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Populism and hegemony in Islamic State: The building of the caliphal State in the propagandistic *Dabiq* magazine

Abstract

This paper studies the form and emergence of the construction and representation of the self-proclaimed State of caliphate by Islamic State. *Dabiq* magazine, the bridge between the organization and its readers (allies and enemies) has been used completely in this paper (15 total issues) with the purpose of knowing and comprehending critically how ISIS uses a propagandist and its communicative line to construct and represent itself and its idea of State as safe and pious. Great quality visual and textual resources of the magazine reproduce the populist, hegemonic and antagonistic self-construction of the caliphate as a form of life and government. It will also show the self-projection of ISIS to the outside and the we-other equation. In short, this work aims to approach the propagandistic discourse of an organization that shapes itself as the savior of society, designed and self-proclaimed through social institutions and forms of government that reinforce its domination and particular cultural hegemony.

Keywords

Islamic State, caliphate, propaganda, hegemony, populism, Dabiq.

1. Introduction

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has received the attention of a large number of researches, disciplines and points of view since the organization started its most known attack against the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014.

The most approached perspectives of analysis have been its propaganda (Gråtrud, 2016; Novenario, 2016; Thompson, 2017), its discourse (Kuznar, 2017) and aesthetics (Richards, 2016; Botz-Bornstein, 2017), especially those disseminated through the internet (Atwan, 2015; Aly *et al.*, 2016; Bloom, Tiflati & Horgan, 2017; Kraidy, 2017).¹ This way of

¹ According to these lines, it is important to mention researching around counter-propaganda of ISIS (Al-Rawi, 2016b).

spreading is the most useful for the organization to extend public conversations, meetings, magazines and modern digital formats, like videogames and apps (Al-Rawi, 2016a).

The most mediated side of the propaganda of ISIS is its extreme and intimidating violence across sophisticated images. “Some of these [images], consistent of its message of inevitable victory and group members depict as fearsome warriors [...]. Images of gore, beheadings and executions are intended to intimidate opponents” (Farwell, 2014: 50). However, these cases of explicit and appealing content are a smaller part of its propaganda production (Winter, 2015). In addition, its rhetoric tries to establish “a generalised enemy of Islam –the camp of kufr– who is responsible for all the suffering experienced by Muslims around the world” using menaces and cruel images. This content seeks to invoke “the name of Islam and articulating general exhortations from the Quran to establish a peculiar form of Muslim identity tied to ISIS’s political project” (Low, 2016: 309–310). To do that, the identity construction of the organization is made dialectically. Along with the identification and definition of the enemy –using violence, threats, defamation– the proper definition of the organization is very important –security, stability and welfare– (Ingram, 2015).

The principal purpose of this study is how ISIS exteriorizes its image to the rest of the world. To do that, the digital magazine of the organization, *Dabiq* (2014–2016), has been examined because it is one of the most popular broadcasting tools. The magazine was first edited in English, apart from some issues in French, so the main audience of the magazine is English speaking Muslims (Ingram, 2016b). Given the popularity of *Dabiq*, there is a lot of research on it (Huey, 2015; Novenario, 2016; Winkler, El-Damanhoury, Dicker & Lemieux, 2016; Heck, 2017; Wilbour, 2017). The disparity between these authors is interesting due to the difficulty of coming to an understanding of its main motivation: to attack its enemies, to recruit or it is simply a magazine with no common thread (Colas, 2016). Further, in all the issues of the magazine, the identity us–others appears unequal. As opposed to other magazines like *Inspire* of Al-Qaeda², *Dabiq* adds another dichotomy: “crisis–solution” (Ingram, 2016b). Facing the crisis of the argued oppression of Muslim by the West and the deviation of the Muslim no Jihad governments,

the Islamic State claims the area controlled by the Caliphate is the only Islamic jurisdiction. Subsequently, this territory is the only area in which the limitations with respect to rights of freedom, life and property, and compliance with Islamic Law apply (Pelletier *et al.*, 2016: 5).

This is the key for Garrido (2016) and Napoleoni (2014). Besides the violent and outdated practices that highlight the media, one of the most important novelties of ISIS is the ability of creating a State that satisfies (crisis–solution) the need of the Muslim it takes in. Furthermore, the propagandistic broadcasting of the executions of the prisoners seeks to shape an image of itself as a proto–state as well as a legitimate state entity and religious authority” (Herfroy–Mischler & Barr, 2017: 23). Opposite to organizations that only offer the martyrdom, ISIS pictures a merciful earthly existence.

Through the *Dabiq* magazine, this analysis studies how the image of the caliphate as a State is built as a secure and seductive space for the Sunni Muslim who reside in the West and are encouraged to emigrated (Hegira) to Holy Land. To do that, all the published issues of *Dabiq* (15 in total) have been analyzed and all the information that shows the construction

² Despite the fact that both magazines are in English, *Inspire* central motivation is to appeal to the identity, meanwhile *Dabiq* combines messages of election of identity and rational election (Ingram, 2016b). Both magazines share some common concerns like how to publicize the martyrdom of their combatants. This is an anti–western rethoric and a preoccupation about the present moment of the global movement beyond the events in the Middle East (Droogan & Peatie, 2016).

of “us” has been taken into consideration. The approach is mixed because Content Analysis and qualitative reasoned analysis have been used as methodological tools. Before starting, it is necessary to approach to the theory of propaganda and concepts of hegemony, populism and antagonism to understand the theoretical basis of the results.

