"The Evolving Self-Presentation of the Islamic State, From *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah*"*
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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 Yan Song Lee (y10014@mix.wvu.edu)

Abstract

In 2016 the Islamic State (IS) dramatically altered the centerpiece of its Western outreach, shuttering *Dabiq* magazine and replacing it with *Rumiyah*. While *Dabiq* was marked by twin appeals to themes of chaos and civilization, the publication run of *Rumiyah* finds IS experiencing significant setbacks. Utilizing a quantitative content analysis of images in *Rumiyah* reveals IS adapting its framing to better reflect its present abilities and outlook. Drawing upon framing effects and social movement literatures, we argue the imagery in *Rumiyah* represents the group taking a step backward from would-be state to more typical jihadi organization.

Introduction

One of the most notable aspects of the Islamic State (IS) is its widespread and masterful utilization of media (Damanhoury et. al 2018; Macnair and Frank 2017; Wignell et. al 2017). While many jihadi organizations employ print, radio, television, and internet communication to spread their ideology, claim victories, and recruit members, IS is unique for how expansive their media output has been throughout the organization's existence (Callimaci and Rossback 2018; Nanninga 2018; Winkler et. al 2019). A centerpiece of their print outreach toward Western audiences was the magazine *Dabiq*; in production from July 2014 until July 2016, it highlighted a combination of their ability to induce ferocious chaos for all who eschewed their interpretation of Islam, while touting their ability to provide a serene and bucolic civilization to all who joined (Authors, 2018). While most of the group's communiques are in Arabic, English is the second most-common language employed by IS, and *Dabiq* was a centerpiece of their English language efforts (Wignell et. al 2017; Winkler et. al 2019). However, *Dabiq* was shuttered in favor of IS' new magazine *Rumiyah*, the first issue of which was released in September 2016, followed by 12 more issues until production appears to have ceased in September of 2017.

The change of name is only one of several notable differences between *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, ranging from content to style to length, prompting the question of what has led the organization to so drastically change one of their central pieces of public outreach. Drawing from the framing effects and social movements literatures (Bedford and Snow 2000; Berger and Luckman 1990; Gamson et. al 1992; Snow 2004; Seo and Ebrahaim 2016), our argument is that the changes in output reflect the changing fortunes of the organization; as IS' material fortunes have declined, the group has reframed their self-presentation. While *Dabiq* was produced during the group's rapid rise and expansion, *Rumiyah*'s publication run covers a time of decline for the

would-be state, as they have lost control of large swaths of territory and seen their once massive influx of foreign fighters dwindle (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018; Wignell et. al 2017; Winter 2017). Given that frames are dynamic processes requiring at least some empirical credibility, the claims made within the pages of their magazines must have some basis in material reality. Through analyzing the visual frames employed in both publications it is revealed that while the IS of *Dabiq* could promise both the ability to deliver civilization within their territories and chaos to the outside world, the IS of *Rumiyah* no longer has the ability to provide civilization, and thus has to abandon loftier proclamations of statehood and instead focus more exclusively on their ability to mete out violent chaos to their enemies.

Conceptualizing IS Communication

Framing the IS Movement

Given its remarkable ability to recruit large numbers of fighters from abroad and establish a semi-functioning political state, IS's communication strategy can be studied fruitfully through the lens of the social movements literature (Snow 2004). Social movement scholars have increasingly studied frames and framing processes to better understand the dynamics of social movements (Benford and Snow 2000). Frames have been conceptualized various ways (Scheufele 1999; Entman 1993; D'Angelo 2002). In one study, a frame is defined as a characteristic of communication content (Woods 2007); in another, it appears as an internal structure of the mind (Scheufele 1999), while in other cases it is used to represent both cognitive elements and aspects of mediated discourse simultaneously (Gitlin 1980). There is also disagreement over the conceptual differences between framing, priming and agenda setting. Considering these inconsistencies, the present study adopts a "minimalist perspective," which

advocates for conceptual simplicity and theoretical restraint (Woods 2011, 201). "Frames" are conceptualized here as identifiable characteristics of mass-mediated content that are of interest to scholars. While frames may have a range of causes and effects, they exist first as words, images, photos and symbols that appear on paper and in other mediums.

