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Caliphate, *Hijrah* and Martyrdom as Performative Narrative in *ISIS Dabiq* Magazine

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ABSTRACT


This article aims to explore the place of the Islamic narrative in the ISIS propaganda machine, *Dabiq* magazine, to see how they legitimate and narrate their visions of religion and ideology and how these narratives are constructed and performed. Within this analysis, the article puts focus on the performative aspect of these narratives. These narratives alongside the citation of Qur'anic verses (*ayahs*) and hadiths create a powerful meaning and mindset for ISIS's supporters and fighters.

KEYWORDS

ISIS; jihad; religious ideology; *hijrah*; performative; caliphate

The aim of this article is not to question whether ISIS is Islamic or not;¹ however, the obscure and brutal ideology of ISIS emphasizes the articulation of various narratives and discourses² that enable the mobilization of foreign fighters,³ and with the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the group does not only want to depose Assad and fight against his regime, but rather they wanted to establish an Islamic state and caliphate,⁴ even they were defeated, they are still present in Syria and Iraq and want to extend their expansion in inner Asia and Africa.⁵ As the caliphate is to be universal, they want to expand it throughout the world with their message and call for jihad and *hijrah*. The world is shocked at their brutal violence, and, at the same time, at their ability to attract supporters, and their organization and mobilization capability. One of their organizational capabilities is their magazine, *Dabiq*, and its content.

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¹T. Holland, 'We Must Not Deny the Religious Roots of Islamic State', *New Statesman*, 17 March 2015; N.S. Sheikh, 'Reclaiming Jihad as a Strategy of Conflict Transformation', *Peace Review*, 27:3 (2015), pp. 288–295; M. Hasan, 'How Islamic is Islamic State', *New Statesman*, 10 March 2015.

²B. Colas, 'What Does Dabiq Do? ISIS Hermeneutics and Organizational Fractures Within Dabiq Magazine', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 40:3 (2016), pp. 173–190; J. Droogan and S. Peattie, 'Mapping the Thematic Landscape of Dabiq Magazine', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71:6 (2017), pp. 591–620; H.J. Ingram, 'An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 51:3 (2016), pp. 458–477; P. Wignell, S. Tan, and K.L. O'Halloran, 'Violent Extremism and Iconisation: Commanding Good and Forbidding Evil?', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14:1 (2017), pp. 1–22; D. Wilbur, 'Propaganda's Place in Strategic Communication: The Case of ISIL's Dabiq Magazine', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11:3 (2017), pp. 209–223.

³Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters an Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters Into Syria and Iraq* (New York and London, 2015).

⁴C. Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State* (The Brookings Institution, n. 19, 2015); F.A. Gergeres, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton University Press, 2016); C.R. Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁵S. Ganguly and F. al-Istrabadi, *The Future of ISIS, Regional and International Implications* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

The article aims to explore the place of the Islamic narrative in the ISIS propaganda machine, *Dabiq* magazine, to see how they legitimate and narrate their visions of religion and ideology and how these narratives are constructed and performed. Within this analysis, the article puts focus on the performative aspect of these narratives.⁶ There are other studies look at images to see how violence is legitimized,⁷ but the narratives used in *Dabiq* are crucial elements to understand the ideology of ISIS, and it is also important to examine to what extent this ideology is functional and operative among its supporters. The ideology is necessary to enact and mobilize ISIS supporters, but it has not been sufficient. To suffice, a performative discourse and narrative must be bundled with the ISIS ideology. From this angle, *Dabiq* stories fulfil the function of creating a virtual community; however, this virtual community is forged upon real images, news, and ‘martyrs’ with specific narratives used in *Dabiq*.

This article first looks at the narrative and performative theories in the theoretical discussion part that sheds lights also on the link between narrative theory and performativity. After the theoretical discussion, the article will explain its methodology and research questions. Then it will resume its findings and analysis in *Dabiq* magazine.

Theoretical discussion

Narratives

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative Theory*, H. Porter Abbott defines narrative as ‘the representation of an event or a series of events ...’.⁸ Marie-Laure Ryan notes that ‘most narratologists agree that narrative consists of material signs, the discourse, which convey a certain meaning (or content), the story, and fulfil a certain social function’.⁹ Narratives are important as human beings interpret the world around them through stories and abstract ideas. Narratives create a sense of coherence, a trajectory and a safe and comfortable place. By organizing the world around them based on coherent narratives rooted in credible sources, they construct preferred ways of life. This makes sense of the events of everyday life and connects these events to existing information and justifying daily actions. Narrative depicts distinct and performative themes drawing the reader’s attention to salient points, thereby drawing them into the story’s discourse.¹⁰ Discursive theorists use narrative performances in an attempt to acknowledge the agency and

⁶The question is whether Islamism is a useful term for ISIS and its supporters who are labeled ‘extremist’, ‘fanatic’ and ‘radical’. There are profound differences between reformism of Abduh, the revivalism of Al-Banna and the revolutionary jihadism of Zawahiri. There is no consensus about the term of Islamism how to use and how to depict. Unfortunately, widely circulated substitutes for Islamism such as fundamentalism, Jihadism or Islamic extremism, are themselves subject to even create ambiguities. I take James Piscatori’s definition of Islamists as ‘Muslims who are committed to public action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda’. The political agenda of ISIS is drawn from the creation of an ‘Islamic state’. The idea of Islamization of the state, mentioned above as a political goal for Islamists is, as pointed out by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, a “reinvention of tradition” such that the word state (*dawla*) historically referred to entirely different forms of government than the modern nation state. In the twentieth century, the term of *dawla* (state) was transformed into *al-dawla al-islamiyya* (the Islamic state), from caliphate to national Islamic state. I will discuss this ideology in the first narrative. Dale F. Eickelman and J. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁷Wignell, Tan, and O’Halloran, ‘Violent Extremism and Iconisation’.

⁸H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 13. For an overview of definitions of ‘narrative’, see Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Toward a Definition of Narrative’ in David Herman (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹Ryan, ‘Toward a Definition of Narrative’, p. 24.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

reflexivity of individuals.¹¹ According to Bamberg, narratives are the rhetorical tools that provide rhetorical work in a particular context. These rhetorical works create meanings, accomplish the management of contradictions, weakness and useful to be impressive. The stories and narrations deal with some troubles, critics that may arise within the negotiation of identities, struggle over meaning, create coherent repertoires and challenge the existing codes.¹² As they are told, recounted, recited, described to an audience, narratives are seen as performative.

Performativity

For J. L. Austin, a British philosopher of language and known his theories on speech acts, language does not only represent; at the same time, it can realize something. He classifies this kind of language as ‘performative’: it announces and makes happen.¹³ Austin underlines that the illocutionary speech acts such as declaration of marriage performs the action through the utterance of the statement. Additionally, he argues that in order to be performative, it is also necessary to be uttered in ‘appropriate circumstances’.¹⁴ An utterance becomes performative when it is declared by an authoritative person. This Austinian concept of performativity has inspired many scholars, many of them have departed from his initial concept of the performative utterance¹⁵ and critically engaged with it. Derrida describes the performative act in relation to acts that create something new in the political arena as well as in the literary sphere.¹⁶ For Derrida, the success of utterance depends on conventions and repetitions.¹⁷ The iterative and citational forms of utterance are crucial to the realization of performative utterances. Judith Butler follows this idea that the repetitive character of performativity identifies gender. Drawing upon Derrida’s notion of iterability and citation, for Butler, ‘speaking is itself a bodily act’.¹⁸ In other words, the discourse as an embodied practice and forms such as gaze, gesture, posture and movement shapes the identity of a person. Butler extends these embodied practices and forms to the performative agency,¹⁹ which is not only discursive, but performativity encompasses bodily practices.²⁰ According to Butler, the gender is not a natural fact, but it is a result of citation and repetition of practices. For example, naming a body as girl or boy constructs her or his identity. Adding to this performativity as embodied practices, performance studies incorporate artistic, aesthetic events, ceremonies, religious events like rituals, language use, narratives, rhetoric and increasingly theatre and music shows.²¹ An important body of these theoretical works reflect the performative figures, characters, and their stories. Loxley describes ‘performance as the thing itself’,²² coupled with ‘liveness’ or ‘realness’ of life. The performance becomes the reality itself. Everyday events

¹¹M. Bamberg, ‘Stories: Big or Small—Why Do We Care?’, *Narrative Inquiry*, 16:1 (2006), pp. 139–147.

¹²J. Reynolds and S. Taylor, ‘Narrating Singleness: Life Stories and Deficit Identities’, *Narrative Inquiry* 15 (2004), pp. 197–251.

¹³J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 6.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵J. Loxley, *Performativity*. (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

¹⁶J. Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’ in J. Derrida (ed.) *Limited inc* (Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1–23.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁸J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 10.

¹⁹J. Butler, ‘Performative Agency’, *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3:2 (2010), pp. 147–161.

²⁰Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 117.

²¹D.S. Madison and Judith Hamera, eds, *The Sage Handbook for Performance Studies* (London: Sage, 2006).

²²Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 117.

and experiences come to the screens and the media with performed forms and settings in which the realness is narrated. The performed stories strengthen the meaning of happenings by providing them new forms, characters. Words, costumes, actions do not only represent something, but at the same time they invite the audience to enter into the reality of the performance.²³ The performed story with real characters in happening engages in this way with its audience. Anthropologists and sociologists extend the terminology of this realness of performativity in everyday life in which life is performed in a certain way through practices.²⁴

Thus, by infusing the narrative and performativity, this article aims to point the performance dimension of narrative. Utilizing the content analysis and also some narrative based jihadist stories in *Dabiq* made possible to elaborate the link between performance and narration. The method that we used critical content analysis is merged with the performativity.

Methodology: research question and data design

Research questions

This article addresses three questions to understand how ISIS's narrative is performative with a strong religious focus that is unable to explain reality and does not offer an informed view on Muslim cultures and contemporary societies: RQ1: How do *Dabiq* editors use Islamic narrative? RQ2: What kind of themes are used by ISIS in *Dabiq*? RQ3: What is the role of life stories of ISIS's soldiers in *Dabiq* magazine? RQ4: Do *Dabiq* editors reinvent Islamic narratives, using material borrowed from the Islamic past or is it a new serialization of discourses, methods, and practices in *Dabiq*?

To answer these questions, the article analyses the 15 issues of *Dabiq* to follow the narratives that appear in it. In all issues of *Dabiq*, the editors emphasize narratives that are institutionalized accounts of the right way to look at Islam and Muslims. These narratives supply ready-made answers to recent developments about Islam and they allow its readers to make a rapid association between today's world and the Islamic past within an ISIS framework. In that sense, these narratives in *Dabiq* can be perceived as presenting shortcuts to acquiring very substantial and antagonistic tendencies and suppositions about non-Muslims by creating a virtual Muslim community.²⁵

Methodology and data set

This study adopts critical content analysis as its framework. Critical content analysis is defined as

close reading of small amount of texts that are interpreted by the analyst and then contextualized in new narratives; a definition that is a hermeneutic, reader response-oriented research stance that can be critical as well. What makes a study critical is not the methodology, but the framework used to think within, through, and beyond the text, such

²³Ibid., pp. 147–148.