2. Propaganda, construction of social imaginaries and common sense

The definition of propaganda is always an unfinished work in spite of numerous and laudable suggestions (Baines & O’Shaughnessy, 2014; Jowett & O’Donell, 2015; Vázquez Liñán, 2017). Nevertheless, there are some points that serve to analyze the discourse of ISIS through the *Dabiq* magazine: (1) all propagandistic acts are communicational and ideological, (2) with the purpose of maintaining or modifying the relations of power, (3) constructing, reproducing or destroying social imaginary (Vázquez Liñán & Leetoy, 2016; Tarín Sanz, 2018³). The last part of the definition shows perfectly the reasons why the propaganda is vital for the construction of caliphal State.

It is crucial to recognize that the construction of social imaginary across propaganda is difficult and measureless, but linking both issues helps to understand the importance of massive mediation in modern societies (Martín Barbero, 2003; Mattelart, 2007). It is interesting both parts of the definition of social imaginary by Taylor (2006: 39). The first one refers to “the way [people] imagine their social existence, the type of relations between each other, the type of things that occur between them, the expectations and the images and normative ideas”⁴ of these expectations. Part of that imagination, crucial for this study, acts over communities, tribes, States, nations or another “cultural artefacts” (Anderson, 1991: 4). Every nation is a symbolic community (Evans, 2007) and “it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [...] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1991: 6). This is the way the Muslim community (*umma*) has enunciated its image.

an ideal that nurtures the community identity of the Muslims, above their social or cultural diversity [...]. For contemporary Islamism, the *umma* justifies its internationalist mission, because of the Muslim⁵ are part of the same community (Gómez García, 2009: 336–337)⁶.

The characteristic of that community imagined by its members (a true *umma* supported or not opposed to ISIS) is partially mediated by the propagandistic discourse of its self-construction.

The second part of the definition of Taylor (2006: 39) denotes that “the imaginary is the collective understanding of common practices and share feelings of legitimacy”. This connects with the important political task of the fight for the common sense, where the construction of the imaginary, and therefore, the propaganda, play an outstanding role. For Gramsci, the common sense is the belief shared by the people. There is a contradiction in this: meanwhile the elite is hold on it, it fuels a revolutionary potential to construct the new society (Crehan, 2011).

³ Unpublished work.

⁴ The translation is ours.

⁵ The idea of *umma* has been used propagandistically as an interclass, intergeneric and interethnic project and the unique required link is the statement of the Islamic faith. However, ISIS differentiates in the practice the true Muslim (Sunni affiliated to its politic project) from the takfir (infidel) of the Suni opponent governments or of the Shiite (Heck, 2017). The takfirism is not a sole strategy of ISIS, but “large part of the contemporary Islamism makes use of the takfir forgetting its obligation of converting the infidel and using the condemnation as a central axis in the battle against political regimes of Muslim societies” (the translation is ours) (Gómez García, 2009: 320).

⁶ The translation is ours.

The common sense is understood as apolitical and ideological (Zizek, 2008) as long as the ideology is a system of “shared basic beliefs”, “base of the social memory shared by the groups”⁷ (Van Dijk, 2003: 23).

Consequently, there is a connection between the social imaginary and the ideology. At the same time, this link is part of the future definition of the propaganda. Assuming that the propaganda can contribute to construct or reproduce this social and deeply ideological imaginary, it can be used to approach how ISIS shows its own image of community. An image characterised by the utilization of caliphal state as a place to emigrate (imagined community); able to solve the problems of the members through a certain and strict religious interpretation (common sense).

3. Populism, antagonism y hegemony

In the last twenty years and in different temporary and spatial scenarios, the appearance of the moment or the popular break an historical event that provoke “the equivalence between unsatisfied claims, the materialization of them around certain common symbols and the emergence of a leader who personifies that process of popular identification”⁸ (Laclau: 2006, 58). This is the solidary sharing-pooling of the collective frustration in an integrating political project to solve the problems the system is unable to. Meanwhile this idea has been recognized in West and Latin America, the neoliberal frame, dominant since the eighties and nineties, does not consider the Syrian Arab Spring nor the Iraqi postwar as popular moments/breaks which explain the emergence and success of ISIS⁹.

Beyond the motives of these moments/breaks, the interesting point is to argue how the populist reason can help to understand part of the propaganda of ISIS. According to Engesser *et al.* (2016), “the core of the populist base-line ideology” consist of five key elements of the discourse of the organization: “popular sovereignty, pure people, corrupt elite, dangerous others [and] the glorification of the heart land”. Although later concrete examples will be explained to a great extent, this fact can illustrate from the first issue of *Dabiq*. Here it can be seen some of the main principles of the new state like “popular sovereignty”, “pure people” and “glorification of the heart land”:

Therefore, rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis. [...] The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims (A call to Hijrah, July 2014: 11).

