ACTING LIKE A STATE :

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF

ISLAMIC STATE's

(STAGED) PERFORMANCES

OF MODERN STATENESS

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BY

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not, to the best of my knowledge, breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent, that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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إلى شعبي العراق وسوريا الصامدين والمنسيين

DEDICATED TO THE RESILIENT AND FORGOTTEN

PEOPLE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AaS	Ahrar Al Sham
AIVD	Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service
APC	Armoured Personnel Carriers
AQ	Al Qaeda
AQAP	Al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula
AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSI	Crime Scene investigation
CT	Counterterrorism
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FSA	Free Syrian Army
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ILC	International Law Commission
IO	Information Operations
IR	International Relations
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria
JaI	Jaish Al Islam

JaN	Jabhat Al Nusra
NATO	Northeast Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBC	National Broadcasting Corporation
PKK	*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* or Kurdistan Workers Party
PMU	Popular Mobilisation Units
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Front
SVBIED	Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
TIP	Turkestan Islamic Party
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
US/USA	United States/United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VBIED	Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
WB	World Bank
YPG	*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* or People's Protection Units

Acting Like A State: Visual Analysis of Islamic State's

(Staged) Performances of Modern Stateness

Khawaja Moinuddin (Moign Khawaja)

Abstract

The 'Islamicness' (or not) of so-called 'Islamic State' (IS) has been controversial and come under intense scrutiny. This thesis investigates the under-studied other side of the equation: the 'stateness of Islamic State'. Specifically, it enquires IS's 'performance of modern stateness' projected in its official videos. Two core questions are addressed: How did IS project 'performances of modern stateness' in its official videos? What were the purposes behind those 'performances'?

The definition clause of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States specifies that "[t]he political entity claiming to be a State must have (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) a government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states." Following this framework and utilising qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, the thesis provides detailed examination of IS's portrayal of its population, territory, governance, and foreign policy in its videos. It establishes that IS had a vision to implement a 7th century ideology, but via 21st century means: its videos are replete with performances of specifically modern stateness. The thesis shows that IS performed like a State in its videos, not with the intention of seeking international recognition, but with the objective of giving local populations the impression that their needs as subjects were being met across the Caliphate while attracting immigrants from all over the world to come and help further the state project.

This work contributes to a growing body of research on IS's visual propaganda and its state-building project through detailed analysis of a large tranche of official IS videos, and will also prove beneficial in future research on de-facto Jihadi states and deradicalisation.

1: INTRODUCTION

The entire world, especially Muslim-majority countries, was taken by surprise when Islamic State (IS) declared the establishment of a 'Caliphate' after capturing Mosul, Iraq's second city, in early July 2014. It was the first time in 21st century[1] that a Jihadi organisation, known for its violent extremist ideology and brutal military actions, went on to rule over large swathes of Iraq and Syria with Mosul and Raqqa as the respective regional capitals until it was dismantled after the liberation of Mosul by US-led forces in July 2017. During their roughly three-year long reign – one of the longest ever by a Jihadi organisation – IS claimed to be a State[2] and at its peak governed with an iron-fist over a population of around 10 million (Revkin, 2018), which was spread across territory roughly the size of the Britain[3]. They documented different aspects of their Caliphate in shape of multimedia products such as audio messages, images, magazines, and videos, which was then transmitted to its subjects at home and supporters abroad through social networks.

During its existence as a Caliphate, IS received widespread condemnation for the atrocities it committed and the hateful ideology it spread, both online and offline. An overwhelming majority of scholars dismissed its 'Islamic' and 'State' credentials for not meeting the required standards set for both attributes and labelled them as a terrorist organisation with the façade of a State (Weiss & Hassan, 2015). However, under the veneer of disputed claims of religious order and statehood

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[1] The last time a major Jihadi organisation captured large swathes of territory and established its government was the Taliban who seized Kabul on 26 September 1996 from an alliance of Afghan Jihadi factions known as the *Mujahideen*.

[2] This thesis will be using 'State' with capital 'S' whenever it is mentioned in reference to IS. In all other cases, it will be 'state' with 's' lower case.

[3] The claim was made in an official IS video entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015).

exists a vast resource, that is, IS's official media publications, which project the existence and functioning of a Caliphate, proclaimed to be run in accordance with *Shariah* (Islamic law) with the express goal of 'remaining and expanding'.

Thesis' Arguments and Hypothesis

IS heavily emphasised on two vital aspects of its identity – Islamic and State. While the Islamic aspect of IS has been debated at length by scholars, especially the fact about how much they had to do with Islam if at all, little research has been done to investigate the State aspect of IS. The fact that IS termed itself as 'Islamic State' or *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah (الدولة الإسلامية)* in Arabic is proof that it claimed to be a State in the truest sense of the word in front of the world – including its subjects at home, supporters abroad, and enemies worldwide – and presented evidence in shape of official propaganda releases not just to back it up in but also to seek recognition from its subjects and supporters for statebuilding purposes. This research project is the first of its kind that looks into the Caliphate's state-like performances and provides a visual longitudinal analysis based on hundreds of official videos, spanning from its declaration in mid 2014 to its dismantlement in July 2017. The investigation conducted in this thesis is not done with the intention, in any shape or form, to deliver a judgement on whether IS was a State or not due to the fact that IS's credentials as a State are fraught with difficulty, highly problematic and deeply contentious (Grasten & Grzybowski, 2023), and there remain big question marks around how much like a State IS actually performed given that in its heyday access to IS-controlled territory to verify such claims was almost impossible[4]. Even to this day, despite the lapse of five years since IS's total

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[4] The only journalist who has visited the Caliphate on record after receiving an invitation by IS is Jurgen Todenhofer, who contended: "We have to understand that ISIS is a country now" (Walt, 2015).

collapse in 2018, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to visit the parts of Iraq and Syria where they once ruled in order to ascertain and measure its existence as a State due to the unstable political and security situation – a point also raised by Longobardo (2017) in his analysis on IS's statehood status. Hence, the ways to confirm or deny the existence of IS on the ground as a 'State' remain very limited, therefore beyond the scope of this research.

Instead, this study takes into account IS's claims of state-like existence based on its heavy projection in their visual propaganda content and is based on the following line of arguments: First, IS claimed to be a state and wanted to be recognised as one. Second, IS was not interested in seeking a place within the international community (Grzybowski, 2023) as it involved obtaining recognition from other recognised states of the international community (Fabry, 2010), which would have compromised its extremist ideology. Instead, IS sought recognition from its subjects at home and supporters around the world by projecting itself as a modern state that is akin to other modern states around the world but with the clear exception that it is ruled under *Shariah*. Third, IS's state-like actions – defined in the thesis as 'performances of modern stateness' and explained in detail below – were projected to millions of people around the world, including its subjects at home and supporters abroad, in order to seek their recognition as a state while also garnering support for statebuilding purposes. In other words, the study posits that IS keenly demonstrated to its subjects and supporters that it has met the conditions of being a state by projecting displays of population, territory, government, and a capacity to enter into relations with other states (read foreign policy), which is essentially the four criteria set under the 1933 Montevideo

Convention for the Rights and Duties of States[5], without implicitly making such a statement. And finally, the state-like performances IS projected in its official videos should be treated as theatrical and not substantive due to the fact that IS faced high public scrutiny while having to deal with low state capacity. This notion is rooted in the reasoning that while all modern states engage in performances of modern stateness, both substantive and theatrical, in order to express and maintain their legitimacy and sovereignty in front of domestic and international audiences (Ringmar, 2016), their performances depend on two major factors, that is, state capacity and public scrutiny, based on which they tend to be more substantive or theatrical (Ding, 2020). Additionally, this project also draws attention to the 'staged' aspect of IS's theatrical performances – underlining the fact that the state-like performances in IS propaganda videos were carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited by IS's media operatives in order to project IS in a favourable light to its audiences, thus broadcasting visual content that was a fusion of fact and fiction.

To prove the above-mentioned arguments, this research project makes the following hypothesis: First, historically, the bulk of statemaking in the West occurred as a result of warmaking, therefore, any geopolitical entity claiming to be a state that itself emerged from war and conflict can be described well by using Western concepts of state. Second, there is a clear distinction between 'becoming a state' and 'attaining statehood' and that the Montevideo Convention is merely the criteria for the former. Third, statehood status cannot be attained until a state demonstrates its independence and garners recognition from other states without

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[5] The definition clause of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States specifies that "[t]he political entity claiming to be a State must have (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) a government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states." It remains as the only internationally recognised framework that lays down the conditions on what constitutes a State.

which even fulfilment of the criteria set under Montevideo Convention is rendered useless. Fourth, statehood concerns the state's external attributes whereas stateness refers to its internal attributes, and therefore, sides of the same (State) coin, and that the Montevideo Convention – as the criteria for state – can be used to determine statehood or stateness but additional conditions apply. Fifth, any state's performances of stateness are both theatrical and substantive in nature. States could be performing one or the other more depending on the level of state capacity and public scrutiny. Moreover, theatrical performances by states can be/are staged as every state likes to project itself in a positive light.

This study tackles the state-aspect of IS for a number of important reasons: First, IS is the first Jihadi organisation in the 21st century to have had declared itself a Caliphate and ruled over a large territory inhabited by millions of people under Shariah (Islamic law). No other Jihadi organisation, except arguably the Taliban, has ever reached such a feat in contemporary history, though the latter proclaimed an Emirate and not a Caliphate. Second, IS undoubtedly is one of the most technology savvy Jihadi organisations of the 21st century, and their documentation of different aspects of the Caliphate are unprecedented in many ways. Third, at its heyday, IS's Caliphate was the largest de facto state in control of a major terrorist organisation[6] (Lister, 2014), seconded only by the Taliban's Emirate in Afghanistan[7]. While the Taliban have repeatedly assured they have no territorial ambitions beyond Afghanistan's recognised territory (Meyer, 2021), IS refused to

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[6] See e.g., UNSC Resolution 2170 (2014), UN Doc. S/RES/2170 (2014); SC Res 2178 (2014), UN Doc. S/
RES/2178 (2014); SC Res 2199 (2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2199 (2015).
[7] Taliban established its first Emirate in September 1996 which was later toppled by US-led forces in December 2001. They made a comeback from 2009 onwards after capturing swathes of Afghan countryside territory but did not declare the formal reestablishment of the Emirate until US forces withdrew in August 2021. They were added to the Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) list in July 2002 in an executive order signed by then US President GW Bush.

accept borders of modern states and claimed extraterritorial jurisdiction over Muslims worldwide based on its specific interpretation of Islam, which instantly added them to the list of historical revolutionary totalitarian states, such as USSR circa 1923 (Kilcullen, 2015; Walt 2015; Tuong and Van Orden 2020). In short, the fact that IS's Caliphate was unlike many de facto states which were founded and run by proscribed terrorist organisations in modern history, especially Jihadi ones, warrants a special status in the list of de facto states worldwide, therefore worthy of an in-depth research.

This thesis is based on the analysis of visual content because it asserts that IS wanted to achieve a very simple yet important goal by releasing slick propaganda videos: to seek recognition of subjects across the territory and supporters all over the world of its existence as a state by producing documentary evidence and based on that convince them to help with statebuilding. The research project explores the state-aspect of IS with the help of an in-depth visual analysis of official videos for the following reasons: First, compared to other forms of audio-visual content – such as audio files, images, and magazines – videos are highly dynamic content that contain more information, easy to digest, offer multi-sensory experience, manage to get viewers' attention, and attain it for a longer time. Moreover, the influence of videos in the age of social media is undeniable. We now live in a world where most people prefer videos over images or text, thanks to the popularity of social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, TikTok, YouTube and others, where most of the users spend more time online watching videos. According to a survey published by online marketing firm Kennected, 78 percent of social media users watch videos online every week while 55 percent view them on a daily basis (Twomey, 2021). Second, videos have the ability to tell a story or convey a narrative more effectively than any other form of content as they can be based on

a sequence of actions/events or interviews/narratives, which allow for a more comprehensive portrayal of a situation, idea or narrative. The storytelling aspect in videos helps shape perceptions and influence the viewer's understanding or interpretation of the content compared to other forms of visual content. Third, videos provide additional context and depth compared to images or text. They depict a situation from different angles, capture movements, and reveal nuances that may not be apparent in a single image or set of images. As a result, videos are extremely effective in conveying a more complete picture and allow for a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Fourth, the combination of audio, visuals and narrative elements in videos evoke strong emotional responses. Various audio cues, voiceovers, and music – *a capella* in IS's case – create an atmosphere that enhances the emotional impact of the content and effects the mood of the user. This emotional connection makes the message more persuasive and memorable. Fifth, videos effectively demonstrate complex actions, concepts, or processes that might be challenging to convey through audio, images or text alone. They depict stories in different modes such as step-by-step sequences, abstract events or real-life situations, providing a clearer understanding of the subject matter. In short, videos have the advantage of combining various elements to create a more immersive experience, and for that very reason, it has been used time and again for manipulative purposes, such as spreading misinformation or propaganda, by different governments and terrorist groups.

Taking into account the above mentioned reasons of why videos stand to be the format that is more suited to deliver long messages while also being popular around the world (Thimothy, 2019), it is not surprising that IS, being a 21st century terrorist organisation, produced content in video form showing their state-like activities in great detail and shared it on social media (Williams, 2016). In

addition, there is compelling evidence to suggest that active Jihadis are deeply immersed in Jihadi culture with videos forming a core element of that culture (Hegghammer, 2017). Supporters of terrorist organisations, especially Jihadis, have used television (and now social media) to spread their strategic narratives to millions globally, as they are well-suited to convey their vivid spectacle of terrorist attacks (Livingston, 1994). Several studies have found terrorist videos, especially violent ones, to be powerful recruitment tools as they are capable of swaying the minds of impressionable viewers, especially young people around the world, and motivate them to join the fight (Aday, 2019; Byman 2016; Gates & Podder 2015; Sheikh 2016). According to a study conducted by Lesaca (2015), viewers may find IS more persuasive in their messaging, the same way previous research has shown violent video games can for those receptive to them. As a result, IS videos with "high production value and pop culture appropriation are dangerously persuasive and potentially effective in recruiting foreign fighters and converts" (Aday, 2019, p. 144). In summary, analysing IS videos to research its performances of modern stateness is more relevant than focusing on images published in their magazines or standalone photosets because IS specifically chose the video format to project their state-like performances as the video format possesses the capacity to tell the story in great detail which in turn garners widespread interest, has the potential to go viral, potentially leaves a deep mark on the audience, and convinces them to join their statebuilding cause.

Keeping in mind the above mentioned reasons, the project presents a comprehensive overview of how IS projected its abilities and strength as a state; provides an in-depth account of the purposes behind these performances, and argues that they can be better understood and analysed in long form visual content, that is, videos. Though IS published thousands of images that also project

their performances of modern stateness, it is their official videos that narrated the story at length, with more clarity, and were designed to offer the audience a deeper context in order to seek their backing. The project adopts visual content analysis, instead of other forms of qualitative/quantitative analysis, for the following reasons: First, it is more intuitive and easier to process than textual material (Pfau, 2008). Second, it is very effective in understanding larger narratives (Barbieri & Klausen, 2012). Third and most importantly, studies analysing IS videos remain scarce (Allendorfer and Herring 2015, Tinnes 2015, Winter 2015a; Akil 2016, Auchter 2017; Barr & Herfroy-Mischler 2017, Baele et al. 2019) with academic literature still lacking an exhaustive study of the multilingual video output of IS, especially the ones in Arabic and English languages. This study bridges the gap by providing visual content analysis of official IS videos to deepen the understanding of this particular form of content, which arguably played a major role in helping gain IS not just international reach and notoriety but also wage an effective global propaganda and recruitment campaign (Gates & Podder, 2016; Williams, 2016).

The study explores as case studies four major aspects of the Caliphate, that is, its population, territory, government, and foreign policy projected in its official videos – based on the Montevideo Convention – for the reason that it is the only internationally recognised framework that lays down the conditions on what constitutes a State. This thesis provides the most detailed visual account of IS's performance of modern stateness to-date, and shows how they were used as a call for legitimacy and support. Therefore, not only it contributes to the historiography of IS but also shines light on the key role videos played in its branding campaign as a 'State' and delivers valuable insights into the organisation's propaganda and recruitment strategies, which can be useful in efforts for countering violent Jihadi propaganda and de-radicalisation. The findings of this study can also help

understand how the blueprint of the Caliphate might inspire and influence future Jihadi movements with statebuilding ambitions. In short, this thesis is original, significant, and timely.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Overall, official IS propaganda projects the gradual construction of a state-like entity which was providing services to the population, exercising law and order over the territory under its control, developing institutional structures and welfare services, and constantly reiterating its 'us vs them' rhetoric which promised a clear victory of its supporters and a resounding defeat of its enemies anywhere they were encountered (Byman, 2016; Williams, 2016). However, most of the scholarship avoided or ignored the debate around the state credentials of IS on the basis that it would never become part of the international community (Novogrodsky, 2018), and also perhaps due to the challenges an 'Islamic state' posed to several pillars of international law, namely "its concept of a state, recognition, the concept of a failed state, the Articles of State Responsibility, cultural property, international humanitarian law – including the issue of humanitarian intervention, the responsibility to protect, and the use of force" (Coleman, 2014, pp. 75, 76).

This research seeks to answer the following two questions: How did IS project modern stateness in its official videos? What were the purposes behind those performances of modern stateness? The answers to the two questions are found in the visual analyses of 374 official IS videos, majority of which are in Arabic and English languages, which were published between July 2014 to July 2017. Moreover, this thesis presents a comprehensive overview of how IS projected its

abilities and strength as a State – termed here as 'stateness' and later explained; and provides an in-depth account of the purposes behind these performances.

Academics often categorise propaganda as 'black' or 'white' with the former known to be comprising false information or half-truths with hidden sources and information questionable or falsified (Ali, 2015). This study, which is entirely focused on IS official propaganda videos, agrees with scholars such as Ali (2015), Beale (2019), El Damanhoury (2017), Lakomy (2021), and Milton (2022) who reckon that IS's propaganda is not necessarily based on the depiction of reality and truth. In fact, a detailed study carried out by Milton (2022, p. 232) identified three distinct types of deception employed by IS in its propaganda content: substantive, spread, and source. This research also shows that IS's 'performances of modern stateness' were a blend of fact and fiction while their narratives were extremely one-sided and offer a binary understanding of events and lack any nuanced explanation. The study notes that most of the people appearing in these videos were of two types: local populace who have no other choice but to comply and 'act as directed' or face the consequences; and, the loyal IS supporters – including local and foreign fighters, commanders and clerics – who were willing to engage in strategic manipulation as part of the purposes of propaganda. There are some videos in the dataset that do not bear the official date of publication, which IS decided not to publish for unknown reasons, and as a result, created ambiguity and confusion in some cases. However, efforts were made to cross-check the timing of production and publication, for example, by tracking the events and places present in the videos. While efforts were made to collect as many official IS videos as possible, constant takedowns and disruption of IS's online sources meant there remains a chance that a few important and influential videos might have slipped through the net, and therefore are not part of this project. There are a large

number of purely military-themed videos, featuring IS's attacks on enemy positions, for example, Russian soldiers deployed near Palmyra, or sermons by scholars emphasising IS's position on matters related to philosophy, politics or religion. Such videos were not included in the dataset as they do not directly address any of the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention.

The above mentioned limitations do not have any major implications on the study as it is focused solely on assessing IS's own 'performances of modern stateness' that took place during its existence as a 'Caliphate' regardless of their downsides.

Structure of the Study

This thesis consists of 9 chapters. The current (introduction) chapter offers a synopsis of the project. It identifies a persisting neglect of aspects of IS's 'state-ness' in existing IR literature in contrast to major emphasis on its 'Islamic-ness', and aims to plug the gap by offering an in-depth visual analysis of IS's 'performances of modern stateness' projected in its official propaganda videos while also outlining the significance and limitations of the study.

The second chapter takes stock of the current state of the art and reviews how the 'State' aspect of IS has been explored in existing literature, including the state-like performances in its propaganda, while identifying the gaps that currently exist, especially with regards to IS's 'performances of modern stateness'. It is divided into three sections: the first offers a concise historical background of IS; the second focuses on the literature that wholly or partially examines different aspects of the 'State' of IS; whereas the third presents research that addresses IS's state-like performances that were projected in its media products, such as print/online publications and videos. The chapter, while noting that there has been an

increased interest in IS's media products, observes that most of the existing international relations (IR) and counterterrorism (CT) scholarship is heavily focused on IS's hyper-violence and masterful use of media for propaganda and recruitment purposes, and underlines that, as a consequence, IS's stateness, especially as performed in its propaganda videos, has been mostly overlooked. It highlights gaps in both pools of literature and emphasises the need to explore other aspects of the 'Islamic State' contained in its official videos in order to better understand its 'Caliphate project'.

The third chapter presents a conceptual framework which helps perform the visual analyses in the empirical chapters. It makes four major arguments: First, First, IS claimed to be a state and wanted to be recognised as one. Second, IS demonstrated it is meeting the four criteria of being a state, that is, the Montevideo Convention, not because it was interested in seeking a place within the international community (Grzybowski, 2023) as it involved obtaining recognition from other recognised states of the international community (Fabry, 2010), which would have compromised its extremist ideology. Instead, IS sought recognition from its subjects at home and supporters around the world by projecting itself as a modern state that is akin to other modern states around the world but with the clear exception that it is ruled under *Shariah*. Third, IS's state-like actions – defined in the thesis as 'performances of modern stateness' and explained in detail below – were projected to millions of people around the world, including its subjects at home and supporters abroad, through its official videos in order to seek their recognition as a state while also garnering support for statebuilding purposes. In other words, the study posits that IS keenly demonstrated to its subjects and supporters that it has met the conditions of being a state by projecting displays of population, territory, government, and a capacity to enter into relations with other

states (read foreign policy), which is essentially the four criteria set under the 1933 Montevideo Convention for the Rights and Duties of States[8], without implicitly making such a statement. And finally, the state-like acts documented in IS's official videos should be treated as 'theatrical' performances of modern stateness, and not 'substantive', due to the issues IS faced with state capacity and public scrutiny. Moreover, the theatrical performances projected in official IS videos were – in all likelihood – carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited by its media operatives in order to project itself in a favourable light, therefore 'staged', and should be treated with caution.

The fourth chapter presents the methodology applied to 374 official IS videos included in the dataset with the help of which IS's state-like performances were qualified for an in-depth visual analysis in the empirical chapters. The chapter describes the entire process which first began with downloading hundreds of video files. The downloaded videos were then screened and catalogued, which also revealed their different classifications such as genres, languages and technical aspects. After that, the chapter demonstrates the step-by-step application of coding process to a sample video to document the methodology applied to the entire dataset. It then concludes with the snapshots of emerging performances of the four case studies which are analysed in the empirical chapters. The chapter also underlines the ethics of the study.

Overall, chapters 5-8 are empirical chapters, consisting of case studies based on the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention. The fifth chapter is a case study

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[8] The definition clause of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States specifies that "[t]he political entity claiming to be a State must have (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) a government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states." It remains as the only internationally recognised framework that lays down the conditions on what constitutes a State.

based on 97 population-themed videos included in the dataset and presents a portrait of the Caliphate's population. The chapter is divided into two major sections. The first focuses on the lives and roles of local and foreign men in the society, and their portrayal as 'submissive subjects' and 'fierce warriors' defending the Caliphate. It then unpacks the framing of children in the videos, including child soldiers and young girls. After that, it addresses the role and portrayal of women, conspicuous by their absence, from IS's projection of population in its videos. The second section discusses the citizenship agreement IS had with the population under its control, based on the stateness performed in that aspect, and how it unravelled as the Caliphate was dismantled.

The sixth chapter is based on the description and analyses of 77 territory-themed videos. The chapter essentially establishes that IS's territorial expansion, both on the ground and in its visual propaganda, took place in three distinct stages, which were identification, expansion, and projection. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the first stage of IS's territorial strategy, which consisted of identifying the targeted territory and the enemy controlling it with the help of latest technology, such as drones and maps. The second section details the second stage of IS's territorial expansion, which took place through military means, including brazen attacks and fierce fighting with the enemy. The third section reports how IS – after successfully implementing the first and second stages of its territorial strategy – initiated the third stage which consisted of projecting the newly captured population centres, oil and gas fields, vital civilian and military installations, under its firm control and the inception of a new 'utopian' life.

The seventh chapter is based on the assessment of 131 governance-themed videos which essentially showcase IS's governance model and its performances of modern stateness. For analytical purposes, the chapter is divided into three major sections, with each section comprehensively assessing the staged theatrical performances of major branches of IS governance, that is, law and order, services, and administration, by first underlining the modern concepts of the three respective branches, and then delivering an extensive analysis of the performances depicted in the official videos.

The eight chapter is the last of the empirical chapters. It is based on the analyses of 69 official IS videos that evidence how the Caliphate conducted its foreign policy and the factors that shaped them. It inquires the capacity in which IS entered into relations with other states and the policies that were directed at them while also analysing its relations with other non-state actors around the world and the diplomacy it engaged in to turn them into its overseas '*Wilayaat*' (affiliates). The first section presents an overview of the pariah or rogue state diplomacy, reflects on IS's performances related to foreign relations, and then proceeds to analyse IS's foreign policy, especially its 'Extinction of Grayzone' doctrine, which constantly presented war and aggression as the only way to implement its strategy of 'remaining and expanding' the Caliphate. The second section dissects IS's bellicose foreign policy towards neighbouring countries and international powers published in its official videos, and uncovers the underlying reasons behind them. The third section sheds light on how IS engaged in 'revolutionary diplomacy' with other Jihadist organisations in North and West Africa by seeking their *Bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) and incorporating them into the organisation as external *Wilayaat* (affiliate provinces). The chapter illustrates IS's relations with three major non-state actors, namely Ansar Bait Al Maqdis, Ansar Al Shariah, and Boko Haram.

Chapter nine summarises the dissertation's findings and provides conclusions. discusses the core findings of the thesis in relation to the research questions by taking a stock of all the chapters, explains major contributions to the literature, and proposes future research endeavours. It consists of four sections. The first section summarises the core research project. The second section discusses the gaps identified in the literature and conceptual contribution of the study. The third section presenting the major empirical findings gleamed from the four case studies and discusses the project's contribution to the literature. The final section suggests avenues for future research.

2 : A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE ON THE 'STATE' ASPECT OF IS AND STATE-LIKE 'PERFORMANCES' IN ITS MEDIA PRODUCTS

Every aspect of the Islamic State (IS) has proven to be extremely controversial. While many have been subject to intense debate and scrutiny (especially its Islamic credentials), the 'State' aspect of IS, despite being highly contentious, has attracted less attention from international relations (IR) and counterterrorism (CT) scholarship, and as a result, remains an understudied subject, as argued earlier. This project showcases a detailed portrait of the 'State' aspect of IS based on an in-depth visual analysis of the staged state-like performances in its official videos, and argues that they were made for the purposes of expressing stateness to its subjects and supporters in order to seek their support and legitimate the Caliphate in their eyes. To this end, this chapter reviews the current state of the art and shows how the 'State' aspect of IS has been explored in existing literature, including the state-like performances in its propaganda, while identifying the gaps that currently exist, especially with regards to IS's 'performances of modern stateness'. The following review is divided into three sections: the first presents a concise historical background of the self-proclaimed Caliphate along with its significance among violent Jihadi organisations; the second section focuses on the literature that wholly or partially examines different aspects of the 'State' of IS; whereas the third discusses research addressing IS's state-like performances that were projected in its media products, such as print/online publications and videos. The chapter, while noting that there has been an increased interest in IS's media products, observes that most of the existing international relations (IR) and counterterrorism (CT) scholarship is heavily focused on IS's hyper-violence and masterful use of media for propaganda and recruitment purposes, and underlines that, as a consequence, IS's stateness, especially as performed in its propaganda

videos, has been mostly overlooked. It highlights gaps in both pools of literature and emphasises the need to explore other aspects of the 'Islamic State' contained in its official videos in order to better understand its 'Caliphate project'.

Historical Background of the Islamic State

The rise of self-styled Islamic State (IS) has been attributed as an 'accident of history' which took place as a result of multiple economic, political and social tensions in the Middle East (Barrett, 2014). Jurgen Todenhöfer, a German journalist and former lawmaker who has been to Iraq and Syria several times since early 2000s and is the only journalist officially allowed into the Caliphate, termed IS as 'the child of the 2003 Iraq War' (Todenhöfer, 2017), a view accepted by US-government funded RAND Corporation, which in its report conceded that the "Islamic State is a by-product of the American intervention in Iraq and of the subsequent American departure" (2017, p. x). Al Qaeda affiliates in Iraq, following the US invasion in 2003 and ensuing chaos after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, increasingly focused their efforts on establishing local bases of operations in order to acquire and consolidate territorial control from where they could launch expansive attacks on the near enemy, meaning the local Iraqi government and its US allies (Lister, 2014). It was the time when an obscure Iraqi religious scholar named Al Baghdadi also took up arms (McCants, 2016). Al Baghdadi, full name Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali Al Badri Al Samarrai, was reportedly born in 1971 in the Iraqi city of Samarra, north of Baghdad (Stern & Berger, 2015), and in his twenties moved to Baghdad to study. He lived in a room attached to a small mosque in Al Tobchi neighbourhood of Sunni-majority district of Al Adhamiya, and helped found an insurgent group named *Jamaat Jaish Ahl As Sunnah wal Jamaa'ah* (Army of Sunnis) which capitalised on widespread Sunni revolt against the US occupation forces in Iraq (Gerges, 2016). He was reportedly captured by the

US authorities in February 2004 in Fallujah and was imprisoned in Camp Bucca for several months before being released "with a large group of other prisoners deemed to be low-level threats" (Gerges, 2016, p. 132).

After his release, he soon joined the ranks of a violent Jihadi organisation which was then under the leadership of Abu Omar Al Baghdadi (Stern & Berger, 2015). The group was founded by Abu Ayyub Al Masri, an Egyptian Jihadi, who replaced Abu Musab Al Zarqawi after his death in an American airstrike in June 2006. Al Masri, also known as Abu Hamza Al Muhajir, convinced several other Iraqi insurgent groups to merge into his organisation, and installed Abu Umar Al Baghdadi as the leader (Stanford University, 2019). Al Baghdadi then went on to establish the 'Islamic State of Iraq' (ISI) after declaring that the *Mujahideen* had "reached the end of a state of jihad and the start of a new one, in which we lay the first cornerstone of the Islamic Caliphate project and revive the glory of religion" (Hashim, 2014, p. 72).

The group called itself *Dawlah* (Arabic for State) rather than an Emirate, which, according to scholar Will McCants, meant Abu Umar Al Baghdadi wanted "a modern nation-state or evoke the memory of medieval caliphates like the *Dawlah Abbasiyyah*, which spanned Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, and North Africa" (McCants, 2016, p. 21). While Al Zarqawi managed to establish de facto control over Al Anbar province by 2006 after transforming his movement Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) into the dominant element of the post-2003 resistance to US occupation (United States Marine Corps, 2006). His successors, namely Abu Omar Al Baghdadi and Abu Hamza Al Muhajir, faced challenges from not just the US occupation army and allied Iraqi government forces, known as the 'Anbar

Awakening[9]', but also from rival Sunni insurgents. The latter considered the Caliphate project "a deviation from the main task of fighting the American occupiers" and made it clear that they were "interested in liberating Iraq and not in creating an Islamic state" (Hashim, 2014, p. 72). The declaration of a State also failed to receive the approval of Al Qaeda's leadership, including Osama Bin Laden and Aymen Al Zawahiri, who were "highly critical of Abu Hamza and Abu Umar" (Al 'Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 14) but did not publicly denounce the move. That did not deter ISI from going ahead with its plans of establishing a State. In fact, it went on to unleash violence on a mass scale to crush dissent from all sides and assassinated Jihadis and others who refused to accept Abu Omar as the Caliph. It also carried out a string of coordinated truck bombs that killed more than 500 people on 1 August 2007, one of the most deadliest days of the entire US occupation of Iraq (Soufan, 2018).

ISI's bullying of other Sunni insurgent groups such as *Ansar Al Sunnah[10]*, *Jaysh Rijal Al Tariqa Al Naqshbandiya[11]*, the Islamic Army, the 1920 Revolution Brigade, and others, as well as Arab tribes and ordinary civilians "had eroded its base of support among Iraq's Sunnis, which was crucial for keeping alive its state-building enterprise" (McCants, 2016, p. 43). Coupled with unrestrained violence against US-backed forces only led to the failure of the first Islamic state project, ISI was on the verge of defeat by the end of 2008 (Hashim, 2014). On 18 April 2010, ISI received a fatal blow when its top leadership, including Abu Ayyub Al Masri and Abu Umar Al Baghdadi, were killed in a joint US-Iraqi raid near Tikrit. By June 2010, "80 percent of the group's 42 leaders, including recruiters and

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[9] Anbar Awakening was a movement in which Sunni tribes in Anbar province began to cooperate with American forces against anti-US insurgency (Hashim, 2014).
[10] Supporters of Sunnah.
[11] Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order.

financers, had been killed or captured, with only eight remaining at large"
(Hashim, 2014, p. 73). According to Ali Soufan, a leading US counter-terrorism
analyst, "as a governing political entity, the Islamic State of Iraq was, like its
cardboard emir, no more than a tenuous fiction" (2018, p. 106).

The dismal failure of the caliphate project and wiping out of the high command set
the stage for the emergence of Ibrahim Awwad Al Badri Al Samarrai, also known as
Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi and Abu Du'aa, who assumed the leadership and "set about
rebuilding it, largely through a relentless campaign of car bombs and suicide
bombings attacks, but subsequently much helped by the Syrian civil war, which
began in earnest around May 2011" (Barrett, 2014, p. 12). After taking over the
reins of ISI, Al Baghdadi revived the organisational structure and went on to create
a "cohesive, disciplined and flexible organisation" that allowed "subordinates wide
latitude in the field, as long as they stayed within the mission guidelines
established by the leader" (Hashim, 2014, pp. 73, 74). He sought to win the
allegiances of Sunni tribes in Al Anbar province who were protesting against the
sectarian policies of then Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki's Shia-dominated
government in 2011 (Stern & Berger, 2015). Amidst the 2011 Arab uprisings across
the Middle East and North Africa, which also shook many Syrian cities, Al
Baghdadi sent two of his trusted lieutenants, Abu Muhammad Al Joulani and
Mulla Fawzi Al Dulaimi, to Syria to establish an effective network of local and
foreign fighters in Syria and wage an extremely violent campaign against the
Syrian regime (Gerges, 2016). Al Joulani profited from the chaos and power
vacuum in Syria and succeeded in establishing an ISI branch, which he named
Jabhat Al Nusra[12] (JaN) in an online video posted in January 2012 (Atwan, 2015).

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[12] Commonly known as Al Nusra Front or the Front for Victory. The term Nusra is taken from the
Quran and means "to rush to somebody's aid; to provide assistance; to support; to defend; or to

Fearing growing military and organisational clout of JaN in Syria, Al Baghdadi summoned Al Joulani and urged him to publicly declare the ties between the ISI and JaN, which Al Joulani refused on the pretext that he went to Syria at the request of AQ leader Al Zawahiri and any recognition of ties with ISI would undermine JaN's popular support among other rebel groups and masses (McCants, 2016). Enraged by Al Joulani's stance, Al Baghdadi went ahead and released an audio statement in which he unilaterally declared JaN's merger with ISI to form the Islamic State of Iraq and Al Sham, also known as ISIS, in April 2013 (Hashim, 2014). Al Joulani swiftly rejected Al Baghdadi's announcement and instead pledged his allegiance to Al Zawahiri, which led to full-scale hostilities between the two major Jihadi organisations (Lister, 2016). Al Zawahiri, on his part, also issued a ruling in which he opposed the merger and instructed that ISIS continue its operations in Iraq whereas JaN would focus on Syria, which was ignored by Al Baghdadi. As a result, Al Zawahiri ordered the disbanding of ISIS, ignored again by Al Baghdadi (Hashim, 2014). The resultant internecine bloodletting in January 2014 ended in ISIS's victory, with JaN getting expelled not only from eastern Syrian cities such as Raqqah and Deir Ez Zour but also from the oil and gas fields in the region, effectively losing vital oil revenue (Al 'Ubaydi, et al., 2014). Eventually, Al Qaeda's leadership broke off ties with Al Baghdadi in February 2014, a move which ISIS responded to by murdering Abu Khalid Al Suri, Al Zawahiri's personal emissary who was charged with mediation between ISIS and JaN (Stern & Berger, 2015).

Around the same time, ISIS also made large territorial gains in Iraq and went on to capture parts of Ramadi and Fallujah in January 2014, setting the stage for its

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give cover or protection" (Meir Amit Center, 2013). However, it has also been translated as "the Victory Front" (Atwan, 2015).

version of 'shock and awe' (Hashim, 2014). Eventually, ISIS fighters launched their biggest offensive to date, and on 10 June 2014 captured Mosul, Iraq's second city and home to 1.5 million people, following a sudden collapse of Iraqi security forces (Chulov, 2014). Buoyed by the swift fall of Mosul and successes on the ground elsewhere in Iraq and Syria, ISIS leadership felt the situation as opportune for the establishment of a caliphate. On 29 June 2014, ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad Al Adnani announced that "the *Shūrā* (consultation) council of the Islamic State studied this matter after the Islamic State – by Allah's grace – gained the essentials necessary for *Khilāfah*," and as a result "announce the establishment of the Islamic *Khilāfah*, the appointment of a *khalīfah* for the Muslims." In his speech, Al Adnani named "Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Awwād Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Alī Ibn Muhammad Al Badrī Al Hāshimī Al Husaynī Al Qurashī by lineage, as-Sāmurrā'ī by birth and upbringing, Al Baghdādī by residence and scholarship" as the "*imam* and *khalifah* for the Muslims everywhere." He also decreed that the "Iraq and Shām" in the name "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS)[13] is "henceforth removed from all official deliberations and communications, and the official name is the Islamic State from the date of this declaration" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2014, p. 5).

During its roughly three years of existence – from July 2014 to July 2017 – IS controlled an estimated area of 88,059 km² (34,000 square miles) with a population of 10 million civilians (Revkin, 2018) though IS itself claimed to control over 240,000 km² "which is greater than the size of Britain"[14]. At the peak of their power, roughly around mid-2015, the ostensible Caliphate controlled major Iraqi and Syrian cities such as Mosul, Raqqah, Fallujah, Ramadi, Al Bab, Manbij, Tikrit,

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[13] IS's former name in Arabic stood as *Ad Dawlat Al Islamiyyah fil Iraq wa Ash Shām* (الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام), which means both the 'Islamic State of Iraq and Levant' (ISIL) and the 'Islamic State of Iraq and (Greater) Syria' (ISIS) (Barrett, 2014).
[14] The claim was made in an official IS video entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015).

Samarra, Palmyra, Al Mayadeen, and most of Deir Ez Zour, among others, and boasted of providing a holistic system of governance, which included religious, educational, judicial, security, welfare, and infrastructure projects (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). The roll-back of IS was initiated by two major international coalition forces – one led by U.S. which included NATO members, Iraqi army and paramilitaries, and Kurdish forces; the other was led by Russia which included the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), Hezbollah, and Iran-backed militias among others. Both the coalitions effectively dismantled the Caliphate after Mosul and Raqqah were captured in July and October 2017 respectively (Martinez & Winsor, 2017).

Significance of IS as a Jihadi Organisation

IS undoubtedly is one of the most technology savvy Jihadi organisations of the 21st century. In its propaganda videos, IS documented its astronomical growth – from a militant organisation to a full-fledged State that defended and expanded its boundaries by annihilating with extreme brutality its enemies while dispensing justice, peace, and security to its subjects – and projected it worldwide through its multimedia publications, including its official publications such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* (English-language magazine) and *Al Naba* (Arabic-language weekly newspaper) (El Damanhoury, 2019), and in hundreds of videos produced by a variety of official media outlets, including Al Hayat, Al Furqan, and those of its various *Wilayaat* (provinces) in Iraq and Syria, and beyond. In addition to its multimedia publications, IS also ran an FM radio station named Al Bayan which was broadcast in major cities across the Caliphate (Gambhir, 2016). It also ran a publishing house named Al Himma Library which was founded in 2010 and was in charge of producing books, leaflets, pamphlets, and posters (Winkler & El Damanhoury, 2022).

The purpose of this was to, at the same time, serve and coerce the local population, while entice immigrants from all over the world to come and build the nascent state (Gambhir, 2014). IS also demanded recognition of its 'supreme authority' from the rest of the world "as the sole political, religious, and military authority over all of the world's Muslims" (Cronin, 2015, p. 3). At the same time, it refused to "recognise the legal independence of other states," (Nielsen, 2015, p. 3) on the basis that such a move violated religious principles that gave them the right to control territory, create a "pure Sunni Islamist state," and govern it according to the laws of *Shariah* (Cronin, 2015, p. 3). While the group lost almost all of its territories in Iraq and Syria by early 2018, IS's existence and performance as a statebuilding, territorial organisation "represents a new step, a new wave, in Jihadism" (Gerges, 2016, p. 4), which even after its military defeat has the potential to become the model for "future Jihadist movements seeking to consolidate their control over territory in a lawless environment" (Al-Tamimi, 2014, p. 13). The author concurs with Al Tamimi's reasoning and therefore believes that this study will play a key role in understanding how and why IS's documentation of its Caliphate can help inspire Jihadi movements with statebuilding ambitions in future.

Scholarly Explorations of the 'State' Aspect of IS

This section focuses on academic studies that have explored different features of IS's 'State', including works that scrutinise its status as a 'Caliphate'; examine it through the 'pseudo-state' lens, explain certain aspects of its 'performance as a State', and assess different criteria related to its claims of 'statehood' such as maintaining control over population, expanding territory, running effective government, and exercising sovereignty. The review also identifies certain gaps in the literature that deal with the 'stateness' aspect of IS.

IS's Different Statuses

Creation of a State was a vital objective for IS, which Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi made clear in his maiden appearance on 5 July 2014 at Grand Nuri Mosque in Mosul when he declared himself as the 'Leader of the Faithful' of the newly founded Caliphate in front of a Friday prayers audience (Barton, 2014). As mentioned earlier, this declaration instantly added IS to the list of historical revolutionary totalitarian states, such as USSR circa 1923, on the basis of its claims of extraterritorial jurisdiction over Muslims worldwide based on its specific interpretation of Islam (Kilcullen, 2015). However, most IR scholarship refused to take IS's state credentials seriously on the basis that it can never become part of the international community (Novogrodsky, 2018). Tomuschat (2015, p. 223) underlines the challenges associated with assessing IS's legal status and declares that it is "not as easy as commenting on a traditional country like France or Spain." This is due to the fact that the emergence of an 'Islamic State' challenged several pillars of international law, namely "its concept of a state, recognition, the concept of a failed state, the Articles of State Responsibility, cultural property, international humanitarian law – including the issue of humanitarian intervention, the responsibility to protect, and the use of force" (Coleman, 2014, pp. 75, 76). This situation led to a basic legal question: What criteria must IS's 'Caliphate' meet, if at all, in order to be considered a State under the international law? (Shany, et al., 2014). Despite the fact that international law fails to specify the concept of State in its entirety (Weissberg 1961; Novogrodsky, 2018), on the one hand, Ille and Mansour (2015) argue that its elements should be based on the Montevideo Convention of 1933 on the Rights and Duties of the State because, as Coleman explains, the "Montevideo criteria are generally accepted as a convenient normative basis for the definition of statehood," (2014, p. 78). On the other hand,

Grasten & Grzybowski (2023, p. 135) question the choice of applying the Weberian notion of statehood codified in the Montevideo Convention and instead focus on IS's "delineation of a distinct bordered territory, the building of an administrative structure and government capacity of the state, and the appeal to and political referent of a distinct community" in their research that analyses snapshots of IS's statehood.