²⁴Ibid., p. 152.

²⁵G.R. Bunt, *IMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (London: Hurst, 2009).

as critical discourse, postcolonialism, women's studies, queer studies, and childhood studies.²⁶

In critical content analysis, the meaning of text becomes important and the features of texts must be discussed. As Krippendorff underlies the texts do not have single meanings and they can be read from numerous perspectives through counting the characters, words, or sentences of a text, categorizing its phrases, analysing its metaphors, describing the logical structure of its constituent expressions.²⁷ I use the critical content analysis to analyse the narratives and to understand what kind of meaning is attributed to these narratives by *Dabiq* editors.

Fifteen issues of *Dabiq* have been published to date, and each issue is structured roughly in the same manner. Each issue opens with a quote from Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi.²⁸ At a minimum, recent issues have included a foreword, an interpretation of current events, a devotional section, a summary of recent military events, biography of a martyr or martyrs, a women's issues section, a summary of Western reports about ISIS, and an interview with a commander and ISIS fighter. In later issues, there are some portraits of ISIS fighters who are called 'foreign fighters'. There are common types of articles across issues: 'Advertisements', 'Amongst the Believers are Men', 'Feature Articles', 'Foreword', 'From the Pages of History', 'Hikmah (Wisdom)', 'Interviews', 'ISIS Reports', 'Last page message', and 'To/From Our Sisters/For Women'. The title of each issue and the cover images reflect the central theme of the issue by introducing the main theme. For example, the second issue's cover image is about flood and Noah's story. The feature article focuses on the story of Noah and the Flood to develop the theme of *bayat*.

The analysis comprises of two interrelated tasks. The first task entails looking for common key themes that occur across several articles in *Dabiq*. These key themes and words point to particular narratives. The second task comprises studying the use of these narratives within the context of the stories of jihadis narrated in *Dabiq*.

This article analysed all *Dabiq* articles and marked the significant points by highlighting them. The highlighting texts are assigned to various key terms that are used as codes. For each article of *Dabiq*, this study looked at the terminologies and key terms that describe the content of each one. The article used also the methodology developed by Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, Kay L. O'Halloran and Rebecca Lange,²⁹ adopting a thematic network analysis technique based on Attride-Stirling's work.³⁰ This method is started from some Basic Themes towards a Global Theme. The collection and classification of Basic Themes enable to construct the Organizing Themes which are reinterpreted in light of their Basic Themes.³¹ Basic themes are derived from various codes highlighted

²⁶R. Beach, C. Jenkins, R. Rogers, and V. Yenika-Agbaw, 'Exploring the "Critical" in Critical Content Analysis of Children's Literature' in Kevin M. Leander and Deborah Wells Rowe (eds) *58th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference, 2009), pp. 2–3.

²⁷K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An introduction to its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), p. 22.

²⁸Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, was born in Jordan in 1966. His real name is Ahmad Fadi al-Nazzal al-Khalayila, better known as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. He nonetheless became a key exponent of jihadism in Jordan.

²⁹Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, Kay L. O'Halloran, and Rebecca Lange, 'A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*', *Perspective on Terrorism* 11:2 (2017).

³⁰J. Attride-Stirling, 'Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Research* 1:3 (2001), pp. 385–405.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 389.

in *Dabiq* articles. These basic themes are coded to create global and organizing themes. The list of all these key terms found in *Dabiq* articles were generated manually. The organizing themes can be coded as narratives.

Following their identification and attribution, these themes were then used to construct narratives. All articles were catalogued and assigned to key themes and codes, labelled to certain narratives. The articles are attributed to some key themes and narratives according to their subject matter and context. This study found seven narratives with different themes and sub-themes (see Table 1) used in *Dabiq* articles. Each key term and theme are attributed to one or two narrative (see Figure 1). To explore the key themes, this article applied the content analyse employing qualitative research techniques that involves coding techniques while summarizing the data to extract a kind of narrative. By examining

Table 1. Top 7 narratives and interrelated topics themes in *Dabiq* issues.

Narrative	Topics in articles	Themes of articles
Crusade	Denunciations of enemies: 'crusaders', the United States, Syrian opposition and its Western allies, Arab regimes and other Muslim groups considered apostate. Eschatological references to the end of time, the last day as glorious, clash between Muslims and non-Muslims, the separation between Islam and West, the two are portrayed as distinct	Truth, Martyr, Final Day, Doomsday, Enemy, Other, West and Islam, West and Muslim, Ally, al-Qaidah, Armageddon
Morality	Articles about a range of topics: spreading Islam and establishing Islamic values. Articles emphasize on how to be a good Muslim and true scholar. Giving advices to ISIS supporters, fighters and women, citations of hadith and Qur'anic scriptures supporting various issues, examples from the prophet life, the brotherhood of jihadis, moral decadence, sexual deviance, unity of Muslim community, role of Muslim women, the marriage, the role of family, arguments in favour of slavery	Piety, Truth, True Muslims, True scholars, Islamists, Legitimate scholars, Prophets, Tawhid, Muwahhidin, Obedience, Brotherhood, Wisdom, Kufr, Irja, Community, Unity, Bayat, Advices, Shariah, Jama'ah, Marriage, Woman, Wala and Bara, Call to Islam, Martyr
Jihad	Encouraging military attacks, promises of ISIS victory, stories on ISIS heroes, martyrs, the concept of martyrdom, call for Muslims to engage in attacks, defining jihad as duty and an obligation for all Muslims, jihadi tales from the battlefield, child soldiers, the permission of killing of civilian people, the desirability of death, fighting for Islam and Muslims, expansion of ISIS	Fight, War, Execution, Military Operation, Terror, Martyr, Hero, Mujahidin, Soldier
<i>Hijrah</i>	Topics include migration to ISIS territory, living in an Islamic state, division between dar al-Islam and dar al-kufr, Muslims living in West and ISIS	Endurance, Jahilliyya, West and Muslims, Hypocrites, Jihad, Community, Caliphate, <i>Dabiq</i> , Bayat, Martyr
Caliphate	Islamic leadership, Islamic authority, true Islamic scholars and Islamic state, establishment of sharia, pledged allegiance to ISIS, positive examples of the group's leadership, interviews with leadership, expansion and new territories, hadith and scriptures supporting the caliphate and why the caliphate is correct	State, Community, Imamet, Authroity, Leadership, <i>Dabiq</i> , Community, <i>Hijrah</i> , <i>Dabiq</i> , ISIS, Jama'ah, Slavery, Military Operations, Currency, Caliphate, Bayat, Apostasy, Ghanimah, Jihad, Pledges of allegiance to ISIS, recognizing the Caliphate, Authority
State	Topics reflecting ISIS obligations of Muslims, aspects of Shari'a law, ISIS advertisements, ISIS maps, ISIS gold dinar and currency, ISIS weaponry, operational strengths of ISIS, establishment of service and utilities like healthcare, government institutions	Obedience, Shariah, Governance, Execution, Slavery, Punishment, Conquest, Reign, Advice, Security, Leadership, Authority
Hypocrite	The concept of idolatry and takfirism, apostate, Wahhabi ideology, ideological and strategic alliances and separation with other groups, oppressive and aggressive of local regimes, critics of other Islamist groups, critics of secularism	Non-Muslims, Christians, Jews, Apostasy, Yazidis, West and Islam, West and Muslims, Murtadd, Tawaghit, Takfir, Dhawahiri, Irja, Enemy, Mubalah, Execution, al-Qaidah, Bayat, Rivalry, Heresy, True Muslim, True Scholars, Kufr, Ibn Taymiyyah, Modernity, Jahilliyya, Shia, Mursi

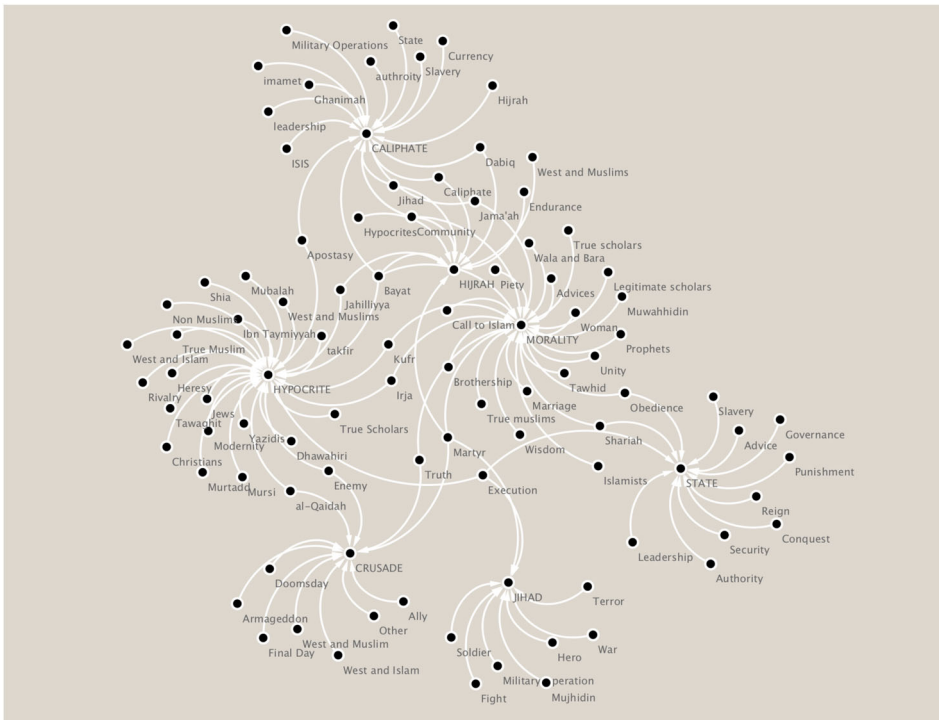


Figure 1. Network graph of interrelated narratives in ISIL's *Dabiq* magazine. Size of the nodes varies according to their degree centrality.

the major key terms and themes pursued in each article, the narratives are identified in terms of ISIS priorities and objectives. Some key themes as codes are appeared several times in different articles such as apostasy, war, and *hijrah*. This article does not look at the word frequencies to see how often specified words are found in the articles, but the aim consists to look at how key themes – words are used to create a meaningful narrative in *Dabiq*. The concordance of key terms in *Dabiq* enables to locate terms and to explore the narratives in which keywords are used. Within these narratives and key themes, the article apparently elected the stories of ISIS jihadis to examine the recurrence of narratives in line with performance. The defined narratives may also be sought in the context of stories of jihadis, highlighted in 'Among the Believers are Men' articles. This study tries to find the correlation between general narratives, performances and stories of ISIS fighters.