The idea that even subtle differences in the framing of an issue can shape how people understand it (*framing effects*) has motivated framing research across multiple disciplines (Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Iyengar 1991; Gamson et al. 1992; Woods and Arthur 2017). For social movement researchers, the act of producing frames is theorized as "meaning work— the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings" (Benford and Snow 2000: 613). The individual and collective actors of social movements are embroiled in "strategic framing contests" (Entman 2007), and different sides of a conflict can use the same frames to advance different agendas (Seo and Ebrahaim 2016). Previous research suggests that successful collective action frames inspire and legitimate the activities of movements in the eyes of adherents, adversaries and bystanders (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000). In the case of IS, inspirational framing is needed for mobilizing individual supporters, particularly fighters, while being recognized as a legitimate, formidable threat and global player is required for international politics and the formation of collective identity (Damanhoury et. al 2018; Mahood and Rane 2017). The legitimacy of the IS movement depends in part on how socially recognized news sources frame or construct the movement (Berger and Luckmann 1990), and how readers decode and interpret the frames and images (Gamson et al. 1992).

While Western news sources frame IS as a 'formidable foe' (Courty, Rane, and Ubayasiri 2019), a threat to regional and global stability, a product of failed states, or a humanitarian

disaster (Siboni et. al 2015; Xu and Hellmueller 2016), new media and technology have allowed IS to construct its own image and disseminate it directly to audiences without the filters of Western or global news outlets (Kraidy 2017; Winkler et. al 2019). Stressing the functional importance of new forms of communication to social movements, Castells (2012: 15) argues "in our time, multimodal, digital networks or horizontal communication are the fastest and most autonomous, interactive, reprogrammable and self-expanding means of communication in history."

Much of IS' media output is clearly designed to ensure Western audiences and media sources will pick up on and thereby amplify their message (Richards 2016). In addition to directly appealing to Muslims living in Western nations, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* attempt to speak to policy makers and media sources (Christien, 2016; Colas, 2016). They do so both directly through the discourse of the magazines, but also symbolically through the images presented, which build upon and repurpose common Western tropes, such as the orange jumpsuits worn by IS prisoners or the American-style military garb worn by IS fighters. As Winkler et. al (2016: 1) argue, IS regularly employs "historic American media trope[s]" in its publications, intentionally styled to evoke fear in Westerners and ensure the widespread circulation of these images on both social and traditional media. As a central dimension of IS' impression management, these frames are likely to amplify perceptions of the threat posed by IS, especially in Western audiences (Norris, Kern and Just 2003; Woods 2011; Woods and Arthur 2014).

With the advent of digital technology, social entities of all kinds, from small groups to large-scale organizations and social movements, now have more control over their public images. Sports clubs, hospitals, petroleum companies, think tanks, militaries, radical environmental movements and terrorist organizations are utilizing impression management

techniques to repair damaged reputations, justify decisions, and craft a specific image for targeted audiences (Elsbach and Sutton 1992; Woods, Manning, and Matz 2015; Shim and Stengel 2017; Authors 2018). While IS' stated goals of building a caliphate and destroying the West are certainly different from those of most organizations, their interest in influencing how audiences perceive them and their actions is much the same. As Moore-Gilbert (2017: 2) argues, when analyzing a group like IS, visual frames may be even more important for those challenging established states "in the Arab world where more traditional means of image production have long been under the control of authoritarian governments."

For these reasons, a small but growing literature has examined terrorist groups as impression managers. Most studies, however, focus only 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, previous research suggests that IS's strategy for mobilizing followers and legitimating its operations involves an "ideological spectacle" (Matusitz 2015) intended not only to kill and harm, but also to dramatize their grievances, intimidate a targeted audience, and disrupt social order, a common feature of jihadist organizations (Weigert 2003; Alexander 2004). Furthermore, most studies on the media output of IS focus on a static period, examining a snapshot of the organization's existence. In this study, we add to the growing literature on IS by examining how their output has changed over time and what that changing output reveals about the fortunes of the organization. We do so through building upon our prior work analyzing the imagery in *Dabiq* (Authors 2018) and examine the evolution of IS's representations of threat (chaos frames), as well as the group's appeals to providing for its adherents (civilization frames).

