From *Hijrah* to *Khilafah*:
Rhetoric, Redemption, and ISIL's Recruitment Strategy

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Global migration to ISIL-controlled territories has persisted despite ISIL's well-documented repressive tactics, multinational efforts to stop the migration, and the difficulties facing disillusioned recruits who wish to return to their home countries. This article asks what motivates some individuals to emigrate from countries that rank high on the UN's Human Development Index to ISIL-controlled territories in Iraq and Syria. To address this question, I examine ISIL's official online magazine, *Dabiq*, as a rhetorical artifact designed to persuade and motivate readers. *Dabiq*'s recruitment strategy consists of three key terms arranged as a jeremiad that guide readers through a redemptive drama of guilt and purification. The article discusses implications for rhetoric and professional communication, terrorism studies, and counterterrorism strategy.

Keywords: rhetoric, jihadism, recruitment, globalization, professional communication

Many scholars in fields that study global issues and challenges, such as development studies, value freedom as "the primary ends and the principal means" (Sen, 1999, p. 15) of global socioeconomic development. However, the value of freedom is not universally self-evident. For example, more than 20,000 foreign fighters have voluntarily migrated to the self-declared Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Often, ISIL's recruits hail from countries that rank high on the United Nations' Human Development Index. Global migration to ISIL-controlled territories has persisted despite ISIL's well-documented repressive tactics, multinational efforts to stop the migration, and the difficulties facing disillusioned recruits who wish to return to their home countries (Crawford & Koran, 2015). Viewed in the context of global socioeconomic development, this phenomenon becomes especially puzzling. Why do ISIL's recruits choose to embrace "unfreedom" (Sen, 1999), effectively embracing severe deprivations and surrendering their own individual agency?

This article asks what motivates some individuals to emigrate from countries that rank high on human development to ISIL-controlled territories in Iraq and Syria. To address this question, I examine ISIL's official magazine, *Dabiq*, as a "rhetorical artifact" (Foss, 2009) designed to persuade and motivate readers (Foss, 2009, p. 70). Through its persistent call to *hijrah* (migration), *Dabiq* systematically recruits readers who live outside its territories. Drawing on theories at the intersection of religious rhetoric and professional communication, I analyze *Dabiq*'s call to *hijrah* as a redemptive drama (K. Burke, 1984) in the

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form of a jeremiad (Bercovitch, 2012). By generating jeremiad-like tension between religious ideals (embodied in ISIL's caliphate, or *khilafah*), and the pitfalls of freedom (associated with countries that rank high on human development), *Dabiq*'s redemptive drama provokes guilt (K. Burke, 1959) in the audience. Further, joining ISIL is the only method *Dabiq* offers for purging the guilt provoked by its text; readers can join the organization by traveling to ISIL-controlled territories or (much less preferably) by carrying out suicide attacks as unaffiliated supporters. The article discusses implications for rhetoric and professional communication, terrorism studies, and counterterrorism strategy.

Literature Review

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, much scholarship has examined motivations that prompt unaffiliated individuals to join terrorist groups, including personal, psychological, and economic motivations. A good deal of this scholarship focuses on jihadist organizations, which include a diverse assortment of global and local groups sharing the belief that "armed confrontation with political rivals is a theologically legitimate and instrumentally efficient method for socio-political change" (Ashour, 2011, p. 379). Like other terrorist groups, jihadist organizations are known to prey on the "grievances" of disaffected and vulnerable individuals. Such organizations accrue "strategic benefits" by targeting new recruits with various motivations (Von Knopp, 2007). Unemployment is one factor that makes individuals susceptible to jihadist recruitment efforts. Organizations such as al-Qaeda thrive, spread, and recruit operatives through networks among incarcerated populations. Al-Qaeda also targets global populations of disaffected youth (Sparago, 2007). Hegghammer (2013) suggests that the opportunity to participate overseas in foreign fighting motivates some recruits, but contact with a veteran member of a jihadist group can inspire some individuals to participate instead in domestic terrorist attacks.

Many studies have examined the key role of digital media in recruiting new operatives. Many terrorist organizations have leveraged the affordances of digital media, including social media, to promote violent extremist ideologies (Thompson, 2011). Sivek (2013) explores how al-Qaeda's digital magazine, *Inspire*, guides readers through a self-radicalization process. Several studies examine ISIL's magazine, *Dabiq*, asking what the magazine's content, structure, and language reveal about the organization and its target recruits (Colas, 2016; Ingram, 2016; Vergani & Bliuc, 2015). Beyond the circulation of digital magazines, jihadist organizations have deployed widespread recruitment campaigns on the Internet and via social media. There are thousands of active jihadist Internet forums that are dedicated to various groups and topics (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016; Weimann, 2006). ISIL uses Twitter to "lavish attention on potential recruits" before calling new operatives to action (Berger, 2015, p. 19). While groups such as Al-Shabaab have used Twitter and other social media platforms, ISIL's global social media campaign is unique in its strategic use of multiple platforms (including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to reach global audiences (Farwell, 2014 see also Klausen, 2015). ISIL has produced and circulated its own video game for recruitment purposes (Al-Rawi, 2016). Some evidence suggests that ISIL's media strategy may be shifting as it loses control of the territories that it once occupied. Noting that ISIL has changed the name of its flagship magazine from *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah* (Rome), Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran, and Lange (2017) argue that the new magazine downplays apocalyptic themes and imagery (p. 9). However, the "underlying worldview" presented by the organization remains relatively consistent across both magazines (p. 2).

