

IS, a global caliphate, and exceptionalism: An ideological criticism of the Islamic State's rhetoric  
in *Dabiq*

by

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## Abstract

In July of 2014, a spokesperson for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) made a televised announcement that captured the attention of the world – the terrorist organization decided to tweak its name to simply the Islamic State (IS), to indicate its intention of moving beyond Iraq and the Levant and conquering the world. This shift in rhetoric, along with the phenomenon of Muslims and non-Muslims from Western nations leaving their homes, friends, and families behind to join IS, have prompted discussions and debates on what makes this terror group's message so effective. In the days following IS's name change, the first issue of its magazine *Dabiq* was published online through its Al-Hayat Media Center. With versions in English, Arabic, German, French, and more, the magazine gained notoriety for its high-production value. This study seeks to understand the ideology manifest in IS rhetoric in *Dabiq*, which makes it so captivating to both sympathizers and agitators alike. This study is an ideological criticism of six of the fifteen issues of *Dabiq* published; the six issues chosen were all released in relation to catalytic events perpetrated or claimed by the terror group. For instance, the November 2015 Paris attacks or the shooting in San Bernardino, CA, by a 'radicalized' couple who pledged allegiance to IS. This study unearthed major themes of political claims, religious appeals, and terrorist actions which IS uses to incite recruitment. This analysis identifies IS's ideology as one of Political Islamist Terrorism, and concludes with implications concerning exceptionalism and the persuasive appeal of *Dabiq*.

*Key terms:* Ideology, ISIS/ISIL/IS, rhetoric, terrorism, magazine, propaganda, exceptionalism

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Finally, I would like to share my thoughts following the completion of this thesis. The stereotype of the lone wolf is consistent in both descriptions from Western and IS outlets. As described in issue three of Dabiq, the lone wolf “lives in the West amongst the kafir for years, spends hours on the internet, reads news and posts on forums” (“A Call to Hijrah,” 2014, p. 25). In U.S. contexts, the term is generally used when describing violence committed by an individual male, such as Omar Mateen and Alexandre Bissonnette (Lampert & Mehler Paperny, 2017). Especially when the male is single or divorced, in their mid-20’s and 30’s, spends much of their time on the internet (CNSFL, 2016; Yourish & Lee, 2016).

While I normally would not describe oneself as necessarily anti-social or as spending a disproportionate time on the web, this project has resulted in less social time and more exposure to online jihadist content than any other previous research undertaking. Considering my relative demographic fit of the lone wolf stereotype, as well as my attempt at reading Dabiq honestly and removed from personal opinion as possible, I feel it is both relevant and of academic merit to share my opinion on the overall effectiveness of Dabiq.

As one who has incorporated into my own ideology critiques of the U.S.'s military industrial complex, many of the accusations IS relied on were not jaw-dropping or shocking to me. Perhaps the most surprising aspect was the extent to which I found myself actively agreeing with the arguments proposed by Dabiq. To clarify – never once have I felt sympathy or attraction in anyway for the ideology of IS. However, as a rhetorical critic one must be able to separate the ideology within the argument, and per the Toulmin model, arguments can be valid or logical, but not necessarily true. To argue that IS does not ever produce compelling arguments is to neglect the various rhetorical strategies present in Dabiq.

At times, the cognitive dissonance was strong. I found myself questioning the purpose not only of my own research, but of the larger institutions and systems I am complicit in. If I found myself agreeing with aspects of IS, what was I doing at Kansas State, a school run by a U.S. imperialist? Why am I striving for employment in a capitalist political economy? What if I am wrong about the afterlife? Luckily, I had a support system of friends, peers, and mentors who I could express these concerns too in a judgement-free space, quelling and quieting my dissonance. Because I was not treated as an “other,” I never viewed these people in my life as a “them.”

While reflecting on this experience I could not help but imagine a lonely Muslim adolescent searching for community, kinship, and love in a world which demonizes their existence. I imagined a white male entering middle age who offers nothing of considered “value” in our capitalistic society. I imagined that the brutality of Dabiq would appear banal when compared to state-sanctioned lynchings of People of Color. I imagined how many of these people are not privileged enough to have the amazing support systems I did.

While I cannot quantitatively speak to the effectiveness of Dabiq, my experience begs the question – if a white male from a Midwest middle-class background with no religious affiliation could find IS’s ideology persuasive, then under the right circumstances, who would not?

## **Dedication**

To the 45 million displaced human beings on this planet

and

Poth Acouth



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## Chapter I – Introduction

On June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the spokesperson for the terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), announced a purposeful name change. In an audio recording and accompanying document, the speaker Abu Mohammed al-Adnani made an official declaration of an Islamic *Khilafah*. The Arabic word<sup>1</sup> for Caliphate, *Khilafah* is an area containing a leader, or caliph, of a Muslim community considered to be the successor to the Prophet Muhammad (“The Return of *Khilafah*,” 2014). Salazar (2016) argues that this invokes the huge amount of geopolitical control former Caliphates from the Islamic Golden Age had, stretching from Spain to Iran, which is an ideal for ISIL. Adnani drew on historical references to these Caliphates from the eighth to thirteenth centuries<sup>2</sup>; but he made an important distinction. The new *Khilafah* would expand beyond ISIL’s occupied regions of Iraq and Syria, and go beyond the region of control of previous Caliphates to form a *global* *Khilafah*; hence the group’s new name, the *Islamic State* (IS) (Tran & Weaver, 2014). The message was produced in the Al-Hayat Media Center in Raqqa, Syria, the central headquarters of the terror group. Al-Hayat described that IS reverted to this shorter adaptation of its title to demonstrate its intent of the *Khilafah* to not be limited to a specific region but to consume the world (Zelin 2015).

IS had received media coverage and political attention, but it was this official declaration that truly captured the gaze of the Western world (Berger, 2015; Gambhir, 2015). This terrorist organization no longer constituted yet another sectarian militant group from the Middle East and

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<sup>1</sup> Unless noted by an in-text citation of Dabiq, all Arabic translations come from bab.la, an Oxford University-sponsored language translation project

<sup>2</sup> The Rashidun (632-661 CE), Umayyad (661-750 CE), and the Abbasid (751-1258, 1261-1517 CE) Caliphates trace back to the initial predecessor to the Prophet Muhammad (Ahsan, 2010).

North Africa (MENA<sup>3</sup>) region, but rather, an existential threat to the entire world – including Muslims who refuse to accept its agenda (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014). The group’s exceptionally brutal tactics compounded with impressive media production and a robust social media presence resulted in IS being labeled a unique, and possibly revolutionary terrorist organization (Celso, 2014; Fahmy, 2016; Haykel, 2016). The notion that this terror group is somehow different from previous iterations of terrorist Islamic sects has oft been cited as a rekindling of the perpetual war between the West and Islam, on par with the Crusades (Dawson & Amarasingam, 2016; Salazar, 2016).

To commemorate its declaration of the reframing of the Islamic Khilafah to a global Khilafah, IS began releasing an official magazine, published in English, French, German, and obviously, Arabic. The first fifteen issues were titled *Dabiq*, (“The Return of the Khilafah,” 2014) an important choice of name:

As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab [Aleppo] in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith [anecdotes about the Prophet Muhammad] describing some of the events of the Malahim [referred to as Armageddon in English]. One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the Crusaders will take place near Dabiq. (p. 4)

In September 2016, *Dabiq* was replaced by a new iteration of IS’s magazine entitled *Rumiyah*, Arabic for Rome, which as of April 2017 has published seven issues. However, this study will focus on six separate issues of *Dabiq*, as this iteration of the magazine served as the foundational online text for the terrorist organization (Celso, 2015; Ingram, 2016; Wignell, Tan, & O’Halloran, 2017). In using ideological criticism as a tool, this project will seek to unearth the

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<sup>3</sup> MENA has no standard definition, but the following countries are most frequently described as the region: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen

ideology as presented in the rhetoric of IS in Dabiq. One of the core goals of this rhetorical analysis is to examine how Muslims and non-Muslims in Western societies are persuaded to join IS or commit terrorist attacks in their home communities.

A key way of unearthing the ideology of IS, as aforementioned, will be through a criticism of the rhetoric employed by Dabiq. Foss (2008) articulates that after a critic surfaces the ideology embedded in an artifact, “the next step is unveiling how this is done” (p. 213). The rhetorical strategies Dabiq uses are a part of this “next step,” as they help shed light on the way IS constructs arguments (Jowett, 2009). This speaks to the larger classification to which ideological criticism belongs – rhetorical criticism. As a field of study, rhetorical criticism analyzes the purpose of words, sights, and sounds that are the symbolic artifacts used for communication among people (Foss, 2008). This criticism will, therefore, assist in identifying how IS constructs its ideology through the rhetorical strategies of Dabiq.

Dabiq was released mainly on websites operating on the deep web, a part of the internet inaccessible by standard search engines. To make Dabiq more accessible to the public, the Clarion Project, a Washington D.C. organization founded in 2006 to combat extremism, began downloading and archiving issues on its website. The magazine was irregularly published over a two-year span from July 2014 to August 2016, with as little as 22 to as many as 109 days in between issues, and is 25 to 70 pages in length. Within the context of achieving its ultimate goal of a global Islamic Khilafah, the magazine describes itself as a periodical focused on *tawhid*, or unity, *manhaj*, or truth-seeking, *hijrah*, or migration, *jihad*<sup>4</sup>, or striving/struggling, and *jama'ah*, or community congregation and prayer (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014). Each issue starts with

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<sup>4</sup> Definitions of Jihad vary greatly, but generally it means to struggle/strive for praise from Allah, but depending on the context or sect it can mean to wage war.

the same quote from Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi<sup>5</sup>: “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader army in Dabiq.” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 2). By quoting az-Zarqawi in what is viewed as one of the group’s foundational publicity texts, IS makes a claim to the ideology proposed by the deceased jihadist. The objectives echoed in az-Zarqawi’s quote are further iterated by the first issue of Dabiq “The Return of Khilafah” (2014):

Soon, the day will come when the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master, having honor, being revered, with his head raised high and his dignity preserved. Anyone who dares to offend him will be disciplined, and any hand that reaches out to harm him will be cut off. So let the world know that we are living today in a new era. . . . [The Muslims] have a statement to make that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its deviant nature. (p. 8).

Dabiq paints an image of a utopian world in which IS’s interpretations of what “true” Islam is has conquered the free world. It is this idealized notion of Islam that IS attempts to spread through its various forms of media and social media presence (Celso, 2014; Gambhir, 2014).

The existing literature on IS or Dabiq approaches the group’s social, political, and religious dynamics with research stemming from political science, security, sociological, and journalist perspectives (Celso, 2014; Fahmy, 2016; Gambhir, 2014; Ingram, 2016; Winter, 2015). There has been a concentrated effort to explain the motivations for migration, even though these studies are often limited by sample size and the extent to which the researcher can trust the intentions/authenticity of jihadists (Coolsaet, 2016; Weggemans, Bakker, & Grol, 2015). Dawson and Amarasingam (2016), who interviewed a variety of jihadist fighters in Iraq and

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<sup>5</sup> az-Zarqawi was the founder of *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* or “Organization and Monotheism,” a militant Jihadist terrorist organization, which formed in 1999. Several name changes and pledges to different groups later, sparked by the death of az-Zarqawi in 2006, the group eventually became what we know as the Islamic State today (Hassan, 2016d).

Syria from a variety of sectarian militant groups, including IS, elaborate on the caution one must apply in this sort of research:

We recognize the grounds for exercising caution in using the statements of jihadi fighters. People are inclined to remember, interpret, and present its past in ways that justify or reinforce its present commitments. This is doubly so when these current commitments are willfully at odds with pervasive norms of behavior prevalent in the societies in which they were born (p. 13).

Existing qualitative research cautions the authenticity of findings, while quantitative studies face limitations of sample size. Salazar (2016) claims, much of the discussion for future research speculates on the ways Dabiq uses rhetorical strategies to persuade readers. This study, therefore, focuses on the rhetorical strategies employed by IS in Dabiq that construct its ideology.

In addition, the overwhelming narrative of radicalization has often been aggrandized for political purposes, capitalizing on a fear of Islam or Islamophobia (de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2016; Edwards, 2015; Nesser, Stenersen, & Oftedal 2016; Perry & Long, 2016). While Islamophobia certainly has increased since 9/11, the underbelly of this resentment and fear has existed in the U.S. for decades. Edward Saïd, the influential Palestinian-American scholar who had an immense impact in the fields of literary criticism, postcolonial studies, and Middle East Studies, has argued that Islamophobia is an inherent part of how the West understands the East. That “for the West to understand Islam has meant trying to convert its variety into a monolithic developing essence, its originality into a debased copy of Christian culture, its people into fearsome caricatures” (Saïd, 1978, p. 12). The notion that these fearsome caricatures may be residing in U.S. neighborhoods, drove anti-Islamic hate activity as of November 2016 to levels not recorded since 9/11 (Edwards, 2015; Weine, Henderson, Shanfield, Legha, & Post, 2013).

So much so, rising Islamophobia and fear of “radical” Islam struck a chord with a populist political movement in the U.S., and it functioned as a primary impetus leading to the

election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016 (Hassan, 2016d). The Trump administration's multiple attempts at an executive order barring migrants from Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq (removed from the second ban), and Yemen, as well as the dismantling of the U.S. Countering Violence Extremism program to focus solely on "radical Islamic terrorism," are clear manifestations of these negative perceptions of Islam in policy work (Ainsley, Cooke, & Volz, Merica, 2017; Thrush, 2017). While Trump and the movement surrounding him may not be the sole cause for Islamophobia in the U.S., their emphasis on the cruelty and violence of IS has added to a detrimental depiction of what Islam is. Politicians, citizens, and journalists around the world have been specifically captivated by IS's grotesque and brutal visuals depicting violence against its opponents (Zelin, 2015). High-production quality videos of oppositional fighters, international journalists, and other "infidels" being burnt alive, decapitated, and executed have received much coverage in global media, despite brutal imagery accounting for slightly more than 10 percent of IS's content output (Fahmy, 2016). The mainstream media has widely diagnosed IS's media production as propaganda, or information of biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause, or point of view (Leone, 2015).

While it is certainly true that IS relies on manipulation to radicalize readers, describing it solely as propaganda may quickly dismiss the strategic character of the group. As a terrorist organization, which seeks to conquer the entire world through a global Khilafah, IS's media, such as Dabiq, effectively operates as a public relations tool (Galloway, 2016). Describing IS's content as simply propaganda is easy; but considering the group's attempt at creating a legitimate Khilafah and encapsulating the globe, this term needs to be problematized and explored.

Zelin (2015) provides an in-depth exploration of the intricacy of IS's organizational apparatus that produces its online content. Over the course of one week in April 2015, IS



broadcasted 123 media releases from 24 *wilayah*<sup>6</sup>, or provinces of control, in six different languages, in formats varying from visual imagery (pictures, videos, and graphics) to news reports and radio broadcasts (Zelin, 2015). IS's "propaganda" models that of a public relations or media corporation, on par with that of some Western countries (Galloway, 2016). At the time of Zelin's (2015) study, IS claimed to have 33 total provinces spread across MENA; these included 19 in Iraq and Syria, five in Yemen, three in Libya, two in Saudi Arabia, and one each in Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, and the Afghanistan/Pakistan region (Zelin, 2015). The content sought to unify previously fractured sects of Muslims (and non-Muslims) to adapt their beliefs to that of the IS ideology. This also increased the population and geopolitical control of the terror group's so-called Khilafah.

Analyzing the magazines produced by the wilayah that target Western audiences is crucial to gaining greater insight into how IS lures individuals, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to join its Khilafah in Western societies. This study, specifically, is dedicated to identifying how IS constructs its ideology through the rhetorical strategies of Dabiq. This chapter served as introduction to this topic. Chapter two is a review of the literature on extremism, terrorism, and radicalization studies, the representations of IS in a globalized media, and literature focusing on IS's various organizational apparatuses, digital media presence, and culture. Chapter three is an explanation of the methodological approach, specifically, ideological criticism as well as the role of the rhetorical critic. Chapter four traces the ideological origins and historical evolution of and influences that shaped IS. Chapter five details an analysis of six issues of Dabiq that were released at catalytic moments for the group. Chapter six answers the research questions and

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<sup>6</sup> Stemming from the Arabic word w-l-y, "to govern," Wilayah refers to any constituent IS controls. These provinces operate as near sovereign states, allowing for IS to expand more rapidly throughout MENA (Zelin, 2015).

names the ideology of IS, while the seventh and final chapter serves as a discussion of the implications and limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter II – Literature Review**

Dabiq is a massive text totaling hundreds of pages that provide insights into the ideology of IS. Based on themes of unity, brotherhood, and utopia, this magazine offers an idealized version of an Islamic Khilafah that a select few interpretations of the faith, such as Wahhabism and Salafism, have ardently strived to achieve for centuries (Fahmy, 2016; Wiktorowicz, 2005). The combination of radical interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism and centuries of Western imperialism have been instrumental in shaping the social, political and religious messages of IS (Hassan, 2016b). According to Foss (2008), ideology is “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretation of some aspect(s) of the world” (p. 209). Through a critical reading of the patterns of belief as found in Dabiq, this study will seek to understand the ways in which rhetorical strategies embolden the ideology of IS.

Considering IS’s rise as a perceived global threat, irrespective of the legitimacy of that claim, it becomes exigent to examine how IS might have arrived at this locus of power. It becomes necessary to ask, how is IS’s ideology represented in Dabiq? Further, how does IS rhetorically craft messages in Dabiq to appeal to targets of radicalization? To that end, and to provide a context for this study and Dabiq, a review of the current ontological approach to studies of this organization, examining the portrayal of Islam in the media, and acknowledging the group’s socio-cultural and historical origins follow. This chapter will focus on: 1) an overview of scholarly studies on extremism, terrorism, and radicalization, 2) a review of interpretations and perceptions of Islam in the context of globalized media, and 3) a discussion of the scholarly literature on IS—how it operates within the geopolitical context of MENA.

## **Radicalization, Extremism, and Terrorism Studies**

Perhaps what has caught the gaze of the West more than anything about IS has been the phenomenon of citizens from countries like Belgium, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States leaving the comforts of their homes to fly to Raqqa, the headquarters of IS (Yourish & Lee, 2016). Indeed, from March 2014 to July 2016, the U.S. government tracked over 900 suspected IS sympathizers, 101 of whom were charged with some degree of international terrorism, and convicted 46 of that total (CNSFL, 2016, p. 8). Those tracked and charged were suspected of violating statutes like the use of weapons of mass destruction, providing material support to terrorist organizations, bombing public places, and immigration violations. The 101 charged with international terrorism were sorted into five categories; 48 foreign fighters (those who allegedly joined or took steps to join IS abroad), 42 plotters (those who allegedly took action or planned to harm U.S. persons or property on behalf of IS), 19 facilitators (those who allegedly aided others to join IS), five cyber terrorists (allegedly accessed protected computer networks), and two IS leadership associates (CNSFL, 2016, p. 2-4).

The demographic profile of these convicts is limited, but from available information it can be stated that: the average age of the IS recruit is 26; 77 percent are U.S. citizens; 87 percent identify as male; one-in-three is a Muslim convert; 42 percent are accused of plotting against U.S. targets; 50 percent procured firearms; one-in-three live with his/her parents; 26 percent expressed a desire for martyrdom; and 89 percent used social media (CNSFL, 2016, p. 2-4). Criminal histories were found in 28 percent of cases, 6 percent were treated for mental illness, and 25 percent were second-generation immigrants. Only 22 percent acknowledged *bay'ah*, or pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader of IS (CNSFL, 2016, p. 2-4). This report conducted by the Center for National Security at Fordham Law (CNSFL, 2016)

classifies a common narrative found in most instances of attempted migration, such as how more than three quarters were motivated by dissatisfaction with American society and almost half expressed resentment over the oppression of Muslims worldwide (Yourish & Lee, 2016). The director of the CNSFL, Karen J. Greenberg, published the following statement (CNSFL, 2016) to summarize the demographic report:

Given the recent attacks at home and abroad, these patterns may change, but it is important to have the relevant facts at hand. . . . This report suggests that efforts to intervene with or redirect these late adolescents towards more constructive futures will require focus on individual needs and circumstances, rather than on predictive large scale socio-economic determinants. (p. 5)

Apparently, radicalization has become an issue globally, and especially for the Western world; but to what extent, and how has it become so? The impact of radicalization on the West is most visible in two political surprises of 2016; the decision by British citizens to leave the European Union and the 2016 U.S. election of Donald Trump as president. Both political events were driven by anti-migrant, anti-refugee, and most notably, anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The fascination with the subject, often escalating discourse into becoming destructive and exceptionally Islamophobic, has resulted in a number of different publications, mainly from a political science perspective (Archetti, 2013; Edwards, 2015; George, 2015; Greenberg, 2016;; Selim, 2016; Stern, 2016; Weine et al., 2013). Scholars have focused on community and trust building to prevent radicalization. This has stemmed from the surge in “homegrown” terrorism encouraged by al-Qaeda in the late 2000s (Weine et al., 2013). While earlier research focused more on the scope of where, when, and how often do people become radicalized, the most recent emphasis has been placed on understanding the mobilization to action for these individuals from a political science perspective (Stern, 2016).

Important distinctions between radicalization, extremism, and terrorism need also be detailed. Radicalization is the process of an individual's increasing rejection of alternative worldviews and perspectives in favor of a singular ideology; extremism is the space radicalized individuals operate within; and terrorism, while still a hotly disputed term, is most frequently referred to as behavioral political action that seeks to disrupt, harm, or eliminate other individuals, cultures, states, and more (Archetti, 2013; Edwards, 2015; George, 2015; Stern, 2016). It is easy to conflate these terms; however, the process of joining a terrorist group is so complex, that it becomes necessary to maintain accurate definitions when conducting research. Serious counter-terrorism, radicalization and extremist efforts cannot be curtailed until the communication processes underpinning these acts are unpacked. As such, this analysis will use these precise definitions. Radicalization, within this context, refers to the process individuals go through as they consume and adopt the IS ideology. Extremism/t will be used for IS at-large, its members, and the rhetoric it produces, while terrorism/t denotes the specific actions of the organization.