Chaos Frames

IS's image as a dangerous, destructive force often appears in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah.* Although the photographs in these magazines contain numerous distinct frames, many of them can be categorized under a "master frame" (Benford and Snow 2000), referred to here as chaos frames. These frames are likely to provoke worry and amplify perceptions of the IS threat, especially in Western audiences (Norris, Kern and Just 2003; Woods and Arthur 2014; Kraidy 2017). 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 (Winkler et al. 2019: 3). 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).

Chaos frames are also 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 IS's chaos frames, they are less likely to be tuned out, and more likely to be regarded as regular occurrences (Siboni et. al 2015; Kraidy 2017).

The specific chaos frames under study here 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.

Civilization Frames

Although IS's use of chaos frames has received ample attention from scholars (Colas 2016; Richards 2016; Winkler et. al. 2019), 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, this 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.

There is reason to believe that the literature on the impression management of terror groups may not provide as much insight into IS, as their tactics and aims differ 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 instead focuses 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; Damanhoury et. al 2018).

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.

This study examines three civilization frames, including: 1) delivery of material goods, such as health care, schools, roads and technology, 2) parades and celebrations demonstrating the group's strength and projected popularity, and 3) displays of the IS flag.

The Rise and Fall of IS

It is difficult to overstate the explosive growth of IS, as within the span of less than a year it went from being a small offshoot of *Al Qaeda* into an organization controlling huge tracts of land throughout Iraq and Syria while commanding material fortunes estimated to be roughly US$ 2 billion (Chulov 2014). Indeed, the organization once held the position as "the wealthiest and most heavily armed terrorist group in history, far surpassing Al Qaeda in terms of its monetary and arms resources" (Houck et. al 2017: 108). In addition to its territory and wealth, IS also drew large amounts of foreign fighters, with estimates of those who emigrated to IS-controlled areas to join the fight ranging from 5,000-10,000 on the low end (Siebert et. al 2015) to upwards of 100,000 on the high end (Winkler et. al 2019). Regardless of which estimate is more accurate, it

is widely agreed upon that IS represents "the largest mobilization of foreign fighters in Muslim majority countries since 1945" (Neumann 2015).

As implied by the organization's name, IS used these resources to create their own state in the territory they captured. Far from simply adopting the label, they genuinely set about fulfilling most of the tasks typically associated with the modern state, including the provision of living stipends, potable water and electricity, instituting crime control, developing their own currency and taxation system, and even creating their own D.M.V. (Callimaci and Rossback 2018). Our previous study (Authors 2018) found this ability to fulfill the functions of a nation-state constituted a significant aspect of IS' attempts to appeal to outside audiences. Indeed, much of the success of the organization is tied to their offering of security and other state services in regions plagued by anarchic violence and chaos (Celso 2014; Cockburn 2014; Wozniak 2018).

However, this success was relatively short-lived, as the organization has experienced massive losses of territory, revenue, and fighters since the peak of their activities in 2015-2016 (Wignell et. al 2017; Winter 2017). IS has not only lost "almost all the lands it controlled" at its peak, but furthermore have also lost their "main source of revenue from seized oilfields, illegal taxes and other unlawful means" (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018: 57). Even more damaging to the group are the areas it has lost control of, most notably the areas surrounding the border of Turkey, which was a central passage for foreign fighters emigrating to join IS (Azman 2016), which has caused a massive decrease in the number of fighters available to the organization (Nanninga 2018). On a more symbolic level, IS has lost control of the actual town of *Dabiq* which not only supplied the name of their previous publication, but plays an important role in Islamic apocalyptic prophecy (Wignell et. al 2017). In addition to declining material fortunes, there is evidence the group is suffering from infighting and potential fissures, so much so that

organizational leadership has had to release appeals to the membership on the dangers of "disputation and disagreement between yourselves" (Sivech 2016: 24).