One scholarly area that examines how rhetorical artifacts such as written texts persuade or motivate people consists of the overlapping fields of rhetoric and professional communication. According to one definition, rhetoric is "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions" (K. Burke, 1959, p. 46). More generally, rhetoric examines how words, symbols, and texts persuade or motivate people. *Professional communication* is a broad term that encompasses many different "purpose-driven communications on the job" (Schriver, 2012, p. 276), including print-based documents, websites, videos, presentations, and other media. In its most narrow sense, professional communication denotes "the rhetoric of professionals who communicate" (Faber, 2002, p. 306), including doctors, lawyers, religious leaders, university professors, and teachers. Professional communication also connotes a broader social process of "creating cognitive structures and relational networks among people" for the purpose of "educating, persuading, clarifying, sharing, or collaborating" (Schriver, 2012, pp. 277–278). Professional communicators might, for example, create a map of a subway system for riders, or a fact sheet designed to educate physicians about new pharmaceuticals (pp. 277–278). As purpose-driven communication, the jihadist magazine *Dabiq* employs professional communication to educate, persuade, clarify, share, and collaborate with global audiences. The magazine includes reports of the ISIL organization's activities, incorporates theological and legal materials authored by clerics, and specifically targets educated professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers in its recruitment calls (see Wojtasik & Szczepanski, 2017).

By examining *Dabiq* through the lens of rhetoric and professional communication, I aim to illuminate how the magazine persuades and motivates readers. In particular, studies at the intersection of religious rhetoric and organizational discourse offer potentially fruitful insights for the study of jihadist magazines and other media. For example, K. Burke (1984) describes a quasi-religious "redemptive drama" (p. 278) of guilt, purification, and redemption that recurs across rhetorical artifacts and institutions. According to Burke, hierarchies and institutions impose demands on individuals; people must sometimes reject these demands, which generates guilt in individuals. Guilt is an unpleasant emotional state that motivates individuals to seek purification through personal mortification or scapegoating. A substantial thread of rhetorical scholarship is devoted to identifying redemptive dramas in political discourse (Bobbitt, 2007), disaster communication (Lule, 1990), and the intersection of medicine and legal communication (see, e.g., Schultz, 2011). In the political sphere, many redemptive dramas assume the form of the American jeremiad—a pattern of discourse involving an idealistic "prophetic vision" (Bercovitch, 2012, p. 81) of the ideal community, a condemnation of the actual community, and a method for purging the community of deviations to achieve the prophetic ideal. The pattern described by Bercovitch is uniquely American because it facilitates the "literal and eschatological" renewal associated with forming political states in a new frontier, such as the early American colonies (p. 81). Like most redemptive dramas, the American jeremiad generates tension and urgency (or "anxiety") associated with guilt (p. 83). Cobb (2005) explores how tensions produced by the American jeremiad motivate scapegoating in (for example) antigay discourse. Jihadist magazines share many features of the redemptive dramas described by Burke and Bercovitch, such as an idealistic vision and the systematic scapegoating of individuals and communities. Although the authors of jihadist content may not consciously reenact these patterns, the concepts of the redemptive drama and jeremiad illustrate the persuasive power of religious rhetoric deployed in combination with political/organizational discourse.

The next section describes how one jihadist magazine, *Dabiq*, interweaves religious and political concepts to motivate readers to perform *hijrah*.

About *Dabiq*

Published in several languages—including English, French, Russian, German, and Arabic—*Dabiq* is the flagship digital magazine of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The magazine spans 15 issues published between July 2014 and September 2016. Its publication overlaps with ISIL's most concentrated and successful efforts to control territories in Iraq and Syria (J. Burke, 2017). Topics regularly covered in the magazine include "reports" of ISIL's activities and explanations of the organization's ideology, theology, and efforts to build a new "Islamic state" or "caliphate" (Islamic State, 2014, September 10, p. 2). The magazine also publishes reports of ISIL's military attacks and biographies of fighters (McCantz & Watts, 2016).

