Chaos and Civilization: The Organizational Impression Management of the Islamic State in *Dabiq* Magazine*

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Jesse S.G. Wozniak, West Virginia University (jesse.wozniak@mail.wvu.edu); Joshua Woods, West Virginia University (joshua.woods@mail.wvu.edu); and Quenton King, Columbia University (quenton.king@columbia.edu)

Abstract

Objective: This article analyzes how the Islamic State (IS) employs Organization Impression Management in the imagery it displays in its official outreach magazine, *Dabiq*.
Methods: We employ a quantitative content analysis of all 1,317 photographic images in the fourteen existing issues of *Dabiq*.
Results: We find photographs published in *Dabiq* to be concentrated in two seemingly-contradictory themes of IS as a harbinger of violent chaos and IS as a provider of triumphant and secure civilization.
Conclusion: IS carefully balances its media output to portray a world in which all who follow the dictates of the organization live in peaceful tranquility and abundance, while those who do not will face endless chaotic violence.

*Direct all correspondence to Jesse S.G. Wozniak, 219 Knapp Hall, 29 Beechurst Avenue, Morgantown, West Virginia, 26501, jesse.wozniak@mail.wvu.edu, who shall share all data and coding for replication purposes. The authors of this paper would like to thank Yan Song Lee for his extensive assistance with the manuscript.

Introduction

From its first official public statement in the summer of 2013, the Islamic State (IS) has relied heavily on self-produced media to attract followers and disseminate its core message to multiple audiences (Celso, 2014; Ingram, 2015; Colas, 2016; Richards, 2016; Winkler et al., 2016). Surprisingly well-produced, with slick graphics and easily-digestible commentary on contemporary events, IS puts out a constant stream of media content (Winter, 2015). A centerpiece of their media efforts was *Dabiq* magazine, IS's official mouthpiece in which they reported on news of the caliphate and defined their core beliefs while distinguishing themselves from the wide variety of jihadist and insurgent organizations throughout the region. Although *Dabiq* was eventually superseded by their new publication *Rumiyah*, it's roughly two year production run (from June 2014 until July 2016) covers the rise of the organization from a small offshoot of *Al Qaeda* to a major actor in the region.

Analyzing the imagery employed throughout the publication run of *Dabiq* reveals two primary messages: that of IS as a powerful agent of chaos and destruction and that of IS as a provider of secure civilization, serenity, and triumph. While these appeals may seem contradictory, we argue they are actually mutually beneficial to the image IS wants to project of itself to both potential recruits and adversaries alike. As such, the present study seeks to correct the dearth of sociological research on this pressing issue by employing quantitative content analysis of IS imagery in *Dabiq* to reveal how their self-presentation tactics are at once a new form of terror/insurgency while simultaneously retaining many elements of traditional state-building efforts.

IS, Media, and Self-Presentation

Of the many unique attributes of IS, one of the most remarked upon is their extensive employment of media (Winter, 2015; Christien, 2016). IS and IS-affiliated individuals produce over 90,000 discrete social media messages per day (Winkler et., al 2016), with roughly 70% of their output in the form of photographs depicting their efforts (Winter, 2015). The media output of IS

ranges from billboards and posters within and immediately around the territories under their control, radio and video disseminated on flash drives and throughout the internet, and print publications such as the one analyzed in this study, many of which are typically available in over a half-dozen different languages (Ingram, 2015).

Media is a central pillar of IS strategy, and it is very clear the group invests heavily in this area, having created "a robust, multi-level organizational structure designed to exercise control over the organization's external messaging" (Price et. al, 2014: 48). There are three levels to the IS media organization: the central media units where *Dabiq* and other official publications are produced, provincial information offices, and of course the much broader membership and support base which produces so much of the social media output (Ingram, 2015). The local provincial media offices, operating in each province controlled by IS, exist not only to disseminate the media of the central office, but also to act as a sounding board for messaging strategy and to incorporate local appeals into broader messages (Price et. al, 2014).

The organization's prolific output is designed to appeal to a wide variety of groups; some articles and imagery are clearly aimed at antagonizing Western officials, others at attempting to convert and recruit those living both within the Middle East and throughout the world, while still other messages and images are designed to speak to those within their own territory, highlighting the work the group has done and disseminating their political and ideological aims (Colas, 2016; Price et. al, 2014; Richards, 2016). The sophistication and variety of IS' appeals allows the group to offer a much broader range of causes to join when compared to other jihadist organizations (Celso, 2014; Siebert et. al, 2016).

What is especially notable about the media produced by IS and *Al Hayat*, their official media arm, is the quality of their output (Colas, 2016; Price et. al, 2014). *Dabiq* is a prime example; the magazine is clearly a professional production, with dazzling photographs and regular running features, such as "Islamic State Reports" detailing the latest developments from the front lines, or "In

The Words of The Enemy," dissecting speeches and news articles of Western politicians and media. The high-level production makes *Dabiq* stylistically comparable to many major Western news magazines, save with significantly more photos of decapitations.