As this study adopts the critical content analysis, the articles are contextualized in narratives. The narratives are elaborated by the author of the article to understand what kind of framework is used by ISIS to convey their message. The analyse is not limited to codes and themes but can also include stories to create a whole narrative. Thus, the critical content analysis is an appropriate method that allows the researcher to look at historical and political contexts, and present trends. *Dabiq* de-contextualizes or re-contextualizes some of Islamic notions such as caliphate, *hijrah*, and martyr. The critical content analysis helps to look at the historical and political context in which these concepts are re-emerged.

Discussion of findings

Islamic narrative in Dabiq

Muslims recognize the Islamic narrative consisting of systematic interrelated stories which come from Islamic history, the sacred texts of Islam, the Quran and hadith, prophets' lives, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and the *fiqh*. The narrative tells people what it means to be Muslim, how they should lead their lives, and how to fulfil their religious obligations through stories and rules that convey a shared or 'common view on life', and the ideal believer. These sources and sacred texts of Islam are a major reference for *Dabiq* issues that make many references to these sources. How do *Dabiq* editors use Islamic narratives?

First, *Dabiq* uses Islamic narratives in a fragmented way giving different components of a story to strength its arguments on different issues. The fragment character of narratives given by *Dabiq* does not totally reflect the editorial choice, but the Qur'anic narratives and prophetic tradition cite in fragmented forms. The whole theme via interrelated stories makes a systematic discourse.³² Taking the Qur'an surah 105, al-Fil, as an example, it contains five verses referring to 'the people of the elephant'. The surah tells the story of how the Ka'aba was saved from invading enemies but without the assistance of Muslim commentaries, the reader would not understand when it happened and to which event the surah refers.³³ It is not at all unusual for the Qur'an that the linear story is missed and the story is very fragmented in the Qur'an, so it sends the listener or reader to prior or existing knowledge, or complementary materials including *tafsir* (exegesis) and *hadith*. *Dabiq* articles respects and follows this non-linear and fragmented way of narrative. These kinds of narratives often exist in fragmented forms in *Dabiq* articles and a reader must begin with pre-existent knowledge that accords with Qur'anic narrative.

Secondly, the performative narrative is not setting out to describe a situation, an event or an action; it becomes an event and an action. It is itself an action. Readers are called to avow a narrative of a victory of a *mujahideen* and in this way a disposition is generated in readers to imitate ISIS's supporters. The victory and battle narrative knit together or entangle ISIS and its supporters by addressing the subject. In another example, the migration to the lands of ISIS creates a disposition that ISIS's supporters should follow through imitating the prophet's life. In the story of a battle, an ISIS supporter comes to believe what is realized and what is invited to. It constitutes an ideological engagement within the performative narrative. The images and stories shared by ISIS's supporters in *Dabiq* magazine point to the way the narrative can be performative, performing an action. In *Dabiq*, the ideologues of ISIS develop a language and write texts corresponding to acts. Performative utterances, such as calling to join ISIS, the announcement of the Caliphate and the moral obligation of every Muslim to do jihad are forming intersubjective readings and affirmations of ISIS's supporters which can be analysed also as an

³²J.R. Halverson, H. Goodall, J. Lloyd, and S.R. Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 14.

³³This surah actually refers to an Arab legend that is reported to have taken place during the year of Muhammad's birth around 570 CE. The story goes that a Christian king in Yemen named Abraha was jealous of the pilgrims attracted to the Ka'aba shrine in Mecca, so he built a massive church in Sana'a, and then sent out his army, led by a war elephant to destroy the Ka'aba in Mecca. However, when the army approached, the elephant knelt down in the direction of the Ka'aba and refused to go any further. A swarm of birds then took to the air and pelted the army with stones, causing them to flee and return to Yemen. This story conveys God's miraculous intervention to protect the sacred shrine in Mecca, known to Muslims as the House of God.

individualized jihadism³⁴ that is linked with very political acts. In the first issue of *Dabiq*, a sentence about the declaration of the Caliphate by al-Baghdadi reveals this performative language:

O Muslims everywhere, glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your head high, for today – by Allah’s grace – you have a state and *Khilafah*, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership. It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. (*Dabiq* 1: 7)

This declaration is not only an announcement of state; the discourse is itself both performative and constative in announcing the Caliphate. Not only the announcement of the Caliphate, but the utterance of migration, jihad discourse is also something conveyed in performative language. The *Dabiq* discourse depends on a simple combination of the performative and declarative, where the act, as we see in migration and jihad, brings the events and discourse into success. *Dabiq* writings claim to tell us what they think about the world, but with the performance of their supporters, *Dabiq* succeeds in carrying the characters and events into reality. In *Dabiq*, the martyr, jihad and caliphate icons and symbols are important for mobilization because they give sense and meaning to events. These symbols constitute important components of narratives through which meanings are constructed. The icon of a martyr and making jihad has particular resonance in *Dabiq* and ISIS-related media, where the concept of the violent jihad and martyr has re-integrated into new stories.

What kind of themes are used by ISIS in Dabiq?

Even the main theme in *Dabiq* changes in each issue, the key themes and terms are repeated in each article. In first three issues, *hijrah*, caliphate, and community are the main themes and narratives that can be found in various articles. Some of keywords such as *bayat*, jihad, military operations are recurrent in all issues. The tone of jihad, military operations and expansion gained importance after first three issues. The term of enemy, heresy and the sectarian language persist through all issues of *Dabiq*. The sectarian language stemming from the idea of *takfirism*, judging to be someone unbeliever and rendering them apostate (*murtadd*), is widely used to give a message who is true Muslim and true Islamic scholar. In line with this language, issues from 5 to 15, give an emphasis on the allegiance and expansion of ISIS in different countries. While the expansion and allegiance are highlighted, the other jihadist or Muslim groups are discredited such as Salafis in Egypt, Syrian opposition and al-Qaida.

This article underlies that *Dabiq* presents a clear key themes founded on a clear set of agenda that is very repetitive and very recognizable narratives which reinforce the propaganda of ISIS’s antagonistic world view. This worldview is very simple and repetitive as seen [Table 2](#). Despite the appearances of the changes in messages from issue to issue, ISIS adapts very similar arguments based on typical seven narratives. [Table 2](#) shows the key themes used in various articles based on article’s own qualitative analysis.

The narratives are quite consistent across *Dabiq* articles and issues (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)). The narratives in *Dabiq* show a pattern of repetition and interrelated with different key

³⁴N. Lahoud, *The Jihadis’ Path to Self-Destruction* (London: Hurst, 2011).

Table 2. Themes and narratives cited in all Dabiq articles.

	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3	
ISSUE 1: THE RETURN OF KHILAFAH, 1435 Ramadan (July 2014), 50 pages.	Introduction: Dabiq Magazine	3	Dabiq	Caliphate			CALIPHATE			
	Khilafah Declared	6	Caliphate	Hijrah			CALIPHATE			
	Islamic State Reports	8	Hijrah	Bayat	Military Operations		HURAH	JIHAD	COMMUNITY	
	Imamah is From the Millah of Ibrahim	10	Community	Leadership	Jam'ah		CALIPHATE			
	The Islamic State in the words of the Enemy	2	Enemy				CRUSADE			
	Feature: from Hijrah and Khilafah	8	Hijrah	Caliphate	Jihad		CALIPHATE	JIHAD		
	Islamic State News	10	Military Operations	Hijrah			JIHAD	HIJRAH	STATE	
	Cover page	1	Dabiq				CALIPHATE			
Issue 2: The Flood, 1435 Ramadan (July 2014), 44 pages	Foreword	2	Hijrah	State	Bayat		HURAH	CALIPHATE		
	It's either The Islamic State or the Flood	7	Enemy	Heresy	Free Choice		HYPOCRISY	COMMUNITY		
	Islamic State Reports	6	Military operations	Heresy	Hero		JIHAD	HYPOCRISY	STATE	
	Wisdom	2	Hijrah	Jihad			JIHAD	HIJRAH		
	Feature: The Flood of the Mubalah		Mubalah	True Muslims	Takfir		HYPOCRISY	COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
	The Islamic State in the Words of the Enemy	2	Enemy	Propoganda			CRUSADE			
	Islamic State News	10	Military operations	Ghanimah	State		JIHAD	CALIPHATE		
	Cover Page	2	ISIS	Hero			CALIPHATE			
	Issue 3: A Call to Hijrah, 1435 Shawwal, 42 pages	Foreword	2	Rules				STATE		
		The Islamic State Before al-Malhamah	7	Jama'ah	Hijrah	Obedience	True Muslims	CALIPHATE	HIJRAH	
Islamic State Reports		11	Apostasy	State	Dabiq		HYPOCRISY	CALIPHATE		
Wisdom		2	Hijrah	Jahiliyya	Critics of Modernity		HIJRAH	HYPOCRISY		
Hijrah from Hypocrisy to Sincerity		10	Hijrah	Jihad	Critics of Modernity		HIJRAH	HYPOCRISY	JIHAD	
The Islamic State in the words of the Enemy		2	Propoganda				CRUSADE			
Foley's Blood in Obama's Hands		2	Enemy	Politics			CRUSADE			
The Complete Message from Foley		2								
Cover page		1	Hijrah				HIJRAH			
Issue 4: The Failed Crusade, 1435 Dhul-Hijjah		Foreword	3	Enemy	Victory			CRUSADE		
	Indeed your lord is ever watchful	4	Victory	Hope						
	My provision was placed for me in the shade of my spear	4	Ghanimah	Jihad	Hero		JIHAD	COMMUNITY		
	The revival of slavery Before the Hour	4	Slavery	Islamic principles			CALIPHATE	MORALITY		
	Islamic State Reports	12	Military Operations	Bayat	War		CALIPHATE	COMMUNITY		
	Wisdom	2	Ghanimah	Niyah			MORALITY	COMMUNITY		
	Reflections on the Final Crusade	13	Crusade	Doomsday	Armageddon		CRUSADE	ARMAGEDDON		
	In the Words of the Enemy	2	International Politics	Enemy			CRUSADE			
	A Message from Sotloff	5	Self							
	Hard Talk	4	persuasion							
	Cover	1	Armageddon			Hadith	ARMAGEDDON			

(Continued)

themes. According to ISIS's agenda, the key themes are changed in articles. Table 1 and its visualization in Figure 1 show the distribution of the major narratives across all issues of Dabiq. Figure 1 demonstrates that the greater emphasis is based on Caliphate, Hypocrites and Morality. This does not mean that other narratives are less important than these three

Table 2. Continued.