IS as a Caliphate

Considering IS's existence as a Caliphate gives rise to a few problematic but important questions, such as: "What is the importance of defining this entity as a 'Caliphate'? Is it a different category of a State? How does the title or status as a Caliphate affect or interact with the answers to the above initial questions?" (Coleman, 2014, p. 77). But, first and foremost, what is a Caliphate? Cronin (2015) describes Caliphate as a State with a hierarchical and centralised organisation. According to Salafi-Jihadis, a Caliphate is the establishment of a State which fulfils the following three conditions: first, it is formed after the elimination of all nation states ruled by the 'infidel regimes' in Arab and Muslim countries; second, where all Muslims are subject to accepting a selected and agreed-on ruler; third, it is based on a single Muslim theocracy which is governed in accordance with the model of the early Islamic Caliphates (Meir Amit Center, 2013, p. 39). IS made the establishment of a Caliphate a keystone of its project for Islamic revival, and right from the onset communicated to its subjects, as well as supporters around the world, that it is implementing a 7th century ideology by reviving the societal values and structure that existed during the reign of Prophet Muhammad and his successors, the four 'rightly guided' caliphs (Caló, et al., 2020). According to Bunzel (2016), IS emulated the example of the first Wahhabi state which was founded in the Najd region of the Arabian peninsula when Muhammad ibn Saud

and preacher Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab joined hands in 1744. He adds that while IS can be perceived as "a kind of fourth Wahhabi state, given its clear adoption and promotion of Wahhabi teachings" (Bunzel, 2016, p. 8), it "adopted certain ideas about politics, violence, and the apocalypse that the three Saudi-Wahhabi states never did." Moreover, it strived to exist as a State unlike any other from the past with intentions "to establish a new hierarchy within Sunni Jihadism" (Hamming, 2017, p. 28). IS used the concept of *imamah* (leadership), based on its own interpretation of the Islamic traditions of leadership and statehood, to describe its politico-religious aspirations. Kaneva & Stanton – in their exhaustive study of IS's key ideological concepts such as *imamah*, *hijrah* (migration) and *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) – establish that the "concept of *imamah* is central to IS's conception of Islamic statehood" and was projected as a necessary pre-condition for the "legitimacy of the Islamic State" (2020, pp. 7, 9). They also note that the way of joining IS, as a State and not as a militant group, was the following: accept the *imamah* of IS and its caliph, perform *hijrah*, and give *bay'ah* to the caliph after arriving in the Caliphate (Kaneva & Stanton, 2020).

IS as a State

While academics have increased their interest in governance attempts by non-state actors (Gartenstein-Ross & Magen, 2014) they remain divided over the status of IS as a State. Ahram & Lust (2016) concede that IS, despite showing nothing but contempt for international laws around sovereignty, did its best to look and act as a State by adopting many typical governance characteristics prevailing in the Arab world. Amorós (2016, p. 9) notes in his report that IS's claim of being a State is grounded in two distinct types of legitimacy: one, "that of States, whose legitimacy ultimately derives from a government controlling a defined territory and the population who lives within its limits," while the second is "that of transnational

Jihadist groups, which propose a political order organised under the principles of political Islam." Therefore, he brands IS's claim of State as 'paradoxical' because "it attacks the current world order (both defined in Westphalian and globalisation terms) but at the same time adopts the form of the basic unit – the State – of the system it aims to destroy" (Amorós, 2016, p. 9). Amorós (2016, pp. 20-21) also contends that "the survival of the Islamic State and the survival of the international society are mutually exclusive, as both are grounded on opposed views of the legitimacy of world order." Similarly, Longobardo (2017, p. 225) in his article that analyses IS from a legalistic view declares that IS's failure "to fulfil the additional legal statehood criteria that have been formulated by scholars in recent decades reinforces the

idea that IS has never been a State."

Fromson & Simon (2015) also agree with the 'State' notion of IS but adopt a more nuanced approach. By comparing ISI's and AQAP[15]'s attempts at statehood in Iraq and Yemen respectively, they describe both Jihadi organisations encountered what political scientists term a 'Jihadist governance dilemma' in which administering the territory – "despite the Caliphate's exalted status within Jihadist ideology – becomes an Achilles' heel" (Fromson & Simon, 2015, p. 38). Weinstein (2006) explains the Jihadi 'Achilles' heel' factor plays a key role in determining their governance priorities and providing protection to their population. He argues that, on the one hand, resource-rich organisations struggle with maintaining discipline because of the opportunists that join the bandwagon for immediate gain, and are thus predisposed to violence, while on the other hand, resource-poor organisations are more likely to offer good governance and services to its subjects. Revkin, in her

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[15] Al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula.

research on IS's taxation policies in resource-rich areas of Syria, concludes that "IS was no more likely to impose taxes and other revenue-extracting policies in resource-poor districts than in resource-rich districts" (2019, p. 4). This finding contradicts 'resource curse' and 'revenue bargaining' theories by Levi (1988) and Boucoyannis (2015), which suggest that "armed groups will only engage in taxation and other statebuilding activities in areas where they lack exploitable resources such as oil" (Revkin, 2019, p. 1). Gartenstein-Ross observes that "paradoxically, when these groups appear strongest – when they gain control of state-like assets – their greatest weaknesses are exposed" (2014, p. 3). Fromson & Simon, addressing Gartenstein-Ross' paradox, contend that IS tried to avoid this trap by basing its governance "on the shaky foundation of outright repression, pseudo-legitimacy and the appearance of effectiveness" (2015, p. 39).

IS's Various Roles as a Non-State Actor

There are some scholars who – while acknowledging IS's terrorism – view the Caliphate in various non-state actor capacities. According to Cronin (2015, p. 1), IS's 'pseudo-state' is led by a conventional army which "boasts some 30,000 fighters, holds territory both in Iraq and Syria, maintains extensive military capabilities, controls lines of communication, commands infrastructure, funds itself, and engages in sophisticated military operations." Gunther & Kaden (2016, p. 134) in their article regard IS as both "a socio-political movement and a quasi-state" that combines "different sources of authority and means of power pertaining to each of these two roles." Gomes & Mikhael (2018), agreeing with the classifications of "a hybrid and insurgent terrorist organisation" (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 11) or a "quasi-state sponsor of terrorism" (Byman, 2016, p. 144), declare IS to be a "more complex organisation which ultimately aimed to reconfigure the

Levante's borders", which in other words means a terrorist organisation with statebuilding aspirations.

Honig and Yahel (2017), drawing on Rapoport's four waves of terrorism theory, define IS as a 'terrorist semi-state' on the grounds that it controlled portions of a weak state's territory, maintained governance, and used it to launch terrorist attacks against third party victim states. They also paint IS as a hybrid organisation that possessed conventional military capabilities combined with guerrilla and terror capacities (Honig & Yahel, 2017). Compared to Jackson's (1990) description of a quasi-state, which is a State that merely possesses international legitimacy but lacks the ability to establish control over its territory, Honig and Yahel's (2017) semi-state is the exact opposite: it lacks official recognition but establishes control over territory with no danger of collapsing unless there is an external intervention, which exactly was the case with the Caliphate. Pinos (2020, p. 1) also draws a similar conclusion in which he first introduces the concept of parastates, which are "territorial oddities in the sense that they operate outside formal international diplomatic channels and perhaps most importantly outside legal internationally-recognised boundaries" and explains that such states "tend to emerge out of secessionist regions and are successful enough to achieve de facto control of the territory they seize, but fail to legally formalise such moves; lacking, in most cases, legal international recognition" and declares IS as "the paradigmatic example of the terrorist parastate".

Additionally, there are also scholars who view IS as a revolutionary movement. According to Krause (2018), IS evolved as an insurgent organisation since its inception in 2006, transformed itself into a political entity as a State in 2014, and

after the dismantling of the Caliphate in 2017 morphed into a 'revolutionary movement' – an entity that has military, political, social, cultural and ideological aspects. Kalyvas (2018), in his essay on decoupling violent Jihadism from both religion and terrorism and understanding Jihadi groups as rebel groups engaged in civil wars, also reflects on IS through the prism of revolutionary movements, and concludes that IS "might revert once more into a de-territorialised, clandestine network relying on transnational terrorism, a strategy that can be spectacular but tends to be much less effective at achieving tangible political goals than armed rebellion" (2018, p. 45). As predicted by Kalyvas, IS has been operating in guerrilla mode ever since it lost Baghouz, the last town under its control in eastern Syria, in early 2019. Ever since then, its Caliph Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi and his successor Abu Ibrahim Al Hashimi Al Qurashi have been killed by US special forces in northern Syria in October 2019 and February 2022 respectively (The Meir Amir Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2022).

Snapshots of IS's 'Stateness'

At one point during its existence, IS keenly championed itself as a 'Caliphate' where a sizeable population was leading their lives according to Islamic laws in a territory that was roughly the size of the United Kingdom. IS, in its propaganda content, firmly rejected the legitimacy of all existing nation-states, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, and strongly encouraged its supporters worldwide to immigrate to the Caliphate and help rebuild it. Scholars have analysed IS's depictions of 'statehood' by applying the following two major approaches: First, by comprehensively focusing on the major features of the Caliphate utilising the framework of the Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties

of States (1933)[16]. And second, by selectively exploring certain individual aspects of the aforementioned criteria, for example, Sunni Arab tribes living under the Caliphate, IS's territorial expansion plan, law and order branch of the government, and IS's policy towards Arab monarchies. The following sub-sections survey the literature that provide snapshots of IS's overall 'statehood' status as well as its key individual aspects.

Figure 2.1: Screenshot of Dabiq magazine (Al Hayat Media, 2014) issue# 1 page 38, which shows the five stages of IS's territorial roadmap.

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[16] Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933) lays down the basic criteria for statehood: "The State as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with other States".

Population of the Caliphate

While IS never explicitly expressed its intentions of establishing a modern State by following the international laws and conventions related to statehood, it fully realised the vitality of population in any statebuilding project, and laid out the following five stages of establishing the Caliphate in the very first edition of its flagship English-language magazine *Dabiq* (Al Hayat Media Centre, 2014, p. 38), as shown in Figure 2.1, the first two of which are entirely dependent on population, that is, *hijrah* (emigration) and *jama'ah* (forming a community of faith). Moreover, once the Caliphate was established in 2014, a leaked document entitled 'Caliphate on the Prophetic Methodology' written by a key IS leader named Abu Abdullah Al Masri enshrined IS's governing principles and guiding strategy for becoming a viable state and identified the two major pillars of IS society as *ansar*[17] or 'the people of the land' and *Muhajirin* or 'emigrants[18].' The unofficial manifesto, translated into English and published online by researcher Aymenn Jawad Al Tamimi (2015) stated: "And from then there would be the cultivation of educational and societal change with which the *Muhajirin* co-existed and organisation of their ranks with the *ansar* – the people of the land[19]" (Al-Tamimi, 2015). The projection of population by IS also alludes to the three categories of membership of statebuilding terrorist groups, suggested by Revkin as: (1) members of the group's military wing (military personnel); (2) members of the group's civilian wing (civilian employees); and (3) members of the civilian

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[17] IS consistently referred the population of Iraq and Syria as natives, *Ansar*, and compared them to the 'Ansar of Madinah' throughout their publications, for example, in *Dabiq* magazine. However, IS clarified in issue #3 of *Dabiq* that this "contrast between the Islamic State today and the state of Madinah in the time of the Prophet (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) and his Companions is not to suggest that the *Khalaf* (later Muslims) are better than the *Salaf* (early Muslims), for these are historically related differences, not indicators of religious preference" (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 5).
[18] IS used the term emigrants to describe *Muhajirin* in the first issue of *Dabiq* magazine (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 22).
[19] The whole document is accessible here:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/islamic-state-document-masterplan-for-power

population being governed (civilian subjects) (2018, p. 120), which will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

IS made its ideological objective to control territory and govern civilians through the establishment of a Caliphate by emulating the earliest Islamic State founded by Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century (March & Revkin, 2015). Drawing on Laclau's theory of populism as an analytical frame and Giroux's definition of public pedagogy, Low (2016, p. 303) says IS sought to "establish an equivalent identity amongst a diverse population of Muslims worldwide" with the overt political objective of severing their "loyalties to various nation-states to produce a new transnational public – an *ummah* that will heed its call – through the articulation of Muslim identity with its political project for the formation of a Caliphate." Part of IS's appeal to its local and worldwide supporters was its presentation of the Caliphate as "an emotionally attractive place where people 'belong', where everyone is a 'brother' or 'sister'" (Atwan, 2015, p. 20). IS's objective was to use this freshly minted identity to bring Muslims across the globe under a single umbrella and protect them from the excesses of their adversaries (Low, 2016). The social contract offered by IS to its subjects entailed governance under IS's harsh implementation of *Shariah* – with delivery of justice, safety and security, and provision of essential services and public goods – at the fore. In return, the civilians were expected to offer not just their utmost loyalty but also payment of *Zakat* and other taxes while also living their lives strictly in accordance with IS-imposed rules and regulations (Revkin & Ahram, 2020).

Bernstein (2017, p. 1), in his analysis based on Montevideo Convention but without using any content to measure IS's claim to statehood, declares that the Caliphate 'likely' met the requirement of having a permanent population "on a de facto basis

until such time the territory is reclaimed by the original sovereign state." El Damanhoury (2019), using the Montevideo Convention in his analysis of images published in *Dabiq* magazine and *Al Naba* newsletter to assess IS's projections of statehood, notes that the visual narrative in *Dabiq* suggested the population living in the Caliphate is on the rise, contrary to *Al Naba* which "generally avoids visual arguments for permanent populations or relationships with other states, tribes, and other members of the population (2019, p. 77). Anfinson (2019), who also applied the same criteria for similar analysis but only used images published in *Dabiq* magazine, agrees with the notion that IS exaggerated the rise of population in the Caliphate, and explains that the photographs of foreign fighters and children were utilised "to 'prove' that a diverse aggregate of individuals planned to permanently inhabit the territory claimed by the Islamic State" (2019, p. 6). Research by Anfinson (2019) and El Damanhoury (2019) are of particular interest to this study as they offer a glimpse into IS's state-like performances published in its online magazines, and explain the reasons behind their projection. This thesis takes into account those findings and builds upon them substantially by analysing official IS videos.

It is generally regarded that violent Jihadi groups, especially IS, deploy extreme brutality to achieve their political and militaristic objectives. Some scholars, Mironova (2019) in particular, complain that academics and policy researchers in their quest to understand why and how groups engage in violence pay way more attention to the 'violence' aspect of an armed group, which leaves the 'group' aspect unexplored. Arguing that "without the people, there is no group and, as a result, no one to conduct those acts of violence," Mironova (2019, p. 33) in her research – which investigated the people behind IS, especially its founding members – notes that the "majority of IS human resources were local people who

joined the armed group for different reasons like ideology, money, power, or because they simply did not have other options." Rosenblatt, in his detailed report on IS fighters, reveals the following:

> *"The average fighter at the time of joining ISIS was 26 to 27 years old, single, had travelled to less than two foreign countries, had the educational equivalent of a high school degree, had basic religious knowledge, reported no previous fighting experience, and had the professional equivalent of someone between an unskilled labourer and a blue-collar worker."*
> *(2016, p. 7)*

The population residing in IS's Caliphate can be roughly divided into two sections, that is, the locals and foreigners. IS recruited many locals – almost all of them Sunni Arabs with some Sunni Kurds and Turkmen – and sought their active support through a combination of different coercive measures. A report published by The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies concluded that IS principally managed to gain local support by stoking the apprehensions and frustrations of the local Sunni population (Oosterveld & Bloem, 2017). An Oxfam-sponsored research corroborated the pro-Sunni narrative and added that IS posed itself as the 'defenders of Sunni values' who will save them from the excesses of the Iraqi Army (Dietrich & Carter, 2017). Fisher (2014), in her Marxist analysis of Sunni Arab support for ISIS in Iraq, singles out the economic situation of many Sunnis behind their support for the Caliphate, especially that of the rural communities that had been hit hard by agriculture crisis. Dawod (2017, p. 28), in his study of tribes that play a central role in political, military and security issues in Iraq, notes that a number of Sunni tribes and clans allied themselves with IS in Iraq's Sunni-dominated provinces of Al Anbar and Nineveh partly because they always refused to accept the newly installed regime in Baghdad after US illegally invaded and

occupied Iraq in 2003. As part of the classic 'divide and rule' strategy, IS exploited the differences and conflicts between tribes and the governments in Baghdad and Damascus, and even used financial bribes to coax them into pledging allegiance and surrendering control of their areas (Khatib, 2015). However, such strategy did not work on major Sunni tribal confederations such as "*Shammar, Obaid, Jubour, Zubaid, Albu Fahd, Albu Nimr, Albu Farraj, Albu Alwan*, etc., [who] neither helped IS nor pledged allegiance to the organisation" in order to maintain their ties with the State (Iraqi government) as well as major regional powers such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and world powers such as the US (Dawod, 2017, p. 31). Dukhan (2016), expanding on the research on tribes that supported or opposed IS, says some members of *Al Bakir* clan from *Al Akidat* tribe fought with IS while hundreds of members from *Sha'itat* tribe put up a fierce resistance, which was punished by IS in form of a massacre and mass displacement. The tribe received an amnesty only when their elders submitted to IS control. IS also released several videos, included in this research and detailed in the population case study, in which it showed tribal leaders from *Albu Sha'ban, Al Akidat, Baggara*, and *Jubur* tribes and clans pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. IS's main intention was to co-opt the tribes by appealing to their tribal and religious identities in order to "create a new form of citizenship in which individuals can have security – physical, economic, social, and religious – as long as they accept IS's message" (Kfir, 2015, p. 241).

Apart from investigating IS's relations with the tribes in eastern Syria and western Iraq, scholars have also focused on IS's attempts to carve out a new sense of citizenship in the Caliphate, which reflected its pan-Jihadi ideology. Ahram (2015) claims the notion of creating a new form of citizenship distinguished IS from most previous insurgent groups in Iraq and Syria because IS vehemently rejected all

identities that were based along ethnic or nationalist lines, which they saw as moves to superficially divide the Muslim community. In their quest to create a pan-Islamic State, IS placed Sunnis at the pinnacle while relegating non-Muslim communities such as Christians to *dhimmi* (second-class status) and decreed the complete eradication of heterodox groups such as the Shi'as, Yazidis, and Alawites (Ahram, 2015). Abdel-Razek & Puttick (2016), in their detailed study on the state of majorities and minorities in post-IS Iraq, note how "Christians, Shabak and Yezidis saw themselves dismissed from their jobs and their properties expropriated" with only Christians given a choice between "submission to the group's authority, including paying the jizya, and death" (2016, p. 570). Their research also reveals how IS uprooted entire minority communities, such as Assyrian Christians and Shia Turkmen, from their historical homelands in northern Iraq while subjected Yezidis, another native community, to systematic mass displacement, genocide and sexual slavery. At the same time, IS also targeted minorities in Syria, including an attack in which multiple suicide bombers killed more than 250 men, women and children in the Druze town of Rami near southern Sweida in July 2018 (Frantzman, 2019) while also capturing the ancient towns of Al Qaryatain and Mahin and abducting hundreds of Assyrian Christians (Al-Khalidi, 2015). A report by Counter Extremism Project (2017) details IS's persecution of religious minorities in Syria, such as Alawis, Christians, Shia, and the Sufis, and notes how IS subjected them to threats, extreme hatred and in several cases, violent attacks because they were labelled as heretics and infidels who must either convert to Islam or die.

While IS subjected minorities to humiliation and persecution, it elevated the status of Sunnis on all levels, provided they complied with its Salafi-Jihadi ideology. It accorded Sunni men who saw IS as a lesser evil "compared to rapacious

government forces" with higher privileges (Ahram, 2015, p. 70). Local Sunni men in Syria, especially in the east, were provided around $300 a month to join IS as fighters with the option of taking civilian jobs should they choose to stay away from the dangers of the frontline and enforce power over civilians (Mironova, 2019). According to Mironova, "IS group members in Iraq, from the very beginning of the war, were more dedicated to fighting and more willing to die in combat compared to local Syrian fighters, many of whom had joined for money and power" (2019, p. 33). As a result, IS recruited thousands of foreign fighters in Syria who took great risks to reach the Caliphate and depended on it for their survival (Mironova, 2019). Benmelech & Klor (2018), in their study based on in-depth interviews with 16 Danish foreign fighters, estimate around 30,000 fighters from at least 85 countries with majority from the Arab world, immigrated to the Caliphate as of December 2015. However, Milton (2021) casts doubt over the estimates of foreign fighters provided by governments as they fail to take into account the fact that not all foreign individuals ended up with IS, and may have joined other militant groups such as *Jabhat Al Nusra* (JaN)[20], Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) and others operating in the region. According to Sheikh (2016), the 'statebuilding narrative' was the main driving force that motivated thousands of foreign fighters to migrate to the Caliphate. Many foreign fighters came from Western countries where Muslim immigrants faced difficulties while integrating into "rich, secularised, and homogenous societies" thus fuelling radicalisation (Benmelech & Klor, 2018, p. 2). Vinci (2006) underlines loyalty, self-help, economic incentives and coercion as usually the four basic factors that motivate foreign fighters to migrate and join armed conflicts abroad. Rand & Vassalo (2014, pp. 2, 3), based on their analysis of foreign fighters' stated motives for traveling to

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[20] *Jabhat Al Nusra*, known as Al Nusra Front in English, is a former Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria (Stern & Berger, 2015).

fight in Iraq and Syria posted on their social media accounts, identify sectarian 'Sunni vs Shia' and 'Assad regime vs Muslims' as the major motivational themes. While all foreign fighters received special treatment, attention and care in the Caliphate, Chassman (2016) claims foreign fighters from Western countries enjoyed the privileged status for abandoning 'Western ideals' in order to wage jihad.

Some studies have examined how continuous bloodshed, displacement, coercion, and deep uncertainty affected different parts of the population differently. Ahram (2015, p. 58) notes that in such periods of war and crisis that "States tend to adopt hyper-masculine characteristics: they use violence to defend territory, lives and honour" while casting genders in opposite roles. "Men, as warriors, are empowered by their ability to protect 'their' women" while women "as 'beautiful souls': innocents, embodying peace and purity" (Ahram, 2015, p. 58). A report compiled by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD, 2016) confirms many of these notions, and explains that men, after swearing allegiance to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi as the caliph, received military and *Shariah* training, and were given a choice between support work for the Caliphate such as joining *hisbah*, front-line combat duty and carrying out a suicide attack. Many men joined IS in order to feel like 'real men,' that is, as heroes, warriors, protectors, and breadwinners – roles they felt were denied to them in their home countries (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020). Of the estimated 20,000–31,500 who people immigrated to Iraq and Syria to join IS per CIA assessment (Sciutto, et al., 2014), about 10 per cent were women from Europe, North America and Australia, with the majority believed to be between the ages of 18 and 25 (Zakaria & Winter, 2015). While many men from the West complained about marginalisation and discrimination in their home countries due to their immigrant background, a large

number of Arab men – including locals – cited widespread corruption, sectarianism and economic crises as reasons behind their deprivation and hoped for a life which provided them employment, marriage, accommodation, and other necessities of life (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020). A study conducted by Basra, et al. (2016) found that a considerable proportion of foreign fighters that joined IS had criminal convictions in their home countries, which pointed to IS's willingness to attract and engage with such elements by offering them redemption through strength, power, and violence, all the while professing its Islamic credentials. Another study, basing its framework on Sageman's (2008) four historical waves of Jihadi terrorism, suggests that many foreign fighters from European background came from a 'no future subculture' and had no hopes in the system they grew up in, and as a result, migrated to the Caliphate, which promised a better life in this world and hereafter (Coolsaet, 2016). While IS did reward the men who joined and served them as fighters, teachers, bureaucrats or in other capacities, it made life difficult for men who refused to join IS and support the Caliphate. Such men were subject to extreme pressures by IS who restricted their movement and forced closure of businesses, which severely impacted their ability to fulfil the responsibility of providing for their families (Dietrich & Carter, 2017). As noted previously, a lot of research has focused on the lives and actions of foreign fighters, especially those who migrated from Western countries, but there exists a clear gap in the literature about local men in both Iraq and Syria, especially urban youth, who lived under IS and went on to join their ranks on ideological grounds or under coercion.

Similar to the dearth of research on the role of local men in IS, there also appears to be lack of knowledge about the role local Iraqi and Syrian women played in the Caliphate as almost all research is focused on foreign women who emigrated to the

Islamic State and began a new chapter in their lives. A report published by AIVD (2016) underlined that foreign women received firearms training shortly after arrival and were then tasked with carrying out the first and foremost duty, which is to have as many children as quickly as possible after helping them find a suitable husband. Other duties may have included recruiting other women to come and join the Caliphate, perform logistical tasks, and join female police units, such as *Al Khansaa* Brigade and *Umm Rayyan* Brigades – an all-female religious police force that dealt with other women accused of committing un-Islamic acts (Lia, 2017). Female officers from the mentioned brigades were involved in gathering intelligence, patrolling the streets, arresting women, surveilling women formerly associated to the Syrian regime or other rebel groups, and attracting other women from Arab and European countries into the Caliphate in order to get them married to IS fighters (Faraj, 2018). Abu Rumman & Abu Hanieh (2017), who investigated the cases of 47 women that joined Jihadi groups, reveal the presence of a battalion of 35 women that operated in Raqqah and carried out atrocities against other women. However, the official IS policy insisted that a woman's involvement in jihad is crucially important, but should take place within the confines of her home where she fulfils her husband's emotional and sexual needs, procreates, and raises the next generation (Cottee & Bloom, 2017). According to Winter & Margolin (2017, p. 27), IS's official Arabic and English language publications consistently conveyed a threefold message to its female supporters: first, female supporters were told to stay at home and maintain a sedentary and reclusive lifestyle; second, they were advised to support IS through money and words, rather than deeds; and, third, they were instructed to have as many children as their bodies would permit and be open to remarriage if their husband was killed on the battlefield. Perešin (2015), in her research on finding the reasons why hundreds of Muslim women from the West joined IS, highlights many women were attracted to the offering of

"traditional domestic female roles in the newly established 'Caliphate', like wives of fighters and mothers of the next generation of Jihadists" while also being receptive to the possibility of occupying "professional female positions, to recruit new (female) followers, to support fighters, to serve in a police role and be ready to participate in military operations if the need should arise" (Perešin, 2015, p. 33). Contrary to the common perception that all women in the Caliphate held 'back seat' roles, Spencer (2016), in an in-depth study analysing a sample of 72 women affiliated with IS, found that depending on nationality, age, technical expertise, and husband's rank within IS, a woman was able to hold a particular role such as recruiter, patrol officer, overseer, principal advisor, prison guard, doctor, student, and combatant, among other positions in the Caliphate. The study also proved that women from Arab backgrounds were able "to gain authoritative positions like patrol officers and overseer because of their inherent knowledge of Arabic and Islamic culture," and that nationality was undeniably the key factor that determined certain roles within IS (Spencer, 2016, p. 96). Similarly, a study by Khelghat-Doost (2017) based on interviews with 20 male and 30 female Syrian and Iraqi refugees concluded that IS provided its female members an "enabling women-only environment to perform the social obligations assigned to them" while minimising the possibility of mixing with the opposite gender to the lowest possible degree. The study also concluded that "IS has pushed the boundaries of women's utilisation in Jihadi organisations beyond combat tactical capacities" and facilitated their participation in "different gender-segregated parallel institutions" such as education, healthcare, police and charity to address women's affairs in the Caliphate (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p. 8). However, the studies mentioned above are rich on details about the lives of foreign women living in the Caliphate, yet offer little details about the lives and role of local women, which points out the obvious literature gap.

While men and women were subjected to a repressive environment in IS's totalitarian regime, children equally had a hard and traumatic life (AIVD, 2016). As soon as children were old enough to go to school and begin learning, IS imposed upon them a radical curriculum which included theological education in the form of Quran, Sunnah, and Islamic history lessons (Al Tamimi, 2014) in order to pave way for indoctrination from a very young age and change religious and societal norms (Pinheiro, 2015). Additionally, IS labelled boys as 'Cubs of the Caliphate' and sent many of them to special military training camps from a very young age where they received weapons and other specialist trainings, including carrying out executions (AIVD, 2016). Research conducted by Horgan & Bloom (2015) shows many children joined IS's ranks through various ways, such as, being the sons and daughters of foreign fighters, children of zealous locals, children from IS-controlled orphanages, children taken away from parents through coercion, and runaway children/adolescents, and in some instances foreigners, who volunteered to join and fight for IS. In a follow-up study, Bloom et al. (2016) note that when these children fought for IS and lost their lives in military operations, including suicide bombing missions, they were portrayed by IS as child 'martyrs' – the same way as adult 'martyrs' – which was part of its psychological operations (psyops) in order to sow fear in the hearts of its enemies by elevating the status of its fighters, men and children alike. Similarly, a study conducted by Benotman & Malik (2016) which analysed 254 images IS published between August 2015 and February 2016, confirmed that IS used images not only to instil fear but also to normalise violence perpetrated by children. Christien (2016) theorises that IS's portrayal of children committing violence was, first, to evoke anger and frustration among IS's audience and force them to take some action, and second, legitimise their use of child soldiers as part of their long-term statebuilding goals. One of the main findings of

Watkin & Looney's (2019) research alludes to a shift in IS's focus, who after presenting children as the victims of Western-backed warfare, resorted to projecting them as 'fierce, prestigious child perpetrators' who were flourishing under the Caliphate. On the other hand, young girls were labelled as 'flowers and pearls of the Caliphate' and received an education that centred around their role as obedient housewives who were "to be fully veiled, remain hidden, and never leave the house, except in exceptional circumstances," and were taught a particular set of skills, such as sewing and knitting, that could help them in their future role as housewives (Benotman & Malik, 2016, p. 44). Kaczkowski's thematic analysis of 104 images of children published in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* magazines (2019) concludes that children were shown for propaganda purposes such as victimisation, safety/normalcy, guidance, training, and perpetrating violence.

As shown in this sub-section of the review, the present literature contains rich information about the role of foreign fighters in the Caliphate but provides sparse information about the local male population. This gap, and many others, is addressed in the population case study, which – based on the visual analysis of 97 population-themed videos – presents a vibrant portrait of population living under IS control, including the various interactions between the locals and foreign fighters, the civilian lives of IS fighters, the innocent/violent roles children played in the videos, and IS's engagement with different sections of the society, which will prove to be a significant addition given that scholars previously focused mostly on foreign fighters by mostly assessing IS's magazines and newsletters.

Territory of the Caliphate

While there is hardly any consensus among scholars and analysts on IS's true nature and intentions (for example, Cockburn, 2015; Warrick, 2015; Stern &

Berger, 2015; McCants, 2015; Byman, 2015; Weiss & Hassan, 2015; Fishman, 2016; Wood, 2016; Gerges, 2016), there is a unanimous agreement on its existence as a "territorial organisation" (Kadercan, 2019, p. 2), because IS – being a truly global organisation – not just professes to represent faith, that is Islam, in its name but also a geographical determination (Barrett, 2015). While all modern states assert and enforce their control within the demarcated territories acknowledged by the international community – chiefly the United Nations (UN) – IS completely rejected the validity of any borders, and instead, "sought to control territory that it believed to be unbounded and elastic and that will expand based on the occupation or 'opening' of countries" until "it encompasses the entire world," a territorial ambition quite reminiscent of the Third Reich and the USSR (Jabareen, 2015, p. 54). In other words, IS renounced the contemporary nation states created during the colonial period, and instead, sought the 'Caliphate of the Muslim Ummah' – an ideological ambition deeply entrenched in the Salafi-Jihadi religious ideology that transcends nationalism and race and makes it the "new geopolitical phenomenon" (Jabareen, 2015, p. 52).

Many scholars refer to this phenomenon as the 'geopolitics of jihad' in which Salafi-Jihadi groups divide the world in binary terms: between *Dar Al Islam* – the land where rule of Islam prevails – and *Dar Al Harb* – the land of war where Islam needs to be imposed (Parvin & Sommer, 1980, p. 3). According to Kadercan (2019, p. 7), "this Manichean geopolitical vision stipulates that there can never be boundaries until a *Shariah*-based perpetual peace is established all over the world." Moreover, IS not just rejected the demarcation of borders, it also refused to acknowledge the very concept of rigid borders itself (Kadercan, 2019), as it remarked in the 4th issue of *Dabiq* magazine, after demolishing the Iraqi-Syrian border, that "the *Mujahideen* of the *Khilāfah* delivered yet another blow to

nationalism and the Sykes-Picot-inspired borders that define it."[21] Instead, IS positioned itself as a "frontier state fighting a never-ending war in defence and for the glory of the Islamic lands" (Kadercan, 2019, p. 19). In order to achieve that, IS – in the very first edition of its flagship English-language magazine *Dabiq* (Al Hayat Media Centre, 2014), as shown in Figure 2.1 – laid out the following five stages of establishing the Caliphate: *Hijrah* (emigration); *Jama'ah* (forming a community of faith); destabilise *Taghut* (tyrant ruler); *Tamkin* (consolidation); and *Khilafah* (Caliphate).

Gates & Podder describe IS as the "only group that combines rebel governance with expansionist territorial ambitions – to create an Islamic Caliphate" (2015, p. 108). According to Jabareen (2015, p. 55), territory – from IS's point of view – is something that is "unbounded and elastic and that will expand based on the occupation or 'opening' of countries" and will continue doing so "until it encompasses the entire world," – an ideology that is reminiscent to expansionist regimes of the past such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. IS, in its proclamation as a Caliphate, projected a dualistic vision of the sovereign state which was simultaneously "Westphalian and pre-Westphalian in nature" wherein it demanded "recognition as a sovereign state" while seeking to "create a new world order in which territorial lines are based on religious identity" (Bielat, 2015, p. 3). IS's conception of territoriality is identical to many other Islamist outfits which were established since the first decades of the 20th century, such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Jabareen, 2015), which caused IS not only to create new territorial boundaries based on transnational ideals, but to pronounce claims of sovereignty over the territory as a Caliphate (Bielat, 2015). While IS refused to

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[21] Dabiq – 4th issue (Al Hayat Media, 2014).

accept "not only the location of borders, but also the very concept of [Westphalian] border itself" (Kadercan, 2019, p. 5), at the same time, IS envisioned a Caliphate that looked and acted like a State without precluding any territorial boundaries (Ahram & Lust, 2016). IS "positioned itself as a frontier state fighting a never-ending war in defence and for the glory of the Islamic lands" (Kadercan, 2019, p. 8), and defended its territorial integrity at all costs, which rendered its stance towards sovereignty as paradoxical and one-sided (Bielat, 2015; Nielsen, 2015). Jabareen described IS as a "new contemporary geopolitical phenomenon" whose "conceptions of territoriality" are comparable to the Islamic states of the past, but its "tactics of territoriality" distinguish it from both the Westphalian norm and past or contemporary Islamic organisations (2015, p. 52). Grzybowski (2023, p. 3), while contrasting Islamist/Jihadist groups with national ambitions, declares that IS "projected a counter-territory beyond state borders to explicitly challenge the state system and the very principle of inter-territoriality." In a nutshell, there is a consensus among scholars that IS dismissed all the Westphalian notions of bounded territoriality (Hamdan, 2016).

A number of scholars also assessed IS's transition from a terrorist organisation to a "de facto territorial power" (Tomuschat, 2015, p. 223) which, thanks to its consistent strategy of infiltration, assassination, and intimidation before fully controlling an area (Shatz & Johnson, 2015) "preceded by years of preparation of unconventional warfare" (Whiteside, 2014), went on to occupy large areas of Iraq and Syria by mid 2015. Zelin (2016), based on his analysis of IS's media products, points out the following five phases of territorial conquest: intelligence gathering; low-intensity attacks; co-option of locals; introduction of *hisbah* activities; and provision of social services along with basic governance. During its reign, IS not just sought to empower Sunnis at the expense of all other non-Sunni communities

but also to redraw and repaint the map of territories under its control in sectarian terms, which was part of its efforts to carve out "socially homogenous enclaves" based on their "sectarian and/or ethnic identities" (Kadercan, 2019, p. 11). This involved "geographic cleansing," which Stern (2016, p. 199) describes as a process "in which minorities and enemies of the militant group either emigrate or are killed, leaving behind mostly Sunni Arabs willing to live under ISIL's harsh but semi-stable rule." The main goal behind IS's territorial conquest was to establish a mode of governance, claimed to be based on the methodology of Prophet Muhammad and his successors, the four righteous caliphs (Ahram, 2019), where its citizens would receive the same services provided by a nation state but in a "more ethical manner" (Lister, 2014, p. 28).

IS's actual territorial control on the ground and its representation on maps witnessed a huge variation. On the one hand, IS used borderless, unlabelled maps both in *Al Naba* and *Dabiq* to "display its territory or what it claims to be Muslim lands that should be acquired" (El Damanhoury, 2019, p. 74). On the other hand, the media described IS's territory as 'swaths' with varying estimates of area under its control – with a report by The Wall Street Journal suggesting 12,000 square miles while an article by The New Yorker estimating 35,000 square miles (Gilsinan, 2014). Even the maps representing IS territorial control offered mixed projections, from "sprawling network of nodes, connections, holes, and islands" (Offenhuber, 2017) to "a coherent territorial entity like Jordan or Belgium" (Gilsinan, 2014, p. 1). De Ugarte (2014) paints IS's territorial control as "a floating, agile, exhausting, and resilient power" which relies heavily on transportation routes while the "territory is of no interest." His views are seconded by political analyst Jomana Qaddour who agrees that while IS controlled major cities and roadways leading in and out of them, but at the same time questions "that some of

that area is desert, so what does 'control' of that kind of land even mean?" (Gilsinan, 2014). However, Roggio disagrees with the comparisons and explains that "Iraqis [and also Syrians] in the small hamlets and villages not directly under Islamic State control know who are truly in control" and likens it to American citizens living in remotest areas of Alaska seldom seeing little to no government involvement but knowing they live under US government jurisdiction by all means (Gilsinan, 2014). Offenhuber (2017, p. 20) weighs both sides of the debate and explains that IS "strives for a total control of territory, many of its units operate quasi-autonomously, intertwining control over physical space," and as a result, "a map of the IS can never be complete or finished, and instead always remain in a state of in between." While IS in its propaganda content "consistently reiterated notions of accumulating and enacting sovereign control over its claimed territory" (Anfinson, 2019, p. 9), Kadercan (2019, p. 12) believes that its "territoriality is portable" and warns that IS "can survive as a movement – or as an active organisation with global appeal – even after losing its territory, with the intention of establishing territorial control in future."

While research has focused on several aspects of IS's territory and territoriality, there remains a gap in terms of determining the indicators IS used to demarcate its boundaries. At the same time, questions remain unanswered on the strategy IS used to capture new territories while also retaining areas under its control before eventually facing territorial defeat in 2018 and retreating to desert hinterland in Iraq and Syria. Based on an extensive visual analysis of 77 territory-themed videos, the upcoming territory case study chapter addresses these two gaps in detail by revealing an elaborate three-stage territorial conquest plan that starts with identifying the areas marked for capture, attacking and fighting to seize the territory and acquire war booty, and then projecting control over the newly

captured territory by making use of flags/fighters/leaders as well as civilian endorsement while also exploring IS's other expansive displays of territoriality. This project is a significant addition to literature as it provides a comprehensive step-by-step visual analysis of the modern technological means IS used to capture territory, how its fighters battled its enemies and openly humiliated them, and how it projected control over the territories after conquering them. [explain the importance of these additions].

Statebuilding and Governance of the Caliphate

Scholarship on IS has broadly studied IS's three-year long rule in two different veins: some focused on statebuilding activities and aspirations while others investigated its attempt at governance in different capacities. Statebuilding is described by Fukuyama (2004, p. ix) as "the creation of new government institutions and the strengthening of existing ones." Like most Jihadi groups, IS is "highly ideological, and claims to implement true Islamic law in areas where it rules" (Hoffman, 2013, p. 23). However, it started statebuilding differently compared to previous Jihadi projects in countries like Afghanistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia, The Philippines, and Yemen, which ended prematurely without major successes. While IS surprised the whole world, especially the Muslim world, by the sudden announcement of a Caliphate, it was quietly laying down the 'constitutional' foundations of a State up to a year before in a series of texts, rulings and guidelines, based on the classical Islamic theory of statecraft known as *Siyasah Shar'iyyah*, which means 'religiously legitimate governance', and set up a dualistic model of law and governance (March & Revkin, 2015). Da Silva et. al (2023), in their analysis of Dabiq to situate IS's strategic narratives of statebuilding, identify the provision of security, the provision of basic services and social cohesion as the three crucial aspects of IS's statebuilding efforts

– which Khalaf (2015) describes as provided most capably and efficiently to locals in Syria's non-government controlled areas.

Revkin's research, which examines the rise of statebuilding terrorist groups with aspirations of governing people and territory, notes that "the empirical realities of a new generation of terrorist groups with state-like ambitions for sovereignty" contradicts the assumption that "terrorist groups are primarily military organisations," which has been fuelled by the "current counter-terrorism paradigm" (2018, p. 111). Zelin (2012) claims that the emergence of a new wave of statebuilding Jihadi groups in recent years has ushered a new multipolar 'Jihadosphere', which also prompted the end of Al Qaeda's monopoly over global jihad. Al Tamimi (2015), seconding Zelin's observation, explains that Jihadi groups have made several attempts since the 1980s to govern their territories and provide services to locals, with some of these proclaimed state entities often labelling themselves as an Islamic 'Emirate' in recognition of the Caliphate as its end goal. He also declares IS's governance structure as the "biggest Jihadi statebuilding project to date" (2015, p. 117), and critiques the existing literature for providing descriptive snapshots of IS's administration instead of thorough evolutionary analysis – a view with which the author wholly agrees and attempts to address in the government case study. Caris & Reynolds (2014) note how Islamic State expanded its statebuilding project under its *Imamah* (leadership) concept, which exerts both political and religious control over the lives of its subjects living under the confines of the Caliphate. Gartenstein-Ross and Magen (2014), in their review of Jihadi governance, emphasise that – apart from their hard-line interpretation of *Shariah* and brutal implementation methods – Jihadi groups are also challenged by factors such as legitimacy, effectiveness and sustainability. Like Khalaf (2015), Hassan (2016) also reckons that IS was better at governing certain areas compared

to the governments in Baghdad and Damascus because it delivered safety and security, effective courts and unified rule to local communities in its capacity as a State and not as an insurgent group.

Borzel and Risse (2010) define governance as a system where various social institutions coordinate with each other under a structure to provide binding rules or collective goods through a process. A few scholars have directly addressed the topic of rebel governance, including Vega (1969) and Wickham-Crowley (1987), who explored the phenomenon and coined the terms 'guerrilla governance' and the rebel 'counterstate' respectively. Researchers studying state formation as a result of civil war have long established an empirical distinction between "armed groups that engage exclusively in warfare and terrorism, and those with state-like aspirations to govern people and territory" (Revkin, 2018, p. 114). Weinstein (2007) argues that discipline within a violent non-state actor's ranks indicates whether it will protect population and build governance structures or unleash violence that will result in wanton death and destruction. Arjona et al. (2015) explain how and why armed groups govern by comparing several case studies of insurgent governance – broad patterns that fit IS, including civilian participation in administration, and commercial production, among others. Revkin (2018) asserts that rebels, including terrorist groups, partake in governance and statebuilding activities through providing services such as education, healthcare, and electricity, to civilians in exchange for their resources such as taxation, forced labour, and military conscription, as part of their efforts to legitimise their authority over the population under their control. This conclusion is reinforced in a comprehensive study by Milton (2021), which discloses the scope and size of IS's governance and military enterprise by gleaming information from a small batch of key official IS documents captured by US military forces operating in Iraq and

Syria. According to the detailed report, IS dedicated significant personnel resources to its governance machinery, with an estimate suggesting over 60,000 unique identification numbers for employed males, forming approximately 18 per cent of the entire personnel that was at the Caliphate's disposal during its existence. The report also reveals that over 200,000 people were on the group's payroll in Iraq alone (Milton, 2021).

A number of studies have analysed IS's governance on an extensive scale. Solis (2015) notes that IS, despite never regarded as a State in international law, possessed a government structure. Caris and Reynolds' (2014) investigation of IS's 'holistic system of governance' in Syria, which documents both administrative and service-oriented branches, reveals that the former branch ran courts and justice, educational, public relations, and religious enforcement and preaching while the latter provided humanitarian aid, bakeries, and key infrastructure such as water and electricity. They conclude that "IS's ambitious governance program is both a demonstration of IS's greatest strength and potentially its greatest weakness" (Caris & Reynolds, 2014, p. 25), a view agreed by Anfinson who notes that *Dabiq* magazine "fetishize[d] the existence of effective governance by detailing state-like instances of disciplinary power and control" (2019, p. 13). Nanninga (2019) in his research says that IS presented itself as a well-functioning state in order to differentiate itself from other Jihadi-led governments of the past and present. While El Damanhoury agrees that *Dabiq* depicted a prosperous state thanks to a functional government that efficiently provided services, the coverage of governance in *Al Naba* newsletter, he observes, "appears neither economically vibrant nor sustainable" (2019, p. 76).