According to its authors, *Dabiq* serves to focus on issues of interpretation of Islam, as well as containing "photo reports, current events, and informative articles on matters related to the Islamic State" (*Dabiq*, Issue 1:3). Throughout the fourteen issues published as of this writing, the magazine hews closely to its stated mission, with articles dedicated to a wide-range of concerns both specific to the Islamic State and to Muslims in general, with topics ranging from the proper role of women in jihad, to the training of new recruits, to the delivery of medical services and restoration of electricity, to advertisements for IS's various radio and video channels. In the time since data collection and analysis was completed, *Dabiq* was discontinued and replaced by a new publication *Rumiyah* (meaning Rome), likely reflecting IS' loss of control over the Syrian town of Dabiq and reflecting their prophecy of a fall of Western powers and the increasing likelihood of action outside of the lands of the caliphate (Wright, 2016).

Like much of *Al Hayat*'s output, *Dabiq* is designed to attract Western audiences (Richards, 2016). Importantly, the Western audiences *Dabiq* is speaking to represent a diverse array of interests; in addition to targeting English-speaking Muslims, it also attempts to speak to Western policymakers and media outlets (Christien, 2016; Colas, 2016). *Dabiq* speaks to these audiences both directly through the discourse of the magazine, and symbolically through the images employed, which build upon and repurposes common Western tropes, such as the orange prison-style jumpsuits worn by IS captives, or the American-style military garb worn by IS members themselves. There is evidence that IS's attempt to appeal to foreign audiences is having success; while there is no way to accurately gauge how many people have emigrated to IS-controlled areas, estimates range from 5,000-10,000 on the low end (Siebert et. al., 2015) to up to 100,000 on the high end (Winkler et al., 2016).

Regardless of the exact number, IS represents "the largest mobilization of foreign fighters in Muslim majority countries since 1945" (Neumann, 2015).

The Presentation of Persons versus Online Organizational Selves

Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) still offers a useful conceptual repertoire on the ways people strategically manipulate social information to shape what others think of them and control how the immediate situation is being defined. Goffman provided several insights on the tactics people use to present themselves as normal, acceptable, moral, entitled to respect, powerful, or in possession of valuable knowledge and expertise. He suggested that single individuals, or people working in teams, are motivated to enact successful presentations to fulfill their plans, such as securing scarce resources or avoiding stigma and embarrassment (Goffman, 1956; Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1964).

To apply Goffman's work to our study of IS's tactical impression management, we should begin by mentioning two ways in which our subject and approach differ from his. First, Goffman treats impression management as an embodied experience—that is, one that occurs between two or more individuals in face-to-face situations. People's words, inflection, facial expressions, clothing and bodies all transmit ("give" and "give off") important parts of the performance (Goffman, 1959:2). As noted by Shilling (1999:545), "the corporeal dimensions of co-presence" are central to Goffman's take on impression management. The "settings" where self-presentation occurs are real places with distinct geographical locations—establishments with fixed barriers, such as hospital waiting rooms, college dormitories, and grocery stores. Although Goffman wrote at length about impression managers working in "teams" (1959:77-105), described how organizations present a "front" just like individuals (1959:77), and acknowledged that differences in social status shape social interaction, he did not dwell on the marked advantages that organized groups hold over ordinary people in carrying out successful performances and controlling the definition of situations.

The performances in *Dabiq* do not require the co-presence of individuals or even a specified geographical location, as the settings where web-based interaction occurs are unbounded. Using *Dabiq* and other types of electronic communication, IS can promote its image whenever, wherever, and to whomever has access to the internet and an inclination to learn about the group.

As a second divergence from Goffman's work, we should note the difference between professional and novice impression managers. *Dabiq's* identity work represents the efforts and skills of a full media bureaucracy working from a detailed propaganda model who construct the organizational identity of IS with the aid of extensive material and educational resources, rich social networks, and advanced technologies. The amount of planning and forethought that goes into the production of *Dabiq* far exceeds the preparations that go into most social interactions. Indeed, the organization places such importance on their media presence that "senior fighters and propagandists hold more or less equal status" (Chulov, 2016) within their ranks, and the saying "half of jihad is media" is both a rallying cry and organizational model for IS (Cockburn, 2014; Cottee, 2016). IS also projects its image through numerous mass-mediated publications, Youtube videos, and other social media that are continually developed and revised by professionals who follow organizational routines. These formalized procedures systematically reduce the occurrence of gaffes and disruptions in impression management and reinforce "dramaturgical discipline" (Goffman, 1959:216).