The September 11th attacks fundamentally redefined much of the academic field of security and terrorism studies. Current security approaches have been questioned for being too black-and-white; i.e., the threshold to charge an individual with terroristic activity is too high while there is no clear middle-ground outside of monitoring suspects (Selim, 2015). Edwards (2015) offers an example of the complicated nature of understanding IS's ideology through an analysis of the rhetoric of Congress about the rhetorical choice of 'radical' versus 'radicalized:'

Radical is the form most closely linked to choice. A significant feature of this language is that homegrown terrorists are not radical but radicalized... the passive verb radicalized was appropriated in these hearings to indicate an ongoing state, often lacking a clear beginning or end point. Also, while the former promoted agency and an internalized ideology, the latter emphasized the externality of the ideology that the radicalized has been tricked, swayed, or seduced into adopting (p. 109-10).

This is a primary example of the complexity of radicalization – to what extent is a reader of Dabiq a ‘radical,’ someone with agency who actively chooses to join such a violent organization? Is it more that the audience of Dabiq is subject to an inescapable process of radicalization when the right demographics (CSNFL, 2016; Yourish & Lee, 2016) are exposed to this ideology? This study seeks to answer some of these questions through a rhetoric/communication perspective, to unpack how IS attempts to persuade vulnerable individuals to adopt its ideology.

### **Global Representations of Islam**

Edward Saïd is perhaps best known for his 1978 work *Orientalism*. The text served as a critique of Western perceptions of the Orient and became a jumping-off point for an entirely new way to look at culture (Saïd, 1978). 18 years following the release of *Orientalism*, Saïd was interviewed by the *New York Times* on the state of Muslim perceptions in the West at the time. Asked about how the West’s attitude toward Islam has improved since the release of his seminal text, Saïd (Shulman, 1996) provided a damning answer, especially in a pre-9/11 world:

I don’t think it has improved at all. In fact, it has decidedly worsened. If you look at how Islam is represented today in newspapers and on television, you see that it is still considered a threat, something that must be walled out. The Arab world is depicted as a place full of terrorists and fanatics. Instead of expanding, the West’s comprehension of the Arab world is contracting.

Saïd’s comments echoed at a time when the U.S. had exited a messy war in the Gulf Coast and witnessed the failure of Israeli/Palestinian peace talks. The mid-90s certainly were not a time of positive perceptions of the Middle East. The events that would occur five years after Saïd’s interview would amplify fear and intolerance towards Muslims into Islamophobia.

The term *Islamophobia* has a slightly disputed history dating back to potentially the 1920s, but it became more popular in 1996 after the Runnymede Trust established the

Commission on British Muslims (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016). This section of the literature review focuses on Islamophobia; this becomes significant because research concerning Islam and its representations in global media is dominated by the theme of Islamophobia (al-Rahim, 2016; Bowe & Makki, 2016). Furthermore, contextualizing the nature to which the West propagates anti-Islamic sentiment is important to this thesis as it provides insight into the claims made by Dabiq that rely on critiques of imperialism and Western intervention in the MENA region.

The discourse surrounding Muslims in media has been studied within public/digital spheres and in discourse analyses of news coverage (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016; al-Rahim, 2016; Al-Zo'by, 2015; Bowe & Makki, 2016; Harmanşah, 2015; Kumar, 2014; Satti, 2015; Yusha'u, 2015; Zhang & Hellmueller, 2016). Scholars have found a link between problematic or limited media coverage and Islamophobic beliefs (Satti, 2015; Yusha'u, 2015). Following the terror attack of al-Qaeda on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, it was speculated by many that the degree of Islamophobia would never be higher. Sadly, that was not the case. Indeed, the number of anti-Muslim hate groups has continued to grow larger, despite the U.S.'s too-little-too-late attempts at pulling out of Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2011 alone, the Southern Poverty Law Center found that anti-Muslim hate groups tripled that year (Kumar, 2014).

The legacy of this increase in intolerance is deeply rooted in traditions of U.S. colonialism and imperialism (Hassan, 2016d). Situated within colonialist contexts, the increasing intolerance of Muslims in post-9/11 demonstrates a form of neo-orientalism that has grasped the U.S. public (Al-Zo'by, 2015). The advent of cyberspace and social media as a means of expediting Islamophobia has made it easier to find if and where Muslims live in your neighborhood, to target online Islamic safe spaces, and to consume stereotypical images of

Muslims propagated by media outlets. Saïd (1981) predicted a concerning Islamic representation in the global media:

For most Americans (the same is generally true for Europeans) the branch of the cultural apparatus that has been delivering Islam to them for the most part includes the television and radio networks, the daily newspapers, and the mass-circulation news magazines; Together, this powerful concentration of mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam and, of course, reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media (p. 43).

Saïd's predictions have come true, with the prevalence of misrepresentations of Islam in the media, in both online and offline spheres.

Media plays a significant role in shaping public ideals and serves as a primary source of knowledge. Often, media helps identify the 'self' and the 'other' in given situations and is influenced by hegemonic ideological forces that exist within its social location. This universalizes media narratives as being the logical representation in a public sphere. Al-Zo'by (2015) elaborates on this notion, arguing that "...the ideological media apparatus functions as crucial site where dominant cultural and social representations (myths, essentialization, stereotypes, partial truths) [are] deeply ingrained in the collective discursive practices [and] are produced and reproduced unconsciously" (p. 220). The neutrality, or lack thereof, of journalists covering the Middle East and/or Islam, has set the agenda that Muslims are the violent villains, the 'other,' and the U.S. is the 'self,' a hero who conducts *good* violence (Satti, 2015). Globalization of media has had a troubling effect on this neo-orientalist gaze, insofar as it has allowed the line to be blurred between foreign and domestic news. This has had a substantial impact on the discourse surrounding these issues, particularly in communities which often lack exposure to Islam (Satti, 2015; Zhang & Hellmueller, 2016). Consequently, anti-Muslim stereotypes have proliferated unchecked throughout the U.S., and have been reproduced by politicians and citizens alike.



Zhang and Hellmueller (2016) conducted a content analysis on CNN, a Western transnational news outlet, to determine the hegemonic discourse on Muslim stereotypes. CNN's coverage exhibited themes like strategic games, human rights crisis, and political opportunism. Satti (2015) analyzed Al-Jazeera, the Qatari transnational news outlet, through a similar methodology, and found that both news channels shared the first two ideas of strategic games, human rights crisis, but Al-Jazeera commentators added the prowess and goals of ISIS, and the failing state of the MENA region (Satti, 2015; Zhang & Hellmueller, 2016). Satti (2015) furthers that "... both indicated the aggressive nature of IS and both covered other attributes, such as the crimes against humanity that were committed, and the desire for peace and religious tolerance that are often lacking during wartime" (p. 48). The shared similarities and slight deviations demonstrate that regardless of the location or source, there is likely to be somewhat of a presence of 'othering' in both Western and non-Western/MENA media. The reason stems from different fears – the West fears legitimate political opposition to its political, social, and economic global hegemony, while those in the MENA region are worried about the eradication of their statehoods (Satti, 2015; Zhang & Hellmueller, 2016).

While the ethnocentrism confronting Muslims is quite often unabashedly discriminatory, this does not always manifest in solely hateful ways. For example, in a content analysis on cyber Islamophobia focusing on the hashtag jihad, an idea of *Islamonausea*, not *phobia*, was articulated by Twitter users (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016). *Islamonausea* was articulated as intolerance, or uneasiness, at *bad* Muslims, so long as *good* Muslims accept the rules of Western society. Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez (2016) explain:

A primary problem appears to be that the media ascribes its own definitions to the meanings of words such as 'jihad' and 'Islamist.' Western mainstream media has played a key role in ensuring that the definition of 'jihad' points to the vilification of Islam as a

religion and its followers as inherently violent, unstable and bent on destroying Western civilization. (p. 35)

The use of Western definitions for Islam/Muslim-related terms and concepts, without attention to context and nuances, lead to Islamonausa (and Islamophobia). Even though Islamonausa is not outright hatred and discrimination, peaceful and nuanced interpretations of terms associated with Islam and Muslims often carry no weight compared to how non-Muslims define it. For instance, nuanced and non-violent interpretations of the term *jihad* are irrelevant to general Western/non-Muslim perceptions as it does not fit the stereotypical and Islamophobic image of Muslims.

The representation of Muslims in global media spaces, traditional or new, is emblematic of larger, systemic, anti-Islam currents that have historical roots (al-Rahim, 2016; Kumar, 2014). al-Rahim (2016) has traced the modern iterations of this discrimination to the eight years Bill Clinton spent in the White House, while Kumar (2014) argues that Islamophobia is the U.S. political system's new version of McCarthyism. Initially, al-Rahim demonstrates that in a fragile period in the Arab world, Clinton overly simplified Islam for his political purposes. The rise of al-Qaeda and the World Trade Center bombing in early 1993 served as the catalyst for Clinton's problematic rhetoric. Following this attack, Clinton spoke to how the cure-all for violent acts carried out by extremist groups was to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (al-Rahim, 2016):

... The perceived American public opinion of Muslims as somehow being associated with the actions of Islamist radicals and terrorists—popular media aspects of which go back at least to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and the ensuing hostage crisis that lasted until the beginning of 1981—the Clinton administration set forth what I call the 'dissociation thesis'; i.e., that terrorism and Islam are neither linked religiously nor politically. Implicit in this thesis is the assumption that the linchpin of Muslim or Islamist radicalization which leads to acts of and support for terrorism is primarily the failed Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (p. 92)

It is this positioning of the U.S. as a savior for Islam/Muslims that is problematic. Clinton perhaps is not wrong - a peace agreement between the two sides likely would have benefits for

Muslims in the region. But to ascribe the abolition of anti-Muslim beliefs, values, and actions as reliant on solving the Israeli-Palestinian crisis is to oversimplify the various ways in which Muslims are institutionally oppressed throughout the world (al-Rahim, 2016). As such, it becomes significant to uncover the critical aspects of Muslim/MENA history that have shaped these Islamophobic beliefs.

Problematic rhetoric about Islam continued throughout both George W. Bush and Barack Obama's presidencies. Bush is guilty of collapsing all of Islam into a particular ideology that allows the U.S. military to position itself as the civilized heroes of the brutal religious victims trapped in the dark ages; Obama emphasized outreach to Muslim communities and subtly othered Islam in the process by failing to recognize the possibility at co-habitation of religions (al-Rahim, 2016). It is important to note that this age of neo-orientalism will likely escalate Islamophobia with the election of Donald Trump as president of the U.S. and noted conspiracy theorists and anti-Islamic foreign policy-makers making up his cabinet (Warrick & Hauslohner, 2016).

The coverage of Islam around the globe is often inaccurate, discriminatory, or both. These anti-Muslim sentiments are manifested deeply in Western institutions, resulting in normalized 'othering' discourse in the media, politics, and the general citizenry. The problematic image of what "true" Islam is by the West has, for decades, served as justification for extremist sects of Islam to adopt the war definition of jihad. Historically, terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, have used similar arguments in order to persuade members of the Muslim diaspora in the U.S. (Archetti, 2013).

## **Literature on the Islamic State**

There exists a certain urgency to conduct research on the Islamic State since its revival under al-Baghdadi in 2014. In Western and non-Western states alike, there is an allegedly unique quality to IS, something which sets it apart from other terrorist organizations. Some scholars have analyzed the group's media apparatus (Fahmy, 2016; Gambhir, 2014; Winter, 2015; Zelin, 2015), while others have focused on its digital presence, with many hailing IS as being as tech-savvy as Western corporations (Celso, 2014; Galloway, 2016; Kibble, 2016; Perry & Long, 2016; Salazar, 2016). However, the one consistent theme is that of the brutality featured in IS media. Many point to the collective effort of its media production and digital presence to explain the number of radicalized citizens who leave the Western world for IS's headquarters in Raqqa (Dawson & Amarasingam, 2016; Edwards, 2015; George, 2015; Greenberg, 2016; Mirahmandi, 2016; Selim, 2016; Stern, 2016). This section will cover IS's organizational apparatus, its digital presence, and discuss its cultural power. This will help provide greater context to the analysis of the rhetoric of Dabiq.

**Organizational Apparatus.** The Islamic State made impressive organizational strides since 2011, when the fracturing of the Syrian government began due to the Arab Spring, leaving a power vacuum for the group to consolidate power (Hassan, 2016d). Since July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the restoration of the Khilafah, IS has expanded across the Middle East and North Africa (Rose, 2014). Reports of wilayah, the areas of control IS occupies, have ranged from 15-34 cities that mainly are centered in Iraq and Syria, but these extend to Afghanistan, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and West Africa (Winter, 2015; Zelin, 2015). The media production is impressive, and arguably, dangerous. As Winter (2015) elaborates:

At the time of writing, an average of three videos and more than fifteen photographic reports are circulated per day. Radio news bulletins appear daily, meticulously timed in its regularity and broadcast in multiple languages, including Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, English, French, and Russian. . . . [IS] centrally composes and produces *nashids* (jihadist music sung *a cappella*) and feature-length films that depict its most barbarous acts, which emerge on a monthly basis (p. 12).

These wilayah have a clear organizational hierarchy that resembles a public relations firm in the U. S. (Galloway, 2016). Individuals have defined roles as videographers, editors, social media experts, and so on. These positions usually offer status and wealth; a prominent spot on the IS hierarchy. As one Islamic State defector who held a job related to its media apparatus explains to the Washington Post (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015):

It is a whole army of media personnel. The media people are actually more important than the soldiers. Its monthly income is higher. They have better cars. They have the power to encourage those inside to fight and the power to bring more recruits to the Islamic State.

Further, this emphasis on economic security and even materialism appears to show an idea of class structure, reminiscent of Sayyid Qutb (Euben & Zaman, 2009). Qutb, a leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, serves as a significant current to the avowed religious ideology of IS. Qutb was immensely critical of the surrounding Muslim world in addition to criticisms of Western imperialism and materialism, and as a result, some scholars describe him as being foundational to the mainstreaming of Islamist, or fundamentalist Islam today (Euben & Zaman, 2009; Hassan, 2016d). More will be discussed on scholars such as Qutb in chapter four.

The impressive organizational apparatus IS has instituted in a short period has drawn the attention of the West. In setting up media production centers to create and disseminate propaganda in strategic locations where its ideology can be exposed to recruitment targets, IS fuels its army through its public relations team (Galloway, 2016; Zelin, 2015). Winter (2015)

claims that IS's organizational apparatus is designed to encourage fighters and persuade possible recruits. Mercy, brutality, victimhood, war, belonging, and utopianism are featured prominently in its videos, images, radio bulletins, songs, and films. When situated within the context of the atrocities committed by the terror organization, articulating that the group's organizational apparatus produces texts which depict mercy, victimhood, and even belonging, may seem outlandish (Fahmy, 2016). However, these are the prominent themes expressed by recruitment targets - they see justified violence in the name of the Khilafah (Coolsaet, 2016; Dawson & Amarasingam, 2016).

Additionally, Harmanşah (2015) argues that IS conducts a 'scorched Earth' strategy in dissemination to maximize media attention. This approach is described as extremely aggressive campaigns to capture the destruction of landmarks and execution of prisoners, and then distribute videos through the Al-Hayat Media Center (Harmanşah, 2015). Indeed, IS expanded its media production rapidly in an incredibly short period, through both the physical occupation of land as well as perceived threats in the MENA region and around the world. One such tactic IS has utilized to make its organizational influence appear further-reaching is through the spectacle of violence, especially regarding the destruction of cultural sites (Smith, Burke, de Leiu, & Jackson 2016). Harmanşah (2015) further elaborates on the IS program of cultural heritage destruction:

... [IS's videos] took the form of smashing artifacts in archaeological museums, iconoclastic breaking and bulldozing of archaeological sites, dynamiting of shrines, tombs, and other holy sites of local communities, and burning of libraries and archives. .. the Islamic State coordinates and choreographs these destructions as media spectacles of violence aimed at objects and sites of heritage, and these spectacles take place as re-enactments or historical performances that are continuously and carefully communicated to us through ISIS's own image-making and dissemination apparatus that increasingly utilizes the most advanced technologies of visualization and communication (p. 4).

This is an attempt at deconstructing the evidence of alternate historical interpretations of Islam that do not apply to IS's extremist Salafi Jihadism ideology. The terror group has destroyed a number of prominent cultural symbols from before and after the Rashidun Caliphate, and disseminated videos of these actions on social media sites – arguing in the process that cultural remnants that do not serve their idealized vision of Islam are illegitimate and must be eliminated (Smith et al., 2016). While complete erasure may seem impossible, long-term effects of the destruction of localized historical sites could have radical implications.

**Digital Presence.** More than the sharing of videos and images, IS also utilizes social media to a surprising effect. While a majority of its digital content reaches the West via the deep web, members of IS often choose to interact with other social media platform users (“The Islamic State’s Magazine,” 2014; Zelin, 2015). Twitter has been the application of choice for IS members (Berger & Perez, 2016). The immediacy of contact and information dissemination to some dedicated followers, ability to quickly create new accounts and Twitter’s lack of strict regulations make it the ideal platform for this purpose. It is even believed that Twitter played a role in the November 2015 Paris attacks, where members coordinated the timing of and confused victims in the aftermath of the shootings and bombings (Berger, 2015). It was only recently that the social media site began to take action against its massive base of IS users, estimated to be well over 125,000, by suspending and/or banning multiple accounts (Calamur, 2016). In fact, FBI Director James Comey recently described the relevance of IS propaganda units on Twitter - “I am optimistic that the actions of our colleagues in the military to reduce the supply of ISIL tweeters will have an impact. But we’ll just have to watch that space and see” (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). Considering Comey’s role in U.S. government security, it is clear that the social media use of IS has garnered global attention.

Increasingly, communication scholars have sought to understand the impact of terrorist groups' online presence. Archetti (2013) has written an insightful text concerning how terrorist organizations seek to construct global narratives that overlap with the individual narrative of potential recruiting targets. Hence, the themes of community (*jama'ah*), and unity (*tawhid*) as prevalent in Dabiq ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014; Fahmy, 2016). By offering a space for those who feel uncomfortable or excluded from the West, IS allows individuals to weave its narratives into a larger group's (Archetti, 2013). Indeed, the role of social media is frequently associated with a growing concern behind Muslims becoming radicalized (George, 2015; Greenberg, 2016).

In explaining the effectiveness of IS's social media presence, scholars have begun attempting to incorporate Habermas's theory of the public sphere into more digital spaces (Dahlberg, 2001; Gil de Zúñiga, 2015; Valtysson, 2012). However, this is often met with limitations in understanding the nuanced effects of cyberspace on discourse. The notion that Habermas's theory, which describes places constructed for engagement in social, political, etc., discourse, is easily translatable to the internet fails to take into account the immense networks and institutions which make up the world wide web (Pfister, 2014). As a result, the idea of networked rhetorics has recently been introduced as a new theoretical approach to tackling these shortcomings.

Pfister (2014, 2015) initially defines networked media, as it begets networked rhetorics. Networked media describes the interlocking forces of 'old' mass media, such as television and radio, 'new,' such as social media and digital technologies, and how participating in these various networks creates affect. Networked rhetorics, then, describe a set of communication practices and strategies under the conditions of a networked media. Pfister (2014) notes the importance of the plural rhetorics, which –



Implies a multifaceted phenomenon that stretches beyond the account I provide here... There have always been rhetorics, not just *a* rhetoric, and understanding the communication dynamics of a new media system requires a recognition of the multiplicity of rhetorical practices and theories that undergird them (p. 10).

This operates as strong justification for this study, insofar as the current lack of research on rhetorical strategies of Dabiq. As a magazine disseminated through this notion of networked rhetorics, recognizing the “multiplicity” of IS’s rhetoric is crucial to unpacking its ideological approach to persuasion.

Papacharissi (2014) builds off of this notion of networked rhetorics by explaining its connection to constructing affective publics. In arguing that social media facilitates feelings of engagement, Papacharissi (2015) is concerned with understanding how networked rhetorics intersect with “various sociocultural, economic, and political conditions” to spur mobilization for social movements (p. 8). The philosophical notion of affect, commonly referred to as emotion or feeling, as the ultimate driving force of persuasive for networked rhetorics (Papacharissi, 2014 & 2015; Pfister, 2014). In incorporating affect into theories of networked rhetorics, scholars “fill the gap between content and effect by providing a simple explanation that avoids the linearity of casual empiricism and integrates the complexity of networked drives or forces working with, alongside, or against each other” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 16). Primarily, networked rhetorics seek to explain why individuals are emotionally drawn to particular ideologies by situating the rhetoric within larger sociocultural, political, and economic contexts.

Literature approaching Dabiq and/or IS from a critical or cultural standpoint has been extremely limited. Kibble’s (2016) “critical” analysis describes the intentions of IS for war, enslaving women, and executing non-believers. However, Kibble, a former Navy veteran and religious scholar, is arguably misusing the term critical in his analysis – nowhere in the ten page article does he investigate, situate, or contextualize the social, political, and economic histories

which have resulted in IS. Rather than attempting to understanding the justification for IS's terror, Kibble (2016) only goes as far back as 9/11 and concludes by shifting the burden for responding to the organization on all Muslims – “IS is a Muslim problem and that Muslims must rise up and counter its ideology” (p. 141). Saïd (2004) illuminates the issue with Kibble's work:

The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no live notion (or any knowledge at all of the language of what real people actually speak) has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an *ersatz* model of free market ‘democracy’, without even a trace of doubt... there is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion. (p. 871-2)

Kibble (2016) represents the latter – the Western scholar posturing “critical” work as one which reinforces Islamophobic expectations of how Muslims should respond to Islamist terror groups.

### **Research Questions**

With this review as foundation, as IS seeks to establish its own alternative global culture, a “true” global Khilafah, this study seeks focuses on the rhetorical strategies of IS in Dabiq to determine the ideology of this proposed new alternative. Considering the dissemination of Dabiq online through the dark web and Clarion Project, as well as the impressive digital presence of IS (Berger & Perez, 2016), the research questions of this study are:

RQ1: How does Dabiq rhetorically manifest the ideology of IS?

RQ2: What rhetorical strategies are used to persuade readers of Dabiq to join IS?

This project will answer these questions through the methodology of ideological criticism. The array of beliefs, rhetorical strategies, and historical references make Dabiq an ideal artifact for analysis. To understand the specifics of this framework it is necessary to advance to chapter three, the methodological approach.