IS established *Shariah* courts as part of the main structure of governance (Revkin, 2016) after reaching the fifth and final stage of its territorial expansion, which is the establishment of the *Khilafah*, as shown in Figure 2.1. It appointed judges to resolve issues or cases decisively by applying Islamic legal rules based on Quran, *hadith*, or other accepted sources. In other matters that cannot be resolved by referring to the mentioned sources, judges and state-appointed religiously legitimate authorities alike, such as consumer protection inspectors, military commanders, police officers, all the way to the caliph, were asked to "issue law-like decisions that met two necessary conditions: (1) those decisions must be issued with the welfare (*maslaha*) of the Muslim community in mind and (2) they must not be inconsistent with the divine rules of *Shariah*. The resulting human interpretations of *Shariah* are known as *fiqh*" (Revkin, 2016, p. 13).

A detailed report by RAND Corporation (2017) which analysed the macro-economic consequences of IS's three-year occupation of large parts of Iraq and Syria, disclosed that IS raised funds from local residents, commercial business, and industry through direct taxation, social regulations, and protection rackets, to the tune of several hundred million dollars annually across Iraq and Syria. It also underlined that IS's additional revenue streams such as the "extraction of oil, natural gas, and phosphates, as well as some direct control over manufacturing of goods, such as cement" which in return funded its civic services such as basic sanitation and water supplies for public and agricultural use (RAND Corporation, 2017, p. xvi). The report concludes that the Caliphate "faced a clear trade-off between devoting resources to holding a city militarily and devoting resources to effectively governing it" (RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 181). Another RAND report (2018), based on satellite imagery, took an unprecedented look at the economic activities in areas under IS control and admitted that the local economies faced

more destruction from constant air strikes and counterattacks by IS's enemies rather than the harsh rule and high taxes imposed by the IS authorities.

Various academics have also panned particular aspects of IS's governance such as education and welfare departments, and security apparatuses. Guidère's (2017) *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalism* claims that IS completely supplemented the existing education systems in Iraq and Syria by introducing its own curriculum, schools, teachers, and textbooks. IS's move to impose its own educational system is further researched by Arvisais and Guidère who take a look at the entirety of IS's curriculum – including the teaching 'reforms', purging of existing teachers and textbooks, and content and context of IS's textbooks. They conclude that during its roughly four years of existence, IS educated over 250,000 youth (estimate) in their schools and "attempted to redefine education through the lens of a sectarian vision of Islam, a tactic that was visible in the group's propaganda and textbooks" (Arvisais & Guidère, 2020, p. 512).

Al Tamimi, in his analysis of IS's Department of Zakat and Charities based on IS' internal documents and audio-visual releases, provides a thorough overview of the Caliphate's welfare system and suggests that it was "primarily used for the main purpose intended: namely, to help the poor among the Muslims in the territories it controlled" (2021, p. 31). Milton's (2021) report reveals the judgment and grievances, public security services, and the *hisbah* were the three largest ministries in terms of the number of personnel employed, which is a clear indication of IS's strong emphasis on maintaining law and order in the Caliphate. Another extensive study of IS's official documents by Al Tamimi (2015) reveals the ostensibly comprehensive and impressive nature of IS bureaucracy while also underlines the clear existential challenges the Caliphate faced from its enemies.

Bokhari (2016, p. 5), agreeing with Al Tamimi's premise about existential threats facing IS, explains that IS's heavy-handed approach on the security aspects of governance stems from its past experience as a "non-state Jihadist force," which affords it the edge of retaining hard-fought territory gained from its enemies. Baskaran's (2015) critical study of IS's healthcare lists a series of abuses meted out to civilians, especially women, and how fighters received favourable treatment over other sections of the society, all the while showcasing in its propaganda that the people living under their control were receiving the best health services possible.

Khalaf (2014, p. 59) elucidates effectiveness, legitimacy and security as three major tools that ensured IS's stern governability of its subjects and implementation of strict *Shariah* laws by its well-structured institutions. Speckhard and Yayla, in their research based on the testimonies of IS's defectors and captured documents, label IS as "a ruthless organisation" that "profited from the meticulous intelligence planning techniques of former Iraqi Baath regime elements" with its security apparatus not just forming the "core structure that gave birth to IS, both as a terrorist organisation and as a nascent totalitarian state" (2017, p. 13) but also becoming the backbone of the State by providing protection to the *hisbah* (religious police), *shortah* (police), and emni (internal security), and holding it together. ~~[explain a bit how they became element of IS governance].~~ In their research based on interviews with IS defectors and retrieved official documents, De Graaf and Yayla (2021, p. 47) describe the Caliphate's police department as a "modern, complex, administratively extended, and even efficient force" despite holding a less visible, low-profile and non-performative role as opposed to other IS law and order units such as the security services and *hisbah*. Overall, the police department was "vital in implementing a system of mundane control of 'commanding right and prohibiting wrong'" and served as "an essential component

of the Caliphate's appeal to people living under the rule of ISIS" (De Graaf & Yayla, 2021, pp. 45, 16). Stergiou (2016, p. 203) also contends that IS "runs a dysfunctional, super-regulated and counterproductive 'economy' of fear in a context of total stagnation in local level and over-taxed population" which is "an amalgam of terrorist and criminal practices" and contradicts its aspiration of becoming a viable proto-state. In its defence, IS claimed it is simply following the Islamic laws of armed conflict through many of its law and order agencies, including internal security, police, and religious morals unit (March & Revkin, 2015).

Bilger (2014, p. 10), in his analysis of another important component of IS governance, reveals IS's army was led by a disciplined military command which was unified by a coherent top-down leadership, uniquely making it "superior to all of the regional military commands in Iraq." Milton's (2021) report reiterates Bilger's premise and highlights the fact that "Islamic State's military structure appears to have been, on paper at least, more complex and detailed than previously described" and attributes the strength to the "bureaucratic structure the group created that allowed it to maintain and direct its fighting capabilities at a higher level than would have been possible in the absence of such a structure" (Milton, 2021, p. 39). Beccaro (2018), in his paper on IS's use of irregular warfare tactics – including drones, suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIEDs) attacks and use of children as suicide bombers, and hit and run attacks – argues that despite using terrorism as a tactic, IS is not a terrorist organisation but a hybrid group which uses modern technology with high precision and great ruthlessness to capture territory and defend it. While IS was militarily defeated in 2018 by two major international coalitions, led by the US and Russia respectively, its shadow still lurks in the remote areas of eastern Syria and north-western Iraq

where it sporadically mounts guerrilla attacks on isolated towns, military posts, and infrastructure.

While this review notes that the aspects of IS's governance have been explored by several scholars, it also unveils a big gap in the literature where the performances of modern stateness by the Caliphate's branches of government have not been studied as a whole. The governance case study addresses this gap by presenting IS's model of governance and focusing on the performances of the Caliphate's main branches of government – the administrative, law and order, and services – based on the visual analysis of 131 governance-themed official videos.

According to Nielsen, Jihadi groups such as IS reject the concept of sovereignty on religious grounds and make the following set of arguments:
"God alone is worthy of worship and worship of anything else constitutes idolatry; God has given humankind rules governing all aspects of life for individuals and societies; following rules not established by God constitutes worship of those rules; state sovereignty is a man-made rule that separates Muslims from each other by man-made borders, and therefore, recognising state sovereignty is a form of idolatry" (2015, p. 3).

Youmans (2019, p. 50) believes that IS based its appeal to legitimacy on "the unavoidably dualistic nature of Islamic governance," which is described by Bahlul (2000) as 'factual sovereignty' where a group of people proclaim to have been granted power by the highest authority (God) with the directive of acting in accordance with His will. *Dabiq* magazine mentioned the following verse in Quran (2:247) in its third and tenth issues respectively in the context of divine sovereignty: "Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him

abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah gives His sovereignty to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing [in favour] and Knowing." IS also asserted that the Caliphate being the only true polity – rooted in the oneness of God and a sanctuary for true monotheists around the world – is therefore in a sense "an expression of divine sovereignty" while "all other authority was deemed illegitimate" as the nations beyond the Caliphate, including Muslim-majority states, were declared as "an all-encompassing enemy in their nomenclature" and labelled as the "lands of unbelief" (Youmans, 2019, pp. 52, 53). While IS rejected adherence to international law in its entirety, it did appeal directly to the Muslims around the world for recognition and legitimation by urging them to migrate and legitimise their claims of reviving the 'promised Caliphate' (Ahram & Lust, 2016). At the same time, IS was not interested in securing recognition from other states, which is a hallmark of modern sovereignty and the requisite of joining the international order based on sovereign states (Fabry, 2010). Youmans (2019) explains that IS did not expect nor desire recognition from the 'infidel' international community as it would have compromised its legitimacy as the 'only true state' in the world and undermined its statebuilding efforts by triggering an exodus of citizens.

The bedrock of IS's vision on sovereignty and its policy towards other states and non-state actors can be rooted in its territorial vision, which is based on the simple geopolitical objective of degrading and destroying what the group refers to as the 'grey zone,' that is, the "sociocultural environment where Muslims and non-Muslims shared the same physical environment and political institutions in a common social context" (Joffé, 2016, p. 808). IS described the 'grey zone' as a world which is divided between the true believers, and the infidels – a concept which is deeply ingrained in the traditional Islamic concept of *Dar Al Islam* (the

House of Islam) versus *Dar Al Harb* (the House of War) (Jabareen, 2015). IS's 'grey zone doctrine' is grounded in an "extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognised cadre of religious authorities" (Bunzel, 2015, p. 7). This binary vision, presented by IS as the 'God's promise' (Hamdan, 2016), mirrors the 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis, in which Huntington (1993) suggested that the primary sources of conflicts in the post-Cold War world will be people's cultural and religious identities.

IS, while not addressing any states in particular, listed a series of reasons that can be pretty much classified as its foreign policy (Hama, 2017). In a feature entitled "Why We Hate You And Why We Fight You," published in the 15th edition of its official English language magazine *Dabiq* (Al Hayat Media, 2016), the unnamed author cites disbelief, promotion of secular and liberal values, committing blasphemy against Islam, and killing of Muslims while occupying their lands by Western countries as the key reasons behind IS's continued hostile stance towards them and their allies and justification of its terrorist attacks. A close look at the reasons mentioned in *Dabiq* magazine reveals that IS's grievances were religious and not political in nature, which means IS left no room for peaceful negotiations but wanted to pursue warfare until it succeeded in creating a Caliphate and imposition of *Shariah* (Hama, 2017). Consequently, IS claimed and endorsed several terrorist attacks around the world, especially in Western Europe and USA, and encouraged its 'soldiers' to attack the enemies of Islam, including an audio statement by Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi in which he praised the attackers and said such attacks "equal one thousand operations where we are" (Blanchard & Humud, 2018).

Scholars have predominantly focused on military operations against IS and IS-sponsored terror attacks in the West, and discussed them as a dynamic of IS's foreign policy. As a result, there exists a gap in literature when it comes to IS's policies and rhetoric towards neighbouring states such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt as well as its stance towards other Muslim countries and global powers such as China, France, India, Russia, the UK, and the US. The upcoming foreign policy case study addresses this lacuna by analysing 69 IS foreign policy-themed videos and outlines IS's policy statements towards neighbouring states as well as regional and world powers.

Screening of the State-like Projections in IS Media

A staggering volume of research has focused on IS's media, ranging from its bureaucracy to products and output to dissemination/support networks on social media platforms, and from violence to the role of foreign fighters and women in its ranks. However, for the sake of clarity and space, this section of the chapter is exclusively focused on academic studies that explored IS's history and structure of its media department, and its multimedia content, such as online magazines and videos, in order to ascertain its state-like performances, including statebuilding activities, projected within them.

History and Structure of IS's Department of Media

Finsnes (2010) considers the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) as the first ever Salafi-Jihadi organisation which went on to create its own visual culture, part of which are the 'classic' messages and fighter videos. *Al Furqan*, the media arm of ISI established in 2006, mainly produced high quality videos depicting operations by the ISI, speeches of its leaders, martyrdom operation clips and documentary-style propaganda films about the situation in Iraq. It soon morphed into a very

advanced, concerted and probably the most efficient cyber jihad campaign three years later when the Caliphate was declared in July 2014, photos and videos of which were posted on the Internet, taking most major international news networks by storm (Long, 2015). After the declaration of the Caliphate, IS posted thousands of videos, photo reports and infographics across the Internet, covering not just its military activities but also its subjects, territory, governance, and ideology on major platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to attract people around the world to join, support, or sympathise with the group (Brooking & Singer, 2016). Long (2015) notes that IS has taken cyber jihad to a whole new level, evolving from static websites, chat forums, and online magazines to aggressive and effective use of today's interactive and fast-paced social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, Instagram, AskFM, Tumblr, WhatsApp, and many others. By utilising the tools that online social media has to offer, IS sought to network with people all over the world in order to create and sustain its Caliphate and to promote its agenda and ideology. According to Winter (2015), Islamic State captured the imagination of international media like no terrorist group before.

Scholars such as Abdulmajid (2021), Lahaye and Hindson (2015), and Sekulow et al. (2014) deem IS the most powerful radical Islamist group in world history. One of the major reasons that made IS an unparalleled Jihadi organisation were its superior military and financial capabilities, which were harnessed to establish an advanced media network that would help "the development of the organisation's sphere of influence" and increase its "fame and prominence compared to other Jihadi groups around the globe" (Abdulmajid, 2021, p. 84). IS's media supremacy was established by a sophisticated media network known as the '*Diwan* of

Media[22]'. This department was run by a dedicated bureaucracy whose main duties included broadcasting IS's military successes, governance activities, and religious indoctrination; while also maintaining social control over its subjects and persuading potential supporters abroad to join its ranks (Gambhir, 2016). According to a report published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, IS's *Diwan* of Media was "the central hub for all creation and distribution of official IS content" (Al 'Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 49). It was responsible for all of the media productions, including footage and photosets from battlefronts, glimpses of daily life from towns and cities under its control, high-quality propaganda movies, photos, statements, infographics, and audios among other content (Gambhir, 2016).

IS's media bureaucracy was divided into primary and secondary tiers. The primary tier, known as the 'Base Foundation' (*Al Mu'asasat Al Umm)* consisted of six primary media houses, namely *Al Furqan[23]* Foundation, *Al Hayat[24]* Media Centre, *Al I'tisam[25]* Media Foundation, *Ajnad[26]* Foundation for Media Production, *Al Bayan[27]* Radio, and *Al Himmah[28]* Library. *Al Furqan* Media Foundation (*Mu'assasat Al Furqan)* was established in 2006 by Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) (Atwan, 2015) and remained as the exclusive media producer until ISI was rebranded as ISIS in April 2013 (Nanninga, 2019). It also delivered official statements issued by IS's top leadership (Winter, 2015, p. 12), including the declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014. *Al Hayat* Media Centre (*Markaz Al*

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[22] *Diwan* in Arabic means office, bureau or department.
[23] *Al Furqan* literally means distinction, that is, the separation between truth and lies. The 25th chapter in the Quran is entitled *Al Furqan.*
[24] *Al Hayat* literally means life.
[25] I'tisam literally means taking over.
[26] *Ajnad* means army or soldiers and is the plural for the word *jund.*
[27] *Bayan* means declaration or statement.
[28] *Himmah* means ambition or determination.

Hayat lil I'laam) was founded in May 2014 (Atwan, 2015) and was the second major media outlet that produced audio-visual content in languages other than Arabic. It also published well-known English-language magazines such as *Dabiq*[29] and *Rumiyah*[30]. Al I'tisam Foundation (*Mu'assasat Al I'tisam*) was basically a film production unit which was responsible for most of the slick, high-production-value Arabic-language videos (Atwan, 2015). *Ajnad* Foundation for Media Production (*Mu'assasat Al Ajnad lil Intaj Al I'lami*) was established in 2013 for the purposes of producing and publishing audio material such as *anashid* and Quranic recitations (Schatz, 2015). *Al Bayan* (*Idha'at Al Bayan*) was IS's exclusive radio station, which began broadcasting *anashid,* discussions and news updates from Mosul in August 2014 and remained on the airwaves until the fall of Raqqah in 2017 (Meir Amit, 2019). *Al Himmah* Library (*Maktabat Al Himmah*) was the sixth primary media organisation, which published and distributed books, pamphlets, and posters (Al Tamimi, 2021). Furthermore, the Base Foundation also publishes *Al Naba*[31], which is a weekly Arabic-language newsletter that carries official statements from IS leadership, news items, religious articles, technical guidance on carrying out attacks, statistical data on IS's military activities, and commentary on current events (Meir Amit, 2019). It was founded in April 2015 and was distributed both online and offline when IS controlled major territories in Iraq and Syria (Abdulmajid, 2021). After the loss of territory, *Al Naba* became an online-exclusive publication, which IS continues to publish to this date.

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[29] A *hadith* mentions *Dabiq* as the location of an apocalyptic battle that will take place between Muslims and their enemies (BBC Monitoring, 2016).
[30] *Rumiyah* means Rome. The title refers to the following quote by former IS leader Abu Hamzah Al Muhajir: "O *Muwahhidin* (monotheists), rejoice for by Allah we will not rest from our jihad except beneath the olive trees of Rumiyah (Rome)." Rumiyah supplemented Dabiq after its discontinuation in July 2016.
[31] *Al* Naba literally means the news item. The 78th chapter in Quran is also entitled *Al Naba*.

IS's secondary media tier consisted of 18 *Wilayaat*[32] (provincial) media bureaus located in Iraq and Syria, namely *Al Anbar, Al Barakah, Al Fallujah, Al Furat, Al Janub, Al Jazirah, Al Khayr, Dijlah, Dimashq* (Damascus), *Diyala, Halab* (Aleppo), *Hamah, Homs, Kirkuk, Ninawa*, North Baghdad, *Raqqah*, and *Salahuddin* (Gambhir, 2016; Winter, 2015; Zelin, 2015). It also had its media offices in overseas affiliates such as *Khurasan* (Afghanistan), Sinai (Egypt), and West Africa (ISWAP[33]) provinces. Most of the media bureaus went out of operation once IS lost territorial control of its *Wilayaat* not just in Iraq and Syria, following military operations that were led by US and Russia, but also in other places like Afghanistan, Egypt, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen where IS faced heavy defeats by other Jihadi groups such as the Taliban, Boko Haram, and Al Qaeda or government forces.

In addition to the primary and secondary tiers, the 'auxiliary agencies' (*Al Wikalaat Al Mu'assasat Al Radifah*) were tasked with fulfilling the Base Foundation's needs and interests while side-stepping the duties of provincial media outlets (Al Tamimi, 2017). Chief among the auxiliary agencies was *A'maq*[34] News Agency (*Wakalat A'maq Al-Akhbariyyah*), which despite not being formally acknowledged as part of IS's media apparatus, covered not just attacks and military operations carried out by IS but also the provision of services and civilian life in IS-held territories (Al Tamimi, 2017). It emerged in late 2014 during IS's campaign to capture Kobani in northern Syria. According to Callimachi (2016), IS's internal documents suggest *A'maq* was a central component of its media operations but was never formally presented as such in order to maintain 'a veneer

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[32] *Wilayaat* is the plural of *wilayat* in Arabic; meaning provinces.
[33] Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) is considered a breakaway faction of Boko Haram (Celso, 2018).
[34] A'maq literally means the depths.

of objectivity'. Other two media groups connected to IS while not being officially presented as such were Furat[35] Media Center (*Markaz Al Furat lil I'lam*), which was established in IS's Caucasus province in July 2015 and mainly released Russian-language videos; and, Al Battar[36] Foundation which produced media products and operated in various IS provinces including in Syria, Sinai, Khorasan, Libya and Yemen (Meir Amit, 2019). A number of studies have contrasted IS's media output with their territorial control (Milton, 2016, 2018; Alexander 2017; Berger 2017; Wiskind 2016; Cunningham et al. 2017; Kuznar 2017; Lakomy 2017; Wignell et al. 2017; El Damanhoury et al. 2018; Winter 2018) and concluded that loss of territory translated into a sharp drop in media output by IS's both central and provincial outlets. Milton (2016, 2018) points out diminished territorial and military capabilities as the major reasons for this drastic loss of material and personnel. Kaczkowski et al. (2021) in their detailed study conclude that IS depended on its online activities to maintain and expanded its territory while simultaneously banking on its territorial resources to sustain its online media campaign. In other words, IS's media output and territorial control were directly proportional to each other, with studies by Milton (2016), Alexander (2017), Lakomy (2017), El Damanhoury et. al (2018) and Winter (2018) concluding that increased military pressure by anti-IS coalitions degraded the quality and quantity of IS's media output. In a related study, Winkler et al. (2021) found that elimination of IS's media leaders, which significantly coincided with their loss of territorial control (from August 2016 to October 2017), brought about significant changes in the group's quantity of output and visual framing strategies.

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[35] *Al Furat* is the Arabic name for River Euphrates.
[36] *Al Battar* literally means the cutting edge. It is also the name of one of Muhammad's 11 swords (Seerah, 2020).

Forms of IS's Multimedia Content and Output

Scholars have noted that visual media for IS were more than "just a tool for persuasion and incitement: they were a means of cultivating in-group conformity, enshrining an attitude of 'universal acceptance' towards its State and of 'universal challenge' towards its adversaries" (Winter, 2022, p. 183). Moreover, IS's media products painted the overall image of the Caliphate as an ever-expanding 'utopia' – a land with booming economy, flourishing Islamic society, thriving wildlife and nature, effective safety and security, and strong government (Winter, 2015). Simultaneously, the content also illuminated the spectre of "a pure, authentic, and truly Islamic society unburdened by Western influence and local subversion" by propagating images of good life under the Caliphate where men and young children got on with their daily lives with smile on their faces while young girls and women were conspicuously absent (Kraidy, 2018, p. 46). Most of IS's multimedia content showcasing the Caliphate was published in three major forms, that is, images, publications, and videos. Each of these is treated in the sub-sections below.

Images

Extensive analysis of IS's media content reveal that images played a central role in their propaganda campaign of projecting a viable state, based on the fact that they are more effective framing devices and rhetorical tools to communicate issues when compared with text (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). This approach can be better understood by Farocki's (2004, p. 17) definition that operative images are "images that do not represent an object, but rather are part of an operation." According to Kraidy (2017, p. 1203), IS conceives images as "bullets, rockets, missiles – weapons in an arsenal." Artrip & Debriz note that IS's media strategies "are more frantic and fragmentary" (2018, p. 80) with even the most gruesome

images "do not stop at appropriating and recruiting the lives and actions of immediate subjects, nor at those most directly affected by the violence of globalisation" (2018, p. 81). They conclude that IS's publication of spectacular images of horror/terror managed to infiltrate Western media and resulted in its ideological domination and power getting challenged (Artrip & Debrix, 2018).

Charlie Winter, in his book which is based on an exhaustive research encompassing more than 20,000 photographs published online by IS between December 2015 and September 2017, underlines that the Caliphate was "uniquely obsessed with narrative, image management, and branding," and used "cameras as weapons throughout its formative years" as a means to deploy photo-propaganda in order "to construct a comprehensive, holistic image of its statehood endeavours, one that revolved – always unrealistically – around the typically totalitarian ideals of stability, security, and sustenance" (Winter, 2022, pp. 72, 184). In his analysis of IS's 'statehood-focused propaganda', Winter divided the pictures broadly into six categories, namely, "policing, punishment, outreach, education, welfare and municipal services," and concluded that IS portrayed itself "as a place that was characterised by order and efficiency, one that was seamlessly advancing the interests of its subjects" with a view of developing "a comprehensive and, of course, deeply idealistic notion of what it was to live in its Caliphate" in order to idealise and inspire civilians and supporters (2022, p. 204). Speckhard (2015, p. 41), based on her examination of propaganda imagery found in IS's Internet posters and media campaigns, concludes that the Jihadi organisation "mastered the art of advertising — combining images with catchy slogans in attempts to override critical thinking to market itself as a group and a lifestyle choice" just like it is done so successfully in Western advertising.

Despite the widespread impression that most of IS's content features blood and gore, a research project conducted by Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, which looked into 9,000 official IS images released in 2015 and 2016, confirms that a majority of official IS multimedia releases revealed non-violent aspects of life in the Caliphate, with less than half (48%) having a military theme, and others depicting aspects such as commerce, governance, lifestyle, religion, and other daily life activities (Milton, 2016). Kraidy (2018, p. 54), whose research focused on IS's non-violent, spectacular images – including the peculiar depiction of "life under the shadow of the Caliphate," and its elusive currency, the dinar – concluded that the "IS spectacle is planetary, and consists of images expertly crafted for global circulation." Archambault & Veilleux-Lepage (2020, pp. 13, 14), who analysed 524 images of IS drone activities, based on their findings conclude that IS "constantly exploited the symbolic value of drone images" due to their propaganda value, and used them as an icon "to support their statebuilding exercise."

Print/Online Publications

IS published tailored products for niche audiences, chief of which were print/online publications such as *Al Naba, Dabiq* (later replaced by *Rumiyah*), *Dar Al Islam, Istok*, and *Konstantiniyye,* which targeted Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Turkish-speaking populations, respectively (Gambhir, 2016). A number of scholars such as Azman (2016), Bunker (2015), Celso (2014), Colas (2017), Gambhir (2014), Ingram (2016), Kibble (2016), Lakomy (2019; 2020), Mahzam (2018), Reed & Ingram (2017), Ryan (2014), Spada (2016), Wignell (2017), and Winkler et al. (2019 & 2022) analysed *Dabiq*, and in some cases *Rumiyah* magazine, to identify major themes that characterise IS's messaging and communications strategy. However, only a few studies have investigated IS's state-like projections. El Damanhoury's study, which analysed 1,144 images published in

first 12 issues of *Dabiq* magazine for projections of statehood, declared that "statebuilding images constitute a prevalent visual strategy throughout *Dabiq* magazine, which targets English-speaking audiences" (2016, p. 3). In a consequent study, in which he compared images bolstering IS's claims of statehood published in *Dabiq* and *Al Naba*, El Damanhoury noted that the "international norms of statehood differed in its visual arguments when targeting an English-speaking audience versus an Arabic-speaking audience" with *Dabiq* imagery full of romanticised depictions of an "all-encompassing, fully functional Caliphate" while imagery in *Al Naba* failed to present a functioning state (2019, pp. 67, 79). Anfinson's research, which analysed imagery published in the entire 15 issues of Dabiq magazine, underlines that IS made use of digital visualising technologies not just to encourage migration of foreign fighters but also to provide 'evidence' of fulfilling the four constitutive criteria of statehood: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states; as part of its "visual projection of 'statehood' in order to embellish and enhance its own territorial project" (2019, p. 6). In another study by Kaczkowski et al. (2021), which studied the relationship between territorial control and visual imagery presented in the issues of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* from July 2014 until September 2017, observed a strong correlation between military activities and statebuilding imagery with territorial gain/loss, and concluded that any changes in one factor has an effect on the other. In addition, a study conducted by Karhili et al. (2021), which analysed a total of 4,008 images appearing in Al Naba, Dabiq and Rumiyah publications, found that IS gave way more prominence to statebuilding imagery in comparison to religious imagery with 1,242 of all statebuilding images (30.99%) and just 537 (13.40%) were religious images. Winkler & El Damanhoury, in their book which compares the proto-state media systems of Al Qaeda and IS, note that "the magazines and newsletters of the proto-states utilize multimodal

reinforcement to emphasize three associated themes to augment that community-building project: emigration, militancy, and statebuilding" (2022, p. 20). They also underline that IS's statebuilding images focus on different aspects of its governance such as law enforcement, markets and currencies, media operations, social services, ties with affiliated militant groups, territorial expansion, and form 35 per cent of all of its magazine and newsletter imagery (Winkler & El Damanhoury, 2022). Heck (2017), in his analysis of how IS created a narrative identity through Dabiq magazine, underlines three major narratives: first, IS feeds on claims that the Caliphate was founded to protect Muslims and end their subjugation at the hands of Western powers; second, impose the religious supremacy of IS's interpretation of Islam; and third, establish global dominance of their Salafi-Jihadi version of Islam. Yarchi (2019, p. 61), in his extensive IS multimedia content analysis which also includes a random sample of English articles published in 15 Dabiq issues as well as 4 Rumiyah magazine issues, also arrives at a similar conclusion and notes that "the organisation uses its magazines to empower itself and to attract potential supporters on one hand, while presenting a threat to its enemies on the other."

Videos

Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and others have used videos as a medium not just to broadcast propaganda and facilitate funding and recruitment but also to send a clear message to their adversaries (Ozgur, 2006). However, it is IS's use of videos which has "set it apart from other terrorist groups and their attempts to disseminate their ideas" (Conroy & Al-Dayel, 2020, p. 9). The reason that terrorist groups like IS are drawn to videos is the affordances it provides in the context of politics, which in comparison with older, legacy media such as newspaper, radio and television,

offers maximum amplification of ideas. Yarchi (2019, p. 60), in his extensive IS multimedia content analysis which also includes a random sample of 120 videos, found videos to be the most prominent aspect of its media campaign with IS using them "frequently to promote its narrative, while [simultaneously] trying to empower the organisation and undermine its enemies." According to Papacharissi (2017, p. 4), videos – be it on YouTube, Vine or live-blogged accounts – "convey a sense of immediacy that makes us feel like we are there, wherever there may be." IS ensured that all of its official videos are of top quality and feature 100% original filmed content instead of mashups of borrowed footage (Fernandez, 2015). Robinson and Dauber (2018) systematically graded the quality of IS videos, based on their technical production criteria, and noted IS's ability to restore the quality of their video production and further improvement after suffering from heavy production setbacks in autumn 2015. Research also suggests that only 10% of IS' numerous visuals are videos (Milton, 2016), typically featuring "close combat footage, execution videos, martyr farewells, biographies of martyrs, operational summaries, and original music" (Whiteside, 2016, p. 25). Nanninga (2019) in his research comprising 772 IS videos identified warfare, recruitment, governance, executions, and overseas attacks as key five categories that were central in IS's videos, with governance-themed videos comprising 19.3% of the total video output. He also noted that most of the group's total video output was produced by provincial media outlets[37]. In one of the most exhaustive research projects that studied more than 9,000 videos, picture reports, and photographs embedded in Twitter posts, Milton (2016) concluded that more than half of visual products focused on themes such as governance, justice, religious ceremonies, and daily life

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[37] According to Nanninga (2019, p. 8) IS's central media groups only produced 2.8% of the group's total video output over the entire research period (July 2015 – June 2018) while the remaining 97.2% of the videos were produced by the group's provincial media outlets.

in the Caliphate while just 9% on the preparations to storm the battlefield or its aftermath. Stern and Berger (2015) also note that the majority of IS multimedia products do not depict violence but emphasise civil society as a valuable counterpoint to validate its violence and offset repulsion arising from it.

Despite the fact that IS produced thousands of videos and published them online, very few studies have used them exclusively to analyse IS's state-like performances and how they were used for propaganda purposes. Most studies have focused on IS's displays of violence in official videos while also analysing their propaganda style, and how they were used for recruitment purposes. This research plugs the gap by facilitating an extensive study of IS's 'performances of modern stateness' projected in 374 official governance-themed videos. The study takes this stance for the fact that IS invested heavily in terms of resources to produce high quality, slick videos that not just featured brutal acts of violence such as beheadings, executions, immolations, stonings and mass executions but also featured utopian portrayal of life inside the Caliphate, all for the purposes of showcasing governance. Scholars such as Atwan (2015), Weiss and Hassan (2015), and Stern and Berger (2015) consider videos as the crucial element in IS's propaganda machine that attracted thousands of men and women from all over the world to move and live under IS rule. The videos were produced by a professional and well-trained IS media department that reflected a sophisticated use of camera work, composition, lighting, editing, visual effects, and post-production techniques and resulted in video content that matched, or even surpassed, industry standards in terms of the file size, storytelling and video quality, "something that no terrorist group we know of has ever done before" (Robinson & Dauber, 2018, p. 14).

Conclusion

The review of existing literature on the 'State' aspect of IS and its State-like performances projected in its media products, such as images, print/online publications and videos, underscores academia's high interest in challenging IS's 'statehood' narrative while overlooking its 'performances of modern stateness'. It also confirms an over-emphasis on IS publications such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* magazine while overlooking its audio-visual materials (Al Dayel & Anfinson 2017; Cantey 2017; Colas 2016; Heck 2017; Ingram 2016a, 2016b; Novenario 2016; O'Halloran et al. 2016; Spencer 2017; Wignell et al. 2017; Wilbur 2017; Winkler et al. 2016). As a result, there are only a handful of studies on IS videos whose scope remains limited to assessing certain aspects, with much emphasis on violence[38], production quality[39], and propaganda style[40]. Moreover, very few studies have focused on tracing the ebb and flow of the Caliphate, especially its digital domain[41], from its inception in 2014 to its extinction in 2017. Last, this review highlights the dire need to further develop current research on IS's thematic content, with emphasis on its stateness and their projections in the propaganda videos.

The review also reveals that this project is the first of its kind that presents a comprehensive overview of the State aspect of IS with the help of its performances of modern stateness projected in official videos. While a number of studies – including two important ones by Anfinson (2020) and El Damanhoury (2020) respectively – have shed light on IS's displays of statehood as published in its

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[38] Studies by Winter (2014), Tinnes (2015), Barr & Herfroy-Mischler (2017), Auchter (2018), and Sweeney & Kubit (2020) primarily focused on the depiction of violence in IS videos, such as executions.

[39] Study by Robinson & Dauber (2018) researched IS videos' production quality.

[40] Studies by Dick (2019), Leander (2016), Venkatesh et al. (2018), Winkler & Pieslak (2018) analysed different aspects of propaganda in IS videos.

[41] Studies by Almohammad & Winter (2019), Lakomy (2017), Milton (2018), Munoz (2018), Nanninga (2019) and Winter (2015) assess the decline in IS's visual propaganda output based on certain time periods.

flagship Dabiq magazine, this thesis argues that the State aspect can be better understood by analysing its performances of modern stateness, and grounds itself in the visual analysis of official IS videos. This project is executed in an attempt to comprehensively address the key gaps identified above, that is, further in-depth exploration of the State aspect of IS, contextualising its State-like performances, while also making a contribution to the growing literature on visual analysis of IS's multimedia products, especially its videos.

3 : SEEING IS BELIEVING: CONCEPTS THAT EXPLAIN WHAT IS A STATE, AND WHY DO STATES 'STAGE' THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES OF MODERN STATENESS

Though IS always asserted to be a State since its inception in Iraq in 2006, its most audacious claim of being a State was made in early July 2014 when it declared the establishment of a Caliphate (a political and religious system of governance in Islam which is led by a Caliph) after capturing Mosul, Iraq's second city. Subsequently, it ruled over large swathes of Iraq and Syria with Mosul and Raqqa as its respective regional capitals until it was dismantled after the liberation of Mosul by US-led forces in July 2017. During its three-year long reign, IS bolstered its claim of being a State in a number of ways such as establishing territorial control and governing millions of people over significant territory, and demonstrating its ability to exercise sovereignty and authority within its self-declared Caliphate; managing administrative bodies and institutions to govern the areas under its control, and appointing governors, judges, and administrators to oversee various aspects of governance, such as justice, public services, and security; enforcing its own interpretation of Shariah including the implementation of Hudood (Islamic penal code) through courts, religious police (*Hisbah*), police forces (*Shortah*), intelligence apparatus (*Emni*) and other related bodies; utilising various symbols and imagery traditionally associated with the State such as currency, flag, identity cards, official seals, and others to project a state-like image; and running a sophisticated media campaign that comprised high-quality videos, magazines, photosets, radio stations, and other forms of multimedia to attract supporters, disseminate its message and legitimise its claims of being a State. This study considers these state-like acts, and many others, as performances of stateness and argues that IS projected them to achieve these two important goals:

first, to deliver proof of its existence as a State to its subjects home and supporters abroad; and second, to seek recognition from locals across its territory and emigrants from all over the world to help with statebuilding.

As explained in the introduction chapter, this thesis makes the case that IS wanted to be recognised as a state by its subjects and supporters in order to recruit them for statebuilding purposes and chose the route of 'stateness' to project itself as a modern state that is akin to others around the world but with the clear exception that it is ruled under *Shariah*. The literature review chapter highlighted that while a number of studies have questioned IS's state aspect by challenging its 'statehood' narratives, its performances of modern stateness have been overlooked so far with only a handful of studies that have analysed some aspects of its state-like performances. The review concluded that there remains a gap when it comes to comprehensively studying the state aspect of IS through its official videos, which this project seeks to address.

This chapter presents an in-depth explanation of the concepts related to the state-aspect of IS in order to validate the following four arguments: First, IS claimed to be a state and wanted to be recognised as one. Second, IS demonstrated it is meeting the four criteria of being a state, that is, the Montevideo Convention, not because it was interested in seeking a place within the international community (Grzybowski, 2023) as it involved obtaining recognition from other recognised states of the international community (Fabry, 2010), which would have compromised its extremist ideology. Instead, IS sought recognition from its subjects at home and supporters around the world by projecting itself as a modern state that is akin to other modern states around the world but with the clear exception that it is ruled under *Shariah*. Third, IS's state-like actions – defined in

the thesis as 'performances of modern stateness' and explained in detail below –
were projected to millions of people around the world, including its subjects at
home and supporters abroad, through its official videos in order to seek their
recognition as a state while also garnering support for statebuilding purposes. In
other words, the study posits that IS keenly demonstrated to its subjects and
supporters that it has met the conditions of being a state by projecting displays of
population, territory, government, and a capacity to enter into relations with other
states (read foreign policy), which is essentially the four criteria set under the 1933
Montevideo Convention for the Rights and Duties of States[42], without implicitly
making such a statement. And finally, the state-like performances IS projected in
its official videos should be treated as theatrical and not substantive due to the fact
that IS faced high public scrutiny while having to deal with low state capacity. This
notion is rooted in the reasoning that while all modern states engage in
performances of modern stateness, both substantive and theatrical, in order to
express and maintain their legitimacy and sovereignty in front of domestic and
international audiences (Ringmar, 2016), their performances depend on two major
factors, that is, state capacity and public scrutiny, based on which they tend to be
more substantive or theatrical (Ding, 2020). Additionally, this project also draws
attention to the 'staged' aspect of IS's theatrical performances – underlining the
fact that the state-like performances in IS propaganda videos were in all likelihood
carefully scripted, meticulously directed, and heavily edited by IS's media
operatives in order to project IS in a favourable light to its audiences, thus
broadcasting visual content that was not always reflective of reality.

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[42] The definition clause of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States specifies
that "[t]he political entity claiming to be a State must have (a) a permanent population; (b) a
defined territory; (c) a government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states." It
remains as the only internationally recognised framework that lays down the conditions on what
constitutes a State.

This chapter substantiates these arguments based on the following four hypothesis: First, historically, the bulk of statemaking in the West occurred as a result of warmaking, therefore, any geopolitical entity claiming to be a state that itself emerged from war and conflict can be described well by using Western concepts of state (and related terms). Second, there is a clear distinction between 'becoming a state' and 'attaining' statehood, and that Montevideo Convention is merely the criteria for the former. Third, any geopolitical entity claiming to be a state becomes a de facto state[43] by fulfilling the Montevideo Convention but does not attain statehood status until it demonstrates its independence and garners recognition from other states[44]. Fourth, statehood concerns the state's external attributes whereas stateness refers to its internal attributes, and therefore, sides of the same (state) coin, and that the Montevideo Convention – as the criteria for state – can be used to determine statehood or stateness but additional conditions apply. Fifth, any state's performances of stateness are both theatrical and substantive in nature. States could be performing one or the other more depending on the level of state capacity and public scrutiny. Moreover, theatrical performances by states can be/are staged as every state likes to project itself in a positive light.

What makes a state 'the State'?

This section starts with comprehensively answering the basic yet fundamental question: what is the 'State'? It then focuses on its basic attributes, provides historical background, offers an assessment of the concept of state in international law and complications around it, explores the role of warmaking on state,

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43 For example, Somaliland and Transnistria.
44 For example, Kosovo, which has been recognised by 101 UN member states as of 13 July 2023.

illuminates IS's conception of the state, and concludes with the explanation of why Westphalian state model can be used to assess IS's claim of being a state.

It has always been difficult to define the 'State' (Mitchell, 1991). Political scientists reckon states as the most important politico-territorial sub-divisions in the world. Yet, as a concept, the state remains somehow overlooked in political science, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, and is a source of considerable ambiguity (Robertson, 1985). International law scholar James Brierly argues that "the definition [of 'State'] would be difficult to establish and highly controversial," while conceding that "the word was commonly used in documents and speech, and its meaning had been understood without definition" (Crawford, 2006). Pierson (1996) calls the concept of the state 'notoriously slippery'. A glance at the international system reveals that all states are considered sovereign, independent, and equal, but differences become evident once various economic, geographical, and political factors are taken into consideration (Knight, 1992). Those states that exercise sovereignty form the basis of international society (James, 1986) and become part of major global organisations such as the United Nations, European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Northeast Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the World Bank, and others. While there is no question about the states' importance as organisers of territory and people, and vital contributors to the world economy, what remains ambiguous are the basic characteristics that make a state 'the State'.

It is important to consider this question because a lot of geopolitical literature that deals with the state simply assumes its basic criteria and attributes, and often conflates it with statehood. Scholars such as Buckholts (1966), Kasperson & Minghi (1969), Pounds (1972), Muir (1975), Bergman (1975), Norris & Haring

(1980), Short (1982), Dikshit (1982), Paddison (1983) and Mellor (1989), among others, describe the basic attributes of the state, albeit in an incomplete and fragmented manner (Knight, 1992). Political geographers such as Oppenheim (1955), Brierly (1963), Crawford (1979), Akehurst (1982), Shaw (1986), and Green (1987) discuss the qualities of statehood from an international law perspective but fall short of framing the fundamental qualities of the state in the first place (Knight, 1992).

Brief History of the State

Historically, the basic concept of state has always been associated with elements such 'control of territory, presence of population, functioning of government, and exercising of sovereignty by the ruler', and widely accepted by people not just in the West but also in other major non-Western societies such as the Chinese, Indian, and Islamic. For example, the foundations of the first ever established state in recorded history, a unified state known as the Qin Dynasty, was established once the emperor Ying Zheng took control over large swathes of central China and controlled a large population under a unified political system (Fukuyama, 2011). The earliest Indian states such as *Anga*, *Kuru*, *Magadha*, and *Panchala* "were fully sovereign entities that controlled defined territories and rules over relatively dense populations centred on urban areas" with a political system that centred around the *Rajas* (kings/princes) and *Sabhas* (tribal assemblies) (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 159). Similarly, while the foundations of the early Arab-Islamic state were laid by Muhammad after the conquest of Mecca in circa 630AD, it was during the era of Umayyad caliph Abd Al Malik ibn Marwan (685-705) that a political entity "maintained a standing army and police, extracted taxes from its subjects on a regular basis, maintained a bureaucracy to collect those taxes, administered justice and resolved disputes, and was capable of commissioning public works like grand

mosques" (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 194), thus, considered to be the first Arab and Islamic state by early Islamic history scholars. Moreover, all major Islamic empires in contemporary history – such as the Umayyad, Abbasid, Mamluk, Seljuk, and Ottoman – were considered a state in the first place because they possessed territory over which a considerable population resided who were ruled by a distinct system (often Shariah), and the ruler exercised sovereignty granted to them by 'God'.

Fundamental Attributes of the State

According to traditional theory, which is based on the reading of historical, political and legal literature, the existence of modern states depends on possession of the following attributes: first and foremost, territory; second, population; and third, government (Crawford, 2006, p. 94). In addition to these three features, German political scholar Max Weber contends that sovereignty is another important characteristic of a state (Newton & Van Deth, 2010). Each of these features are discussed below.

Territory: Territory, in the most simplest terms, can be described as an "area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state" (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2019). Cowen & Gilbert (2008, p. 16) describe territory as a bounded space that has had "something done to it" or "has been acted upon." In other words, "territory is the land that has been identified and claimed by a person or people" (Cowen & Gilbert, 2008, p. 16). It originates from Latin word *terra*, which means land in English (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Lachs (1980, pp. 9, 36) defines territory as "the physical foundation of state power in several dimensions" with power exercised in regard to its territory as "the most basic manifestation of a state's jurisdiction." Territoriality, on the other hand, bases itself on this bordered

space, or 'territory', to include and exclude people and things in order to establish communication, social control, and symbolic representation (Sack, 1986). Balibar (2004, p. 192) refers to territoriality as a process that socially and spatially assigns "identities for collective subjects within structures of power" and categorises them in a manner that "is possible only if other forms of the 'subject' are violently or peacefully removed, coercively, or voluntarily destroyed."

