



## Examining ISIS's Use of Terminological Amplification in its Media Publications

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to use textual interpretation to show that, in *Dabiq Magazine*, Issue 1, ISIS employed vocabulary to advance its belief system. The paper attempts to answer the question: What discursive strategies are utilized in *Dabiq*, paying special attention to how the group weaponized Islamic terminology to legitimize its violent ideology? The study systematically examines the nonexclusive Islamic terms ISIS regularly uses. ISIS advocates an adjustment to early Islamic social structures and advances brutal jihad philosophy. Accordingly, it argues that ISIS's utilization of non-specific Islamic terms methodologically fortifies jihad as the head of its methodology. It exhibits ISIS's inclination toward specific terms in its philosophy, thereby delineating its emphasis on certain branches of its belief system over others. The researcher applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary research method. Based on discourse analysis of *Dabiq Magazine*, Issue 1, the results of the study revealed that ISIS props up brutal jihad as the main point of its methodology, which it embraced from Zarqawi. The study implied that in advancing its belief system, ISIS lays out specific rules for recruited people to put themselves in the thought of a reestablished period of Islamic human progress.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary discourse analysis approach, this research article utilizes textual interpretation to show that in *Dabiq*, Issue 1, ISIS employed lexical support focusing on how the group weaponized Islamic terminology to legitimize its violent ideology. *Dabiq Magazine* was a Raqqa, Syria-based online magazine of the Islamic State, published via the deep web from July 2014 to July 2016. One of the many forms of Islamic State mass media, it partook in religious outreach to Muslims around the world, ultimately seeking to gain new recruits for the "caliphate" by encouraging Muslims to immigrate to Islamic State territory (Fraser, 2014 & Kibble, 2016). To do so, it will methodically investigate the nonexclusive Islamic terms that ISIS utilizes regularly. This will enable it to exhibit the progressive system associated with ISIS's utilization of non-specific Islamic terms. It will likewise contextualize ISIS's utilization of these terms inside the structure of its *takfiri* belief system. To recap, ISIS advocates adjustment to early Islamic social structures and advances brutal jihad philosophy. In actuality, moreover, jihad itself is the main point of ISIS's methodology (strategy), which incorporates "*hijrah*, *bay'ah*, *sam'* (hearing), *ta'ah* (compliance), and *i'dad* (preparing), prompting *ribat* and *qital* (battling), at that point *Khilafah* or *shahadah* [martyrdom]" (Clarion Project, 2014, p.35). Thus, this article will contend that ISIS's utilization of non-specific Islamic terms methodically fortifies jihad as the main point of its methodology. Along these lines, by highlighting ISIS's inclination for specific terms within its philosophical system, it will delineate the need ISIS places on advancing certain parts of its

belief system over others. Moreover, to show ISIS's purposeful abuse of non-specific Islamic terms to advance its belief system, it will exhibit how ISIS emphasizes the use of these terms. To do so, it methodically distinguishes the notable use of each term. It then distinguishes how ISIS itself utilizes each term. This enables it to clear up any disparities between these two types of utilization.