Also, as noted before about takfirism, the accusation of corruption and apostasy against the Islamic governments which do not share ISIS particular interpretations of Salafism (Al-Ibrahim, 2015). This discourse is similar to the discourse of “corrupt elite” suitable for populism. With no doubt, one of the peculiarity of the discourse of ISIS is the characterization of the other as enemy, an antagonist dynamic (Mouffe, 1995). At the same time, this implies the identification of us (Carpentier, 2007) and fits with Engesser *et al.* (2016) names as “dangerous others”. In that case, the enemies or the ones responsible of not satisfying the claims (crisis) are all those who do not support ISIS. On the contrary, the use of us (solution) implies to Muslim tied to the apparatus (ISIS) and its leaders (Abu Bakr al Baghdadi). The leadership (*imamah*) is crucial to the populism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987) and to

⁷ The translation is ours.

⁸ The translation is ours.

⁹ The epistemological traditions of the West, Latin America and the Arab-Muslim world show differences in the application of static models to these diverse contexts. However, that does not impede necessarily the opposite situation in which it is not possible to find a common element to contribute partially to explain this phenomenon.

ISIS, according to the magazine ('The concept of Imamah is from the millah of Ibrahim', July 2014).

As said before, the construction of us-other, which according to Schmitt (2007) establishes the basis of the politics, becomes part of the strategy of *Dabiq* (Ingram, 2016a). That is why it is interesting to separate the reductionist view of radicalization and military recruitment that can be read in the media production of Jihadi organizations (Nilsson, 2015; Wadhwa & Bhatia, 2015; Mahood & Rane, 2017). Also, to call to critical theories of communication and to cultural studies used to study the political and religious propaganda in the West, but missing from the Islamic propaganda. According to these trends, media are instrumental areas for the construction and reproduction of cultural hegemony (Martín-Barbero, 2003; Anderson, 2006; Carpentier, 2007). Gramsci (2000) completed the definition: the cultural direction of a dominant group over other dominated. But Gramsci's, the way of constructing that hegemony partly depends on the political and socioeconomic development, associating the liberal democracies to the civil society and, on the other hand, non-democratic regimes to the absence of democracy¹⁰. In the first model the access to power order is effective through a war of positions and the maintenance of the order is due to the social consensus. This war of positions consists on the gradual control of institutions or ideological apparatus (Pereyra, 1998), like mass media (Hall, 1996; Gramsci, 2000). The second model, on the opposite, is stricter and the civil context is weaker. The takeover has to be done by assault, according to Gramsci. Although the takeover of the power by ISIS is more similar to the second model, the absence of democracy in Syria and Iraq and, therefore, the lack of a civil empowered society able to assume consensus-, needs to be part of the analysis of media and of the national apparatus to consolidate its political project.

ISIS has built a structural framework similar to states in order to reinforce its cultural domination. As the organization explained in the video *The structure of the Khalifah*, under the executive power (the caliphate) there are two legislative chambers, the committee of representatives and the council of the *Shura*. In parallel, there are *wilayah* or provinces with their own administrations; *dawawin* or ministries which promote the welfare; and other minor committees. This innovative existence in armed groups permits, according to Napoleoni (2014: 18), the popular support to the state:

The combatants of ISIS fix roads, organize dining room charity to homeless and guarantee the daily electricity supply. This samples certain understanding of the fact that, in XXI century it is not possible to create new nations simply by using terror and violence.

In conclusion, the existence of mass media embedded in *Dabiq* magazine in the project of ISIS, deal with the need of recruiting soldiers and professionals to the survival of the project, and a constructing tool of cultural hegemony. In collaboration with other institutions, the project pretends to complement the coercion with other agreed forms of control.

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Objectives

The main objective of this work is to analyze the imaginary self-construction of ISIS as state across its propagandistic product, *Dabiq*. The specific objectives are:

¹⁰ Originally, Gramsci uses a geographical metaphor to refer to both model: the first is represented by Western Europe (West) and the second, by Russia (East).

1. To recognize, quantify and analyze the space where ISIS proposes itself as a legitime, secure, effective and merciful state, using *Dabiq* to obtain samples of analysis.
2. To identify, quantify and analyze the visual resources through *Dabiq* tries to reconstruct and reproduce the social imaginary explained in the previous objective.
3. To characterize and evaluate themes, nature and types of propagandist contents in *Dabiq* magazine.

All these objects try to show a critical view around the use which the Islamic armed organizations, especially ISIS, give to media. The purpose here is to go further the academic and media trends which think in the communication simply from the exhibitionism and military recruitment. This work attempts to provide a new view and to recognize, at the same time, the value of the academic literature which emphasizes in other contents of the magazine.

4.2. Content analysis

The present study uses the Content Analysis because it is a “systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002: 1). This method has been applied successfully in research of the press and the propaganda as objects of study (Krippendorff, 2004). Additionally, there are previous application of this method in other researches related to the external communication of several Islamist armed groups (Smith et al., 2008), even in ISIS (Winkler, El-Damanhoury, Dicker & Lemieux, 2016).

As can be seen in the previous definition, the Content Analysis is systematic as long as it proposes normalized and steady standards of analysis for all the analysis units; it is objective in the extend that the results can be replicated by other researchers; and quantitative because the texts can be converted to measurable numerical variables. In this occasion, there are three axis of analysis with different elements and categories to which have been assigned a numerical reference (Table 1). These categories will be explained during the analysis.