A state is outlined by its "exclusive jurisdiction over a delimited territory" and its sovereignty is defined by the "boundaries of their territorial competence" (Sahlins, 1989, p. 2–3). In other words, a state needs a defined territory where it can exclusively perform and display its activities though there is no necessity in international law for defined and demarcated boundaries. Important to underline here that 'territory' is the first major characteristic of the state (Ahram, 2017)." Tilly (1982, p. 3) defines the state as a "relatively centralised, differentiated organisation the officials of which more or less successfully claim control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a population inhabiting a large, contiguous territory" while Weber describes it as "the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a particular territory" (1919, p. 33). In essence, both Weber and Tilly conceptualise the state as a political organisation exercising absolute monopoly over physical violence within a particular territory.

For a state to exist, it must exercise control over a particular defined territory that is not shared with other states, though parts of its land boundaries may be in contention with other states. The state's territorial exclusivity includes particular land area; off-shore waters and portions of rivers, lakes, and canals along or through which international boundaries exist; control over the aerial space above

its territory; and unrestricted access to the subterranean areas over its territory such as rivers and lakes and the resources therein. Simply put, land is the essential component of the state to which all other attributes are secondary (Knight, 1992). The importance of territory is so essential that, according to Oppenheim (1955, p. 451), "a state without territory is not possible." While territory remains the critical component for any State's existence, it is meaningless without the presence of people. In other words, territory serves as the territorial frame upon which human societies live and seek sustenance, therefore, creating societies and using them for societal betterment (Knight, 1992).

The concept of the state as a territorial entity started taking shape during the 16th and 17th centuries (Koojimans, 2002) when it succeeded the *Res Publica Christiana* – the dominant form of Christian political order, also translated as the Christian Commonwealth (Nolan, 2006). The members of the *Res Publica Christiana* – united under the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope and run by a complex feudal system – were gradually replaced by a system of well-defined territorial entities that possessed a relatively high degree of central authority, that is, a sovereign (Hobach, et al., 2007). According to Koojimans (2002), the word sovereign originates from the Latin term *suprema potestas*, which translates to 'the highest authority' or 'supreme power', and refers to the state as the highest body of authority which does not draw its powers from other earthly figures such as the Pope or the Emperor, in contrast with the *Res Publica Christiana*. The transition from *Res Publica Christiana* to the contemporary system of states was formalised in 1648 when representatives of the major political powers in Europe assembled in the cities of Münster and Osnabrück and signed a series of peace treaties that became known as the 'Peace of Westphalia' (Birdsall, 2009). As a result of these peace treaties, a new political order which was based

upon the concept of a sovereign state ruled by a sovereign – referred to as 'Westphalian Sovereignty' – took root in central Europe.

The discoveries and innovations in cartography in the 17th century allowed the states to demarcate their borders with improved accuracy, thus granting them more control over their territory and taking the importance of territorial control to new heights. Increased authority over its territory enabled the state to expand the bureaucracy, which in turn helped them perform key tasks such as registering and monitoring the population, managing taxation, and centralising the use of (legitimate) violence through its police forces[45] (Hobach, et al., 2007). The consolidation of the state's territorial control led to the birth of '*Eigenthumstheorie*' – or property theory – where the territory is quite literally considered as its possession (Milano, 2006). However, the rise of nationalism in 18th and 19th century paved way for the '*Eigenschaftsstheorie*' – or attribute theory – where the territory is considered an attribute of the state and not its property. As a result, any claims to the territory of the state, or damage, is considered by the state as an assault on its sovereignty, thus leading to disputes and wars (Knight, 1992).

Population: The second most important criteria for a state to exist in traditional theory is the presence of people, that is, persons living together on its territory. Grotius (1646, p. 14) philosophically defines the state as "a complete association of free men, joined together for the enjoyment of rights and for their common interest." Vattel (1758), in a similar vein, describes states as "political bodies, societies of men who have united together and combined their forces, in order to

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[45] The word police comes from an old French word meaning "to govern". (O'Neil, 2018)

procure their mutual welfare and security." According to Newton and Van Deth (2010, p. 19), people can be described as a group "whose common consciousness and identity makes them a collective identity." Similar to most political concepts that have gained global understanding, the modern notion of the sovereign people has Western and classical origins. Along with *peuple* and *popolo*, 'people' is derived from the Latin word *popolus* meaning populace, normally plural, meaning a collection of specific individual people (Canovan, 2006). To be a people, the individuals concerned must have something in common.

Territory without people holds no meaning to the state as "without people there is no territory" (Knight, 1992, p. 313). Former US President Woodrow Wilson pointed out that modern definitions of the state "always limit sovereignty to some definite land" and subscribed to Bluntschli's definition which says that "[T]he state is the politically organised people (*Volkperson*) of a particular land" (Wilson, 1889, p. 9). Kelsen (1941, p. 44), agreeing with Wilson's assertion, describes the state as "the specific union of individuals, and this union is the function of the order which regulates their mutual behaviour."

Expanding on the notion that territory and people are an absolute must for the foundations of any state, Oppenheim (1955, p. 118) describes a permanent population as an aggregate of individuals that "live together as a community in spite of the fact that they may belong to different races or creeds, or be of different colour." However, to be considered as 'a people', the concerned individuals must share something in common such as a language, religion, history or culture – though such a 'uniting factor(s)' are highly contested (Newton & Van Deth, 2010, p. 19). According to Shany et al. (2014, p. 4), the requirement of a permanent population stems from the fact that "a state is a means of realising the shared

aspirations of groups that have united due to cultural, religious, historical or other characteristics they have in common."

The state requires a permanent population to exist and function not just because "without people there is no territory" (Knight, 1992, p. 313) but it is the realisation of the shared cultural, religious, historical and other aspirations of its population that brings the state together and shapes a national identity. While there is no threshold of a minimum number of nationals necessary for a state to exist, it is necessary that its permanent population identifies itself as citizens of the state (Knight, 1992) and are bound together through common political aspirations, known as national identity (O'Neil, 2018, p. 68).

Government: The third important criteria of state in traditional theory is the existence of a government. A state needs the ability to act as the primary authority over its territory and the population living there by passing and enforcing laws, defining and protecting rights, resolving disputes between people and organisations, maintaining law and order, and providing security to its citizens. The set of institutions tasked with performing these responsibilities is known as the government (O'Neil, 2018). Max Weber describes the government as the actor or institution that must "monopolise the legitimate use of physical force" on behalf of the state in order to avoid the danger of anarchy and lawlessness, and its ultimate collapse (Newton & Van Deth, 2010).

Governance, on the one hand, is described by Fukuyama (2013, p. 350) as "a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not." At a basic level, governance can be characterised as "decisions issued by one actor that a second is expected to

obey" and refers to the control of social interactions by both state and non-state

actors (Kahler and Lake 2004, 409). Some definitions, for example those based on

the World Bank (2000) guidebook, focus on technical government functions, and

evaluate governance based on factors such as economic policy-making and

implementation, delivery of services, and accountability of public resources and

power. USAID, on the other hand, defines governance as the government's ability

"to develop an efficient, effective, and accountable public management process

that is open to citizen participation and that strengthens rather than weakens a

democratic system of government" (Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 5). Meanwhile, the

United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID, 2001, p. 11)

describes governance as how different "institutions, rules and systems of the state

– executive, legislature, judiciary, and military – operate at central and local level

and how the state relates to individual citizens, civil society and the private sector."

On the other hand, the term 'government' has a more formal meaning, generally

referring to "a substantial, durable, bounded organisation that exercises control

over the major concentrated means of coercion within some territory" (Tilly, 2003,

p. 9). O'Neil (2010, p. 25) defines government with an interesting analogy: "If the

state is the machinery of politics, and the regime its programming, then the

government acts as its operator." Rosenau (1992, p. 4) further explains that

"governance is a more encompassing phenomenon than government. It embraces

governmental institutions, but it also subsumes informal, non-governmental

mechanisms, whereby those persons and organisations within its purview move

ahead, satisfy their needs, and fulfil their wants." He sums up by saying that

"governance is a system of rule that only works if it is accepted by the majority (or,

at least, by the most powerful of those it affects), whereas governments can

function even in the face of widespread opposition to their policies" (Rosenau,

1992, pp. 4, 5). In other words, Rosenau refers to lack of governance as 'anarchy or

chaos' while regards an ineffective government as simply 'weak'. While international law is clear on its requirement that a state be run by an effective government it does not mention any preferred form of governance. Per Shany, et al. (2014, p. 6), "both a democratic government and a dictatorial government can equally meet the requirement of effective government" as long as the ruling entity exercises authority over the territory by, for example, collecting taxes, maintaining law and order, and providing public services.

This project demonstrates in the governance case study that IS's government was based on a modern (Western) nation-state model, which broadly accorded all of the above conceptualisations and consisted of three levels. First, at the foundational level, comprised a structure of rule and authority – a system of political and social institutions, such as civil service and judiciary, that generated and implemented authoritative political decisions. At the mid-level, public services ensured the creation of economic stability, provision of public health, education, and preserving of clean environment. And at the tertiary level existed a security apparatus which was responsible for providing internal and external security to its citizens while maintaining monopoly over the means of violence.

Sovereignty: Besides the criteria of having territory, population and government for a state to exist, traditional theory also attaches importance to attributes such as sovereignty and argues that for a state to perform its basic duties with competence and ability, it should be able to exercise independently its functions without any external interference. Newton & Van Deth describe sovereignty as the highest power that the state possesses within its own territory, which means that it is independent and not under the authority of another state or 'community'" (2010, p. 20). However, they add that this does not imply that the state is above the law

but is subject to the rules of a constitution (Newton & Van Deth, 2010). Crawford refers to sovereignty as "in its origin merely the location of supreme power within a particular territorial unit (*suprema potestas*), [that] necessarily came from within and did not require the recognition of other states or princes" (2006, p. 12).

According to Brown (2008, p. 108), sovereignty means that "a state can legitimately sanction the use of force or violence in its own territory," while Kwiecień (2011) believes that full sovereignty is only achieved when a state has the full capacity to perform legal transactions in the international arena, enjoys the protection of the legal status of a state, and abides by the 'mandatory standards' that prohibit states from taking certain actions against others in their bilateral relations. Crawford has a slightly different take on sovereignty and describes it as "the totality of international rights and duties recognised by international law as residing in an independent territorial unit – the State" (2006, p. 32). Political thinkers, such as Hobbes and Bodin, though accept that the origin and foundations of nations "lie in force and violence," insist that "sovereignty is not just about power and force but also about authority, legality, and legitimacy" (Simpson, 2008, p. 42). Gramsci also says that any state whose sovereignty entirely relies over the monopoly of violence does not stand on the sufficient ground of the right to exist and may disintegrate (Slomp, 2008).

Sovereignty, as famously described by American political scientist Stephen Krasner, "has always been a form of organised hypocrisy" partly due to the fact that "sovereignty is inextricable from international hierarchy" (Ahram & Lust, 2016). Sovereignty, according to K. J. Holsti, "helps create states; maintains their integrity when under threat from within or without; and guarantees their continuation and prevents their death" (Ahram, 2019, p. 8). As a result, certain

situations rise where some states are more equal than others despite the fact that all states are presumed equal under international laws (Lake, 2003).

Ever since the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the concept of state sovereignty features prominently in IR studies. State sovereignty includes two distinct domains: 'domestic' or 'internal' sovereignty, wherein it acts as it wishes within its own territory, and is independent of other powers. Stephen Krasner describes 'domestic sovereignty' as "the formal organisation of political authority within the State and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control within the borders of their own polity" (Krasner, 1999, p. 4); 'external sovereignty', which is most often linked with the fact that the state is recognised as a state by other states. Crawford describes both domains of sovereignty as follows:

> *"The internal sovereignty of a State does not, in any degree, depend upon its recognition by other States. A new State, springing into existence, does not require the recognition of other States to confirm its internal sovereignty . . . The external sovereignty of any State, on the other hand, may require recognition by other States in order to render it perfect and complete . . . [I]f it desires to enter into that great society of nations . . . such recognition becomes essentially necessary to the complete participation of the new State in all the advantages of this society. Every other State is at liberty to grant, or refuse, this recognition . . ."*
> *(2006, p. 9).*

Concept of State in International Law

Given the state's central role in IR, it would seem reasonable to believe that a clear and codified definition of state exists in international law. Yet there exists no central definition in international law that defines what constitutes a state.

Georges Scelle, an international jurist and member of the United Nations

International Law Commission (ILC), was so frustrated by the ambiguity that

during its inaugural session in New York in 1949 he declared that despite been

active in international law for more than fifty years, "he still did not know what a

state was and he felt sure that he would not find out before he died. He was

convinced that the Commission could not tell him" (Weissberg, 1961, p. 194). His

frustration is understandable as attempts to agree on an acceptable definition of

the state in international law later on were stonewalled by different countries for a

variety of reasons. One such attempt of defining the state, tabled in 1955 by Sir

Gerald Fitzmaurice, UK's representative at the ILC, suggested the following:

> *"For the purposes of the present Code (a) In addition to the case of entities*
>
> *recognised as being states on special grounds, the term 'state'*
>
> *(i) means an entity consisting of a people inhabiting a defined territory,*
>
> *under an organised system of government, and having the capacity to*
>
> *enter into international relations binding the entity as such, either directly*
>
> *or through some other state; but this is without prejudice to the question of*
>
> *the methods by, or channel through which a treaty on behalf of any given*
>
> *state must be negotiated—depending on its status and international*
>
> *affiliations; (ii) includes the government of the State." (ILC, 1956, p. 107)*

But even this attempt to clearly define the state was abandoned with the ILC

noting the following in its commentary on Draft Articles:

> *"The term 'state' is "used . . . with the same meaning as in the Charter of the*
>
> *UN, the Statute of the Court, the Geneva Convention on the Law of the Sea*
>
> *and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations: that is, it means a*
>
> *state for the purposes of international law" (ILC, 1966, pp. 178, 192).*

Notice that the latter definition defaults to the meaning of the term 'state' used in the UN Charter as well as other conventions of international law without removing the term's ambiguities in the first place. Drafts tabled later by the ILC also failed to define the term much to the frustration over issues related to state succession, which according to Crawford (2006, p. 44), is due to the reason that not being "a state is to be denied independent access to those forums that states – themselves or through international organisations – still control". In other words, it gives existing states more leverage over newly emerging states when it comes to determine the latter's powers, rights and obligations [briefly explain why the definitions differed from one another]. The matter of formally defining states and their recognition (statehood) has remained on the ILC agenda since its inaugural session in 1949 but little progress has been made on the issue ever since.

Role of War in Historical Statemaking

After explaining the brief history of the state, describing its essential attributes, and illuminating the reasons behind the lack of a clear definition of state in international law, this sub-section first describes the definition of statemaking, sheds light on the part war has played in the history of statemaking in the West, and makes case for why the Western concepts of state aptly describe the Islamic State.

Statemaking is the process by which a state comes into being and establishes its authority over a territory and its people. It is a complex and multifaceted process that involves a variety of factors, including war, conquest, diplomacy, and economic development (Lemke, 2019). The emergence of the modern developmental state has been considered a 19th and 20th century phenomenon (Pincus & Robinson, 2016). While there is a general disagreement among scholars

about the causes of that emergence, consensus remains that the end of Napoleonic Wars was the period when the development of the modern state began as states all across Europe finally recognised the importance of improving the conditions of the vast majority of their populations. Prior to the 19th century, historic accounts suggest that states operated as narrow fiscal-military enterprises that were engaged in fighting wars and extracting resources to fight more wars. Many of these entities were pre-modern states who came into existence sometime between the 15th and 18th century right across Europe and were indifferent to the living conditions of their subjects. According to most accounts, states were occupied with interstate conflicts and depended on fighting wars to survive and develop (Pincus & Robinson, 2016). It is in reference to this period Charles Tilly (1975, p. 42) famously suggested: "War made the state, and the state made war." He later elaborated that "war wove the European network of national states and preparation for war created the internal structures of the states within it" (Tilly, 1990, p. 42). All economists, economic and fiscal historians, political scientists and sociologists agree that only those states that developed a strong capacity emerged as victors from this intense period of incessant warfare while the rest perished (Bonney & Ormrod, 1999).

While wars have taken numerous other forms in various civilisations around the world, in some cases to preserve state-like entities, it has served as "an instrument of state policy" and is seen as "a relatively new form of organised violence" (Holsti, 1996, p. 1). The main purpose of violence – with plunder, predation and glory among its main by-products – for the past three and a half centuries has been primarily to advance and/or to protect the interests of the state and almost always waged for political reasons. The Clausewitzian conception of war is summarised in his famous dictum: "war is a continuation of politics by other means" (Holsti,

1996, p. 2). As armed conflicts often lead to uncontrolled total violence – in line with Holsti's definition "war is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds – states maintain an army to protect and advance the interests of the state, especially its diplomatic interests (Holsti, 1996, p. 2). Those armies are tasked with a range of duties – from territorial defence to expanding the sovereign's empire. Tilly (1982) refers to this physical force as the military organisation, or army, whose task is to stand up to the challenges of eliminating/neutralising the state's internal and external enemies and secure its territory, borders and citizens. Conclusively, in the contemporary world a warmaking apparatus, that is, a regular army, is the apparatus needed for statemaking.

Tilly contends that states use organised violence characteristically to conduct the following four activities: First, warmaking which involves "eliminating or neutralising their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force". Second, statemaking which involves "eliminating or neutralising their rivals inside those territories". Third, protection which involves "eliminating or neutralising the enemies of their clients". And lastly, extraction which involves "acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities: warmaking, statemaking, and protection" (1984, p. 15). He adds that while the four mentioned activities take place through different forms, such as, extraction which ranges from outright plunder through regular tribute to bureaucratised taxation, "all four depend on the state's tendency to monopolise the concentrated means of coercion" (Tilly, 1984, p. 16). In all, territory – and in its wider extension, territoriality – which constitutes as a key feature of sovereignty in the modern state system, is acquired and maintained on the basis of monopolising the means to violence and coercion for which a state needs a 'physical force.'

IS's Warmaking for Statemaking Purposes

In order to conceptually accommodate the use of organised violence by IS towards the international order to preserve its sovereignty, it is pertinent to consider Kochi's suggestion which expands the concept of war to include not only conflict between sovereigns but also conflict about sovereignty. It can be argued that the term 'Partisan[46]' also describes IS best when it comes to warmaking for the sake of statemaking and vice versa. According to Schmitt, the Partisan "is a political, rather than a criminal actor" whose "purpose is not personal enrichment, but the establishment of a new, different public order" (Behnke, 2012, p. 194). Kochi, based on Schmitt's description of the Partisans, explains the following:

> *"These Partisans are completely modern, they view their acts of violence as that which will destroy an old legal order and through which a new order will emerge: they wish to posit, raise up and create a new human order through action, and if necessary, through violence." (Kochi, 2009, p. 213)*

It is important to note that in the contest for sovereignty, violence is the only available mode to the Partisan, who never distinguishes between legal and political violence. As a result, the Partisan "exposes that all sovereign and therefore legitimate power rests on political violence" (Behnke, 2012, p. 194). The Partisan, cognisant of the fact that "many, if not all, political orders have been founded, and maintained themselves, through terror in its different guises" (Behnke, 2012, p. 194), uses it for the enactment of its sovereignty. The recognisability of the Partisan – IS in this case – "and the claim to sovereign status that affects the violence do not depend on the precisely identifiable source of the order, but on the nature and extremeness of the violence" (Behnke, 2012, p. 197). Considering 'non-

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46 Oxford English Dictionary defines partisan as "a strong supporter of a party, cause, or person."

sovereign' war to be the equivalent to 'terrorism' (Kochi, 2009), it can be argued that the Caliphate was founded, and existed for three years, through the violent enactment of sovereignty, which included the use of terrorism in Iraq and Syria or by one of its affiliates as well as operatives around the world. As described earlier, 'territory' of a state is connected with 'terra,' that is, the earth or land on which it exists. Yet Connolly (1995, p. xxii) points out to the Oxford English Dictionary (2008) definition which suggests that the word 'territory' is derived from *terrere*, that is, to frighten, with territory being "a place from which people are warned off." Therefore, terrorism can be defined as "the sublime brilliance of sovereignty in which enemies are made," (Behnke, 2012, p. 196) in which IS proves itself to be more than just a mere criminal organisation. Interestingly enough, Osama bin Laden also defended the use of terrorism by Al Qaeda organisation – IS's predecessor as well as rival – as part of their overall strategy. In an interview with the American network ABC, the Saudi-born Jihadi icon explained:

> *[T]errorism can be commendable and it can be reprehensible. Terrifying an innocent person and terrorising him is objectionable and unjust, also unjustly terrorising people is not right. Whereas, terrorising oppressors and criminals and thieves and robbers is necessary for the safety of people and for the protection of their property. There is no doubt in this. Every state and every civilisation and culture has to resort to terrorism under certain circumstances for the purpose of abolishing tyranny and corruption. Every country in the world has its own security system and its own security forces, its own police and its own army. They are all designed to terrorise whoever even contemplates to attack that country or its citizens. The terrorism we practice is of the commendable kind for it is directed at the tyrants and the aggressors and the enemies of Allah, the tyrants, the traitors who commit acts of treason against their own*

countries and their own faith and their own prophet and their own nation. Terrorising those and punishing them are necessary measures to straighten things and to make them right. (Frontline: "Hunting Bin Laden", 1998)

IS, considering Osama Bin Laden as the spiritual father of modern-day jihad and themselves as "the rightful inheritor" of his legacy (Al Hayat Media, 2014), used both war and terrorism for statemaking purposes and, in extension, to carve its own 'sovereign' status. According to Hegel, war plays a productive role in the international system where it produces and re-affirms the ethical-political community that organises itself within a state (Behnke, 2012). War, as described by Nancy, is the 'Event par excellence': "the Event that suspends and reopens the course of history, the sovereign event. Our kings, generals, and philosophers have only ever thought of it this way" (Nancy, 2000, p. 107). It can be argued that both Al Qaeda, and its rival IS, think of it in this way, too.

Unlike the Westphalian system which considers sovereign state as the most powerful and legitimate form of political unity and its control over territory to be the condition for statehood, the Islamic system considers *Shariah* (Islamic law), *Hakim* (the ruler), and the *Ummah* (Muslim nation) as the three main elements of an Islamic State, examples of which can be a caliphate or Emirate (Kennedy, 2016). Any claimant of Islamic statehood that misses these elements is considered earthly and un-Islamic, and as a result, not worthy of recognition. However, all Islamic states that ever existed in history did meet the fundamental criteria of territory, population, government, and sovereignty before their claims of statehood were taken seriously by their subjects and historians alike. The account presented below also demonstrates that IS's Caliphate came into existence when they

exercised sovereignty over a population that resided within a certain territory and was governed under IS's own laws.

After successfully driving out Iraqi security forces from the country's second city, Mosul, on 1 Ramadan 1435[47], corresponding 28 June 2014, IS declared the establishment of a Caliphate with inspiration behind the move based on the divinely inspired State founded by Prophet Muhammad in 622 (Burden, 2018). After his death in 632AD, Muhammad was succeeded by Abu Bakr as his successor, *Khalifah*, which in Arabic means caliph, deputy, vicegerent or successor. Abu Bakr was succeeded by Omar who assumed the title *Amir Al Mu'mineen* (leader of the faithful). He practically founded the first *Khilafah* (caliphate) which later continued in one form or the other until the collapse of Ottoman Empire in 1922. According to Lambton (2006), Islam – like Judaism and Christianity – believes in the divine origin of government. Interestingly, while the concept of state in Western world has been clearly separate from the concept of church, early Muslims had no word for state in literal sense in that they saw themselves as part of an *Ummah* (Muslim nation), bound together in a *Millah* (religious community), and governed by a person such as a *Khalifah* (caliph), *Emir* (ruler), *Imam* (spiritual leader) or *Malik* (king). Though theoretically speaking, the concept of state for Muslims was born the day when Prophet Muhammad received the word of God in a visit from Gabriel, God's arch-angel in 610 AD (Lambton, 2006; Doak, 2005).

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[47] The Islamic calendar was devised by Caliph Omar in 638 AD. Its epoch was chosen as 16 July, 622 AD marking the emigration of Prophet Muhammad and his companions to Medina. It is a lunar calendar with 354 days, 11 days fewer than the solar year (Lunde, 2021).

While the call for creating a caliphate in former territories of the Ottoman Empire was not unique, IS became the first Jihadi group that actually established a territorial caliphate, which was unlike previous failed state projects led by Jihadi groups in countries such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia, The Philippines, Yemen, and others (Lia, 2015). In another break from other Jihadi organisations in contemporary history, IS in its title bears the claims of being 'Islamic and State', both at the same time, and set upon founding a Caliphate, which was designed to function like any 21st century state in terms of functionality – taking and holding territory and everything within (Mecham, 2015). It also sought to establish a modern de facto state which rivalled the existing world order where it sets its own rules of statehood and performs modern stateness by "implementing true Islamic law in areas where it rules" (Byman, 2016, p. 136), thus setting itself upon a grand ambition which has never been undertaken by any other Jihadi organisation in recent history.

Instead of proclaiming an Emirate (Arabic for principality) or Imamate (political entity ruled by an imam), IS's earliest iteration came in October 2006 in the form of an Islamic state, entitled the 'Islamic State of Iraq' (ISI), with the intention to "govern and build the foundation of a Caliphate" (Fishman, 2021, p. 59). ISI merely existed as a 'paper state' since its formation, and in early 2010 became almost non-existent due to the joint US-Iraqi tribal forces' operations that eliminated its top leadership and command structure (McCants, 2016). It resurfaced again under the leadership of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi once the civil war broke out in Syria in late 2011 (McCants, 2016). In April 2013, it forcibly merged Syrian Jihadi outfit Jabhat Al Nusra with itself and announced the creation the

'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria' (ISIS[48]) (Fishman, 2021). Some reports also suggest that ISIS established the 'Emirate of Azaz' after capturing the northern Syrian town in September 2013 from Northern Storm Brigade and publicised itself as the 'promised project of the Caliphate' (Al Tamimi, 2015), though it is hard to imagine that ISIS simultaneously functioned as a State and an Emirate. Explaining IS's preference for a Caliphate as compared to other forms of Islamic states, Lia asserts that the Caliphate – as opposed to an Emirate – has a higher threshold in that it is a "full-fledged state with a multi-million size civilian population" and for this very reason the Jihadis "view every action they take as relevant for the ultimate goal of a powerful Caliphate ruling the Muslim world" (2015, p. 32) – a goal which is imprinted in IS's territorial expansion roadmap. In other words, Caliphate is the highest form of existence of any Islamic state, and for IS, their declaration was a confirmation that it "has fulfilled all the conditions for *Khilafah* mentioned by the scholars" on those basis announced the "establishment of the Islamic *Khilafah*, [and] the appointment of a *Khalifah* for the Muslims" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2014). This study treats the Caliphate as a form of the Islamic state, and notes that at times IS used *Dawlah* and *Khilafah* interchangeably in its official propaganda, including videos, and the same convention is followed here.

After rebranding itself from ISIS to the 'Islamic State of the Caliphate' or simply the 'Islamic State' (IS), Muslims around the world were urged to recognise the emergence of a truly Islamic state and rush to join their project, which was based on their (Muslims') understanding and aspirations of a modern, 21st century state. This case was made in the very first issue of IS's flagship *Dabiq* magazine, where

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[48] IS's former name in Arabic stood as *Ad Dawlat Al Islamiyyah fil Iraq wa Ash Shām* (الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام), which means both the "Islamic State of Iraq and Levant" (ISIL) and the "Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria" (ISIS) (Barrett, 2014).

excerpts from a commentary entitled "State of Jihad: The Reality of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" were quoted. Co-written by Douglas A. Ollivant, former Director for Iraq at the US National Security Council, and Brian Fishman, former Director of Research for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, and published on War on the Rocks website (2014), the article said:

> *"The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is no longer a State in name only. It is a physical, if extra-legal, reality on the ground. Unacknowledged by the world community, ISIS has carved a de facto state in the borderlands of Syria and Iraq." (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 17)*

The authors emphasise that while 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 group "does not have safe haven within a state. It is a de facto state that is a safe haven" (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 32). By publishing the said 'words of the enemy' in the English-language magazine, IS underlined three important points: first, an acknowledgement of its status as a (de facto) state; second, its functioning as a state, which holds territory, provides services and dispenses justice, has its own army and flies its own flag; and third, it is no more a group within a state but a 'State' on its own.

However, IS did not project itself as identical to all other modern states – including Islamic states such as Iran, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia – but insisted that it fulfilled all the constituent elements of a Caliphate, with Caliph Ibrahim (Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi) possessing all the necessary qualifications of a caliph, and having the authority to invalidate the legitimacy of "all Emirates, groups, administrations, and organisations," that do not accept his supreme authority (Bunzel, 2015, p. 31). This was done because IS feared that further emphasis on its

state-like characteristics might be perceived as its intention of recognising and integrating into the Westphalian system, which is based on the principle in international law that each state has exclusive sovereignty over its territory, and is "secular, pluralistic, and procedural in nature" (Delahunty, 2018, p. 14). In other words, IS's explicit acceptance of the Westphalian system would have meant that it was willing to curb its ambitious territorial expansion plans and respects the sovereignty of other states, which were clearly against its goals, as will be demonstrated in the empirical chapters while also nullifying its extremist ideology in the process.

As outlined in the literature review, academics have seen the existence of IS in different capacities ranging from non-state actor[49] to proto-state[50] to a terrorist semi-state[51]. Others have termed IS a revolutionary state[52] and even conceded that it "fulfils the requirements for a sovereign state and, more so, represents itself as a righteous and powerful State" (Ille & Mansour, 2015, p. 22). Important to note is the fact that the term 'state' is the common denominator here and it is its different types that scholars describe IS as and offer their reasons behind such classification. The major reason why IS has been perceived in some capacity of state is because it conquered territory that was inhabited by a large population and ruled over it under own form of government, therefore essentially fulfilling the very basic conditions attached to the concept of modern state. Moreover, the use of the term state in their official name 'Islamic State' implies they are a state and engaged in statebuilding business.

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[49] (Jacoby, 2021)
[50] (Winkler & El Damanhoury, 2022)
[51] (Honig & Yahel, 2017)
[52] (Walt, 2015)

Therefore, based on fact that population, territory, government, and sovereignty are the common denominators between the ancient Chinese, Indian, Islamic or European states, and the modern states under the Westphalian system, and that IS itself came into existence after fulfilling the criteria, albeit in different capacities, it is very important that its claim of being a state be adjudicated under the same criteria.

Montevideo Convention – The Criteria for Being a State or Attaining Statehood Status?

This section provides an extensive review of the Montevideo Convention and argues that being an internationally accepted framework any geopolitical entity claiming to be a state first needs to fulfil it and only then its claim of being a state can be treated seriously by other states. Additionally, it takes into account two other criteria attached to Montevideo Convention, that is independence and recognition, and explains why statehood is conditional upon achieving them all together. It concludes with an illustration of the reasons behind IS's rejection of the modern concept of statehood, and the type of recognition they sought from their subjects and supporters for statebuilding purposes.

International Criteria for Becoming a State

Despite the absence of a clear definition of what constitute state and statehood, international law does provide an 'objective' criteria for state attaining of which helps bestow the status of statehood. Based on the 'principle of territorial effectiveness,' meaning the existence of effective control over a given territory, the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933) is widely accepted as the definition of a state. The Montevideo Convention's Article 1 declares: "The State as a person of international law should possess the following

qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with other States." It was based on this framework that the Arbitration Commission of the European Conference on Yugoslavia in Opinion No. 1 concluded that "the State is commonly defined as a community which consists of a territory and a population subject to an organised political authority' and that 'such a state is characterised by sovereignty" (Murphy & Stăncescu, 2017, pp. 7-8). Before examining the criteria for statehood below, it should be noted here that the Montevideo Convention was primarily intended for assessing the creation of new states and not for evaluating the continuation of existing states (Hobach, et al., 2007, p. 166). The following explanation of Montevideo Convention's four criteria is based on international legal interpretations, and not the general understanding and background of the state as laid out in the previous section.

Permanent population: The existence of a permanent population is a natural requirement for state, as described in the previous section. However, there is no criteria relating to the size of population (Shaw, 2008). In the eyes of international law, Tuvalu, with a population of around 10,000 inhabitants, is as much a state as China, which has a population of over one billion. According to the UN Charter's Statement, international law is said to concern 'people' in that "all people have the right to self-determination" where the term 'people' generally refers to the whole 'people' of a state, and not to a specific group within it. Also, population must have a link to territory, for a people are said to be the total population of the total area of the state territory. International law grants paramountcy "to the population of the total state over parts of either the population or territory within" (Knight, 1992, p. 313), and does not preclude statehood based on the presence of refugees or the

existence of nomadic people moving in, around or outside of the territory (Raič, 2002).

Oppenheim (1955, p. 118) describes permanent population as an aggregate of individuals from distinct ethnic, racial or religious background living together as a community. However, what exactly constitutes "a people – language, religion, a common history, a culture – is a highly contested matter" (Newton & Van Deth, 2010, p. 19). According to Shany, Cohen & Mimran, the requirement of a permanent population stems from the fact that "a state is a means of realising the shared aspirations of groups that have united due to cultural, religious, historical or other characteristics they have in common" (2014, p. 4). They add that the Montevideo Convention has no threshold of a minimum number of nationals necessary for a state but should identify themselves as the citizens of the nation and exercise their rights of citizenship – which in other words can be described as society. In a broader context, society can be defined as a complex human organisation, which "is a collection of people bound by shared institutions that define how human relations should be conducted" (O'Neil, 2010, p. 47). The way individuals define themselves and their relationship to one another, as well as their relationship to government and the state that makes them, differs from country to country and place to place, and is one of the reasons that makes societies worldwide different and unique (O'Neil, 2010).

Defined territory: A state needs a defined territory where it can exclusively display its activities, though there is no necessity in international law for defined and demarcated boundaries. According to Crawford (2006, p. 48), "a new state may exist despite claims to its territory, just as an existing state continues despite such claims." This statement can be explained by two different scenarios: first, where

the claim involves the entire territory of a new state; secondly, where it involves the boundaries of the state. Israel is one such entity, the entire existence of which as a state is opposed by some parties and its exact boundaries disputed by others. Nevertheless, Israel was admitted to the United Nations on 11 May 1949. US Ambassador to the UN, Philip Jessup, supporting Israel's admission to UN, had this to say on that occasion:

> *"One does not find in the general classic treatment of this subject any insistence that the territory of a State must be exactly fixed by definite frontiers . . .The formulae in the classic treatises somewhat vary, . . . but both reason and history demonstrate that the concept of territory does not necessarily include precise delimitation of the boundaries of that territory. The reason for the rule that one of the necessary attributes of a State is that it shall possess territory is that one cannot contemplate a State as a kind of disembodied spirit . . . [T]here must be some portion of the earth's surface which its people inhabit and over which its Government exercises authority. No one can deny that the State of Israel responds to this requirement." (Crawford, 2006, p. 48)*

Therefore, it can be argued that international law takes into consideration "the presence of a stable community within a certain area, even though its frontiers may be uncertain" (Shaw, 2008, p. 200) with the only requirement that the state "must consist of a certain coherent territory effectively governed" – a principle that suggests "the requirement of territory is rather a constituent of government and independence than a distinct criterion of its own" (Crawford, 2006, p. 52).

Government: In the simplest terms, the elite, and/or, leadership in charge of running the state are described as the government (O'Neil, 2018). The existence of

a permanent population on a defined territory needs some form of government to function reasonably effectively and solidify its credentials for statehood. Thus, it can be strongly argued that government is "the most important single criterion of statehood, since all the others depend upon it" (Crawford, 2006, p. 56). A government has a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force within a state (Newton & Van Deth, 2010).

There are two important sides to the criterion of government: First, the government must exist as "an institutionalised political, administrative and executive organisational machinery for the purpose of regulating the relations in the community and charged with the task of upholding the rules" (Raič, 2002, p. 62); Second, the government "must actually exercise state authority over the claimed territory and the people residing in that territory" (Raič, 2002, p. 62). While the existence of a government that is capable of exercising independent and effective authority over the population and territory is required for the existence of a state, it is not a precondition for recognition and entry into the international community (Shaw, 2008). Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, two Balkan states that emerged after the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991, were recognised as independent countries by the European Community (EC) member states on 15 January 1992 and 6 April 1992 respectively and became members of the United Nations – under Article 4 of the UN Charter – despite the fact that both the states were undergoing a civil war and substantial swathes of their territories were not under their effective control. More recently, South Sudan was granted independence by Sudan on 9 July 2011 following a referendum and the international community moved to recognise the newly formed state despite the fact that it had a weak government that was deeply divided along tribal lines, poor infrastructure, and disputed borders along with other existential crises (Reuters,

2011). According to Shaw (2008, p. 201), while effective control by the central authorities in an independent state is required for statehood, the collapse of governance within a state does not necessarily undermine the state's claim to statehood or affects its statehood title. Countries such as Afghanistan, Lebanon and Somalia suffered from prolonged periods of civil war when the effectiveness of the government was severely paralysed but these situations did not have any effect on their statehood status. At the same time, there are also instances in contemporary history where the state's quest for statehood was rejected by denying international recognition and membership of the UN despite the government's effective control over the population and territory. Entities such as Abkhazia, Kosovo, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Somaliland, South Ossetia, Taiwan, Transnistria, and Western Sahara are examples of de facto states whose statehood status is disputed as they have not been able to receive unanimous recognition from the international community. Therefore, it can be argued that while the government's sway over the population and territory are considered as important factors that consolidate its statehood laurels, they are neither exhaustive nor immutable provisions, and other major factors, such as independence and recognition by the international community, decide the state's statehood status.

Capacity to Enter into Relations with Other States:

Capacity to enter into relations with other states is the fourth criterion of the Montevideo Convention, which according to Simpson (2008, p. 52) means that "states will recognise other states and diplomatic relations can begin." While it is not a requirement for a territorial entity to already have relations with existing states in order to be a state, what is required of them is to rather have the 'capacity' to enter into such relations (Radan, 2019). In order for states to enter into

relations with other states they must attain the administrative capability to engage with others, that is, have some form of government – and in some cases – seek recognition as a state (Simpson, 2008).

While a state may claim to have both the government and administrative capacity to enter into relations with other states, many existing states may not be willing "to enter into relations with the entity in question" (Raič, 2002, p. 73). Therefore, the emphasis must be put on the term 'capacity' as advocated by the American Law Institute: "[a]n entity is not a State unless it has competence, within its own constitutional system, to conduct international relations with other States, as well as the political, technical, and financial capabilities to do so" (1987, p. 73). According to Crawford, while the capacity to enter into relations with other states at the international level is no longer an "exclusive state prerogative" because "states pre-eminently possess that capacity" as a result of proclaiming statehood, it still serves as a useful condition "since such capacity is independent of its recognition by other states and of its exercise by the entity concerned" (2006, p. 61).

The capacity to enter into relations with other states is the fourth but also the least important criterion of the Montevideo Convention (Shany, et al., 2014). It has also been described as problematic by leading international law scholars, such as Crawford, who described it as "not a criterion, but rather a consequence, of statehood, and one which is not constant but depends on the status and situation of particular states" (2006, p. 61), which is also agreed upon by Delupis (1994, p. 43) who also argues that "[capacity] is, in effect, a consequence, rather than a condition of statehood." However, the Article 3 of Montevideo Convention clearly declares that "the political existence of the State is independent of recognition by

the other States" (Klabbers J., 2016, p. 4). Due to abstruse nature and interpretation of this criterion, the contemporary interpretation stands as 'independence' from other states (Crawford, 2006, p. 62), which, in turn is dependent upon "whether the territorial entity's government is independent" (Radan, 2019, p. 51). Case in point is the *Island of Palmas Case* (1928, p. 838) where it was ruled that "independence in regard to a portion of the globe is the right to exercise therein, to the exclusion of any other state, the functions of a state." However, states – recognised or otherwise – may put pressure on each other to coerce them into adopting or rejecting a desirable course of action because "if that [was] the meaning of independence, very few states would exist today" (Raič, 2002, p. 75). In other words, the capacity to enter into relations with other states as a practical fourth criterion of the Montevideo Convention depends on both having a government and independence (Crawford, 2006, p. 62), or as Raič (2002, p. 74) puts it, the "essence of such a capacity is independence."

A Status Complex Yet Vital – The Statehood Conundrum
The word 'hood' is a suffix used in English language to denote a person, condition or quality – consequently, statehood is a status bestowed to a territorial entity attaining the qualities traditionally related to being a State (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Under international law, statehood may well be a status but it is not created by legal rules alone. According to Vidmar (2020, p. 224), "statehood is politically created and the law merely registers it."

A rise in the number of recognised states since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 would lead any layman to believe that the path to attaining statehood for these states was well-defined and signposted. However, the opposite is the case as statehood 'in the sense of international law' has not always been a clearly defined

concept, and "there are still no universally acceptable criteria clarifying who has the right to independent statehood and under what circumstances a distinct group can proclaim independence" (Visoka, 2018, p. 1). The reality is that even today there exists no generally accepted and satisfactory legal definition of statehood (Crawford, 2006). And yet, despite its ambiguities and complexities, sovereign statehood remains one of the most important aspect of global politics (Visoka, 2018), with Crawford (2006) describing it as "rather a form of standing than a set of rights" which places states on the international stage and enables them to perform acts, and make treaties, though these powers, rights and obligations are bestowed upon the state based on matters of evidence and not inherent substantive rights. As a result, statehood has become "a matter of contest rather than reception" (Koskenniemi, 1991, p. 401).

Additional Conditions to Attaining the Statehood Status

As highlighted in the introduction of this chapter, this project asserts that fulfilment of the criteria set under the Montevideo Convention does not automatically bestow statehood status to the claimant state. After detailing in the previous section that possession of attributes such as territory, population, government, and sovereignty are enough for an entity to project itself as a state, below are the two vital conditions without which statehood is incomplete and states are barred from entering the international community.

Independence

Besides the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention, the state's ability to act as an independent and sovereign entity, for example, in political and/or economic domains, is added as another criterion by some international lawyers (Shany, et al., 2014). International law expert James Crawford considers independence as a

"central criterion for statehood" (2006, p. 62). The Draft Declaration on the Rights and Duties of States put forward in 1949 by the International Law Commission defines independence as "the capacity of a State to provide for its own well-being and development free from the domination of other States, providing it does not impair or violate their legitimate rights" (ILC, 1949, p. 286). According to Knight (1992, p. 315), a state requires formal and real independence in order to comprehensively "exercise the functions of the state within the bounds of the state to the exclusion of any other state" without owing allegiance to any outside authority. However, a state's political or economic dependence that may exist in reality is not seen as affecting the legal independence of the state, unless that state "is formally compelled to submit to the demands of a superior state", thus relegating its status to a dependent state (Shaw, 2008, p. 211).

According to Crawford (2006), the term independence can be distinguished in two major ways: first, a state's independence as an initial qualification for statehood, and second, as a condition for its continued existence. On the one hand, a new state's secession attempt will be judged based on its efforts to "demonstrate substantial independence, both formal and real, from the State of which it formed part before it will be regarded as definitively created" (Crawford, 2006, p. 63). On the other hand, international law protects the independence of existing states from unlawful invasions and annexations, in order to ensure their existence despite lack of effectiveness, thereby placing much significance on "[t]he context in which the claim to independence or to loss of independence is made" (Crawford, 2006, p. 63). A territorial entity's claim to independence cannot be taken seriously if the reality portrays otherwise.

International law scholar Alan James also argues that constitutional independence is the fifth unwritten criterion, by which he means that possessing the constitutional separation from other sovereign states, and based on this principle maintains that entities such as Gibraltar, Northern Cyprus, and Faroe Islands cannot be recognised as states due to their legal ties with the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Denmark respectively (Simpson, 2008). Meanwhile, there are other entities that do meet the four criteria of state and have received formal recognition from several other sovereign states, for example, Kosovo, Palestinian Authority, and Taiwan, but are not considered unanimously as sovereign entities as major world powers object to their status as an independent state.