As the group's fortunes have declined, its once prodigious media output has begun to slow. While IS still actively produces an array of publications, observers estimate its output has declined anywhere from one-third (Winter 2017) to two-thirds (Azman 2016) of its previous levels. Additionally, the group appears to have shuttered its broadcast of Al-Bayan radio, which previously broadcasted on a daily basis (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018). This decline in production can also be witnessed in the media still being produced and disseminated; not only was *Dabiq* longer than *Rumiyah* in terms of both pages and wordcount, *Dabiq* consisted of entirely novel material, while *Rumiyah* relies on articles recycled from various other IS news bulletins for a large portion of its content (Azman 2016; Wignell et. al 2017).

Alongside these changes in the group's wider fortunes and their media output, there has been a substantial change in the content of that output as found in *Rumiyah* when compared to its predecessor *Dabiq*. The change in name is emblematic in this respect; *Dabiq* drew its name from the town referencing a Koranic story of the apocalyptic triumph of Islam while *Rumiyah* literally translates to "Rome" and the term is often used as a stand-in for the West generally. As such, the change in title may signal that the movement is shifting its focus from the immediate establishment of a new Caliphate and instead pointing to a nebulous future, as IS "appears to be resigned to a longer time frame to achieve victory" (Wignell et. al 2017: 9).

The name change is a prime example of Bedford and Snow's (2000) argument that collective action frames such as those promulgated by IS are not static, but rather a "dynamic, ongoing process" (628). A central aspect of the dynamism of collective actions frames are that they must exhibit some form of empirical credibility; while not necessarily needing to be a

completely accurate reflection of empirical reality, such frames do need to evince at least some fit with events that are unfolding in the world. As such, changes in material conditions, like those experienced by an organization losing significant amounts of territory and resources, may necessitate changes in frames employed by that organization. This study investigates this claim by comparing the chaos and civilization frames in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah.*

Data and Methods

The website of the Clarion Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to "exposing the dangers of Islamist extremism,"[1] houses all issues of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah.* To determine the main themes and framing strategies in the publications, we began with a qualitative analysis of all articles from three randomly selected issues. This method of 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; Neuendorf 2002). Following Winkler et al. (2019), this study focused on photographs*,* using text as a secondary source to establish the context of ambiguous images. For example, in some images of dead bodies, it was difficult to determine whether the deceased were friends or foes of IS. In such cases, the coders consulted the article's text or the photo's caption to make sense of the images. The qualitative stage of the analysis was aimed not only at categorizing the manifest attributes of the photos, but also at interpreting their latent meanings. Although it did not affect the enumerative results of the study, it did shape what we set out to find.

After three independent coders completed qualitative analyses, they discussed the main themes and achieved consensus on the prevalence of two general frames: chaos and civilization.

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

To measure these themes, we established a quantitative coding scheme with fourteen variables[2].

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 units of analysis consisted of all the photographs appearing in *Dabiq* (N =

1,317), and all photographs in *Rumiyah* (N = 491). Given that the data represent a census of all

units in the population, there is no need for inferential statistical analysis.

For each photo, we determined whether chaos frames were present. These frames

included the appearance of a weapon, the number of dead bodies, whether dead bodies were

friends or foes of the IS, the number and type of executions, use of non-fatal violence, depictions

of terrorist attacks in a Western country, the destruction of religious relics. We also coded for

civilization frames, including 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, a total of 287 units of 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%). For this variable, Scott's Pi,

which corrects for chance agreement, was .792. Compared to other acceptable reliability

coefficients, such as Cohen's Kappa, Scott's Pi is a more conservative measure (Riffe, Lacy, and

Fico 2005). Krippendorff (1978) has suggested that Alpha levels of .80 or higher indicate

adequate reliability. After further analysis, we determined that the relative lack of agreement on

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

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 (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 2005).

Descriptive Analysis and Results

Shorter and More Violent

The central finding of our previous study (Authors 2018) was that *Dabiq* featured two seemingly-contradictory themes throughout its publication run; specifically, images in that publication centered heavily on the organization's ability to inflict violence and destruction upon its perceived enemies, but also their ability to provide safety, stability, and civilization to those within the territories it controlled. However, as the group has lost territory, members, and funding, their ability to provide civilization has declined considerably. As such, it appears the group has made the decision to instead focus more exclusively on its still-potent ability to deliver violent chaos to those it opposes.