Terrorist organizations as Impression Managers

Scholars have researched the impression management tactics of several organizations, revealing how a range of groups, such as hospitals, petroleum companies, radical political movements, and think tanks attempt to repair damaged reputations, justify decisions, and craft a specific image for targeted audiences (Elsbach and Sutton, 1992; Bolino et al., 2008; Woods, Manning, and Matz, 2015). The goals of IS certainly differ from those of most organizations, but its interest in controlling how audiences perceive the organization and its actions is the same. For this

reason, a small but growing literature has examined terrorist groups as impression managers. To our best knowledge, however, almost all previous studies focus on how terrorist groups engineer mass-mediated images of death and destruction, as opposed to the image of a sustainable organization or institutionalized social entity. For instance, Alexander (2004:91), taking a dramaturgical approach, argues that terrorism involves both political and symbolic action – a "political performance" intended not only to kill and harm, but also to gesture intentionally and create meaning for an audience. Terrorist attacks are carried out by trained actors who are motivated by directors who control the plot and shape each scene.

Following Goffman, Matusitz (2013, 2015) defines terrorism as an ideological spectacle, a kind of political theater performed in a language Westerns know well. Terror groups use spectacular violence to dramatize their grievances, as well as frighten and intimidate an audience. The visceral spectacles of terrorism not only frighten individuals, but also disturb social order. As Weigert (2003) explains, the foundation of public order rests on the ability of individuals to trust and accept the identities of other people as they interact and commingle in public spaces; the dramatic physical and symbolic forces of terrorism threaten this baseline cultural assumption and disrupt public order.

Several other scholars have theorized terrorist attacks as spectacles, performances, theater, cultural production, or staged events, without referencing Goffman or his dramaturgical approach (Lombari, 2015; Winter, 2015). Most relevant to our study is the research of Winkler et al. (2016) who examined IS's visual communication strategy in the first twelve issues of *Dabiq*. They argue that IS regularly employees "about to die images," "a historic American media trope," in its magazine (Winkler et al., 2016:1). The group's graphic videos and photos of prisoners being tortured and executed are intentionally stylized to evoke fear in Westerners, and ensure the wide circulation of its images on social media and Western news coverage (Winkler et al., 2016).

The frames and framing effects of IS's impression management

Many scholars refer to aspects of communication content as "frames," to the choices made by writers, journalists and other communicators as "framing," and to the influence of frames on human consciousness as "framing effects."[1] Frames take many forms, and have been conceptualized as short phrases such as "the Cold War," single words such as "communism," and images such as a photo of the Berlin Wall.[2] This study examines frames in the photographs appearing in fourteen issues of *Dabiq*. Although the wide array of visual images in these issues contain numerous distinct frames, many of them can be categorized under two general themes: chaos and civilization. The chaos frames appearing in *Dabiq* include: 1) dead bodies of IS enemies in war zones; 2) prisoners of IS who have been or will be executed; 3) the aftermath of IS-aligned terrorist attacks; and 4) the destruction of religious or political statues, relics and icons that conflict with IS ideology.

Comprising a key dimension of IS's tactical impression management strategy, these frames are likely to provoke worry and amplify perceptions of the IS threat, especially in Western audiences (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003; Woods, 2011; Woods and Arthur, 2014). Part of the persuasive power of these frames lies in their propensity for being picked up by traditional and social media and made available to a wide audience. As Winkler et al. (2016:3) argued, the "contingent, imaginative, emotive meanings" of *Dabiq's* visual imagery "tend to recirculate more frequently over time within the media environment." As decades of psychometric research has shown, dangers that are more "available," or easier to recall, are perceived as more threatening than less available hazards, even when the former is far less likely to result in actual harm than the latter (Woods, 2012).

[1] Without delving into detail, it should be noted few areas of social science have inspired as much critical examination and disagreement as the academic discussion of what news frames are and how they function in communicative texts (see Scheufele, 1999; D'Angelo, 2002). Yet the concept of framing remains extremely popular across multiple disciplines.

[2] The early development of framing as an area of research is often associated with Erving Goffman, who applied the concept to a variety of social phenomena, non-mass-mediated social interaction in particular (Goffman, 1974; see Benford and Snow, 2000).

Dabiq's gruesome images of death and destruction – the aftermath of an explosion in a crowded restaurant, a headless corpse, men being burned alive in a cage – are likely to engage the emotions of any who see them. When a frame evokes high levels of emotion, it tends to focus people's attention the "badness of the outcome, rather than on the probability that the outcome will occur," which explains the common misjudgment of very frightening yet extremely low risk hazards (Sunstein, 2003). One important critique of the framing effects literature suggests that audiences "tune out much, if not all, undesired content" (Gans, 1993:31); given both the availability and evocative nature of *Dabiq's* terror frames, they are less likely to be tuned out, and more likely to be regarded as regular occurrences.