### Chapter III – Methodological Approach

This study seeks to unpack the rhetoric of IS in Dabiq. Since its declaration of the goal to establish a worldwide Khilafah in July 2014, thousands have either attempted to or successfully moved to IS territories in the MENA region, plotted “lone wolf” attacks in their countries, or have sought to infiltrate Western states to carry out terrorist attacks (George, 2015; Yourish & Lee, 2016). Many of these individuals cite online resources, such as instructional YouTube videos, and Twitter accounts as media through which they get influenced and encouraged to join the organization (Fahmy, 2016; Greenberg, 2016; Stern, 2016; Yusha’u, 2015). Indeed, this phenomenon is not without precedent, as the terrorist group al-Qaeda is well-known for using the cyber public sphere as a recruiting field (Archetti, 2013). The U.S. Government has placed emphasis on curbing radicalization and the appeal of these terror groups, to little avail (George, 2015; Greenberg, 2016; Leone, 2015; Selim, 2015; Stern, 2016; Weine et al., 2013).

IS has currently been pushed out of key cities it had occupied and is facing possible elimination. However, what drones, barrel bombs, and troops cannot defeat is an ideology. IS is an amalgamation of various interpretations of the Prophet Muhammad’s hadiths<sup>7</sup>, ancient fundamentalist Islamic scholars’ philosophies, and the regional influence of Wahhabism and Salafism. With such a complex history, origin, and root, even if IS as an organization is defeated, a different terrorist organization, or a reformation of IS, will emerge as the new existential threat to the West (Hassan, 2016d)- as one has seen in the case of al-Qaeda (Archetti, 2013). Indeed, it is the ideology crafted by and the rhetorical influence of these terror organizations that remain

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<sup>7</sup> A collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims along with the Qur’an.

long after the organizations die. Thus, it becomes important to focus on an analysis of their rhetorical messages and explore their ideology; this can also provide an insight into how and why the rhetorical messages of terrorist organizations, such as IS, exercise such influence to radicalize individuals transnationally.

IS's mobilization of networked media and rhetorics is of particular importance. It is the ability to disseminate messages to any part of the world with an internet connection that expedites radicalization, although sociocultural, political, and economic factors contribute as well (Coolsaet, 2016; Dawson & Amarasingam, 2016). Three families of victims from the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando filed lawsuits against Facebook, Twitter, and Google, alleging that these social media platforms were complicit in the radicalization of Omar Mateen, the shooter who pledged himself to IS moments before the attack (Fung, 2016). As the lawsuit says, "Without . . . Twitter, Facebook, and Google (YouTube), the explosive growth of ISIS [IS] over the last few years into the most feared terrorist group in the world would not have been possible" (Fung, 2016). The nexus of IS's dissemination of persuasive rhetorical messages and the vast network of IS media and rhetoric make it essential to understand IS's ideology and how the rhetoric of IS in Dabiq influences its audience.

To that end, this study will undertake an ideological criticism of six online issues of Dabiq that represent crucial moments in IS's quest for a global Khilafah. In the next few sections I will describe rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, ideology, and ideological criticism for this project. Thereafter, I will present brief overviews of the six issues of Dabiq to be analyzed. Finally, I will briefly discuss the role of the rhetorical critic and conclude this chapter.

### **Rhetoric, Ideology, and Criticism**

To even define the word rhetoric is often a controversial choice. Dating back to disparities between Plato, “the art of winning the soul by discourse,” and Aristotle, “the ability to see the available means of persuasion in a given situation,” this term is often conflated, confused, and misused (Armstrong, 1991; Jowett, 2009). Some definitions describe rhetoric as persuasion, while others define rhetoric generally as any communicative expression. To Foss (2008) rhetoric involves symbols created and used by people, where “a symbol is something that stands for or represents something else by relationship, association, or convention” (p. 4). The selective choosing of symbolic interaction is what allows individuals to create its interpretations or perceptions of the same symbol; non-IS sympathizers look at the group and see the most brutal collection of terrorists in modern times, while sympathizers and members of the group see, perhaps, a brotherhood.

The divisive history of defining rhetoric is indicative of its multiple functions. As Foss (2008) elaborates, rhetoric encourages individuals to change, understand worldviews, and to describe reality as they see it. Indeed, it is this last function of rhetoric which is one of the most influential. Foss (2008) argues that reality is not fixed but changes depending on our interactions within a social construction framework; “This does not mean that things do not exist . . . . Rather, the symbols through which our realities are filtered affect our view . . . and how we are motivated to act toward it” (p. 6). To conduct rhetorical criticism is to understand this particular nuance of the definition of rhetoric.

Rhetorical criticism serves as the basis for ideological criticism, which Foss (2008) describes as the means to “discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and the ideologies that are being muted in it” (p. 231). To reiterate, Foss (2008) defines an ideology as “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretation of

some aspect(s) of the world” (p. 209). An evaluative mental framework, ideological criticism seeks to uncover these patterns of belief from a given artifact, and is usually concerned with power and hegemony. IS seeks to establish a global Khilafah “until it burns the crusader army in Dabiq,” as the terror group situates its ideology as the ideal, rightful hegemony, in direct conflict with the current Western hegemony over the world. The paradox of these incompatible powers demonstrate the need for ideological criticism and to understand the rhetorical strategies of IS that manifest this ideology.

### **Artifact**

Dabiq is a magazine of great range, variety, and language. Translated into English, German, French, Arabic, and more, the online magazine was first published in July 2014 and ceased operation in August 2016. The fifteen issues published to date range from 25 pages to 70 and contain various articles, manifestos, updates on geopolitical control; each issue contains at least one list of top ten videos from a highlighted wilayat, ranging from firing rocket launchers in the desert to beheadings (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016; “The Return of Khilafah,” 2014). The existence of this magazine is captivating and alarming for the West. The notion that a group capable of such brutality can also have public relations-esque departments communicates to the world IS’s intent to move beyond the realm of other terrorist organizations before it; that IS is a legitimate state, with active citizens, governance, and political economy (Celso, 2015; Gambhir, 2014; Salazar, 2016).

This analysis will focus on the six issues of Dabiq: issue one, “The Return of Khilafah”; issue three, “A call to Hijrah”; issue six, “al-Qa’idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within”; issue 12, “Just Terror”; issue 13, “The Rafidah: From Ibn Sa’ba to the Dajjal”; and issue 15, “Breaking the Cross.” Each of these issues was released around a catalytic event of IS’s rise to

infamy. This analysis will focus on the rhetorical strategies and persuasive appeals in each issue concerning IS's ideology. While this means the majority of the analysis will analyze the textual rhetoric of Dabiq, visuals which accompany seminal arguments of each issue, such as the magazine cover, will also be analyzed.

Issue one, "The Return of Khilafah," (2014) is focused on the declaration of the Khilafah and what that means to the world. It explains the purposeful choice behind naming its magazine Dabiq as the final battleground of humanity. Issue three, "A Call to Hijrah," blames President Obama's actions in the Syrian Civil War for terror group's murder of U.S. journalist James Foley. In fact, it concludes with a message allegedly written by Foley, condemning the U.S. government for dropping bombs on the MENA region ("A Call to Hijrah," p. 40). Issue six, "al-Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within," begins with a foreword claiming responsibility for a terror attack in Sydney, Australia, which killed two people (p. 3-5). The issue further provides advice for potential "soldiers" of the Islamic State. This advice encourages supporters to carry out killings of Westerners whenever and wherever they can ("al-Qa'idah of Waziristan," p. 6-15).

Issue 12, "Just Terror," boasts about the terrorist attacks in Paris, a bombing in Beirut, and the downing of a Russian plane in Sinai, amongst other attacks. This issue is also striking for the high number of Islamic State propaganda videos it advertises. Issue 13, "The Rafidah: From Ibn Sa'ba to the Dajjal" is centered around praise for the San Bernardino attacks which killed 14 people in California. Issue 15, "Breaking the Cross," is unlike previous issues which have primarily been directed at Muslim majority societies, this issue is overwhelmingly content aimed at converting non-Muslims to Islam. Articles include "Why we hate you and fight you" along with a conversion story "Why I came to Islam" from a former Christian woman from Finland.

Each of these six issues, upon close reading, provides important insights into the ideology of IS, making for worthy analysis. An ideological criticism and unearthing IS's rhetorical appeals, can reveal how IS persuades possible recruits transnationally.

### **Standards of Evaluation and Role of Researcher**

The standards used in rhetorical and ideological criticism to judge analyses of artifacts are grounded in two core assumptions; that reality is a symbolic creation, and that a critic explains an artifact through an interpretation (Foss, 2008). As Foss (2008) argues, "there are as many realities about the artifact as there are vocabularies from which to conduct an inquiry about it (p. 21). This is a particular challenge of criticism because one can never completely remove bias towards data; the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the researcher affect how one interprets the artifact. This work, therefore, is intended to offer one analytical interpretation of how individuals can be persuaded to join terrorist organizations, such as IS. In other words, this is a rhetorical interpretation which cannot be generalized; yet it provides new insights into the function of rhetoric in constructing and communicating an ideology to an audience, in this case, Muslims and non-Muslims to join IS and engage in global acts of terror.

Understanding these two assumptions is key to correctly implementing the standards when writing critically. As Foss (2008) argues, the primary standard is the argument – and the evidence and logic that supports that argument – made by the critic:

This evidence constitutes the grounds of the argument—the data from the artifact on which the argument is based . . . [such as] ample quotations from a discursive artifact and ample descriptions of the dimensions of the visual one. You also must quote the evidence accurately, and the evidence you cite should be representative of the artifact as a whole. This standard of adequate, accurate documentation requires that what the critic says exists in an artifact is, in fact, there. (p. 21)



A second standard is reasonable inference, that is, the critic must be able to show how she/he reasonably inferred the claims made from the data. This can be done by explaining the warrants of the claims, as the warrants authorize the movement from the grounds to the claims (Toulmin, 1958). Again, it must be kept in mind that each rhetorical critic brings biases and a unique framework to the process of criticism; therefore, although the audience of the critique must be able to follow and appreciate how the critic arrived at the claims, they do not have to agree with those claims (Foss, 2008). Third, Foss (2008) emphasizes the importance of coherence in criticism. The critic must arrange, order, and present findings so they are congruent and consistent. When findings do not contradict one another, and all the main dimensions of the artifact are explored, a critic achieves congruency.

As a rhetorical critic one needs to be creative and imaginative; one must be able to write in a way so that the reader can experience and envision the artifact as the critic does; one must be successful in conveying one's passion for the artifact; one must be able to persuade the reader to view the artifact's contribution to rhetorical theory in the manner of the critic; and finally, the rhetorical critic must be able to offer a compelling account to readers so that they can experience some aspect of the world in a novel way (Foss, 1983; Wander & Jenkins, 1972). It is impossible to grasp the *one* true intent of human action. But through logic and rules, a rhetorical critic can help discover what an artifact teaches about the rhetorical claims of its authors. According to Foss (2008), through the study of one artifact the rhetorical critic makes suggestions concerning some process of rhetoric, and the societal reality it represents. Specifically, this ideological criticism will unearth the rhetorical strategies that Dabiq utilizes to construct a coherent IS ideology.

## Chapter IV - History and Background of IS: Ideological Origins and Evolution

This chapter serves a crucial contextual role for this ideological criticism. The terror group's interpretation of Islam represents one of the most extreme iterations of the faith, built on a variety of different fundamentalist sects (Hassan, 2016d). This chapter will trace IS's evolution and its ideological origins<sup>8</sup>. While this chapter will explore the religious ideological history of IS, it is relevant to note that this is not an analysis of IS's ideology as present in Dabiq, which is the ultimate goal of this project. Nor is this chapter a complete reading of IS's ideology, which encompasses social, political, and economic beliefs. However, it must be kept in mind that the religious history of Islam, which IS uses as the foundation for its belief system, often overlaps with sociopolitical and economic aspects. This chapter will begin with a brief overview of IS's notion of Islam, before moving to the conflict between Wahhabism and Salafism. The third section will investigate the historical roots of Wahhabism and Salafism, how they expanded throughout the Arab World, and finally, how they transformed into the modern iterations of conservative Sunni Islam of today.

**Overview.** The Islamic State does not operate as an entirely new branch of Sunni Islam. It is a byproduct of a sect of practice promoted by various Islamic scholars that most closely resembles Wahhabism and Salafism. There exists a rich history of Sunni Islamic revivalist movements that attempt to empower Muslims against both the *kafir*, or disbeliever, and the *mushrikins*, polytheists (Haykel, 2016, p.71). Similar to the development of Christianity, which has led to an enormous number of branches and sects within the religion, the same is true for

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<sup>8</sup> This chapter serves an additional purpose – to inform, provide context, and admittedly, to teach me more about Islam in the process. As a graduate student in Communication Studies, I have had little classical training in Islamic or Middle Eastern Studies. As such, this chapter also functioned as an opportunity for me to learn more about the complexities and dynamics of Islam.

Islam. The main movements influencing IS's religious identity are Wahhabism and Salafi Jihadism (Alvi, 2014; Celso, 2014; Galloway, 2016; Haykel, 2016).

The distinction between these two sects concerns the history of 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. An admirer of Ibn Taymiyya, a seminal 13<sup>th</sup>-century scholar, al-Wahhab used the logic of Taymiyya to justify the reformist Hanbali school, which called for returning to specific practices of the time of the Prophet and his companions. Al-Wahhab grew an alliance with Muhammad Ibn Saud, the forefather of the Saudi ruling family (Euben & Zaman, 2009). This alliance forged a cultural reverberation in the region that spread Wahhabism across Afghanistan, India, and North and West Africa, and dominated Saudi Arabia.

**Wahhabi/Salafi conflicts.** Often described as an ultraconservative, fundamentalist movement, Wahhabism is a branch of Islam to which its adherents often deny the label, in preference of Salafism, especially in Saudi Arabia (Algar, 2002). This is the preferred term as *Wahhabi* is considered derogatory; it encompasses the most extreme interpretations of Salafism. The first companions of the Prophet Mohammed were called the *salaf* and operated under the belief that they had a pure understanding of Islam as a result of receiving direct lessons from Allah; hence, Salafi is the preferred denomination in Saudi Arabia (Wiktorowicz, 2005). Deviations from the pure practice of the *salaf*, the first companions, is not permitted.

The distinction between Wahhabism and Salafism is defined by location too, as the former is centered in Saudi Arabia, while the latter is believed to be a more general puritanical movement that occurs in multiple regions. According to Algar (2002), the two movements have three elements in common, and one important feature that distinguishes them. The similarities are: "...above all disdain for all developments subsequent to al-Salaf al-Salih (the first two or three generations of Islam), the rejection of Sufism (outward practice), and the abandonment of

consistent adherence to Sunni schools of thought” (Algar, 2002, p. 47). However, Salafis distinguish themselves ideologically from Wahhabis by emphasizing persuasion, not coercion, to rally other Muslims. Despite these perceived distinctions, many scholars argue that these differences have ideologically become indistinguishable. The 1970s saw Wahhabism co-opt the language and symbols of Salafism, resulting in this fusion of identities. Further (Abou el-Fadl, 2005):

Both Wahhabism and Salafism imagined a golden age within Islam; this entailed a belief in a near-historical utopia that they thought was entirely retrievable and reproducible in contemporary Islam. Both advocated a form of egalitarianism and anti-elitism to the point that they came to consider intellectualism and rational moral insight to be inaccessible, and thus corruptions to the purity of the Islamic message. (p. 79)

Despite the tension between these two sects, they share large aspects of their ideology. The blurriness between these two Sunni movements is indicative of the co-optation of Salafism by Wahhabism, to avoid being portrayed as mushrikin. Therefore, much of the current discourse centered around what influences IS’s current ideology is a highly disputed one; many of the central claims can be found in both Wahhabism and Salafism (Hassan, 2016a).

### **Roots of Wahhabism/Salafism: The Hanbali School and Ibn Taymiyyah**

It is of importance to note this co-optation, as Salafism has deeper roots, tracing back to the Prophet Mohammad’s death. His death left a power vacuum in which there was no clear leader to offer direction to the religion’s followers (Esposito, 2003). This is when the two largest branches of Islam—Sunnism and Shiism-- were created. Sunnis believe that because Mohammad never appointed a caliph before his death, he intended for there to be an election, which his father-in-law Abu Bakr won. This is opposed to Shia Islam, which believes that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the prophet, was meant to be caliph. Because a majority of Muslims chose to

support Abu Bakr, his line became the dominant establishment of Khilafah, including the Abbāsīd Caliphate (Holt, 1984).

It was during this time in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries that saw four *madhhabs*, or schools and rites, establish Islamic jurisprudence as the official education of the faith. Beyond respect to theory, the schools also enacted rites in practice, such as how an individual's property is divided upon death and the details of formal prayer (Watt, 1988). The development of these four rites was crucial to the geopolitical expanse of Islam during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. But most relevant to this study is the school which governed Muslims in modern-day Qatar, most of Saudi Arabia, and has a presence in areas such as U.A.E., Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, and Syria (Champion, 2002). Directed by Ahmad ibn-Hanbal, this school is referred to as Hanbali. It was crucial to much of the development of Salafism (Haque, 2010) as well.

Hanbal's work was especially important, as midway through the 10<sup>th</sup> century an informal consensus emerged within Islam that *ijtihad* was closed. This term refers to "... the right of a qualified scholar to go back to the primary sources and work out from them what he thought Islamic principles involved" (Watt, 1988, p. 29). Mainly, Hanbal's work was forever preserved under the notion of defense of religious institutions and its judges against political pressures. While Hanbal's work reverberates in Islamic interpretations to this day, there was a barrier to the ideological development of his rite to modern-day Salafi Jihadism and Wahhabism

The Mongolian empire dominated the global landscape in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, conquering lands stretching all the way from Central Europe to Karakorum. The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, amongst other Muslim communities in the Middle East, was not immune. Various raids led by Chingiz Khan, and later his grandson, Hulagu, decimated the Hanbali area, and eventually the entire Khilafah (Ahsan, 2010). This had a devastating effect on the political and

social development of the territory, but additionally so, the spirit of inquiry and original research diminished along with the millions of perished Muslims. According to Ahsan (2010):

For centuries Arabic had been the language of religion, science, and philosophy in Iran, and all thinkers and scientists had chosen Arabic as the vehicle of expressing its thoughts. But henceforth Arabic lost its position of privilege and its use was restricted mostly to the field of theology and scholastic learning. The Arabs themselves lost even the shadow of a major role in Islamic history. The fall of Baghdad, therefore, was also an ominous sign of the loss of Arab hegemony. (p. 794-5)

Following the rise and development of theological and philosophical movements in Islam and the subsequent sacking of Baghdad, a period of time existed in which Haque (2010) refers to as a pre-renaissance for the religion. It was during this time that Ibn Taimiyyah, a seminal scholar in the development of Wahhabism and Salafism, was born.

The son of a Hanbali scholar, Ibn Taimiyyah received an excellent education and became an eminent author in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, publishing countless books, religious decisions, letters, and notes, most of which he wrote while in prison. Jailed for “doctrines and practices prevalent among powerful religious and Sufi establishments, an overly outspoken personality, the jealousy of his peers, the risk to public order due to this popular appeal and political intrigues” (Michot, 2012 p. 240), Ibn Taimiyyah developed an unsympathetic attitude towards philosophers, theologians, and the Sufis. He argued for a strict return to the practice of the salaf, and even led wars in Syria near Damascus for his cause, resulting in him being referred to as *mujahid*, or a fighter for the cause of Islam (Haque, 2010). However, it was his aggressiveness in debate, writing, and war that eventually lead to his imprisonment and death.

Taimiyyah’s work has inspired generations of thought on interpretations of Sunni Islam that would clash with the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had risen to power following a vacuum of power after the Mongols conquered the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, resulting in the installation of a religiously-influenced education system, “to work for the dominance of the

traditional world-view and self-image” (Watt, 1988, p. 27). It was this attempted domination by Ottoman interpretations of jurisprudence and education that harbored the harsh criticisms of these institutions by al-Wahhab, resurfacing the old arguments of Taymiyyah (Haque, 2010; Michot, 2012).

### **Expanding throughout the Arab World**

Due to the influence exerted by al-Wahhab and his allies, the Saud family, other scholars emerged in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century who preached similar ideologies, such as Muhammad Abduh, Hasan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt and Maududi in India (Euben & Zaman, 2009; Watt, 1988). These scholars operated as an important bridge between the older works of scholars like Taymiyyah and online Salafi-Jihadi scholars (Wagemakers, 2011). Abduh, born in Egypt in 1849 and educated by Hanbali scholars, sought a return to the traditionalist worldview as he believed in Islamic self-sufficiency. al-Banna, born in 1906, built on Abduh’s work in education praxis. In 1928, he founded the now renowned Muslim Brotherhood, which emphasized the education of Muslim youth in Egypt. When al-Banna moved to Cairo in 1933, the Brotherhood saw a spike in followers, as the lack of religious instruction in Western-themed classrooms left the people wanting for spirituality. The rapid growth of citizens raised in this religious ideology also caused al-Banna and other figures to become more politically involved, which led to his assassination in 1949 (Watt, 1988). A follower of al-Banna’s in the wake of his death would emerge as Egypt’s next great, and arguably the most controversial Islamic scholar.

Sayyid Qutb, dubbed by some Western journalists as “the philosopher of Islamic terror,” is quoted by both violent Salafi Jihadists and nonviolent mobilizers who seek political reform (Euben & Zaman, 2009, p. 129). Qutb’s seminal text *Milestones on the Road* (1964) is seen as a depiction of “true” Islamic society, arguing that currently the world is in *jahiliyya*, or ignorance.

Operating as a form of intellectual and moral isolationism, he was met with resistance and controversy, yet he remained an influential force in Egypt. Abou el-Fadl (2014) argues, this text exhibited fascist undertones guided by Carl Schmitt, German philosopher and a member of the Nazi party (p. 191-2). Indeed, Abduh, al-Banna, and Qutb's teachings have impacted the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and more broadly, Sunni Islam today.