Media analysts note that "the magazine's significance . . . lies not only in its content, but in its very existence" (Gambhir, 2014, p. 2). *Dabiq* is strikingly sophisticated in its strategic messaging to global audiences and its eye-catching design, rich with symbolism and imagery. The magazine's title evokes at least two interpretations. First, the name *Dabiq* refers to the historical battle of Marj Dabiq, fought near Aleppo in Syria in 1516, in which the Ottoman Turks defeated the Marmluk sultanate. Thus, "the symbolic battle corresponds with ISIS's ideology of regaining the Islamic Caliphate in historic regions of Muslim rule" (Styszynski, 2014, p. 11). Scholars have also noted that, according to one Islamic hadith (or saying), *Dabiq* is the future site of a battle between the Muslims and "Rome," or Western powers (Gambhir, 2014, pp. 2–3). Although the latter reading represents "a reductory take on a very complex hadith" (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016, p. 47), ISIL appears to have "capitalized on this narrative" in the magazine's messaging (Maggioni, 2015, p. 71). The magazine's circulation patterns reflect these two readings. *Dabiq*'s online format and its availability in English and other European languages enable the magazine to reach audiences in Western countries (see, e.g., Colas, 2016; Gambhir, 2014; Wilson, 2017). However, *Dabiq* is available in many languages and is calibrated to attract global audiences; its relationship to the West is just one facet of its circulation.

Some scholars have noted the recurrence of transliterated Arabic terms in *Dabiq* and other jihadist media (see, e.g., Colas, 2016, 2018; Vergani & Bliuc, 2018). Such terms pose a conundrum for analysts, who "must still make implicit translation decisions" (Colas, 2018, p. 2) about what such terms mean to writers and readers, even when jihadist texts are written in English. Although *Dabiq* supplies translations for transliterated terms, the magazine's translations often deviate from definitions presented in Arabic dictionaries and other possible translations (Colas, 2018, pp. 2–3). The transliterated terms that appear in *Dabiq* may also be unfamiliar to readers, many of whom are not proficient in Arabic (Wojtasik & Szczepanski, 2017, p. 127). However, at least some readers are likely to be familiar with the practice of using transliterated terms in religious discourse. Colas (2016) notes that many imams "code switch" between English and Arabic during English-language sermons (p. 179).

One theme that recurs in *Dabiq* is its call to readers to migrate to ISIL-controlled territories, which the magazine terms the "call to *hijrah*" (Islamic State, 2014, September 10, p. 10). *Hijrah* is an Arabic term for migration (Gambhir, 2014). Like the magazine's title, *Dabiq*, *hijrah* evokes religious symbolism. Historically, *hijrah* refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to escape religious persecution in 622 CE; this

important event marks the founding of the Islamic city of Medina at the start of the Islamic *hijri* calendar (Gambhir, 2014). By deploying the term *hijrah* in its recruitment call, *Dabiq* reframes the ISIL organization's recruitment strategy as a religiously significant opportunity for global Muslims to escape oppression and join their brothers in "a new era" of "might and dignity for the Muslims" (Islamic State, 2014, July 5, p. 8). The magazine's use of the Islamic *hijri* calendar further reinforces this apparent continuity between Muhammad's *hijrah* and the magazine's modern-day call to recruitment.

Although *Dabiq*'s call to *hijrah* addresses all Muslims, it particularly targets educated professionals. These individuals possess the expertise necessary to develop services, infrastructure, and governance for the self-declared Islamic State, or *khilafah*. Thus, *Dabiq* makes a special plea for educated professionals to consider performing *hijrah*: "We make a special call to the scholars, fuqaha' [experts in Islamic jurisprudence], and callers, especially the judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specializations and fields" (Islamic State, 2014, July 5, p. 11). To further attract this educated professional audience, *Dabiq*'s articles present visual and textual evidence of the organization's ongoing efforts to develop and modernize "services for the Muslims" (Islamic State, 2014, p. 29). For instance, one article on "Healthcare in the Khilafah" (Islamic State, 2015, May 21, pp. 24–26) depicts a hospital with a pediatric wing, modern imaging services, and affiliated medical school (see Figure 1). These images represent the organization's commitment to developing infrastructure and services; the accompanying text calls on readers with medical expertise to perform *hijrah* (Islamic State, 2015, May 21, p. 26). Whereas the ISIL organization offers a "prophetic vision" (Bercovitch, 2012, p. 81) of a new caliphate, it is dependent on readers' support and expertise to actualize this vision.
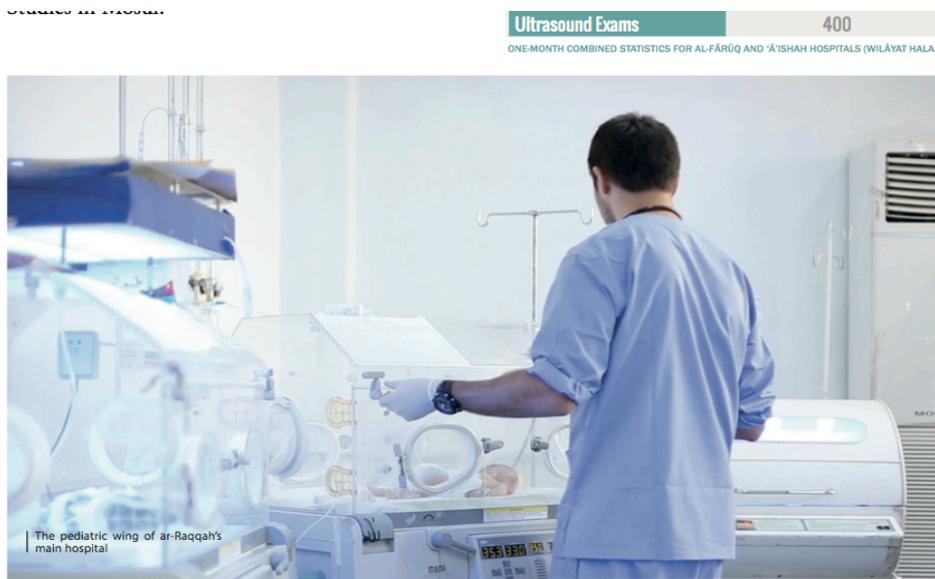