Virtually all terror frames in *Dabiq* are nested in IS's extremist ideology, which it describes as Islamic. Its professed theology and practices – the ruthless subordination of women, mediaeval torture and execution tactics, end-of-days proclamations – are likely to be perceived as frightening, archaic and yet familiar to most Westerners. These pronouncements fit many people's stereotype of radical Islamic groups. By encouraging the further use of schematic representations (stereotypes) of radical Islam, *Dabiq* and other IS media platforms make it more likely that Westerners will use this stereotype in a range of negative social perception judgments.[3] While the popular association between Islam and mass violence certainly predates IS, as seen in media coverage of events ranging from the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979-1981 to the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000 to the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Nacos, 1994; Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2003; Traugott and Brader, 2003), in recent years few other groups have done more than IS to promote negative views of Islam in the minds of many Westerners (Yum and Schenck-Hamlin, 2005; Panagopoulos, 2006).

Interpreting the threat of IS using stereotypical notions of Islamic fundamentalist groups may lead some people to conclude that IS has no logical basis, that its motives are irrational or

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[3] Race research in sociology and social psychology relies on a similar line of theorizing (see, for example, Ford, 1997).

otherworldly, that compromise is unattainable and therefore the threat of IS cannot be controlled (Pape, 2005). Threats perceived as hard to control evoke higher risk judgments (Fischhoff et al., 1978). Uncontrolled dangers are also thought to engage people's emotions, which may affect the cognitive processing of these threats (Slovic et al., 2002; Sunstein, 2003). The radical Islamic frames that appear in *Dabiq* may be particularly influential because they have a "diagnostic" component—an explanation of why violent acts are carried out (extremist theology). Diagnostic frames are known to have greater influence on attitudes, beliefs and behaviors than frames that merely name the problem (Gamson et al., 1992; Benford and Snow, 2000; Cress and Snow, 2000).

Differences between IS's impression management and other terrorist groups

Previous research has explained IS's use of images of chaos and destruction, from large-scale explosions in the battlefields of Syria and suicide attacks in Western cities to the intimate executions of IS prisoners (Colas, 2016; Richards, 2016; Winkler et. al., 2016), but far fewer studies have examined the group's appeals to civilization, and its efforts to appear as a growing, institutional actor, if not a classic state. As such, our study can be considered part of the "second wave" (Ingram, 2015:733) of work on IS which seeks to offer nuance and complexity to the analytical understanding of the organization. Its legitimacy rests not only on the success of its attacks, but also on its ability to secure territory and maintain it with a top-down bureaucratic structure.

As such, there is reason to believe the rich set of literature on the impression management of terror groups may not provide as much insight into IS, as their tactics and aims differ significantly from the groups studied by prior scholars. Chief among these differences is IS's claim to statehood, as rather than focusing on expelling Western forces or destroying Israel, central goals of Al Qaeda and many other previous jihadist organizations, IS "wants to establish a caliphate *immediately*" (Siebert et al., 2015:32). While previous organizations often featured calls for Muslims throughout the world to engage in lone-wolf style attacks wherever they were living, IS and *Dabiq* instead focus

on calls to emigrate to IS-controlled regions and to become part of the caliphate. Although IS does argue that those who cannot emigrate to the caliphate should conduct attacks wherever they are, their emphasis is decidedly upon building their state, not the gradual weakening of Western states through prolonged struggle, as is typically found among other jihadi organizations (Gambhir, 2014).

In some ways, this makes IS more in line with traditional conceptions of state-building, as opposed to our current understanding of terror/jihadi organizations. Through the pages of *Dabiq*, IS broadcasts itself as filling Tilly's (1985) classic conception of the prerequisites of state formation, as they detail their political and governmental institutions, systems of criminal justice, and even their own currency (Gambhir, 2014). As such, they are in many respects similar to other modern insurgencies, as they seek to fill not only a "politico-military void – and the pragmatic needs of stability, security, and livelihood that entails – but also a vacuum of values and meaning" (Ingram, 2015:735), which is reflected in *Dabiq*'s focus on both military successes as well as lessons on understanding the Koran and questions of *Sharia* interpretation.

Yet in other ways, IS marks a significant departure from both other terror organizations and classic conceptions of state-building. Specifically, through their announcement of a self-proclaimed caliphate, IS messaging "represents a transition from the prevalent imagination of the nation and the nation state to a religious imagination that runs counter to the nationalist movements from the colonial and postcolonial periods" (Jabareen, 2015:53). Although they seek to establish much of what we associate with the traditional nation-state, IS also aspires to usher in a global revolutionary movement. In this sense, Richards (2016) argues they are best understood as attempting to create a "postmodern state" which can be "relocated across the globe in a manner unimaginable within traditional conceptions of the state and the Westphalian model of international order" (2016:780).