This particular brand of Islam expanded beyond the Middle East, Arab Peninsula, and North Africa. Indeed, the scholar and journalist Maududi founded the Jama'at-I Islami, an organization similar to the Muslim Brotherhood, in 1941 in India (Watt, 1988). Similar to the intent of Egypt's iteration of this group, Maududi created the association to instruct young men in "true" Islam. While not an innovative thinker, Maududi was regarded as a phenomenal writer. His work with Jama'at-I Islami was able to spread his message throughout the region, arguing Islam must be understood solely through the fundamentalist texts (Euben & Zaman, 2009). Unlike some other scholars of his time, Maududi read English and Western texts; not to disseminate information, but rather, to be critical of life both in the West and in the Arab world. Maududi (1966) elaborates on this:

Western civilization is of course no match for Islam; indeed, if the conflict had been with Islam as such, no other civilization could possibly have the better of Islam. But the tragedy is that Islam with which Western civilizations happens to be in conflict today is a mere shadow of the real Islam. The Muslims are devoid of Islamic character and morals, ideas and ideology, and have lost the Islamic spirit. The true spirit of Islam is neither in its mosques nor schools, neither in its private lives nor public affairs. . . .The Law of Islam does not now govern its private or collective conduct (p. 11).

This is all to demonstrate the long route that Wahhabism and Salafi Jihadism have taken to formulate modern iterations of these ideologies today. While some scholars sought secularization and Islamic modernism, the overarching responses were grounded in rejection and



withdrawal from the West (Esposito, 1999). This created a relative bubble of Wahhabi influence, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

**Modern amalgamation of fundamentalist Sunni Islam.** Hassan Hassan, a resident fellow at the Tharir Institute for Middle East Policy, published a piece on the lesser known modern scholar Muhammad Surur. Arguing that he is as equally of a transformational figure as Qutb, Hassan brings to light the role Surur played in the development of the extremist ideologies of Wahhabism and Salafi-Jihadism. After being a Muslim Brotherhood leader in Syria in the 1960s, Surur moved to Saudi Arabia where he was influenced by Salafism. It was here that he helped organically create a leaderless and unorganized religious movement combining traditional and revolutionary ideas called the Islamic awakening (Hassan, 2016c). What often led to the extremist, violent interpretations of jihad, was the eagerness of scholars like Ibn Taimiyyah, Qutb, Surur, and Maududi to call for declarations of *takfir*, or the process of declaring an apostate. Most Muslims believe that accusing another Muslim of takfir is the same as killing him. Indeed, it is this emphasis on takfir and the violent, extremist call for traditional world-views that has helped develop the ideology of al-Qaeda, and eventually, the Islamic State (Alvi, 2014; Hassan, 2016a; Wiktorowicz, 2005).

The Islamic State is complex and deeply rooted in extremely conservative, fundamentalist beliefs. As the Islamic world has sought stability for centuries now, the Islamic State has attempted to fill the vacuum, using the teachings of scholars such as Hanbal, Taymiyyah, Wahhab, and Qutb in the process (Hassan, 2016a). Indeed, it is this complex hybrid of influences ranging from Salafism to the Islamic awakening movement of the 1970s, the Egyptian scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and other currents of Islam that form the historical and evolutionary context of IS. This chapter, however, does not address how IS

converts religious interpretations into a politically active ideology. Hence, it becomes expedient to move to the analysis this study.

## Chapter V - Analysis

This analysis will address Dabiq's role in radicalizing individuals in the West. In terms of its scholarly contribution, while these texts/IS has been analyzed by mass communications and political science scholars, there is scant work in the field of rhetoric and communication that unpacks IS ideology as manifest in its rhetoric in Dabiq. This analysis will focus on issues one, three, six, twelve, thirteen, and fifteen of Dabiq. These texts were chosen for analysis due to the timeliness of their release through IS's online media production branch, Al-Hayat. Each issue was released following events around the globe by the terror group that attracted major/global headlines. IS provides reading material to take advantage of the increased attention following coordinated or "lone wolf" attacks. This content is rife with references to Islamic history, including hadiths, quotes from the Qu'ran, and passages from companions of the Prophet Muhammad, to name a few; Dabiq employs several substantive and stylistic rhetorical and persuasive appeals/strategies to encourage migration, or *hijrah*<sup>9</sup>.

Specifically, an issue of Dabiq consists mainly of articles, ranging from short page-long *hikmahs*, or statements of wisdom/philosophy, to lengthy essays penned by Islamic converts, journalists, and scholars. This analysis focuses on this content, as well as some accompanying visuals to featured texts that can be considered significant rhetorical moments, such as the cover of each issue. Other prominent content in Dabiq are battleground updates from various wilayah and lists of top videos showing combat footage, propaganda, etc. from each wilayah; however the videos are unplayable on the Clarion Project's archived pdfs. While these are significant

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<sup>9</sup> This is the term used to describe migration to the holy lands of Mecca and/or Medina, but within IS's context, it refers to movement to the lands of its locus of control, namely Raqqa. The use of hijrah also works in conjunction with the historicity of al-Baghdadi's name, Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr was the companion of the Prophet Muhammad who accompanied Him on the first hijrah following an assassination attempt.

rhetorical content, this analysis is concerned with the persuasive and rhetorical strategies manifest in the written and some prominent visual communication of Dabiq. In the process of analyzing the six chosen issues of Dabiq, three central themes emerged – political claims, religious appeals, and terrorist actions. As such, the rest of this chapter is structured in sections related to each central theme.

### **Political Claims**

Dabiq constructs political claims that demonstrate the intent of the group’s proposed global caliphate. For instance all 15 issues of the magazine begin with a quote from the founding leader of IS, Abu Mus’ab az-Zarqawi. An image at the start of issue one features three soldiers in army fatigues, their backs facing the camera as the flames of a battle rage in front of them, as az-Zarqawi states; “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 3). This is perhaps the most definitive excerpt that describes the goals and ultimate political purpose of IS. One of the first of many usages of metaphor, IS employs terms like ‘spark’ and ‘fire’ to present the image of an idea spreading like wildfire. With the will of Allah, this fire will eventually drive the crusader armies (Christians, Jews, atheists, any mushrikin or kafir) to Dabiq, the city in Syria. A hadith from a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, cited by Dabiq, proclaims that Dabiq will be the final battleground for true Muslims against all non-believers and apostates, which of course includes the crusader armies (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014).

Specifically, the cover of the first issue of Dabiq, released in July 2014, features a faded brown map outlining the MENA region with the words “The Return of Khilafah,” superimposed over the countries. By introducing its magazine with a call to bring back the original Khilafah,

the lack of national borders on the aforementioned map is an allusion to the land which IS views as rightly it's; stretching from west Egypt to Pakistan, and south central Asia to Yemen. While the emphasis of this issue is this, a rhetorical analysis of highlights three major themes— the urgency to accept IS's version of Islam, the process of becoming an active ideologue in the organization, and a hierarchical submission to IS leaders.

**The urgency to accept IS's version of Islam.** Dabiq places great emphasis on the positives of its practice while expressing extreme disdain against deviants, frequently referred to the Arabic word mushrikin. Those who do not adhere to its beliefs have “bowed and prostrated submissively before the mushrikin... falsely claiming that this was for the sake of global peace which the United Nations and the ‘divinely revealed faiths’ called for” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 21). Thus, mushrikin, or non-believers, especially Muslims, are lying to themselves or purposefully practicing Islam incorrectly so as to become subservient to the greater global order controlled by the West. This is one of the first of several attacks on international institutions throughout Dabiq. Global organizations such as the UN, European and African Unions, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are derided as failed institutions, which propagate an anti-Muslim world order (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014; “A Call to Hijrah,” 2014; “Just Terror,” 2015; “Breaking the Cross,” 2016). To avoid being complicit in these institutions, the ideologue must “Rush, O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 11).

Further, even negotiating with mushrikin can be problematic for IS members. Dabiq argues that to negotiate is “merely jumping out of the frying-pan and into the fire” (“The Return of the Khilafah,” p. 25). This is perhaps one of IS's most used rhetorical strategies, an either/or

argument. To exist outside the Khilafah is to live in a heated frying pan, and working amongst the mushrikin is to jump directly into the fire. This also describes a level of urgency IS promulgates by invoking the imagery of fire as a metaphor for existential threats to the group's existence. This metaphor of a frying pan is essential when articulating how Dabiq promotes urgency and dissonance to its readers. The fire symbolizes antithetical political structures to IS's Islam – Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Capitalism, Communism, as well as other interpretations of Islam. It is this urgency that Dabiq invokes using metaphor to drive people to pledge their allegiance (bay'ah) to Abu Bakr al-Husayni al-Baghdadi, the Caliph ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014). In describing the ideologies of the West as dangerous to the existence of Muslims, Dabiq seeks to figuratively light a fire of motivation for its audience to act quickly.

Over time, Dabiq explains, it is natural for "a man's faith to become worn out" ("The Return of Khilafah," p. 20). As such, being responsible for fellow mujahadid is akin to being a part of a flock of animals; you are always a member of a larger group, and that group sticks together and helps one another. The issue elaborates on this idea using a metaphor, where Islam is a garment and every Muslim a thread. To stay on the righteous path, or *millah*, is to follow the path of Ibrahim. One follows a blend of religious and political actions that comprise this path even in the face of death ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014):

Stick to the jama'ah (congregation) of the Muslims and its imam. And if they have neither a jama'ah nor an imam? Then avoid every group, even if you have to bite onto the root of a tree until death reaches you while you're in that condition. (p. 22)

The use of metaphors demonstrates an emphasis on appeals of symbolism – a reader interprets the metaphor given the context provided by Dabiq to determine the purpose of the metaphor, which often calls for an internal search for purpose or explicit calls for hijrah. The involvement in IS begins with subscribing to the practices of the jama'ah, or larger congregation, which is

praised by various hadiths as being a more holy form of practice as opposed to individual prayer. By emphasizing the importance of group relations and community, IS constructs a space, which it makes innately political.

To begin this process of religious and political participation, a member must submit to elder imams who preach directly from scripture, and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad; “Indeed every man is a shepherd and every shepherd is responsible for his flock. So the imam of the people is a shepherd and he is responsible for his flock” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 22). This leads to a greater community called the immamah, which vehemently rejects ideas such as secularism and separation of state and religion, and states that “the position we’ve taken on the meaning of imamah – that it includes both political and religious leadership equally – is correct” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 23). This further explicates that the urgency for religious and political action are of equal importance. Incompatibility of secularism and Western governments with the Khilafah embody the metaphor of the frying pan, where exposure to these belief systems will burn Muslims alive, further invoking the urgent need for migration. Dabiq continues that “the people today have failed to understand that imamah in religious affairs cannot be properly established unless the people of truth first achieve comprehensive political imamah over the lands and the people” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 25). While this may seem difficult to achieve for the reader, the issue quotes several hadiths describing how Allah will strike those who question the immamah. Through use of metaphors and by constructing arguments which rely on either/or appeals, IS instills a sense of urgency in its audience, to act fast and join the terror group.

**Hierarchical Submission.** It is this process becoming an ideologue that leads to the third theme of this issue; how IS attempts to construct systemic hierarchies for Muslims to adhere to,

within its territories. We can consider IS's increased involvement in Syria's civil war since 2011 as context for its establishment of organizational hierarchies. In Dabiq's ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014) words:

The events of Sham began to unfold and the Islamic State quickly got involved, answering the cries of the weak and oppressed Muslims by sending a mission from Iraq to activate its units in Sham and later make the announcement of its official expansion. This new condition opens the path for the complete unification of all Muslim peoples and lands under the single authority of the Khilafah. (p. 40)

This demonstrates how IS seeks to expand its territory and consolidate power. IS observed a vacuum of power in the period of time in which Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was facing substantial losses to local rebels (Hassan, 2016d). Jumping on this opportunity, IS infiltrated and sought to reform the territory in Sham, "undoing the colonial processes," which assigned it the name Syria and "its modern-day borders" ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014, p. 41-3). These actions are all a part of the conquest of Khilafah, harkening to the notion put forth by the cover of the issue – that the current borders in the MENA region are invalid, and liberating Syria/Sham from colonial and imperial powers is the first step towards fulfilling IS's destiny.

Considering the lofty goals that IS has, its need for people to not only join its ranks but submit to its organizational apparatus is of utmost importance in establishing a global Caliphate. Hence, IS's rhetoric in this issue of Dabiq focuses extensively on describing the extent to which one should submit to the hierarchy. The issue makes a call for scholars, Islamic jurisprudence experts, doctors, engineers, and military officials to remind them where their true duty lies – Allah; "We call them and remind them to fear Allah, for its emigration is an individual obligation, so that they can answer the dire need of the Muslims for them" ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014, p. 11). A duty to the will of Allah and adherence to the path are the most important qualities of a proper IS ideologue. By referring to the previous notions of political



action, as well as the role of a community of elders in the immamah, Dabiq describes the extent to which one must submit to this hierarchy. The magazine articulates this submission: “I order you with five things that Allah ordered me with: jama’ah, Sam’ (listening), ta’ah (obedience), hijrah, and jihad fisabilillah (for the sake of Allah)” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 31).

And the consequences of failing to follow these steps are grave:

Indeed, whoever leaves the jama’ah by a hand span has removed the noose of Islam from his neck unless he returns. And whoever calls to the call of *jahiliyyah*<sup>10</sup> then he is from the gatherings of Jahannam (Hell).” They said, “O Allah’s Messenger, even if he fasts and prays?” He said, “Even if he fasts, prays, and claims to be a Muslim. So call the Muslims by its names, by what Allah named them: al-Muslimin<sup>11</sup>, al-mu’minin, ‘Ibad Allah (Slaves of Allah). (p. 31)

Clearly, the rhetoric in Dabiq focuses on absolute either/or arguments, relies on religious symbolisms, such as the pillars of Islam, and metaphors, like fire, and quotation marks around terms like nationalism help create dissonance and a sense of urgency in readers. This section also leans heavily on appeals to credibility, or ethos, by arguing for a strict adherence to a singular way of life as proposed by al-Baghdadi. The first issue of Dabiq, therefore, offers interesting rhetorical insights into how IS formulates the strategic messaging of its ideology, the aims of active ideologues, and how and where it seeks to establish hierarchical, structural control. The choice of Sham over Syria, the cover page featuring a MENA region with no borders, and the urgency assigned to political action indicate a strong disapproval of colonial and Western influence on the history of the region. It is a way in which the group appears revolutionary and one-of-a-kind, thus offering a greater appeal to those looking for power, security, and jama’ah.

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<sup>10</sup> Ignorance

<sup>11</sup> Excommunication and exodus – also a radical Sunni group and an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As IS seeks to literally return to the Khilafah, this issue offers a blueprint for those wishing to engage with the terrorist organization.

***Obedience to authority.*** Initially, Dabiq reiterates ideas of submission and obedience to authoritative figures and symbols such as Baghdadi, hadiths, the Prophet, and Allah. In two *hikmahs* or philosophical expressions, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Arfajah, is quoted to elaborate on this idea, arguing that those who withdraw their obedience from Allah will face him on “Resurrection Day” without an excuse (“Just Terror,” 2015, p. 23). To be disobedient to Allah is to die a death of ignorance. Arfajah expresses concern about apostates and deviants, attempting to persuade potential ideologues (“Just Terror,” 2015):

If bay’ah [allegiance] is given to two caliphs, then kill the second of them. Whoever comes to you wanting to break your strength or divide your unity while your matter is altogether of a single man, then kill him [the agitator] (p. 24)

Any person claiming to have more influence than Baghdadi, per this excerpt, is an apostate who must be killed. This limits the possibility of a power grab in the organization, as all ideologues must submit only to the true Caliph – Baghdadi.

Feelings of strangeness, especially for those living in the West, are exceptionally normal and not cause for concern, as it serves as a reminder that one is living in crusader lands. Dabiq uses this to justify the sense of urgency to adhere to the path of hijrah; because the proper Muslim fitrah, or natural sense of the world, is at war with that of crusader lands. Failure to acknowledge one’s fitrah fuels feelings of strangeness, dissonance, and depression for those living in the West. As IS (“Just Terror,” 2015) describes:

The battle to preserve his fitrah and faith knows no ceasefire. If he wants to preserve what mustard seed of faith he has been blessed with, he must exhaust himself to the utmost so as to remain just a Muslim... If he abandons the struggle or briefly falters, he will quickly find himself an apostate (p. 30)

Often when Dabiq calls for strict adherences to authority and the faith, it also acknowledges the impact of failing to do so. In emphasizing how IS's ideology will offer purpose so long as sympathizers submit to authority, Dabiq simultaneously highlights the resulting eternal damnation that comes with resisting the authoritative figures and symbols of IS.

Calls for obedience and acceptance of fitrah are not limited to threats concerning the afterlife—it is mentioned that one obtains *Jannah*, or Islamic paradise, through a steadfast commitment to one's jama'ah, truthfulness, and bloodshed in the face of oppression (“Just Terror,” 2015). In fact, each issue of Dabiq has dedicated a significant portion of its content to ideas of submission to hierarchy, whether it is through explanation of the millah, calls for migration, or detailed instructions on living under IS.

**Focus on U.S. foreign policy criticisms.** A key part of motivating readers to political action is centered around rampant and unrelenting criticisms of United States foreign policy in the MENA region. This critique begins in the forward of the issue, which concerns the death of James Foley. A freelance war reporter from the U.S., Foley was captured by IS in November 2012, and executed in a viral beheading video in August 2014 (Callimachi, 2014). His death marked a significant peak in attention for the terror group. Also, Dabiq offers an eight-point justification for its high-production recording of Foley's death: 1) the U.S.'s support for Peshmerga, Iraqi Kurdistan's military branch, 2) support for Syrian rebel groups and allyship to “Saudi Arabia,”<sup>12</sup> 3) the collateral damage produced by U.S. missiles and drones, 4) failure to release Muslims in U.S. prisons 5) the U.S. failed an earlier rescue attempt for Foley in Raqqa 6) the U.S.'s alleged non-response to IS threats 7) President Obama's suppression of information

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<sup>12</sup> The quotation marks here are by choice of the authors of Dabiq. This is likely a stylistic choice to invalidate the legitimacy of the Saudi state, similar to IS's choices to surround modern and nationalism with quotation marks.

concerning IS to the public and 8) Obama's failure to mention another beheaded journalist, Steven Sotloff, an Israeli "ally of Zionist Peshmerga forces" ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014).

IS positions itself as a victim of U.S. imperialism; it attempted reasonable negotiation with the U.S. but was shunned, thus it had no other option but to kill Foley to stay true to its word. Dabiq rhetorically situates IS as victim and the U.S. as a monolithic evil. In an article allegedly written by Foley, Dabiq ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014) states:

The purpose of this message is not to appeal for my freedom. This is because many chances were given to my government and family to negotiate for my release, all resulting in failure on the part of my government and family. My captors have made many efforts to ensure a successful arrangement. (p. 39)

This also serves as an appeal to ethos for IS – it was the terrorist group which behaved accordingly and thus has credible claims of moral high ground over the U.S. who refused to negotiate. While it is unknowable if Foley truly did write this article or not, the selection of his name as the author of this piece appeals to both Foley's level of credibility as an international journalist, but also to pathos – Foley's words are highly critical and emotionally charged, going as far to making a direct appeal to his brother, an enlisted member of the U.S. Air Force ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

I call on you John, to think about whoever made the decision to bomb Iraq recently and kill those people, whoever they might have been. Think John. Who is it they really killed? And did they think about me, or you, or our family and how that decision is going to affect us? I died on that day John. When your colleagues dropped those bombs, they signed my death certificate! (p. 40)

This critique centered on the U.S. is further emphasized at the end of the issue, through the Foley article. In the piece, Foley blames Obama for his impending execution and supports the claim that IS attempted to negotiate with the U.S. He argues that his imprisonment by IS is justifiable considering the legal/ethical gray area that much of the U.S. foreign policy operates within ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

Just as many Muslims from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and other Muslim countries are currently prisoners of the US [sic] government with many cases being of questionable legality according to US [sic] law, we, the American people are also victims of our government's foreign policy. (p. 40)

This comparison of Foley's imprisonment to the "many cases being of questionable legality," such as prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, is used as justification that IS is a legitimate state. A terrorist organization has hostages, but a nation-state, like the U.S., has prisoners of war. It may be a small distinction to make, but an important one to an aspiring legitimate state like IS. Strategic rhetorical choices such as framing group characteristics and appeals to credibility, or ethos, demonstrate the extent to which IS views the legitimacy of its actions. Categorizing Foley as a prisoner of war as opposed to a hostage places IS on the same level as the U.S. – a nation-state retaining a U.S. citizen is akin to the imprisonment of alleged jihadists in Guantanamo Bay.

The supposed Foley article articulates the perspective of U.S. foreign policy while pointing out its flaws ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

Our government, for the last 13 years has stretched our military around the Muslim world to interfere in its affairs. They have killed in the name of "preserving life," tortured and raped in the name of "humanity," destroyed in the name of "rebuilding," and ruined the lives of millions of people. They have incurred a great debt of blood and wealth and it will be you and me, the average citizens, who will inevitably pay the price of its crimes. (p. 40)

After illustrating the wrongdoings of the U.S., Foley issues a 'call to action' to his friends, family, and loved ones, describing the U.S. government as the real killer. In his words, "I call on my friends, family and loved ones to rise up against my real killers, the U.S. government, for what will happen to me is only a result of its complacency and criminality" ("A Call to Hijrah," p. 40).

Foley's article may seem extreme, and considering this issue was published nearly a year following his death, it is quite possible the entire piece is a fabrication. However, this article

operates rhetorically as a way for readers to witness the transformative process of IS's ideology, in which one could go from reporter for Western imperialism to a harsh critic of it. If Foley could undergo this shift in logic, in viewing the U.S. as the "real killers," then so can Dabiq's audience.

*The threat of the West.* Dabiq builds off the argument that since IS is a legitimate state, worthy of migration and praise of Muslims, then the West is the antithesis of this. To live in the West as a Muslim is to be under constant threat. This adds to the continued sense of urgency IS invokes for bay'ah. In the words of the mother of a Muslim family who migrated to the U.S., "every family that comes here suffers one calamity or another on its children" ("Just Terror, 2015, p. 33). These calamities, or the allure of drugs, alcohol, promiscuity and gangs, pose an existential threat to traditional Muslim families. Under the Khilafah, those who commit calamities such as consuming alcohol or theft could be punishable under the most extreme "laws of Allah" ("Just Terror," 2015, p. 16). Minor actions that are largely normalized in the West are viewed as existential threats to Muslims who reside in these areas.