*Figure 1. A doctor examines a neonatal patient in the
pediatric wing of ISIL's hospital in Raqqa.*

To articulate the rationale behind its prophetic vision, *Dabiq* "carefully builds off a basic set of Islamic religious concepts" (Gambhir, 2014, p. 1), such as *hijrah*. Many of these concepts are presented in Romanized Arabic and emphasized through the use of italics or capitalization in the magazine's typography. By deploying a distinct conceptual vocabulary, the producers of *Dabiq* ensure that the magazine's messaging remains consistent and appears to be grounded in Islamic religious concepts. This move is particularly important for attracting critical readers such as educated professionals, who may question *Dabiq*'s theology or ideological rationale.

To investigate *Dabiq*'s conceptual vocabulary and its rhetorical worldview, this article employs cluster analysis (Berthold, 1976; K. Burke, 1939)—a method of rhetorical analysis for examining the "key terms" that recur throughout a rhetorical artifact (Foss, 2009, p. 70). Key terms serve various functions in rhetorical artifacts: They function as lenses or "terministic screens" that name and define situations, create identification of a "common ground" of shared vocabulary (Cheney, 1983), and motivate or "command" audiences to align their actions with the terms chosen by the rhetorician (Foss, 2009, p. 71). Cluster analysis consists of three steps:

1. Identifying three to five key terms that recur throughout the rhetorical artifact with high frequency or intensity.
2. Charting the words and phrases that cluster around and further define the key terms.
3. Discovering patterns that reveal the artifact's identification strategies and/or "the worldview constructed by the rhetor" (Foss, 2009, pp. 73–75).

Thus, cluster analysis elucidates a rhetorical artifact's key terms and their interrelationships. By performing a cluster analysis of *Dabiq* magazine, I elucidate the magazine's "rhetorical worldview" and its strategy for motivating readers to perform *hijrah*.

To perform the rhetorical analysis of *Dabiq*, I first downloaded PDF copies of all 13 issues of the magazine. These issues span a two-year period from July 2014 to January 2016. *Dabiq* is free and legal to download in the United States; obtaining *Dabiq* from a counterterrorism clearinghouse (jihadology.net) provided further assurance that the copies I had obtained were complete, authentic, and free of viruses. Next, I identified *hijrah* as a key term for analysis. As noted above, the term *hijrah* recurs throughout *Dabiq* and signals the magazine's recruitment call. I also identified two additional key terms related to *hijrah*: caliphate (*khilafah*), an Islamic political concept that ISIS uses to explain the organization's method of governance, and "the gray zone," a pejorative phrase that describes regions marked by the coexistence of religious groups. Although *Dabiq*'s conceptual vocabulary includes other words, these three key terms recur with particular "frequency and intensity" (Foss, 2009, p. 73); they are also emphasized with color and distinctive font styles throughout the magazine. After identifying the three key terms, I bookmarked every occurrence of *hijrah*, caliphate, and the gray zone in all 13 issues of the magazine. I also highlighted words and phrases that "cluster around" and further define *Dabiq*'s key terms (Foss, 2009, pp. 73–74). Finally, I looked for patterns and relationships among the terms. I found that they form a three-term jeremiad (Bercovitch, 2012) that describes an ideal political and religious state (caliphate), condemns the communities in which *Dabiq*'s readers reside (the gray zone), and provides a method (*hijrah*) for achieving the ideal community. Finally, by contextualizing *Dabiq*'s three-term jeremiad within the broader

phenomenon of the redemptive drama (K. Burke, 1959), I identified guilt as a key rhetorical motivation for joining ISIL.