Recognition

In international politics, recognition is the act of realising certain factual situations and granting them legal understanding (Shaw, 2008). The act of recognition of a territorial entity as a state by the international community of states is akin to a person's registration and issuance of a birth certificate by municipal authorities after their birth – both continue to exist without recognition but will face difficulties in terms of becoming part of the civilised society. Such is the importance of recognition for states that it:

> *"[o]pens...the way for the conduct of diplomatic relations, recognition of passports, recognition of a nation's consular protection of its citizens, trading in a national currency, trading in state assets and debts, acceptance of state guarantees, the possibility of concluding binding inter-state agreements, the possibility of becoming party to inter-state conventions, of taking a seat in the United Nations, and of acceding to other inter-state organisations." (Bailes, 2015, p. 253)*

If a state recognises another political community within the framework of international law, this only means that the recognising state regards the recognised state as having fulfilled the conditions of statehood. This type of recognition, therefore, is not normative but instead expresses that state's cognition of a given situation:

> *"The legal act of recognition is the establishment of a fact; it is not the expression of a will. It is cognition rather than recognition. With a political act of recognition, a government expresses its intention to treat another state as an equal member of the international community." (Honneth, 2012, pp. 28, 29)*

However, the recognition of newly born states remains among the most problematic yet fundamentally important aspect of international politics. Almost all states seek recognition as it "plays a vital role in their ability to function as a sovereign and independent state and have relatively equal access, rights and obligations in the international system" (Visoka, et al., 2020, p. 1). Historically, newly emerged states have faced considerable resistance from established states for a number of reasons, such as ideological rivalry, territorial integrity or its ripple effect on international politics, and redrawing of borders, especially if it is resulting from a violent conflict. Nevertheless, it does not deter them from seeking recognition due to its fundamental importance in international politics. Notwithstanding its crucial role, state recognition remains unregulated in international law and there is no institutional mechanism to regulate this practice in world politics. As a discretionary state practice, it has been invoked and revoked by states in varied ways and for different purposes.

Regardless of the state fulfilling the Montevideo Convention criteria or not, "without the recognition – express or implied – of other states, it is likely to prove difficult to operate as a state within the international system" (Wilson, 2009, p. 460). The issue of recognition, partly due to the privileges it bestows, remains a complicated one. The international law says that "[A]n entity not recognised as a State but meeting the requirements for recognition has the rights of a State under international law in relation to a non-recognising State" (American Law Institute, 1965, p. 107), therefore, lending credence to Crawford's argument that "an entity is not a State because it is recognised; it is recognised because it is a State" (2006, p. 93). However, key issues lie around the legal effect of recognition, and create situations where the formation (and continued existence) of a state hinges on recognition by existing states. The simple question is: can a political entity be considered a state under international law, even if it is not recognised as such by existing states?

Two major theories govern the realm of recognition: constitutive theory, which accords that "the rights and duties pertaining to statehood derive from recognition by other states," thereby, effectively tying statehood to recognition by other states (Crawford, 2006, p. 4). Per constitutive theory, even if a state meets the classical criteria for statehood, it must receive confirmation from existing states in order to join the international community and enjoy the rights provided under international law – putting recognition and statehood on an equal footing. On the other hand, declarative theory maintains that "the political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states as long as the state fulfils certain substantive criteria", implying that "states exist ontologically prior to international society, and recognition is only a formal acknowledgement of what already objectively exists" (Visoka, 2018, p. 28) – rendering it into a "purely political act

having no bearing on the legal elements of statehood (Sterio, 2015). Simply put, while the former concludes that there can be no state without recognition, the latter considers the new situation and declares statehood as a legal status independent of recognition.

While both theories take a definitive position, they fail to satisfactorily explain modern practice, and have some obvious drawbacks. On the one hand, constitutive theory fails to address the issues faced by states that are not recognised by (some or all) other states therefore denying them the rights and obligations under international law (Shaw, 2008), and has been labelled as "an intellectual prop for *Realpolitik*" (Nicholson & Grant, 2020, p. 29). On the other hand, declaratory theory, while minimising the power of existing states to bestow legal personality on new states, assumes that a political entity can readily be classified as having particular legal status, thus confusing 'fact' with 'law' (Shaw, 2008; Crawford, 2006). Article 3 of the Montevideo Convention (1933, p. 2) can be seen as validating declarative theory:

> *The political existence of the State is independent of recognition by the other States. Even before recognition the State has the right to defend its integrity and independence, to provide for its conservation and prosperity, and consequently to organise itself as it sees fit, to legislate upon its interests, administer its services, and to define the jurisdiction and competence of its courts.*

> *The exercise of these rights has no other limitation than the exercise of the rights of other States according to international law.*

However, it is the middle ground, and not wholly constitutive or declarative theory, that prevails in the contemporary world where one state grants recognition to the other on the basis that the basic requirements of international law as to the creation of a state as well as its geopolitical interests were met. Warbrick (2003, p. 237) specifies that:

> *The 'constitutive' theory and the 'declaratory' theory, are neither compatible with the other and neither capable of dealing with all the circumstances in which recognition decisions arise, with the result that adherence to one or the other is apt to mislead in the borderline case.*

Therefore, it is entirely up to a sovereign state to decide whether or not to recognise a geopolitical entity vying for statehood – regardless of the fact whether such an entity satisfies the legal criteria of statehood (Sterio, 2020). Moreover, jurists such as Kelsen (1941, pp. 605, 607) argue that in reality states "alone are the authorities empowered by general international law to decide" which other entities are states. He also concludes that the intimate linking of recognition with statehood staged by the existing states has led to the impression that recognition is a legal act in the international sphere, and it is up to political leaders to recognise or not to recognise a state based on their own arbitrary policies rather than following international law in this regard, thus turning recognition into a 'diplomatic weapon of choice' (Kelsen, 1941). In sum, recognition and statehood are closely connected in practice as pointed out by a leading American law academic:

> *While international recognition is no longer widely considered to be a required element of statehood, in practice the ability to exercise the benefits bestowed on sovereign states contained in the Westphalian sovereignty package requires respect of those doctrines and application of*

them to the state in question by other states in the interstate system. (Kelly,

2005, p. 382)

The predominant view in the law of statehood is that states emerge simply by meeting the statehood criteria and that recognition merely acknowledges this fact. Recognition thus ought to have a merely ceremonial declaratory role and no consequences on the legal status of a territory. However, that does not seem to be the case in contemporary international politics. While states acknowledge others' sovereignty in many ways, formal diplomatic recognition matters the most due to the fact that it is "the golden ring that political leaders hope to grasp," (Krasner, 2009) but does not come easy as states are not required to recognise another state automatically. As states remain the primary unit of analysis in IR (Waltz, 1979), newly emerging states have no choice but to seek recognition from other states in order to join the international community as it enables their treatment as sovereign equals (Visoka, et al., 2020, p. 363). In other words, if states were acquiring statehood status by merely fulfilling the Montevideo Convention criteria, the number of states as part of the international community would have been considerably higher than it currently is.

Therefore, in light of the arguments and evidence presented above, it can be concluded that the four conditions of Montevideo Convention are fundamental for any geopolitical entity to fulfil in its pursuit of the claim of being a state. However, after establishing itself as a (de facto) state, it then needs to demonstrate its independence and seek recognition from other recognised states. Once it receives recognition from the majority of the already recognised states, especially from the major world powers, it will then be admitted into the fold of international community – thus completing the journey to statehood status.

Analysing the Concept and Forms of Recognition

The previous sub-section defined recognition in IR, its two major theories, and the reasons why recognition is a vital condition for any geopolitical entity existing as a state that wishes to join the international community. As this thesis argues that IS sought recognition – not from the international community but – from its subjects and supporters for statebuilding purposes, it is important to dig a bit deeper in order to understand the concept of recognition, evaluate its types, and establish how it was pursued by the Caliphate, as will be done below.

Recognition has a normative as well as a psychological dimension and involves at least two parties – a subject of recognition (the recogniser), and an object (the recognised). Arguably, if one recognises another person with regard to a certain characteristic or feature, for example being punctual, they not only admit that this person has this feature but also embrace a positive attitude towards them for having this feature. Such recognition implies that we treat them in a certain way based on their normative status, that is, as a free and equal person. But recognitions are not merely normative and also have a psychological dimension to them. Most theories of recognition are based on the assumption that people develop a practical identity depending on the feedback of other individuals or society as a whole. According to this view, those not receiving recognition, for example, those who are depicted by other people or the societal norms and values in a one-sided or negative way, will find it harder to embrace themselves and value their identity. Thus, it can be argued that recognition constitutes a "vital human need" (Taylor, 1992, p. 26).

Although the issue of 'recognition' has gained traction in research literature in recent years, the conceptual core of this phenomenon still remains under dispute (Honneth, 2007). According to Geis (2018, p. 612), recognition is "a relational concept because (mutual) recognition is regarded as a prerequisite for successful identity formation and beneficial social action." He argues that its flip side, that is mis-recognition, occurs when "individuals or collective actors experience as humiliation, disrespect, or false representations of their identity, is seen as a major cause of political resistance, and as significant in the escalation of potentially violent conflicts" (Geis, 2018, p. 612). Kochi reckons that recognition "involves an affirmation by the self that a necessary and essential element of itself resides in the other and the relation of mediation with it" (2009, p. 213). Recognition, after all, is usually understood as an inclusive move through which previously excluded actors, or their so-far ignored grievances, are addressed, and incorporated in a shared moral or political structure (Honneth, 1995).

The concept of recognition can be differentiated in accordance with the kind of features a person gets recognised for. Most scholars agree that recognition is a vital human need or an anthropological constant only in a formal sense. New demands of recognition have been constantly evolving from the historically established and changing ideas that are linked to the kind of recognition we deserve and seek. This can be elaborated by taking into account the rather recent historical development of the premodern concept of honour, which was assigned to persons as members of a group within a hierarchical social structure. It had two sides to it: first, equal respect be awarded to all agents capable of autonomy; and second, esteem be based on one's achievements. Whereas the former ensures a basic level of recognition for everyone, the latter creates a hitherto condition with regard to the kind of recognition one deserves (Taylor, 1994). Some authors argue that the

dependence of esteem on achievements, and recognised for such, has created an insecurity, which in modern times is being dealt with by attaching more importance on intimate love and friendship within the private sphere.

The divide pointed out above can be boiled down to two major theories of recognition. On the one hand, Kantians – and more generally liberals – usually emphasise on the respect for the equal dignity of autonomous beings, that is, the first dimension of the modern recognition order. On the other hand, Hegelians seek a more encompassing view of recognition that tends to cover all spheres of recognition within modernity. Generically based on Hegelian views, the concept is used to indirectly depict cursory attitudes and/or practices through which individual subjects as well as social groups receive acknowledgement for certain specific characteristics. Honneth underlines the fact "that recognition represents a moral act anchored in the social world as an everyday occurrence," (2007, p. 329) and outlines four premises based on which acts of recognition take place. First, the affirmation of positive qualities of human subjects or groups. Second, recognition as an act consisting of a lot than mere words or symbolic expressions in order to make it more believable and credible to the recognised. Third, the acts of recognition not resulting as a mere side-effect of an action aimed towards another goal, but expressed through an independent intention, more specifically through the pursuits of a series of interactions as being a form of recognition. Fourth, if recognition represents a conceptual specie, then love, respect, and esteem can be considered as distinct forms of recognition based on which the recogniser and recognised communicate, interact, and affirm their actions. Based on the four premises by Honneth (2007) of the modern recognition order that stem from Hegelian views of recognition and treatment of the subject, the following sub-

section reviews the theoretical validity of recognition and how IS used it as a tool for political purposes.

IS's Politics of Recognition

On a theoretical level, the concept of recognition enjoys enormous importance in matters related to international relations. As demonstrated above, the statutes of international law ensure that a politically organised community comes into legal existence only by virtue of being recognised by other internationally 'recognised' states (Honneth, 2012) – often in line with their vested interests. As a result, the (recognised) state formulates a foreign policy, part of which examines any (newly emerged) state's claim to statehood status based on the defined prerequisites of a 'state' – that is, the Montevideo Convention. Kelsen declares that the act of legally granting recognition is a necessarily reciprocal act due to the fact that a newly recognised state can only be viewed as a full-fledged member of the international community if it recognises the states that offer it recognition in turn. If a state fails to return the recognition extended to it, its admission to the international community will remain incomplete because that state will not yet have proven its competence as a member of the legal community of states (Kelsen, 1941).

A state recognising another state is a political act through which the recogniser expresses its intention to treat the recognised as an equal member of the international community (Honneth, 2012). While examining the role recognition plays in political contexts, it is hard to understate the particularly complex, at times contradictory, and multifaced reality IS presents which also reflects the overall complexities of recognition relationships and their political consequences (Kaden & Günther, 2021). And this is where the problem lies with IS not seeking the path to modern statehood via recognition as it involved seeking recognition

from already existing states and granting recognition in return, thereby declaring

other states of the international community as equals but also accepting their

legitimacy in the process – an absolute redline which IS vowed never to cross even

if it came at the cost of its own destruction. In the foreword of English magazine

Dabiq's 8th issue (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 3), the editor quoting Abu Musab Az

Zarqawi – one of IS's founding fathers – declared the following:

> *"[W]e do not perform jihād here for a fistful of dirt or an illusory border*
>
> *drawn by Sykes and Picot. Similarly, we do not perform jihad for a*
>
> *Western tāghūt to take the place of an Arab tāghūt. Rather our jihād is*
>
> *loftier and more superior. We perform jihād so that Allah's word becomes*
>
> *supreme and that the religion becomes completely for Allah. {And fight*
>
> *them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah}*
>
> *[The Spoils of War: 39].*

To further prove the point that IS and the rest of the world – whether Muslim-

majority countries or otherwise – cannot be treated as equals, the Dabiq editorial

(Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 4) quotes the following two verses from Quran:

> *"Then will We treat the Muslims like the criminals? What is [the matter]*
>
> *with you? How do you judge?} [The Pen: 35-36];*

> *"Or should we treat those who believe and do righteous deeds like*
>
> *corrupters in the land? Or should We treat those who fear Allah like the*
>
> *wicked?" [Sād: 28].*

The bottom line is that IS claimed that their ideal state – based on Islam and

monotheism – can never coexist with the nation-state system that is prevalent in

the contemporary world. Instead, in the same Dabiq issue, IS made the following announcement:

> *"O Muslims everywhere, glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your heads high, for today – by Allah's grace – you have a State and Khilāfah, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership. It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. It is a Khilāfah that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shāmī, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribī (North African), American, French, German, and Australian." (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 4)*

The non-recognition policy espoused by IS became its 'unique selling point' and it set it different from all the other types of states – internationally recognised, de facto, or secessionist parastates – as they all "aim for *de jure* recognition" (Pinos, 2020, p. 120). Instead, IS chose to seek recognition from subjects at home and supporters around the world, and used "its pariah status to construct a counterhegemonic narrative" (Pinos, 2020, p. 122). This project articulates that IS sought recognition from its subjects and supporters as a state (Caliphate) for help with statebuilding purposes.

IS, unlike other revolutionary secessionist armed groups including Jihadi organisations such as the Taliban, claims to fight not for land – as underlined above – but for the imposition of Islam in its 'purest form' possible. In a video released in 2010 – when ISI (IS's predecessor) was on its last legs – the group laid down the following claims and traits for which it wanted recognition from its supporters – Sunni Muslims from around the world:

We fight until the entire world worships [according to] the Sharīʿa of God the Great and the Almighty, until the world is ruled with the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet – peace and prayer be upon him – and until Islam extends its rule over the worlds and spreads its wings on earth in the light of the Sharīʿa of God the Great and Almighty. [Al Furqan Media, 2010]

The inferences that can be drawn from this fundamental doctrinal statement are as follows: first, the claim to disseminate *Tawḥīd* (monotheism); second, to exert power according to divine ordinances; and third, fight against anything that diverts from it (Kaden & Günther, 2021). These three elements were repeated again when IS spokesman Al Adnani announced the following while declaring the establishment of the Caliphate:

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 Earth is Allah's. {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} [The Heights: 128]. The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims." (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 10)

Furthermore, to boost its credentials as a true 'Islamic State', IS pursued an 'us vs them' policy where it ensured that its ideology as well as performances resemble as closely as possible to the early Islamic state that was established by Prophet Muhammad in early 7th century AD, though with some modifications that were in line with the duties and expectations of any modern state, while opposing anything and everything different from itself. This meant that IS had to stick to hard line interpretations of state in Islam while rejecting the traditional Western

conceptions of statehood, especially the notion of state sovereignty, because it "is a man-made rule that separates Muslims from each other by man-made borders," [and] therefore recognising state sovereignty is a form of veneration" (Wickramasinghe, 2015, p. 160). According to Nielsen (2015, p. 5), this rejection is nothing new and comes from Sayyid Qutb – a 20th century Islamist intellectual considered as one of the spiritual founders of Muslim Brotherhood – who argued in his 1964 book entitled 'Milestones' that because human beings have embraced earthly sovereignty, instead of heavenly, and as a result, the "whole world is steeped in *Jahiliyya* [ignorance]... based on rebellion against the sovereignty of Allah on earth. It attempts to transfer to man one of the greatest attributes of Allah, namely sovereignty, by making some men lords over others." Delahunty (2018, p. 13) believes IS's Caliphate, like other similar movements, "rests on a theological-political basis" which is in stark contrast with the Westphalian order that argues for the separation of "human political realm from theological speculations about what might be beyond it." Also, given the reciprocal nature of recognition and the key role it plays in the process of attaining statehood, IS was cognisant of the fact that it will never receive recognition from other states in the world, including Islamic ones such as Saudi Arabia despite sharing the Salafi-Wahhabi ideology. Therefore, it was in IS's interest to unilaterally reject all the international norms and conventions based on which states interact with each other – including mutual recognition of independence and respecting sovereignty of states. By refusing to seek recognition from other states, IS declared its goals, which were independent of, and in conflict with, the international state system. As such, IS also implied that it cannot rely on third party states for the recognition of its political nature but "produce its own sovereign status and to escape the criminalisation of its campaign by the international community" (Behnke, 2012, pp. 195, 196).

After detailing IS's guiding principles on recognition, the following sub-section unpacks three major forms of recognition, we as human beings experience, and how IS, as a political entity, addressed them as part of their campaign to seek recognition from its subjects and supporters alike.

Unpacking the Forms of Recognition Sought by IS

Mutuality has always served as the explanatory and normative core of the concept of recognition. Hegel famously argued that human beings gain self-consciousness through a process of mutual recognition (Iser, 2019). It is only by understanding other's intentional actions that we grasp our own actions and utterances as expressions of an intentional self. In this vein, it has been argued that human beings start to recognise others as persons from a very early age. For example, a baby learns to recognise his/her attachment as intelligible being, that is, meaning-conferring and autonomy, and later starts perceiving all other humans as humans. These actions from a very elementary age shows that recognition is needed not only for the creation and preservation of a subject's identity, but also to communicate a basic normative attitude. Therefore, it can be declared that "to recognise someone is to take her to be the subject of normative statuses, that is, of commitments and entitlements, as capable of undertaking responsibilities and exercising authority" (Brandom, 2007). Honneth (2007, p. 330) describes respect, esteem, and love as three main aspects of recognition and are explained below along with the context in which IS sought them.

Respect: One of the core principles behind the establishment of universal human rights is exercising equal dignity and respect, and has become the central dimension of recognition. The meaning of respect, and questions such as "what it

means to recognise the other as equal?", has come under heavy debates in moral and political philosophy. Humans often contrast respect with disrespect and humiliation to gauge how they have been treated with the normative expectation not to be treated like animals or mere objects. IS, as a social group, treated Muslims as the victims who have been degraded and humiliated for a very long time, and presented joining the Caliphate as the only way to receive respect from the world, especially from the West. The inaugural edition of Dabiq, which was released right after the fall of Mosul in late June 2014, carried a message by IS spokesman Abu Muhammad Al Adnani, who declared the following:

"The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them to rise.

The time has come for the Ummah of Muhammad (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonour, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone, and the dawn of honour has emerged anew.

The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared."
(Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 8)

Taking into account the above mentioned excerpt, which preceded the appearance of IS Caliph Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi by a week, it is clear that IS addressed Sunni Muslims en masse and referred to their recent history which witnessed colonisation by several European powers and division into numerous nation-states

after the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire. Harking on the exploitation and colonisation faced by Muslims in the Middle East and other parts of the world right after the symbolic caliphate was disbanded in 1923 by Turkish nationalist forces, IS asked both its subjects and supporters to rise up and put an end to the humiliation by joining the Caliphate and promised to restore respect for the *Ummah* by waging jihad, culmination of which will ensure victory and a new era of respect and dignity for Muslims. In another Dabiq magazine issue, an article penned by a purported female named 'Umm Sumayyah Al Muhajirah' declared: "It is *Khilāfah* with everything it contains of honour and pride for the Muslim and humiliation and degradation for the *kāfir*[53]" (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 46) The underlying message IS communicated to its followers was that the Caliphate has been established with the foremost objective of restoring respect of Muslims around the world and a determination to the end the humiliation faced across the globe at the hands of 'infidel governments' and their 'apostate[54] allies'.

While IS demanded respect from non-believers, especially Western governments, it also called upon Muslims to respect the fact that the Caliphate seeks to impose *Shariah* in its purest form and urged them to "rush to your state" (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 10). In an article entitled "The World has Divided into Two Camps", published in the first edition of Dabiq magazine in June 2014, the editorial declared the following:

> "*O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the*

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[53] Kafir is the Arabic word for unbeliever. In Islam, the term is reserved for anyone who does not believe in One God and Muhammad as His final prophet.
[54] Apostasy in Islam refers to a person quitting the religion and carries a death sentence. The Islamic term for an apostate is *murtad*.

Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the jews, the

crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions

of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilised by the

jews." (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 10)

By virtue of this message, IS implied that true Muslims are only those who live

under the Caliphate or will move to the state to lead a life under *Shariah*, and

urged them to make *Hijrah* (emigrate). Al Adnani, in his declaration of the

establishment of the Caliphate, underlined the following:

"We clarify to the Muslims that with this declaration of Khilafah, it is

incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the khalifah Ibrahim

and support him (may Allah preserve him). The legality of all Emirates,

groups, states, and organisations, becomes null by the expansion of the

Khilafah's authority and arrival of its troops to their areas. (Al Hayat

Media, 2014).

The message also made clear that the legitimacy of all other Muslim entities,

including Jihadi organisations, has been revoked due to the fact that IS has

restored the Caliphate and imposed *Shariah* thus fulfilling the conditions of a true

Muslim state, and therefore reserving respect and recognition only to themselves.

Esteem: The major emancipatory movements of the last two centuries – such as

the anti-colonial independence movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America or

the civil rights movement in the US – had a common theme between them in that

they demanded equal respect and rights. In contrast, many of the contemporary

social movements demand recognition of a specific aspect of their identities – such

as cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, sexual, or religious – on the basis that their

respective identities have been neglected or demeaned by the dominant norm or value system of the society. It is thanks to these phenomena that the notions of a 'politics of recognition' or 'identity politics' have become part of the mainstream societal narratives. However, critics question on what basis should these differences matter normatively, and ask if (a) recognition is owed to the affected as subjects with equal moral status or (b) because we should esteem their specific properties as valuable?

The proponents of the first camp argue that recognition is equally entitled to all subjects based on a context-sensitive form of respect (esteem) where the unrecognised claim that the 'neutral' state/society is by no means neutral but rather biased towards, in most cases, the majoritarian section of the society. As a result, the proponents insist, that all members of the society who do not fit the hegemonic understanding are being discriminated against (Taylor, 1994), for example, people of colour, sexual and religious minorities, women, etc. On the contrary, the second camp argues that esteem should not be awarded to groups of a particular identity but to individuals, and only for their specific features instead of the wholesale identity group. They also advocate for denying esteem any role in public politics and contend that individuals getting respect and esteem from others, such as family, friends, or fellow members of the society, should suffice (Rawls, 1971).

A look at IS's visual propaganda reveals that the group was engaged in both forms of 'identity politics' and switched between them when it suited their narrative. For example, IS claimed that Muslims around the globe are being discriminated against due to their belief system, especially the ones living in the West where the majority White 'infidels' are oppressing them by imposing discriminatory laws,

such as the hijab law in France or Trump's visa ban on six-Muslim majority countries, or forcing them to abandon their religion by enforcing the secular values of inclusion, diversity and tolerance. Case in point is the accusation published in Dabiq magazine's 9th edition (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 50) that "they (crusaders) use their power to tyrannise the weak and oppressed Muslims. Their jewish, hypocritical, and apostate allies attempt to attain honour and might through the crusaders." The article alleges that non-Muslim powers and their Muslim allies are plotting against Islam and Muslims but are not aware that Allah will grant victory to His true followers. In almost every edition of Dabiq and Rumiyah magazines, and other digital publications for that matter, IS constantly urged its followers to ask God to unite the ranks of the Muslims in every region of the world and give them the strength and support to migrate to live under the shade of the Caliphate on the basis that Muslims living anywhere expect for the Islamic State are leading a life of sin and ignorance. In reference to the tragic drowning of the Syrian toddler named Ayan Al Kurdi on the shores of the Turkish beach resort town of Bodrum, Dabiq's 11th issue (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 22) condemned Muslims for fleeing their lands and heading towards Western countries instead of the Caliphate. An article entitled "The Danger of Abandoning Darul-Islam" quoted a verse from the Quran, which says:

> *"Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." The angels will say, "Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination. Except for the oppressed among men, women and children who cannot devise a plan nor are they directed to a way – For those it is expected that Allah will pardon them, and Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving." [The Women: 97-99]*

The message here implies that while it is true that Muslims around the world face discrimination and oppression for no other reason than the fact that they are Muslims, they no longer remain to be the victims if they choose to move to any other land except for the Caliphate. In parallel, IS also pushed the narrative of absolute equality for people living under the Caliphate and refuted any claims of discrimination other than their piety and righteousness. In his first sermon addressed to the subjects and supporters of the Caliphate, Al Baghdadi reiterated the following:

> *"It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers.*
>
> *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." (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 4)*

<u>Love and friendship</u>: Love and friendship matter in recognition theories because they are two of the most important forms of intersubjective recognition that humans experience (Honneth, 1995). Recognition theories argue that our sense of self is shaped by the way that others recognise us, and that love and friendship are two of the most powerful forms of recognition. In love, we are recognised for our unique value as a person. We are seen and appreciated for who we are, not just for what we can do. This kind of unconditional recognition can help us feel secure and valued, and it can also assist in developing our own sense of self-worth. Friendship

is another important form of recognition. In friendship, we are recognised for our shared interests and values. We are accepted for who we are, and we are able to be ourselves without fear of judgment. Friendship can help us feel connected to others, and it can also contribute towards developing our own sense of identity.

Both love and friendship can be seen as forms of 'positive recognition.' This means that they involve the affirmation of our worth as persons. In contrast, 'negative recognition' involves the denial of our worth. This can happen through acts of violence, discrimination, or simply through ignoring or dismissing us (Ricken, 2023). Recognition theories argue that positive recognition is essential for our well-being. It helps us feel secure, valued, and connected to others. Without positive recognition, we can feel lost, isolated, and even worthless. For these reasons, love and friendship are two of the most important forms of recognition that humans experience. They can help us to develop our sense of self, to feel connected to others, and to live a more fulfilling life.

IS spun a narrative around love and friendship as part of its campaign to seek recognition from Muslims at home and abroad. Its publications, including magazines and videos, carried dual messages of love and friendship in which it asked true Muslims to express their love towards the Caliphate and its supporters and in return seek God's love and friendship. In the inaugural issue of Dabiq magazine, IS set the tone of the relationships to expect while living under the Caliphate. In an article entitled "The Concept of *Imamah* (Leadership) is from the *Millah* (Path) of Ibrahim," the author described love as an integral part of having Islamic faith. An excerpt from the article says:

> *"Indeed the Millah of Ibrahim ('alayhis-salam) 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. By doing so, this young Muslim Muwahhid was simply
following those who had preceded him in Iman from amongst the scholars
whose knowledge and religious practice he trusted. (Al Hayat Media, 2014,
p. 20)

The article also claims that Muslims migrating from different corners of the world to the Caliphate are forming bonds based on love and friendship for the sake of God. The essay notes that "some would even express their love for it (Caliphate) by singing Islamic *anashid* in English and in various other European languages" *(Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 20).* The messages of love and friendship also featured in a number of videos, including a series of short videos entitled 'MujaTweets' – a play on words '*Mujahideen*' and 'tweet' – that were published by its media wing Al Hayat Media, showing how the Caliphate's youth as well as the elderly are forming relationships based on love and friendship for the sake of God. For example, "Mujatweets 1" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) shows a foreign fighter from Germany performing *a capella* in German language, in which he exhorts people to "come join the ranks of the Islamic State" and "live in obedience, full of honour, satisfaction, and to scare the kuffar." In another example of how foreign fighters are integrating into the society based on their love and devotion for the Caliphate, "Mujatweets 4" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) shows an unnamed fighter from Germany visiting injured IS fighters in a hospital, making small talk and then on camera urging fellow "brothers and sisters in Islam" to express love and friendship in (permissible) ways possible. Similarly, "Mujatweets 8" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) is a Russian-language video which shows foreign fighters from Central Asia preparing meals in a canteen and serving it to other foreign and local fighters along with their children. A young man named Abu Abdul Rahman Al Khurasani speaks on camera

and says: "My message to every Muslim is that we call them to Sham (Levant) so that you can see with your own eyes what's happening in the land of Khilafah. Alhamdulliah! (All praise be to God)," indirectly conveying a message that the bonds being formed between the local and foreign people in the State are truly rooted in the feelings of love and friendship for God and His people. Another official IS video entitled "The Year of the Friends of God" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) shows elderly, young men and children gathered for Eid congregation and hugging and congratulating each other after the end of prayers. The video also shows a number of young IS fighters appearing together on camera and expressing their love for each other while claiming that this (Eid day) is the best day of their lives so far.

In line with the arguments presented above, it can be deduced that IS did not project state-like performances in its official videos with the intention of gaining international recognition as a member state and attaining statehood status. Instead, it equated recognition with respect where 'others' do not respect IS's vision therefore IS has every right to disrespect them. IS sought respect from its subjects and supporters based on the respect for Islam and its state credentials. IS also used esteem as part of its recognition discourse as it vowed to keep fighting until the flag of Islam is raised and dignity of Muslims is restored. Moreover, IS used love and friendship as the ultimate form of recognition from its supporters and urged them to embrace their new identity, which is based on Islam and nothing else.

As mentioned before, this project contends that IS was seeking recognition from the subjects at home and supporters abroad as a state based on its performances of modern stateness, and therefore should be analysed with 'stateness' lens instead.

The next section presents a host of definitions of stateness while grouping them together according to the attributes they are focusing on, and then outlines the definition this thesis will use to perform visual analysis in the upcoming empirical chapters. It then proceeds to provide a succinct historical account of stateness in Iraq and Syria before the emergence of IS for contextual purposes. After that, it describes the mechanisms IS used to perform modern stateness in its official videos. It is then followed by an explanation of how statehood and stateness originate from the concept of state. It concludes with an explanation of how Montevideo Convention is the framework for determining the claim of being a state, and additional requirements apply if it is used to assess statehood and stateness respectively.

State, Action, Stateness!

'Stateness' is a political concept derived from the 'State'. The dictionary definition defines 'ness' as a suffix that denotes a state or condition, therefore stateness can typically mean the state or condition of the State (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). As illustrated in the first section of this chapter, the idea of the modern state and the concept of sovereignty started taking shape in the 17th century after the Treaty of Westphalia was concluded in 1848. The concept of stateness, in contrast, is relatively new and was introduced by John P. Nettl towards the end of 1960s. During the last five decades, the concept of stateness has gained traction and has now become extremely influential in state-centred empirical studies (Sawaed, 2019).

Definitions and Attributes of Stateness

There is no single definition of stateness that is universally accepted for the very reason that it is a relatively new, novel yet complex concept. It was introduced by

Nettl (1968) who reckons that 'stateness', like state and statehood, is a conceptual variable with no clear-cut definition. As a result, even in specialised literature, stateness is defined and interpreted by scholars in a variety of ways due to their focus on its different dimensions. Additionally, it can be used interchangeably or even confused with related concepts such as statehood, state capacity, sovereignty, and other synonymous concepts – hence the need for delineation.

As the first scholar to put forward the term, Nettl describes stateness as a "cultural concept of self-identification and, indeed, affect for the state" (1968, p. 573). Some scholars argue that the conceptual work on stateness is still in its infancy, which leaves imprecise and often conflicting definitions, with the upshot being that any work where stateness is substituted with synonymous concepts has the potential to seriously imperil its coherence and theoretical utility (Podolian, 2020).

As shown in the sections above, the concept of state and related terms such as statehood are shrouded with ambiguity. The concept of stateness is no exception. As the modern version of state in Europe mostly came into existence as a result of wars and armed conflicts, Max Weber's definition of the state "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1946, p. 78) seems to resonate with most of the scholars studying stateness, and use the element of monopoly on violence as a major attribute of stateness. For example, Fukuyama – based on Max Weber's definition of the state – describes stateness as "the functions, capabilities, and grounds for legitimacy of governments" (2004, p. xi), and illustrates it with the following analogy: "The ability, ultimately, to send someone with a uniform and a gun to force people to comply with the State's laws" (2004, p. 6). Bäck & Hadenius (2008, p. 3) consider stateness as "the capacity of the state organs to

maintain sovereignty (as the ultimate third-party enforcer) over a geographical territory." They underline that in a functioning state, the state organs ought to uphold monopolistic control in a basic military, legal, and fiscal sense, and that they should not face any competing powers challenging their control in these areas. Andersen et al. refer to stateness as "the state's capacity to impose law and order within its territory, to construct and implement policies, and to claim legitimacy as a political unit" (2014, pp. 1207-08). This stateness attribute is also measured on a global level, known as the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), and indicates how developing countries are steering toward democracy and a market economy by analysing political factors such as the monopoly on the use of force, state identity, no interference of religious dogmas, and basic administration (UNESCO, 2020).

A review of literature on stateness reveals that scholars often see statebuilding and monopoly on violence under the same light, and reckon the former leans heavily on the state's use of legitimate violence and its capacity to enforce law and order – with heavy emphasis on the post-conflict situation and less on the process during normal and peaceful conditions. According to Fukuyama (2005, p. 87), creation of a strong government that "has a monopoly of legitimate power and that is capable of enforcing rules throughout the state's territory" is the essence of statebuilding – one that usually takes places after a state emerges from a violent conflict. His views are in line with Linz & Stepan's who also view statebuilding as "the creation of armed forces and a unified police" (1996, p. 424). However, other authors, such as Carbone (2013), view statebuilding from a wider perspective and perceive it as a dynamic process, which starts with the establishment of a basic political order, administration, and legitimacy, while Ilyin et al. describe it as a process which involves the "consolidation of centres and borders of different kinds (political,

judicial, cultural, economic etc.) in which country's tradition of stateness plays a key part" (2012, p. 7).

The second set of definitions place 'state capacity' at the heart of stateness, with Tilly – in conjunction with Nettl's definition – describing stateness as "the degree to which the instruments of government are differentiated from other organisations, centralised, autonomous, and formally coordinated with each other" (1975, p. 32). Evans notes it as "the institutional centrality of the state" in terms of the "extent to which private power can . . . be checked by public authority" (1997, p. 62), which in other words means that stateness is solely a matter of state capacity. Fukuyama also adds that a good state is one whose institutions are transparent and efficiently serve the needs of its clients – the citizens (2004, p. 26). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2004, p. 51) – building upon Fukuyama's definition of stateness – describes stateness as "the state's capacity to fulfil functions and to meet objectives regardless of the size of its bureaucracy or the way in which it is organised." Börzel et al., in their analysis of how the EU is promoting good governance in the southern Caucasus, underline stateness as "the capacity of state institutions to develop and implement policies and to perform regulative functions such as the monopoly on the use of force and capacity to hierarchically adopt and enforce collectively binding decisions" (2008, p. 9). Hendrix (2010) proposes stateness as the state's performances related to its administration/bureaucracy, military, and the political institutions. Sojo (2011), in his extensive survey of stateness and government performance in Latin American states, explores the state's technical (economic support), administrative (delivery of services), institutional (rule of law and anti-corruption), and political (democratic values) aspects as dimensions of stateness. Ilyin et al., in their study of factors of stateness in post-USSR republics, define stateness as "the capacity of the

state to exercise its fundamental functions as well as to meet the practical implications of its recognition as a member of a state community or communities" (2012, p. 6). They add that stateness varies from state to state due to the fact that it rests on the state's abilities to fulfil its basic functions, that is, its 'performance as a state'. In other words, stateness is "the ability of states to fulfil their basic functions" (Ilyin, et al., 2012, p. 4). Blanchard & Ripsman (2013), in their book on economic statecraft and foreign policy, define and operationalise stateness by exploring the state's autonomy, capacity, and legitimacy. A number of studies purely analyse stateness through state capacity lens. For example, Tsygankov (2007) gauges stateness in the post-Soviet world by analysing quantitative data available on domains such as security/unity, and economic, and political viability. Bratton & Chang (2014) in their study measure stateness in African countries using political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption while McConnell (2016) examines the exiled Tibetan government's stateness, based in Dharmshala in northern India, by focusing on its relationship between territory and power, and development of rational-legal authority respectively. Evans' study (2018) explores stateness based on a state's institutional centrality, capacity to deliver services and security, and its authority and political economy, and underlines that globalisation has influenced stateness to a greater degree. Martínez and Eng (2018) in their research evaluate stateness in Syrian rebel-held territories based on the provision of two key welfare services – bread and healthcare – but stop short of measuring IS's stateness.

Some scholars have used the terms stateness and state capacity interchangeably or even as extensions of one another, which has led to confusion and contestation. Bäck & Hadenius are one such example who describe stateness as "the capacity of the state organs to maintain sovereignty (as the ultimate third-party enforcer) over

a geographical territory," while also being able to "uphold monopolistic control in a basic military, legal, and fiscal sense," and ensure that there are "no competing power centres (that) exercise control in these areas" (2008, p. 3). Møller & Skaaning critique the present literature for treating stateness as a broader concept of state capacity, and argue that "stateness should instead be understood in terms of the existence of a monopoly of violence in a sovereign territory and an agreement about citizenship within this polity" (2011, p. 16) while insisting that "state capacity also covers the ability to implement policies", which, as a concept, "goes beyond the monopoly on the use of force within a sovereign territory and the basic agreement about citizenship" (2011, pp. 2-3).

Other scholars such as Carbone (2013) view the concept of state capacity in terms of the relationship between a state's extractive capacity and its strength, and measure it with the help of a broad range of indicators such as armed conflicts, communications, corruption and abuse of office, democracy, the rule of law, poverty, political violence, etc. Soifer & Vom Hau in their exhaustive study on infrastructural power in developing countries describe state capacity as "a function of state bureaucracy, the state's relations with social actors, and its spatial and societal reach" (2008, p. 220), which is broadly in line with Fukuyama's (2004) argument that tax extraction is a measure of state capacity. Mann sees state capacity in terms of infrastructural power and describes it as "the institutional capacity of a central state, despotic or not, to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions" (1993, p. 59). Fortin argues that the state must first possess "the necessary means to maintain law and order and to protect the rights of citizens, in other words, to ensure the maintenance and delivery of essential public goods", and measures state capacity with indicators such as tax

revenue, corruption, infrastructure reform, property rights, and contract intensive money (2012, p. 903).

Another concept frequently seen as synonymous with state capacity is state strength (Bratton & Chang, 2006). Huber (1995, p. 166) defines 'state strength' as "the capacity to achieve the goals set by incumbents in chief executive positions." D'Anieri, agreeing with Huber's description, says that state strength can be defined as the government's ability to adopt and implement a policy in society, and adds that it should be seen "as the state's capability relative to its own society (for example, to extract taxes from the populace), not to other states" (1999, pp. 84-85). Way elaborates that the term state strength consists of both the domination of state officials over subordinates and state capacity, in line with Linz and Stepan's (1996) definition, and describes it as the state officials' capacity to successfully implement state objectives with the help of state agencies and regional administrations (2003, pp. 4-5).

There is a section of literature that values citizenship agreement as the highest yet neglected attribute of stateness. Linz & Stepan (1996), who combine the aspects of state's monopoly on the use of force and state capacity in shape of provision of basic administration, outline stateness in two major ways: the existence of a state with whom people identify themselves and do not want to join another state or secede (1996, p. 7), and the congruence in a state between the polity (territorial boundaries) and the demos (right of citizenship) (1996, p. 25). Hence, they describe citizenship agreement as the absence of "profound differences about the territorial boundaries of the political community's state and profound differences as to who has the right of citizenship in that state" (1996, p. 16). In other words, they outline stateness as the identification of a population with its state – and term

it as a people-oriented concept (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Møller & Skaaning, in their study that investigates the links between stateness and democracy, agree with Linz & Stepan (1996), and insist that "stateness should instead be understood in terms of the existence of a monopoly of violence in a sovereign territory and an agreement about citizenship within this polity" (2011, p. 16). Andersen et al. present a comprehensive definition and deduce that stateness is based on the "state monopoly on the use of violence, administrative effectiveness of the state, and agreement on who are the citizens of the state" (2014, p. 1203).

After considering a host of definitions of stateness used in the literature during the last five decades, this thesis infers that "stateness is the state's capacity to effectively assert authority over its territory and population, and to perform its basic duties such as imposing law and order within its territory, constructing and implementing policies, claiming legitimacy as a political unit while ensuring that it is not competing with any other power centres in the areas it controls, and presence of a population who identify themselves with the state and do not want to join another state or secede." While this definition is broadly based on Fukuyama's definition – whose work has been termed influential in the field of international relations by renowned scholars such as Charles Tilly, Michael Mann, Robert Rotberg and Stephen Krasner as well as global institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations – it also takes into account an important attribute of stateness, that is, citizenship agreement, which is missing from Fukuyama's original definition of stateness. Simultaneously, the project underlines the three attributes of modern stateness as (a) monopoly on violence, which is the de facto ability to use physical force to comply (Fukuyama, 2004, p. 6); (b) administrative effectiveness, which is "the ability of states to plan and execute policies" (Fukuyama, 2004, p. 7); and (c) citizenship agreement, which is the absence of

"profound differences about the territorial boundaries of the political community's state and profound differences as to who has the right of citizenship in that state" (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 16).

Stateness Before IS

Before bringing to light IS's concept and performances of modern stateness, it is important to first get a glimpse of how statebuilding in general, and stateness in particular, has fared in contemporary Middle East for contextual purposes. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the victorious great powers – France and Great Britain – signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 which was an agreement on how to carve up the spoils among themselves. The pact reorganised the Middle East in a completely different order from what had prevailed for the preceding 400 years, which led to the lack of correlation between the power and social structure in the society. As the crisis ensued, internal and external challenges to the very idea of the state's existence started to build up (Michael & Guzansky, 2017). From this point on, most Arab states suffered from weaker national identity and the ideas of a modern, nation-state were alien to their way of thinking. Arab society, till the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, usually lived together around a shared culture, customs, folklore, history, and religion but without a coherent national identity. They also lacked experience in running the state and its institutions. Moreover, the tribes and various ethnic groups suddenly became subjects of newly established estates, which happened without their consultation, and consent, in many cases. As a result, they were unconvinced of the justifications provided by the European colonisers for the establishment of nation-states on their territory (Hourani, 1981). This meant that the masses were not necessarily loyal to the state and did not

embrace their new identity with ease (Sawaed, 2019), and therefore unable to resolve ethnic, national, and religious tensions.