Issue 5: Remaining and Expanding, 1436 Muharram	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
	Foreword	1	Expansion				STATE		
	Yahya: Lessons from Shahid	6	Martyr	Prophets			MARTYR		
	Islamic State Reports	10	Bayat	Governance	Military Operations	Currency	COMMUNITY	JIHAD	
	Hikmah	2	Hope						
	Remaining and Expanding	12	Expansion	Hope					
	In the Words of the Enemy	2	self	Enemy			CRUSADE		
	If Cantile were the US		International						
	President Today	4	Politics				CRUSADE		
	Cover	1	Child soldier				JIHAD		
Issue 6: Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan A Testimony from Within, 1436 Rabi' Al-Awwal	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
	Foreword	3	Sydney attack				JIHAD		
	Advice for the Soldiers of the Islamic State	10	Advices	State			COMMUNITY		
	The Qa'idah of Adh-Dhawahiri, al-Harari, and an-Nadhari, and the Absent Yemeni Wisdom	10	Bayat	Takfir			COMMUNITY		
	Islamic State Reports	14	Military operations	Bayat	Expansion		COMMUNITY	JIHAD	
	Hikmah	2	Misleading imams				MORALITY	HYPOCRISY	
	Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan - A Testimony from Within	14	Takfir	True Muslims			MORALITY	HYPOCRISY	
	In the words of Enemy	2	Enemy				CRUSADE		
	Meltdown	5	Gold Currency				CALIPHATE		
	Cover page	1	Truth				ARMAGEDDON		
Issue 7: From Hypocrisy to Apostasy The Extinction of Grayzone, 1436 Rabi' al-Akhir (February 2015)	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
	Foreword	2	Execution						
	The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot	4	Execution	State			HYPOCRITE		
	Advice for the leaders of the Islamic State	9	Advices				COMMUNITY		
	From the Pages of History	3	Apostasy	Takfir			TAKFIR		
	Islam is the word of the Sword not Pacifism	5	Jihad	Pacifism	Moderation		JIHAD		
	Responding to the Doubts	1	critics of al-Qaida	Takfir			HYPOCRITE		
	Islamic State Reports	18	Military operations	Islamic Rules			MORALITY	STATE	
	Hikmah	2	Caliphate	Bayat			CALIPHATE	COMMUNITY	
	Among the Believers are Men: Abu Qudamah al-Misri	4	Jihad	Hero	Martyr		MARTYR	JIHAD	
To Our Sisters	2	Hijrah	Hero	Martyr		MARTYR	JIHAD		
In the Words of the Enemy	2	Propoganda	Enemy						
The Extinction of the Grayzone	13	Takfir	Other	Enemy		HYPOCRISY			
The Good Example of Abu Basir al-Ifrigi	4	Life story of jihadi	Hero			MARTYR	JIHAD		
Interview with Abu 'Umar al-Baljiki	4	Interview with jihadi	Hero			MARTYR	JIHAD		
The Anger Factory	6	Enemy	Politics						
Cover page	1	Costantinople							

(Continued)

ones. If we look at the visual analysis of seven narratives; each of them is interconnected as we see in the example of jihad. Jihad as a narrative may be seen a small node, however the jihad as a key theme can be found in most of the narratives such as in Crusade, Morality, and Caliphate.

After analysing the themes and narratives drawn from these themes, in next section, this article wants to examine the role of ISIS fighters' stories narrated in *Dabiq* magazine to understand how the themes employed in articles devoted to the ISIS 'martyrs'.

Table 2. Continued.

Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
Foreword	4	Critics of nationalism						
The allies of Al-Qaidah in Sham	5	Critics of Al Qaidah	Unity			Unity, Ummah		
From the Pages of History: Abu Bakur as-Siddiq's Monumental Stance	2	Abu Bakr	Apostate			HYPOCRITE		
Islamic State Reports	14	Bayat	Hijrah	Military operations	State	COMMUNITY		
Hikmah	2	Hijrah				HUJRAH		
Among the Believers are Men	2	Life story of jihadi				MARTYR	JIHAD	
To Our sisters: The twin halves of the muhajirin	7	Hijrah	Endurance			HUJRAH	MORALITY	
Irja' the Most Dangerous of Bid'ah	18	Faith	Theology			MORALITY		
In the Words of the Enemy	2	Enemy				CRUSADE		
Interview with Abu Muqatil at-Tunusi	5	Hero	Expansion	Bayat				
Paradigm Shift	4	critics of US airstrikes						
Cover page	1	Armageddon	Doomsday			ARMAGEDDON		

Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
Foreword	3	Attacks Texas				JIHAD		
The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham : Part II	2	critics of al-Qaida	Heresy	True Muslims		HYPOCRISY		
The Virtues of Ribat for the Cause of Allah	6	Jihad	Martyr	Islamic rules		JIHAD	MARTYR	
Conspiracy Theory Shirk	6	Conspiracy	ISIS power			CALIPHATE		
From the Pages of History: The Flags of Jahiliyyah	4	Sykes picot agreement	Politics			CRUSADE		
Islamic State Reports	14	Military operations	State			JIHAD	COMMUNITY	
Hikmah	2	True Muslim	Piety			COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
Among the Believers are Men: Hudhayfah al-Battawi	4	Life story of jihadi				JIHAD	MARTYR	
From Our Sisters: Slave girls or prostitutes?	6	Woman	Slavery	Family		MORALITY		
And Allah is the Best Plotters	10	Crusade	Alliance	Enemy		CRUSADE		
In the Words of the Enemy	6	Enemy				CRUSADE		
Interview with the Amir of the Yarmuk Camp Region	8	Jihad	Expansion			STATE	JIHAD	
The Perfect Storm	4	Critics of US policies				CRUSADE		
Cover Page	1	Doomsday				ARMAGEDDON		

Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
Foreword	3	Attacks				JIHAD		
The Allies of Al-Qaidah in Sham: Part III	8	critics of al-Qaida	Heresy			HYPOCRITE		
Tawhid and Our Duty to Our Parents	4	Family	Islamic Rules			COMMUNITY		
A Fatwa to Khurasan	8	Bayat	Al-Qaidah			HYPOCRITE	COMMUNITY	
From the Pages of History: The Expeditions, battles and victories of Ramadan	4	Jihad	Prophet			JIHAD	COMMUNITY	
American Kurdistan	6	PKK and kurds	Enemy	True Muslim		CRUSADE	HYPOCRITE	
The Qawqazi caravan gains pace	2	Bayat	Expansion			COMMUNITY		
Hikmah	2	Wala' and Bara				COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
Among the Believers are Men	2	stories of jihadis				JIHAD	MARTYR	
From Our Sisters	8	Advices	Takfir	Woman	Marriage	COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men	16	Shariah	Governance			COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
In the Words of the Enemy	4	Enemy				CRUSADE		
Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni	7	Jawlani Front	Takfir			HYPOCRITE		
Cover page	1	critics of Muslim groups	Takfir	Heretic		HYPOCRITE		

(Continued)



Table 2. Continued.

Issue 11: From the Battle of al-Azhab to the war of Coalitions, 436. Dhul-Qadah (September 2015)	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
	Foreword	2	al-Qaidah critics				HYPOCRITE		
	The Allies of Al-Qaidah in Sham: Part IV	4	critics of al-Qaida				HYPOCRITE		
	The Evil of Division and Taqlid	6	Community	True Muslim			COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
	The Mahdi of Rafidah: The Dajjal	2	Mahdi, Rafidah,	Enemy			CRUSADE		
	Wala and Bara versus American Racism	4	racism in US	Brotherhood			MORALITY		
	The Danger of Abandoning of Darul-Islam	2	darul islam	Kufr			STATE	MORALITY	
	From the Pages of History: From "Jihad" to Fasad	4	Irja	Jihad			COMMUNITY	Jihad	
	Islamic State Reports	8	Military operations				JIHAD		
	Hikmah	2	True Scholars				MORALITY		
	Among the Believers are Men: Afu Jafar a-Almani	1	Story of Jihadi	Hero			JIHAD	MARTYR	
	To Our Sisters: A Jihad without Fighting	6	Woman	Jihad			JIHAD	MORALITY	
	From the Battle of Al-Azhab to the War of Coalitions	10	War	Enemy	Coalition		CRUSADE		
	In the Words of Enemy	4	Enemy				CRUSADE		
	Interview with Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani	4	Expansion	Bayat					
	Cover page	1	Piety	True Scholars			MORALITY		
	Issue 12: Just Terror, 1437 Safer (November 2015)	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2
Foreword		3	Attacks	Jihad			JIHAD		
The Allies of Al-Qaidah in Yemen		4	critics of al-Qaida	heresy	enemy		HYPOCRITE		
Advice to the Mujahidin: listen and obey		2	Advices	Leadership	Obedience		STATE	MORALITY	
The Allies of Al-Qaidah in Sham : The End		6	Enemy	Heresy	Apostasy		HYPOCRITE		
From the Pages of History: Baqiyah		2	Resistance	Resilience			JIHAD		
To Our Sisters: Twjo, Three od Four		4	Marriage	Polygamy			MORALITY	COMMUNITY	
Hikmah		2	Jama'ah	Unity	Obedience		COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
Military Operations by the Islamic State		4	Military Operations				JIHAD		
And as for the Blessing of Your Lord, Then Mention It		4	Muslims in West	Kufr system	Nationalism	Secularism	MORALITY	COMMUNITY	
O You Who Have Believed, Protect Yourselves and Your Families From Fire		4	Kufr system	secularism			MORALITY	COMMUNITY	
The Revival of Jihad in Bengal		6	Jihad	Expansion			JIHAD		
You Think They are Together, But Their Hearts are Divided		4	coalition forces				CRUSADE		
Paradigm Shift Part II		4	critics of US	ISIS			CRUSADE		
In the Words of the Enemy		4	enemy	politics			CRUSADE		
Amongst the Believers are Men		4	life story of jihadi	Hero			JIHAD	MARTYR	
Interview with Abu Muharib as-Sumali		5	critics of al-Qaida				CALIPHATE	COMMUNITY	
Cover page	1	Armageddon				CRUSADE			
Issue 13: The Rafidah From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal, 1437, Rabi' al-Akhir (January 2016)	Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
	Foreword	3	Attacks				JIHAD		
	Kill the Imams of Kufr	4	Takfir	True Muslim Scholars			COMMUNITY		
	From the Pages of History: The Safawiyah	4	Shia	Enemy			HYPOCRISY		
	Military Reports	6	Military operations	Enemy	Expansion		JIHAD		
	Hikmah	2	Martyr	Hero			MARTYR		
	Among the Believers Are Men	2	Life Story of Jihadi	Hero			MARTYR	JIHAD	HJURA
	To Our Sisters: Advice on Ihdad	4	advices for widows	women			COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
	Do They Not Then Reflect on the Qur'an	3	Jihad				JIHAD		
	The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal	14	Shia Community and history				HYPOCRISY		
	In the Words of the Enemy	2	Enemy	Politics					
Interview with the Wali of Khorasan	7	Bayat	Expansion	Bayat		CALIPHATE			
Cover page	1	anti jewish				CRUSADE			