Stylistics is used here to demonstrate that in *Dabiq, Issue 1*, ISIS made a piecemeal usage of the Qur'an to justify its actions. To do so, it will systematically situate the particular Qur'anic passages that ISIS uses within the wider Qur'anic passages/chapters in which they originate. This contextualization will facilitate the interpretation of the specific issues and themes these passages actually address. It will then identify how ISIS itself uses each passage. Doing so will facilitate the highlighting of the discrepancies between the original contexts of these passages and their miscontextualization by ISIS. Thus, this interpretive strategy will illustrate precisely how ISIS makes a piecemeal usage of the Qur'an to justify its actions. By ISIS's *piecemeal* usage, this article means the selective use and deliberate miscontextualization of particular passages for the pursuit of ISIS's own ends (Clarion Project, 2014).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section sheds light on the scholarly debate over ISIS's ideology, giving essential consideration to the types of its key messages rather than its substance. This is due to semantics that are not arbitrarily chosen but rather intentionally selected to reflect specific thoughts (Van Dijk, 2015). Along these lines, both substance and frame reflect the belief system. Also, phonetic decisions are ideologically influenced. This is not to say that substance and frame are totally unrelated. In fact, it is to say that they are mutually dependent and commonly strengthen. As Fairclough notes, philosophy contributes to dialect, and dialect is a form of belief system (Fairclough, 2013, p. 9). So, in any case, this part is not as inspired by the substance of ISIS's message as it is in ISIS's intentional use of nonexclusive Islamic terms in organizing that message. Thus, not exclusively will this section prove the way that ISIS deliberately abuses Islamic terminology to advance its own belief system, but it will unmask the procedure behind that purposeful abuse. Before doing this, however, it is essential to first give a concise review of the substance of *Dabiq, Issue 1*, and in addition a short outline of ISIS's publicity wing – including *al-Hayat Media Center* (the remote dialect media arm in charge of creating *Dabiq*) – and quickly contrast *al-Hayat's* most conspicuous periodicals and *Dabiq*.

### **2.1. Background on ISIS Media**

At the point when ISIS existed in its past frame, 2006 as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), it built up al-Furqan Foundation for Media Production. This media arm delivered DVDs, CDs, handouts, notices, official public statements and online explanations for the association (Roggio, 2007). In the wake of rebranding itself as ISIS in 2013, ISIS made two more media arms. Immediately, it made *al-I'tisam Media Foundation*, which is ISIS's focal appropriation unit (Zelin, 2013). Afterwards, it made the *Ajnad Foundation for Media Production*, which represents considerable authority in sound discharges and nasheeds (Islamic melodies droned either to the foundation of percussion or acapella) (Zelin, 2013). In conclusion, when ISIS possessed Mosul in 2014, it made *al-Hayat*, which particularly targets Westerners through the creation of English, French, German, Russian, and Turkish material (Beacon, 2014). Critically, these four media arms (even al-Furqan, which ISIS founded before it went up against its present shape) for the most part provide broad media experience to ISIS's promulgation methodology.

*Al-Hayat* itself has delivered four noticeable periodicals: *Dabiq* (referring to the field of Aleppo, Syria, where ISIS imagines Armageddon happening), Dar al-Islam (House of Islam, alluding to dominant part Muslim regions which, in a perfect world, are led by *shari'a* and in

which Islam can openly be rehearsed [Dar al-Islam, n.d.]), *Konstantiniyye* (Constantinople, alluding to the fall of this focal Byzantine [Eastern Roman Empire] city to Muslim Ottoman powers, who might rename it Istanbul) and *Rumiyah* (Rome, referencing, once more, the Roman Empire's Fall).

Since *Dabiq* was first discharged in July 2014 and was distributed in English, French, German and Arabic (Clarion Project, 2014), its multi-lingual approach reveals insight into its essential target group of readers, i.e. Western people. Besides, *Dabiq* is a refined purposeful publicity magazine that talks about nonexclusive Islamic ideas, for example, *jama'ah* (group), *jihād* (heavenly war), *hijrah* (movement), methodology (technique) and *tawhid* (solidarity). It likewise contains articles/religious discourse and photograph reports featuring ISIS's military triumphs. Significantly, *Dabiq* is special from other noticeable ISIS periodicals (which will be examined later) in that it lays out the religious underpinnings of its form of a caliphate and gives religious argumentation to help its set up political foundations. In this way, through *Dabiq*, ISIS depicts itself as being more than essentially a psychological militant association (Gambhir, 2014).

*Dar al-Islam* was first discharged in December 2014 and is distributed entirely in French (MEMRI, 2015). It concentrates fundamentally on promoting lone wolf assaults inside France. Frequently, such assaults are executed without coordinate material help from worldwide terrorist organizations, yet are impacted (regardless of whether through web-based social networking or through purposeful publicity instruments) by such associations.