One difference between the publications is how much less effort appears to be devoted to *Rumiyah* in comparison to its predecessor. While the average issue length of *Dabiq* was 61.5 pages and its longest issue (Issue # 7) clocked in at 85 pages, the average issue of *Rumiyah* is only 44.6 pages, with its longest issue (Issue #11) coming in at 60 pages. More germane to this study, *Rumiyah* features only 491 total pictures in its production run, compared to 1,317 pictures in the production run of *Dabiq*. In addition to its much shorter length, a number of the articles appearing in *Rumiyah* are simply recycled from various other IS publications (Azman 2016; Wignell et. al 2017).

In addition to having less content, *Rumiyah* is also focused more on the organization's ability to spread chaos than on its waning ability to provide civilization. In *Dabiq*, the chaos

theme was more prevalent than the civilization theme, as the former comprised a little over 47% of all images in the magazine while the latter accounted for only slightly over 19% (the remaining images fit neither code, mostly consisting of headshots of media members or politicians, or generic wildlife or landscape photos). Yet in *Rumiyah*, that disparity is much starker, with photos falling under the chaos code representing 59% of all images in the production run with instances of images representing the civilization code falling to slightly below 19%.

[Table 1 approximately here]

[Table 2 approximately here]

The Duality Endures No More

What was perhaps most surprising about the findings of our previous study was how the duality of chaos and civilization endured throughout the publication run of *Dabiq*. Although IS experienced quite a bit of growth and change during that period, the relative preponderance of both codes remained roughly static. Yet although the first issue of *Rumiyah* was published only two months after the final issue of *Dabiq*, there is a major change in the relative prevalence of our two central codes. It is not just the change in the codes as overall categories that is interesting, but also the changes in individual codes which are quite telling as well. What we see in *Rumiyah* is not only an organization that no longer has the ability to provide civilization but one that drastically increases its focus on the most destabilizing and terrorizing capacities it can marshal.

Similar to the findings of our analysis of *Dabiq*, pictures of IS fighters brandishing weapons or pictures simply of weapons themselves dominated *Rumiyah*, comprising the single

largest category of any type of photo and accounting for 39.3% of all images in the magazine. This figure represents a 21.8% increase in the depiction of weapons compared to their prevalence in *Dabiq*. The second most common image under the chaos label (third most common image of any type) in *Rumiyah* was the depiction of terror attacks, either in progress or the immediate aftermath. While such depictions only account for 9% of *Rumiyah's* images, this represents a 225% increase in such images compared to *Dabiq*. Closely following terror attacks are depictions of dead bodies, which similarly only account for a relatively small percentage of all images in *Rumiyah* but represent an increase from *Dabiq*, more than doubling from 1.9% in the latter to 4.1% in the former.

This shift toward more heavily depicting the chaos aspect of IS' appeal makes sense in light of the changing material fortunes of the organization. In our study of *Dabiq*, we argued that IS was attempting to form what we termed a "terror state," one in which "civilization is reserved for those who submit to the rule of IS while violent savagery awaits all who would resist" (Authors 2018: 20). After successfully seizing large tracts of land and establishing much of the infrastructure of a modern state, "IS is now looking at the prospect of reverting back to being an insurgent movement" (Sivech 2016: 24). As such, while it loses the ability to provide civilization but retains the ability to deliver chaos, it seems the organization is highlighting what it still has the capacity to achieve, namely attacks upon its enemies.

However, the increase in the chaos code was not equally distributed among all the variables which constitute that code. The destruction of religious symbols and idols of other sects of Islam and other religious traditions dropped to well less than half of what they were in *Dabiq*, falling from 3.2% of all images in that magazine to only 1.4% of all images in *Rumiyah*. This is again likely tied to the declining territorial control and amount of manpower available to the

organization; while committing lone-wolf style terror attacks requires few personnel or controlled territory, the bulldozing of houses of worship and destruction of statues not only requires a number of people and resources, but also requires the control of the territories these are found in. This again points to a strong connection between the media output of IS and the material conditions faced by the organization.