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
Foreword	2	Brussels attacks	Martyr			JIHAD	MARTYR	
The Knights of Shahadah in Belgium	2	Brussels attacks	Martyr			JIHAD	MARTYR	
Kill the Imams of Kufr in the West	10	takfir	True Scholars	West		MORALITY	HYPOCRISY	
Do They not Reflect on the Qur'an	2	kufir	Hypocrites			COMMUNITY	HYPOCRISY	
Islamic State Operations	6	military operations				JIHAD		
Affliction and Faith	2	Faith	Hope			MORALITY	COMMUNITY	
The Murtadd Brotherhood	16	Takfir	West	Kufr system		COMMUNITY	HYPOCRISY	
From the Page of History: The Fitnah of Mongols	6	Ibn Taymiyyah	True Muslims	Hypocrites		HYPOCRISY		
Among the Believers are Men	2	Martyr	Jihad			JIHAD	MARTYR	
The Blood of Shame	4	US critics				CRUSADE		
In the Words of the Enemy	2	UN report on ISIS				CRUSADE		
Interview	9	Expansion	Jihad			JIHAD	CALIPHATE	
Cover page	1	Dajjal				ARMAGEDDON		

Article Title	Pages	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Narrative 1	Narrative 2	Narrative 3
Foreword	4	Islam	Military operations			JIHAD		
Contemplate the Creation	6	Secular life	Belief			WEST ISLAM		
From the Pages of History: The Response to the Call of Prophet	6	Prophet's invitation to Islam	non Muslims			MORALITY		
The Fitrah of Mankind and the Near Extinction of the Western Woman	6	fitrah	West and Islam			WEST ISLAM	MORALITY	
Words of Sincere Advice	4	a letter from a convert	Bayat	Hijrah	Jihad	JIHAD	HIJRAH	CALIPHATE
Why We Hate You Why We fight you	4	West and Islam	Kufr system	Secularism		WEST ISLAM		
Wisdom	2	call to Islam	obligations			COMMUNITY	MORALITY	
How I Came to Islam	4	Christianity	West and Islam			WEST ISLAM		
Operations	6	Military operations				JIHAD		
Break the Cross	18	Ahl al Kitab	Trinity					
Interview	6	Bayat	True Muslim scholars	Hijrah	Jihad	CALIPHATE	JIHAD	HIJRAH
Among the Believers are Men	3	Life story of Jihadi	Hero			MARTYR	JIHAD	
In the Words of the Enemy	3	Vatican						
By the Sword	3	Jihad	War			JIHAD		
Cover page	1	Christianity						

Stories of ISIS soldiers in Dabiq

Dabiq editors attributed greater emphasis on ISIS fighters and heroes. From the seventh issue, an article entitled 'Among the believers are men' was dedicated to devoted killed ISIS men in attacks or battlefield. In these 13 stories, including Amedy Coulibaly from France, the magazine *Dabiq* features biographies of ISIS fighters who joined to ISIS in different times from the United Kingdom (2), Canada (2), Germany (2), France, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Bengal. Some of them were coming from high profiles and rang of ISIS like Saudi Arabian-born ideologue Abu Malik al-Tamimi (a.k.a. Abu Malik Anas al-Nashwan). See annexe for the list of these people. Despite the diverse backgrounds and life stories of these jihadis, the structure of their biographies and narratives used in *Dabiq* shows similarities. The biographies emphasize the piousness of these men, their past committed crimes and corruption depicted as *jahilliyya*, their return to Islam by doing *hijrah* to ISIS, pledge of allegiance to Caliphate and becoming

good examples of true Muslims with jihad. Sharing these biographies come into prominence relevantly because of their role that they have played in the rise of ISIS. In these biographies this article coded three common narratives: Islamic state and caliphate; *hijrah* (migration); martyrdom and jihad.

These narratives have an impact on various issues and are repeated many times in different articles. There are undoubtedly a variety of narratives that exist and circulate or travel from one *Dabiq* issue to another; one may speak of multiple practices, beliefs and arguments by pointing to the narratives. However, these three narratives are very present and have a performative aspect in some concrete examples from ISIS fighters. The *Dabiq* editors highlight the importance of these narratives by giving different examples from Islamic history and ISIS fighters' lives.

Inventing Islamic narratives

First narrative: Islamic state and caliphate

Caliphate

Amedy Coulibaly's story given in *Dabiq* reveals how the caliphate narrative is framed. This paragraph is extracted from an interview with his wife:

He was very happy. He immediately believed in the Khalifah and the Khilafah by giving *bay'ah*. ... His heart was burning to meet his brothers in the land of the Khilafah and fight the enemies of Allah. His eyes shined (*sic*) every time he would watch the videos of the Islamic State. He would say, 'Don't show me this', because when he would watch the videos, it would make him want to perform *hijrah* immediately and that would have conflicted with his intent to carry out the operations in France. (*Dabiq* 7: 50–51)

It is interesting to expose Coulibaly's firm stance with the caliphate in defining his experience as joy and suffering about joining ISIS. The short paragraphs about Coulibaly's life inspire future jihadis. The passages about him present an impression of very responsible, devout Muslim, enhancing an attractive image of a Muslim fighter living in France. The language contains a performative emotional being soliciting a life with a jihadi career. It is not only the *takfiri* Salafi ideology that makes feasible this jihadi culture; this kind of performative story that presents the jihadi lifestyle creates a powerful image of the role of foreign fighters in joining ISIS.

The idea of caliphate cannot be considered as an emotional identity and attachment as seen in al-Qaida's discourse, and their adoption of the word within their discourse is driven more by utility than ideology.³⁵ ISIS's use of word and its call play a major role in the discourse and in the writings and equally take a big place in their narrative and ideology. The term is not only used as an emotive historical symbol to motivate their supporters and fighters against other groups and Western forces, as seen in al-Qaeda's statements, but at the same time the caliphate fills the lack of performativity with its realizations. The stories like Coulibaly's create an emotional and performative language. In the stories like Coulibaly's one, *Dabiq* addresses to some key elements and concepts like pledge of allegiance, community (*jamaah*) and *imamet*. The narrative of serving to the caliphate takes an important part of these stories.

³⁵R. Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate? A History of the Struggle for Global Islamic Union, 1924 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 159.

The establishment of the Caliphate was announced in the Islamic State's periodical *Dabiq* on the first of Ramadan 1435 H (29 June 2014), in their first issue 'The Return of Khilafah'. *Dabiq* uses the Muslim calendar. The new *amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the faithful) and caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, addresses Muslims by calling them to unite under the new caliphate. The caliphate is the realization of the perfect society according Islamic principles.

'There is no Islam except with *jama'ah* (community), and no *jama'ah* except with *imarah* (leadership), and no *imarah* except *ta'ah* (obedience)' (*Dabiq* 1: 30; *Dabiq* 4: 3). Citing this hadith, *Dabiq* seeks to call Muslims under the ISIS leadership and claims that this leadership is based on a legitimate caliphate. In this first issue, the editors underline and mention the concept of *imamah* (the office of leadership) following the path of Ibrahim (*millah* of Ibrahim) (*Dabiq* 1: 20). This *imamah* includes also a political position and attitude against the oppressor (*Dabiq* 1: 23): '[I]mamah in religious affairs cannot be properly established unless the people of truth first achieve comprehensive political *imamah* over the lands and the people' (*Dabiq* 1: 25). So, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is announced as the caliph and *imam*, political and religious leader of the Muslim community. *Dabiq* praises Abu Bakr As-Siddiq as a monumental caliph (*Dabiq* 8: 12–13) to justify what they do in the name of Islam. ISIS is regarded as the authentic authority and the caliph has unquestionable *imamah* that restores the Islamic state over every Muslim, who has an obligation to follow. It is not a virtual call or a virtual caliphate as we see below.

Establishing slavery (*Dabiq* 4: 14), founding cities and appointing rulers and *walis* (governors), images from market places (*Dabiq* 4: 19), street cleaning, cancer treatment, restoring electricity, service for needy people (*Dabiq* 4: 27–29), detailed health care and medical operations in ISIS-held territory (*Dabiq* 9: 24) are some of the examples that ISIS would like to give a real image of a functional caliphate. The editors express this operational Islamic state through a social media campaign to encourage giving *zakah* (almsgiving) with images showing zakat collectors and a farm owner holding a sheaf of wheat (*Dabiq* 10: 49) and giving *zakah* to those eligible persons (*Dabiq* 10: 54). ISIS announced also their own currency based on gold, silver and copper, and they consider this announcement to be the break from non-Islamic economic systems. The announcement also reveals that the state monopolizes financial affairs in their lands by distributing and controlling the money. The article portrays the announcement of this new currency with coins of Abdul Malik ibn Marwan and also Andalusia coins.³⁶

With these shared elements, images and notes, ISIS wants to show that the caliphate is not a nostalgic idea or a symbolic meaning for Muslims. It is a real state that brings devout, puritanical life according to sharia and has supporters who want to sacrifice their lives in the name of Allah. This vision is more than nostalgia. For Hugh Kennedy,³⁷ this vision cannot be found in any other Islamist discourse. The caliphate belongs to a chain of justification by the constant references to the Prophet Muhammad, the *sahaba* (the companions of the prophet) and the first caliphs. Their model rulers are the early caliphs, such as Abu Bakr, the first caliph. *Dabiq* refers to Abu Bakr and gives examples from him as he maintained the *rida* wars (the Wars of Apostasy) against the rejectionists and the

³⁶Abdul Malik bin Marwan was the fifth caliph of the Umayyad dynasty from 685 to 705. In his time, the first Islamic currency was established.

³⁷H. Kennedy, *Caliphate: The History of an Idea* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

apostates (*murtadd*) who opposed obedience to the caliph. It is no coincidence that the caliph of ISIS took the first caliph's name. The *Dabiq* editors use Abu Bakr's life and caliphate as an example to justify war against the opponents of ISIS. According to Kennedy, the ideologues of ISIS use an image with a nostalgic aspect, adopting black and black banners to connote the Abbasid revolution and appropriate its symbols.³⁸

It is also important to understand and to expect that the circulation of ideas and debates in response to the absence of caliphate both settles and highlights the vitality of the idea of the re-establishment of the caliphate among Muslims, and ISIS uses this vivacity of circulation of ideas about the caliphate. Mona Hassan studies the symbolism of the oft-roman-ticized caliphate:

For many Muslims, the caliphate even constituted a symbol of Islam itself, one deeply embedded in a rich intellectual and cultural discourse that could readily evoke a sense of the wider community's glory, righteousness, and esteem. For some, harkening back to the earliest caliphal models, it signified the potential of the Muslim community to live up to the best interpretations of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, to constitute a model and mercy for the rest of humanity.³⁹

The concept of caliphate is very controversial in different interpretations and realizations, such as the ideas that caliphate represents God on earth, and the caliph as semi-divine and the chief executive of the *umma*.⁴⁰ Also, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the caliphate became an international slogan for supporters and detractors.⁴¹ The narrative of caliphate begins with recent history and it is not as old as the entire Islamic past. While some other Islamists also recognize and acknowledge the role of caliphate, only ISIS has gone for its establishment by giving the caliphate a territorial aspect.