*Konstantiniyye* was first discharged in June 2015 and is distributed entirely in Turkish (Stein, 2015). It politically assaults the Turkish government (which is as of now engaged with the US-coalition against ISIS), including Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It likewise politically assaults the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK, which is situated in Iraqi Kurdistan and is in strife with ISIS militarily) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

Most recently, *Rumiyah* (ISIS's most current periodical) was first discharged in September 2016 (Li & McKernan, 2016). It is distributed in Uyghur, Indonesian, Russian, German, French and English. *Rumiyah* is like *Dabiq* in that it features ISIS's military victories, but it varies from *Dabiq* in that it additionally features ISIS's achievements in affecting lone wolf assaults in Western nations. In such a manner, *Rumiyah* is like *Dar al-Islam*. In any case, while *Dar al-Islam* instigates solitary wolf assaults particularly inside France, *Rumiyah* makes a worldwide invitation to battle in such manner. Looking at these noticeable al-Hayat periodicals illustrates *Dabiq's* uniqueness as a propaganda publication.

In *Dabiq, Issue 1*, ISIS deliberately lays out religious argumentation for, and commends, its part in what it considers as the recovery of the Islamic caliphate. To start with, it writes about Muhammad al-Adnani's (ISIS's previous representative) declaration of the caliphate and al-Baghdadi's ensuing discourse (Clarion Project, 2014, pp.8-11). Next, it advances its organization building accomplishments amongst itself and the ancestral pioneers of the domains which it involves. In particular, these accomplishments include those who previously offered *bay'a* to Baghdadi (Clarion Project, 2014, pp.12-13). Imperatively, in talking about these accomplishments, ISIS features its military victories, as well as influences it's per users to make *hijrah* to its region keeping in mind the end goal to give *bay'a* to Baghdadi in a similar manner. Along these lines, ISIS welcomes per users to put themselves in the sentimental thought of a reestablished brilliant period of Islamic development.

ISIS at that point contends finally with reference to why its association most mirrors *imamah* (Islamic religious authority). The exact way in which it does as such will be outlined in the accompanying talk of its use of *imamah* to advance its philosophy. Comprehensively, in any

case, ISIS utilizes this non-specific Islamic term to solidify the energy of Baghdadi by belligerence that Islamic religious initiative includes both otherworldly and political parts. In conclusion, in *Dabiq, Issue 1*, ISIS plots the subtle elements of Zarqawi's methodology, which ISIS itself has received. To recap, this methodology incorporates movement, steadfastness, listening, compliance and preparing, which promote battling (Clarion Project, 2014, p.35)

Strangely, ISIS markets *Dabiq, Issue 1* as a desperate reaction to the requirements of the *umma*. It does this by attributing its achievement in starting *Dabiq* to the per users' criticism that it got subsequent to discharging Islamic State News and Islamic State Report (Clarion Project, 2014, p.3). These periodicals were pamphlets/photograph announcements that were discharged, now and again, up to twice every day amid the underlying control of Mosul. In addition, they later stopped creation and ended up noticeably fused as particular areas inside *Dabiq* itself. Strangely, one counterterrorism expert has brought up that the joining of these periodicals into *Dabiq* not just encourages ISIS to depict itself as being popular, yet in addition to reflectively legitimize the soundness of its assertion of a caliphate. All the more particularly, having brought itself into adversity with other jihadist associations through the revelation of a caliphate – ISIS found that its capacity to extend depended first on its capacity to establish religious theory in a manner greater than these associations. Keeping in mind the end goal to do this, ISIS needed to demonstrate that its methodology was more authentic and fruitful than theirs. Consequently, *Dabiq, Issue 1* is full of analysis from conspicuous jihadists, for example, Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi (Gambhir, 2014). This short outline of *Dabiq, Issue 1* sets the phase for examining the vocabulary most often utilized by ISIS to advance its belief system.