Table 1. Sample of data

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Formal | Code | _____ |
| | Year | 1.(2014) 2.(2015) 3.(2016) |
| | Extension | Number of pages |
| | Images | 0. None 1. One 2. Two 3. Three or more |
| Design | Function of the image (García Yruela, 2003) | 1. Informative 2. Demonstrative 3. Symbolic 4. Illustrative 5. Entertaining 6. Several |
| | Type of image | 1. Photography 2. Drawing 3. Mixed |
| | Relation image-text (Erasquin, 1995) | 0. None 1. Opposition 2. Complementarity 3. Autonomy |
| | Section | 0. None 1. Foreword 2. Breaking News 3. Report 4. Article 5. Wisdom 6. The Enemy’s Word 7. Feature 8. News 9. Special 10. Statement 11. Islamic State Report 12. To our sisters 13. Interview with... 14. Among the believers are men 15. From the pages of history 16. Kikmah |
| | Theme | 1. State affirmation 2. Unique merciful state 3. Secure space 4. Land of emigration 5. Other 6. Several |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | Audience | 0. Unkown 1. Muslim women 2. Muslim men 3. Muslim children 4. Foreign Muslim 5. Enemy 6. Community 7. Several |
| | Argumentation (Perelman & Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1994) | 1. Conviction 2. Persuasion |
| | Relation with other contents | 1. Attack to enemies 2. Conquest of new territories 3. Conflict in Syria 4. Conflict in Iraq 5. Militar operations 6. Islamic doctrine 7. Several 8. Others |

Lastly, it has been considered three textual elements that will be object of analysis in each unity: headline, text body and images.

In addition to the quantitative approach, the qualitative perspective has been used to contextualize and illustrate the numerical reality of the Content Analysis published in the magazine. This perspective completes the work and shows certain nuances, casuistry and gaps that the quantitative one is not able to explain clearly.

4.3. Material of analysis

The material is composed by 39 pieces distributed in 136 full pages (14.7% of the total) of the 15 published issues by *Dabiq* (from July 2014 to July 2016). This study covers the entire production of the magazine, so it is not necessary to take a sample.

The content of the magazine has been split in unities of codification, quantified linguistic elements. The unities of codification –at the same time unities of analysis– are complete texts dedicated total or partially to build a particular imaginary of us-caliphal, a virtuoso state in several meanings. All of this include text which the main motivation of constructing the enemy or maintaining logic outside us-other. However, that logic helps to understand more clear some elements of the social imaginary suggested around ISIS. In summary:

1. Texts that present the characteristics, public politics and advantages of ISIS.
2. Text that contrast the negative declarations and actions of the enemy to positive declarations and actions of ISIS.

Consequently, the production related to the definition of the enemy (no relation with the main content) has not been taken into account, nor the content unconnected to propagandistic production, like index or advertised products of ISIS. This exclusion allows a flexibility and a range of themes and genres that enriches the possible conclusions and discussion.

Table 2. Selection of the sample

| Number of magazine | Number of pages | Number of analyzed pages |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 33 | 26 |
| 2 | 44 | 14 |
| 3 | 42 | 10 |
| 4 | 56 | 8 |

| | | |
|--------------|-----|---------|
| 5 | 40 | 18 |
| 6 | 63 | 5 |
| 7 | 83 | 11 |
| 8 | 68 | 5 |
| 9 | 79 | 11 |
| 10 | 79 | 2 |
| 11 | 66 | 2 |
| 12 | 66 | 2 |
| 13 | 56 | 7 |
| 14 | 68 | 11 |
| 15 | 82 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 925 | (14.7%) |

Regarding the codification, the use of numerical codes informs about the unities of analysis and they are complemented by the issue of the magazine.

5. Results

5.1. Recognition, quantification y analysis of the space of us

As can be appreciate in Table 2, *Dabiq* dedicates most of its content to address other strategies than the construction of ISIS. 85.3% of its publications is exclusively for defining the enemy; to advertise other content produced by the media framework of ISIS; to index and supplements with Koranic quotes from Jihadi thinkers and military leaders; to inform about the battles and to different content from the analyzed in this research. Only 14.7% of the published material is considered as object of analysis.

This distribution shows the priority lines of the magazine. As this research maintains that one virtue of the propaganda of ISIS is the construction of a terrene space to solve the crisis of Islamic world, data demonstrates that this strategy is minor. Sometimes, *Dabiq* focuses on defining the crisis (definition of the enemy) at the same time establishing the caliphate as the solution.

Backing to the analyzed content, Table 3 shows that the largest production has been published in the first two years of the magazine, 2014 (48.7%) and 2015 (38.5%). Meanwhile, in 2016 only there is a minimum quantity of pertinent content (12,8%). There is no strategic reason under this, but it corresponds to the number of published issues during these years. Within the 15 existing issues, 6 of them were published in 2014 (40%), other 6 in 2015 (40%) and 3 in 2016 (20%).