The concept of imamah

Many Islamic scholars refer to the word *imamah* as a jurisprudential concept to indicate the dominant juristic discourse about the caliphate's legal necessity.⁴² For Sunni scholars, the caliph, referred to as the *imam* or *amir al-mu'minin* for his role, is meant to ensure stability and harmony in Islam.⁴³ *Dabiq* uses to this argument to attract Muslims in many parts of the world. For example, *Dabiq* reports pledges of allegiance from different groups: from Ansar al-Islam (*Dabiq* 4: 21), Kurdish villages and people (*Dabiq* 5: 12), from Khurasan and Qawqaz (*Dabiq* 7: 33–34), and from West Africa (*Dabiq* 8: 14). According to ISIS ideologues, those who cannot perform their obligation for 'whatever extraordinary reason' must publicly pledge *bay'ah* to the Islamic State (*Dabiq* 2: 3). This is the strategy of ISIS to spread the act of *bay'ah* as much as possible through a recorded broadcast to enhance ISIS's legitimacy and authority.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹M. Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 13.

⁴⁰M. Al-Rasheed, C. Kersten, and M. Shterin (eds), *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); C. Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*; Kennedy, *Caliphate*; Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate?*

⁴¹S. Sayyid, *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order* (London: C Hurst, 2014).

⁴²Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*.

⁴³Ibid., p. 99.

The *imamah* and accepting authority and leadership mentioned in *Dabiq* is not simply referring to *imamah* in religious affairs. Rather, it is inclusive of *imamah* in political issues and political guidance. Loyalty and allegiance is also another important part of the article aforementioned, which is another recurrent theme in various issues of *Dabiq*. The emphasis on the issue of *imamah* and being in a community is particularly marked from the first issue to the last one. Fellow Muslims are invited to join the ranks of ISIS to fight against other factions and Islamist groups. This leads to the next question about the caliphate narrative of ISIS: Is ISIS a real caliphate or a virtual one?⁴⁴

Islamic state (dawla)

The idea of state (*dawla*) appeared in the mid-eight century and it referred to the Abbaside rule. In the twentieth century with the anti-colonial movements, the idea of state came back to the Islamist thinkers' literature to protect Islam as a result of encounter with colonial powers. The concept of Islamic caliphate was constructed around the term of Islamic state that should apply the Shari'a. The establishment of the Islamic state is justified by upholding the Shari'a.⁴⁵ Abu Hasan al-Mawardi's (991–1058) book on *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya w'al-Wilayat al-Diniyya* (The ordinances of government)⁴⁶ is one of referent book in Sunni tradition of Islamic state and Caliphate. The translator of Al-Mawardi's book Wafa H. Wahba said

He (Mawardi) writes as a jurist, expounding Islamic law mainly in terms of the Shafite doctrine, which is one of the four schools of mainstream thinking in Islamic jurisprudence. His discipline presupposes that the secular is inseparable from the spiritual. That given, the Caliphate becomes more than a mere institution; it turns into a symbol representing an entire politico-religious system that regulates the lives of men in a Muslim community to the smallest detail.⁴⁷

His treatise played a major role in this concept of caliphate and Islamic state. The encounter with modern nation state system and nationalism, Islamist thinkers like Rashid Rida (1865–1935) recognized the impossibility of re-establishing the caliphate, so they theorize to transfer the function of caliphate to the Islamic state as a practical alternative.⁴⁸ One must keep in mind that Rida's writings reflect an awareness of Muslim weakness vis-à-vis European colonial powers, the French and British incursion into Egypt. These incursions were very significant in shaping his ideas, especially in relation to the separation of civil and religious authority.⁴⁹ Although the political thought of Islam is not limited in line of Rida's theory, some writers have highlighted the separation of religion and politics based on Islamic doctrines. Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966) a *shaykh* of al-Azhar university in Cairo. He defended the idea that religious and administrative powers of the Prophet were separate.⁵⁰ ISIS model of caliphate does not include notion of sovereignty and

⁴⁴C. Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* (Quilliam, 2015).

⁴⁵Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, p. 30.

⁴⁶Al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya w'al-Wilayat al-Diniyya* [The Ordinances of Government], trans. Wafaa H. Wahba (Reading: Garnet, 1996).

⁴⁷Ibid., p. xv.

⁴⁸H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

⁴⁹S.A. Wood, *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs Rashid Rida's Modernist Defense of Islam* (Oxford: One World, 2007), pp. 206–225.

⁵⁰Ali Abd al-Raziq, *al-Islam wa-usul al-hukm* (Islam and the roots of government), 1925. Later, the Pakistani writer Qamaruddin Khan, modernist Fazlur Rahman, Indonesian intellectual Nurcholish Madjid (b. 1939), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Egyptian professor at University of Cairo, Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi, a prominent Egyptian judge and writer, Abdullahi

human legislation, which is very literalist and human intervention is considered *shirk* in their utopian Islamic state. ISIS's caliphate did not incorporate the accumulative tradition of Islamic past, delineated this experience.

Second narrative: impossible struggle or hijrah to caliphate

One of the important aspects of the biographies is on how these fighters joined to ISIS and how they made their *hijrah*. The biographies detailed their journeys, travels and what kind of difficulties that they faced. The biography of Jihadi John, Abu Abdillah al-Canadi and Abu Ibrahim al-Canadi talked about the *hijrah* experiences. In these biographies, the fighters were depicted as persons who left their jobs, belongings, and families to join the ISIS. The second narrative that *Dabiq* triggers extensively is the notion of *hijrah* to the caliphate with the establishment of the so-called Islamic State. In the Islamic tradition, *hijrah* refers to Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622.⁵¹ At that time, Muslims could not practice their beliefs and religion in Mecca because of persecution. They migrated in order to freely exercise their Islamic beliefs. The *Dabiq* editors use the same argument as cause for migration, saying that Muslims in other countries face some restrictions on their religion, so Muslims cannot practice it fully. For these Muslims, it is an obligation to make *hijrah*. In its first issues of *Dabiq*, ISIS has this concept to attract Muslims to its territories where Muslims can move and can live in accordance with Islamic rules without risking their dignity, or their might and rights as Muslims being violated (*Dabiq* 1: 7). The release of a *nashid* (religious song) video in the Uyghur language with English translation and presenting pictures from the land of the caliphate with the slogan 'Come, my friend' (*Dabiq* 10: 77) illustrated the emotional appeals from ISIS to give a message about the ummah.

A roadmap in Issue 1 details ISIS's narrative about migration and making jihad (*Dabiq* 1: 38–39; *Dabiq* 9: 13). By calling Muslims around the world, *Dabiq* editors acknowledge the need of administrative as well as other type of critical state positions and functions to establish their state. ISIS seeks to recruit especially doctors, engineers, scholars and judges (Islamic), as well as other specialists (*Dabiq* 1: 11). To recruit these personnel, they play on the religious obligation of *hijrah* to Darul-Islam (The Islamic State). The *Dabiq* calls Muslim students of medicine to join the ISIS ranks to benefit and support the Muslim ummah (*Dabiq* 9: 26). An article in another edition is titled, 'Abandon the Lands of Shirk [idolatry] and Come to the Land of Islam' (*Dabiq* 8).

Ahmed an-Na'im, Sudanese born Islamic scholar, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, Sudanese Islamic scholar, they urge upon the separation between religion and politics.

⁵¹ Muslims already left Mecca first time in 615 to the Christian monarch Negus. In 620, some Medinan people met with prophet and they became, and 2 years later in 622 a Medinan delegation around 75 Muslims they promised to protect prophet and prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers in Mecca to emigrate to Yathrib (Medina). Nearly all Meccan Muslims migrated to Medina. See Martin Lings, *Muhammad, His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Inner Traditions, 2006), pp. 118–122. The term Hijra became a fundamental notion in Islamic tradition including contemporary times. The word Hijra are mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an (Qur'an 16:41, Qur'an 16:110; Qur'an 8:72). The majority of these verses contain praises and rewards to those who emigrated from oppression to practice their religion. The recommendation of migration from oppressed area to a free geography later became a usual practice in Islamic tradition, canonized in Muslim jurists texts. Muhammad Khalid Masud looks at doctrinal foundation of hijra and how these doctrinal approaches were re-interpreted by Muslim jurists, later on historical developments such as colonialism, Muslim migration to non-Muslim countries, and the rise of Muslim nation-states shape this doctrine. See M.K. Masud, 'The Obligation to Migrate: The Doctrine of Hijra in Islamic Law' in Dale F. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds) *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 29–50.