The existential threats are not limited to your standard fair of teenage rebellion, either. Apostate religions such as Catholicism, Buddhism, Judaism, and political economies like Capitalism, Communism, and Fascism all embody these perceived threats to the Muslim Ummah. The multicultural embrace of different religions and ideologies make the West a disconcerting place for Muslims, as IS alleges all these factions are united in only one area – against Islam ("Just Terror," 2015):

They compete against each other as well to obtain the larger following of blind sheep and to continue to draw wealth from these followers to its own gluttonous pockets. They meanwhile never learn from the lessons of the past and decide instead to follow the footsteps of those nations who were destroyed by Allah for its arrogance. (p. 43)

Dabiq uses metaphors to rhetorically situate its enemies as clueless animals without agency, who are complicit in anti-Muslim systems of power. An explicit criticism of both capitalism and Western foreign policy highlights IS's willingness to distance itself from the idolatry of wealth and emphasizes the uniqueness of its state formation. Indeed, the focus on accruing wealth as an ultimate ideal is a highly Western value that starts from a young age, and particularly, IS argues, in secular schools. Dabiq states that to be educated by these secular schools is akin to being 'uneducated'. IS furthers this critique ("Just Terror," 2015):

Many people have been duped into believing that a secular "education" is a "necessity," so much so that they consider it a child's essential "right" to waste dozens of years in school to obtain a piece of paper that may ultimately have nothing to do with the profession he later works in! (p. 33)

The group goes as far as to compare schools to wolves and children as their prey ("Just Terror," 2015):

And if some wish to argue that they have no choice because its children will be taken away by the kafir authorities if they refuse to send them to school, I say to them, you are the ones who willingly choose to live like sheep in a land of wolves, so don't blame the wolf for coming to snatch his prey! (p. 35)

By invoking animalistic metaphors, Dabiq illustrates the West as evil and dangerous to the innocent Muslims at risk of corruption, creating a strong appeal to pathos. To fight the West is an act of self-defense against a vicious wolf, not proactive attacks.

To clarify, this metaphor describing Western educational institutions as wolves does not mean IS rejects education. However, this Western, secular approach to educating youth is the problem the group sees. This issue of Dabiq laments the promotion of nationalism in schools through daily events such as the pledge of allegiance to the U.S. flag, the emphasis on tolerance in the classroom, and the assimilation of Muslim students as further reason that the U.S. and Western educational systems are incompatible with the Muslim way of life. Dabiq situates capitalism and secularism as arguably the greatest threats to Muslims living in the West – any

reader who agrees with the perceived evils of these institutions, legitimate claims or not, is susceptible to the persuasiveness of IS's rhetoric.

Dabiq ("Just Terror," 2015) offers coping advice for those who feel threatened by Western education and other institutions:

For others who truly care for its sons and daughters and have not yet lost them, but have made the same mistake of sending them to be "educated" by wolves out of some misplaced hope to see them succeed, I offer you the most sincere advice that I can give you on this topic before it's too late: "O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones." (p. 36)

Defending oneself and one's family from these existential threats posed by the West, in particular through the evils of secular education, is an exceptionally important aspect of grooming the ideology of IS in possible recruits.

**The unique nature of IS.** Dabiq argues that not only is the West incompatible for faithful Muslims, but that the nature of IS speaks to its supposed pioneering, or unique nature within the context of historical nation-states. It is this modern iteration of an attempted Khilafah that IS describes as wholly unique, unlike any attempted state before it, appealing once more to the historical context of the MENA region. As an example, the issue turns to IS's expansion into Syrian lands through Iraq ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

Were any of them [previous empires] established by the emigration of poor strangers from the East and the West who then gathered in an alien land of war and pledged allegiance to an "unknown" man, in spite of the political, economic, military, media, and intelligence war waged by the nations of the world against its religion, its state, and its hijrah? And in spite of the fact that they did not have any common "nationality,"<sup>13</sup> ethnicity, language, or worldly interests, nor did they have any prior acquaintance! (p. 5)

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<sup>13</sup> Again, the quotation marks here are used by Dabiq – likely to question the validity of the notion of nationality, calling into question how any person can have a national identity when they rightfully belong to the Khilafah



Indeed, IS's very existence seems near improbable - for a sectarian militant organization preaching perhaps the most extreme and narrow interpretation of an already widely-misunderstood religion, Dabiq argues that the rise of IS to prominence is both unique and impressive. The group is not exclusive to any ethnicity or language limitations (although gender parameters exist for IS inhabitants), and it manages to recruit thousands of people in spite of the extremely dangerous geopolitical situation and societal suicide that comes with pledging bay'ah to al-Baghdadi. As "A Call to Hijrah" (2014) articulates, "This phenomenon is something that has never occurred in human history, except in the case of the Islamic State! And nothing like it will ever occur thereafter except in relation to it; and Allah knows best" (p. 5). Regardless of its political claims it is impossible to deny the uniqueness of IS.

This state would be further supported by its citizens, who view themselves as modern day slaves. Dabiq bemoans "work, employment, hours, and wages" as forms of "subjugation to kafir<sup>14</sup> masters" ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014, p. 29). Indeed, a hadith from ibn-Hanbal confirms that the noblest form of income for an IS member is *ghanimah*, or wealth taken by force from an enemy during war ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

It is the income of the *ghānimīn* (earners of *ghanimah*), which was made permissible for them upon the tongue of the Sharī'ah. This income was praised in the Qur'ān more so than any other was. Its people were also praised in a manner that no other people were praised. For this reason, Allah chose this income for the best of His creation and the seal of His prophets, who said, 'I was sent with the sword before the Hour so that Allah would be worshipped alone without a partner. And my provision was placed for me in the shade of my spear. (p. 29)

This rhetoric allows IS to situate itself as liberator of slaves, that can reap fiscal rewards under the nomenclature of *ghanimah*. The issue elaborates on the role of *ghanimah* in liberating the ideologue ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

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<sup>14</sup> Translating to "Concealer of truth," Kafir is often used in conjunction with mushrikin.

This honorable provision helps one escape slavery and dedicate his life truly towards his Master through worship, jihād, and study of the religion. Whereas dedication of one's life towards employment, if the employer is a kāfir, only leads to humiliation that could possibly over time lead to concessions followed by an inferiority complex composed of [sic] kufr. (p. 30)

This drive to be liberated is a manifestation of the desire to achieve hijrah for this pioneering, unique nation state. The great emphasis on what sets IS apart from other terrorist organizations serves as a foundational argument of logos. Readers of Dabiq could be attracted to hijrah if they believe the narrative pushed by IS – that there is something different, credible, and special about this organization. Dabiq's call-to-action for those disillusioned by Western, and more specifically U.S. imperialism frames IS as an entirely new response to state-building, implying its global caliphate lacks corruption and/or problematic history, such as the Western powers interfering in the MENA. This lends to the credibility and legitimacy of IS as a nation-state. By appealing to the emotional impulses of readers with criticisms of the West, Dabiq highlights either/or arguments, which encourage dissonance in the residents of Western nations.

*The 'remaining' Islamic State.* Most of this issue is dedicated to justifying IS's existence as a legitimate nation-state. In bemoaning the failure to remove French military intervention in Syria pre-Paris attacks, IS accuses France of being afraid of the 'n-word' – negotiate ("Just Terror," 2015, p. 49). Indeed, a common platitude of Western nations is the refusal to negotiate with terrorists, regardless of the context. IS claims that France's refusal to negotiate with it is a microcosm of the collective rejection of IS's statehood by the majority of the world. In light of this, the Caliph al-Baghdadi gave a speech arguing the formation of a true ideological geopolitical state. The address is described in glowing admiration ("Just Terror," 2015):

His words touched the depths of the hearts, reminding them of Allah's promise to His believers and keeping them firm for years to come. The Islamic State would remain, despite the crusaders, the tawaghit, the tribal and factional sahwat, the Rafidah, the Peshmerga, and the palace scholars (p. 18).

The recurring phrase of al-Baghdadi's speech was "The Islamic State is baqiyah (remaining)" ("Just Terror," 2015, p. 18). In Baghdadi's words ("Just Terror," 2015):

The Islamic State is bāqiyah (remaining). It is bāqiyah because it was built from the corpses of the shuhadā' (sacrifices) and it was watered with its blood... It is bāqiyah because the success granted by Allah in this jihād is clearer than the sun in the middle of the sky... It is bāqiyah by the truthfulness of the leaders who sacrificed its blood and the truthfulness of the soldiers who raised it with its forearms; we consider them such, and Allah is its judge. It is bāqiyah because it united the mujāhidīn and is the refuge of the oppressed. It is bāqiyah because Islam has begun to rise and climb, the dark cloud has begun to scatter, and kafir has begun to be defeated and exposed. It is bāqiyah because it is the supplication of the oppressed, the tear of the bereaved, the cry of the prisoner, and the hope of the orphan. It is bāqiyah... because every treacherous and cowardly person of desire and heresy began to slander and defame it; so we became certain of the truthfulness of the goal and correctness of the path. It is bāqiyah because we are upon certainty that Allah will not break the hearts of the oppressed [sic] and He will not let the oppressive people rejoice over such a defeat. It is bāqiyah because Allah promised. (p. 17-8)

In a similar style to Barack Obama's "Yes we can," or Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream," al-Baghdadi's rhetorical strategy of repeating "The Islamic State is baqiyah" has become a rallying cry for supporters, especially when confronted with doubt about the legitimacy and longevity of the IS "state."

To legitimize its remaining state, the authors of Dabiq turn to John Cantlie, the former photographer for James Foley, who was also kidnapped by IS. Issue six featured his article concerning IS's minting of gold dinars, as he attempted to justify this as a severe economic alternative to the Western hegemony over global finances. In issue eight Cantlie penned another article describing IS as a legitimate state, which allegedly made headlines in Western Media outlets, mocking Cantlie and calling the work terrorist propaganda. Building on his previous work, Cantlie argues that this perception has begun to change ("Just Terror," 2015):

15 months after the declaration of the Caliphate, the US-led campaign against it is more diffused than ever, and there are many now in the West who are conceding that the Islamic State is a country that is here to stay. (p. 47)

This shift in legitimacy is primarily supported by the alleged stability of the state IS has constructed. This notion of security is centered around strict political and religious values as adopted by the Khilafah, where all citizens live under Shari'ah Law, practice IS's specific form of Sunni Islam, and are welcomed into the Qurayshi (the Prophet Muhammad's) tribe. Cantlie explains ("Just Terror," 2015) that this deviates greatly from most MENA nations, and is a key component in the success of IS:

It's precisely for reasons like this that the Islamic State has arisen so fast and in such a short space of time. There is only one sect here, Sunni Islam, and the Caliph can only be from one tribe, Quraysh. Here in the Caliphate, there is no room for pluralism. (p. 48)

Forging a singular national identity is a stark contrast to most other states in the MENA region, one of the most culturally diverse parts of the world. In fact, the terrorist group uses the cultural, political, and social fractions of other countries to argue that it is more stable. In Dabiq's words, "many Syrian businessmen see ISIL as the only option when compared to the anarchy that prevails in areas controlled by other rebels, including Western-backed groups" ("Just Terror," 2015, p. 48). Beyond economic appeal, its government structure, services such as healthcare, and large military, are other justifications for the IS state. This is an effective rhetorical strategy, as it furthers the either/or narrative of IS's statehood. The nature of its governance is in contradiction to the West's definition of the group as a terrorist organization; hence, either IS's organization is not as elaborate as it portrays to be and the Western definition is fair, or the West/U.S. fails to acknowledge the comprehensiveness of the 'remaining' state that is IS.

There has been little to no acknowledgment of IS's attempted statehood by the West—discourse from Western nations almost exclusively refer to it as a terrorist organization. Brigadier General Richard Magnum, at the Georgia Caucasus Strategic Studies Institute,

published a paper quoted by Dabiq (“Just Terror,” 2015); in it he made a case for the U.S.

treating IS like a state. Magnum argues (“Just Terror,” 2015):

It is a State and if the West wants to defeat it, it must accept either: 1) The Islamic State is enough of a threat to world or regional peace that the West is willing to go to war with it, or 2) The costs of a war are too great and the West must plan to contain the Islamic State and ultimately negotiate with it as a sovereign State. (p. 49)

In admitting the legitimacy of IS as a ‘remaining’ nation-state is to legitimize the threat it poses to global order. As such, Western rhetoric seeks to de-legitimize IS’s organization by describing it as nothing more than hyperbolic terrorists, not a group which can provide a realistic future for potential recruits. By once again appealing to the ethos, or credibility of the terrorist group, Dabiq emphasizes its uniqueness.

IS focuses heavily on the title of the state. This is an attempt to solidify its regional power as the status quo, as opposed to a flash-in-the-pan terrorist group that disappears after a period of dominance and attention. In speaking to this notion, Cantlie elaborates (“Just Terror,” 2015):

It is the requirement of the American government and its allies to verbally belittle the Islamic State in public comments by referring to it as just a terrorist “organization” ... if it’s just an “organization” and the soldiers who fight for it just terrorists, this gives the public a hook on which to hang its hat. People understand the words “terrorists” or “jihadists” and will largely support any military action against them. But it loses its urgency when you’re fighting soldiers from a state. It just doesn’t conjure up the same images of extremely imminent danger for a politician’s speechwriter. Fighting mere terrorists is one thing, fighting a country, even if that country takes pride in its terrorist tactics, is quite another. But to concede that the Islamic State is indeed a state in any spoken comment would be an admission of its victory that no political leader is currently prepared to make. So they deliberately continue to call them the “so called” Islamic State, ISIL, IS, ISIS, Daesh and whatever the next nom de jour is in a move to show: “Pah. Fiddlesticks! We don’t even know what its name is. We’ve got this in hand”. (p. 48-9)

This harkens to instances of IS describing terms like nation, nationalism, and Saudi Arabia in quotation marks – Dabiq seeks to redefine the meaning of select terms. By effectively co-opting the term nation within the historical context of its claim to a global Khilafah, Dabiq uses the rhetoric of statehood to counter the Western label of jihadists.

As the West continues to debate whether or not IS is a state, Cantlie sees two probable scenarios unfolding: IS expands until it runs into military and/or economic limitations, consolidates its territory and forms a sort of Caliphate-Empire or the provocations of bombings, knife attacks, and shootings eventually encourage a boots-on-the-ground front by a Western nation resulting in the final battle in Dabiq (“Just Terror,” 2015). An attack on the scale of 9/11, or larger, is what it would likely take to provoke this sort of all-out-war, however.

Cantlie, however, speculates that a nation may do so without this level of provocation: “American “hawks” may very well come to Dabiq on its own without the Islamic State needing to blow up any dirty bombs in Manhattan” (“Just Terror,” 2015, p. 50). Indeed, this argument serves to further illustrate Western foreign policy as hypocritical and shortsighted (“Just Terror,” 2015):

People in the West are impatient and demand results, and they’re not coming. Like Vietnam, the war against the Islamic State looks like it’s turning into a grinding war of attrition to try and reduce the enemy’s numbers without any clear goals set along the way. (p. 50)

This plays into the either/or narrative Dabiq heavily relies on. IS’s ideology seeks to legitimize its state by offering “those living under its rule better governance in some respects than they received from the state before it took over. Corruption is far less prevalent, and justice, albeit brutal, is swift and more evenly applied” (“Just Terror,” 2015, p. 50). The Islamic State provides readers a serious, anti-Western alternative to statehood in the MENA region – one which will, in Baghdadi’s words, remain.

**A global economic alternative.** A looming problem for this ‘remaining’ IS if its attempts at building and expanding a legitimate state are successful, is a glaring economic one; a nation-state that has acquired territory largely through opportune occupation and violence will likely struggle finding stable financial partners. As such, Dabiq seeks to solve this problem, mainly

through the minting of gold dinars and its resulting impact. The article about this subject is allegedly written by Cantlie . The context of the narrators of these pieces (Foley earlier and Cantlie here) operates as a compelling rhetorical strategy for sympathizers, in that both are from Western cultures— one generally will not find such intense criticisms of imperialism and capitalism in Western media outlets. Thus, the authors’ identities as U.K. (Cantlie) and U.S. (Foley) nationals plays an important role as regards criticisms of the West, as well as demonstrating the power the Khilafah holds in transforming individuals’ thoughts and attitudes.

Returning to the economic imperative, the choice of gold as the official currency of IS is both a traditional and practical one. Within a historical context, gold dinars and silver dirhams were the currency of the Islamic Golden Age. The Umayyad Empire, based in Damascus, Syria, began using the dinar as early as 696 CE. While this once more invokes historical references to construct appeals to logic, credibility, and nostalgia for the Caliphates of old, gold dinars also serve a multitude of practical purposes for IS (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

There is a finite amount, so it will never lose its value, banks can’t just print more of it when they choose, and it is worth what the market says it is, not what banks dictate. It is durable, you can exchange it for goods, and it’s worth as much or more today as it was thousands of years ago. Now that’s real money. It’s amazing to think that a lump of gold that may have been used for trade thousands of years ago is still in circulation. It may have been melted down and be part of a bullion bar or it may be worn around someone’s neck, but it’s still around. Try that with a piece of paper. (p. 59)

The importance of currency speaks beyond current fiscal stability. The emphasis on minting gold dinars is as much about establishing economic viability for IS as it is subverting standard systems of global trade. This issue is particularly critical of the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944, in which the “world’s currencies were pinned to the [U.S.] dollar,” and the resulting 1971 measure undertaken by President Nixon canceled the direct convertibility of dollars to gold (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” p. 60). It was following this cancellation by Nixon that the Saudi state

was able to step in as an ally of the U.S. and replace gold with oil. Indeed, the importance of gold is enormous; Dabiq claims there is a correlation between when the U.S. got involved in the Syrian Civil War and when the terror group began encroaching on oil fields in MENA (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

America would start wars and kill hundreds of thousands of people to protect the value of the dollar amongst other economic interests. This was made obvious when the US and its allies sat back and watched while As[s]ad slaughtered more than 200,000 of the people of Syria. However, as soon as the Islamic State moved towards the oil fields of Iraq and Arabia, America immediately got involved. (p. 61)

The approach to minting dinars and the criticism of the U.S. economic indulgence of oil are deeply tied to IS’s ultimate goal—the destruction of the global economic status quo to promote currency and institutions that favor it. As IS seeks a stable currency following the destruction of the current political economy, its provocation is focused on doing more than wreck the economies of Western nations (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

It’s no coincidence and a smart way of hitting America where it hurts, so the US has to rely more on its own supply. In a panic to stop the situation from getting worse, America has invested billions into its own oil and gas drilling programs, making them now the largest oil producer in the world at 11 million barrels per day and entering into an oil price war with its Saudi friends. So suddenly the market is flooded with cheap oil that everyone can now buy with its increasingly worthless US dollars. You don’t have to be a financial expert to see where it’s all headed. Wars, economic implosion, chronic deflation and, eventually, a new global financial system that will emerge from the ashes. (p. 61)

Here Dabiq constructs a narrative in which we are nearing the end of the economic hegemony capitalism has enjoyed around the globe, particularly since World War Two. The end of this is signified by the impending apocalyptic battle in Dabiq, which will result in the creation of a new Khilafah. As such, Dabiq points out to its readers that the beginning of a new economic order is soon upon the world, with a new global currency system (dinars)—logically encouraging anti-capitalist audiences to adhere to the organization. Dabiq (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015) furthers:



The US Federal Reserve is now printing over \$1 trillion per year in “Quantitative Easing” in a desperate effort to stave off deflation and print its way out of collapse. They may run out of paper in its efforts, but it still won’t work. The dollar’s time is now coming to a close like every other fiat currency before it, and despite the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people to postpone it, history shows it’s inevitable. And for the first time ever, all the world’s currencies are also fiat currencies backed by absolutely nothing. When the collapse comes, it will be shattering... (p. 62)

To the sympathizer, joining IS is simply the next logical step to securing fiscal stability.

Dabiq presents the vision of both an ideal IS participant/citizen and currency for the Khilafah. The destruction of the global economic status quo and implementation of a stable gold dinar is important; as a result the greater impact is an overall implosion of the West—fiscally, politically, and socially.

**Sectarian conflict over online jihadist scholars.** Dabiq spends time memorializing two prominent online scholars of its ideology. IS has relied on a tool of radicalization used by many other terrorist groups in the last few decades, the internet. This is a well-noted concern in the field of radicalization and terrorism studies (Archetti, 2012). While Western academics have been critical of online scholars posturing as Islamic historians, Saudi Arabia has gone a step further to try and discredit them. For example, in January 2016 the country allegedly executed two online jihadist scholars, Abū Jandal al-Azdi and Abdul-‘Azīz at-Tuwayli; at-Tuwayli’s true identity (and death) has yet to be confirmed, but al-Azdi is a prominent former al-Qa’idah editor (Wagemakers, 2011).

Combining religious university experience with internet-savviness, al-Azdi rose to prominence in his attempts to preach to radical Saudi Islamists. al-Azdi and at-Tuwayli both relied heavily on the works of Wahhab, creating a troublesome scenario for Saudi Arabia. This is in part why modern day Sunni Muslims in Saudi Arabia prefer to distance themselves from the term Wahhabism, to avoid being conflated with terrorist groups such as IS. Considering the

historical influence Saudi Arabia has had on the development of Islam in the MENA region, Dabiq uses the narratives of al-Azdi and at-Tuwayli to further highlight the distinctions between IS and Saudi Arabia's interpretation of Islam.

After proudly displaying a history of killing deviant scholars, IS justifies these actions in light of the executions by the Saudi government: "Indeed, it was already obligatory to spill the blood of these palace scholars, for they had apostatized years ago, defending and supporting the taghut in the war against Islam. However, the reason to kill them now is even greater" ("The Rafidah," 2016, p. 8) This—a sacrifice through violence—offers a path to the Hereafter even if one cannot migrate to the proposed Khilafah. Through online jihadi scholars, Dabiq offers this alternative ideal—for sympathizers to attack apostates and non-believers, especially in the West ("The Rafidah," 2016).

