[5] See, for example, Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic Monthly* 266.3 (1990): 47-60, and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72.3 (1993): 22-49.

conducted by Schwartz et al. have shown that cultural memories of the distant past—such as the Roman capture of Masada in 73 CE—can transform from obscure history to potent social and political imaginary fodder seemingly overnight, as was the case in Israel in the nineteenth century.[6] To distinguish between two orientations toward the past, historians Michael Oakeshott (1983) and Hayden White (2014) provide scholars with useful rubrics for observing particular orientations toward the past that are either "historical" or "practical."[7]

In an inquiry into the "historical past," individuals and groups perceive previous events as antiquarian objects of study, which may not have daily or frequent relevance to their lived experience of the present. Here, Oakeshott's original definition of the historical past is useful, as he describes it as something tied to a "critical inquiry of a certain sort [. . .] assembled in answer to a historical question."[8] As such, when academics and teachers instruct students to "think like a historian" and critically evaluate and contextualize sources about the past, they invoke the norms of academic historiography outlined by Oakeshott and White as the "historical past."[9] Among the bastions of academic historiography and history education, a "historical" assessment of the past should avoid contemporary comparisons or moral lessons for the present.[10]

But outside of academia and history classrooms, history and the past are often to be invoked for more strategic, presentist, and practical purposes. This orientation toward the past as connected to the concerns of the present is what Oakeshott and White call the "practical past." The practical past relates to ways of knowing and actively engaging with the past as it relates to daily decisions, contextualization of social surroundings, or navigation of individual or group identities. As White argues, a perception of the past as "practical" for the present "serves as the basis for the kinds of perception of situations, solutions of problems, and judgements of value and worth that we must make in everyday situations of the kind never experienced by the 'heroes' of history."[11] In this formulation, it is hard to imagine current or former leaders of the free world invoking the past in any way that is not "practical"—to shape popular opinion on policy, to invoke civic imaginations and political aptitudes, and so forth. With the exception of the rare world leader with a solid

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[6] See Barry Schwartz et al, "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory," *Sociological Quarterly* 27.2 (1986): 147-64.

[7] See Michael Oakeshott, *On History, and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983) and Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

[8] Oakeshott, *On History*, 36, 68.

[9] See, for example, Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

[10] See Peter Lee, "History in School: Aims, Purposes and Approaches: A Reply to John White," in *The Aims of School History: The National Curriculum and Beyond*, eds. Peter Lee et al. (London: Institute of Education, 1992), 20-34; Dennis Shemilt, "The Caliph's Coin: The Currency of Narrative Frameworks in History Teaching," in *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 83-101; and Rob Phillips, *Reflective Teaching of History 11-18: Meeting Standards and Applying Research* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

[11] White, *Practical Past*, 15.

grounding in historiographic norms, such as Winston Churchill, should we be surprised when leaders tackling contemporary challenges summon the past to weigh in on concerns of the present?

For some, particularly for academic historians, contemporary leaders' and groups' soliciting the practical past is not just problematic, but abhorrent. Of all the leading historians of the Crusades to critique metaphorical uses of the Crusades after 9/11, Oxford historian Christopher Tyerman is the most impassioned. "To understand medieval crusading for itself and to explain its survival may be regarded as an urgent contemporary task," he argues, but "one for which *historians* must take responsibility," or else the history of the Crusades is doomed to lose its "objective precision in definition, practice, perception, or approval."[12] Without the "objective precision" of an academically trained historian, Tyerman fears the Crusades will undergo a transformation from the historical to the practical past, as already "the Crusades no longer just haunt the memory but stalk the streets of twenty-first-century international politics, in particular in the Near East."[13] In short, for Tyerman and for many other leading Crusade historians in the U.K. and U.S., the distant past should never be made practically relevant to present socio-political circumstances.[14] As Tyerman dictates on behalf of academic historiographers and their specific approach to the "historical past": "There can be no summoning of the past to take sides in the present."[15]

Academic historians' staunch commitment to perceiving the past as "historical," rather than "practical" for the present, helps us contextualize the virulence of some historians' critiques of Obama's brief mention of the Crusades in 2015. Thomas Madden, a medieval historian at the University of St. Louis, responded to the president's remarks by complaining dryly "I don't think the president knows very much about the crusades. He seems to be casting them as an example of a distortion of Christianity and trying to compare that to what he sees as a distortion of Islam in the actions of ISIS."[16] To be sure, the president *doesn't* know as much about the historical Crusades as a tenured professor of medieval Crusader history. But neither is it uninformed nor naive to question the ways in which the Crusaders distorted parts of Christian theology, at least the non-violent, turning of cheeks, loving thy neighbor aspects of the New Testament.