Data and Methods

The website of the Clarion Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to exposing the dangers of Islamist extremism,"[4] houses all issues of *Dabiq.* In January 2016, we downloaded the thirteen issues that were available at the time, later adding a fourteenth that was published as the study was on-going. To determine the main themes and framing strategies in the publication, we began with a rhetorical analysis of all articles from three issues. This method of qualitative analysis is appropriate for revealing how an organization frames its goals and actions, as opposed to how often certain frames or images appear (Hijmans, 1996). Following Winkler et al. (2016), this study focused on photographs, using text as a secondary source to establish the context of ambiguous images.

After three independent coders completed rhetorical analyses, they discussed the main themes and achieved consensus on the prevalence of two general frames: chaos and civilization. To measure these themes, we established a quantitative coding scheme with fourteen variables[5]. For the quantitative analysis, individual photographs of real-life situations, objects, people or places served as the unit of analysis. Paintings, cartoons, tables, and figures were not treated as photographs. The total sample consisted of all 1,317 photographs published in the fourteen issues of *Dabiq*.

For each of photo, we determined whether a weapon was present, the number of dead bodies, whether dead bodies were friends or foes of IS, the condition of the dead body, the number and type of executions, the use of non-fatal violence, depictions of terrorist attacks in a Western country, the destruction of religious relics, the type of non-military, material goods, resources or services, the presence of a moving parade or stationary celebration, and whether an IS flag was displayed.

Following three coder training sessions, standard inter-coder agreement tests were conducted on a random sample of all photos from three issues (issues 1, 8 and 11), a total of 287 units of

[4] See the about section of the Clarion Project website; retrieved online 12/27/2016 at http://www.clarionproject.org/about

[5] Contact first author for a copy of the full code book and protocol.

analysis. The percentage of agreement on the fourteen variables ranged from 90% to 100%. The percentage of agreement for each variable were as follows: V1 100, V2 100, V3 90, V4 99, V5 98, V6 96, V7 98, V8 98, V9 100, V10 95, V11 98, V12 96, V13 97, V14 94. A high level of agreement was found on all variables, except variable 3 (90%). After further analysis, we determined that the relative lack of agreement on variable 3 was derived from technical errors, as opposed differences in interpretation. Overall, the intercoder reliability tests returned results that were in line with conventional standards of content analysis.

Descriptive Analysis and Results

Two Central Themes

In coding the imagery employed in *Dabiq*, two prominent and seemingly-contradictory themes stood out, which we label "chaos" and "civilization" and describe in detail below. The "chaos" theme was the most prevalent throughout the publication run of *Dabiq*, accounting for slightly over 47% of all images in the magazine. The "civilization" code was not as common, but still represented a major theme of the publication, accounting for slightly over 19% of all images. The remaining 34% of images did not fit any of the codes we employed and were not analyzed for the study. While these miscellaneous images don't have a coherent theme, most of the "other" category tended to consist of one of two types of images: pictures of journalists, politicians, and other world leaders used in conjunction with stories about media or politics an article is critiquing, and generic wildlife or landscape images, such as a picture of sand dunes or a flock of birds in flight.

In addition to being the most prevalent theme in the magazine, the "chaos" code is likely what most observers would expect in a magazine published by a notorious terror organization; images of violence, death, and destruction are common throughout every issue. Indeed, images bearing at least one code falling under the "chaos" label comprised just over 47% of all images (623 out of the 1,317 total images). By far the most prevalent were depictions of IS fighters with weapons

or depictions of weaponry themselves (425 images), followed by the depiction of dead bodies (99 separate images displaying a total of 189 separate bodies).

[Table 1 about here]

What is most notable about these images, especially those depicting the aftermath of terror attacks or executions, are their unflinching and often gleeful depiction of mutilated and dismembered bodies. In the case of terror attacks, these images are typically depicted in triumphant fashion, with splashy images highlighting the damage and focusing on those killed by IS members. Text accompanying these photos speaks glowingly of the "lions" of the movement who sacrifice all for glory, and lavish praise upon the "soldiers of terror" who are depicted as advancing not only the cause of IS, but of Islam more generally.

Execution images often display the moment immediately before death, with IS prisoners typically depicted blindfolded and kneeling in orange prison-style jumpsuits as IS members hold a gun to their head or sword to their neck. Other execution images are even more grisly, such as a series of photos in which a condemned prisoner is thrown from the roof of a tall building, with images capturing the fall and subsequent aftermath, or a series of photos in which a captured pilot is locked inside a cage and burned alive, followed by images of his charred corpse. Especially chilling are the reoccurring depictions of children either about to or just having executed an IS prisoner, with accompanying text speaking of teaching the "lion cubs" how to become warriors of the faith.