Saudi Arabia's strong economic relationship with Western nations, especially the U.S., makes the fight over ideological scholars an important one for IS. Elaborating on Saudi Arabia's execution of online jihadist activists, Dabiq levies a heavy criticism ("The Rafidah," 2016) of the Grand Mufti of the country:

Hiding behind claims of being "Sunnī," "Hanbalī," "Salafī," and especially descendants and students of Muhammad Ibn 'Abdīl-Wahhāb, they are truly nothing more than slaves of tāghūt, waging war against the mujāhidīn in order to maintain the status quo. It was Ibn 'Abdīl-Wahhāb who mentioned among the ten greatest nullifiers of Islam, "Eighth: Backing the mushrikīn and aiding them against the Muslims." (p. 7)

Thus, IS and Saudi Arabia effectively are engaged in a struggle over the legacy of Hanbali, Salafi, and Wahhabi scholars, with violence as a preferred method of winning this battle. In fact, IS claims that it was already obligatory to spill the blood of these scholars, who they view as stemming from the royal Sa'ud family's corruption, but "the reason to kill them now is even greater" ("The Rafidah," 2016, p. 9). This sectarian conflict provides an in-depth example of

how similar interpretations of Islam, such as Wahhabism, still have massive distinctions, which makes IS's ideology unique. By linking the ways in which Saudi Arabia invalidates the true iteration of Islam, largely through its relationship with the West, Dabiq provides appeals to logos and ethos for sympathizers to its cause.

Dabiq utilizes a variety of political claims in order to encourage action amongst its sympathizers. The magazine urges quick action through migration and submission to authority (religious and political), while also leveling foreign policy criticism at U.S. and other Western interventionists. In rejecting the credibility of the West, Dabiq also legitimizes the ethos of its institution by describing how IS is unique and 'remaining,' which offers a real economic alternative through the minting of gold dinars. The magazine additionally draws a line in the metaphorical sand with Saudi Arabia and claims to Wahhabi/Salafi Jihadist online scholars. Ultimately, Dabiq constructs arguments around political claims for potential recruits to adopt as apart of the larger IS ideology.

### **Religious Appeals**

Through the utilization of al-Baghdadi as both "political and religious leadership equally – is correct," as well as conflicts with Saudi Arabia over online scholars, Dabiq highlights that often political claims and religious appeals overlap ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014, p. 23). The same is true for terrorist actions – often the political claims of IS ultimately result in terrorism. However, these sections were chosen as identifiers of the core framing of each argument/theme. The following section will describe arguments which rely most heavily on religious appeals.

The cover of the third issue of Dabiq, which was released in September 2014, features a low camera shot next to the wheel of a truck, taking up the top-left corner. Ahead of the truck are five white Toyotas in a sort of fleet in what appears to be the desert. Each pickup has a number

of hooded men riding in the back, and superimposed into the dirt sand is the title, “a call to Hijrah,” or migration to the holy lands (“A Call to Hijrah,” 2014). This image is reminiscent of the rhetorical choices invoking fire in the last issue, speaking to audiences who feel a sense of urgency to pledge bay’ah to al-Baghdadi.

**Enlightenment through hijrah.** Per Dabiq, the hijrah to Sham is what encourages recruits to head to Syria and join the ranks of IS. Historically, following an assassination attempt, the Prophet Muhammad, with his companion Abu Bakr left Mecca for Medina in what was described as the first hijrah (Euben & Zaman, 2009). In invoking this term, Dabiq harkens to a critical moment in the history of Islam, when the Prophet noted the importance of migration to holy lands. To make this trip is to adhere to the “millah of Ibrahim,” as found in the works of ibn-Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali School which influenced much of Salafism<sup>15</sup> (“A Call to Hijrah,” 2014, p. 25). A similar passage by the equally seminal Ibn Taymiyya suggests that there is hijrah after hijrah, or that upon meeting in Raqqa, mujahideen must seek to expand their control to the rightful holy lands, reiterating similar rhetoric from issue one. Prospective IS fighters must strive to ‘migrate,’ or remove mushrikin from their declared Khilafah, thus following the initial, literal migration of Prophet Muhammad (“A Call to Hijrah,” 2014). The issue then focuses on explaining to the audience the benefits of doing hijrah, as well as emphasizing the consequences of failure. The reference to Islamic scholars of the Hanbali school provides an appeal to ethos that speaks to the historicity in selecting the term hijrah to justify recruits migrating to IS loci of control. This emphasis on credibility demonstrates Dabiq’s attempts at legitimizing its hierarchical structures with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the new Caliph.

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 33 for context

Mere pages after stills of execution by firing range, the image of a somewhat cloudy sky through which an airplane is emerging captures the reader's eye. Featuring the headline, "Hijrah and forgiveness," is where the issue begins to extol the virtues of hijrah. Particularly, the notion that to pledge allegiance to Allah is to be forgiven of all wrongdoings. Next to the airplane features a brief Hadith from 'Amr ibn al-'As, who led the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 640 CE<sup>16</sup> ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014):

'Amr approaches the Prophet after receiving the love of Islam, and will pledge allegiance to Allah upon one stipulation, that he be forgiven, to which Muhammad responded; "Are you not aware that Islam wipes out all previous sins? And that hijrah wipes out all previous sins?" (p. 23)

All those who say bay'ah to Allah are forgiven of past transgressions, as well as any future wrongdoings, so long as they remain on the path. The forgiveness offered by Allah should alleviate self-doubt of purpose, and cause the individual to reject the centrality of ego. Indeed, "a fulfilled life comes through fulfilled hijrah" ("A Call to Hijrah," p. 34). As in issue one, the authors of Dabiq argue that hijrah should next propel them to destabilizing taghut, or other leaders/idols in the area, particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Chechnya, Algeria, Somalia, and Waziristan.

The benefits to following the enlightening path of hijrah are made exceptionally clear; however, the issue also speaks of the dangers in failing to undergo migration. Consider the following example ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014) in which the authors of this text appear to be speaking directly to the audience:

So abandoning hijrah- the path to jihad- is a dangerous matter. In effect, one is thereby deserting jihad and willingly accepting his tragic condition of being a hypocritical spectator. He lives in the West amongst the kuffar [sic] for years, spends hours on the internet, reads news and posts on forums, only to be encompassed by the verse... ( p. 25)

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<sup>16</sup> This expansion into Egypt resulted in the overthrowing of the Byzantine empire by the Rashidun Caliphate (Butler, 1902).

As reported by government and journalistic sources, the most susceptible demographic for radicalization are 20-30-year-old “lone wolf” males who prefer engaging in online networked rhetorics to more social lives (CSNFL, 2016; Greenberg, 2016; Yourish & Lee, 2016).

Considering the previously cited savviness and self-awareness of IS’s social media presence<sup>17</sup>, this is an example of Dabiq appealing directly to this demographic’s insecurities. Building on previous themes from the first issue, “The Return of Khilafah,” (2014), of creating dissonance and urgency in its readers, Dabiq describes those most vulnerable to radicalization as hypocrites sitting out the most important battles for Allah on the sideline, unless they commit hijrah and continue along the path to jihad. This operates as an appeal to the reader’s emotion, or pathos – if the reader fits the description of hypocrites living in the West, living amongst the mushrikin, they should then feel a desire to address this apostasy.

In a surprising turn, Dabiq speaks practically to readers in an excerpt from an article that offers advice for those embarking on hijrah - “Keep in mind that the Khilāfah is a state whose inhabitants and soldiers are human beings. They are not infallible angels. You may see things that need improvement and that are being improved” (A Call to Hijrah,” 2014, p. 33). After dedicating previous issues (and themes in future issues) entirely to the necessity of a strict adherence to the path of IS, offering this qualifier for those seeking migration is important to note. This calls into question the extent to which IS believes in the strict adherence of the path. Are previous themes of the millah of Ibrahim hyperbole, or is this just a rhetorical strategy used by Dabiq to “get its foot in the door” with potential recruits, so to speak? Perhaps this is an

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<sup>17</sup> See chapter II, “Digital Presence” section

extension to those "lone wolfs," like Mateen, to make the enlightenment of hijrah appear more accessible. Dabiq ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014) concludes:

You may find mistakes that need fixing. You may find some of your brothers with traits that need mending. But remember that the Khilāfah is at war with numerous kāfir states and its allies, and this is something that requires the allotment of many resources. So be patient. (p. 34)

In reinforcing this idea that new members of IS will see flaws within the organization is an interesting rhetorical strategy – one that offers the possibility for rectifying previous character flaws. Despite an individual's past mistakes, they now operate as a part of a larger community that is constantly working towards hijrah, so long as individuals "know that hijrah is a great deed but it is not a license to view yourself better than others" ("A Call to Hijrah," 2014, p. 34).

**The rejecters of "true" Islam.** The 13<sup>th</sup> issue quotes Ibn Taymiyya's harsh words for Ibn Saba's role in deviating from the "true" version of Islam: "He strived to spread falsehood aiming to corrupt the religion, but was unable to do so. However, some discord and strife occurred amongst the Muslims" ("The Rafidah," 2016, p. 33). Ibn Taymiyya plays an enormous role in the development of the avowed religious ideology of IS<sup>18</sup>. Dabiq centers this version of Islam around this critical moment in Islamic history, as it is this that allows IS to cast all deviants from the path, no matter how small, as rejecters. Indeed, many, if not all forms of Islamic apostasy, have evolved from this sectarian split led by Saba - "Ibn Saba ultimately led to the forming of the sect known as the Rāfidah; the sect, like all deviant sects, would change over time, innovating more and more heresies, kafir, and wickedness" ("The Rafidah," 2016, p. 34). Hence, a reader of Dabiq should not listen to contradictory narratives from different sects of Islam they may be exposed to, outside the established Khilafah.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter IV, Roots of Wahhabism/Salafism

In its words, IS calls the false prophet the *Dajjal*, or Antichrist, who will appear before the real Messiah for corrupting those who deviate from Islam. Adding to the sense of urgency built up in previous issues, Dabiq describes (“The Rafidah,” 2016) this as one of the most important issues for Muslims:

The Rāfidah await the Jewish Dajjāl, who they plot to support alongside the Jews against the Muslims. Thus, as the signs of the Hour approach, a Muslim should ignore the confusion spread by the callers to Hellfire and instead – while performing jihād – reflect upon the condition of the Rāfidah, those who imitate them, and those who defend them, and thereafter ask Allah to keep his heart firm upon Islam, protect him from the evil of the Dajjāl and all other fitnah, and enlighten his heart with truth, until he meets Allah while He is pleased with him (p. 45)

Through emphasizing hyperbolic claims about the nearing apocalyptic battle between the West and Islam, IS constructs strong pathos appeals for its audience—since the final hour of this iteration of society is near, one has to act on the growing passion and urgency and pledge to the righteous side. An earnest reader would be wise to reject the so-called rejecters, and acknowledge IS as the absolute ideology.

**How to Break the Cross.** The fifteenth issue of this magazine, released in July 2016, does without subtlety or context for its title and cover page; a soldier on a church roof replacing the cross with an IS flag. The terror group’s foundational argument in its final issue of Dabiq is anti-Christianity and the superiority of IS’s religious symbolism. “Breaking the Cross (2016) speaks to ideas regarding the dismantling of Western cultural, religious, political, economic and social hegemony over the world. These are concentrated in two ideass: why they hate and fight us, and the spirituality of Islam.

Having rhetorically situated the last issue of Dabiq around justifications for hating and fighting the West, “Breaking the Cross” (2016) then describes how to ‘break,’ or move away from one’s belief system, Christianity. In an anonymous article penned by an IS member who



converted from Christianity and resided in Finland is included to offer an example of the process of breaking the Christian faith to convert to Islam.

“How I came to Islam,” is allegedly written by a former Finnish citizen, who urges others to use her story as motivation to do the same (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 36). The author describes her upbringing in Finland as being surrounded by lazy Christians, who did not strictly practice the faith but still taught basics of it to youth. This evidently confused the author, especially “ideas such as God being three people, yet He was also killed on a cross, and He had a human mother” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 37). Later, secular teachings such as evolution, the Big Bang Theory, contradicted this further and caused more confusion for the author. After marrying, having two children, and promptly divorcing a non-practicing Muslim man, the author then describes wanting to learn more about Islam to teach her children. After finally procuring a copy of the Qu’ran, which according to her is difficult due to discrimination in Finland, she describes herself as finally happy and eventually moves to the Khilafah in Raqqa – “I can’t even describe the feeling of when you finally cross that border and enter the lands of the Caliphate. It is such a blessing from Allah” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 38).

Exposure to its interpretation of Islam, which offers purpose and purity to those who feel distraught and disgusted by the West (or any non-IS state), becomes a sort of an alternate reality, or an oppositional global order, which has been unjustly oppressed. The author of the piece (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) justifies this perception and the action that comes from embracing this belief:

Whatever hardship you may face on that path will be worth it. In the end, you’ll be so happy you found the truth, because what you’re going to gain after embracing Islam is better than anything you might lose or sacrifice. (p. 39)

This notion of embracing Islam, meaning the loss or sacrifice of other aspects of life, is what IS refers to as breaking the cross. IS presents an absolute dichotomy—one can exist in the false, non-Muslim lands, not adhere to the millah, and be complicit in the attempted hijacking of the return of the Messiah, or break Western practice and embrace the correct path presented by IS. There is no middle ground.

Dabiq offers tools to the readers to remove Christianity from their belief system. For example, an in-depth explanation of why a Muslim should say “Allah” instead of “God” despite them having similar and arguably the same meaning (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016):

While ‘god’ has become an English word that simply means ‘something worshiped,’ it is incorrect to use ‘God’ as the proper name for the Creator... one should adhere to referring to the Lord by His actual name, with which He was comparatively referred to by any of the Semitic prophets – like Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. And that name in Arabic – the only preserved Semitic language – is ‘Allah,’ which comes from the word ‘ilah,’ meaning ‘the one who deserves to be worshiped.’ (p. 50)

This argument is based on the belief of the textual accuracy of the Qu’ran as opposed to the Bible. Dabiq (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) articulates:

The biblical scribes were moved by its ignorance and arrogance to write things that a knowledgeable person’s intellect simply cannot accept, especially one who claims to believe in the Wise and All-Knowing Lord. These contradictions are apparent on the very first pages of the forged Torah<sup>19</sup>. (p. 50)

The article goes on to describe the story of Adam and Eve from the Book of Genesis, in which Adam is instructed by God that whoever eats an apple from the Tree of Wisdom in the Garden of Eden shall die. However, Dabiq points out the apparent “contradiction” – that Satan, the snake who tempts Adam and Eve into eating the fruit because it will make them like God, was right

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<sup>19</sup> Here, Dabiq argues that the Bible is a falsely expanded upon iteration of the Jewish Torah by describing it as ‘forged.’

according to Genesis. Indeed, Adam and Eve did not immediately die, demonstrating that per the Bible, Satan was correct and God lied. Dabiq (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) articulates further:

Certainly, Satan is the liar, but the lying scribes of the Jews have sided with Satan and agreed with him in the following passages, in that after Adam and his wife ate from the tree, they did not die, but it is instead found, “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever’” (Genesis 3:22). The mention of the tree of eternal life shows that Adam was already a mortal according to the Bible, thus denying anyone’s interpretation that eating from the tree of knowledge made him a mortal, thus only symbolically “dying” that very day. (p. 51)

In demonstrating the immediate falsehoods of the Bible, Dabiq seeks to metaphorically ‘break the cross’ by invalidating Christianity’s central text, allowing its readers to remove the false faith from their belief system.

Dabiq directs readers to accept the transliterations that preserve Semitic languages, such as Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic, invalidating English translations as problematic and untrue. These more accurate texts are described as the tools needed to convert to Islam for those living in the West (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016). Beyond language, there are symbolic differences in reading the Arabic versions of the Qu’ran, instead of reading the words of foreigners, and possibly non-believers; a true ideologue reads in the language of the Prophet Muhammad, which is classical Arabic. “Breaking the Cross” (2016) details that the name of Allah plays a role in establishing the impotence of Arabic:

As such, one should adhere to referring to the Lord by His actual name, with which He was comparatively referred to by any of the Semitic prophets – like Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. And that name in Arabic – the only preserved Semitic language – is الله” Allah,” which comes from the word إله” ilah,” meaning “the one who deserves to be worshiped.” (p. 52)

This allows Dabiq to encourage its audience to go beyond English translations and to learn Arabic, bringing them closer to the language of Allah.

This argument for using the term Allah is discussed (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) by highlighting the misguided logic of Christianity’s “God”:

How do they claim to be monotheistic and claim to know Him as being the One and Only, the Merciful, the Just and Wise God yet they attribute to Him a mother, a son, a partner, and the Trinity, believe He is unable to forgive mankind for its “original sin” except by having one of His most beloved men unjustly bear its burdens and be crucified on its behalf, and declare that the laws He legislates are cruel, barbaric, and unfit for modern times? (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 7)

The association of “God” with Christianity, projected to all forms of idolatry for the perceived creator, is how Dabiq furthers the either/or narrative by arguing that the term itself is an oxymoron. This additionally speaks to the importance of language in Dabiq’s rhetorical strategy and an emphasis on Arabic over English. Further, this unlocks an entire new culture and history to readers who begin learning Arabic.

Dabiq argues that Allah is responsible for all things within this culture and history (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016):

Man also has a curiosity that leads him to invent things, by his Lord’s permission. He invented the cart, the automobile, the airplane, the supercomputer, and the hydrogen bomb. These inventions were not the result of a man sitting down on a paper scribbling randomly. Rather, he sat and reflected day after day to invent such constructions. (p. 13)

Additionally, all global political conflicts are foresight from Allah, and the fact that “the denier claims that all this is the result of mere chaos!” neglects the predetermined nature of all things (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 13). Indeed, everything can be traced back to the influence of Allah, not the Christian “God.” This situates the highest of ethos to Islam; while invalidating any credibility of the Christian faith and breaking the cross.

**The spirituality of Islam.** The level of emphasis on religious, political, and social Islam in Dabiq does not underscore one other persuasive appeal for pledging allegiance to IS. The idea of spirituality as intrinsically linked with the practice of Islam is an intriguing strategy that uses

appeals to pathos. For example, a hikmah titled “Contemplate,” featuring a starry mountain range skyline, instructs readers to look inwardly for guidance (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016). Written by a member of IS on the frontlines of northwestern Aleppo in early 2013 (when IS went by Jabhat an-Nusra), this article describes a brief interaction with a cat as an opportunity for reflection (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016):

Suddenly something moved nearby, less than two meters away. I noticed it was a cat, cold like myself. It observed me for a few seconds as I observed it. It appeared to consider whether or not I was an aggressive or compassionate soul, then advanced towards me, leaped on my lap, and began purring. The whole ordeal led me to reflect more. It was a creature, with a soul, able to observe another creature, with a soul, and then determine if the other creature would be welcoming or not, and finally decide to take the risk of intruding upon this other creature’s lap for the sake of comfort and warmth. How great is He who created both of these creatures and facilitated for them a means of communication not fathomable by either of them! It was a moment of reflection like no other, a blessing from Allah. (p. 9)

This narrative serves as an example for Dabiq’s audience to find Allah in their casual, daily lives. A random encounter with an animal can be interpreted as a sign from Allah to pledge allegiance to the faith. One of the earliest scholars of Islam and a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, Ibn Abbas, is quoted as saying that (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016,) “an hour of contemplation is better than an hour of prayer” (p. 6). Dabiq elaborates (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) on the notion of purpose and spirituality further:

Man, unlike any other, has a desire for what is far greater than food and spouse. He is moved by happiness and sorrow, love and hate, and a longing for something greater. All of these emotions also serve him in his worship of his Lord. (p. 12-3)

This is perhaps the strongest appeal to pathos present in Dabiq.

Ultimately, Dabiq seeks to present pathos/emotional catharsis through contemplation as one of the rhetorical strategies, to convince sympathizers to join the group. The ideology of IS as manifest in this issue is dependent on the interwoven themes of hatred of Western institutions

and values, an elaboration of the process of breaking the cross of Christianity, and the catharsis of Islamic contemplation and spirituality through ethos, logos, and pathos appeals to Islam.

### **Terrorist Actions**

Politics and religion frequently operate in Dabiq as precursors to encouraging terrorist actions. The foreward of issue six praises Man Haron Monis, who despite being unable migrate to Raqqa, fought crusaders from the inside. Monis murdered two hostages in a chocolate café in Sydney, Australia, to which Dabiq responded: “Any allegations leveled against a person concerning its past are irrelevant as long as they hope for Allah’s mercy and sincerely repent from any previous misguidance” (Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan, 2015, p. 3). Monis is not alone, however; this issue of Dabiq lists five other attacks in Australia, Canada, U.S., and France. As with issue three, Dabiq (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015) critiques Western foreign policy to justify why and how these attacks will continue:

And all that the West will be able to do is to anxiously await the next round of slaughter and then issue the same tired, cliché statements in condemnation of it when it occurs. The Muslims will continue to defy the kāfir war machine, flanking the crusaders on its own streets and bringing the war back to its own soil. (p. 4)

The twelfth issue of Dabiq, released in November 2015, additionally begins by praising an IS attack. The cover features a number of French medical respondents to the November 2015 IS attack in Paris, France huddled around a gurney. A bloody body bag is featured in the foreground. Dabiq states that the assault by “eight men with only assault rifles and explosive belts” on the music venue, The Bataclan, and various cafes, left over a hundred civilians dead and sent the country into a national emergency (“Just Terror,” 2015, p. 2-3). Knife attacks in the U.S., Israel, and Australia are praised as well, as IS reinforces the idea that the West is not its only enemy—it seeks to shatter every mushrikin’s notion of safety and security.

IS believes and advocates for this not from an offensive standpoint, but allegedly a defensive one. The idea of “*Just Terror*” arguably means justifiable and/or terror for justice, as opposed to simply terror. This describes a rhetorically situated narrative of justice (“Just Terror,” 2015):

And so revenge was exacted upon those who felt safe in the cockpits of its jets. These are the deeds of those upon the methodology of the revived Khilafah. They will not let its enemies enjoy rest until enemy blood is spilled in revenge for the religion and the Ummah. (p. 2-3)

This rhetoric is rooted in the historical context of the previously abolished Caliphates. Drone strikes and dropped bombs are not only imperialistic and violent, but the military interests they serve for Western nations are antithetical to the rightful claims IS has to the MENA region. France began conducting airstrikes in Syria in September 2014, and after multiple alleged requests and threats from IS to French officials to halt operations, the terror group finally responded (“Just Terror,” 2015, p. 2). This articulates the terrorist actions as IS as justified, not egregious or barbaric.