Three constraints narrow the scope of this analysis. First, counterterrorism research has noted the extreme difficulty of obtaining first-person accounts from radicalized individuals (Sivek, 2013). Consequently, this analysis does not claim to reveal the motivations and responses of *Dabiq*'s actual readers. Instead, it reveals the motivations supplied by *Dabiq* and its worldview, encoded in the magazine's key terms. Second, I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of ISIL's online presence, which encompasses more than 20,000 Twitter accounts and YouTube videos (Berger & Morgan, 2015, p. 2). Instead, I examine one rhetorical artifact (*Dabiq* magazine) that functions at the core of ISIL's "strategic messaging" (Gambhir, 2014, p. 1). Other studies are needed to examine whether ISIS's messaging remains consistent across various platforms, or whether important variations in messaging appear across ISIS-affiliated accounts. Finally, this study does not attempt to provide a quantitative analysis of the frequency of different keywords in *Dabiq*. Instead, it expands on one cluster (Foss, 2009, pp. 73–74) of keywords related to *hijrah*. These keywords elucidate the rationale that *Dabiq* provides for joining ISIL and the magazine's strategies for motivating readers.

Dabiq's Three-Term Jeremiad: From *Hijrah* to *Khilafah*

This section describes how *Dabiq* interweaves political and religious concepts (or key terms) to create a "prophetic vision" (Bercovitch, 2012, p. 81) that aligns religious ideals with political states. *Dabiq*'s three-term jeremiad defines the ideal Islamic state (caliphate), condemns secular communities (gray zones) in countries that rank high on human development where *Dabiq*'s readers reside, and provides a clear method (*hijrah*) for actualizing the magazine's vision of a caliphate. The words and phrases associated with these three key terms further legitimize the magazine's "prophetic vision" by connecting it to fundamental Islamic principles (i.e., jihad, *tawhid*, etc.), and contrasting these principles with contemporary concepts of freedom. Thus, *Dabiq* presents a rhetorical worldview that reaffirms traditional Islamic principles, explains present-day problems as deviations from these principles, and promises a bright future based on a return to the caliphate government associated with early Islamic history.

Exalting ISIL's Caliphate

Arguably, the most important term in *Dabiq* is the concept of a caliphate, or *khilafah*. Briefly, a *khilafah* is an ideal Islamic state, prevalent in early Islamic history, governed by a spiritual successor to the Prophet Mohammed (Caliph), and based on principles of Islamic law and jurisprudence (Gambhir, 2014). Just as the Puritan jeremiad "set out the sacred history of the New World" (Bercovitch, 2012, p. 83) by attaching religious significance to the New England colonies, the term *khilafah* imbues ISIL's governance with historical and religious legitimacy. This term recurs throughout *Dabiq*'s pages frequently and with intensity. For example, the cover of the first issue announces "The Return of the Khilafah" and celebrates the progression "from *hijrah* to Khilafah" (Islamic State, 2014, July 5, p. 2). In the same issue, five of the seven article titles use the term *khilafah* or Islamic state, a near synonym that represents the same concept (p. 2). *Dabiq*'s first article, "Khilafah Declared," announces the "glad tidings" of the newly established *khilafah*:

> Raise your head high, for today—by Allah's grace—you have a state and Khilafah, which
> will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership. . . . If kings were to taste this
> blessing, they would abandon their kingdoms and fight over this grace. So all praise
> and thanks are due to Allah. (Islamic State, 2014, July 5, p. 7)

The excerpt illustrates how *Dabiq*'s description of the *khilafah* interweaves religious ideals ("Allah,"
"blessing," and "grace") with terms that evoke political power ("kings," "dignity," "might," "rights," and
"leadership"). In the ideal caliphate, advantageous political practices intertwine with fundamental
religious principles.

Tawhid

ISIL's caliphate is founded on the fundamental Islamic principle of *tawhid*, or unity.
Traditionally, the Arabic word *tawhid* asserts the unity and oneness of God, or monotheism (Gambhir,
2014). In *Dabiq*, this word also takes on a political meaning; it refers to the caliphate's power to unify
all Muslims from various political and ethnic backgrounds:

> It is a Khilafah that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni,
> Egyptian, Maghribi [North African], American, French, German, and Australian. Allah
> brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving
> each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding
> each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another. Their blood mixed and became
> one, under a single flag and goal, in one pavilion, enjoying this blessing, the blessing
> of faithful brotherhood. (Islamic State, 2014, July 5, p. 7)

In this excerpt, the "single flag" refers to the black "flag of *tawhid*" that officially represents ISIL
(Prusher, 2014; see Figure 2). This flag bears the Islamic statement of *tawhid* in Arabic script (Prusher,
2014); thus, the flag dually connotes Islamic monotheism and political unity behind ISIL. By fighting in
"a single trench" under the "single flag," citizens of the new caliphate do not merely gain personal might;
they also enjoy collective "brotherhood" (p. 7). In ISIL's caliphate, the founding principle of *tawhid*
transcends ethnic and geographic differences.

5TH   الآن الآن جاء القتال
THE FIGHTING HAS JUST BEGUN

WILAYAH: **KARKUK**

Figure 2. A soldier plants ISIL's official flag in Kirkuk.