Table 3. Frequency of analyzed texts by year ago

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 2014 | 19 | 48.7 |
| 2015 | 15 | 38.5 |
| 2016 | 5 | 12.8 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

5.2. Identification, quantification y analysis of visual resources

A remarkable matter in the analyzed formal elements is the large appearance of images in the published content (Table 4). One of the main atractives of the propaganda of *Dabiq* is the general plenty and high-quality pictures, produced by professionals (Mahood & Rane, 2017) from West. All of convenient content is followed by one image at least (23.1%). The same percentage is applied to the articles that include two pictures. However, the content with three or more images are more than a half (53.8%). In spite of, as indicates Lewis (2004), the visuality of political Islam is subordinated to the word, the abundant appearance of images means an adaptation to Western narrative models. That is explained by the audience (English-speaking Muslims) of the magazine. The cultural phenomenon of ISIS, in conclusion, cannot be explained with no recognition of the adaptation of modernity and globalization, also in esthetic, communicational and technological areas (Garrido, 2016).

There is an overwhelming majority of pictures (Table 5) (93,3%). As happens with videos of executions of prisoners, *Dabiq* shows its preference by explicit and realistic pictures –but not necessarily reflecting violence. Nevertheless, the use of photography does not imply an absence of digital treatment and most of them appears with effects created by computer. As Botz-Bornstein (2017) exposes, the aesthetic of ISIS maintains connections with the Italian futurism because, to the contrary of other Jihadi organizations, does not focus on fantasies and exotic dreams, but show the reality and technological vanguard of the photography. Drawings are set aside to a 5.6% and the combined images represent a 1.1%.

Table 4. Presence of images in analyzed texts

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| One | 9 | 23.1 |
| Two | 9 | 23.1 |
| Three or more | 21 | 53.8 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

Table 5. Type of image in analyzed texts

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Frecuency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Photography | 84 | 93.3 |
| Drawing | 5 | 5.6 |
| Combined | 1 | 1.1 |
| Total | 90 | 100.0 |

The images in *Dabiq* achieve different functions (Table 6). To determine them, we have employed the classification of García Yruela (2003), who differentiates between informative¹¹, demonstrative¹², symbolic¹³ and illustrative¹⁴ functions. In order of higher to lower frequency these functions are distributed in: symbolic (33.3%); demonstrative (23.1%); informative (15.4%); and illustrative (2%). According to the researcher, these functions are not discriminatory between each other, so a 23.1% of them fulfill at the same time two or more roles.

Also, as can be seen Table 7 based on the categories proposed by Erausquin (1995), most of the photographs maintain a complementary relation with the text (92.2%), that is, they obey to a narrative coherence with the verbal content of the text and they foster the textual message¹⁵. On the contrary, a 4.4% of the images is autonomous and they present an independent content of the text and none of them are opposed or contradictory to the text (in positive or negative sense). Although ISIS give importance to images in its propaganda, only a 3.3% of them have a significant and complete unity, noting that their uses tend to accompany the text.

¹¹ These types of images are news by themselves and they are crucial to give a full content and understanding.

¹² As demonstrative function, all these visual pieces show or demonstrate a more complex and complete reality that are added to the text.

¹³ They describe a concept, an idea of an abstract entity.

¹⁴ This function serves, mostly, to ease the textual mass more than to provide a specific meaning.

¹⁵ In order not to be reiterative, the content of the images has been addressed in a implicit way in the analysis, as long as the visual and verbal text are overwhelmingly complementary.

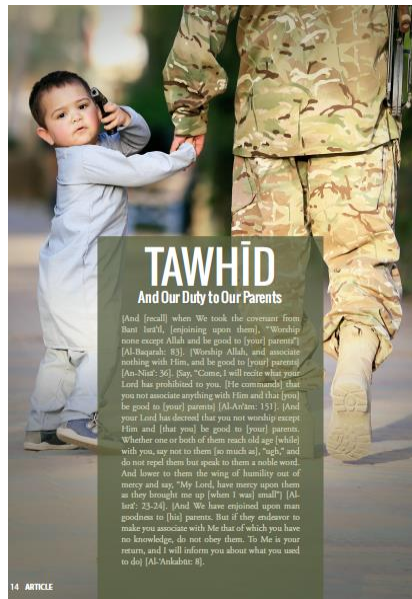


Figure 1. Example of a symbolic and complementary photography about the uniqueness of God (*Tawhid*) and the duty to the parents

Table 6. Function of the image in the analyzed texts

| <i>Function</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Informative | 6 | 15.4 |
| Demostrative | 9 | 23.1 |
| Symbolic | 13 | 33.3 |
| Illustrative | 2 | 5.1 |
| Several | 9 | 23.1 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

Table 7. Relation image-text in the analyzed texts

| <i>Relation</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| None | 3 | 3.3 |
| Complementarity | 83 | 92.2 |
| Autonomy | 4 | 4.4 |
| Total | 90 | 100.0 |

5.3. Characterization and evaluation of themes, nature and types of contents

One feature of *Dabiq* is its lack of regularity: during its three years of life the magazine has been published inconstantly. Also, its structure, pagination and desing have varied with no apparent criterion. That is the reason why it is difficult to find a guideline of regular

sections that helps to collect all the analyzed content. But at the same time, it is able to present the content as a transversal discourse. In this way, these contents are spread through the magazine and, even, a 15.4% of the analyzed content has been published with no criterion in any section.