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[12] See Christopher Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom: Holy War and the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6, 10 (emphasis added).
[13] Tyerman, *Fighting*, 199.
[14] See Brian Johnsrud, "Metaphorical Memories of 'New Crusades' between the U.S. and Middle East after 9/11," in *Memory Unbound: New Directions in Memory Studies*, eds. Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Peter Vermeulen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 195-218.
[15] Tyerman, *Fighting*, 6.
[16] See the report of his words in Evan Simon, "Historians Weigh in on Obama's Comparison of ISIS Militants to Medieval Christian Crusaders, *ABC News*, 6 February, 2015, accessed 1 June 2016, http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/historians-weigh-obamas-comparison-isis-militants-medieval-christian/story?id=28787194.

Thomas Asbridge, a historian at the University of London, responded to Obama's remarks in the same news report by conceding "It is true to say, that by *modern standards*, atrocities were committed by crusaders, as they were by their Muslim opponents. It is however, far less certain that, by *medieval* standards, crusading violence could be categorized as distinctly extreme in all instances."[17] Of course, the acting president of the United States of America is, first and foremost, concerned with modern standards—ethical, moral, and otherwise. Imagine if Obama had instead conducted a thought experiment with his National Prayer Day audience along the lines of "But if we consider *medieval* standards, maybe ISIS's actions aren't that abhorrent or anomalous after all . . ." But to mention the Crusades as the "practical past," with potential lessons for comprehending the complicated present, is for Asbridge a reprehensible act "grounded in the manipulation and misrepresentation of historical evidence."[18]

Issues of authority are obviously at play here. As professionals with PhDs, university tenure, and endowed chairs in history departments, academics like Tyerman, Madden, and Asbridge clearly feel protective of their intellectual territory. They have a vested stake in censoring what can be said about the Crusader past, by whom, and for what purposes. But this indiscriminate protection of a sacrosanct "historical past" can occlude the multitude of ways and reasons for which individuals invoke the past today, not least for making it "practical" for their present needs and circumstances. Within the scope of medievalism studies, the invocation of the Crusader past after 9/11 does more than invoke the practical past in the *context* of the present; it does so *in service of* the present and for imagining possible futures. In this latter formation, the practical past can reach beyond the present to invoke notions of futurity, or how we use figurative language like metaphors to expand our vocabularies, to probe the human ability to act, to prompt reflection, debate, and imaginings about past events and potential futures.[19] Indeed, a focus on the future—more so than the past—was emphasized by a White House adviser in response to critiques of Obama's use of the Crusader past: "He wanted to make the point that this isn't the first time we've seen faith perverted *and it won't be the last.*"[20]

Metaphors in Medievalism

As I mentioned above, it is uncertain if Bush's use of a Crusade metaphor in his speech directly after 9/11 was consciously historical or if he inadvertently used the Crusades colloquially to mean a just or righteous cause. Regardless, his remarks were practical, at least in their reception, if not in "authorial intent." His usage was rhetorical, figurative, and, most importantly, metaphorical. While the critiques by historians noted above illustrate lively debates concerning how the past *ought* to be

[17] Simon, "Historians Weigh in," italics added.
[18] Simon, "Historians Weigh in."
[19] See Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
[20] See Michael D. Shear, "Obama, Trying to Add Context to Speech, Faces Backlash over 'Crusades,'" *The New York Times*, 7 February 2015, New York edition, A11.

engaged with—historically or practically—they also expose a slippage in understanding literal vs. metaphorical uses of the medieval past.

What traits and functions give metaphor and metaphorical language the potential to transform our perception of the past into something historical or practical? Metaphor can be most broadly defined as "a poetically or rhetorically ambitious use of words, a figurative as opposed to literal use, [for the purpose of] likening, comparing, or analogizing two or more things."[21] In linguistic philosophy, the metaphor's primary subject is called the *tenor*. The second subject is called the *vehicle*. In the statement "The 2003 Iraq War is a Crusade," then, the *tenor* is the 2003 Iraq War, and the *vehicle* is "Crusade." Thus, the second subject matter (in this case the Crusades) is newly introduced with an eye to temporarily enriching our resources for thinking and talking about the first (here the Iraq War).