## **2.2. Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to utilize textual interpretation to show that in *Dabiq Magazine*, Issue 1, ISIS utilized vocabulary support to advance its belief system. Specifically, the paper attempts to provide a clear answer to the research question: What discursive strategies are utilized in *Dabiq* paying special attention to how the group weaponized Islamic terminology to legitimize its violent ideology?

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researcher applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary research method. CDA is a subfield of discourse analysis that examines how power relations within society are constructed, maintained, or challenged through various forms of discourse, such as speech, text, and visual media. Emerging in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, CDA is rooted in critical theory and discourse analysis, drawing on the works of influential scholars like Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun van Dijk. This interdisciplinary approach spans linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, social psychology, and education, focusing on three interconnected levels of analysis: the text, the practices surrounding its production and consumption, and the broader social context. CDA posits that discourse is ideological and plays a crucial role in reinforcing or contesting societal power imbalances. It emphasizes the importance of language in shaping thought and discourse, illustrating how even seemingly neutral terms can uphold dominant social norms, such as gender bias. Scholars in this field have applied CDA to various domains, including education, media, politics, and race relations, to uncover hidden inequalities (Fairclough, 2023).

## **4. DISCUSSION**

The accompanying area methodically dissects the nonexclusive Islamic terms that ISIS utilizes generally often. Thus, it shows the progressive terminological system associated with ISIS's utilization of these terms. It likewise contextualizes ISIS's utilization of these terms inside the



system of ISIS's own *takfiri* ideology, which advocates adjustment to early Islamic social structures and advances brutal jihad. Afterward, it contends that ISIS uses Islamic terms to make jihad the main part of its methodology. In this manner, by featuring ISIS's inclination for specific terms inside the structure of its philosophy, it outlines the need ISIS puts on advancing specific parts of its belief system over others.

ISIS utilizes the term '*khilafah*' to allude to its own particular authoritative structure. It does this by laying out religious argumentation for, and praising, its part in what it considers as the restoration of the caliphate. This is apparent from the subtitle of *Dabiq, Issue 1: "The Return of Khilafah."* This is additionally obvious from the title of *Dabiq Issue 1's* second segment, *Khilafah Declared*. This area covers two subjects: 1) the declaration of the caliphate by Adnani and 2) Baghdadi's first discourse. Adnani depicts the organization of ISIS's caliphate as a recovery for the *umma*.

In this way, Adnani depicts ISIS's caliphate as a vanguard for the *umma*, having freed it from common persecution and enabled it as a victor in the wake of shame. Critically, Adnani assigns "the sun of jihad" as the vehicle for this strengthening.

In this manner, ISIS's transposition of the term *khilafah* from an early Islamic setting onto its own authoritative structure matches with its support of strict adjustment to early Islamic social structures. It additionally supports its own belief in the advancement of brutal jihad.

#### 4.1. Imitating Imamah

The Qur'anic use of the term '*imamah*' alludes to authority over an assembly of individuals. In like manner use, the use of, imam can be utilized as a honorific title for an Islamic scholar, or to signify one who leads *salah*. On a more extensive scale, though *khilafah* customarily alludes to the establishment of authority related with Sunni Islam, while *imamah* traditionally alludes to the organization of administration related with Shia Islam. In particular, while both *khilafah* and *imamah* encompass the profound and political parts of Islamic religious initiative, Sunni and Shia teaching contrast in their perspectives in regards to the successorship related with this authority. All the more particularly, while Sunni tenet holds that successorship has a place with the Qurayshi Companions of the Prophet, Shia teaching holds that successorship has a place with the genealogy of Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Consequently, ISIS's depiction of itself as the association that most copies *imamah* agrees with its promotion of strict adjustment to early Islamic social structures. Additionally, its endeavor to solidify its energy by debilitating the individuals who contradict it harmonizes with its advancement of brutal jihad, in this way fortifying brutal jihad as the main point of its methodology.