Despite that, the section that published more relevant content for this study was Report (28.2%), a bulletin dedicated to present the news of the daily life of the caliphate. The second more approached section, paradoxically, is In the Words of the Enemy (12.8%). This section is a crucial strategy from ISIS to appear as a competitive entity against enemy countries (Al-Dayel & Anfinson, 2017). To do that, Dabiq collectes direct quotes from the speeches of Western leaders. One illustrative example can be the words of Douglas A. Ollivant, former director for Iraq in the UN Security Council:

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is no longer a state in name only. It is a physical, if extralegal, reality on the ground. Unacknowledged by the world community, ISIS has carved a de facto state in the borderlands of Syria and Iraq. Stretching in a long ellipse roughly from al-Raqqa in Syria to Fallujah in Iraq (with many other noncontiguous “islands” of control in both Iraq and Syria), this former Al Qaeda affiliate holds territory, provides limited services, dispenses a form of justice (loosely defined), most definitely has an army, and flies its own flag (The Islamic State in the Word’s of the Enemy, July 2014).

The rest of the content presents a low percentage and frequency of appearance, so there is not possible to determine a common pattern. Data can be consulted in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Section where the analyzed texts appear

| <i>Section</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| None | 6 | 15.4 |
| Foreword | 3 | 7.7 |
| Breaking News | 1 | 2.6 |
| Report | 11 | 28.2 |
| Article | 2 | 5.1 |
| In the Words of the Enemy | 5 | 12.8 |
| Feature | 2 | 5.1 |
| News | 2 | 5.1 |
| To Our Sister | 2 | 5.1 |
| Interview with... | 3 | 7.7 |
| From the Pages of History | 1 | 2.6 |
| Kikmah | 1 | 2.6 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

Related to the analyzed themes (Table 9) and, according to the obtained results, three categories have been set: state affirmation, secure space and land of emigration.

The first category is the most repeated (41%). The included contents pretend to present the administrative structure, the territorial borders and the care system of ISIS, which implications of a country with its own entity. In that way, *Dabiq* highlights the strenght of the state and its continuous expansion (Remaining and expanding, November 2014). Also, the magazine announces the creation of its own currency, based on the gold pattern (The currency of the Khilafah, November 2014) and advertise the care programs during Ramadan ('Ramadan: A blessed month', July 2014). One of the most explicit articles of the magazine that better exposes the construction of the social institutions is 'Healthcare in the Khilafah' (May 2015), a report around the care infrastructure financed by the caliphate. In addition to add the statistics of patients and surgical assistance, the text announces the creation of a program of training in Islamic medicine, in order not to depend on impure education:

In order to ensure a steady supply of qualified medical personnel in the future as well as expanding and enhancing the current medical services from a professional as well as Islamic point of view, the Islamic State recently opened the Medical College in ar-Raqqah as well as the College for Medical Studies in Mosul (*Ibidem*).

In this sense, the article 'A Window into the Islamic State' (October 2014) describes the suffering of the war by the communities and the recovering of who is under the borders of ISIS thanks to public funds.

In this occasion, the text is accompanied (Figure 2) by photographs of the repairs of bridges, roads or wires, among others.

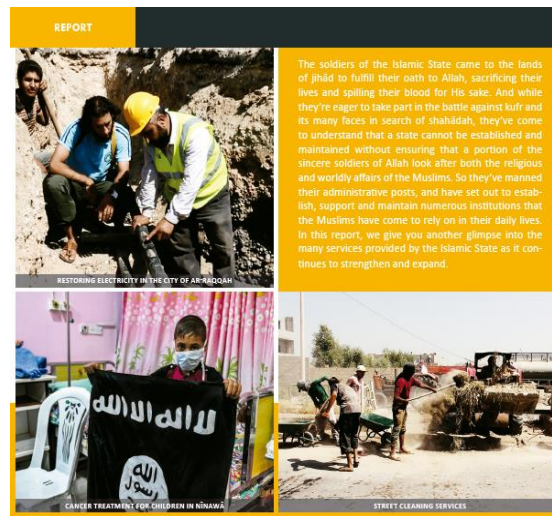


Figure 2. Sample of photographs of the repairs by ISIS

Dabiq not only presents to ISIS as a sovereign and strong entity, but also the caliphate is portrayed as a secure space (12.8%) where the arbitrary and "antisuni" violence has been eliminated. The text makes an effort of presenting the atmosphere as piety and in coincidence with the law of God. For example, 'Halal tribal assemblies' (July 2014) tells the meeting between tribal leaders of the caliphate who recognize the success of ISIS. In addition to the statal affirmation, *Dabiq* stresses on a "state of security and stability enjoyed by the areas under the Islamic State's authority", "reduce the crime rate" and calling "to implementing the Shari'ah, establishing the religion, promoting virtue and preventing vice".