Once the colonial-imperial powers of France and Great Britain left the region after the end of World War II, the newly created nation-states in the Middle East – in particular the Arab republics such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria – enjoyed relative stability once power was seized by dictators who ruled with an iron fist. They introduced nationalist ideologies, such as pan-Arabism, in their quest to obtain legitimacy and unite the nation under their banner. Both Iraq and Syria embraced the Arab socialist ideology known as Ba'ath, introduced by Michel Aflaq and Salah Al Din Bitar in 1940s, and wanted to unify the economics, politics, and society of the Arab world under the slogan "unity, freedom, socialism" (Devlin, 1991). The Ba'ath[55] Party seized power in Syria during the 8th of March Revolution in 1963 whereas the Iraqi faction eventually overthrew the regime of Major General Abdul Karim Qasim in 17th of July 1968 Revolution and established its government in Baghdad. After severe machinations and internal coups, Hafez Al Assad seized power in Syria in 1970 while Saddam Hussein got hold of the presidency of Iraq in 1979 after serving as the vice president for 11 years (Michael & Guzansky, 2017). The Ba'ath Party-led regimes in both countries, despite being arch rivals due to personality differences between the ruling elite, introduced social welfare to the citizenry, which included free education, healthcare, while heavily subsidising prices of food, fuel and public utilities such as electricity and water (Martínez & Eng, 2018). Syrian President Hafez Al Assad cemented his rule by cultivating the loyalty of the rural population by devoting state resources to public utility projects such as land reclamation and irrigation while also allowing significant freedoms

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[55] Ba'ath is the Arabic word for resurrection.

for private economic activity (Devlin, 1991). Thanks to the nationalisation of oil and other industries by the Iraqi Ba'thist regime, the state's oil revenue increased by 40 times in less than a decade and revenues stood at $21.4 billion, 10.5% of total OPEC[56] output, in 1979 just before its disastrous war with Iran (Alnasrawi, 1994). The regime invested heavily in public infrastructure and services sectors, which – according to The World Bank data – helped Iraq's GDP per capita reach $3,851 in 1980 and hit a record $10,217 in 1990, one of the highest at that time in Arab world. The fortunes tremendously declined after Saddam's disastrous invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and subsequent Persian Gulf War in 1991 (The World Bank, 2023). Hafez Al Assad's regime also got entangled in Lebanon's civil war, which raged from 1975-1990, and moved in to occupy parts of the country in 1976 and remained an occupying force until 2005, which also had an adverse effect on its stateness activities.

The Ba'athist regimes also embarked upon ideological reformation programmes, moving away from Pan-Arabism – which started to decline after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's death in 1969 – to Syrian and Iraqi nationalism respectively, which in turn helped forge a stronger sense of citizenship and loyalty to the state while also improved quality of life in both the countries. Another method used by the Ba'athist regimes to consolidate national sentiment was an attempt to revive historical roots. Thus, for example, Hafiz Al Assad used Syrian history to promote his image and regime (Wedeen, 1999) while Saddam Hussein promoted the notion that the Iraqi people were descendants of the great civilisations of Mesopotamia and likened himself to the ancient Babylonian King

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[56] Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is an association of the thirteen major oil-producing countries, which was founded in 1960 to coordinate policies. It is based in Vienna, Austria.

Nebuchadnezzar (Abdi, 2008). However, the foundations of legitimacy and national identity developed during Hafez's and Saddam's eras were not deep enough to withstand regional and international winds of change, such as the dissolution of the USSR, increasing revival of Islamic identity, and worsening socio-economic conditions due to state corruption and US-led sanctions on both respective states.

The terrorist attacks that took place in USA on 11 September 2001 are arguably the turning point in Middle Eastern history as both Iraq and Syria came under increased US hostility, which ultimately resulted in full-scale US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. The disintegration of the Ba'ath regime culminated in the rise of Islamist militant groups with Al Qaeda in Iraq in 2004, later renamed as Islamic State of Iraq, at the forefront. The disintegration of stateness in Iraq reached its height when ISIS – formed after a forced merger of the Iraqi and Syrian wings of former Al Qaeda – took control of Mosul in June 2014 and established the Caliphate. This upheaval was in part also facilitated by civil strife in neighbouring Syria, which broke out after mass demonstrations erupted against President Bashar Al Assad[57] in March 2011, which culminated in a civil war between the Syrian regime and mostly Islamist militant organisations, chief among them were Al Qaeda and ISIS (Fishman, 2021).

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[57] Bashar Al Assad is the second son and third child of Hafez Al Assad. He assumed power after the death of his father in July 2000.

Understanding IS's Mechanisms of Performing Modern Stateness

As argued earlier, despite basing its origins in medieval Islamic ideology which promised a 'Caliphate based on the prophetic methodology'[58], IS embarked upon performing modern stateness in its pursuit of seeking recognition as a state from its subjects and supporters and their help for statebuilding purposes. It can also be argued that as IS sought to attract supporters from all over the world for statebuilding purposes, it had to engage in performances of stateness that were modern, efficient and completely relatable by other citizens around the world, and transmitted them in a medium that was accessible, easy to use, and popular – that is, videos. Soon after the establishment of the Caliphate in July 2014, IS published hundreds of official videos that documented their control over a growing territory that is inhibited by a large population and governed effectively, thanks to the imposition of *Shariah*, and communicated its policies towards other states – which gave impression to its subjects and supporters that the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention have been met. While the upcoming four case studies demonstrate how IS projected meeting the requirements of being a state under the Montevideo Convention based upon its performances of modern stateness, the sub-sections below provide a brief description of how IS engaged in stateness by performing its three major attributes.

Monopoly on violence: While it is beyond any doubt that IS owes its existence to its use of force, as highlighted in the previous sections, it consolidated its rule by

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[58] According to William McCants (2014), the phrase 'prophetic methodology' is rooted in a prophecy attributed to Prophet Muhammad, in which he explained how religious authority will erode to until the caliphate is restored. A feature entitled "From Hijrah To Khilafah," published in the first issue of Dabiq (Al Hayat Media Center, 2014), attributed a Hadith to Mohammed which sheds some light on the 'prophetic methodology': "There will be prophethood for as long as Allah wills it to be, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be Khilafah on the prophetic methodology and it will be for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be harsh kingship for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be tyrannical kingship for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be Khilafah on the prophetic methodology" [Ahmad].

having a monopoly on violence within the confines of the Caliphate, and enforcing law and order with the help of a number of security apparatus such as *Hisbah* (religious police), *Shortah* (regular police), and *Emni* (intelligence service) (De Graaf & Yayla, 2021). These three branches of IS were essential to the group's success as they helped to enforce strict laws, maintain order, mete out punishments in the public, and protect its leadership among other tasks. Without these branches, it can be argued that IS would not have been able to achieve the level of control it did. More details of how IS displayed its monopoly on violence as part of its performances of modern stateness are provided in the upcoming empirical chapters.

State capacity: One of the biggest factors that distinguish IS from other Jihadi groups is its evolution "from being just a purveyor of violence to being a social service provider," (Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 65) which IS took strides "to highlight its attempts to bring successful governance to the people living within the territory it controls" (Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 67). Apart for being notoriously known for its monopoly on violence, IS also boasted its state capacity in hundreds of images and videos to convince its subjects and supporters that the Caliphate is doing its best to provide services such as agriculture, civic infrastructure, education, economy, finance, food and water, healthcare, media and public information, religious affairs, tribal relations, and others, across various *Wilayaat*[59] of the Caliphate. In areas under its control, IS also established alternative structures to replace them with the Iraqi and Syrian ones with a view of "providing basic services, restoring daily life to the status quo ante, and fill the administration void that was created" (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014, p. 4) – as part of

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[59] Wilayaat is the Arabic plural word for wilayat, which means province.

its extensive campaign to project itself as a state. However, this project argues that while IS projected provision of basic services to the people living in the areas under its control, overall the Caliphate suffered from low state capacity while under high public scrutiny, and as a result, had to resort to theatrical performances of modern stateness, as will be explained in the next section.

Citizenship agreement: Citizens play an integral part in any statebuilding project. As seen with many rebel organisations and de facto states, the citizenry typically comprises three kinds: (a) people who support the ideological vision of the organisation wholeheartedly and offer help in establishing their rule (b) people who do not support the organisation yet turn to them for protection (c) people who are coerced into becoming citizens (Mabon, 2017). The main objective of IS imposing monopoly on violence and enhancing state capacity was to facilitate an agreement with its subjects in exchange for their support for its statebuilding project. In the first issue of Dabiq, IS listed an advertisement entitled "A Call to All Muslim Doctors, Engineers, Scholars and Specialists" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) and urged them to move to the Caliphate under its *Hijrah* (emigration) campaign. This was part of its citizenship agreement, which revolved around a state purely for Sunni Muslims regardless of their ethnic, geographic or racial background, and tied them all together under the bond of universal brotherhood (*Ummah*) – as described in this chapter's section entitled '*IS's Standpoint on Recognition'* above. After the citizens had pledged their allegiance (*Bay'ah* in Arabic) to Caliph Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi after their village/town/city came under IS control, the leadership ensured that services and protection were provided to people living under the Caliphate and welcomed others from all over the world under its fold. Simultaneously, IS made it extremely difficult for people to leave its confines by labelling them as apostates who were not worthy of recognition – as described in

this chapter's section entitled '*Unpacking the Forms of Recognition Sought by IS*' above. It is widely claimed that people who tried to leave or defect were executed by IS (Mabon, 2017). Official IS videos are rife with the views of its subjects who always praised the State's statebuilding efforts, especially its governance, and vowed to lay down their lives for the 'remaining and expanding' of the Caliphate, as will be demonstrated extensively in the empirical chapters.

Statehood vs Stateness – Two Sides of the Same (State) Coin?

As demonstrated in the sections above, statehood concerns the state's external attributes of the state such as independence and recognition of state's sovereignty by other recognised states. In contrast, stateness refers to the state's internal attributes – such as monopoly on violence, state capacity, and citizenship agreement – and formal recognition of its sovereignty as a person of international law by other states has little to no effect on its state of affairs (Andersen, et al., 2014). However, while both are essential characteristics of the state that reflect its institutional foundations and development, statehood in particular signifies the statutory properties of a state that leads to its recognition as a state by other states, and grants it the right to equally participate in the international arena as part of the 'concert of nations', such as the UN. Stateness, on the other hand, refers to the state's capabilities to sustain its territory, population and the welfare of its citizens (Ilyin et al., 2012; Zaytsev, 2018). In other words, statehood and stateness are two conceptually different dimensions of the modern state, where the former reflects its "external and internal recognition of sovereignty", while the latter demonstrates "the level and quality of the state's basic functions" (Melville, et al., 2013, p. 3). Both statehood and stateness are connected with the external and internal characteristics and functions of the state, as they both share sovereignty as the common factor that "ties the power and society by way of internal and external

legitimisation in the specific territory" (Okunev, 2012) where external sovereignty is implemented by the state by pursuing a foreign policy in line with its vested interests (Biersteker & Weber, 1996), and internal sovereignty achieved through political processes taking place within the boundaries of the state (Agnew, 2005). In conclusion, this dissertation asserts there are external and internal dimensions of state sovereignty: statehood is rooted in the principle of external sovereignty where the state receives recognition from other states based on the monopoly over the use of force within its territory; stateness is rooted in the principle of internal sovereignty where the state maintains monopoly over the use of force and performs basic administrative functions within its territory, and is often considered as 'inward-looking' statehood (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

Use of Montevideo Convention for Determining Stateness
The discussion above provided a deeper understanding of what constitutes a state, a state's path to statehood and different attributes of stateness, and how these concepts are connected with one another. It showed that the classical criteria of state – territory, population, government, and sovereignty – forms the basis of the Montevideo Convention – whose four criteria constitute permanent population, defined territory, effective government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states – on the basis of which states become candidates of statehood status. It also shed light on the decisive factors of independence and recognition without which statehood remains an unattainable goal for any newly emerged state. The text also mentioned that the foundations of stateness lie in the key features of the state, such as the identification of a population with its state (Linz & Stepan, 1996), imposition of law and order within its territory (Andersen, et al., 2014), and development and implementation of policies by state organs (government) to perform regulative functions such as the monopoly on the use of

force and enforcement of collectively binding decisions (constitution) (Börzel, et al., 2008). By reflecting on the above mentioned similarities between the features of both statehood and stateness, it is clear that the Montevideo Convention stands as the criteria of state, based on which a state seeks statehood by demonstrating independence and seeking recognition from other recognised states and performs stateness by maintaining monopoly on violence, enhancing state capacity, and extending citizenship agreement.

Practically though, there exist territorial entities such as Kosovo, Somaliland, Taiwan, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and several others that objectively fulfil the criteria of a state. In line with the Montevideo Convention, they possess territory (albeit with disputed borders) that is inhabited by a permanent population, run by a government that exercises sovereignty, and capably conducts its relations with other states, and continue to function like other states, yet their status of statehood is disputed due to partial or complete non-recognition from other states. As a result, they are effectively blocked from joining the international community of states – a situation which suggests that the generally accepted criteria for statehood are an incomplete system of law, as neither the declaratory, nor constitutive theory of recognition seem to satisfactorily explain the objective legal situation of states in international law. At the same time, it can also be posited that the above mentioned unrecognised/partially-recognised states constantly engage in 'performances of stateness', with some entities, such as Kosovo and Taiwan, considerably more committed to these than some other entities, such as Somaliland and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, regardless of their statehood status. Therefore, it can be surmised that in the contemporary era receiving recognition from other states, based on fulfilling the Montevideo Convention while also performing stateness, is the only way for a

newly emerged state to attain statehood and enter the fold of the international community.

Based on the arguments made above, it is clear that IS was focused more on performing stateness rather than acquiring statehood status. The empirical chapters of this thesis provide the detailed evidence of the state-like performances presented in hundreds of its official videos. The next section first characterises the dual meanings of performance with emphasis on the theatrical, followed by a scrutiny of factors that determine performances of stateness such as state capacity and public scrutiny. Moreover, in line with the old adage 'seeing is believing', it uncovers the reasons why states 'stage' their performances of stateness and broadcast them to their audiences, and the rationale behind labelling IS's theatrical performances of modern stateness as 'staged'.

States 'Stage' Theatrical Performances for Legitimacy and Support Purposes

Stateness essentially entails the state's capacity to perform its basic duties. As outlined in the introduction of this chapter, this project makes the case that performances of modern stateness documented in IS's official videos should be treated as 'theatrical' rather than 'substantive', based on the issues IS faced when confronted with low state capacity and high public scrutiny. Additionally, the thesis also argues that these 'theatrical performances' should be viewed as 'performances within performances' or 'staged performances', meaning the state-like performances in propaganda videos were carefully scripted, meticulously directed, and heavily edited by IS's media operatives in order to project the Caliphate in a favourable light to its audiences in order to seek their support, and not always to convey the truth. Therefore, to elaborate further, this section begins

by exploring the dual meanings of performance in the Sociology and IR literatures, with emphasis on the theatrical. It then sheds light on the literature around state performances, and illustrates how Ding's (2020) framework, which suggests that factors such as state capacity and public scrutiny determine state's performances as substantive or theatrical, precisely explains IS's 'state capacity vs public scrutiny' dilemma and will be used to evaluate IS's performances of stateness in the upcoming case studies. It then discusses the literature around 'staged performances', and describes how and why states project their 'staged-state performances' in the media. Furthermore, it explains Fujii's 'performative analysis' framework, which is based on the premise that performance-makers stage performances by turning ordinary moments into extraordinary events with the intention of seeking their audiences' attention and conveying the desired message(s). It concludes with the assertion that, as IS was heavily invested in presenting a crafted image of itself to its audiences, application of Fujii's framework is best suited to examine IS's 'staged theatrical performances of modern stateness' based on which the analysis will be conducted in the empirical chapters.

The Nature of Performance in Sociology and IR

English-language words such as actor, drama, play, role, stage, story, etc., come with double meanings denoting both the substantive and theatrical sides. Performance is another such word whose substantive meaning can be described as "the action or process of performing a task or function," whereas the theatrical connotation can entail "a display of exaggerated behaviour or a process involving a great deal of unnecessary time and effort" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). In terms of its origins, Turner explains "'performance'. . . has nothing to do with 'form', but derives from Old French *parfournir* 'to complete' . . . A performance, then, is the

proper finale of an experience" (1982, p. 13). According to Tracy Davis, scholar of performing arts and theatre:

> "[P]erformance is a naturalised execution of an uninterrupted unfolding sequence of actions. This does not require acting skill, but it is acting; this is not theatre, but it is theatrical; this is not performance but it has a methexic relationship to what could someday be performed." (Davis, 2007, p. 88)

Schieffelin describes performance as an assertion of "competence or virtuosity by one or more performers" directed at an audience with the intention of conjuring up "an imaginative reality or intensification of experience among the spectators, and bring about an altered awareness of their situation and/or a sense of emotional release" (1998, p. 195). In his reflection on the theatrical side of performance, ethnologist Richard Bauman notes:

> "A mode of communicative display, in which the performer signals to the audience, in effect, "hey, look at me! I'm on! Watch how skilfully and effectively I express myself". That is to say, performance rests on an assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative virtuosity, highlighting the way in which the act of discursive production is accomplished, above and beyond the additional multiple functions the communicative act may serve. In this sense of performance, then, the act of expression itself is framed as display." (Bauman, 2004, p. 9)

One of the most authoritative literatures on performance emerged in the realm of sociology. Many sociology scholars directly appropriated and adapted vocabulary from the theatre while analysing everyday social interactions, and concluded that

our daily lives are akin to theatrical performances "staged by conscious agents who adhere to scripts" (Pratt, 2009, p. 525) where "nothing or very little may escape the rubric of the performative" (Davis, 2007, p. 84). According to Jeffrey (2013, p. 26), social sciences have benefitted hugely from the theatre's rich contribution in shape of "terms and metaphors" which help "narrate the complexity of social and political life" (Jeffrey, 2012, 26). Erving Goffman stands out as one of the early adapters of dramaturgical metaphors. In his book entitled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959, p. 246), Goffman uses the language of the stage – "of performers and audience, of routines and parts; of performances coming off or falling flat; of cues, stage settings and backstage" – to explore how individuals conduct themselves in the presence of others. Scholars such as Crang (1994) and Enck and Preston (1998) have used Goffman's analysis as a framework to explore intimate social dynamics of workplaces and homes, while others such as Andreas (2008) and de Souza Briggs (1998) have used it as analytical tools to evaluate international intervention and democracy building respectively.

It is via the social sciences that performance made a mark on the IR literature where scholars have described performances by States as "a deceptively simple idea" – simple because one can easily describe its key concepts and objectives, yet deceptive because of the difficulties in its implementation (Schick, 2003, p. 73). It was American anthropologist Clifford Geertz who came up with the notion that "performance embodies the idea of state activity as theatre" in his seminal research on the 19th century Balinese state, *the negara*, and argued that state performances not only reflect function, but also project authority through symbolism, while concluding that the rituals and spectacle of the state were not means to political ends but ends in themselves: "power serves pomp, not pomp power" (Geertz, 1980, p. 13). In a similar vein, Neumann & Sending insist that the state's "assumption of

responsibility to an audience" becomes "obligatory for achieving whatever form of legitimacy on which the State in question depends," and for that very reason, "legitimating stories are necessary to sustain a polity over time" for both autocratic and democratic states (2021, p. 5). Ringmar, in his critique of the embodied IR theory, argues that "[P]erformances provide a major means through which such meaning is made. Much of what takes place in world politics is not just happening; rather, it is made to happen, and to appear, in a certain fashion – it is performed" (2016, p. 1). He further explains that performances "are not representations of something else but ways of coming into the presence of ourselves" and concludes that it is only "as performed that international politics becomes visualisable and, thereby, imaginable and, thereby, real" (Ringmar, 2016, p. 118). In other words, it is through performances that both imaginable and real exist in international politics, and it "is not what the state does that is different, but how it does it" (Richards & Smith, 2002, p. 279), with Jeffrey contending that any state's "legitimacy and ability to lay claim to rule" relies heavily on its performances (2013, p. 2). Therefore, it can be inferred that states depend on performances as means of legitimising their authority and existence and displaying their sovereignty, with IR literature suggesting their dependence on the substantive and theatrical nature of performances relies heavily on state capacity under the watchful gaze of the public.

It is a widely accepted truism that well-managed states perform well, and the 'team of managers' they rely on is known as the 'bureaucracy', which helps them with both substantive and theatrical performances. According to Frederickson, for much of the 20th century there was a consensus among scholars that "a politically neutral, merit-based civil service and a well-managed government of expert public administrators" are two important keys to improved state performance (2007, p.

1). On the one hand, both democratic and non-democratic states boast about their substantive performances by relying on several objective measurements such as crime figures, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), human development index (HDI), inflation rate, proportion of debt to national income, purchasing power parity (PPP), trade deficit/surplus, unemployment index, and other socio-economic indicators, data of which is often furnished by the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), Transparency International (TI), and the World Bank (Bäck & Hadenius, 2008). On the other hand, the very same states on a daily basis engage in a varied set of theatrical performances – such as civil servants working in government departments, doctors and nurses checking up on patients at hospitals, guards enforcing border security, immigration officers controlling entry/exit points at airports and border posts, judges presiding over criminal and other miscellaneous cases, law enforcement officers patrolling the streets, municipal workers cleaning and maintaining public thoroughfares, park rangers protecting and preserving natural resources in nature reserves, teachers delivering lessons at schools and colleges, wardens collecting toll charges at motorways, and various other duties performed by state-appointed personnel – that not only influences their substantive performances but also demonstrates their effectiveness and efficiency to the citizens. In short, states depend on both substantive and theatrical performances to display their sovereignty and maintain power, and as such, go hand in hand.

State Performances amidst State Capacity and Public Scrutiny

To reiterate, like any other actors on the stage, states perform stateness on the domestic stage to gain legitimacy from the audience, that is, its subjects, whereas they perform statehood on the international stage to gain recognition from the audience, that is, member states of the international community. In order to

perform better in front of the domestic audience, termed as 'performance legitimacy'[60], a state depends on its various organs – such as financial, legal, and military – to carry out its tasks and delegates the public servants, that is, the bureaucracy, to do their job in the best way possible (Bäck & Hadenius, 2008, p. 3). In the fundamental Weberian sense, states enhance their capacity and maintain legitimacy by establishing and depending on a 'rational bureaucracy'. The members of such bureaucracy are recruited on merit, given a high degree of autonomy, and encouraged to apply clear rules for decision making that are geared at accountability, impartiality, and openness (Heredia & Schneider, 2003). Chen's study investigates the implications of campaigns and bureaucracy on state performance in China, and concludes that "bureaucratic cooperation is key to the effective deployment of bureaucracy and enhanced state performance" (2021, p. 59). Political scientist Iza Ding – who embedded herself with the Chinese bureaucracy to scrutinise bureaucratic practices that were put in place to combat air pollution in Yangtze River Delta amidst heavy public scrutiny – theorises that when faced with lack of capacity and high public pressure, states are more likely to engage in theatrical performances rather than substantive in order "to persuade citizens of its virtue, if not its efficacy" (2020, p. 532). Her theory is based on sociologist Ervin Goffman's (1959, p. 7) observations that individuals 'perform' in front of an audience in a favourable light by using certain gestures, language, and symbols in order to influence their impressions. Ding's study argues that an individual's performance depends on two different stages, with "'front stage' acts may differ from behaviour on the 'back stage,' where actors do not face an audience" (2020, p. 529).

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[60] Scholars such as Zhao (2009), Zhu (2011), Zhang (2021) believe that the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) provides material benefits to the Chinese population in return for their political support.

Applying Ding's 'low state capacity vs high public scrutiny' framework, this project demonstrates in the empirical chapters that IS, in its bid to act like a state, put on performances in its official videos that leaned heavily on the theatrical mainly due to frail state capacity and strong public scrutiny. This hypothesis resonates with Ding's assertion that a state engages in 'performative governance' when lacking the capacity to "resolve citizens' concerns but is under strong public pressure to do so, in order to "persuade citizens of its virtue, if not its efficacy" (2020, p. 532). IS suffered from low state capacity for a number of reasons, chief among them was its dismantling and restructuring of existing bureaucratic structures, constant aerial bombardment and land-based attacks by its adversaries, exodus of educated and highly-trained workforce, and sabotage at the hands of informers/spies, among others (Gerges, 2016). Despite that, IS branded itself as the 'Caliphate in accordance with the prophetic method' (McCants, 2014) and took upon the mammoth task of rebuilding a nascent state while protecting its subjects, defending and expanding its territory, imposing law and order based on *Shariah*, and sending stern warnings to its enemies who were threatening to annihilate it all the while being under heavy public scrutiny of its allies and foes both domestically and internationally. Ultimately, the Caliphate collapsed within three years of existence and IS ended up losing territorial control mainly due to institutional weaknesses, blatant use of aggression and violence towards its opponents, meting out of harsh punishments to its subjects, failure to deliver the lofty promises made to locals and immigrants alike, and inability to defend the Caliphate from dual military campaigns waged by the US and Russia-led coalitions respectively, as the upcoming case studies will establish.

Seeing is Believing – States 'Staging' Theatrical Performances of Stateness to Gain Legitimacy and Support

States have been engaged in 'staging' theatrical performances of stateness ever since they have been in existence but television networks recording and broadcasting them to worldwide audiences is a recent phenomenon. TV programmes such as Rescue 9/11, produced by CBS[61] Network from 1989 to 1996, featured re-enactments and occasional real footage of emergency services provided to people who sought help by dialling 911 in the US. The series' popularity prompted similar spin-offs to be produced and broadcasted in the UK, New Zealand, Spain and other Western countries. Similarly, Australia's Channel Seven premiered a documentary series in 2004 entitled 'Border Security: Australia's Front Line', which featured the agents of Australian Department of Home Affairs, Australian Border Force, and the Australian Quarantine, and Inspection Service enforcing Australian customs, finance, immigration, and quarantine laws. The programme, also known as 'Nothing to Declare', became a hit and was aired in countries across Asia, Europe, and North America (Farrell, 2015). Spin-offs of 'Border Security' were also recorded and broadcasted in Canada and the US where border agents were shown securing their country's borders from incoming illegal immigrants, migrants, and criminals. More recently, BBC released a documentary series in 2015 entitled 'The Detectives' in which their camera crews followed Greater Manchester Police force's detectives who were conducting operations against organised criminal gangs, and provided exceptional coverage of live police investigations (Hannam, 2021).

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[61] Columbia Broadcasting System.

What does a state gain from the recording and broadcasting of theatrical performances of stateness by the media? This project terms all recorded and broadcasted theatrical performances of stateness as 'staged' – where the entire process, from scripting to production and broadcasting, is about projecting the action for maximum effect in order to make their audiences look and take notice, and seek their legitimacy and support. Based on Bauman's definition of performance in which he describes performance as "an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience" (1992, p. 41), renowned political scientist and scholar Lee Ann Fujii's approach, known as 'performative analysis', is more focused on the process of putting on a show rather than being set of individually separate and distinct events. Applying her 'performative analysis' framework to three specific episodes of violence that took place in *My Lai* during the Vietnam War, the rape and killing of two women during the Rwandan genocide, and a lynching that took place in rural Maryland during 1930s USA respectively, Fujii contends that the actions that took place in these episodes of violence were "crucial to turning an ordinary moment into an unforgettable show" (2013, p. 414), with the performance-makers' implicit intention to impress their audiences by seeking their attention and conveying the desired message(s).

This study also considers 'staged' as the key element of the recorded and broadcasted theatrical performances of stateness where the directors, following a roughly written script, meticulously film the acts of actors and participants at certain locations, which are then carefully edited and broadcasted by media production houses to the desired audiences in order to seek their approval and support. For example, documents obtained by Guardian Australia reveal that in exchange for the exclusive behind-the-scenes access to Channel Seven crew, the

Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) officials had the final say over the content of documentary entitled 'Nothing to Declare' with written approvals granted for broadcasting every episode of the series (Farrell, 2015). Despite Channel Seven insisting that it had editorial control of the programme, and the approvals from the DIBP were needed to protect ongoing and future investigations, critics maintain that the government agency retained a veto over what gets aired, and for the Australian government the programme worked "far better than an advertising campaign in selling reassurance" (Burton, 2007, p. 195). Interestingly, Australian Customs CEO admitted in the annual 2004-05 report that "there has been a positive spin off from participation of many officers in the Channel Seven production of *Border Security*" (Australian Customs Service, 2005, p. 3).

Believe in What We Are Saying and Showing – IS's Staged Theatrical Performances

To say that IS's entire existence, from its phenomenal rise to its dramatic fall, is a series of theatrical performances is an understatement. Two examples perfectly illustrate this point. One of the earliest IS videos, in which the self-proclaimed 'Caliph' Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi made his first and only public appearance, is full of anomalies and theatrics. On 5 July 2014, Al Baghdadi appeared on the first Friday of the holy month of Ramadan in a historic mosque in Iraq's second city of Mosul dressed in a black robe before a crowd that seemingly had no prior idea of who he is and what is about to happen. He delivered a short sermon in which he declared the establishment of the 'Caliphate' and wrapped-up his brief appearance by leading the congregation in prayer. The video did not show the crowd pledging their allegiance to their new ruler, which is a key proof of legitimacy from its followers that was featured in dozens of other IS videos. It also did not

demonstrate any interaction between the caliph and the 'faithful'. And IS's theatrics extend all the way till its decline accelerated: it is mid-February 2016 and Fallujah – a city located about 50 kilometres west of the Iraqi capital Baghdad and known for putting up fierce resistance against the US occupation army in 2004 – is encircled by anti-IS Sunni tribesmen who are entering the city through its northern neighbourhoods (Faraj, 2016). Yet IS publishes a video via its premier 'news agency' *A'maq* which shows open markets, a *hisbah* van ordering people to offer their prayers in the mosque, boys playing football in the street, and traffic on the roads. It also shows at least a dozen men crowded around a TV watching IS propaganda videos and a kitchen next door readying meals to serve to the people present. Later in the same video, an old man appears on camera denying reports that the city's northern neighbourhoods had fallen and intense clashes were taking place across the city. The video ends with a scene where IS's filming vehicle approaches the city's famous Old Bridge over the Euphrates river but does not cross it. Why? Because the territory across the bridge was secured by Iraqi security forces, and was later used to liberate the city in June 2016 (South Front, 2016). These two videos, and several hundred others, speak volumes about IS's overall staged theatrical performances of stateness which essentially were displays of exaggerated power combined with the actions and processes of carrying out tasks and functions related to the state that were put together in order to impress its subjects and supporters and seek their approval and loyalty – many of which will be included in the visual analysis carried out in the upcoming empirical chapters.

Therefore, this project, in line with Fujii's 'performative analysis' approach, argues that while not all recorded and broadcasted theatrical performances of stateness may be entirely scripted, they are certainly set up and edited in a fashion that conveys a subtle message to the audiences that the state is actively performing its

duties in order to make the lives of its citizens safe and secure, while also taking all the necessary measures to help its citizens in need with no call for help going unanswered. The use of the term 'staged' aligns with Fujii's contention that participants taking part in the theatrical performance "share a general concern for creating a certain 'look and feel' through the display process" in order "for people to see, notice, and take in", with the objective of conveying a certain message to the physically present audience (spectators) as well as desired audiences local and abroad (2021, p. 2).

To conclude, the visual analysis carried out in the empirical chapters will incorporate the following two postulates: first, most recorded and broadcasted theatrical performances of stateness are 'staged' – where actors put on a particular display wherein "creating a certain 'look and feel' that engages the body and all its senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell" (Fujii, 2021, p. 4) with exceptional focus on aesthetics. Second, states, almost always, want to shed light on their performances that portray them in a positive light while censor, or at least hide or ignore, the ones that expose their failures and incompetencies. To explain these postulates, this research focuses on the performative dimension of stateness where the state, in line with the Cartesian view 'seeing is believing', is invested in the "importance of 'doing' things in a particular way in a particular context because such actions constitute a particular identity (gender, national, local) and order, rather than referencing those ideas" (Fujii, 2021, p. 7), and then broadcasting it to the audience to convey its desired message(s) and boost its image.

Conclusions

This chapter began with the quest to provide an exhaustive answer to the basic yet fundamental question: what is the 'State'? Acknowledging the fact that it has

always been difficult to define the 'State' (Mitchell, 1991), it provided a brief history of the state and described that historically territory, population, government, and sovereignty served as the fundamental attributes of state across major civilisations, including the Chinese, Indian, Islamic and Western civilisations. It later took note of the complications around the concept of state in international law and underlined that little progress has been made by the international community on matters related to formally defining the terms 'state' and 'statehood'. As hypothesised that the bulk of statemaking in the West occurred as a result of warmaking, the section engaged in literature that touches upon warmaking and statemaking in the West, and demonstrated that the Western concepts of state are well-suited to analyse IS's claims of being a state for the very reason that it too emerged as a result of an illegal invasion and protracted civil war.

The second section provided an in-depth examination of the Montevideo Convention as it is the only criteria of state. It disclosed that despite the lack of clear definitions of state and statehood, international law does offer an 'objective' criteria for any geopolitical entity to become a state and attain statehood based on its fulfilment. The section then shed light on the fact that despite the presence of Montevideo Convention, there still remains a huge difference between becoming a state and attaining statehood status due to issues faced by claimant states when it comes to demonstrating their independence and seeking recognition from other recognised states. The issues around recognition were found to be complex, and therefore a deeper analysis was performed to understand its other concepts and forms under Sociology and IR theory. It was noted that recognition has normative as well as psychological dimensions and that it constitutes as a vital human need (Taylor, 1992). The section then proceeded to take stock of IS's politics of recognition, based on Honneth's recognition theory (2007), and found that it too

was seeking recognition, albeit from its subjects and supporters, by pushing narratives of respect, esteem, and love and friendship for the Caliphate in its propaganda content on the basis that it is the only true Islamic state which has been established upon the prophetic methodology, therefore worthy of recognition.

The third section presented an in-depth understanding of the relatively novel yet complex concept of stateness. It presented a number of definitions of stateness, chief among them Fukuyama's concept, and established a comprehensive definition of stateness that will be applied while analysing IS's state-like performances in the upcoming case studies. The section also identified monopoly on violence, state capacity, and citizenship agreement as the three essential activities state engage in to perform stateness. A quick peek at the contemporary history of stateness in Iraq and Syria revealed that Ba'athist regimes used a mix of Arab nationalism, socialism, symbolism, and historicism for statebuilding purposes. They eventually lost out to a technology savvy ideological rival whose performances of modern states centred on justifying its monopoly on violence, building and expanding state capacity, and offering a citizenship agreement that was based on its harsh interpretations of Islam. IS projected these performances of modern stateness to its subjects at home and supporters worldwide in order to seek their recognition and help for statebuilding purposes. The section was wrapped up by making a detailed case of how statehood and stateness are extensions of the concept of state and refer to its external and internal aspects respectively. By this token, it was explained that Montevideo Convention, which remains as the sole criteria for becoming a state, can be used to determine statehood if the claimant state can also prove its independence, and receive recognition from other recognised states. At the same time, a claimant state's stateness – attributes of which are outlined as establish stateness by maintaining

monopoly on violence, building and expanding state capacity, and enforcing a citizenship agreement on its subjects – can also be measured if it fulfills the Montevideo Convention first.

The last section made the case that IS state's performances of modern stateness were more theatrical in nature than substantive as it was faced with low state capacity while being under high public scrutiny, and most likely those performances were staged as every state likes to project itself in a positive light. It pursued this argument by first exposing the dual meanings of performance in Sociology and IR literatures while maintaining its emphasis on the theatrical. Once the dual meanings of performance were clear, the section unravelled different concepts of performance legitimacy pursued by states around the world, and concluded that when faced with low state capacity and high public scrutiny, states often pursue theatrical performances in order to "persuade citizens of its virtue, if not its efficacy" (Ding, 2020, pg. 532). The section then explored Lee Ann Fujii's 'performative analysis' framework, which is based on the analysis of the massacre at My Lai during the Vietnam War, the rape and killing of two women during the Rwandan genocide, and a lynching that took place in rural Maryland during 1930s USA respectively, and demonstrates that individuals/states often engage in the process of putting on a show for attention-seeking purposes and convey their desired messages. It concluded with the explanation of how states record and broadcast their theatrical performances of stateness, which may be entirely scripted, meticulously directed, and heavily edited in order to convey a subtle message to the audiences that the state is actively performing its duties.

To validate the arguments made above, this thesis makes a selection of 374 official IS videos, and distributes them in four case studies, namely the population,

territory, government and foreign policy based on the four criteria of state as defined in the Montevideo Convention (1933). For the purposes of providing in-depth visual analysis, the empirical chapters are based on an intricate amalgam of the following four frameworks: (i) the Montevideo Convention (1933) to evaluate IS's performances of modern stateness; (ii) Honneth's Recognition Theory (2007) to evaluate IS's purposes of seeking recognition from its subjects and supporters (iii) Ding's 'Performative Governance' (2020) to reveal how IS's performances of stateness were hugely theatrical due to the impact of low state capacity and high public scrutiny; and (iv) Fujii's 'performative analysis' (2013) to focus on how IS staged its theatrical performances of stateness to seek the attention of its audiences and gain their approval and support. In each set of analysis, the focus is on the range of actors and participants, and the activities that contributed to IS's overall purpose of expressing modern stateness to its subjects and supporters alike. The project will contend that due to the Caliphate facing weak state capacity and heavy public scrutiny, IS's propaganda videos contained a multitude of theatrical performances of modern stateness, which were in all likelihood staged – that is, they were carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited – and were broadcasted to local and international audiences with the intention of seeking recognition from its subjects and supporters and help with statebuilding.

4 : SETTING THE STAGE FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS OF IS'S (STAGED) 'PERFORMANCES OF MODERN STATENESS' BY IDENTIFYING, CLASSIFYING, AND QUALIFYING THE DATASET

This chapter presents the methodology applied to 374 official IS videos included in the dataset that identifies, classifies, codifies, and qualifies IS's state-like performances for an in-depth analysis in the empirical chapters. The chapter is divided into five major sections. The first section presents information about the publishers and propagators of the dataset videos, that is, IS's media structure and major dissemination platforms. The second section explains the step-by-step process starting from disclosing information regarding ethics to downloading videos and screening/cataloguing them in order to establish the dataset according to the case studies. The third section sheds light on the different characteristics of the dataset including genres, languages, and technical aspects. The fourth section demonstrates the step-by-step coding process applied to a particular video in order to illustrate how the methodology was applied to the entire dataset. The fifth section provides a glance at IS's major staged theatrical 'performances of modern stateness' that emerged from the applied method, detailed analyses of which are contained in the empirical chapters.

This chapter reveals that IS established an extremely robust media landscape, which consisted of a multi-layered structure that produced bulk of the Caliphate's media products. This media bureaucracy fed the propaganda material – paramount among which were high quality videos replete with modern-day cinema stylistic cues, post-production work including computer-generated graphics, transitions, voiceover narration, and audio-visual effects – to an extensive dissemination network of supporters that used all major social networks to

distribute the visual content. IS's official videos, produced in several languages including Arabic and English, featured different genres such as *Anasheed* and documentaries, and adopted several file formats to ensure they are accessible to worldwide audiences. The extensive coding and organisation of the dataset, as showcased in this chapter, demonstrates the project's main argument that IS carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited its official videos, and then broadcasted to its audiences with the intention of winning the hearts and minds of locals while also attracting Muslims from around the globe to join its state-building project.

IS's Media Landscape

Before presenting a synopsis of the dataset that is used for the analyses in the thesis, it is necessary to locate the source which essentially produced and published IS's official videos. Scholars such as Abdulmajid (2021), Lahaye & Hindson (2015) and Sekulow et al. (2014) deem IS the most powerful radical Islamist group in world history. One of the major reasons that made IS an unparalleled Jihadi organisation were its superior military and financial capabilities, which were harnessed to establish an advanced media network that would help "the development of the organisation's sphere of influence" and increase its "fame and prominence compared to other Jihadi groups around the globe" (Abdulmajid, 2021, p. 84). IS's media supremacy was established by a sophisticated media network known as the '*Diwan* of Media[62]'. This department was run by a dedicated bureaucracy whose main duties included broadcasting IS's military successes, governance activities, and religious indoctrination; while also maintaining social control over its subjects and persuading potential supporters

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[62] *Diwan* in Arabic means office, bureau or department.

abroad to join its ranks (Gambhir, 2016). According to a report published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, IS's *Diwan* of Media was "the central hub for all creation and distribution of official IS content" (Al 'Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 49). It was responsible for all of the media productions, including footage and photosets from battlefronts, glimpses of daily life from towns and cities under its control, high-quality propaganda movies, photos, statements, infographics, and audios among other content (Gambhir, 2016). The following sub-sections outline IS's media structure and dissemination platforms respectively.

Media Structure

IS's media bureaucracy was divided into primary and secondary tiers. The primary tier, known as the 'Base Foundation' (*Al Mu'asasat Al Umm)* consisted of six primary media houses, namely *Al Furqan*[63] Foundation, *Al Hayat*[64] Media Centre, *Al I'tisam*[65] Media Foundation, *Ajnad*[66] Foundation for Media Production, *Al Bayan*[67] Radio, and *Al Himmah*[68] Library. *Al Furqan* Media Foundation (*Mu'assasat Al Furqan)* was established in 2006 by Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) (Atwan, 2015) and remained as the exclusive media producer until ISI was rebranded as ISIS in April 2013 (Nanninga, 2019). It also delivered official statements issued by IS's top leadership (Winter, 2015, p. 12), including the declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014. *Al Hayat* Media Centre (*Markaz Al Hayat lil I'laam*) was founded in May 2014 (Atwan, 2015) and was the second major media outlet that produced audio-visual content in languages other than

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[63] *Al Furqan* literally means distinction, that is, the separation between truth and lies. The 25th chapter in the Quran is entitled *Al Furqan.*
[64] *Al Hayat* literally means life.
[65] I'tisam literally means taking over.
[66] *Ajnad* means army or soldiers and is the plural for the word *jund.*
[67] *Bayan* means declaration or statement.
[68] *Himmah* means ambition or determination.

Arabic. It also published well-known English-language magazines such as *Dabiq*[69] and *Rumiyah*[70]. *Al I'tisam* Foundation (*Mu'assasat Al I'tisam*) was basically a film production unit which was responsible for most of the slick, high-production-value Arabic-language videos (Atwan, 2015). *Ajnad* Foundation for Media Production (*Mu'assasat Al Ajnad lil Intaj Al I'lami*) was established in 2013 for the purposes of producing and publishing audio material such as *anashid* and Quranic recitations (Schatz, 2015). *Al Bayan* (*Idha'at Al Bayan*) was IS's exclusive radio station, which began broadcasting *anashid,* discussions and news updates from Mosul in August 2014 and remained on the airwaves until the fall of Raqqah in 2017 (Meir Amit, 2019). *Al Himmah* Library (*Maktabat Al Himmah*) was the sixth primary media organisation, which published and distributed books, pamphlets, and posters (Al Tamimi, 2021). Furthermore, the Base Foundation also publishes *Al Naba*[71], which is a weekly Arabic-language newsletter that carries official statements from IS leadership, news items, religious articles, technical guidance on carrying out attacks, statistical data on IS's military activities, and commentary on current events (Meir Amit, 2019). It was founded in April 2015 and was distributed both online and offline when IS controlled major territories in Iraq and Syria (Abdulmajid, 2021). After the loss of territory, *Al Naba* became an online-exclusive publication, which IS continues to publish to this date. Figure 4.1 illustrates the three tiers of IS's media department and the number of videos published by them which are included in the dataset.

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[69] A *hadith* mentions *Dabiq* as the location of an apocalyptic battle that will take place between Muslims and their enemies (BBC Monitoring, 2016).
[70] *Rumiyah* means Rome. The title refers to the following quote by former IS leader Abu Hamzah Al Muhajir: "O *Muwahhidin* (monotheists), rejoice for by Allah we will not rest from our jihad except beneath the olive trees of Rumiyah (Rome)." Rumiyah supplemented Dabiq after its discontinuation in July 2016.
[71] *Al* Naba literally means the news item. The 78th chapter in Quran is also entitled *Al Naba*.

BASE FOUNDATION (54)						
Al Furqan Foundation (15)	Al Hayat Media Center (27)	Al I'tisam Media Foundation (11)	Ajnad Foundation for Media Production (1)	Al Bayan Radio	Al Himmah Library	Al Naba
PROVINCIAL MEDIA BUREAUS (306)						
Al Anbar (4)	Al Barakah (10)	Al Fallujah (15)	Al Furat (16)	Al Janub (7)	Al Jazirah (19)	Al Khayr (47)
Dijlah (13)	Dimashq (7)	Diyala (4)	Halab (29)	Hamah (3)	Homs (15)	Kirkuk (11)
	Ninawa (51)	North Baghdad (3)	Raqqah (43)	Salahuddin (9)		
AUXILIARY AGENCIES (14)						
		A'maq News Agency (7)	Al Battar Foundation (3)	Furat Media Center (4)		

Figure 4.1: Distribution of the Dataset per IS Media Bureaus.