ISIS props up brutal jihad as the main point of its methodology, which it embraced from Zarqawi. By this, it is implied that in advancing its belief system (and, particularly, in promoting its variant of a caliphate), ISIS lays out specific rules for recruited people to put themselves in the thought of a reestablished period of Islamic human progress which they claim to envision, with fierce jihad as its caliphate's definitive objective. Moreover, in drawing out the points of interest of its methodology, ISIS emphasizes Zarqawi's contention that *khilafah* cannot be set up without a *jama'ah* that utilizes fierce jihad as its central vehicle for change in actualizing the call of Allah (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 35). Actually, as already specified in this current area's examination of the term *khilafah*, ISIS talks about its affirmation of a caliphate as having caused "the sun of jihad" to rise. Along these lines, ISIS's utilization of this term concurs with its advancement of brutal jihad.

### Examining ISIS's Use of Terminological Amplification in its Media Publications

ISIS uses *Al-Baqarah*: 124, *Al-Baqarah*: 130, *An-Nisa'*: 29, *Al-An'am*: 115 and *An-Nahl*: 94 to portray itself as the jihadist organization that most imitates *imamah*. In its original context, *Al-Baqarah*: 124 simply illustrates Allah's ordainment of Prophet Ibrahim as the *imam* of believers: "Indeed, I will make you a leader [*imam*] for the people" (Ali, 1989). ISIS, however, extrapolates from this verse far more than it actually says in order to set up its own argument that *imamah* involves both spiritual and political roles. For example, ISIS writes:

[T]he *imamah* mentioned in the above verse isn't simply referring to *imamah* in religious affairs, as many would wish to interpret. Rather, it's inclusive of *imamah* in political affairs, which many religious people have shunned and avoided on account of the hardship it entails itself and on account of the hardship entailed in working to establish it. (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 25)

Thus, ISIS lends authority to Baghdadi as the *imam* of the *ummah* and thereby guardian over all of the *ummah's* spiritual and political affairs (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 24).

*Al-Baqarah*: 130, in its original context, points to the foolishness of anyone that turns away from Islam: "And who turns away from the religion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly? Him We chose and rendered pure in this world: And he will be in the Hereafter in the ranks of the Righteous" (Ali, 1989). ISIS, however, interprets this verse to warn against rejecting its own authority as a caliphate that (allegedly) imitates *imamah* in general and Abraham in particular. For example, ISIS writes:

Through the course of this discussion, we can see that The Islamic State is the entity that most emulates the *millah* of Ibrahim with regards to *imamah* in the areas where it exists...So we can see from the context of these verses that *imamah* is from the *millah* of Ibrahim ('*alayhis-salam*), and that whoever turns away from it is turning away from something that's a part of this great *millah*. (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 27)

Thus, ISIS uses this verse to label as foolish anyone who rejects its portrayal of itself as the jihadist organization that most imitates *imamah*. *An-Nisa'*: 29, in its original context, illustrates Allah's command for Muslims to deal with one another justly: "O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: But let there be amongst you Traffic and trade by mutual good-will: Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful!" (Ali, 1989). However, ISIS uses this verse to claim that in the case that Baghdadi were to ask ISIS's members to treat others unjustly, they would disobey him. For example, ISIS writes: "[W]e will continue to obey the imam as long as he orders us to obey Ar-Rahman (the Most Merciful). But if he orders us to disobey Allah, then we won't obey those orders" (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 29). Importantly, this claim seeks to assure ISIS's audience that it places the commands of Allah before the commands of its *imam*, Baghdadi. In doing so, it legitimizes its actions as divinely-ordained, as opposed to being simply inspired by the leadership of Baghdadi in a cult-like fashion. *Al-An'am*: 115, in its original context, emphasizes the infallibility of the words of Allah: "The word of thy Lord doth find its fulfilment in truth and in justice: None can change His words [*kalimat*, translated by ISIS, rather curiously, as "commands"]": for He is the one who heareth and knoweth all" (Ali, 1989). ISIS, however, uses this verse to argue that it was because of Prophet Ibrahim's obedience to Allah's *kalimat* (interpreted by ISIS as commands rather than words) that he was ordained with *imamah*. For example, ISIS writes:

On account of obeying Allah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions, Allah made Ibrahim an imam for mankind and an example to be followed...Likewise, his hijrah (emigration)...from his land for sake of Allah when he was commanded to leave his people (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 26).

Moreover, ISIS uses this verse to lend authority to Baghdadi by claiming that it is only because of Baghdadi's righteous obedience to Allah's commands that he himself has been chosen to lead the *ummah*:

All this, after Allah had granted the imam of The Islamic State the blessing of performing hijrah and fighting jihad in His cause, on top of already having been characterized by

*his noble lineage, sound intellect, and a prestigious level of knowledge and religious practice.*

*Lastly, An-Nahl: 94, in its original context, warns against leading believers astray from the path of righteousness:*

*And take not your oaths, to practice deception between yourselves, with the result that someone's foot may slip after it was firmly planted, and ye may have to taste the evil (consequences) of having hindered (men) from the Path of Allah, and a Mighty Wrath descend on you. (Ali, 1989)*

ISIS, however, uses this verse to project itself as the jihadist organization that most imitates *imamah* by depicting itself as a vanguard for *tawhid* (monotheism). Importantly, ISIS views *tawhid* as the cornerstone of *imamah*, given that Prophet Ibrahim is considered the original monotheist as a result of his covenant with Allah (*Al-Baqarah*: 124). Specifically, in depicting itself as a vanguard for *tawhid*, ISIS delegitimizes other jihadist organizations by accusing them of failing to address the needs of young Muslims worldwide with regard to the message of *tawhid*. More specifically, ISIS first claims that *tawhid* – which it refers to as the *millah* (path) of Prophet Ibrahim – “has strongly re-emerged within the soul of the young Muslim *muwahhid* (monotheist), such that he believed in it, loved it, declared it openly, and worked in accordance with its requirements” (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 20). ISIS then critiques other jihadist organizations by saying that as young Muslims worldwide yearn to renew their faith through *tawhid*, other jihadist groups fail to respond to this yearning (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 21).

#### 4.2.Celebrating Khilafah

ISIS uses *At-Tawbah*: 15 to celebrate its role in what it considers as the revival of the *khilafah*: “And Allah turns in forgiveness to whom He wills; and Allah is Knowing and Wise” (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 49). In its original context, *At-Tawbah* describes the annulment of a treaty between the Prophet and the *mushrikin* (polytheists) as a result of the Battle of Hunayn. Specifically, this *sura* (Qur’anic chapter) attributes this annulment to the Hawazin Bedouin tribe’s initiation of battle against the Prophet and his followers. Hawazin tribal elders initiated battle against the Prophet and his followers out of fear that Islamic sociopolitical and military gains would threaten the Hawazin’s established trade routes to the east of Mecca (Qur’an Tafsir Ibn Kathir, n.d). Importantly, much of the passage surrounding Verse 15 illustrates Allah’s command to the Prophet to show mercy upon those *mushrikin* who did not engage in battle – for example, by granting them amnesty, as in Verse 6: “If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God. And then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge” (Ali, 1989). Interestingly, however, Verse 15 itself does not explicitly refer to *mushrikin*. Rather, it is ambiguous in that it does not denote one particular group only. I am not saying that this *sura* does not broadly illustrate Allah’s extension of mercy to non-believers. In fact, it does. This is evident from Verse 6, as illustrated above. I am saying, however, that Verse 15 in particular does not explicitly refer to Allah’s extension of mercy to *mushrikin*.