Jihad and Da'wah

According to several media reports, ISIL assigns menial roles to new recruits (Tomlinson, 2014). This information could dampen educated readers' motivation to perform *hijrah*. *Dabiq* invokes two concepts—jihad and *da'wah*—to exalt the individual's role and importance in the new caliphate. *Jihad* is an Arabic word meaning "struggle"; although scholars have debated the meaning of this term (Peters, 2005), it is often considered an Islamic obligation. Like most extremist Islamist outlets, *Dabiq* associates jihad with armed conflict (Wiktorowicz, 2001). ISIL wages jihad to expand its territory, establish new outposts, and fight opposing groups (Gambhir, 2014). ISIL provides readers with an attractive opportunity to perform jihad by serving as mujahideen in the caliphate's elite armed forces, or "Knights of *Tawhid*" (Islamic State, 2015, November 18, p. 3). For example, one article describes an ongoing demand for new recruits to fight the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK, on behalf of ISIS (Islamic State, 2014, July 27, p. 13). According to the magazine, ISIS is currently "pounding the PKK" on all fronts in Kurdistan, thus humiliating the "secularist regimes" (p. 13) that oppose ISIS. For individuals who assume the role of mujahideen, fighting jihad for the caliphate brings political, military, and religious glory.

But "what good is there," one author asks, "in liberating a city only to leave its inhabitants steeped

in misguidance and misery?" (Islamic State, 2014, September 10, p. 17). To address this question, ISIL counterbalances armed jihad with peaceful *da'wah* (p. 16). *Da'wah* is an Arabic term for proselytization; *Dabiq* expands this term to include peaceful development of the caliphate's services and infrastructure:

> It is for this reason that the Islamic State has long maintained an initiative that sees it waging its jihad alongside a da'wah campaign that actively tends to the needs of its people. It fights to defend the Muslims, liberate their lands, and bring an end to the tawaghit, while simultaneously seeking to guide and nurture those under its authority and ensure that both their religious and social needs are met. (Islamic State, 2014, September 10, p. 16)

Dabiq's expanded definition of *da'wah* encompasses preaching, education, jurisprudence, and "jihad against one's inner self" (Islamic State, 2015, November 18, p. 21) when one's personal opinions conflict with sharia rulings. Through the concept of *da'wah*, readers who do not wish to fight an armed jihad can imagine alternative roles as doctors and teachers. Although *da'wah* is not mentioned as frequently as jihad, it performs an important function in affirming the roles available to individuals in the caliphate.

Condemning Life in the Gray Zone

In addition to exalting ISIL's new caliphate, *Dabiq* condemns secular life in regions that rank high on human development where many readers reside. Like the American jeremiad, *Dabiq* foments discomfort with the status quo by issuing "a series of condemnations that detail the actual state of the community" (Bercovitch, 2012, p. 81). These condemnations focus on a way of life that *Dabiq* terms "the gray zone" (Islamic State, 2015, p. 54). The gray zone is founded on the principle of freedom, or free choice; its defining feature is the coexistence between Muslims and diverse non-Muslim groups (i.e., religious, ethnic, political, etc.). According to *Dabiq*, freedom engenders deviance from Islamic principles, disempowerment, and stagnation (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, p. 54). Thus, the gray zone is "on the brink of extinction" (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, p. 66*).* The magazine urges readers to abandon "the camp of the deviant factions" and join "the ranks of true *mujahidin*" (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, p. 39) before ISIL annihilates the gray zones of "Rome" (Islamic State, 2014, July 5, p. 1) in the apocalyptic battle of *Dabiq*.

Freedom

According to *Dabiq*, freedom is the opposite of *tawhid*. Governance by freedom is a "twisted methodology"; freedom allows people the meaningless choice between "absolute truth" (i.e., Islam) and "complete falsehood" (Islamic State, 2014, July 27, p. 5). In short, freedom enables people to lapse from fundamental Islamic principles. "Every time choice is allowed," *Dabiq* asserts, "it will result in misguidance: It's either the Islamic State or the Flood" (Islamic State, 2014, July 27, p. 5). To support this assertion, *Dabiq* catalogs the various forms of "deviance" that are prevalent in the gray zone: disbelief (*kufr*), polytheism (*shirk*), ignorance (*jahiliya*), factionalism, apostasy, sexual immorality, and obesity (Islamic State, 2014, July 27, p. 11). The names of deviant practices appear throughout *Dabiq* in English and Arabic, thus linking the gray zone's problems to deviance from fundamental Islamic principles. Furthermore, because of the diverse ways of life that are accepted in the gray zone, *Dabiq* argues that some individuals

may be unable to distinguish between "true" and "false," or un-Islamic, practices (Islamic State, 2014, July 27, p. 5). Though the gray zone may offer material comforts, its freedoms threaten to lead even the most observant Muslims astray.