As the overall chaos code rose between *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, the inverse is true of the civilization code, which declined slightly. Notably, pictures depicting the delivery of any form of non-military material goods – food, medicine, schools, places of worship – declined threefold, going from 4.6% of all images in *Dabiq* to only 1.4% of images in *Rumiyah*. The only variable under the civilization code which increased were photos of parades and celebrations in which people are depicted as either welcoming the organization to their area or celebrating IS victories. These actually increased greatly, going from 2.8% of images in *Dabiq* to 7.3% in *Rumiyah*. What this seemingly-contradictory decline in all depictions of civilization other than parades and celebrations may reflect is the relative costs associated with the various civilization variables. Whereas the provision of material goods requires actual resources, of which IS has less and less, the production of parades and celebrations requires very little in terms of money or infrastructure. Thus, the dramatic upswing in such depictions may represent the group trying to compensate for their inability to provide other markers of civilization.

Discussion and Analysis

Studying the imagery in *Rumiyah* provides a window into the rationales and public appeals of IS as they broadcast their ideology and attempt to respond to real-world events. Our study adds to a growing body of literature which argues the public messaging of IS comprises a

strategic and pragmatic orientation toward communication (Colas 2016; Harling 2016; Macnair and Frank 2017; Winkler et. al 2019). Understanding the institutional impression management of IS provides a window into how the group is not only attempting to appeal to those it hopes to convert to its worldview, but also how it is attempting to respond to its declining fortunes as both a proto-state and military force.

It is clear IS strategically changes their messaging to respond to the shifting environment they face, in terms of amount, form, and content. Overall, the group is producing much less media output than they were a few years ago (Wignell et. al 2017; Winter 2017), and what they are producing tends to be shorter, less complex, and features less original content than their previous publications (Azman 2016; Houck et. al 2017). Furthermore, the tone of IS media has shifted as well, from featuring a balance of chaos and civilization and the forecasting of a nigh-imminent apocalyptic victory (Authors 2018) to a more exclusive focus on punishing their proclaimed enemies and the much more long-term goal of conquest of Western territories (Khalid 2018; Wignell et. al 2017).

This shift in output and messaging clearly maps on to the changing fortunes of the would-be state. While *Dabiq's* publication run covers the meteoric rise and initial successes of the Islamic State, the period of *Rumiyah's* production saw the group rapidly losing territory, funding, and members (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018; Sivech 2016; Wignell et. al 2017). As a central factor impacting how an organization's frames do or do not resonate with a wider audience is the "empirical credibility" (Bedford and Snow 2000) of their claims -- that is, how well their framing of events maps on to what is happening in the world -- IS has been forced to reengineer their appeals to potential members and their explanations of battlefield outcomes and territorial loses to account for the changing environment in which they find themselves.

From Insurgency to Proto-State, Back to Insurgency

One of the distinguishing features of IS setting them apart from other jihadist and insurgent organizations was their claim to statehood; not only did they invoke the concept in their very name, but they were able to create and deliver most of what is expected from a modern nation state. At their height, IS ran their own schools, criminal justice system, government bureaucracies, and even developed their own currency (Callimaci and Rossback 2018; Gambhir 2014; Houck et. al 2017). Indeed, a central finding of our prior study on *Dabiq* (Authors 2018) was how IS highlighted their ability to provide what the state of Iraq could not, emphasizing throughout the magazine's publication run their provision of safe and serene civilization.

Yet sustained military pressure and internal strife have decimated the organization, and it now controls only a fraction of the territory it possessed a few years prior. Likewise, it's funding and personnel numbers have dropped considerably (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018; Nanninga 2018). As a result, IS simply can't claim the mantle of statehood in the ways they have done in the past. Rather, they are becoming more and more like other insurgent groups, downgrading from a caliphate to an insurgency as their self-proclaimed Islamic State "evolves from a 'physical place' to fight in toward an 'ideological idea' to die for" (Khalid 2018: 3). Yet this by no measure means IS is on the verge of disappearing, as it has shown itself "to be an organization that readily adapts to changing circumstances" (Wignell et. al 2017: 18), and maintains substantial assets, including a still-large number of dedicated followers and well-developed communication and social media platforms (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018).