Augmenting modern day of hijrah

Dabiq develops this concept of *hijrah* in various ways. Its first argument about the *hijrah* narration, the distinction between *Dar al-Islam* (the abode of peace) and *Dar al-Harb* (the abode of war)⁵² is customized in its strict jurisprudence according to the separation between the enemies of God and friends of God. ISIS asserts that the true Islam is and can be practiced in its land. According to this narrative, *Dar al-Islam* contains the territories controlled by ISIS. Muslims should leave where they live and migrate to these lands. In Issue 2, it is written:

Many readers are probably asking about their obligations towards the Khilafah ... The first priority is to perform Hijrah from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from *darul-kufr* to *darul-Islam*. Rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses, and children. (*Dabiq* 2: 3)

Secondly, this narrative focuses on the characteristics of the true Muslim and how to perform Islam. According to *Dabiq*, Muslims need to reject societies based on non-Islamic man-made law, and they have to perform *hijrah* to the lands of ISIS. A Muslim who does not perform *hijrah* and stays in a non-Islamic society will be a sinner, 'which would cause him to commit greater sins until he could commit *kufr* for the sake of his sinful interests' (*Dabiq* 7: 55). For ISIS, the religion of Muslims who continue to live in non-Islamic societies will be destroyed (*Dabiq* 3: 32), and life in *darul-kufr* ends in apostasy. In 'From Hypocrisy to Apostasy', ISIS states,

The Muslims in the West will quickly find themselves between one of two choices (*sic*), they either apostatize and adopt the *kafir* [unbelievers'] religion ... or they perform *hijrah* [migration] to the Islamic State and thereby escape persecution from the crusader governments and citizens. (Issue 7)

A convert woman from Finland who migrated to join ISIS writes that Muslims living in Europe expose themselves and their children to so much filth and corruption (*Dabiq* 12: 33). For this woman, children attending schools are facing the threat of immoral teachings and *kufr* systems. In the Islamic State, they are living a pure life and their children are being raised with Islamic rules (*Dabiq* 15: 39). This article uses pragmatic reasons and arguments to encourage *hijrah*. It argues that the West is corrupted and will corrupt Muslim believers. Muslim children will abandon their faith in non-Islamic societies. Western life incites children to drugs, alcohol, teenage gangs, and illicit sex:

The modern-day slavery of employment, work hours, wages, etc., is one that leaves the Muslim in a constant feeling of subjugation to a *kafir* master. He does not live the might and honor that every Muslim should live and experience. (*Dabiq* 3: 29)

⁵²Territory of war that does not have a treaty of peace with Muslims, those are called *dar al-sulh* or *dar al-ahd*. These notions of *dar ul harb* or *dar ul Islam* does not appear in the Qur'an or Hadith and it is extensively used to describe the abode of the Hereafter and the abode of the life in world. See K. Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (HarperOne, 2007), p. 227. Prophet Muhammad send messengers to the Persian, Byzantine emperors demanded that they choose between conversion and war. It is a legal concept developed by Muslim jurists to designate where Islamic law prevails or not. Historically, the separation between *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* was introduced after the defeat of the Battle of Tours in 732. As a result of this defeat, the world of Islam is engaged in perpetual conflict with the non-Muslims, not exclusively in terms military expansion but also a peaceful persuasion. See C. Bennett, *Muslims and Modernity, An Introduction of Issues and Debates* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 157. However, this legal concept has been affected by historical changes. *Dabiq* uses this classical concept and did not take into account the historical changes. It extended this concept the territories where Muslim population is majority and declare the ruler as apostate and *tawaghit* (idol) regimes. The term *tawaghit* occurs in the Qur'an many times. M.A. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 89–90.

Thirdly, to depict non-Islamic societies, *Dabiq* editors have adopted the term *jahiliyyah*.⁵³ This reflects Sayyid Qutb's reference to the ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia, to describe the modern world. ISIS defines non-ISIS territories as a land of modern *jahiliyyah*.⁵⁴ To confront this *jahiliyyah*, *hijrah* and jihad are two fundamental elements. Fourthly, for *Dabiq*, the *hijrah* signifies also the realization of ummah. The *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiances) coming from different parts of the world signifies this aim of ISIS to bring all Muslims together under one real state. This position is demonstrated through a remark made in an interview with a Tunisian ISIS fighter in Issue 8: 'Alhamdulillah, by performing Hijrah to Sham [Syria], I was blessed with witnessing the revival of the Khilafah' (*Dabiq* 8: 61).

Hijrah stories

As mentioned above, in an interview, Amedy Coulibaly's wife Hayat Boumeddiene emphasized the emotional discursive style of ISIS supporters. His wife says, 'He was very happy. He immediately believed in the Khalifah and the Khilafah by giving *bay'ah*'. The story of a pregnant woman's *hijrah* is also detailed to reinforce the importance of duty and remind readers of the responsibility of every Muslim to migrate (*Dabiq* 8: 35). The difficulties of the journey are given to exemplify a true believer and a valuable *hijrah*. Making sacrifices in life, having difficulties, making an effort to accomplish one's duty are some of the peculiarities of the journey:

She travelled by car and passed through three countries until she reached the land of the Islamic State and then gave birth to her child who, by Allah's decree, died during birth due to pregnancy complications apparently caused by the difficulty of the trip. ... He died and was buried in the Islamic State upon the *fitrah*, and this is better for him than to die through the curriculum of the *tawaghit's* schools. How valuable is the *hijrah* and how valueless is every sacrifice on its path.

The ideologues of ISIS emphasize overpowering the feelings of ISIS's supporters. These references to keeping faith during tough times can be found in many Islamic sources, such as the Qur'an and hadith. Giving these sources with a performative aspect, as in these stories about the *hijrah* of Muslims to ISIS, enhances the reliability and consistency of the stories: they are not only cited on Islamic web sites or books; these stories are present in contemporary life.

In another example, *Dabiq* presents the story of Abu Shurayh as-Silani, from Sri Lanka (*Dabiq* 12: 57). This is a perfect story to understand how he resisted his family's initial opposition to his *hijrah*. Through his words, the *Dabiq* editors show the meaninglessness of the world: 'This is it for me (going to Khilafah). I want to have nothing of this Dunya'. He performed his *hijrah* with his family members, including his parents, wife, and six children.

Dabiq editors highlight how *hijrah* has difficulties:

[He] embarked on a long and strenuous journey that totaled approximately two months and involved trekking the mountain ranges of Europe and its marshy farmlands, sneaking across borders, and being detained by the authorities of various nations on at least two occasions.

⁵³J. Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁵⁴It is defined as the pre-Islamic period or the 'ignorance' of divine government. The term signifies, in Islamist ideologues' views, any political system that is not based on Islamic rules and values.

The journey required a great amount of patience and a high degree of security precautions. (*Dabiq* 13: 23)

They thus portray jihadis as strong and courageous people by emphasizing their personal character in the migration stories. For example, they report that Abu Qudamah left West London, United Kingdom in 2012 two months before his baby daughter was born (*Dabiq* 7: 46–49). Another portrait, written by a female writer, focuses on women's efforts:

I met a sister who was six months pregnant accompanied by her husband coming from Britain. I was surprised by this adventurist, so I said, 'Why didn't you wait a bit until you gave birth to the baby you are carrying and then perform hijrah!' She answered, 'We could not handle waiting any longer. We melted yearning for the Islamic State!'

She also relates the story mentioned earlier in this article of the woman whose child died at birth, apparently as the result of the journey to the caliphate: 'Another sister performed *hijrah* with her husband while she was pregnant. She travelled by car and passed through three countries until she reached the land of the Islamic State' (*Dabiq* 8: 35–36). This journey is presented a very valuable *hijrah* and sacrifice. It is not only a verbal and discursive way of depicting *hijrah*, but the story gives an inside look and makes the journey realistic. The performative aspect of the story is in the process making of jihadi culture and lifestyle surrounding with difficulties, at the same time with the joy of enriching yourself with the idea of reaching Caliphate and being part of it.

Abu Shurayh as-Silani's story strengthens the idea that jihadis left behind them a good life with a prestigious job and personal renown:

His kindness, devotion, and deep concern for the Ummah seemed always to move him in a different direction away from the mundane worldly desires and concerns of most people. Having grown up in a village, he despised life in the city and always preferred to keep things bare and simple. He was also an advocate for physical fitness and was a master of martial arts, for which he was renowned. When he left Sri Lanka to perform hijrah, he had a prestigious job in the suburbs ... When the dream of khilafah became a reality presenting the chance to perform hijrah to a land ... there was nothing that could hold him back from answering the call. As occurred with many others, it felt as though his entire life seemed to lead him to this moment. Hijrah, however, is no easy task. As is the case with all other acts of worship that are beloved to Allah, Shaytān stands diligently in the way. His parents recall him having said during all the trials they faced before embarking upon hijrah. (*Dabiq* 12: 57)

This emphasis on shifting from a luxury life with mundane desires to the simple one and pleasure in joining ISIS is a theatrical image of the jihadist understanding of life and narrative.

Third narrative: martyr and jihad

A man of strong character, a natural leader, Khalid was guided while in prison after having a vivid, life-changing dream. He saw that he was alongside the Prophet fighting the disbelievers. Narrating his dream, he said, 'It was a vision. After hearing the last verse of al-Fath recited in a loud voice, I saw the Prophet on a horse in battle, a distance away. The vision took me beyond the battlefield. I saw myself as an archer shooting arrow at the enemy. I would shoot, take cover, then shoot again'. He narrated other details of the dream and said, 'I then woke up, back in my prison cell'. (*Dabiq* 14: 6)

In this short paragraph, the story of Khalid al-Bakrawi is started with a dream where Prophet is seen and supports his aspiration and purpose about battle and killing people. In this way, the direct connection with the prophetic method spawns the belief that they are righteous and jihad is the way to reach that aspiration. The dreams have two ways of affecting jihadi behaviour: helping activists make sense of the world and establishing authority over followers.⁵⁵

The interesting part of the story is that it is based on old-fashioned figures like archers shooting arrows and going into battle on horseback, capturing cities with horses, and bearing black flags, in front of trucks (*Dabiq* 9: 46). *Dabiq* is full of pictures of iconic figures of black-clothed warriors on horseback brandishing long, curved swords. The texts beneath depict them as knights, courageous and steadfast people. The medieval Islamic characters with black flags and dressed in black recall plentiful memories of courage and commitment and associate the young jihadis with an ancient and purer form of warfare. The flag used by ISIS, the organization's emblem, evokes the battles in Islam's earliest time and symbolizes Islam in its purest stage, the image of religious authenticity.⁵⁶ The author underlines also the righteous and legitimate jihad represented by ISIS fighters. The performative language is used with certain visuals to communicate a heroic image of martyrdom. The fighter in different contexts is depicted as a hero to signify a prominent figure.⁵⁷ The iconic caliphate revivifies this image of courageous jihadis to seduce young people around the world. It offers an epic vision with powerful images and depictions surrounded with Islamic stories, Qur'anic verses and hadith collections. In Issue 10, the *Dabiq* editors give examples from the Prophet Muhammad's battles during the month of Ramadan with the same image, four men on horseback with a black flag and swords (*Dabiq* 10: 26).

Jihad and martyrdom in Islam and in Dabiq

In every issue of *Dabiq*, ISIS ideologues also present making jihad as a duty of Muslims to be accepted by every true believer. The mapping of martyrdom in *Dabiq* is essential for understanding the cultural and religious milieu in which ideas on political martyrdom are formed and cults of martyrs are constructed. It is informative to explore the uses of the language of martyrdom and narrative, and the ways in which it is imagined and experienced in ISIS fighters' stories. This article does not verify whether the term and notion of martyr is useful or appropriate to describe the killings of ISIS, but the focus will be on the narratives and stories taken from the depictions of fighters in *Dabiq*.

Dabiq writers produce articles about ISIS fighters to show that they join and fight deliberately and by choice by dwelling on their firmness of resolve. The creation of this violent jihadi narrative using postmodern materials and new communication means is very meaningful for the ISIS jihadis. Thus, *Dabiq* invents new mechanisms of providing narratives, but at the same time, their purposes and arguments use the old violent Islamic narratives that make a continuity with the old arguments about jihad. The existing literature is devoted to the perception of jihad, and the medieval and contemporary

⁵⁵I.R. Edgar and G. De Looijer, 'The Islamic Dream Tradition and Jihadi Militancy' in T Hegghammer (ed) *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 129.