**The process of becoming an active ideologue.** An ideologue, or a staunch adherent to a specific ideology, is an apt term to describe the larger category of active members of IS and sympathizers. The second theme of this issue concerns the steps one must take to be an active ideologue. The five essential steps start with hijrah. This is the term, as aforementioned, used to describe migration to the holy lands of Mecca and/or Medina, but within IS’s context, it refers to movement to the lands of its locus of control, namely Raqqa. Step two is jama’ah, or the aforementioned joining of a congregation or community of prayer. Being surrounded by other practicing members of the faith helps one in the process of religious and political action. Third, participants must destabilize *taghut* in the area, which means to rebel and criticize those who idolize anyone other than Allah or the Prophet Muhammad. Step four refers to *tamkin*, which is

only defined as “consolidation” within the context of conquering surrounding territory (“The Return of Khilafah,” 1.37-8). After these four steps are completed, the fifth is achieved—Khilafah, or the Caliphate.

The obtainment of the Khilafah has been the hope of the mujahdeen (plural of mujahidin, or soldier) “since the revival of jihad this century,” in possible relation to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and the resulting imperialistic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here, Dabiq appears to mimic and modify its interpretation of the Five Pillars of Islam. The pillars, faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca are central to the ideology of Islam and are generally agreed upon by most sects of the religion. By resembling but not replicating the traditional pillars, Dabiq strategically appears similar to those with backgrounds in Islam, yet deviates strongly in its third and fourth pillars. Destabilizing regional rivals and consolidating territory are far more politically motivated, and can easily result in acts of terror, as opposed to the pillars of charity or fasting.

The way in which ideologues/followers of IS enact this participation is through a methodology of maximum chaos and targeting of apostates of all backgrounds, particularly in Iraq. Dabiq highlights the unification of sectarian groups in Afghanistan to fight “communists and imperialists,” and how many of these affiliated groups faced an obstacle in the pursuit of the Khilafah – the threat of “nationalism” (“The Return of the Khilafah,” 2014, p. 35). Important to discuss here is that Dabiq frequently cites nationalism as a threat to Islam regardless of the actor – the presence of nationalism anywhere is a threat to the Khilafah. This is likely due to the insistence of Dabiq to refer to Syria as “Sham”<sup>20</sup>, in that the terror organization seeks to de-

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<sup>20</sup> An ancient Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid province, in modern-day Syria, which IS uses to argue for rightful ownership of the territory.



legitimize Western imperialism, which created borders in MENA (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 4). While once again relying on either/or arguments, nationalism is also one of the terms frequently placed in quotation marks to invalidate or undermine the legitimacy of the term. The notion of Syrian nationalism, or any modern-day nation-state promoting this ideology, is innately a paradox; in the eyes of IS, it is the equivalent of being a nationalist for a nation that does not exist. This continues to highlight the dissonance and urgency a reader should feel, especially if they reside in countries with high levels of nationalism. By placing potential recruits in an “us versus them” narrative, Dabiq appeals to their sense of ethos and encourages them to get on the path to being an IS ideologue.

**Advice for IS soldiers.** The bulk of this issue is concerned with a former al-Qa’idah soldier offering advice to those who wish to serve IS in this modern-day iteration of a holy war between Islam and the West. The author, operating under a pseudonym unique to his identification with IS, describes a variety of both presented and suggested values and norms for the group. His list characterizes IS’s activities, goals, resources, and group relations. This advice touches on promoting ideas of sincerity, obedience, and truth to Allah (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

Allah has guaranteed the one who performs jihād in His path, having left his home for no reason other than to perform jihād in His path out of belief in His words, that He would enter him into Jannah or return him back home with what he has attained of reward or ghanīmah. (p. 5)

The advice also extends to preparation for the Hereafter, through prayer, agreeability with brothers, loving Islam, and patience (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

Be agreeable with your brothers in everything that brings you closer to Allah and distances you from disobeying Him. Smile at them a lot, and listen to those who are older than you. If you see them working then work with them, for if you remain sitting while they’re working it’ll arouse bitter feelings. And if your brother is dear to you then be humble towards him. And know that being quick to blame someone is not from justice. (p. 8)

Further, Dabiq argues that affection for others (loved ones and relatives), delusions of grandeur, and selfish cravings, are all detrimental to a good soldier (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

Beware of self-delusion and the love of being praised, especially following a victory against your enemy... In summary, control your desires and be austere with your inner self concerning that which is not permissible for you. And being austere with one’s inner self is to be balanced concerning that which it loves or hates. (p. 8)

The emphasis on respect and adherence to Allah speaks to the dynamics of the group relations present within this issue, where submitting to hierarchies and significant scholars are a frequent trend. Indeed, the scholar al-Wahhab is quoted describing the absolute vital role of this structure (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015):

And I view that jihad is to continue with every imam, whether he is righteous or sinful... and I view that it’s obligatory to listen to and obey the imams of the Muslims, both the righteous and the sinful of them, as long as they do not order you to disobey Allah. (p. 11)

This excerpt is arguably an extension of the qualifier found in issue three, which reminded migrants to not be judgemental if they see others committing sin, as no person is perfect.

Although in this instance, Dabiq argues that both the “righteous and sinful” imams must be obeyed, as long as they “do not order you to disobey Allah (“Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan,” 2015, p. 11). This operates as an ethos appeal to IS’s organization, in that the imams of its faith have the ultimate insight and connection with Allah, and thus are credible interpreters of Islam. Deviating from the advice, as described by the al-Qa’idah turned IS soldier, results in not only the loss of wealth and/or status, but also lasting consequences, which would follow the deviant to the afterlife. As such, Dabiq not only encourages individuals to migrate to the Khilafah, it also describes the personality characteristics a IS ideologue should strive towards.

**Motivation through sacrifice.** Dabiq encourages sacrifices similar to Man Haron Mons and the fighters in Paris who could not join the group in Raqqa. This is what Dabiq refers to as *shuhada* or martyr/martyrdom. A hikmah, or statement of wisdom, featuring the image of a noose with the text, “A word of truth,” explains the connection of martyrdom to resisting the Dajjal: “Amongst these best shuhada is the believer who confronts and stands up to the Dajjal, belying his false claims and warning others against him. The Dajjal therefore kills him” (“The Rafidah,” 2016, p. 20). The core of shuhada is sacrifice, even in the face of death. While this is not a new theme in Dabiq, in this issue a specific example is provided—Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, the perpetrators of the mass shooting that killed 14 in San Bernardino, California, December 2015. Through a detailed account of the couple’s plot, Dabiq offers readers both an example of and motivation for sacrifice.

After writing a FaceBook post proclaiming bay’ah to al-Baghdadi, Farook and Malik abandoned their daughter to commit the shooting. IS praises the deep commitment to sacrifice of the couple: “May Allah accept the sacrifices of our noble brother Syed Rizwan Farook and his blessed wife, accept them among the shuhadā’, and use its deeds as a means to awaken more Muslims in America, Europe, and Australia” (“The Rafidah,” 2016, p. 4). The rhetorical strategy of ‘call-to-action’ appeals to those who then perform “lone-wolf” attacks across the world, especially in the West. For those who cannot commit hijrah for Dabiq gain agency through by sacrificing themselves for the cause of IS.

This call for sacrifice goes beyond those who are a part of the Western ummah, as this call is to those living in the MENA region as well: “May Allah bless all the “lone” knights of the Khilāfah in the Arabian Peninsula and grant them success in its deeds and purity in its hearts” (“The Rafidah,” 2016, p. 8). Dabiq argues that the expansion of the IS caliphate is dependent on

the destabilizing of surrounding territories, making the role of shuhada significant to the creation of a stable empire. This motivation to sacrifice is vital to maintaining the perception of IS's power, especially in light of the steep loss of land controlled by the terror group (Hassan, 2016c). Through acts of violent sacrifice, such as the San Bernardino shooting, and its mention/justification in Dabiq, IS rhetorically appears to be a great threat to Western life.

**Why they hate and fight us.** One of the greatest foci in *Breaking the Cross* is a continuation of a series of articles in Dabiq called “Why we [IS] hate you [the West] and why we fight you” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 2). Through this argument, IS seeks to explicitly situate its purpose and intent in fighting mushrikin and kufir, as they feel misrepresented by Western media outlets. In this issue, the terror group references terror attacks in Orlando, U.S.A.; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Magnanville, Nice, and Normandy; France, and Wurzburg and Ansbach; Germany, which led to the death and injuries of more than 600 “crusaders.” Dabiq (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) describes the responses to these terror attacks as confusing:

One would expect the cross-worshippers and democratic pagans of the West to pause and contemplate the reasons behind the animosity and enmity held by Muslims for Westerners and even take heed and consider repentance by abandoning its infidelity and accepting Islam (p. 4).

The penchant for Western cultures to gravitate towards “hedonistic addictions and heathenish doctrines” has resulted in the enslavement of these groups to false idolatry, which manifests in political and social institutions that influence our way of life (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 4). By identifying the justifications for hating and fighting the enemy, Dabiq constructs emotional and logical counterpoints for potential recruits to the social reality in which they live.

This issue highlights that Western philosophy is dangerous. Critiques of Marxism, Communism, and Capitalism have indeed served as labels to insult Western states and its institutions, but *Breaking the Cross* seeks to debunk ideas of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Durkheim,

Weber, and Freud. The ideas of these philosophers spurred the French and October Revolutions, resulting in “oppressive governments in the West and East that colonized lesser states, autonomous regions, and territories” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 21). This hatred for the work of these philosophers and scholars is due to their critical observations of history on topics like war, religion, and resources. In Dabiq’s words (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016) these apostates:

Taught that man’s creation was the result of pure chaos, that history was the result of conflicts merely over material resources, that religion was the fabrication of simpleminded men, that the family social unit was adopted merely out of convenience, and that sexual intercourse was the ultimate reason behind man’s decisions and actions. (p. 20)

Christianity, the generalized religion of the entire West according to IS, has always been in conflict with Islam. The resulting implications of the work of these philosophers, who are all allegedly products of Christianity, is the “so-called ‘Brave New World,’” which “began legalizing weed, bestiality, trans rights, sodomy, porn, feminism, and other evils” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 21). Due to the perceived barbaric nature of legalizing such “evils,” IS justifies its hatred and calls for violence in the West. This furthers the either/or narrative presented by Dabiq. By offering a multitude of symbols to rebel against, from ideologies to more specific threats such as “porn” and “feminism,” IS allows a wide range of characteristics to represent its ideology. Any iteration of Western philosophy offers the opportunity for IS to label someone as the enemy. Thus, a person with relative exposure to these philosophies has a choice to make—do you accept the avowed ideology, or the suggested values exposed by Dabiq?

June of 2016 saw one of the worst mass shootings in the history of the U.S. carried out by Omar Mateen, killing 49 people at the gay nightclub Pulse in Orlando, Florida. While heaping praise on Mateen, who pledged bay’ah just before the shooting, IS describes the media coverage of the attack: “hate crime, terrorist attack, and senseless violence, and only the first two are

correct” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 30). The group’s refutation of Mateen’s disgusting actions as something sensible is justified through Dabiq’s criticism of the West. Instances such as general insults or representations of the Prophet, burning of Qu’rans, and waging war in the MENA region by Western imperialists serve as the basis of criticism.

Further, U.S. politicians dismiss the criticisms of the country’s foreign policy as allegedly a political tool to “garner as many votes as they can for the next election cycle” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 30). This allows the U.S. government to continue problematic policies in the MENA region without mainstream dissent from its citizenry. But IS argues that this is not the only reason. The attempt to appear in control of one of the most unstable regions of the world is important to the U.S. and most Western nations, as “people know that it’s foolish, but they keep repeating it [foreign policy intervention] regardless because they’re afraid of the consequences of deviating from the script” (“Breaking the Cross, 2016, p. 31). The consequences being the takeover of the world by a global Khilafah. The final issue of Dabiq then launches into a list of specific reasons for hating the West.

*Six reasons to hate us.* Dabiq seeks to more correctly describe the intent of hating “us,” generally referring to the West and all other non-believers, in a brief article with six reasons. In articulating more counterpoints for sympathizers and to rhetorically arm itself, IS characterizes its reasons for hatred. The first and second reasons somewhat overlap: mushrikin are disbelievers who reject the Oneness of Allah, and the secular/liberal Western governments who exert political pressure on countries in the MENA area. In Dabiq’s terms – “You’ve made it your mission to “liberate” Muslim societies; we’ve made it our mission to fight off your influence and protect mankind from your misguided concepts and your deviant way of life” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 32). Third, the atheist fringe of thought in the West, tied in with some of the

aforementioned criticisms of philosophy, is an insult to Allah, who created everything. These insults often include mocking Islam, especially its prophets and leaders like the Prophet Muhammad, Ibrahim, and Moses; this is the fourth reason why IS hates the West. The fifth reason is centered around the alleged war crimes and interventionist policy in the MENA region, such as drone strikes and installations of Western puppet governments. Finally, the occupation of what IS views as rightly the land of Allah and Islam is an important reason for hatred against the West. Indeed (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016):

We hate you for invading our lands and fight you to repel you and drive you out. As long as there is an inch of territory left for us to reclaim, jihad will continue to be a personal obligation on every single Muslim. (p. 31-2)

This article summarized much of the logic that Dabiq uses as justification for its hatred and violence towards the West. Many of these themes have been discussed in previous issues, but this is arguably the most in-depth examination of the problematic nature of all aspects of religion, culture, and government in the non-Islamic world, according to IS. These articles detailing justifications for hating the West offer characteristic traits for sympathizers to adopt as a part of the IS belief system, further solidifying a coherent ideology.

The political claims and religious appeals manifest into terrorist actions, as briefed in each issue with a section from the various provinces (wilayah) of IS. Ranging from “Operations” (“Breaking the Cross,” 2016, p. 40). “Military Operations of the Islamic State” (“Just Terror,” 2015, p. 25), and simply “Islamic State Reports” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014; “Call to Hijrah,” 2014; “Al-Qai’dah of Waziristan,” 2015), these portions of each issue detail various political and terrorist updates for that particular locus of control. “Breaking the Cross” (2016) provides a precursor to its discussion on operations:

As the soldiers of the Caliphate continue waging war on the forces of kufr [sic], we take a glimpse at a number of recent operations conducted by the mujahidin of the Islamic State that have succeeded in expanding the territory of the Caliphate, or terrorizing, massacring, and humiliating the enemies of Allah. These operations are merely a selection of the numerous operations that the Islamic State has conducted on various fronts across many regions over the course of the last few months. (p. 40)

While the majority of these updates concern the expansion of geopolitical control and conflicts at existing Wilayah, they also speak to the “lone wolf” attacks encouraged by Dabiq. “Breaking the Cross” (2016) continues:

Germany – On the 14th of Shawwal, a soldier of the Caliphate – our brother Muhammad Riyad – carried out an attack in response to the Islamic State’s calls to target the citizens of nations participating in the Crusader coalition fighting the Caliphate. He used an axe to hack the kuffar on a train in the city of Wurzburg, injuring a number of them before being killed by German police. (p. 45)

The excerpts from these operation summaries shed light on the terrorist actions of IS sympathizers and ideologues. To a reader finding themselves agreeing with Dabiq, these examples of terror, surrounded by political claims and religious appeals, offer a roadmap for an individual to take action – whether that is migration or violent sacrifice.

To summarize, Chapter V sought to analyze the rhetorical strategies and unearth the ideology of IS as found in Dabiq. Through a close reading of these texts, several key themes and rhetorical strategies emerged. Ideological criticism allowed for the deconstruction of the articles and prominent visuals of the six issues analyzed; in turn offering valuable insights into the ideology of IS as represented in Dabiq and rhetorical strategies used for recruitment.



## **Chapter VI: Answering the Research Questions and Discussion**

Analysis of the six issues of Dabiq unearthed the core themes, strategies, and persuasive appeals of IS. These findings formed the basis for answering the research questions of this study:

RQ1: How does Dabiq rhetorically manifest the ideology of IS online?

RQ2: What rhetorical strategies are used to manifest this ideology and persuade readers of Dabiq to join IS?

This chapter will seek to move beyond themes to the big picture—the ideology—and present the rhetorical strategies that support it.

### **The Manifestation of Ideology in Dabiq**

The six issues of Dabiq analyzed in this project help illustrate more clearly the ideological lure of IS's rhetoric. By appealing to themes of U.S./Western imperialism, allegiance to Allah through the path as stated by al-Baghdadi, and the notion of transformative purpose through Islamic practice and spirituality, Dabiq constructs strong persuasive arguments for those vulnerable to these ideas; namely, one who feels slighted by the West, who distrusts the mainstream narrative of Islam, and who, perhaps most critically, seeks a greater spiritual purpose than what society has offered. While Dabiq focuses mainly on the oppressive institutions of the U.S., and generally the West, and its capitalist economies, the terror group's broad comments, which frequently lump Muslim apostates and non-Muslims together, make its arguments applicable to anyone living in any nation that does not adhere to IS's interpretation of Islam. This illustrates a highly political version of Islam that also justifies the holy war interpretation of jihad. By utilizing terrorist actions, religious narratives, political beliefs, and spiritual guidance, IS constructs an ideology of *Political Islamist Terrorism*.

Political Islamist Terrorism is an apt term for the group's ideology as it encompasses these three primary currents to form the "pattern of beliefs that determines" IS's "interpretation of some aspect(s) of the world"(Foss, 2008, p. 209). Considering the definition of "terrorism" as provided in the literature review,<sup>21</sup>to label this ideology as both political and terrorism may seem redundant. If the definition of terrorism describes "political" acts of terror, what purpose does the inclusion of both terms have in naming the ideology of IS? This distinction serves to demarcate that IS's political actions do not exist solely to "disrupt, harm, or eliminate other individuals, cultures, states, and more" (Archetti, 2013, p. 11). Indeed, IS's ideology clearly fulfills the requirements to be labelled an ideology of terror. Yet the political actions of this group go beyond simplistic definitions of terrorism, and extend into attempted statehood, as exemplified by IS's attempts at minting a currency, negotiation with other states, and producing "public relations" ("Just Terror," 2015; "Breaking the Cross," 2016; Galloway, 2016). Classifying this ideology as both political and terrorism means to describe IS as an organization seeking the status of a legitimate nation on the global scale, which often uses strategies of terrorism to achieve these goals.

The issues of Dabiq analyzed devote plenty of time to quoting the Qur'an and Hadiths. Through the selected translations and interpretations, IS presents a rigid ideology as defined by historical *Islamist* philosophy proposed by scholars, such as Hanbal, Taymiyya, and Wahhab. There exists contention when using the term Islamism which must be clarified. Frequently conflated with Islamic fundamentalism, scholars have struggled in articulating when to use each term. Fuller (1991) explains that fundamentalism entails "a strict reversion to the institutions of a medieval or even early Islamic state," whereas Islamism suggests "not so much theology as an

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter II, "Radicalization, Extremism, and Terrorism"

ideology whose implications are not at all old-fashioned, but thoroughly modern” (p. 2). Thus, IS exists at a crossroads. To describe IS as fundamentalist, however, is problematic – the group does cite the Qur’an and hadiths, but Dabiq also selectively deviates from these beliefs when it is politically beneficial. Further, while IS utilizes modern mediums such as social media to disseminate its ideology, the ideas the group espouses are far from modern. Rather, Dabiq argues for the “undoing of colonial processes” (“The Return of Khilafah,” 2014, p. 41). The historicity of IS’s brand of Islamism exposes the need for a nuanced definition of the political, societal, and economic manifestations of terror groups like IS. For the sake of this thesis, I chose to describe IS as *Islamist* as this suffix denotes the followers of an ideology, as opposed to the broader ideology at large. This provides a specific definition for the ideologues of IS.

The modern interpretation of these ideas are disseminated by online scholars, who target Islamic rebel and jihadist groups, citizens of the Muslim ummah, and non-Muslim MENA sympathizers. These targets, who are influenced by the works of the scholars aforementioned, conform to an extreme version of Islam; they fight who they view as imperialist puppets in nation states, or those constructed by or allied to (and largely for fiscal incentive), the U.S. and/or Western interests (Dawson & Amarasingam, 2016; Wagemakers, 2011). It is this particular brand of Islam that Siddiqui (2015) problematicizes. Following the death of the Prophet, “it was understood by Sunnis that access to the Lawgiver, God, had been terminated and what remained were only the scriptural sources—the Quran and the hadith” (Siddiqui, 2015). This resulted in a:

jurisprudential system that could extract legal rulings from the scriptural sources, create new ones, and also adjust preexisting ones. All of this was done with the realization that the jurist was arriving at the best estimation of what God truly wants in a situation, but could not be certain that they have arrived at the correct answer given that the direct connection between humans and God was severed with the death of the Prophet. (para. 11)

This demonstrates the plurality of Islamic Law, which is largely ignored in the Western discourse of Islam (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016; Saïd, 1981; Saïd, 2004). As such, the distinction between *Islamic* and *Islamist* is of great importance and purpose – while IS may borrow symbolism, scholars, and citations from the faith of Islam, to describe their iteration as “true” is innately problematic. Rather, IS embodies only select characteristics of the faith, failing to maintain coherence under criticism. To Dabiq, persuasive, motivating rhetoric takes precedent over a coherent religious ideology.

One particular excerpt from “A Call to Hijrah” (2014) sticks out as critical to the first research question - “Keep mind that the Khilāfah is a state whose inhabitants and soldiers are human beings. They are not infallible angels. You may see things that need improvement and that are being improved,” (p. 33). This is a much softer perspective, as regards adhering to the version of Islam IS supports, and further undermines the ethical appeal promoted by strict/traditional adherents of Islam, such as scholars like Taymiyyah. By leaving room for such deviance in a terrorist network that relies heavily on enforcing the idea of hierarchical submission, IS sends a message to its potential recruits – religious adherence is no more important than following orders from leaders, even if they are non-religious in nature. This situates IS’s ideology as not a purely religious one, reinforcing the notion of Islamist over Islamic.

To describe IS as non-Islamic, however, is problematic, as it relies on the logic and emotional appeal of a variety of scripture excerpts and hadiths from the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. So, it must be stated that IS presents a strict interpretation that one must logically agree with wholeheartedly, and also room for deviance in the actual practice of Political Islamist Terrorism demonstrating malleability for its agents. Thus, the terror group casts a wider

net for possible recruits who have little-to-no interest or context in Islam. Considering that one-third of IS prosecutions in the U.S. from 2014 to 2016 were “Muslim converts,” (CSNFL, 2016), readers of Dabiq can be motivated to join the group for either political and religious reasons, or desire to propagate terrorism.