Insidious Pacifism

"Islam is a religion of the sword," *Dabiq* asserts, "not pacifism" (Islamic State, 2015, February 12,, p. 20). The magazine describes pacifism as an insidious strain of false Islam that has flourished in the gray zone. Pacifism has an "agonistic" (Berthold, 1976, p. 302) relationship to armed jihad, rejecting such violence as an extremist interpretation of Islam. *Dabiq* associates pacifism with "nullification of jihad" and collapse of tawhid (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, p. 20); thus, pacifism poses an existential threat to ISIL's caliphate. Unsurprisingly, pacifism carries intense negative connotations throughout the magazine's pages, where it connotes inertia, inaction, and disempowerment. In particular, pacifism often underlies the reader's misguided objections to performing *hijrah*. For example, some readers may claim that their parents object to or forbid armed jihad on religious grounds. Others may assert that migrating to the caliphate would conflict with endeavors associated with peaceful *da'wah*, such as attending medical school. *Dabiq* dismisses such pacifist excuses and urges readers to act. For instance, the article "Healthcare in the Khilafah" issues a provocation to medical students:

> This should be received as a wake-up call for the many Muslim students in the lands of kufr who claim to study medicine to "benefit and support the Muslim Ummah," but then remain in those lands, chasing after worldly pleasures instead of performing *hijrah* to the Islamic State—and this despite *hijrah* being an undeniable Islamic obligation, in addition to the fact that *hijrah* was and still is relatively easy. The Islamic State offers everything that you need to live and work here, so what are you waiting for? (Islamic State, 2015, May 21, p. 26)

This provocation, quoted in full to reveal the cluster of concepts it involves, directly targets readers who wish to benefit Islam in a peaceful manner by practicing medicine. *Dabiq* accuses such "worldly" readers of shirking their true Islamic obligations, especially when the caliphate has taken great care to make fulfilling such obligations easy, by setting up medical schools, for example. According to *Dabiq*, pacifism, like freedom, amounts to deviation from fundamental Islamic principles.

A Call to *Hijrah*

As illustrated above, *Dabiq* eulogizes life inside the Caliphate as an embodiment of Islamic principles (i.e., *tawhid,* jihad*, da'wah*, etc.) and condemns the gray zone as a region where deviance from these principles flourishes. The juxtaposition between ideal states and actual ones is designed to build feelings of tension and urgency that can only be relieved by performing *hijrah*. Like the "prophetic errand" of the jeremiad, the call to *hijrah* offers "a resolution that incorporates (as it transforms) both the promise and the condemnation" (Bercovitch, 2012, p. 81). *Dabiq* intensifies the urgency of this resolution—*hijrah*—by emphasizing that it is both "obligatory" and "easy" (Islamic State, 2015, May 21, p. 26). Thus, according to *Dabiq*, *hijrah* constitutes a fundamental Islamic obligation; it also offers readers a path of least resistance

for resolving the dissonance between ideal and actual states.

Hijrah, Islamic Obligations, and Suicide Attacks

Dabiq claims that performing *hijrah* is an "undeniable Islamic obligation" (Islamic State, 2015, May 21, p. 26). The word *obligation* recurs frequently in association with *hijrah*; it asserts that Islam compels readers to perform *hijrah* under any circumstances. In fact, *Dabiq* includes numerous articles devoted to weighing the obligation to perform *hijrah* against various other considerations. One article asks whether duty to one's parents supersedes the call to *hijrah*, systematically addressing scriptures and sayings that seem to prohibit migrating away from one's parents (Islamic State, 2015, July 13, p. 15). Another article specifically questions whether it is permissible for Muslim women to embark on *hijrah* despite parental or spousal objections, while yet another article questions whether the strong possibility of getting arrested should prevent one from performing *hijrah* (Islamic State, 2014, September 10, p. 33). Such articles invariably conclude that *hijrah* takes precedence over other considerations. However, *Dabiq* occasionally acknowledges that some readers may truly be physically or financially unfit for *hijrah*. In such rare cases, *Dabiq* offers one unattractive alternative: The reader must "rely upon Allah and stab the crusader" (Islamic State, 2014, October 11, p. 44) in a suicide attack in the reader's home country. A note declaring allegiance to ISIL must also accompany the attack; "otherwise," the magazine notes, "crusader media makes such attacks appear to be random killings" (Islamic State, 2014, October 11, p. 44). Thus, a suicide attack is the only alternative to *hijrah*—and this alternative is only acceptable if the media attributes the suicide attack to ISIL.