Ironically, however, ISIS miscontextualizes Verse 15 to refer to Allah’s mercy towards non-believers. Specifically, it uses this verse to attribute its military successes in taking over Iraqi territory to the help of Allah. More specifically, it uses this verse to argue that Allah’s help during this takeover not only led to the destruction of ISIS’s enemies (or, as ISIS would have it, the enemies of Islam), but also to the *tawbah* (repentance) of *murtaddin* (apostates), thus saving them from *nifaq* (hypocrisy) and *kufr* (disbelief). Importantly, ISIS equates *tawbah* with the surrender of its enemies to ISIS itself. Thus, it uses this verse to celebrate its direct facilitation of *tawbah* in reviving the *khilafah* (Clarion Project, 2014, pp. 48-49).

This is not to claim that ISIS's miscontextualization of Verse 15 to refer to Allah's mercy towards non-believers is problematic in terms of human rights itself. In fact, illustrating Allah's extension of mercy towards non-believers would demonstrate Islam's respect for human rights. I am saying, however, that ISIS's miscontextualization of Verse 15 is problematic because this deliberate miscontextualization is meant to portray ISIS itself as a vehicle of Allah's mercy, and thereby justify its takeover of Iraqi territory as divinely-ordained.

### **4.3.Reinforcing Violent Jihad**

ISIS uses *Al-Anfal*: 39 to reinforce violent *jihad* as the spearhead of its *minhaj*. It sets the context for this miscontextualization by first referencing Zarqawi's jihadist strategy, which ISIS claims is built upon his distaste for Islamic political parties and their failure to incorporate *jihad* into their own strategies. Zarqawi's strategy itself, which ISIS roots in his jihadist experience in Afghanistan, among other places, is based on the belief that a true caliphate could not be established without a community of believers that rely solely on the Qur'an and *sunna* and that practice Salafi thought. For example, ISIS writes:

Learning from the lessons he gained from Afghanistan and elsewhere, he knew that Khilafah could not be established except through a *jama'ah* that gathered upon the Kitab and Sunnah with the understanding of the Salaf... (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 35)

Furthermore, ISIS criticizes Islamic parties for not incorporating *tawhid* into their political agendas. Importantly, ISIS then claims that only a *jama'ah* that incorporated *tawhid* into its agenda and used *jihad* as its fundamental means for change could succeed in saving the *umma*. Referring to itself, ISIS writes:

This *jama'ah*'s most important goal would be to revive *tawhid* especially in matters ignored and abandoned by "Islamic" parties in our times – matters relating to *wala'*, *bara'*, *hukm* (ruling), and *tashri'* (legislation). The *jama'ah* would use the absent obligation of *jihad* as its fundamental means for change, implementing Allah's command, {And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah} [*Al-Anfal*: 39]. Its *jihad* would be based upon *hijrah*, *bay'ah*, *sam'* (listening), *ta'ah* (obedience), and *i'dad* (training), leading to *ribat* and *qital* (fighting), then *Khilafah* or *shahadah*. (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 35)

In its original context, however, *Al-Anfal* references the Battle of Badr to outline the principles of just conduct in war. The Battle of Badr was the Prophet's and his followers' first large scale victory against the Meccans. In fact, *Al-Anfal* and *At-Tawbah* (verse 15 of which was used at the beginning of this article to analyze ISIS's celebration of its role in what it considers as the revival of the *khilafah*) together create one pair. Moreover, both *suras* deal with principles of just war in Islam. *Al-Anfal*: 39, in particular, advocates cessation of hostilities toward those who are no longer engaged in battle against believers:

*And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression [fitnah], and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do.* (Ali, 1989)

Thus, ISIS positions this verse as the primary goal of its *minhaj*. Importantly, however, it only cites the *first half* of the verse, ignoring Allah's command for just treatment towards those who cease hostilities. In other words, ISIS refers precisely to the first half of Verse 39 as the underlying command that it seeks to fulfill as an organization. Moreover, fulfilling this command, it argues, is its sole, ultimate goal. Thus, ISIS both miscontextualizes and deconstructs this verse to justify its use of violent *jihad* as its fundamental means of change for the *jama'ah*.