### **Rhetorical Strategies of Dabiq**

This analysis sought not only to unearth the ideology of IS as manifest in Dabiq, but additionally to understand the rhetorically strategies employed by the magazine to persuade readers. This criticism sheds light on the rhetorical strategies of Dabiq, including us versus them argumentation, metaphors, logos and pathos appeals to the lingering oppression from colonization and imperialism, and ethos appeals to the historicity of Islam.

**Us versus them.** IS describes the West as a place where its audience should feel discomfort, and the path to comfort is through hijrah. Dabiq instills a sense of urgency through emotional and sentimental appeals and idolizes the state created by IS as truly unique and superior to all previously-formed states. The deep criticism of those residing in the West apathetically are complicit to the political, economic, and social institutions and organizations embedded in that nation’s core, whether it’s Capitalism, Communism, Christianity or Buddhism, abetting the notion of urgent action by the potential recruit. IS’s ideology relies heavily on an either/or narrative, creating cognitive dissonance in its readers who are sympathetic with legitimate critiques of Western imperialism and colonialism.

The arguments constructed by Dabiq present an innate global dichotomy, an example of the either/or fallacy – you are either with the terror group or a rejecter. This dichotomy is rooted in a critique of U.S. and Western cultural, political, economic, and social hegemony, using ad populum ideas to appeal to those who acknowledge and are exposed to legitimate criticisms of

these institutions. By packaging these criticisms with narratives of exorcizing ideology, such as breaking the cross of Christianity, the ideology of IS extends membership to all those distraught with the world to which they have been exposed to. Further, the us-versus-them mentality instilled in the audience allows them to reject both common-sense appeals and in-depth, research-driven tactics that focus on reducing radicalization and extremism (Selim, 2016; Stern, 2016; Weine et al., 2013).

**Metaphors.** Dabiq employs a number of metaphors within its text. These includes comparing non-IS ideologues to living in a “frying pan,” instilling a strong sense of urgency for potential recruits to act – before the West, apostate Muslims, or whomever, burns them to death. Adherents are compared to a singular thread within a larger garment. To deviate from the practice of IS’s Political Islamist Terrorism is to then pull one’s thread from the cloth, damaging the garment. This echoes a sense of community – one which the stereotypical “lone wolf” may feel they are lacking. This sense of community is furthered through animalistic comparisons. Specifically, Dabiq argues that IS members all belong to a great flock of sheep, and the Caliph (al-Baghdadi) is the shepherd. While simultaneously instilling notions of community, Dabiq also articulates the theme of hierarchical submission where the ethos of Baghdadi is unquestionable – when has a shepherd ever led his sheep astray?

Animalistic metaphors are also employed when Dabiq argues against the institutions of the West. Educational systems are seen as indoctrinating, oppressive, and ultimately deadly to the “true” way of life to such an extent that IS describes these institutions as wolves. Potential recruits, and their children, are the prey which sustains the wolves. This constructs an argument depicting the West as not only stalking and violently attacking “true” Muslims, but also as a natural characteristic of these cultures. Wolves will never stop hunting prey; just as Western

institutions will never stop indoctrinating the vulnerable. Thus, the Dabiq reader must rebel against these institutions or will inevitably become sustenance for the West.

Perhaps one of the most effective metaphors in Dabiq comes from the final issue, “Breaking the Cross” (2016). It is the description of Christianity, and larger Western institutions as a “cross” that can be “broken” which highlights what I call exorcizing ideologies. Dabiq conflates the main religious symbol of the Christian faith as representative of all non-IS ideologies. Thus, to break one’s cross is not only to distance/remove oneself from the practice of Christianity, but from any belief system or institution which does not adhere to the path IS determines. The combination of a detailed processes in how to become an appropriate IS ideologue, while also explicating how a potential recruit can “break” their current ideology, whatever that may be, creates the opportunity to exorcize, or expel, one ideology in favor of another. This metaphor of breaking the cross allows Dabiq to persuade readers that regardless of how antithetical their previous belief system is to IS’s, they too can become an ideologue. Considering that one-third of IS persecutions were non-Muslims who converted, understanding this process of how Dabiq exorcizes ideology is crucial to understanding how the terror group recruits ideologues (CNSFL, 2016).

**Logos and pathos appeals.** Pathos and logos provide crucial roles in exorcizing the ideology of Dabiq readers. Specifically, the choice of Dabiq to use Western journalists/converts as authors of articles offers both credibility and emotional appeal to potential recruits. Cantlie and Foley embodied the antithesis of the group’s ideology. However, the rhetoric of the articles allegedly penned by the two journalists demonstrated understanding of IS’s actions, and at times, outright sympathy and/or agreement with the group. Indeed, if Western journalists who were previously critical of IS’s ideology could be swayed by it, then logically a reader could as well.

The use of anonymous writers who converted and became outright ideologues also speaks to this notion of exorcizing ideology, offering credibility to IS's ideology as superior to those of the West. Cantlie and Foley operate as living (or in Foley's case, lived) testimonies to which readers of Dabiq can empathize with.

Dabiq consistently situates the colonization and continuing imperialism in MENA as antithetical to its global caliphate. Throughout the magazine, IS uses preferred, pre-colonized nomenclature for places such as Syria (Sham), and place modern nation states in quotation marks, such as Saudi Arabia. This extends beyond the names of countries – nationalism is another term which frequently is featured within quotation marks. Building off the us versus them IS constructs, if the West is illegitimate and the Khilafah has the rightful claim to the world, then it is imperative to decolonize the rhetoric used in describing our social reality. As such, the very notion of nationalism would be illogical – one cannot be devoted to a singular nation, as there are no sovereign areas outside of the proposed IS locus of control.

Dabiq utilizes the persuasive strategy of decolonization rhetoric to mobilize its readers. Truly, if Islam is misrepresented in the media and oppressed in Western societies, yet are the rightful rulers of the world, then Dabiq sympathizers should feel strong emotional purpose in joining IS. Dabiq often describes the flawed intervention of Western outlets as politically self-serving and only exacerbating existing problems. “A Call to Hijrah” (2014) offers an example - “So while genocide is committed by the Maliki, Asadi, and Israeli forces against the Muslims via systematic massacres, chemical warfare, rape, and starvation by siege, Obama watches with euphoria” (p. 35). Although IS has been complicit in the killing, enslavement, and systemic rape of some of the Muslims the group claims to advocate in this instance, this excerpt is a clear



example of how Dabiq utilizes the atrocities of imperialism to invoke emotional responses in its readers.

**Ethos appeals to historicity of Islam.** Dabiq uses historic religious symbols to provide credibility, ethos to its argumentation. By invoking the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, as well as taking select quotes from the Qur'an, IS demonstrates an appeal to the absolute root of Islam, justifying their iteration as "true". Additionally, IS co-opts the traditional notion of the Five Pillars of Islam, seen by many as the absolute core of the faith. Instead of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage, Dabiq argues that migration, community, rebellion, consolidation of territory, and the establishment of the global Khilafah represent the core tenets of "true" Islam. This situates all other forms of Islam as erroneous, as they do not embody the political, Islamist, and terrorist actions described by IS's "pillars". This demonstrates that within the Political Islamist Terrorism ideology, religious symbolism and traditions operate as the vehicle for political legitimization (consolidation of rightful territory) and terrorist actions (rebellion, global Khilafah).

Ultimately, Dabiq utilizes a variety of different rhetorical strategies in order to construct persuasive content. Whether it is a metaphor of a frying pan to instill urgency, the co-opting of traditional Islamic symbols such as the five pillars, or the aim to establish credibility through the use of Western voices like James Foley or John Cantlie, Dabiq's rhetorical choices are dynamic, nuanced, and arguably, impressive.

## **Discussion**

The rest of this chapter will begin to connect the analysis and answers to the research questions to the previous literature on IS/Dabiq, global representations of Islam, and radicalization, extremism and terrorism studies. This will then prompt implications concerning

the power of exceptionalism and the role of rhetoric and communication in the future of counter terrorism.

Initially, this analysis contributes to the existing literature on radicalization, extremism, and terrorism studies. Where works such as Coolsaet (2016) and Dawson and Amarasingam (2016) directly interview jihadists, this analysis focused on the rhetoric of IS's propaganda material. Connecting the narratives of foreign fighters, who cite desires for unity, brotherhood, as well as religious purposes, to the ideology of IS and the rhetorical strategies employed by Dabiq helps solidify our understanding of what motivates individuals to join terrorist groups. As Archetti (2013) explains, this is how ideologues begin to view themselves as part of a larger community narrative as opposed to their singular, isolated, "lone wolf" life. Dabiq encourages deep contemplation and a search for a higher purpose, which is conveniently offered by IS, thus allowing potential readers to begin weaving their own individual identity within that of a larger group community.

The research on counter terrorism/violence is largely focused on combatting online spaces and community engagement (George, 2015; Greenberg, 2016; Selim, 2016; Stern, 2016; Weine et al., 2013). However, this analysis focused on the rhetoric of Dabiq – not necessarily the effect its digital dissemination had on its readers. While IS's online presence is indeed important, this analysis could only situate the rhetorical strategy of Dabiq's digital access – anyone with an internet connection could consume this persuasive material. Yet, these studies often dictate the importance of engaging with potential recruits in an attempt to deradicalize them. This analysis suggests that more work must be done in combatting the various themes which emerged from Dabiq in order to prevent both "lone wolf" attacks and migrators to Raqqa. Indeed, these articles

which aim to combat extremism rarely, if at all, describe the legitimacy of IS's arguments in favor of vague descriptions of Dabiq as impressive, glossy, or suprisingly smart.

This argument extends itself into the second aspect of the literature, global representations of Islam. Dabiq frequently refers to how Muslims, and more specifically IS, are perceived in the global media. Particularly Western institutions invoke problematic depictions of Islam which fuel propaganda content for IS (Al-Rahim, 2016; Kumar, 2014; Zhang & Hellmueller). While non-Western media outlets often portray terrorist organizations more realistically (as they are more often directly exposed/impact), news agencies such as Al-Jazeera are often complicit in the othering of terror group's media production (Satti, 2015). Further, the rhetoric of Western politicians continues to shape how Dabiq constructs arguments – nearly every issue analyzed quoted leaders from around their world and their claims concerning IS.

Dabiq takes advantage of the stereotypes and tropes produced by media outlets from around the world. The generalizations and misunderstandings of simple notions about Islam (such as the plurality of the term jihad) demonstrate how media, political, and social institutions reify and reproduce Islamophobia and Islamonausea. IS acknowledges and incorporates these shortcomings into their propagandist texts, appealing to those with a disdain for mainstream media outlets. The logical flaws in Western insitutions, philosophical thought, and civil life demonstrate IS's argument of decolonization. Indeed, the cover of the very first issue of Dabiq confronts readers with the return of the rightful caliphate which lacks any borders and expands on the Golden Age Caliphates ("The Return of Khilafah," 2014). The testimonies of individuals such as Cantlie, Foley, and anonymous IS converts lends credibility to the notion that the Western world has fundamentally failed, and only IS can rectify these woes by returning to the Khilafah. These failures are indicative of the greater phenomenon of exceptionalism.

Described as the perception that a species, country, society, institution, movement, individual, or period is unusual or extraordinary, the notion of exceptionalism as a political tool is found throughout world history and is not beholden to any single region (Chase-Dunn, Manning, & Hall, 2000; Pei, 1994; Gilmore, 2015). However, the ideology of IS centers much of its rhetoric on dismantling ideas of specifically American exceptionalism. Dabiq's criticisms of U.S. and Western involvement in the MENA region (both founded and unfounded in facts), the uniqueness and superiority of the so-called caliphate, and its argument for constructing economic alternatives to capitalism, are examples of these critiques American exceptionalism (Gilmore, 2015; Gilmore, Sheets, & Rowling, 2016; Ivie & Giner, 2009; Rojecki, 2008). A phrase rooted in the U.S. Communist Party's platform of the 1920s, 'American exceptionalism' is the "notion of America as unique, superior, and even God-favored" and "has been pervasive in the construction and maintenance of American identity throughout the country's history" (Gilmore, 2015, p. 302). Other scholars have directed the rhetoric of American exceptionalism as greatly influencing the public and media perception of the U.S.'s involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan post 9/11, abetting politicians who directed these operations (Gilmore, Sheets, & Rowling, 2016; Ivie & Giner, 2009; Rojecki, 2008). Saïd (2004) can provide greater context for how the U.S. embodies American exceptionalism in relation to MENA:

Today bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples over there who have been such a terrible thorn in 'our' flesh. Accompanying such war-mongering expertise have been the omnipresent CNNs and Foxes of this world, plus myriad numbers of evangelical and right-wing radio hosts, plus innumerable tabloids and even middle-brow journals, all of them re-cycling the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations so as to stir up 'America' against the foreign devil. (p. 872)

This American exceptionalist perception of MENA is a manifestation of the global representations of Islam.

Dabiq utilizes American exceptionalism as a rhetorical strategy. For example, the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib is one of the more frequently cited injustices by Zarqawi's iterations of IS ("Zarqawi' beheaded US man in Iraq," 2004; Greenberg, 2016). Indeed, Zarqawi renamed his terror organization the Islamic State in Iraq in 2006 as he thought Al-Qaeda did not respond strongly enough to Western war crimes in the area (Hassan, 2016a). So long as IS perceives the U.S. as guilty of American exceptionalism the terror group will be able to center this criticism as it recruits people to its ideology.

As IS seeks to survive in the harsh geopolitical climate of the Syrian Civil War, the notion of tamkin, consolidating, must be addressed. While unlikely, what if IS is able to consolidate its geopolitical control, cease aggressive expansion efforts, and truly strive for a seat at the global diplomatic stage? While IS is a self-described global caliphate, negotiations with the U.S. over James Foley provide an example of more practical attempts at nation-state diplomacy. Although Dabiq supports arguments through a decolonization perspective, the notion of consolidating territory and negotiating with nation-states is antithetical to IS's attempts at reversing the effects of colonization. This contradiction highlights that IS utilizes the same notion of exceptionalism that the U.S. does – just within a different context.

This project also contributes to the existing research on IS/Dabiq. As a critical scholar, investigating the claims of Dabiq within the greater social, political, and economic contexts provides analysis which works such as Kibble (2016) do not. Additionally, scholars have yet to approach Dabiq as a text from a purely rhetorical standpoint, instead choosing to use Political Science, Journalism, and even Public Relations perspectives to understand IS's geopolitical and

media currents (Berger, 2015; Berger & Perez, 2016; Calamur, 2016; Fahmy, 2016; Galloway, 2016; Gambhir, 2014; Zelin, 2015). This analysis fills the gap through an examination of IS's ideology as represented by the rhetoric of Dabiq. This ideological criticism demonstrates the nuanced details in Dabiq – from intriguing metaphors to captivating cover pages and sound arguments, the rhetoric of IS's magazine is as impressive as the organizational apparatus and digital content the literature discusses.

## **Implications**

It is vital to explain the implications of this study. Situating what this analysis means within the larger academic discourse, as well as find its significance for counter terrorism policy. In this section I begin by elaborating on implications concerning rhetoric and communication and American exceptionalism.

**Rhetoric & Communication.** This analysis provides important implications for the rhetoric of terrorist organizations in modern discourse. The insistence of Western actors to describe IS as a terrorist organization rather than the group's preferred nomenclature of a global Khilafah/Caliphate, or at the least a nation-state is accurate. Yet, IS has been able to recruit an impressive number of members despite the collective horror across the globe at the group's actions. This analysis demonstrates important implications for the rhetoric of recruitment.

The rhetoric predominantly use in Western spaces matter. Effectively, Dabiq is not just propaganda, nor is it Western public relations –rather it operates dialectically between these ideals depending on the audience and context. The perpetuation of Islamophobic rhetoric in Western spaces will continue to promote dissent for those who do not subscribe to hegemonic ideologies. So long as a Muslim diasporic population is present in a state, the possibility of recruitment to this political Islamist terrorism ideology remains for any individual who accepts

the arguments of Dabiq. As communication scholars, we must strive to understand the nuance of Dabiq, and how IS communicates ideology. While Kibble (2016) places the burden on Muslims to combat IS, he does make the point that this battle is an ideological one. However, the ideological battle against IS must be an intersectional one, where Muslims and non-Muslims alike strive to have more inclusive and understanding rhetoric about the “other,” or we risk only reproducing the very problems which have allowed IS to exist.

**The Power of Exceptionalism.** While the imperialism of the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan are one of the prominent examples of American exceptionalism, the most recent example comes from the 45<sup>th</sup> President’s administration. Trump’s two attempts at passing executive orders to restrict travel from six predominantly Muslim countries is perhaps the best/worst example of American exceptionalism since Abu Ghraib (Merica, 2017; Thrush, 2017). Considering Trump has already been featured in other IS’s media releases, the so-called travel ban can make for excellent material in future jihadi texts. While Trump personifies American exceptionalism, the discussion suggests that the U.S. is not the only culture which utilizes this strategy – indeed, Dabiq uses exceptionalism by co-opting yet simulatenously rejecting aspects of Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism. The inability to aptly categorize IS as one or the other justifies the uniqueness Dabiq argues is central to the group’s legitimacy. Understanding the numerous ways exceptionalism blinds us from observing essential contradictions in a group’s ideology is crucial in combatting the persuasive appeal and rhetorical strategies of texts similar to Dabiq. When wielded by a hegemonic force such as the U.S., exceptionalism is a tool to dismiss and/or ignore those with less power. When utilized by an extremist, sectarian, minority ideology such as IS, exceptionalism allows groups to state its entitlement to power over the oppressive status quo of other hegemonic ideologies

## Challenges

In this section I will briefly outline some of the concerns I encountered while working on this project. This thesis has been in progress for nearly two years – one year for conceptualizing/theorizing and one year for reading, research, and writing. This endeavor, in and of itself, has been challenging for this researcher.

**Identity of researcher.** The standpoint of my identity as a researcher – white, cisgender male, middle-class background, education in Communication studies, non-Arabic speaking, etc. – limits the experience, knowledge, and personal context I apply to this text. Especially in Islamic history, to navigate through what Saïd (2004) called the:

shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples over there who have been such a terrible thorn in ‘our’ flesh. (p. 872)

Avoiding overtly biased and often malicious sources was not always easy as someone with no academic training in Islamic Studies. Specifically, chapter four relies heavily on the external resources provided by academics with more knowledge of Islam than myself, covering perspectives from Journalism, Mass Communications, Political Science, Communication, and Religious Studies.<sup>22</sup> Without the help of these scholars, this thesis could have continued but would not be nearly as informed.

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Frequently I have relied on the works of Saïd (2004) to describe what I could not, and the following passage highlights this limitation and illustrates my attempts at falling into similar pitfalls:

You don't need Arabic or Persian or even French to pontificate about how the democracy domino effect is just what the Arab world needs. Combative and woefully ignorant policy experts whose world experience is limited to the Beltway grind out books on 'terrorism' and liberalism, or about Islamic fundamentalism and American foreign policy, or about the end of history, all of it vying for attention and influence quite without regard for truthfulness or reflection or real knowledge. What matters is how efficient and resourceful it sounds, and who might go for it, as it were. The worst aspect of this essentializing stuff is that human suffering in all its density and pain is spirited away. (p. 873)

The rhetorical critic, as Foss (2008) explained, offers an interpretation of a text. This project has constructed an interpretation of the ideology, rhetorical strategies, and persuasive appeals of IS that is indeed of important value. However, as a white, English-speaking male, I still find it relevant to acknowledge my standpoint in the role of creating this valuable interpretation. A future study would greatly benefit from analyzing the Arabic iterations of Dabiq.

### **Future Research**

**Reading Dabiq through a decolonization lens.** Ideological criticism served this analysis of Dabiq well – clear themes about the ideology emerged from the texts that described how IS persuades individuals through political, economic, social, and religious appeals. However, some of the most rhetorical strategies utilized by Dabiq included the origins of its nation-state, in defiance of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. “A Call to Hijrah” refers to the idea of pushing for “hijrah after hijrah,” a call to reclaim the landmass of the previous Islamic Caliphates and likely expand beyond them (2015, p. 22). The narratives of Cantlie and Foley articulate the erroneous actions of Western society, and that IS's call to return to a global caliphate as the more accurate

iteration of society. These all touch on the notion of decolonization as a tool for subverting current hegemonic forces.

Perhaps contemporary decolonization theory can further interrogate this argument (Brown & Strega, 2005; Ciccariello-Maher, 2017). Decolonizing the historical decisions which molded the modern borders of the MENA, and juxtaposing the arguments for IS's Khilafah with scholars studying previous Caliphates could make for interesting analysis. Ciccariello-Maher (2017) argues that we must investigate and criticize the development of dialectics. This process will yield clearer pathways to encourage citizen participation in articulating how they want to be governed. As such, approaching Dabiq from a decolonization framework would yield different yet important insight.

**Utilizing networked rhetorics.** While the literature on this subject describes the role of online platforms and the affect produced by networked rhetorics, this ideological criticism was limited in the way analysis could be conducted within these frameworks. As such, this new theoretical approach to explaining the influence of rhetoric as it exists online could provide important insights into the process of radicalization. Several other scholars working with qualitative and quantitative analysis of IS and other jihadi groups have voiced concern about the inability to determine the effectiveness of their persuasive appeals. However, an approach which seeks to utilize networked rhetorics could more closely investigate the process of radicalization—from watching jihadi content online to the affect it produces when targets of radicalization are exposed to ideologies challenging the West.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis sought to unearth the ideology of IS as found in Dabiq, while also articulating the rhetorical strategies and persuasive appeals employed by the terrorist group. I term the

ideology of IS as manifest in Dabiq *Political Islamist Terrorism*, which in many ways, as discussed, is an exorcizing ideology. The analysis of six Dabiq issues also illustrated several themes, characteristics, and rhetorical appeals that make it alluring to the “lone wolf” in Western societies, the most prominent of which is the either/or strategy. While the IS fighters are being killed, captured, or are disappearing into the desert today, and it seems like the group itself is losing its grip over the world, its ideology and the vision of a global Caliphate have already inspired many challenging the status quo of the West and American exceptionalism; the power of rhetoric and the lure of an exorcizing ideology can undoubtedly be credited for the kind of effect that drones, barrel bombs, and troops cannot.

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