IS's secondary media tier consisted of 18 *Wilayaat* (provincial) media bureaus located in Iraq and Syria, namely *Al Anbar, Al Barakah, Al Fallujah, Al Furat, Al Janub, Al Jazirah, Al Khayr, Dijlah, Dimashq* (Damascus), *Diyala, Halab* (Aleppo), *Hamah, Homs, Kirkuk, Ninawa*, North Baghdad, *Raqqah*, and *Salahuddin* (Gambhir, 2016; Winter, 2015; Zelin, 2015). It also had its media offices in overseas affiliates such as *Khurasan* (Afghanistan), *Sinai* (Egypt), and West Africa (ISWAP). An in-depth study carried out by Kaczkowski, Winkler, El Damanhoury & Luu (Kaczkowski, et al., 2021) demonstrated that IS relied heavily on its territorial resources to sustain the online media campaign and vice versa, and that its visual content produced by the above-listed media houses suffered from severe disruption and decline in output due to contraction in IS's territorial control, which eventually became non-existent by the end of 2018. [point out that the media offices in the provinces expanded and contracted over time].

In addition to the primary and secondary tiers, the 'auxiliary agencies' (*Al Wikalaat Al Mu'assasat Al Radifah*) were tasked with fulfilling the Base Foundation's needs and interests while side-stepping the duties of provincial

media outlets (Al Tamimi, 2017). Chief among the auxiliary agencies was *A'maq*[72] News Agency (*Wakalat A'maq Al-Akhbariyyah*), which despite not being formally acknowledged as part of IS's media apparatus, covered not just attacks and military operations carried out by IS but also the provision of services and civilian life in IS-held territories (Al Tamimi, 2017). It emerged in late 2014 during IS's campaign to capture Kobani in northern Syria. According to Callimachi (2016), IS's internal documents suggest *A'maq* was a central component of its media operations but was never formally presented as such in order to maintain 'a veneer of objectivity'. Other two media groups connected to IS while not being officially presented as such were Furat[73] Media Center (*Markaz Al Furat lil I'lam*), which was established in IS's Caucasus Province in July 2015 and mainly released Russian-language videos; and, Al Battar[74] Foundation which produced media products and operated in various IS provinces including in Syria, Sinai, Khorasan, Libya and Yemen (Meir Amit, 2019).

As this project is entirely focused on the Caliphate's performances of modern stateness, the dataset included videos which were published by IS's primary, secondary and auxiliary tier media bureaus, but excluded those released by external IS *Wilayaat* based in countries such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. This was done mainly due to most of the videos released by external *Wilayaat* being focused more on issues related to the particular *wilayat* and not exclusively representative of the Caliphate's performances of modern stateness.

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[72] A'maq literally means the depths.
[73] *Al Furat* is the Arabic name for River Euphrates.
[74] *Al Battar* literally means the cutting edge. It is also the name of one of Muhammad's 11 swords (Seerah, 2020).

Dissemination Platforms

IS laid the foundations of a community of online supporters, which was decentralised in nature, extensive in outreach, and global in terms of coverage (Gambhir, 2016). Unlike other Jihadist groups in Syria and beyond who somehow managed to maintain their official presence through official websites, forums or social media accounts, IS's attempts to maintain an official stream of online presence, that is, through websites, social media accounts or forums was met with severe disruption (Conway, et al., 2017) despite making initial efforts to establish its own media sources including formal and informal ones (Szenes & Shamieh, 2015).

Due to the severe disruption of its official online sources, IS adopted a 'crowd sourcing' strategy in which they posted photos, videos, digital magazines, audio broadcasts, e-books and others, on online platforms, forums and file sharing websites, allowing its international and multi-lingual supporter network to download and repost the content far and wide (Gambhir, 2016). Apart from exploiting the vast popularity of both mainstream social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, IS supporters also used niche social media platforms such as Instagram, LiveLeak, SnapChat, Tumblr, and others; along with several file-sharing sites such as justpaste.it, pastebin, and Yandex; and message broadcasting apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, Skype and Telegram (Lakomy, 2017; Gambhir, 2016), as shown in Figure 4.2.
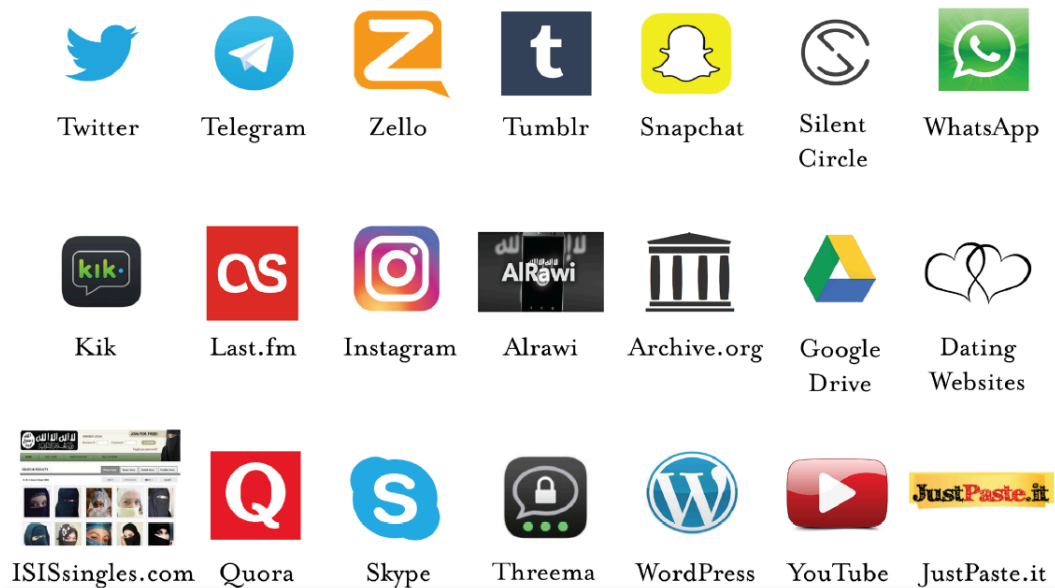
Figure 4.2: List of Online Platforms used by IS's supporters. Source: Gambhir (2016).

Identifying the Dataset – From Ethics to Downloading and Cataloguing

This section describes the different steps that were taken while establishing the dataset. The first sub-section delves into the ethical issues of this study; the second provides details of where the videos were sourced from; whereas the third describes the cataloguing conventions that were applied to the downloaded videos to form the dataset.

Ethics

The study fully acknowledges the presence of violent content, albeit limited, in IS official videos that are included in the dataset and the harmful effects it may have on its viewers (Conway, 2021). To begin with the data collection process, the author sought permission from the University's Information Systems Services (ISS) department to download and store the dataset on a secure, encrypted computer with sole access available only to the author, which after a back and forth of email exchanges, was granted approval. The author then attended VOX-Pol's Summer School in Budapest, Hungary, in July 2016 where the participants were briefed about the ethics and practices of monitoring and storing violent extremist

content, among other topics. The author also attended the University's 'Research Ethics' training programme in 2018, which helped with the understanding of contemporary ethical issues in research and developed skills in applying ethical theories and principles to practical settings. As the research project did not involve other human participants, acquisition of approvals was not needed.

The entire dataset was coded by the author for analysis purposes, which included watching violent content such as gruesome executions and hateful language towards IS's perceived enemies. As recommended by Peter King (2018) in his article for VOX-Pol, efforts such as taking breaks, not watching the entire clip unless necessary, speaking to the supervisor and other peers when needed, and going on a short vacation after the completion of coding were taken in order to mitigate the risks related to trauma and mental/psychological wellbeing. Finally, the author declares that there has been no redistribution or dissemination of any IS propaganda videos both online and offline in any shape or form.

Downloading

The first step was to download official IS videos from available online sources and store them in a safe and ethical manner. The majority of videos included in the dataset were downloaded from the Internet Archive, also known as Archive.org, a not-for-profit website, which describes itself as "a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artefacts in digital form.[75]" Being a major website on the Internet, which "serve[s] millions of people each day and is one of the top 300 web sites in the world," IS supporters used the platform to upload content and post the hyperlinks on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook as 'out-links'

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[75] About the Internet Archive https://archive.org/about/

(Conway, et al., 2017). According to Wolf (2018), Archive.org was one of the top content-hosting providers used by IS supporters where they uploaded and distributed materials throughout the Caliphate era. He also noted that IS supporters also "began posting links to web pages stored by Archive.org's website-archiving service" and "rather than waiting for these pages to be archived by the service's web crawler, members were actively archiving pages after creating them" (2018, p. 3). As a result of law enforcement agencies of many governments around the world making tougher demands to remove the violent extremist content from social platforms, Archive.org also took serious action and started removing pro-IS content (Roberts, 2018). However, even in mid 2022 an unknown number of IS propaganda videos can still be found on Archive.org.

The second major source used to obtain videos for this project was Twitter where IS supporters posted out-links that led to other websites such as justpaste.it, pastebin, Yandex and other file sharing websites. The author was part of a 2017 UK Home Office-funded research project, which was commissioned to measure pro-IS supporter base's disruption on Twitter. While working on said project, the author came across thousands of active and suspended pro-IS accounts which posted out-links, many of which were removed by Twitter's content moderators. However, some links were still active until the end of data collection period in October 2018, which meant that it was possible to retrieve content. The third major download source was Jihadology, a clearinghouse for primary Jihadi multimedia content, from where some of the videos included in the dataset were obtained. The website, founded by Jihadism scholar Aaron Y. Zelin, offers a comprehensive collection of thousands of IS videos and can be searched in several different ways including by time (month/year) and categories (media organisations).

Cataloguing

As part of establishing the dataset, a thorough screening of more than 600 downloaded videos was performed while applying the following filters: First, that the videos were published by official IS media bureaus only; Second, that the videos were published during the Caliphate era (July 2014 – July 2017) with some notable exceptions, which are mentioned in the upcoming section; Third, that only the videos with content that clearly refers to one of the four case studies, that is, population, territory, governance, and foreign relations – in accordance with the four criteria of the 1933 Montevideo Convention – are included while anything else is excluded.

During the screening of the downloaded videos, their details such as titles, spoken language(s), subtitles, media outlet, publication date, duration, genre, nature (violent/non-violent), and tags describing all segments/scenes were simultaneously registered in an Excel spreadsheet. After filtering the downloaded files along the above mentioned filters, a total of 374 videos were included in the dataset, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Overview of the Dataset

Number of Videos per Case Study	
Population	97
Territory	77
Governance	131
Foreign Relations	69
Total	**374**

The screening of the dataset revealed that IS took special care in naming their videos in order to give their viewers an indication of what they are about. In some

cases, if the title was not indicative enough, watching the video in its entirety made it clear what particular subject it relates to. It is important to mention here that videos included in the first four case studies are standalone in nature, that is, the videos included in the Population case study are not found in the Territory, Governance and Foreign Relation case studies or vice versa, therefore unique to them. While many IS videos included in the dataset are very clear about their subject, therefore easily distinguishable and put under a single category, some videos clearly overlap and can be carrying content that caters to several subjects at the same time. One good example is the video entitled "A Visit To Mosul" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) which shows locals expressing their joy over the capture of Mosul by IS, a foreign fighter describing the events that led to the conquest of Iraq's second city, and aspects of governance such as traffic police, *Shariah* courts, and *hisbah*, among many other performances. In such situations, the author carefully weighed the contents of the video and made an executive decision to assign them to a particular case study. Case in point, "A Visit To Mosul" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) was assigned to the Population case study as it focused more on the subjects of the Caliphate compared to other issues.

Classifying the Dataset – Timeline, Genre, Languages and Technical Aspects

This section offers information about different features of the dataset such as the timeline, genre, languages and technical aspects, which emerged after the downloaded videos were catalogued.

Timeline

The bulk of the videos (229) in the dataset were published by IS in 2015, which according to two major studies was the year when the output of IS's media bureaus

was hundreds of videos a month (Winter, 2015; Milton, 2016). While majority of the videos (341) included in the dataset range from July 2014 to July 2017, the three years during which the Caliphate existed, there are 16 videos from the pre-Caliphate era, and 17 post-Caliphate videos, which were added for comparison and context purposes, as shown in Table 4.2. For example, the dataset contains 3 governance-themed videos before IS declared the Caliphate but none after the loss of Mosul, which is most likely due to the reason that the organisation was in total disarray and there were no performances related to governance that could be projected. However, IS did publish videos related to the population and territory before and after the Caliphate era. The author, while agreeing with Winter's opinion that "pre-'caliphate' content should not be cast aside as irrelevant; after all, the propagandistic evolution of these earlier groups is responsible for the nature of Islamic State's messaging today" (2015, p. 12), also believes the same should be the case for post-Caliphate content as IS continued to project its state-like performances, albeit in decline, and it was not until March 2019 when Baghuz, the last town under their control, was liberated and IS ceased to exist as a 'State'.

Table 4.2: A Distribution of the Dataset According to the Publication Dates

| | PRE-CALIPHATE | CALIPHATE | | | | POST-CALIPHATE | |
	JAN 2013 - JUN 2014	JUL 2014 - DEC 2014	JAN-DEC 2015	JAN-DEC 2016	JAN-JUL 2017	AUG 2017- JUL 2021	TOTAL
POPULATION	7	8	57	19	0	6	97
TERRITORY	4	5	41	12	7	8	77
GOVERNANCE	3	5	96	23	4	0	131
FOREIGN RELATIONS	2	9	35	14	6	3	69
TOTAL	16	27	229	68	17	17	374

Genres

Following are the different types of IS videos found in the dataset:

A Cappella: IS produced a number of videos that centred on rhythmic chanting of lyrics combined with sophisticated sound effects and tantalising video clips. Called *anashid* in Arabic, they do not feature use of any musical instruments because it is not lawful under Islamic law (Lahoud & Pieslak, 2018). IS released its famous

anthem "My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared" in December 2013 when it was waging a campaign to capture *wilayat Raqqah* (Lahoud & Pieslak, 2018). Some videos included in the dataset are standalone *anashid* videos while many others feature *anashid* as the soundtrack.

Biography/profiles: Another important genre is the biographical/profile style of videos where the biography of a particular person related to the Islamic State is profiled, either briefly or in detail. Several videos included in the dataset are biographies of IS foreign fighters, for example, "Stories From The Land Of The Living" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) is an English language video which profiles the life of a foreign fighter named Abu Khalid Al Cambodi[76] who migrated from Australia to join the Islamic State. Similarly, IS published several other videos which profiled the lives of other local and foreign IS fighters, in which they were projected as 'Jihadi celebrities' who abandoned their comfortable lives home/abroad in their quest to join a cause which is higher and noble, and would not hesitate to sacrifice their lives to defend the Caliphate. Some IS videos also profile institutions, for example, videos entitled "Tour Of The Diwans Of The State" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016) and "Traffic Police In Wilayat Ninawa" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), not only to demonstrate that the Caliphate is being run by very capable and driven men, and it needs other such men to come and join them, but also as a proof that the 'State' (*Ad-Dawlah* in Arabic) exists and is performing modern stateness like all other modern States in the world.

Communiqué: Several videos included in the dataset, especially in the foreign relations case study, basically feature messages – containing facts, occurrences, or

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[76] His real name is Neil Prakash and was born in Australia to a Fijian father and Cambodian mother (BBC News, 2016).

intentions – that are directed towards a state, nation, or a group of people and are typically issued by an IS leader, fighter or a group of fighters on behalf of the Caliphate. As the Islamic State did not have a dedicated 'Diwan of Foreign Affairs' the duties of communicating with the outside world were often tasked to IS clergy, commanders and fighters who acted as the undeclared spokesmen and conveyed messages directly, often in condemning and threatening tones. Prime examples include videos that start with titles such as *"A Message to …"* in which IS fighters, at times masked and unidentified, spoke on camera and did the talking. Videos of this genre feature plain-talk, and do not include other elements such as animations, on-screen graphics and narrators, and often times the featured individuals record their messages in remote locations, often accompanied by other men of the same ethnicity or nationality, and their children.

Historical narratives/rhetoric: IS produced a large number of videos which are based on conspiracies, historical events, legendary characters, myths, and prophecies, and are often accompanied by added special effects, animation, and a sweeping soundtrack. One good example is the feature film entitled "The Rise Of The *Khilafah* – The Return Of The Gold dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015), which weaves the historical narrative of gold dinar by emphasising on the necessity of having a currency with intrinsic value of global currencies such as the US dollar. The video also harks back to the time when civilisations traded in gold and silver while listing the major flaws of today's global economy, chief of which is its heavy dependence on the US dollar. Other often repeated narratives include Islamic conquests in North Africa and Europe, colonialising of the Muslim world, Arab dynasties with close ties to the Western powers, and oppression of Muslims around the world by Western powers and their regional allies.

Reportage/news: While heavily relying on rhetoric and propaganda in its narratives, IS also focused its resources on producing visual content which had a news angle and reporting side to it. This approach was adopted as part of its bid to target local, regional and global audiences with multilingual offerings using a broad range of platforms and to maximise its reach (Ingram, 2014) and consolidate its support. In several of its videos, IS routinely blended excerpts from news programmes broadcasted on local, regional and international news channels with its own narratives and political stance. One good example is the series of reportage entitled "Lend Me Your Ears" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2014) which was presented by kidnapped British journalist John Cantlie from frontlines locations such as Aleppo, Kobani, and Mosul, in which he routinely questioned the Western narrative, and 'debunked' it with presenting IS's narrative as his own.

Special report/documentary: IS's media houses published a large volume of documentary-style special reports that emphasised its political and military muscle while also showing their government efficiently running day-to-day civic affairs, with the intent of projecting its authority on the ground and giving "its audiences the perception of an accountable and transparent authority" (Ingram, 2014, p. 8). Several videos included in the foreign relations case study can be classed as documentaries, with notable examples such as "Breaking Of The Borders And Slaughtering Of The Jews" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015) and "Crematorium Of The Magi" (Wilayat Al Janub, 2017), which are directed at the Israeli and Iranian governments respectively.

Vox pop: The term 'vox pop' comes from the Latin phrase *vox populi*, meaning 'voice of the people', and is used by the media as a tool to provide a snapshot of public opinion (Media College, 2002). IS media producers published dozens of

videos where they asked the subjects, probably at random, to give their views on a particular topic, which were presented to the viewers as a reflection of the popular opinion. When faced with heavy backlash of their inhumane action of setting alight the captured Jordanian pilot Muaz Kasasbeh, IS used public opinion as a justification of its decision and published several videos, including one entitled "Healing The Believers' Chests" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015), in which civilians, including children, spoke on camera about the execution by burning and supported IS's decision "as a measure of retribution and protection of the civilians".

Languages

Of the total 374 videos included in the dataset, 302 videos are exclusively in Arabic language; 22 videos are exclusively in English language; 38 videos are partly Arabic or English-language; and 31 other videos fully or partly feature languages other than Arabic and English. Below is a description of the major foreign languages (based on the family tree of languages), apart from English, that featured in official IS videos, and were included in the dataset. Several other videos included in the dataset partly contain speech in languages such as Bosnian, Hebrew, and Uzbek, but are not described below.

Turkish: It is the official language of the Republic of Turkey and is spoken by an estimated total of 61 million speakers worldwide, the majority of which are native to Anatolia. Turkish belongs to the southwestern (Oghuz) group of Turkic languages, which is a subfamily of the Altaic languages (Underhill, 2006, p. 1112). It is one of the prominent languages of IS propaganda. The four Turkish language videos included in the dataset are entitled "Turkey And The Fire Of Nationalism" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), "Legislation Is Not But For God" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015),

"The Path Of Jihad" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), and "Cross Shield" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016), and address the huge Islamist community based in Turkey and Europe.

Turkmen: Like Turkish language, Turkmen belongs to the southwestern (Oghuz) branch of the Turkic language family, which is a subfamily of the Altaic languages (Underhill, 2006, p. 1112). It is spoken by members of the ethnic Turkmen or Turkomans in the northern Iraqi provinces of Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Nineveh and Salahuddin. Iraqi Turkmen are the third biggest ethnic group in Iraq after Arabs and Kurds. They are divided along Shia-Sunni sectarian lines, and share close cultural and linguistic ties with the Turks. A large number of Sunni Turkmen supported IS which helped them capture cities such as Amerli, Tel Afar, and Tuz Khormato in northern Iraq (Tastekin, 2014). Two Turkmen-language videos entitled "Agriculture In Wilayat Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015) and "Atmosphere Of Eid Al Adha In Tel Afar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) are part of the dataset.

Uighur: Formerly known as Eastern Turki, it is spoken by Uighurs in the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang of north-western China, also known as East Turkestan. It belongs to the south-eastern branch of the Turkic language family and is spoken by at least 10 million native speakers (Johanson, 2006, p. 1142). A large number of Uighurs who migrated from China to Syria via Turkey, settled in parts of northern Syria, and affiliated themselves with Jihadi groups such as *Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham*[77] (HTS) and Turkistan Islamic Party[78] (TIP). Two Uighur

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[77] *Jabhat Al Nusra* (JN) or Al Nusra Front allegedly severed its ties with Al Qaeda in 2016 and rebranded itself as *Hay'at Tahrir al Sham* (Front for the Liberation of the Levante in Arabic) and controls large swathes of territory in Syria's Idlib province. It is locked in a power struggle with other Syrian Jihadi factions such as *Ahrar Al Sham* while also at war with the Syrian regime and its allies (Celso, 2018, p. 224).
[78] Turkestan Islamic Party is an Idlib-based Uighur Jihadi group (Lund, 2018).

language videos entitled "Come, My Friend" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) and "The Quarters Of The Caliphate – Emigrants From Turkistan In The Land Of Islam" (Al Hayat Media, 2017) are included in the dataset, and address the Uighur community in Syria and abroad.

Kurdish: The Kurdish language is part of the Iranian language family and its three main dialects are spoken mainly in Kurdish-majority regions in south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and north-eastern Syria respectively (Skjærvø, 2006, p. 625). Four Kurdish language videos, with Arabic subtitles, included in the dataset, are entitled "Picnic For The Descendants of Saladin" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Aspects Of Battle From South Ain Al Islam (Kobani)" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), "Aggressive Response To Those Who Helped In The Bombings Of The Tyrants" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), and "Coverage Of The Atmosphere Of Eid In Wilayat Kirkuk" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2016) respectively, which address the large Kurdish population based in northern Iraq. Hundreds of Kurds from Turkey, Iraq and Syria joined the ranks of IS and fought against their own kin in Iraq and Syria (Collard, 2015).

Persian: Also known as Farsi, is a member of the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian language family (Skjærvø, 2006), and is spoken by around 74 million people in countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan (Ethnologue, 2021). Three Farsi language videos included in the dataset are entitled as "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness 2" (Wilayat Al Jazeera, 2015), "Crematorium Of The Magi" (Wilayat Al Janub, 2017), and "Persia – From Yesterday Till Today" (Wilayat Diyala, 2017), and address Iran's large Sunni communities based in the provinces of Golestan, Khuzestan, Kurdistan, and Sistan-Balochistan. The video entitled "Crematorium Of The Magi" (Wilayat Al

Janub, 2017) features the IS-trained terrorists who attacked the Iranian parliament and Ayatollah Khomeini's mausoleum on 7 June, 2017.

French: It is related to the Romance group of Indo-European languages. The roots of modern French language can be traced back to the Latin of northern Gaul. French is currently spoken by an approximately 100 million people worldwide as a first or near-native second language (Smith, 2009, p. 427) many of them living in Muslim-majority Francophone countries such as Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Mali, Senegal, and Tunisia. Twelve French language videos included in the dataset are entitled as "The Ones Who Believed, Migrated And Fought" (Al Furqan Media, 2014), "Mujatweets 6" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), "Stories From The Land Of Living – The Story Of Abu Suhayb Al Faransi From France" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), "The Story Of Abu Salman Al Faransi From France" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Paris has Collapsed" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), "Message To France" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2015), "France Blew Up 3" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015), "My Revenge" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), "We Will Give You A Good Life" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016), "In their Footsteps" (Furat Media, 2016), and "Blood For Blood" (Al Battar Media, 2017).

German: It is a language that belongs to the western group of the Germanic languages of the Indo-European language family. It is spoken by an estimated 100 million speakers worldwide, and ranked as the 10th most spoken language of the world (Durrell, 2006, p. 444). IS produced German-language content which was directed at Germany's 5.6 million strong Muslim population, mostly originating from Turkey, Middle East and North Africa[79]. Two German language videos

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[79] The study, conducted once every five years, was carried out by the Interior Ministry between July 2019 and March 2020 (MLD, 2020).

included in the dataset are entitled "Mujatweets 1" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) and "Mujatweets 4" (Al Hayat Media, 2014).

Russian: It is a major language of the eastern branch of the Slavic family of languages and is part of the Indo-European languages group (Brown & Ogilvie, 2006). It is the official language of Russia and is also widely spoken in the former Soviet Union republics such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with a speaker base of around 258 million people (Ethnologue, 2021). Five Russian language videos part of the dataset are entitled "A Visit To Mosul" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014), "Mujatweets 8" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), "A Message From Brother Abdullah Al Moldovi" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), "The Caucasus – The Disease And The Medicine" (Al Hayat Media, 2016), and "Total Bankruptcy" (Furat Media, 2017) respectively.

Bahasa/Malay: Known as both Bahasa Indonesia and Malay, it is the official language of Malaysia and Indonesia respectively. Malay is a member of the Malayic language group, and belongs to the subfamily of the western Malayo-Polynesian languages of the Austronesian language family (Nothofer, 2006, p. 667) and is spoken by 198 million people in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore among many other places (Ethnologue, 2021). Both Indonesia and Malaysia are Muslim-majority countries. Two Bahasa languages videos which are part of the dataset are entitled "March Forth Whether Light Or Heavy" (Furat Media, 2015) and "Love For Those Who Emigrated" (Furat Media, 2016) respectively.

Technical Aspects

The format of all videos in the dataset is MPEG-4 files. Also known as MP4, it was introduced in late 1998 and is considered an industry standard for audio and video

coding formats by the Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG) (Fernando &

Ebrahimi, 2002). MP4 format is popular because the compression of AV data

makes it easier to publish high-definition content on the web via streaming,

downloading or broadcast television apps (Turner, 2014). The majority of the files

in the dataset is high definition (HD) with a resolution of at least 720p (pixels),

while a few files are standard definition (SD) with varying resolutions, such as 480i

(interlaced resolution) or 576i.

There are also some files which are full HD (1920 x 1080) which is a format used

by major online video streaming/on-demand services such as Amazon Prime,

Hulu, Netflix, Vimeo, and YouTube. An inspection of some video files included in

the dataset by Adobe Bridge software reveals file metadata, such as, the actual date

they were created, the application used to create the file, for example, Adobe

Premiere Pro CC 2015 for Windows PC was commonly used, frame rate, frame

width + height, and video dimensions. However, further metadata such as

name/location/phone number of the creator, Camera Data, GPS and other

personal information is not available, which can be considered as a form of

sophistication on part of IS media publishers in order to cover their tracks and not

compromise their operations.

Coding the Dataset

After carrying out extensive trials of visual analysis software[80], MAXQDA was

chosen for coding the videos and carrying out qualitative/quantitative data

analysis because the software offers robust features and options, facilitates easy

import, organisation, analyses, visualisation, and allows publication of all forms of

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[80] The software were NVivo, ELAN, Transana, and MAXQDA.

data that can be collected electronically, especially videos. It also offers extensive

coding system, powerful visual tools and smooth integration with Microsoft Excel,

which also helps with data analysis. It works seamlessly with macOS, which is the

operating system used for the entire research project. According to the software's

developers, MAXQDA is designed to facilitate and support qualitative,

quantitative, and mixed methods research projects; and is preferred by many

visual data analysts due to its comprehensive range of functions, from

transcription to inferential statistical analysis, and its promise to be "all in one"

software for visual research purposes (MAXQDA, 2021). The following sub-

sections explain the four steps of the methodology: importing → coding →

organising → visual analysis.
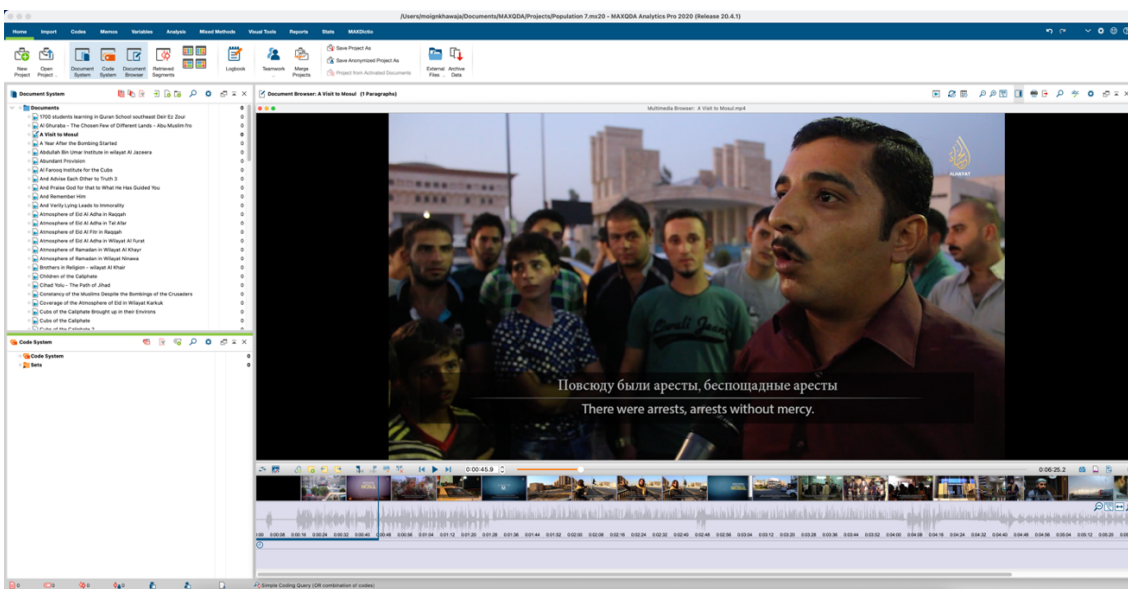
Figure 4.3: Screenshot of MAXQDA main interface

Importing

The goal of this stage was to collect all videos of a particular case study, for

example Population, in a single document in order to codify them. The process

started from creating a new file, initially known as "New Project", which was saved

on the hard disk drive (HDD). The interface, as seen in Figure 3, is divided into 3

panes, namely Document System, Code System, and Document Browser, apart

from the ribbon menu on top of the interface with options such as Home, Import,

Codes, Memos, Variables, Analysis, Mixed Methods, Visual Tools, Reports, Stats, and MAXDictio. Once a video – of any resolution or major file formats such as .mp4, .mov, .mpg, .m4v, or .wmv – is imported into the Project, it is shown in the Document System pane. As shown in Figure 3, once the video is imported, it appears in the Documents as well as in the Document Browser, which is further divided into 3 sections: Top menu which includes options such as file name, sync mode, overview of timestamps, zoom in/out, print document, export displayed document, display search toolbar, spellcheck, preferences, undock/maximise window, and close window; Multimedia browser which includes video player, and a control pane, which displays the icons of control panel, video thumbnails, adding new memo, going to previous/next memo, start of clip selection, play/5 seconds back/5 seconds forward, timer, video position slider, video time lapse counter, screenshot button, option to insert video image as a document in "Documents System", option to export coded video clips, and help. The third section displays the thumbnails of video, the audio layer, and codes. The third pane, right under Document System pane, is that of Code System, which displays the following icons on the top: Reset activations, Display codes in activated documents only, New Code, Display search toolbar, Preferences, Undock window, Maximise window, and Close window. Under the icons bar of the Code System appear the codes; the Sets as well as count of codes to the right of the window pane.

Coding

This is the most important step of the methodology. Unlike other studies that focused on the main themes of IS's multimedia releases, such as brutality, belonging, mercy, military, victimhood, and utopia (Winter, 2015), this project is focused on IS's state-like performances related to its population, territory, governance, and foreign relations. The author adopted a highly visual approach to

code all 374 videos, which meant watching all the sequences/scenes of the video and coding them on the basis of the particular performance(s) that appeared on the screen, and the context behind the performance(s). Following is a step-by-step coding process of a video entitled "A Visit to Mosul" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), which is part of the Population case study. The video is 6 minutes 25 seconds long and was published soon after the capture of Mosul in June 2014.

Step 1: Almost all videos included in the dataset begin with an introductory overlay, which usually features the logo of the publishing house, title of the video, and a voiceover which provides a quick context of the video. The same is the case with the video entitled "A Visit to Mosul" (Al Hayat Media, 2014). After playing the video, the selection of first 35.2 seconds, which is the blue overlay under the scene thumbnails, was coded as 'title/text', as seen in Figure 4.4.
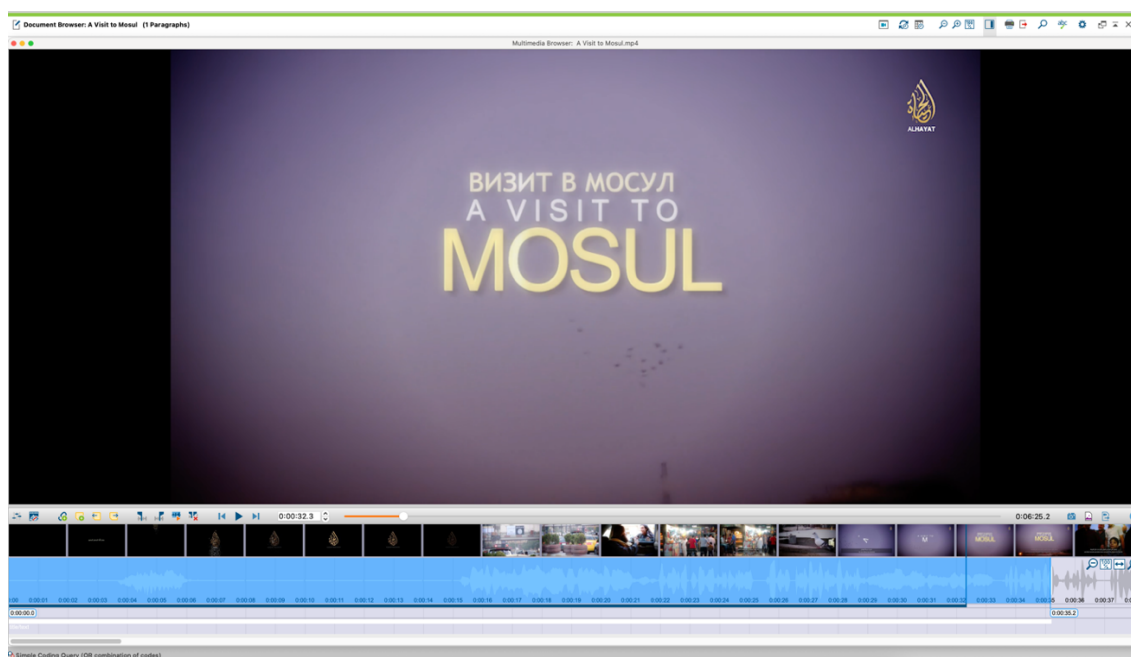
Figure 4.4: Coding step 1

Step 2: After the intro, the video shows the people gathered in the streets celebrating IS's capture of Mosul. An unnamed local man, who is surrounded by at least a dozen men and children, is asked on camera about the past and present

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situation in Mosul to which he responds favourably. While speaking on the camera, his narration is accompanied by background scenes where men can be seen walking in the streets and sitting in cafes having food and drinks while traffic is passing smoothly, followed by another scene where an IS traffic police officer is manning the road. The sequence comes to a close when the title of the video is shown again as a marker to indicate the end of the first sequence and the start of the next one. All of the first sequence was selected and coded as 'local(s)' as it depicts the local population of Mosul, as shown in Figure 4.5.
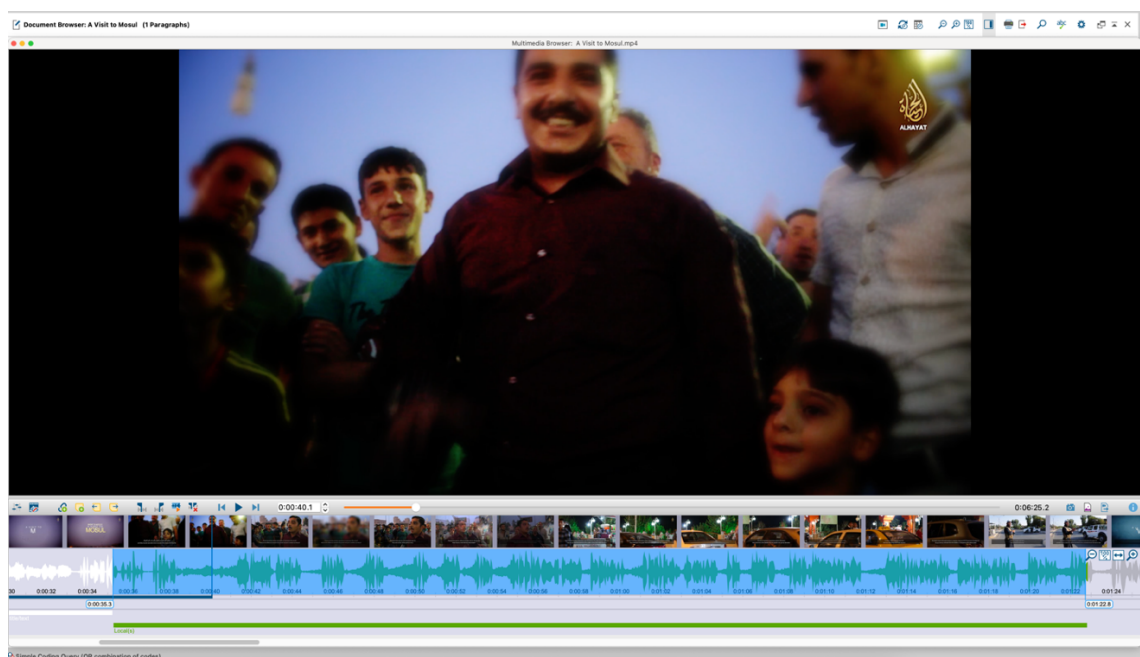
Figure 4.5: Coding step 2

Step 3: The next scene comprises an armed unnamed Russian-speaking IS fighter standing on a flyover and pointing the camera in different directions to pinpoint the advances made by groups of IS fighters, while describing on camera the events that led to the capture of Mosul. This scene selection is coded as 'Foreign Fighter(s)' as it solely features an IS foreign fighter, as seen in Figure 4.6.
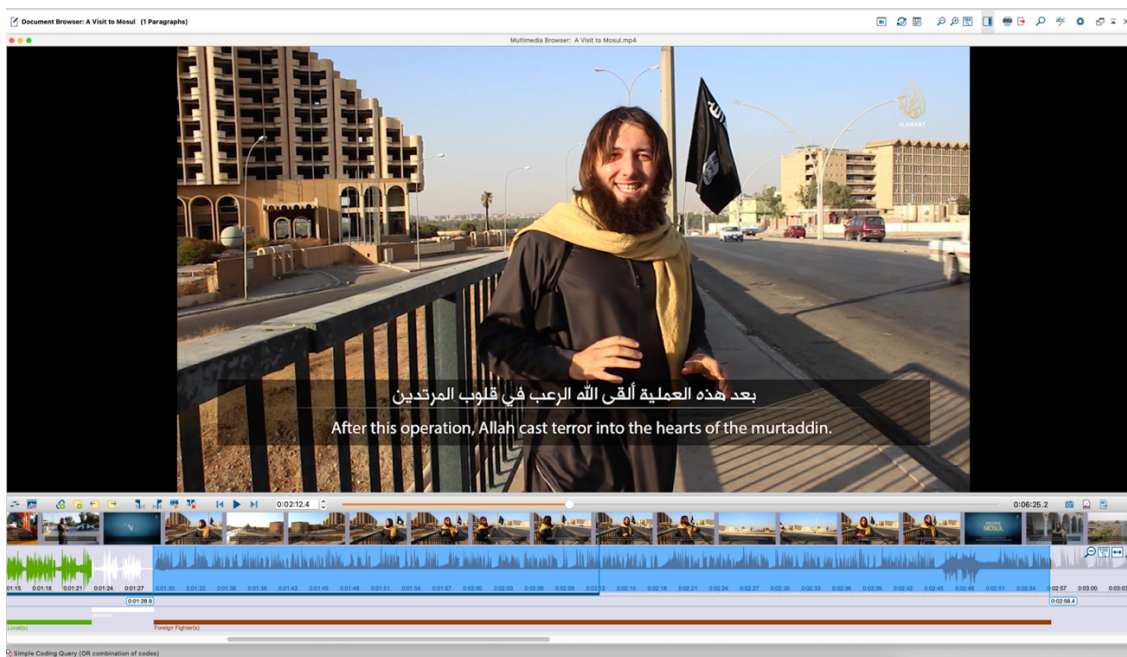
Figure 4.6: Coding step 3

Step 4: The following scene features a *hisbah* vehicle driven by an IS *hisbah* officer on a market road. He is accompanied by another officer who is barking orders on the megaphone to the people in the bazaar. This scene is coded as 'IS engaging with locals', as shown in Figure 4.7.
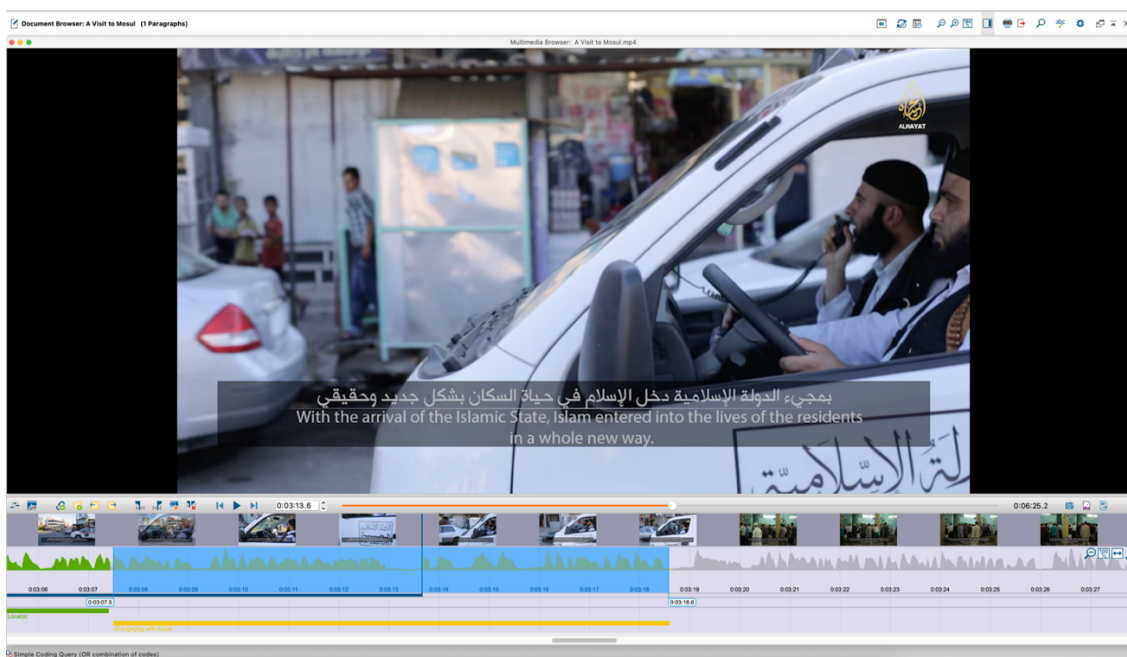
Figure 4.7: Coding step 4

Step 5: The next sequence consists of three scenes: the first shows men gathered in a mosque for congregation prayer; the second shows two young boys with their

(grand) father riding a wooden seesaw; whereas the third shows the view of a bustling road lined up with shops and kiosks. This entire sequence is coded as 'locals' while the scene featuring children is coded 'Child(ren)', which overlaps with 'locals' code, as shown in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8: Coding step 5