### **4.4.Calling for Hijrah**

ISIS uses *Al-A'raf*: 128 to call for *hijrah* to its territories. Specifically, Baghdadi, in his first speech, uses this verse to argue that the occupation of Iraq and Syria by ISIS's recruits through *hijrah* is divinely-ordained: "Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom



He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous” (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 11). Firstly, it should be noted that the word *hijrah* is never used in this verse. Secondly, in its original context, this verse illustrates the challenges Moses faced in persuading Pharaoh to free the Children of Israel. *Al-A'raf* opens by reiterating to the Prophet the importance of his revelations, and ends by instructing him to repeat those revelations without regard for any doubt on behalf of his listeners. In doing so, it provides a synopsis of the historical prophetic communities' successes (credited to their righteousness) and failures (credited to their disobedience). Verse 128 specifically refers to the moment when Moses reassured the Children of Israel after Pharaoh threatened them with execution. Moses did this by discussing how, in spite of Pharaoh's power – dominion of the earth belongs to Allah. Therefore, they (as the righteous) would end up prevailing in the face of Pharaoh's injustice.

Nonetheless, Baghdadi uses this verse as a call to arms for recruits to occupy Iraq and Syria. He bases his argument on the idea that Iraq and Syria belong to those whom ISIS considers to be Muslims (i.e., members of ISIS), as opposed to those who claim a specific nationality (in this case, Iraqis or Syrians). Moreover, he equates those whom ISIS considers to be Muslims with the righteous. Thus, whereas the original context of *Al-A'raf*: 128 symbolized Allah's protection of the Children of Israel's rights, as opposed to referring specifically to *physical* territory, Baghdadi miscontextualized this symbolism to refer to ISIS's own physical territory in Iraq and Syria as the entitlement of its recruits as righteous Muslims (Clarion Project, 2014, p. 11).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1. Conclusions

This article utilized stylistics to show that in *Dabiq, Issue 1*, ISIS utilized vocabulary amplification to advance its belief system. It did so by breaking down the non-specific Islamic terms that ISIS generally utilizes. Consequently, it showed the chain of importance associated with ISIS's use of these terms. It likewise contextualized ISIS's use of these terms inside the system of its *takfiri* ideology. Accordingly, by featuring ISIS's inclination for specific terms inside the structure of its belief system, this article delineated the stress that ISIS puts on advancing specific parts of its belief system over others. Thus, it proves that ISIS deliberately abuses Islamic dialect to advance its philosophy. On a more extensive scale, this article unmasked the methodology behind that purposeful abuse, in this way laying the basis for investigating ISIS's utilization of the Qur'an to legitimize its activities.

### 5.2. Implications

Finally, in relation to the broader implications for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), religious literacy, and propaganda studies, the "divide and conquer" tactic was essential to the Islamic State's rule in Syria and Iraq. The Islamic State was founded as a "utopia" for the *ummah* (global Muslim community), and membership in its freshly imagined society required allegiance to Sunni Islam. As a result, in-group and out-group identities were distinguished, which had significant effects on treatment and policy within the "caliphate". More precisely, the Islamic State's Salafi-jihadi ideology whose purity and legitimacy depended on the reconstruction of a conservative gender order driven its military and administration operations. The Islamic State imposed an ideological-legislative control structure within its borders that defined gender-essentialized and binary roles, frequently reducing its message to: males in public, women in private. Convergence or divergence from these ideals determined each individual's position within the Islamic State's society, and legitimized the behavioral regulation of the in-group and the victimization of the out-group (Margolin & Vale, 2024).

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