Building on the argument of Bedford and Snow (2000: 628) that framing is "a dynamic, ongoing process" we argue that the shifts in content and focus from *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah* reflect what the organization can and cannot do due to its changing fortunes. While IS can no longer provide statehood and civilization, they remain fully capable of spreading violent chaos, which is reflected in the changing thematic content of their magazines. As Winter (2017) argues, IS was "was forced to recalibrate the strategic parameters of its propaganda narrative. In so doing, it reverted to salafi-jihadist type." This is consistent with our findings that not only does *Rumiyah* feature much more chaos, but that the specific types of chaos featured much more heavily consist of committing terror attacks than did the imagery in *Dabiq*. This puts our findings in line with Alkaff and Mahzam (2018: 58) who argue that IS has turned away from proclamations of state-building to instead exhort its supporters "to launch mass-casualty and high-impact attacks as well as lone-wolf attacks using whatever means." In many ways this resembles the experience of Al Qaeda following the US invasion of Afghanistan; ousted from their territorial strongholds and forced to abandon their goal of the immediate creation of a new caliphate, the group went underground and focused much more on lone-wolf style terror attacks (Sivech 2016).

The change in title in IS' centerpiece of Western outreach is reflective of this shift in orientation. While *Dabiq* refers to a Syrian town which figures prominently into a Koranic narrative of Islamic apocalyptic triumph, *Rumiyah* translates to Rome and is often used as a synecdoche for the West more generally. In this way, the title change can be seen as reflecting the shift in focus from building a Caliphate immediately to a more long-term vision of the downfall of Western powers. As Wignell et. al explain (2017: 3), "re-naming the publication after the historical center of Christianity could be a way to show what you aspire to."

Our findings are in line with those of Winter (2017) who argues that between 2015 and 2017, IS produced 74% less "utopia-themed propaganda" against 100% more "warfare-themed propaganda." This shift away from civilization and toward increasing chaos is accompanied by the fact that "the prediction of an imminent apocalypse is no longer prominent in *Rumiyah*" (Wignell et. al 2017: 16). That is, as IS' territory and funding sources rapidly shrink and the group can no longer make plausible claims of establishing a new caliphate or providing a home to those who subscribe to their particular interpretation of Islam, they have to offer a more nebulous and less concrete view of the future. As Khalid (2018: 8) argues, the shift in name of the magazine is an example of IS "brazenly shifting its follower's focus from foretelling a glorious victory in Dabiq (which clearly failed to materialize) to fairy-tale predictions regarding the conquest of Rome."

Limitations and Future Research

While contributing to our understanding of how IS utilizes visual frames and how their framing has changed over time as the organization's fortunes changed, the current study has a few important limitations. Centrally, while the employment of visual frames is clearly an important aspect of both *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, our findings cannot speak to the full meaning of the articles in either. While a descriptive analysis of the differences in visual outputs of the two publications reveals important differences, there is a wealth of information yet to be analyzed. Future research should examine textual content of the two magazines to more fully explicate the differences in their themes and self-presentation. While the initial qualitative analysis we conducted provided us the analytical categories employed in our exploration of the visual content, we only analyzed a few randomly-selected issues. A full qualitative content analysis of

the entirety of each publication run would undoubtedly produce a more nuanced and fuller explication of the self-presentational themes employed by IS.

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study adds to the growing scholarly literature (Houck et. al 2017; Kraidy 2017; McNair and Frank 2017; Winkler et. al 2019) arguing for taking seriously the media output of the Islamic State as a way of understanding the group's ideology, tactics, and recruiting methods. While others have established framing as important component of analyzing the visual output of such groups (Seo and Ebrahaim 2016), few have studied the organization's output as the public self-presentation of a social movement; our study addresses this lacuna through integrating a framing analysis of IS' Western outreach in the form of the imagery employed in *Rumiyah*. Similarly, there are few existing studies that have examined the dynamism of the organization's methods. Most existing studies of the media output of IS are cross-sectional, looking at one period of time. The present study contributes to the literature through a longitudinal examination of how the changing fortunes of the organization have impacted their public messaging.