A regular feature of the magazine that prominently contributes images coded as chaotic and destabilizing is the "Islamic State Reports" section of each issue. This feature shares the name of an earlier publication of IS that detailed their military victories (Gambhir, 2014) and its claims have been independently verified to be accurate representations of IS's efforts and successes (Celso, 2014). These reports depict IS members conducting a wide range of military efforts, ranging from what could be considered traditional aspects of warfare, such as capturing tanks and engaging in

gunfights, to what most would likely consider traditional terror activities, such as the shelling of civilian populations and the mass executions of captured peoples.

However, while many observers understandably focus their attention on these grotesque images of carnage and murder, they "often overlook the humanitarian objectives" (Siebert et al., 2015: 40) which are reflected in a significant number of the images found in *Dabiq*. Specifically, images bearing a least one code falling under the "civilization" label comprise slightly over 19% of all images in the magazine (249 out of 1,317 total images). Of these, the most numerous are images of the IS flag (151 of the 249 images), and the delivery of some form of material good (61 images).

[Table 2 about here]

Depictions of IS's iconic flag were the second most prevalent recurring image of any type in *Dabiq*, comprising 151 (11.5%) of all images, behind only the appearance of weaponry, which appeared in 425 (32.3%) of all images. This speaks to one of the most unique features of IS and what separates them from their predecessors, that of their attempt to create their own functioning state and government. Indeed, a requirement for any existing jihadist group that expresses interest in joining the IS caliphate is that they "must appoint a governor, set up a ruling council, and implement IS's version of Islamic rule" (Economist, 2015). The black and white IS flag appears to be central to the projecting group's identity as a state; the flag is shown being raised over newly-acquired territories, emblazoned on IS vehicles and buildings, and carried by IS fighters into battle.

Another central aspect of the IS's claims to statehood as depicted in *Dabiq* are images of the group providing material goods and services to the populations under its control. The modern nation state has two fundamental needs: legitimacy and effectiveness, and the former is often derived from the latter (Call, 2011). The neo-liberal starve-the-state ideology of the invasion has left Iraq and the surrounding regions bereft of not only the robust social safety net to which they had been accustomed, but without most basic services and material goods (Cockburn, 2014; Mutitt, 2012; Wozniak, 2017). As such, IS depicts itself as directly filling this void left by the invading forces. Not

surprisingly, these goods and services often have a specifically religious bent; the most common material good pictured is the provision of Mosques or other religious spaces, but more broadly, most of these goods are depicted as part of a broader *dawa* outreach, an Islamic concept similar to the Christian missionary work, wherein religious education and welfare service are inextricably linked as one (Celso, 2014; Winter, 2015).

Finally, perhaps the most surprising finding of this analysis are the number of pictures that depict joy and happiness, portraying the Islamic State as a place of hope and progress. As evidenced by the code for parades and celebrations, which accounted for 37 images or 2.8% of all images, the idea that people in IS-controlled areas joyfully welcome the group and are inspired by their new state is a running theme of *Dabiq*. These images show a strong juxtaposition between the destruction and chaos of the invasion and the peace and tranquility of the Islamic State. In addition to the parades and celebrations, there are a significant number of images depicting things such as children happily playing, or people of different races coming together as one under the vision of IS. Indeed, one issue features a lengthy profile piece contrasting the oneness of the Islam against the racism of Western society. Another common tactic are time-series images, showing desolate markets and crumbling infrastructure of the past replaced by IS-controlled markets brimming with goods, happy shoppers, and newly-constructed roads and buildings.

The Enduring Duality

What is especially interesting about these two dominant themes is their relative stability throughout the publication run of *Dabiq*, a period covering over two years. Given the general requirements of statehood, we had expected to see that over time the imagery utilized in *Dabiq* would begin to shift away from those coded as chaos and more toward those coded as civilization, especially given the successes of the group at the time in capturing a large, geographically-contiguous region from which to base their operations and claim to statehood. Instead, half of our

codes did not change in any significant manner, and of those that did, we found a decrease in all the civilization codes and an increase in depictions of terror attacks.

In tracking the weighted frequency of our codes over time (defined as change between the early period of issues 1-7 and the late period of issues 8-14), half of our codes (Weapons, Dead Enemies, Destruction of Religious Icons, Executions, and Non-Fatal Violence) demonstrated no statistically significant movement in either direction. What change did exist was largely attributable to a single issue impacting the overall numbers, such that were these issues removed as outliers, the amount of change would be effectively zero. Depictions of weapons went from 32.2% of all images in the early issues to 32.3% of all images in the latter issues, images of dead enemies of IS went from 2.7% to 1.4%, destruction of religious icons went from 3.1% to 3.2%, and depictions of executions went from 3.7% to 3.4% of images. Of particular interest in terms of the chaos set of codes, we coded images for instances of non-fatal violence, but only found 2 such images in the complete data set, suggesting an all-or-nothing approach to the use of force within IS's presentation of self.