Relative Ease

In light of the various threats that the gray zone poses to fundamental Islamic principles (i.e., freedom and deviance, pacifism, and unfulfilled obligations), *Dabiq* emphasizes the relative ease of performing *hijrah*. Traveling to the caliphate is "still relatively easy," boasts one article. Another article compares *hijrah* with the migration of birds: "They fly in the morning hungry and return full at night" (Islamic State, 2014, September 10, p. 33). To substantiate the claim that readers can perform *hijrah* with ease, *Dabiq* offers selected testimony from readers who recently migrated to ISIS-controlled territory. While acknowledging some hardships, readers' testimony reaffirms that these hardships are worth enduring in order to live in the caliphate. One interview with the wife (Umm Basir) of a deceased fighter (Ahmedy Coulibaly) is particularly striking in its claims of an easy *hijrah* (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, pp. 50–51). The interviewee's husband, Coulibaly, allegedly participated in an attack related to the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shooting. Immediately prior to the attack, Coulibaly arranged for his wife, Basir, to emigrate from Paris to ISIL-controlled territory. Coulibaly then died in the attacks. Yet, in the interview with *Dabiq*, Basir reports that she "did not experience any difficulty" in her solo journey; she claims to feel completely "at ease" (p. 51) living in the caliphate. Another interview with an unnamed woman describes a miscarriage that occurred during her *hijrah* from Britain to the caliphate. Despite the hardship of the miscarriage, the interviewee reflects that it was "better for her unborn child to die" than attend schools in the West. "How valuable is the hijrah," she concludes, "and how valueless is every sacrifice on its path" (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, pp. 50-51). Of course, it is likely impossible to verify the authenticity of these narratives, which may not represent any actual reader's experience. However, these narratives reveal striking

contradictions inherent in *Dabiq*'s claim that performing *hijrah* is easy. To accept this claim, *Dabiq*'s readers must first reject the gray zone—along with freedom and pacifism, its insidious perils—as a source of lifelong hardship.

Dabiq as a Redemptive Drama

Dabiq's three-term jeremiad offers three compelling reasons to perform *hijrah*. First, the reader performs *hijrah to* an exalted caliphate and participates in its development and governance. Second, the reader performs *hijrah from* a gray zone that is corrupted by freedom and pacifism and "on the verge of extinction" (Islamic State, 2015, February 12, p. 66). Third, according to *Dabiq*, *hijrah* is itself obligatory and easy to perform when compared with the poor alternatives offered by the magazine (i.e., living in the gray zone or carrying out a suicide attack). At least this is *Dabiq*'s rationale. What motivates some readers to accept the magazine's reasoning and perform *hijrah*? Examining *Dabiq* in the larger context of the redemptive drama (K. Burke, 1984) suggests one plausible answer: Guilt motivates some readers to join ISIL. According to Burke, guilt motivates individuals to participate in a redemptive drama; guilt arises when individuals recognize, but reject, the demands imposed by a moral or social hierarchy. Guilt motivates individuals because it is subjectively unpleasant; thus, individuals seek to purge their guilt by participating in symbolic purification rituals such as scapegoating and victimage.

Dabiq's three-term jeremiad offers several poignant opportunities for readers to experience guilt. First, the caliphate's principles of *tawhid* and jihad amount to "commands" (Foss, 2009, p. 70) to join ISIL and fight; the reader has rejected these commands to the extent that he or she is still sitting in front of a computer. Next, *Dabiq*'s jeremiad condemns life in the gray zone, where freedom and pacifism flourish and propagate further "deviance" (Islamic State, 2014, July 27, p. 11). Simply remaining in the gray zone amounts to rejecting *Dabiq*'s hierarchy of priorities. Finally, performing obligatory *hijrah* offers a path to achieving ISIL's collective vision; consequently, readers who have yet to perform *hijrah* are both lazy and negligent. Perhaps *Dabiq*'s recruitment strategy is so effective precisely because it targets readers where they are: sitting comfortably in front of their computers in wealthy, educated countries, exercising the blend of intellectual freedom and bodily inactivity that characterizes life in the gray zone.

Conclusion: Questioning Our Terministic Screens

Dabiq's redemptive drama poses three major implications for professional communication, rhetoric, and the study and prevention of terrorism. First, terrorism studies is itself constrained by the "terministic screens" inherent in its terminology. For example, individuals who join jihadist organizations are often presumed to hold "grievances" against America and the West (Crenshaw, 1991). However, *Dabiq*'s redemptive drama is motivated by guilt, not grievance; *Dabiq* generates this guilt by highlighting differences between the individual's way of life and the religious principles of ISIL's caliphate. Second, the fields of rhetoric and professional communication possess useful tools for studying the role of written texts in terrorism-related phenomena such as radicalization. Terrorism studies research has often focused on factors related to the individual, such as psychological factors that predispose disaffected individuals to carry out attacks (Brandon, 2009; Gutiérrez, Jordan, & Trujillo, 2008; Sparago, 2007). The study of rhetoric and professional communication complements this perspective by exploring how artifacts like *Dabiq* put forward

a rhetorical worldview. For example, *Dabiq*'s redemptive drama demonstrates how ISIL's caliphate actualizes fundamental Islamic principles that are not widely valued in the gray zone. In Burkean terms, the tension between actual and ideal states promotes an uncomfortable guilt response—regardless of the reader's psychology. Finally, anecdotal evidence suggests that questioning terministic screens may prove to be a promising counterterrorism strategy. Future efforts can build on this initial success by encouraging readers to question ISIL's definitions of other key terms such as *caliphate*, *tawhid*, and *hijrah*. By systematically questioning the cluster of key terms at the core of *Dabiq*'s jeremiad, counterterrorism programs can defuse responses intentionally provoked by jihadist media such as feelings of inevitable progression, guilt, and urgency.

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