⁵⁶A. Ostovar, 'The Visual Culture of Jihad' in T Hegghammer (ed.) *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 88.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 93.

discussions.⁵⁸ These studies deal with the theological issues and have some general chapters on martyrdom.

The jihadi notions and culture shape the ISIS fighters' minds and provide ideologically important impetus to participate in killings in modern ways. As the *Dabiq* editors put the emphasis on jihad and the jihadi understanding of striving in the path of God, the jihad is something of a renewal of medieval theology about jihad.⁵⁹ But other scholars say that modern and contemporary perspectives on martyrdom and jihad are different from the early, classical and late medieval understandings of jihad and martyrdom.⁶⁰ According to Afsaruddin, most studies focus on the legal dimension and military signification of the jihad.⁶¹ Such academic works emphasize the extensive pre-modern juridical literature to explain the semantic and legal meaning of jihad in Islam. The polyvalent concept of jihad in the Qur'an is not reducible to only a combative dimension with its implications for particular difficult circumstances, problems and people;⁶² however, in ISIS-related discourses and *Dabiq* magazine a cult of military martyrdom is developed in reference to some Qur'an verses. The notion of absolute truth about the treatment of false belief is very present in every issue, but the traditional Muslim scholars also use 'the sword verse'.⁶³ In different articles, many times the writers argue that ISIS followers should kill the polytheists unless they convert and are repentant:

Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden – such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book – until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled. (Qur'an 9: 29)

Dabiq reactivates violent jihadism in connecting to some medieval and contemporary sources; furthermore, this connection is not only discursive. Interviews and personal profiles of fighters frame what ISIS ideologues use as narrative.

Dabiq martyrs

Profiles of dead fighters who emigrated to ISIS play a part in these narratives. Abu Muharib al-Muhajir, born as Mohammed Emwazi and known as 'Jihadi John', who was killed in a US airstrike in 2016 (*Dabiq* 13: 22–23), Abu Qudamah al-Misri, born as Aine Davis, from West London, who was killed by a sniper in Syria (*Dabiq* 7: 46), are some examples of these martyrs. Some of them had already an experience of jihad and war in Iraq and Afghanistan like Shaykh Abu Talhah 'Abdur-Ra'uf Khadim al-Khurasani, Hudhayfah al-Battawi, Abu Malik at-Tamimi. The articles portrayed ISIS fighters as

⁵⁸D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); F.A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); T. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2002); R. Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam: A Reader* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996); E. Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (Yale University Press, 1990); J. Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵⁹D. Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁶⁰A. Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 205.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 109, 116.

⁶³And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the mushrikin wherever you find them, and capture them, and besiege them, and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful [At-Tawbah: 5].

heroes who gone through tough and compelling life conditions that strengthen their faith. The deaths are always presented and welcomed as martyrdoms: they are often not said to have been killed but to have ‘received *shahadah*’ (martyrdom). As Sewell reminds us, ‘The meaning of a symbol always transcends any particular context because the symbol is freighted with its usages in a multitude of other instances of social practice’.⁶⁴ These martyrs witness to a process of ‘travel’ of the martyr symbol across borders with the caliphate and *hijrah* notions.

Dabiq articles integrate stories and give some personal details about the desire for death to intensify the readers’ reaction, through the link with a past which has become a present. The martyr makes this link. By these stories, *Dabiq* encourages the reader to participate emotionally in jihadi scenes. The language used revivifies an intense situation. Readers are not merely being told a story but invited to take part in the story. For example, the story of Abu Qudamah al-Misri (Aine Davis) is detailed from his migration to different battlefields. His diligence, robustness, and eagerness to die are some of the characteristics outlined as those of a true martyr (*Dabiq* 7: 46–49). A sense of collective identity is created not so much by a strict set of beliefs as by the language of martyrdom. The use of the language of martyrdom in these ways contributes to an ISIS identity, both individual and collective.

Even though Salafi discourse is against personal cultification, they place emphasis on the materializing of martyrdom around which the cult can flourish. Thus, their focal point rests on the aspect of the martyr cult. In a similar vein, justifying the new martyrs with the traditional medieval explanation enables the imagined continuity between past and present: this provides legitimacy to the new cultic images by emphasizing the new martyr’s identity, his piety, his abstinence, courage and willingness to die. The glorification of death and the martyr assists the idea that ISIS is on the path of true believers. The new martyr is modernized and an improved version of the martyr depicted in the prophet’s time or in medieval discourse, highlighting the continuity of the military struggle.

As Mittermaier says, ‘martyrdom was becoming something one could imagine, desire, and invite – rhetorically, performatively, and sometimes literally’.⁶⁵ Turning the martyr into a memorial cult requires a performative language and action to be constantly reaffirmed and gives an eloquence to the followers. The martyrs’ stories offer a question of commodification through different elements such as poetry, images, songs, histories and stories which are circulated in *Dabiq*. The *Dabiq* images and stories show how the martyr is becoming a scene of textual performance through the narratives. Daniel Gilman’s article presents the effective role of Egyptian music as ‘martyr pop’ during the Arab Spring.⁶⁶ Music, images, and stories are subtle devices to react to the idea of martyrdom. *Dabiq* does not only make reference to Qur’anic verses or some militant scholars’ work on jihad, it also uses images and stories of its fighters to offer another aspect of the martyr. In one example, ISIS fighters lost the city of Marista, and many of them were killed. Later, ISIS retook the town and buried their martyrs. They remarked that there was ‘a very strong smell of musk’ (*Dabiq* 15: 67). Musk was the Prophet

⁶⁴W.H. Sewell, ‘The Concept(s) of Culture’ in G.M. Spiegel (ed.) *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 76–95.

⁶⁵A. Mittermaier, ‘Death and Martyrdom in the Arab Uprisings: An Introduction’, *Ethnos*, 80:5 (2015), pp. 583–604.

⁶⁶D.J. Gilman, ‘The Martyr Pop Moment: Depoliticizing Martyrdom’, *Ethnos*, 80:5 (2015), pp. 692–709.

Muhammad's most loved and purest perfume. By giving this example, *Dabiq* ideologues would like to sanctify the martyrs by the presence of the Prophet. This is also part of the jihad narrative that spread among ISIS supporters. It creates a symbolic moral community by activating an Islamic symbol and icon. Meir Hatina analyses how martyr figures contribute to social influence and the self-sacrifice of an individual adds quality and morality to the group identity.⁶⁷ In this respect, it is understandable that the focus is on martyrs as they play an important role in motive.

Thus, the focus on martyrs' images and stories causes supporters to forget ISIS's brutal murders. The martyrs and the connection to the past efface brutal images of violence and oppression, as well as the criticisms of their killings and violent attacks. The focus on martyrs creates the risk of politicized images and effectively a political stand. Images of horrible injuries, amputations, empty eye sockets, and decapitations by ISIS are situated in relation to other cruel images and stories such as beheadings, murder, and torture by their enemies. The martyr becomes a figure who facilitates a revolutionary change for ISIS. Jihadi narratives support this revolutionary change. Martyrdom is in this context to be understood mainly as a violent rupture in response to injustice and to establish a religious order.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to examine the deployment of the narratives of *Dabiq* through the appeals to migrate, make jihad and pledge allegiance to ISIS. These appeals are considered as a sign that the magazine wants to play a role in recruiting. *Dabiq* does not only provide images and messages by focusing on the violence and jihad of ISIS to motivate their supporters to action, but also creates a meaning for the action by using narratives linked to ISIS fighters' stories. *Dabiq* reveals also a weakness, as Brandon Colas indicates, because the articles focus on a specific and very literalist understanding of Islamic sources.⁶⁸ They have a particular approach to Islamic history with the Qur'an and hadith that contradicts other interpretations of Islamic texts. This fundamentalist approach to interpreting a text without any outside help, for Colas, creates an ambiguity and weakness in *Dabiq's* use of narrative on emigration and jihad, as these narratives require more elements to understand the context and the Qur'anic and hadith sources,⁶⁹ elements which may have different historical, eschatological, and metaphorical readings.⁷⁰ Colas highlights the second fracture line of this ideological jihadi fundamentalism as individualized jihad, which reduces the role of group identity and communal identity. Following Lahoud's perspective, 'individualized jihad makes it extraordinarily difficult, indeed impossible, for leading jihadis to concentrate, organize and monopolize violence to meet even short-term objectives'.⁷¹ However, *Dabiq* enables communal identity by enacting performative narratives. El Difraoui examines al-Qaida's audiovisual production to see how the organization creates a mythology and a cultic identity.⁷² That performative aspect is based on a

⁶⁷M. Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶⁸Colas, 'What Does Dabiq Do?.'

⁶⁹T. Frissen, E. Toguslu, P. Van Ostaeyen, and L. D'Haenens, 'Capitalizing on the Koran to Fuel Online Violent Radicalization: A Taxonomy of Koranic References in ISIS's Dabiq', *Telematics and Informatics*, 35 (2018), pp. 491–503.

⁷⁰Colas, 'What Does Dabiq Do?', p. 181.

⁷¹Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path*, p. 193.

⁷²A. El Difraoui, *Al-Qaida Par L'Image: La Prophétie Du Martyre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013).

network of visual images, symbols and themes also used in jihadi materials.⁷³ In the case of *Dabiq*, the existence of individual jihadism does not condemn ISIS's organizational management to weakness thanks to the individual narratives and stories. These individual stories about *hijrah* and jihad complete a realistic picture of caliphate. However, it is difficult to measure the impact of *Dabiq* on recruitment. Pelletier et al. found that the language, style and composition of articles in *Dabiq* render it difficult to understand for foreign fighters and inaccessible to a Western audience.⁷⁴ For Pelletier et al., *Dabiq* serves a strategy to build a complete society for Muslims. There are limits to measure how ISIS's strategy is very influential in recruitment process. It is not yet clear what specific components of these narratives and their performativity have an impact on ISIS supporters. There is also need more comprehensive assessment of themes and narratives for more developed measures. More research in this area would be valuable. Such research should investigate connections between giver (*Dabiq*) and receiver (ISIS supporters) and the degree to which narratives are linked between two. This should include an examination of how information disseminated by ISIS through new and classical media platforms is received by various audiences.

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⁷³C. Carvalho, "Kids in the Green Lands of the Khilafat" – A Tumblr Case Study of Imagery within the Jihad 3.0 Narrative' in M.R. Kayıkcı and L. d'Haenens (eds) *European Muslims and New Media* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017).

⁷⁴I.R. Pelletier, L. Lundmark, R. Gardner, G. Ligon Scott and R. Kilinc, 'Why ISIS' Message Resonates: Leveraging Islam, Socio-Political Catalysts and Adaptive Messaging', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 39:10 (2016), pp. 871–899.