Rather than an empirical and literal analysis of similarity between two phenomena, metaphorical language allows "two different and disparate subject matters to be mingled to rich and unpredictable effect."[22] The "rich and unpredictable" *effects* of metaphors cannot be discovered in a close reading of the statements themselves, however. Defining the tenor and vehicle of a metaphor allows one to better understand the people who create and receive metaphors. The active work of metaphor is manifest in the Greek roots of the word, *meta* (over, across, beyond) and *phor* (to carry); who, we need to ask, is "carrying across" meaning when metaphors are created? In the case of metaphors that bridge the present (tenor) and the past (vehicle), shifting focus to the sociality of the utterance helps expose how the metaphor attempts to create historical or practical orientations towards the past for the actors involved.

"But George W. Bush is not *actually* a religious leader," and "The War on Terror is not *literally* a Crusade," an individual with a historical orientation toward the past may argue when faced with such metaphorical constructs. The respondent who values and finds meaning in the metaphor may shrug—even agree—yet continue to enjoy the metaphorical use of the past nevertheless. Metaphors (and metaphorical perceptions of the practical past) serve numerous purposes above and beyond literality. Of course, there is a long history of mistrusting metaphorical language as misleading or deceptive. In Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, for example, metaphor is one of the "abuses of speech," and using "words metaphorically—that is, in other sense than they were ordained for—and thereby to deceive others" is equated with lying.[23] In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke similarly argues that a rhetorical flourish like the metaphor does "nothing else but to insinuate wrong

[21] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Winter 2012 Edition* s.v. "Metaphor," by David Hills, accessed 1 June 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/metaphor.
[22] Hills, "Metaphor."
[23] Thomas Hobbes, *Of Man, Being the First Part of Leviathan*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, vol. 34 (New York: P.F. Collier & Sons, 1909-14), part 5.

ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats."[24] Yet as McCloskey argues in *The Rhetoric of Economics,* rather than simply disregarding an "unexamined metaphor [as] a substitute for thinking," we should closely "*examine* the metaphors, not attempt the impossible by banishing them."[25]

Because metaphors are fundamentally communicative acts, one must take into account the actors creating and receiving these acts of meaning-making. As Ted Cohen explains, a key component of metaphorical language is the creation of intimacy between a metaphor's maker and appreciator (if they are capable of appreciating it for what it is). This social intimacy of meaning occurs when the creator of a metaphor issues a form of "concealed invitation" to the cognitive experience they are initiating.[26] When the audience expends the effort to accept the invitation, this constitutes the acknowledgement of a community. However, the intimacy created through a metaphor that compares the past with the present can only be produced if the appreciator is willing to set aside a literal, historical orientation of the past. In so doing, the reader realizes "that the expression is a metaphor, and [the audience/appreciator] must figure out the point of the expression."[27] Such social reciprocation recognizes that the creator of metaphors about the past and present may simply wish "to say something special, not to arouse, insinuate, or mislead, and not to convey an exotic meaning, but to initiate explicitly the cooperative act of comprehension."[28] Metaphorical acts are often creative, cognitive, and intimate forms of social communication to create an interpretive community capable of grappling with the demands of the present.

Modern academic historiography also has its own particular history of metaphor and literary language. After the "linguistic turn" in history and philosophy, led most notably by Hayden White and Richard Rorty, there was an increased understanding of the academic, social, and cognitive value—indeed, necessity—of using literary forms to present the past.[29] Literary forms were traditionally censured by modern historians because of their association with fiction, deception, or distraction from fact and truth. In part due to Hayden White's influence, many contemporary historians have relaxed their defenses against "fiction" and its attendant literary devices like metaphor or counterfactual thought experiments, elements traditionally associated with falsehoods, lies, or the fantastical imaginary.