In another text ('The birth of two new wilayat', October 2014) with the main purpose of announcing the conquest of new territories, *Dabiq* shows the benefits of that achievement using photographs of combatans keeping the order lost during the war (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Agents of ISIS keeping the order in a new conquer province

The consideration in this category has been extended to those contents that focus on punishment against the Muslim who commit a crime over the particular interpretation of *Sharia* made by ISIS. In 'Clamping down on sexual deviance' (February 2015) the execution of homosexuals is proved to be alluding to the immorality:

In the midst of this widespread affront to the fitrah (natural human disposition), the Islamic State continues its efforts against these deeds of misguidance – which Western “Civilization” regards as a part of their “values” – by implementing the rulings of Allah on those who practice any form of sexual deviancy or transgression (*Ibidem*).

The third category, land of emigration (12.8%), comes from the two previous: the caliphate is a state guarantor or social rights of Muslim, strict against crime and protector of the piety of its population. Those are the duties why all good Muslim has to keep in mind to emigrate (Figure 4). This emigration is cover by the Islamic concept of Hegira, the exodus of first Muslims from Meca to Medina in 622, and one of the principles of Islam. As Gómez García (2009: 135) explains, there are a large number of “extremely violent groups”¹⁶ using Hegira as a tool, like ISIS. The third issue of *Dabiq* dedicated a monographic to defend the mitology of the Hegira until *Sham* (the term assigned to Syria in order not to use the naming of Sykes-Picot), based on coranic excerpts:

For has any state ever been established in human history in the manner that the Islamic State was revived with its expansion into Shām? Contemplate –may Allah have mercy upon you– the states that existed throughout history, both the Muslim states and the mushrik states. Were any of them established by the emigration of poor strangers from the East and the West, who then gathered in an alien land of war and pledged allegiance to an “unknown” man, in spite of the

¹⁶ The translation is ours.

political, economic, military, media, and intelligence war waged by the nations of the world against their religion, their state, and their hijrah? And in spite of the fact that they did not have any common “nationality,” ethnicity, language, or worldly interests, nor did they have any prior acquaintance! [...] The hijrah of the strangers to Shām was in adherence to the path of Ibrāhīm (sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) who established for them the tradition of declaring enmity and hatred towards the mushrikīn and their tawaghit (‘The Islamic State before al-Malhamah’, September 2014).

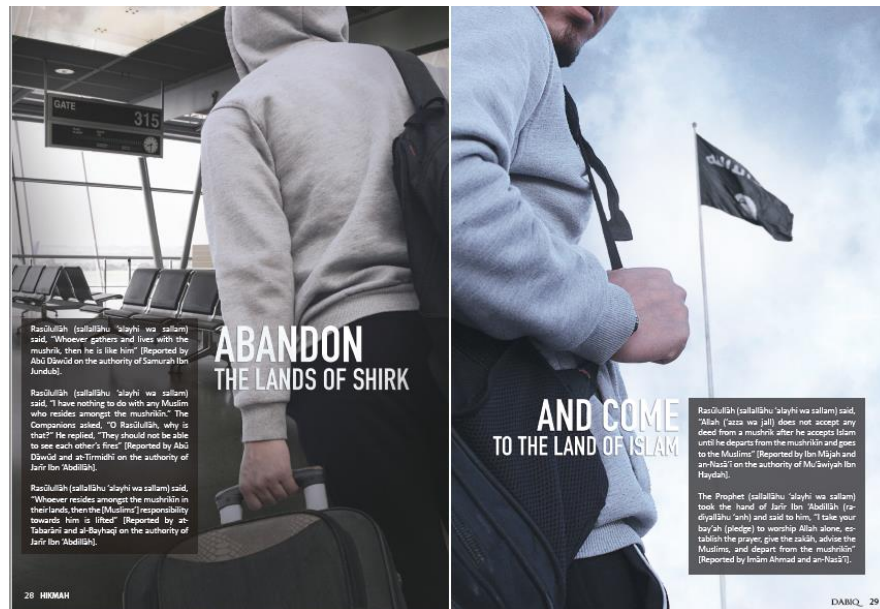


Figure 4. General argumentation of the category land of emigration

The rest of the defined themes, a 25,6% of the analyzed pieces address more than one category previous developed in the same text. Only a 7,7% of the relevant content can not be classified under any common label because of its casuistry.

Table 9. Themes of the analyzed texts

| <i>Themes</i> | <i>Frecuency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Statal affirmation | 16 | 41.0 |
| Secure space | 5 | 12.8 |
| Land of emigration | 5 | 12.8 |
| Others | 3 | 7.7 |
| Several | 10 | 25.6 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

These contents are connected to other themes, even the second ones are the main motivation of the text (Table 10). This means that, occasionally, the general sense differs from the text but it is used to deep in the construction of us or, on the contrary, the main goal is to consolidate the idea of the caliphate with traces of different themes. As has been

explained before, sometime the construction of us is dialectics to the adversary. For example, some contents of conquest of new territories (28.2%) are used to demonstrate the intimidating violence, but also to exhibit the secure space represented by ISIS. The Islamic doctrinal interpretation (30.8%) justifies the land of emigration (Hegira), or again the secure space (compliance of Sharia). However, there are articles linked with text that address the conflict in Iraq (7.7%) or in Syria (2.6%), present the attacks to enemies (5.1%),¹⁷ include several categories (17.9%) or casuistry (7.7%).