This leaves five codes which did experience meaningful change over the two time periods, with four of them declining and one increasing. Of the four which saw a decline, depictions of dead IS members or allies decreased from 3.3% of all images in the early period to 1.2% of images in the late period, although this change was only on the threshold of significance ($p=.01$). The other three, however, all saw significant declines and were all codes in the civilization theme. Depictions of the provision of some form of material good declined from 7.4% of all images in the early period to only 2.9% in the latter ($p<.001$), while depictions of the IS flag declined from 17.3% to 7.7% ($p<.001$), and parades or celebrations declined from 5.8% to 0.9% ($p<.001$). The only variable that experienced an increase from the early to the latter period were depictions of terror attacks, which went from 1.9% of images in the early issues to 5.7% in the latter ($p=.001$).

One potential problem with following the weighted frequency of coded images is the introduction of the "Selected 10," an advertising-like feature that highlights ten of the newest or most

attention-grabbing videos available through *Al Hayat*. These one-page inserts feature a screen shot and one-sentence summary of IS videos; while like the rest of the magazine they touch upon a variety of issues, these videos tend much more heavily toward graphic depictions of violence. Additionally, likely reflecting the growth of the IS media empire, the Selected 10 feature does not appear in *Dabiq* until the ninth issue, potentially altering the balance of codes portrayed in the late period issues.

As such, we further analyzed the evolution of the imagery in *Dabiq* without the Selected 10 to isolate what the effect of this new, image-dense running feature may be on the data set as a whole. Overall, the removal of these images had little effect on our codes, save for depictions of executions and weapons, which went from no change between the two periods in the full data set to decreasing from 3.7% to 1.4% ($p<.05$) and 32.3% to 26.5% ($p<.05$), respectively. By excluding the Selected 10, the initially-predicted trend toward more of a decrease in chaos codes does begin to emerge; however, this is more than offset by the gruesome brutality of the Selected 10 images, which lean heavily on shocking imagery of terror attacks and violence. Yet regardless of whether these images were retained or excluded, the overall story remains much the same; while there is an increasing move toward a higher prevalence of some chaos codes over the civilization codes, overall *Dabiq* continues to present IS as both a harbinger of destruction and a civilizing force.

Discussion and Analysis

Studying the imagery in *Dabiq* provides a window into the logic, motives, and rationales of IS as they developed their ideology in real time. Our finding that the magazine is dominated by two seemingly-contradictory themes strongly suggests we are witnessing the pangs of statehood creation as filtered through IS's organizational self-presentation. As such, our findings add to a growing body of literature examining the impression management of terror organizations in general, as well as specifically those arguing that IS messaging reveals a strategic and pragmatic orientation toward communication (Chulov, 2014; Colas, 2016; Harling, 2016). Multiple scholars have argued IS is

largely non-ideological and that its self-presentation is carefully managed to appeal to the existing politico-military void in the region (Colas, 2016; Harling, 2016) to the point where it is an "open question whether ISIL is a *religious group* using military power to achieve their objectives or a *military organization* using religion for justification" (Siebert et al., 2015:40, emphasis in original). Indeed, leaked internal communications of IS reveal leaders debating proper religious and moral justifications for the seizure of what are seen to be necessary military or monetary targets (Reuter, 2015). As such, understanding IS impression management tactics is of central importance to understanding how the group is attempting to build legitimacy and appeal to both potential members and those it seeks to rule.

Dabiq as a Front and Frame

Organizations use "fronts" to communicate with an audience about who they are, what their goals are, and what their actions mean (Woods, Manning, and Matz, 2015). Fronts have two components: "setting" and "personal front." The setting refers to the physical attributes of a place, while a personal front refers to the characteristics of the performer. The setting of *Dabiq* adheres to conventional magazine design criteria, including color photos, splashy advertisements, and running features, presenting the measured and professional atmosphere of a large organization. In many ways, this makes *Dabiq* similar to the organization itself; while IS relies on the ideological spectacle of terror (Matusitz, 2013; Matusitz, 2015) to invoke fear amongst its proclaimed enemies, it also relies on appeals to civilization and order to present an appealing front to the people it seeks to attract. Similarly, while *Dabiq* often depicts quite gruesome acts, it does so in a slick and professional format that suggests not an inchoate chaotic organization, but rather one with well-established bureaucracy and highly-coordinated media empire.