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[24] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* (London: T. Tegg & Son, 1836), 372.
[25] See Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 46, italics added.
[26] Ted Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 6.
[27] Cohen, "Metaphor," 8.
[28] Cohen, "Metaphor," 7.
[29] Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

In this way, metaphors and practical orientations towards the past trade in creativity, practicality, and a sense of shared cognitive practices capable of engaging with the social conditions of the present. Similarly, when no longer useful or relevant, the practical past may return to being perceived as historical, just as metaphors can retire to literalness (though both are capable of returning to their previous forms should the present call upon them). Pierre Nora, creator of the term "sites of memory" and a key founder of the field of cultural memory studies, uses the metaphor of seashells to describe how cultural presentations of the past can be swept into ebbs and flows, oscillating between "living" memory and "dead" history.[30]

The philosopher Rorty uses a metaphor remarkably similar to Nora's, but in this case to help conceptualize the dynamics of metaphor, rather than memory. Rorty describes creative metaphors and new language as emergent layers in a cultural coral reef, where "old metaphors are constantly dying off to literalness, and then serving as a platform and foil for new metaphors."[31] Rorty finds it essential to view metaphors as one of the three ways new beliefs can be added to our existing beliefs (along with perception and inference).[32] Drawing on the work of Donald Davidson, Rorty contends that metaphors are not entirely distinct from literal language after all. Rather, metaphors are adjacent

> ways of producing effects on your interlocutor or your reader, but not ways of conveying a [literal] message. To none of these is it appropriate to respond with "What exactly are you trying to say?" . . . An attempt to state that meaning would be an attempt to find some familiar (that is, literal) use of words . . . but the unparaphrasability of metaphor is just the unsuitability of any such familiar sentence for one's purpose.[33]

In this way, when metaphorical uses of the Crusader past are evaluated harshly as non-literal, they are easily condemned as traitors to truth-seeking academic standards. This is not to say that all practical uses of the past are innocuous. Like any rhetorical formation, employing metaphor to resurrect the distant past as practical can serve a multitude of purposes, from instigating future violence to calling for peace and reconciliation.

ISIS and Dead Metaphors from the Practical Past

Just as perceptions of the past are described as "living" or "dead" memories by scholars like Nora, Owen Barfield described the omnipresence of living or dead metaphors in modern language, "with its thousands of abstract terms and its nuances of meaning and association [which can transform

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[30] See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25, 12.
[31] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16.
[32] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics," in *The Rorty Reader*, eds. Christopher J. Voparil and Richard J. Bernstein (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 211-26, at 12.
[33] Rorty, "Philosophy as Science," 19.

into] unconscionable tissue of dead, or petrified, metaphors."[34] These "dead" or "petrified" metaphors are often so prevalent that they can easily go unnoticed, however. They become like a "living" memory that transforms into "dead" history, losing its ability to "sting and tingle" in the present. Nelson Goodman similarly describes the transition of metaphors, where "with a progressive loss of its virility as a figure of speech, a metaphor becomes not less but more like literal truth. What vanishes is not its veracity but its vivacity."[35] By mentioning the Crusades alongside the Spanish Inquisition, Obama clearly had a notion of historicity—that his invocation of the past relies upon some understanding of medieval, historical events. But in ISIS's own use of the word "Crusade," we can see a key example of how the metaphorical and practical past can be stripped of all historicity and become dead and petrified. The most important aspect of this transformation is the inability to interrogate the metaphor, to draw check-lists of comparisons and contrasts, as it were, between the present and the referenced past that becomes little more than a word with no historical signifier.

Since July 2014, ISIS has produced a monthly online magazine called *Dabiq*. Rendered with aesthetics and arrangement similar to popular periodicals like *Newsweek* or *Time*, *Dabiq*'s interviews, published speeches, photographs, and commentary focus largely on propaganda and recruitment. The periodical's title, *Dabiq*, is named after a town in northern Syria. In the Muslim *Hadith*, the area near Dabiq will host Islam's final defeat of Rome (interpreted as Christianity generally) in a manner akin to Christian notions of the apocalypse.