Table 10. Relation of the texts with other contents

| <i>Other contents</i> | <i>Frecuency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Attacks to enemies | 2 | 5.1 |
| Conquest of new territories | 11 | 28.2 |
| Conflict in Syria | 1 | 2.6 |
| Conflict in Iraq | 3 | 7.7 |
| Islamic doctrine | 12 | 30.8 |
| Several | 7 | 17.9 |
| Others | 3 | 7.7 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

Although it has been specified before that the readership of *Dabiq* was mainly the Western Islamic community in the diaspora (5.1%) to attract them to emigrate, there is a specific audience to whom the priority contents are addressed (Table 11). Nevertheless, a high percentage of contents goes to several audiences (30.8%), usually to the *umma* as a generic entity (46.2%). Likewise, the section 'To our sisters' offers advice and legal interpretations over women, so female is the main target (5.1%). A minor quantity of texts is dedicated only to Muslim men (5.1%), to Muslim children (5.1%), to enemy (2.6%) or to a no specified audience (2.6%).

Lastly, it is important to highlight the argumentative strategies used by *Dabiq*. The discussion between persuasion and conviction is longer since the first philosophers settled a classification of the types of argumentation. Perelman y Olbrecht-Tyteca (1994) are the authors per excellence in focusing on the understanding, interrelation and separation of persuasion and conviction. The researchers refer to persuasion as "the argumentation that only pretends to serve to a particular public"¹⁸ and the conviction as "that one obtained by the adhesion of all reason entity"¹⁹. The distinguishing nuance, say the authors, is imprecise "and in the practice it is suppressed"²⁰ depending on the image that the speaker has over the audience.

¹⁷ The section In the Words of the Enemy is used as state legitimation because it places ISIS at the same level as the worldwide leaders.

¹⁸ The translation is ours.

¹⁹ The translation is ours.

²⁰ The translation is ours.

This study, and according to the mentioned researchers, leads us to believe that both types of argumentations are connected to the audience (readership of *Dabiq*) of ISIS. It will depend on the reinforced us-other and its interest in each momento (affirmation of sovereignty, unique space of security, governability and piety, rejection to other). In 'A Jihad without fighting' (September 2016) ISIS speaks to women using persuasion and conviction to refer to the duty of a good wife to support the husband who does the Jihad.

O my sister, equip yourself with obedience and worship so that it may be your help and assistance at the time of calamities and hardships! (persuasion).

As for you, O mother of lion cubs... And what will make you know what the mother of lion cubs is? She is the teacher of generations and the producer of men (conviction).

Table 11. Audience of the analyzed texts

| <i>Audience</i> | <i>Frecuency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Unknown | 1 | 2.6 |
| Muslim women | 2 | 5.1 |
| Muslim men | 2 | 5.1 |
| Muslim children | 1 | 2.6 |
| Foreign Muslim | 2 | 5.1 |
| Enemy | 1 | 2.6 |
| Community | 18 | 46.2 |
| Several | 12 | 30.8 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

Table 12. Types of argumentation

| <i>Argumentation</i> | <i>Frecuency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Conviction | 16 | 41.0 |
| Persuasion | 23 | 59.0 |
| Total | 39 | 100.0 |

6. Conclusions

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the texts and the visual resources of the *Dabiq* magazine has permitted the orientation around the way ISIS constructs its image as state. One significant aspect is the use of the image: all the analyzed contents are followed by, at least, one but more than a half of them include three or more. This shows that, in this magazine at least, the caliphate adapts itself to the cultural, communicative and esthetic pattern of the West. Also, the most of the used images are photographs, so the esthetics of ISIS emphasizes the reality, separating from the dreams and fantasies reproduced by other

Islamist organizations. Furthermore, most of the pictures contain relation of complementarity and narrative coherence with the text.

Another interesting aspect of this analysis is the type of published content. There are three remarkable themes: the most repeated is the strenght of ISIS as state and its territorial growth; the second one is presented as a space of security where Muslim can enjoy a life according the precepts of divine law; the third theme is a combination of the previous two and it shows the caliphate as a land of emigration, a secure and solid state to wish to live.

In the West²¹, the image of ISIS is that of an organization imposed by the terror, spreading videos of executions and attacking on a massive scale against civilians. This study shows that ISIS legitimates itself not just through the imposed violence, but also using the consensus by means of propaganda. The caliphate is presented not like a promise of a city of God, but a real city of men, consolidated and secure in where to live according to the law of God. The social apparatus (schools, hospitals, housing, monetary system and so on) configured around ISIS –and remarked across its propaganda – is a good sample of that reality.

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²¹ The perception of Muslims, residents or not in the West, is more complex than the meaning in ISIS. By now, there are not enough studies about this issue but it is possible to show some remarkable researches. For example, Latin American Muslims comprehend the Middle East not as a political space, but as a spiritual and romantic one (Ozkhan, 2017). This conception separates the ideological battle of the organization from its religious priorities. However, and according to a survey carried out among the Suni population of Lebanon (Haddad, 2017), the support to ISIS is greater among the population with less educational level, previous religious membership and a sectarian view of the Shia. These investigations exhibit how contexts, political experiences, religious variations and socioeconomic positions can influence the affection or indifference towards ISIS among Muslim population.

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