The personal front of *Dabiq* is expressed by its title, imagery, multiple publication languages, and lengthy treatises on not just religious questions, but matters of family, interpersonal

relationships, and even personal style. As IS is using the magazine in an attempt to appeal to a wide range of audiences, *Dabiq* employs a variety of both religious and secular tropes, producing imagery that would be familiar to both those steeped in the Islamic tradition as well as those in Western nations with little knowledge of the religion (Christien, 2016; Colas, 2016; Winkler et al., 2016). In this way, the frames employed in *Dabiq* make it more than just simplistic propaganda designed to instill fear; rather, the employment of "diagnostic" components (Gamson et al., 1992; Cress and Snow, 2000; Benford and Snow, 2000) alongside the gruesome speaks to IS's efforts to frame themselves as both agents of chaos and producers of stable civilization.

IS as the Terror State

While most observers have focused on IS' violence and brutality, doing so has led many to "overlook the humanitarian objectives" (Siebert et al., 2015:40), which our analysis indicates comprise an important component of the group's impression management. IS has achieved success in building their state by organizing in regions plagued by chaos and offering welfare services and security (Celso, 2014; Cockburn, 2014; Wozniak, 2017). While the brutality of IS should not be discounted, our study demonstrates that an exclusive focus on their chaotic orientation presents an incomplete picture of how the group is attempting to establish itself and win support, and that no serious examination of the organization's messaging and self-identity can disregard how IS attempts to sell themselves as a civilizing force as well.

In making their twin appeals to chaos and civilization, IS appears to be drawing from "The Management of Savagery," a 2004 book which has guided jihadists around the world. Essentially a how-to manual for building the caliphate, a central tactic advocated by the book is the creation of "regions of savagery," areas so chaotic that local populations will "willingly submit to a group which promises to bring stability" (Siddiqui, 2015). Importantly, the book proscribes not just violence, but specifically random and terrifying violence, serving both the physical functions of traditional warfare

and the psychological functions of casting the caliphate as the only place of safety and security. As such, images of chaos in *Dabiq* begin to make sense not as a contradiction to the images of civilization, but as a necessary building block for that civilization.

This places our findings in line with Ingram (2015) who argues these images are carefully constructed to appeal to both pragmatic and perceptual factors, creating mutually-reinforcing narrative cycles designed to "align rational- and identity-choice decision-making in its audiences" (2015:736). Both image codes appeal to both rational and identity-based thought processes; savage chaos is conducted in the service of a narrow interpretation of Islam as well as creating a reality in which submitting to the demands of IS are necessary for survival, while the provision of services and security similarly allow the organization to paint themselves as fulfilling the Islamic *Dawa* as well as providing an appealing alternative to the dysfunctional states of the region.

Richards (2016) argues IS is creating a postmodern form of political organization which can "be relocated across the globe in a manner unimaginable within traditional conceptions of the state" (2016:780). Along with this new type of state comes a new form of citizenship, one in which "individuals can have security—physical, economic, social, and religious—as long as they accept ISIL's message" (Kfir, 2015:241). As such, the constant juxtaposition of chaos and civilization begins to make sense, as civilization is reserved for those who submit to the rule of IS while violent savagery awaits all who would resist. While previous jihadi organizations such as Al Qaeda employed terror largely to destabilize existing states, IS uses terror to "underlie the ability of the Iraqi state to provide protection, showing that in reality it is the power, especially as it has the financial means to provide for its supporters" (Kfir, 2015:241).

This message of safety for IS and chaos for everyone else may explain why civilization codes decrease over the course of *Dabiq's* publication run. After substantial early success, IS experienced a number of setbacks, losing control of several strategic locations and other governments are proving capable of providing stability and security (Wright, 2016). This undermines IS's self-presentation as

an oasis of stability within regions of savagery and requires more chaos to recapture this important aspect of their appeal. Such an interpretation is in keeping with our data, as while the chaos theme was dominant throughout, the *type* of chaos depicted changed, with images of terror attacks the only code increasing from the early to latter issues. Thus it may be the case that as the organization's ability provide civilization weakens, they need to increase perceptions of chaos around them. Indeed, the titles of IS publications reflect this shift, as *Dabiq* with its reference to highly-coveted Koranic lands is replaced by *Rumiyah*, a reference to the Western lands IS hopes to destabilize.

As IS continues to maintain a presence throughout Iraq and Syria, with evidence the organization hopes to spread to other regions as well (Richards, 2016), it is critical to understand how the organization is attempting to present itself and interact with potential converts and recruits. While this study is largely exploratory, examining only the imagery employed in *Dabiq*, it reveals a complex message in which the Islamic State attempts to portray itself as simultaneously a chaotic force of terror and a civilizing answer to despair and hopelessness. Further research is necessary to examine the full discourse used in *Dabiq* as well as how these themes and appeals may have changed in *Rumiyah* to expand upon this dialectical balance between chaos and civilization.

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