Issue 4 of *Dabiq*, published in English online in October 2014, is entitled "The Failed Crusade." It includes transcriptions of speeches delivered by ISIS leaders, calls for action in the genre of editorials, and short essays. There is no introduction to or discussion of the article's title or what the editors mean by "Crusade," however. Rather, the word "Crusade" is used 59 times, across 23 pages of the 56-page magazine. Yet none of these usages makes any explicit reference to the historical Crusades, in the way Obama did. Instead, the word is used as an empty synonym for the "west," Israel, Christians, Jews, or any of ISIS's perceived enemies. A transcribed speech from the official spokesman of the Islamic State, Shayk Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani ash-Shami, exemplifies how frequently and shallowly the term is applied. The spokesman reports that there has been a "capture of *crusaders* in Muslim lands and their subsequent execution, the killing of *crusaders* in their homelands, and the conquering of new areas in Iraq and Sham despite the *crusader* airstrikes."[36]

If we consider these 59 uses of the word *Crusade* as a metaphor, the instances provide little opportunity for their audience, or appreciators, to engage in meaning-making. The metaphor is flat,

[34] See Owen Barfield, *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, ed. G.B. Tennyson (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 7.
[35] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1968), 68.
[36] ISIS, "The Failed Crusade," *Dabiq* (October 2014), accessed 23 June 2016, http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf, my italics.

"dead," and in this way shuts down opportunities for the kinds of debate, interpretation, or oscillation between the relationship between medieval and modern ethics that Obama's Crusade metaphor enlivened. There is no real past primed in *Dabiq*—practical or historical—insofar as the audience is not encouraged to engage in comparative or figurative thinking. There are calls for action, each with a frightening practicality attached to them, but the sociality of metaphor-work is lost. Readers of *Dabiq*, as well as consumers of ISIS propaganda generally—in online forums, newsletters, chat rooms, social media, and televised broadcasts—encounter the *word* Crusade with alarming frequency, but with virtually no trace of historicity, interpretation, or figurative or literal understanding.

ISIS, of course, is rhetorically focused on the future, in particular on fulfilling the Islamic prophesy that Islam will conquer "Rome" in a world-ending battle in Dabiq, Syria. However, the past is not just made practical for the present, but as mentioned above, it can equally engage in futurity. In responding to attacks on president Obama's use of the Crusades, Adam Gopnik argues in an article in *The New Yorker* that

> [t]he President's point turned out to be not just exactly right, but profoundly right: no group holds the historical moral high ground, and no one ever will. But this is not because a moral high ground doesn't exist. It's because we're all still climbing.[37]

In this statement, Gopnik references the past ("the historical moral high ground"), the present ("a moral high ground doesn't exist"), and the future ("no one ever will" and the "climbing" that is ongoing). In a response like this, we see how Obama's metaphorical use of the Crusader past as practical primed a tripartite vantage point for Gopnik to put the past, present, and future in relation. Issues or mortality and ethics, comparatively and throughout time, are primed in a manner absent from ISIS's medievalisms.

By repeating the empty signifier "Crusade" until it loses any real meaning, ISIS denies its audience the opportunity to engage in critical, ethical, and historical thinking. Whether this is intentional or not, the result is the same. Potential ISIS sympathizers reading *Dabiq* are met with a usage of the medieval past that, in historian Sam Wineburg's words, "depletes the moral courage we need to revise our beliefs in the face of new evidence. It ensures, ultimately, that tomorrow we will think exactly as we thought yesterday—and the day before, and the day before that."[38]

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[37] Adam Gopnik, "Obama and the Crusaders," *The New Yorker*, 13 February 2015, accessed 23 June 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/obama-crusaders.

[38] Sam Wineburg, "Undue Certainty: Where Howard Zinn's 'A People's History' Falls Short," *American Educator* 36.4 (2012): 27-34, 34.

Like all uncritical presentations of the past as a simple and singular landscape, *Dabiq* constructs a history that, as Wineburg points out for other historical works, "atrophies our tolerance for complexity."[39] Obama's use of the medieval Crusades distinguishes itself from ISIS's adoption of the same word. Obama's speech caused a discussion, a (lively) debate, questions, and commentary by the audience or "appreciators" of his medieval metaphor. The ISIS usage affords no such interpretive opportunities. Perhaps we need more urgent metrics for evaluating rhetorical uses of the medieval past beyond historical "accuracy." Rather than adjudicating their validity as literal and accurate (rather than metaphorical and figurative), we can ask if medievalisms that make the past practical invoke blind agreement or critical reflection. If we have any hope of learning from the atrocities of our past, we are in dire need of the latter.

[39] Wineburg, "Undue Certainty," 34.