We argue studying the media output of an organization such as IS is fruitful for researchers in two distinct ways. First, there is clear indication that IS is consciously adapting their messaging to the material conditions and changing fortunes they are experiencing (Damanhoury et. al 2018). As the shifts in content and presentation between our earlier findings regarding the imagery employed in *Dabiq* (Authors 2018) and the findings of the present study, there is a clear messaging shift from when the group was at the height of its success and its

current downswing. Second, there is little other way for researchers to understand the goals, ideologies, and intentions of a group like IS. Direct study of the group through interviews or survey questionnaires is nigh-impossible in any practical sense, and the most germane intelligence gathering regarding these types of groups remains confidential. But given that all actors attempt to control perceptions of themselves and manage the impressions they give off publicly (Benford and Snow 2000; Entman 2007; Gamson et al. 1992; Woods and Arthur 2017; Shim and Stengel 2017), studying media output of IS allows us insight into the organization which would otherwise be difficult to come by.

What we learn from the media output of IS in the form of *Rumiyah* is that the organization is losing what once was its central distinguishing feature setting it apart from Al Qaeda and other jihadist organizations. While a central aspect of the previous appeal was their ability to provide civilization alongside chaos (Authors 2018; Wignell 2017; Wozniak 2018), military defeats and interorganizational conflict have left them unable to do so. Whereas the group once controlled a massive fortune, large swaths of land, and enjoyed a steady influx of recruits and foreign fighters, the group has become a shell of its former self, losing land, revenue sources, and scores of fighters.

As such, IS has little to offer now other than their ability to continue to provide violent chaos. Rather than being able to claim they are building the new caliphate and their meteoric rise will continue until they are triumphant over all, they have been forced to push their prophesied victory toward a nebulous and uncertain future date (Alkaff and Mahzam 2018; Wignell et. al 2017). Their once-prodigious media output has followed suit; while still putting out a rather impressive amount of content across various media platforms, the group has shuttered multiple publications and resorted to recycling posts and articles. Much more importantly, there has also

been a marked change in the content of their media output, reflecting the need for at least some level of empirical credibility within the dynamic framing process (Bedford and Snow 2000).

While still far from being completely defeated, the publication run of *Rumiyah* reveals an organization in retreat, having to refine its public face to account for the changing material conditions it is experiencing. Ironically, this means the organization is becoming more and more like the other jihadi groups it had tried to distinguish itself from, as it has had to shift from calling for recruits to emigrate to the caliphate and instead launch lone-wolf style attacks wherever they are in the hopes of destabilizing Western governments. Further "second wave" (Ingram 2015:733) IS research will be necessary to understand whether the organization can regroup and once again attempt to provide their vision of civilization, or if they will continue their reversion into an otherwise unremarkable terror organization.

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Table 1: Chaos framing in 1,808 photographs appearing in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*

Frame	Dabiq (N = 1317)		Rumiyah (N = 491)	
	Yes N / %	No N/%	Yes N / %	No N / %
Weapon	425 / 32	892 / 68	193 / 39	298 / 61
Dead ally	27 / 2	1290 / 98	6 / 1	485 / 99
Dead enemy	25 / 2	1292 / 98	20 / 4	471 / 96
Execution	46 / 3	1271 / 97	16 / 3	475 / 97
Non-fatal violence	2 / 0.2	1315 / 99.8	1 / 0.2	490 / 99.8
Terror attack	56 / 4	1261 / 96	44 / 9	447 / 91
Destruction of religious icon	42 / 3	1275 / 97	7 / 1	484 / 99

Table 2: Civilization framing in 1,808 photographs appearing in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*

Frame	Dabiq (N = 1317)		Rumiyah (N = 491)	
	Yes N / %	No N/%	Yes N / %	No N / %
Delivery of material goods	61 / 5	1256 / 95	7 / 1	484 / 99
Parades and celebrations	37 / 3	1280 / 97	36 / 7	455 / 93
IS flag display	151 / 11	1166 / 89	50 / 10	441 / 90