Step 6: This sequence consists of five different scenes: the first shows Yezidi men embracing IS fighters after purportedly 'embracing Islam', as seen in Figure 4.9; the second shows an imam hugging a middle-aged Yezidi man; the third shows dozens of Yezidi men in a bowing position while offering their prayers, which is most likely their first prayer after 'conversion' to Islam; the fourth shows a crowd gathered around a media point to watch IS propaganda videos; whereas the fifth displays the façade of a *Shariah* courthouse. The entire sequence is coded as 'IS engaging with locals' and not 'locals' because it involves interactions between IS and locals.
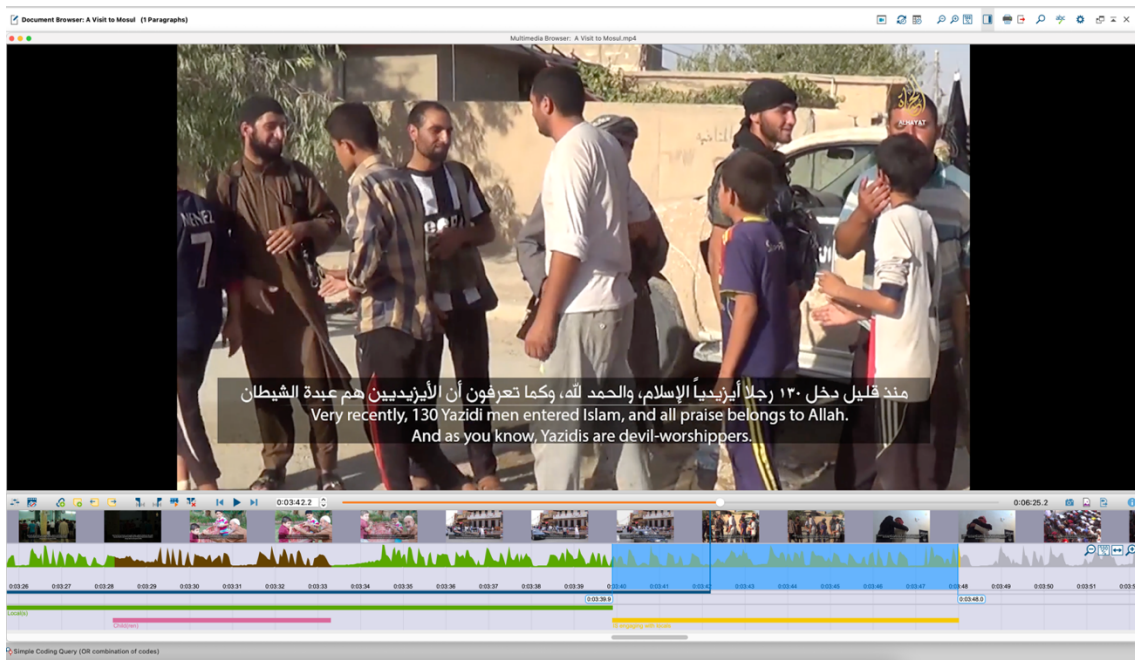
Figure 4.9: Coding step 6

<u>Step 7</u>: The next scene involves the tour of a Mosul courthouse by the Russian-

speaking IS foreign fighter and is coded as 'foreign fighter', as seen in Figure 4.10.
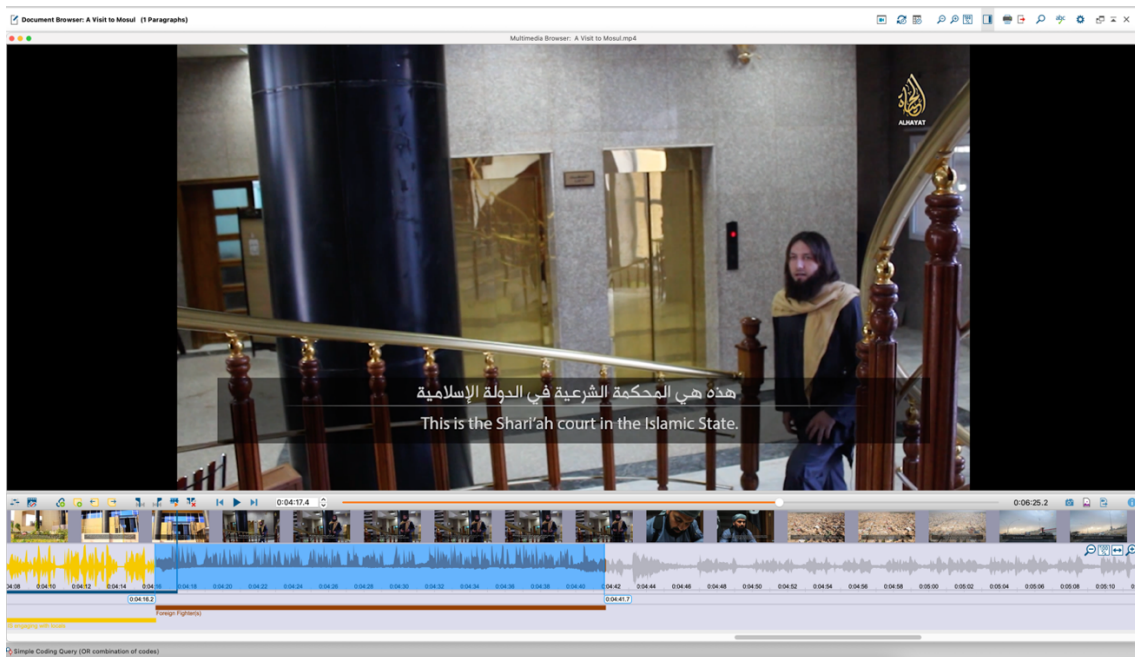
Figure 4.10: Coding step 7

<u>Step 8</u>: The last sequence involves several scenes including a courthouse official

speaking on camera about the blessings of *Shariah* (Islamic justice system) and the

commandment of God about the importance of dispensing fair and just trials;

aerial view of Mosul downtown, IS officials dealing with complainants, *hisbah*

officials passing through a market and speaking to a vendor, and the historic

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leaning minaret of Mosul's Great Mosque of Al Nuri, where Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi made his sole on-camera public appearance. The entire sequence is coded as 'IS engaging with locals' while the last 5 seconds of the video, which are blank, are coded as 'title/text' as shown in Figure 4.11. This wraps up the coding session for the video entitled "A Visit to Mosul" (Al Hayat Media, 2014).
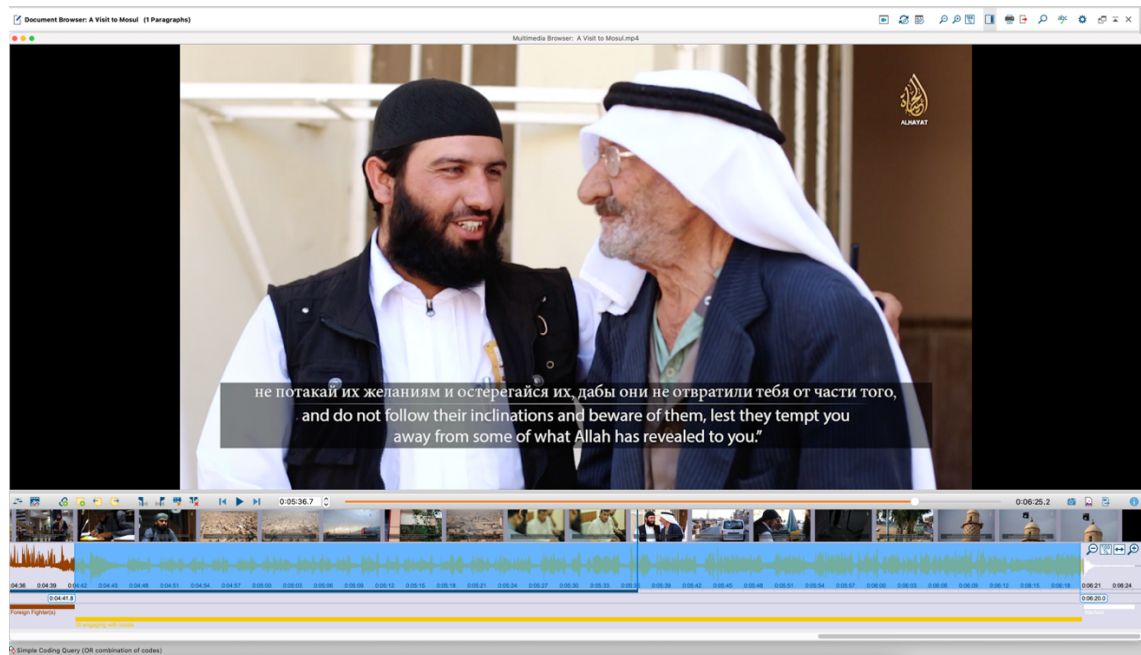
Figure 4.11: Coding step 8

Organising

The screening and cataloguing process, as explained above, was crucial in deciding what videos belonged to one of the four case studies or simply did not fit the criteria. Once catalogued, the videos in all the four case studies, that is, Population, Territory, Governance, and Foreign Relations, in accordance with the Montevideo Convention criteria, were then carefully coded and, wherever necessary, organised into codes/sub-codes format. For example, coding of the Population and Territory case studies reveal the emergence of two distinct patterns: clubbing together codes that are somehow related to each other, such as 'locals' and 'IS engaging with locals' in the Population case study; whereas the emergence of codes that are part of a stage, such as the codes 'aerial view' and 'maps' which are part of

'Identification' stage in the Territory case study, as seen in Figure 4.12. On the other hand, the codes in the Governance case study were organised in accordance with the three branches of IS's government, that is, administrative, law and order, and services, whereas the codes in Foreign Relations case study were organised along similarities, wherever needed. The codes can be organised by simply dragging one onto another and creating a code folder with sub-codes underneath them.
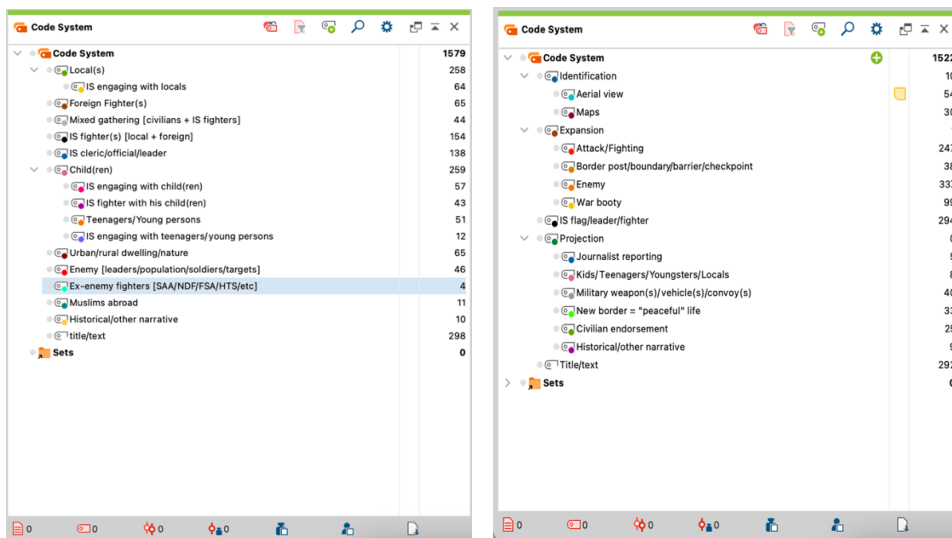
Figure 4.12: Codes of Population (left) and Territory (right) case studies.
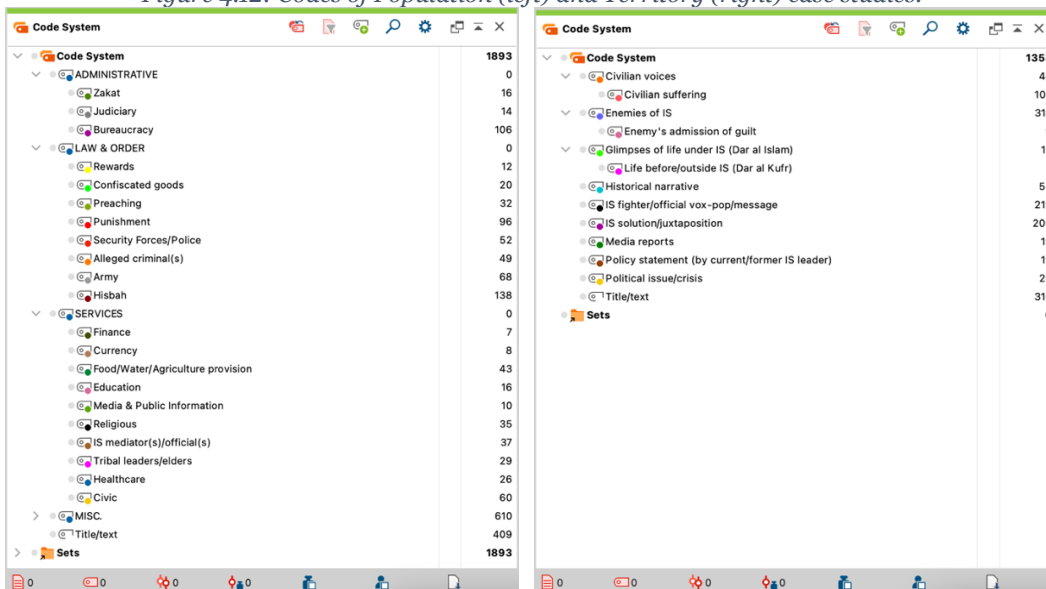
Figure 4.13: Codes of Governance (left) and Foreign Relations (right) case studies.

Qualifying the Dataset

MAXQDA software provides incredible support for exporting results and publishing them, including the option to copy visualisations and graphs to the clipboard and insert directly into a Word document, and facilitating the export of Code Coverage, including time duration and percentages, shown in Figure 4.14 as Excel worksheet tables, which is used in the empirical chapters for analysis purposes.

Figure 4.14: Code Coverage Table in MAXQDA which can be exported directly to Microsoft Excel worksheet

Projections Emerging from the Dataset

This sub-section describes the major projections of IS's 'performances of modern stateness' emerging from the dataset after the completion of coding 374 official IS videos, starting with the performances that emerged in the Population case study:

Based on the coding of 97 videos included in the Population case study, spanning roughly 14 hours, top five performances include locals span almost 3 hours (20%), followed by foreign fighters with more than 2.5 hours (18%), groups of IS fighters (including local and foreign) with more than 2 hours (16%), children (individuals and groups) almost two hours (13%), and IS officials (including clerics and leaders) almost 1.5 hours (10%), as shown in Table 4.3. List of all performances that emerged in the Population case study can be seen in Table 5.1. It is important to

mention a few things here: First, the code 'local' is based on the appearance of a local man or a group of local people in a civilian capacity. The interaction of IS fighters, whether local or foreign, with locals in any of the scenes meant it was coded as 'IS engaging with locals'; Second, IS clearly distinguished between child(ren) and child fighter(s); Third, the difference between performances by foreign fighters(s) and IS fighter(s) [local + foreign] is based on the former appearing on the screen in a civilian capacity whereas the latter appearing while fighting. Note that the 'not coded' entry in Tables 4.3-4.6 essentially reflects scenes which showed the title of the video, or other text, at the beginning, middle, or end of the video, which were left as uncoded.

Table 4.3: List of top five performances in the Population case study

TOP FIVE PERFORMANCES OF POPULATION	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
Local(s)	2:53:02	20%
Foreign fighter(s)	2:34:53	18%
IS fighter(s) [local + foreign]	2:10:05	16%
Child(ren)	1:52:34	13%
IS cleric(s)/leader(s)/official(s)	1:26:45	10%
Not coded	2:03:47	13%
Coded	16:05:16	87%
Total length of Population-themed videos	**18:09:03**	**100%**

The performances in the Territory case study, based on the visual analysis of 77 videos included in the case study, were split into three distinct stages, as shown in Table 4.4: Stage 1 is where the viewers are briefed about the location with the help of aerial views and/or maps that is about to be attacked by IS's army; Stage 2 is where IS fighters are shown staging intense attacks on the enemy and subsequent fighting which results in capturing of war booty and border posts/boundaries/checkpoints etc., which signifies the importance of combat in IS's territorial expansion plan; Stage 3 is post-conquest and is based on the performances of IS's fighters and leaders, often carrying their flags, along with

displays of support by civilians, reporting by journalists and the depiction of a peaceful life after the capture of territory. List of all the performances that emerged in the Territory case study can be seen in Table 6.1.

Table 4.4: Three stages of performances in the Territory case study

THREE STAGES OF PERFORMANCES OF TERRITORY	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
Stage 1 - Identification	**0:27:02**	**3%**
Stage 2 - Expansion	**8:46:04**	**64%**
Stage 3 - Projection	**4:51:26**	**35%**
Not Coded	0:10:54	1%
Coded	13:45:28	99%
Total length	**13:56:22**	**100%**

Based on the coding of 131 videos included in the Governance case study, spanning more than 19 hours, three main branches of governance emerge with law and order featuring on top with a duration of around 9 hours, and comprising 47 per cent of the entire performances. Services is the second major governance branch with performances spanning more than five and a half hours (30%). Administration is the third governance branch with performances spanning almost two hours (10%), as seen in Table 4.5. List of all performances that emerged in the Governance case study can be seen in Table 7.1.

Table 4.5: Performances of three main IS govt. branches in Governance case study

PERFORMANCES OF THREE MAIN BRANCHES OF GOVERNANCE	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
Law & Order	**08:58:58**	**47%**
Services	**05:39:51**	**30%**
Administrative	**01:56:54**	**10%**
NOT CODED	0:18:08	2%
CODED	18:46:05	98%
Total length	**19:04:13**	**100%**

The foreign policy case study comprises 69 videos spanning almost 12.5 hours in duration. Almost half the performances, more than 6 hours in duration, are projected by IS fighters/officials who speak on the camera and express their

opinions or at times read a pre-written statement. The projection of IS's enemies ranks second on the list with 2 hours of footage (16%), followed by civilians voicing their opinions on IS's foreign policy spanning an hour and 16 minutes (10%). IS's presentation of political issues and offering their solutions is the fourth major performance, which spans more than an hour (8%), whereas historical narratives form around 5% of the dataset, as seen in Table 4.6. List of all the performances that emerged in the Foreign Relations case study can be seen in Table 8.1.

Table 4.6: Top five performances in the Foreign Relations case study

TOP FIVE PERFORMANCES OF FOREIGN RELATIONS	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
IS fighter(s)/vox pop/message	6:06:38	49%
Enemies of IS	2:02:20	16%
Civilian voices	1:16:12	10%
IS solution(s)/juxtaposition	1:02:06	8%
Historical narrative	0:35:33	5%
NOT CODED	0:16:03	2%
CODED	12:05:43	98%
Total length	**12:21:46**	**100%**

Conclusion

In the quest to establish a dataset upon which a comprehensive visual analysis of IS's 'performances of modern stateness' can be performed, this project embarked on an extensive process, which first started with the downloading of over 600 official IS videos. The videos were screened and catalogued after the downloading was complete. Only the videos projecting performances related to the Caliphate's population, territory, governance, and foreign relations – in line with the four criteria set by the Montevideo Convention – were selected for the purposes of further analysis while all others were excluded. This resulted in the formation of a dataset comprising 374 videos spanning around 63 and a half hours[81] in total. The

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[81] Precise time duration is 63 hours, 31 minutes and 24 seconds.

dataset was divided into four 'stand-alone' categories based on the four criteria of modern stateness. It was subject to further assessment to find out other characteristics such as genres, languages, and technical aspects. All 374 videos, after their identification and classification, were then coded according to the performances contained within them. This led to the revelation of a quantitative snapshot of all four case studies, including a list of performances according to their screen time – thus signifying their importance in the given case study. In conclusion, the extensive coding and organisation of the dataset performed in this chapter not only sets the stage for an in-depth visual analysis in the case studies, it also demonstrates that the dataset is a comprehensive reflection of IS's visual culture, study of which will be an invaluable addition to the Jihadi visual turn witnessed at the beginning of the 21st century; and that the methodology showcased above bolsters the project's main argument that IS carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited 'staged theatrical performances of stateness' in its official videos, and then broadcasted them to its audiences with the intention of winning the hearts and minds of locals while also attracting Muslims from around the globe to join its state-building project.

5 : A SOCIETY OF LIONS, CUBS, AND JUST (WE) MEN:

IS'S PORTRAYAL OF THE CALIPHATE'S POPULATION

IS's rise through military conquest in Iraq and Syria was more than a rebellion. At the peak of power from mid 2014 to late 2015, IS controlled about a third of Syria and two-fifths of Iraq – ruling over an estimated population of 10 million civilians[82] and an area of 88,059 sq. km (Revkin, 2018). IS transitioned from an insurgent group to a de facto state, which meant they had an ongoing relationship with the civilian population they purported to represent. IS displayed the lives of subjects under its control – living in both urban and rural areas – in its multimedia publications, especially videos, as "a melting pot where Muslims regardless of their colour and background lived together in harmony" (BBC Monitoring, 2018). While IS was not the first Jihadi organisation to declare itself a state, as Al Shabab, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had declared statehood in Somalia, Yemen, and Mali respectively (El Damanhoury, 2019), it was definitely the first non-state actor to gain control over such a huge population and run their affairs as a self-declared state. During the years of the Caliphate's existence, IS's media published images of "a pure, authentic, and truly Islamic society unburdened by Western influence and local subversion, with images of the good life – premised on a puritanical vision of Sunni Islam – showcasing spectacular sunsets and Ferris wheels and showing contented-looking people – mostly men – shopping in markets, fishing in rivers, praying piously, conversing amicably" (Kraidy, 2018, p. 46). However, by

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[82] Figures published by different sources suggest there was a considerable change in population under IS control. According to Frantzman (2019, p. 11), in "July 2015, the UN estimated that eight million people were living under ISIS control" while according to RAND Corporation (2017, p. xi), "at its peak in late 2014, the Islamic State controlled more than 100,000 km2 of territory containing more than 11 million people, mostly in Iraq and Syria."

December 2017 it had lost almost all of its urban centres, such as Mosul – Iraq's second largest city – and Raqqah – the northern Syrian city which was also its de facto capital (Wilson Centre, 2019).

This case study presents IS's portrait of the Caliphate's population, which is based on the extensive coding and resultant visual analysis of the 97 population-themed videos included in the dataset, together accounting for 14.5 hours of content. The chapter is divided into two major sections. The first focuses on the lives and roles of local and foreign men in the society, and their portrayal as 'submissive subjects' and 'fierce warriors' defending the Caliphate. It then unpacks the framing of children in the videos, including child soldiers and young girls. After that, it addresses the role and portrayal of women, conspicuous by their absence, from IS's projection of population in its videos. The second section discusses the citizenship agreement IS had with the population under its control, based on the stateness performed in that aspect, and how it unravelled as the Caliphate was dismantled.

This case study concludes that IS projected an image of a vibrant population living under its control, which was in many ways similar to other permanent populations around the world as it was established over existing populations of Iraq and Syria after successful conquests. However, at the same time, the thesis also argues that it was unlike other populations living in modern states around the world, with many factors that distinguished it from other contemporary societies, such as an extreme interpretation of Islam that gave IS's leadership, especially the Caliph, extraordinary control over the population. Another distinguishing feature of IS's society was the portrayal of *Dar Al Islam* (House of Islam), which was established after the implementation of its territorial roadmap – to be discussed in the territory case study – where *Hijrah* (emigration) enabled a *Jama'ah* (forming a

community of faith) to take shape, which along with *Samm* (listening), *Ta'ah* (obedience), and *Jihad,* would lead to the consolidation of the *Khilafah*[83], as shown in Figure 2.1. The case study also argues that IS deliberately blurred the civilian-military lines in the society and pushed both local and foreign men into the flames of an 'existential war' in which the whole world ganged up against IS and its supporters, and the only way out was fighting till achieving 'victory or martyrdom'[84]. The detailed visual analysis undertaken in this case study, which includes mapping the gendered norms projected in the videos, highlights too the disproportionate portrayal of different demographics of the society. It confirms the superior status conferred on men, exalted not just as fathers and breadwinners in civilian roles but also as fierce fighters laying down their lives for the cause of 'remaining and expanding' the Caliphate.

At the same time, the case study notes a transition for the young boys – manifested as the 'generation of the Caliphate' – who were first portrayed in soft roles as innocent, little ones playing in amusement parks, but later took up the aggressive, masculine roles of executing enemies of IS as child fighters when the Caliphate started to unravel. The portrayal of young girls – labelled as 'pearls of chastity' – ranged from them wearing casual 'Western' clothing and appearing alongside young boys to wearing headscarves, face-veils and loosely-fitted, head-to-toe black garb. It also notes that both young boys and girls were portrayed as transitioning from the age of innocence to cognisance by undergoing training to assume their future roles – with boys destined to become capable, battle-hardened fighters while girls bound to stay home and raise the next generation of 'lions, raptors and

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[83] IS explained it in feature entitled "From Hijrah To Khilafah," published on page 34 of the 1st issue of Dabiq magazine.
[84] Rumiyah issue #9, (Al Hayat Media, 2017, p. 54).

knights[85]'. Unsurprisingly, this chapter also confirms the 'hidden status' of women who contributed to state building by fulfilling their duties exclusively as 'wives and mothers', and went to the battlefield to fight alongside men when the Caliphate was on its last legs. Another important aspect this study highlights is the citizenship agreement IS enforced upon its subjects under the *Bay'ah* principle, and the impact it had on the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, including the privileges bestowed upon the Sunni population whereas depriving all other minorities of their rights and relegating them to second class citizenship, unless they embraced IS's version of Islam. The overall objective of IS, this case study argues, was the portrayal of a 'vibrant population under its control' that sees them as the legitimate authority and supports their vision of a strong, welfare-based, tightly-knit, and an equal 'Islamic' society. At the same time, the population-related performances of modern stateness in official IS videos sent an explicit invitation to Muslims around the world to migrate and help build the Caliphate.

People Make States – Five Distinct Societal Sections of the Caliphate and their Performances

The requirement of a permanent population stems from the fact that "a state is a means of realising the shared aspirations of groups that have united due to cultural, religious, historical or other characteristics they have in common" (Shany, et al., 2014, p. 4). They also add that the 1933 Montevideo Convention has no threshold of a minimum number of nationals necessary for a state but should identify themselves as the citizens of the nation and exercise their rights of citizenship. The way individuals define themselves and their relationship to one

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[85] Many IS videos featuring their fighters and conquests include words such as 'knights, lions, and raptors' in their titles.

another, as well as their relationship to government and the state that makes them, differs from country to country and place to place, and is one of the reasons that makes societies worldwide different and unique (O'Neil, 2010).

While IS never explicitly expressed its intentions of establishing a modern state by following the international laws and conventions related to statehood, it fully realised the vitality of population in any state building project, and laid out the following five stages of establishing the Caliphate in the very first edition of its flagship English-language magazine *Dabiq* (Al Hayat Media Centre, 2014, p. 38), as shown in Figure 2.1, the first two of which are entirely dependent on population, that is, *hijrah* (emigration) and *Jama'ah* (forming a community of faith). As discussed in the literature review, once the Caliphate was established in 2014, a leaked document entitled "Caliphate on the Prophetic Methodology" written by a key IS leader named Abu Abdullah Al Masri enshrined IS's governing principles and guiding strategy for becoming a viable state and identified the two major pillars of IS society as *Ansar*[86] or 'the people of the land' and *Muhajirin* or 'emigrants[87].' The unofficial manifesto, translated into English and published online by researcher Aymenn Jawad Al Tamimi (2015) stated: "And from then there would be the cultivation of educational and societal change with which the *Muhajirin* co-existed and organisation of their ranks with the *ansar* – the people of the land[88]" (Al-Tamimi, 2015). The projection of population by IS also alludes to the three categories of membership of state building terrorist groups, suggested by

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[86] IS consistently referred the population of Iraq and Syria as natives, *Ansar*, and compared them to the 'Ansar of Madinah' throughout their publications, for example, in Dabiq magazine. However, IS clarified in issue #3 of Dabiq that this "contrast between the Islamic State today and the state of Madinah in the time of the Prophet (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) and his Companions is not to suggest that the *Khalaf* (later Muslims) are better than the *Salaf* (early Muslims), for these are historically related differences, not indicators of religious preference" (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 5).
[87] IS used the term emigrants to describe *Muhajirin* in the first issue of Dabiq magazine (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 22).
[88] The whole document is accessible here:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/islamic-state-document-masterplan-for-power

Revkin as: (1) members of the group's military wing ("military personnel"); (2) members of the group's civilian wing ("civilian employees"); and (3) members of the civilian population being governed ("civilian subjects") (2018, p. 120), which will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

Table 5.1 denotes the segments of population and the performances IS used to project them in the official videos, for example, locals were shown on their own (20% of the entire footage) as well as interacting with IS officials (6% of the entire footage). Similarly, foreigners were shown individually or in groups (18%) but also in mixed gatherings with locals and fighters. Coverage of IS fighters, both local and foreign, comprise 16% of the entire population dataset while that of IS clerics, officials and leaders stands at 10%. Children are projected in different settings, such as on their own or groups (13%), as child fighters (8%), engaging with IS fighters or officials (3%), or with their fathers and grandfathers (3%). Women, despite being half of the total population of the Caliphate, are conspicuously missing from the videos, hence absent in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: List of performances in the Population case study

PERFORMANCES OF POPULATION	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
Local(s)	2:53:02	20%
IS engaging with local(s)	0:50:02	6%
Foreign fighter(s)	2:34:53	18%
IS fighter(s) [local + foreign]	2:10:05	16%
IS cleric(s)/leader(s)/official(s)	1:26:45	10%
Child(ren)	1:52:34	13%
IS child fighter(s)	1:25:56	8%
IS engaging with child(ren)	0:27:45	3%
Teenagers/young persons	0:27:31	3%
IS fighter(s) with his/their child(ren)	0:25:17	3%
Enemy [leaders/population/soldiers/targets]	0:21:35	3%
IS engaging with teenagers/young persons	0:20:50	2%
Mixed gatherings [civilians + IS fighters]	0:19:09	2%
Urban/rural dwelling/nature	0:13:08	2%
Ex-enemy fighters [SAA/NDF/FSA/HTS/others]	0:11:47	1%
Historical/other narrative	0:02:51	0%
Muslims abroad	0:02:06	0%
Not coded	2:03:47	13%
Coded	16:05:16	87%
Total length	**18:09:03**	**100%**

Locals: The Loyal Support Base of IS

Irrespective of how well-financed any rebel group may or may not be, all rebels

depend on local assets and seek shelter and cooperation from them (Leites &

Charles, 1995). Locals also provide rebels other vital contributions such as

intelligence about government operations (Popkin, 1979), money, food and

provisions, and participation in rebel-imposed system instead of fleeing (Keister &

Slantchev, 2014). The visual analysis of official IS videos included in the

population case study not just confirm the strong presence of a permanent

population, that is, a Sunni-Arab majority residing in north-western Iraq and

north-eastern Syria in both urban and rural areas under IS control along with religio-ethnic minorities such as the Yezidis, but also its projection as a community that consisted of two major components, that is, the *ansar* and *Muhajirin*, as shown in Figure 5.1, who lived together bound by the 'spirit of brotherhood' and helped the State to 'remain and expand'[89]. The origin of the '*ansar* and *Muhajirin*' narrative can be traced to early Islamic society – founded by Prophet Muhammad after his emigration to Medina in 622AD – which also comprised local and emigrant followers of Islam (Khan, 2015). Table 5.1 shows coverage that focused on the local population and their engagement with IS, spanning around 2 hours and a quarter, which is more than 25% of the entire duration of the population videos dataset – a figure that attests to their importance in the Caliphate project.

STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY UNDER THE 'CALIPHATE'
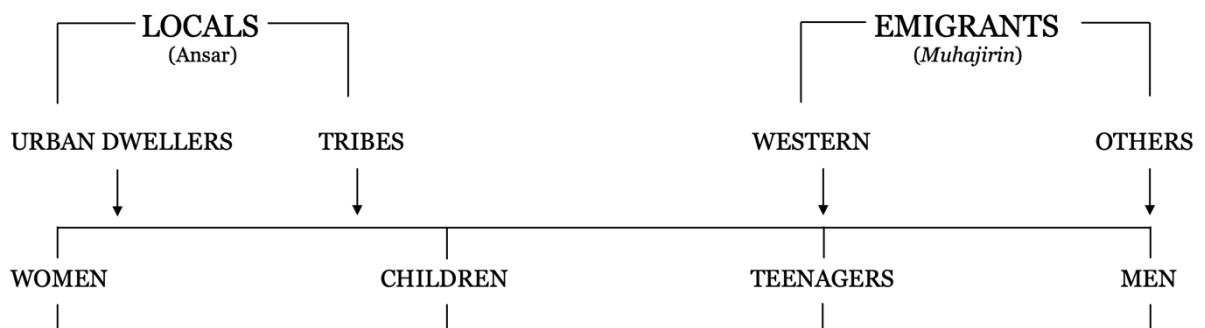
Figure 5.1: Structure of society under IS based on the analysis of population case study videos.

The following sub-sections focus on the videos that project the local population in the following themes: compliance with IS rule; observations of mundane life; celebration of festivals; participation in religious activities such as prayers and outreach activities; fighting for the Islamic State army; and extraction of support

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[89] As shown in videos entitled "Brothers In Religion" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), and "Love For Those Who Emigrated" (Al Furat Media, 2016).

from perceived hostile communities such as Yezidis and Christians, and rebelling tribes like the *Sh'aitat* in Syria. All of these performances were staged to prove that the society living under IS rule fully supports the Caliphate and is living a life of compliance and submission in accordance with *Shariah* while also to demonstrate that IS relied heavily on the local population's support, albeit with brute force and coercion – which is reflective of the overall citizenship agreement IS enforced on its subjects.

Compliance with IS rule: IS maintained a firm grip over the population under its control, thanks to "its astute exploitation of human psychology" which basically depends on the two inherent needs: (i) safety and security, and (ii) personal significance (Jasko, et al., 2018, p. 24). Videos included in the population case study depict locals as IS's main support base, that is, the *ansar* standing by it through good times and bad. According to Mironova (2019), local people formed the majority of IS's human resources and worked for the Caliphate for a variety of reasons, such as ideological alignment, money, power, or survival. IS projected its Caliphate as a 'dream come true for locals' and heralded it as an era which is not only a break from the past but also one that is filled with peace, security and justice, while heavily 'encouraging' them to join. A good example is video entitled "A Visit To Mosul" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), filmed after the fall of Iraq's second city in June 2014, which shows hordes of local people out in the streets celebrating the capture by IS fighters. One of the men – as seen in Figure 5.2 – appears on camera and is asked about the differences between the past and present conditions in Mosul, to which he responds: "There were arrests, arrests without mercy. Road closures, events that are indescribable!" When asked about the treatment of civilians by IS fighters in general and himself in particular, the civilian replies: "By God their treatment is very good. There are no doubts with regard to their

treatment. We ask them questions if we have any." He then contrasts this with the orders of then Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki to the Iraqi security forces to be ruthless towards the citizens of Mosul. The IS cameraman then asks if there are any constraints placed by IS fighters in the streets or at checkpoints to which the man says: "Mosul is here for everybody to see. Let them come to Mosul and witness that there are no constraints from IS, especially on the people of Mosul." Once other towns or cities were captured, IS videos documented locals celebrating their victories[90] in an emphatic fashion, with crowds consisting of young and old chanting pro-IS slogans and offering mass allegiances to the caliph. In other words, many IS videos depicted people being happy over the IS takeover after years of mistreatment by governments in Baghdad and Damascus and happily living their lives under *Shariah*.

Figure 5.2: Screengrab from video entitled "A Visit To Mosul" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014) where an unnamed civilian is speaking on camera about conditions before IS's arrival in the city.

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[90] In videos with titles such as "Joy Of Muslims Over The Victories Of Monotheists In Al Anbar Province" (Wilayat Al Jazeera, 2015), "Glad Tidings Of The Supporters With The Conquests Of The Raptors Of Al Anbar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), and "Glad Tidings Over Conquests Bestowed Upon By God" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

Later, when things got tough for the civilian population living under the Caliphate, partly as a result of the US and Russia-led coalition bombing campaigns, IS videos portrayed the population rallying behind them while condemning targeted air raids on civilian infrastructure and resulting death and destruction as part of the 'global conspiracy against Muslims'. IS also projected itself as the 'defender of its subjects' by carrying out spectacular attacks on its enemies to avenge the civilian losses, a topic which is addressed in the territory and foreign relations case studies respectively. In a video entitled "Constancy Of The Muslims Despite The Bombings Of The Crusaders" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), scores of dead bodies can be seen littered in destroyed homes which are then taken away by civil defence personnel. The video heavily focuses on the aftermath of the aerial bombing in residential areas of Mosul and also shows municipality workers cleaning up debris on a bridge and levelling it again for re-surfacing. The video repeatedly shows different locations that were destroyed as a result of the air raids including a silos, as proof that the war is not just against IS, but also against innocent civilians and their infrastructure. A young man, standing in a busy marketplace surrounded by people, speaks on camera towards the end of the video in which he accuses the enemies of IS of "trying to drive out Muslims from the lands of *Khilafah*" and insists that "God willing they will fail" because the population will stand strong in the face of death and destruction of their lives, properties and infrastructure. His vox-pop is followed by an unnamed IS local official, standing in the middle of a bazaar, reiterating that such campaigns will fail to force "Muslims into submission" and pointing out to the hustle and bustle of business activities in the markets as a sign of the constancy and courage of the Muslims of Mosul, which also depicts the bigger picture painted by IS of a populace that will abide by its pledge of allegiance to Caliph Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi till the end.

<u>Observations of mundane civilian life</u>: IS also keenly displayed normalcy returning to towns and cities once they were 'under the shadow of the Caliphate[91]' and how happy the populace was to live their lives under *Shariah* and enjoy its blessings. In a video entitled "Living Under The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), an IS camera crew moves around different parts of Manbij city capturing activity in the food market and focusing on people buying food in the main bazaar and smiling for the cameras. First, a baker is interviewed on his premises and asked about the food supply situation to which he answers that "everything in the country is in abundance," while also praising God for enabling them to live "under the shadow of Islamic State in complete safety and security." In a similar vein, a shawarma shop owner also praises business conditions under IS and says the markets are fully stocked up with produce, while another baker also echoes these sentiments. The video also consists of vox-pops with other members of the public, including: two men in a mosque who praise IS for enabling them to learn religion properly; a young man who credits IS for ensuring prayers are observed at the timings declared by Prophet Mohammed; a tailor who commends IS for imposing *Shariah*, which has enabled people to conduct business and personal deeds in the best manner possible; and a middle-aged man standing in a court waiting room and continuously praising IS for bringing security and justice to the society. In a number of videos[92], IS boastfully displayed the return of safety, security, peace and justice to the land of the Caliphate while also focusing on the daily lives of local people engaged in their routine activities such as buying and selling in the markets, business activities in gold shops, bakeries selling bread and restaurants serving fast food, city streets full of traffic, and labourers engaged in building activities,

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[91] IS consistently used the term 'under the shadow of *Khilafah*' in its propaganda videos which implied to the territory under its control.
[92] In videos such as "Observation Of Movement In Markets Of Mosul" (A'maq News Agency, 2015), "Mujatweets From The Islamic State 3" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), and "Mujatweets From The Islamic State 7" (Al Hayat Media, 2014).

and ensuring that Islamic law is fully observed at all times. As part of its propaganda efforts to project peaceful life for its citizens, IS also produced videos such as "Excursions of Subjects Living Under The Shadow Of Islamic State" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), and "Abundant Provision" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), which showed the local population taking some time out for rest and recreation, and having picnics in open spaces such as gardens, amusement parks, and river banks. Members of the public also speak on camera and express their happiness and joy about the life under the new system, a message IS was keen on delivering to Muslims around the world in order to entice them to come and live with them. How the population actually felt, especially the people asked to speak on camera, could be a different story altogether as not even a single video carries any criticism or discontent expressed by an individual, let alone groups of people, living under IS territory – as explained in the Conceptual Framework chapter as 'staged' performances.

Marking of festivals: As part of its portrayal of being an Islamic state, IS keenly marked the festivals it deemed Islamic and banned others that it declared un-Islamic, for example, the national days of Iraq and Syria, Nowruz, Christmas and New Year's Day. It also documented the observance and participation of the local populace, along with foreigners, of sanctioned festivals such as Ramadan, Eid Al Fitr, and Eid Al Adha, as part of its efforts to portray how life under a 'truly Islamic state' looks like. On the one hand, an array of videos with titles such as "Atmosphere Of Ramadan In Wilayat Al Khayr" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Atmosphere Of Ramadan In Wilayat Ninawa" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), and "Ramadan – The Month Of Jihad And Quran" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2016) document locals partaking in typical Ramadan activities such as buying new clothes and foodstuffs and other miscellaneous items, offering congregation

prayers, listening to religious sermons, and reciting Quran. On the other hand, a video entitled "Ramadan Under The Shade Of The Caliphate" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) features the flogging of young locals for breaking their fasts without any valid religious excuses, which is a clear display of IS's hard line policies. A host of other videos published by IS showcase Eid Al Fitr – a festival marked to celebrate the end of Ramadan – and its specific festivities and begin with titles such as "Atmosphere Of Eid Al Fitr In…", "Coverage Of The Atmosphere Of Eid In…", " Eid Of…", "Eid Greetings From…", followed by the name of the place they were filmed in, for example, Raqqah, Tel Afar, Wilayat Al Furat, etc. The videos focus on the hustle and bustle of marketplaces in IS-controlled cities where people are shown engaged in shopping, local men fervently offering prayers in mosques along with their children and embracing each other at the end of prayers; families flocking to amusement parks and gardens; and fathers speaking on camera about the joys of Eid and praising the safety and security maintained by IS. More than a dozen videos also document Eid Al Adha – a feast observed at the end of Hajj pilgrimage – featuring brisk trade in the cattle markets, massive Eid congregations, slaughtering of sheep and cows in the streets and slaughterhouses, distribution of meat among the poor, and locals visiting hospitals to meet the sick and injured people in the hospital. In all, the fervour with which the population celebrated the festivals and observed religious activities is portrayed by IS not only as a proof of the popularity of its rule but also the populace's willingness to observe Islamic culture and lifestyle.

Observance of religious activities: Showing its population – both locals and foreigners alike – engaging in Islamic festivals was part of IS's assertion that it was the one and only implementer of true Islam globally (Winter, 2015). A large proportion of IS's messaging thus depicts religious activities imposed on the

population under its control, especially its outreach activities known as 'Da'wah' as part of its promise to implement 'true Islam in letter and spirit'. Several videos[93] show religious officials preaching to locals in mosques and open spaces like roundabouts and streets the basic tenets of Islam such as prayers, fasting, *Zakat*, *Hajj*, and Salafist ideology. One video entitled "Piety In The Times Of Calamity" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) is based entirely on a special congregation carried out at an unnamed mosque in Mosul which shows civilians praying, with some men also weeping, and beseeching God for help in their struggle against the enemies of Islam and Muslims. Some videos also show the local populace complying with IS directives against the use of items deemed un-Islamic. One such example is the ban on satellite dish antennas. In a video entitled "Destroy All Satellite Receivers" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), members of public speak on camera about the 'satellite channels peddling lies' against Muslims and call on others to destroy their satellite dishes as they are the 'work of the devil' and are being used to 'to destroy Islam'. Several other videos show IS officials enforcing bans on consuming alcohol, smoking cigarettes, trimming beards, wearing trousers that cover ankles, among other prohibitions, which are covered in detail in the governance case study.

Fighting for the Caliphate: Locals joined IS in Iraq and Syria for a number of reasons such as financial enrichment, forcible draft, grievances against governments or ethnic groups/sects, power, religious ideology, fame, or just to survive (Mironova, 2019). Thanks to IS's 'glocal' outlook – an organisation with a global appeal but local approach (Sterman & Rosenblatt, 2018) – thousands of foreign volunteers flocked to the Caliphate to join the fighting force but it was the

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[93] Videos such as "Guiding The People" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), "I Am Leaving You Upon A Clear Path" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016), "Preaching In The Streets Of Raqqah" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014), "Raid Of The Villages To Spread Guidance" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016), "Good Nights" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), and "That You May Become Righteous" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) show locals' observance of religious activities.

locals who formed the core structure of the army and occupied top and middle management ranks (Lister, 2014). IS, with the implicit purpose of demonstrating that it roots remain grounded in the lands of Iraq and Syria, showed locals working not just in civilian roles such as bureaucrats, *Hisbah* officials, policemen – as discussed in detail in the governance case study – but also in military positions as commanders[94], frontline fighters[95], sentries[96], elderly veterans[97], foot soldiers[98], and suicide bombers[99]. IS implemented a two-pronged strategy to streamline its local and foreign fighters: blur the distinction between civilians and fighters to advance its narrative that their enemies clearly do not make any distinctions and have unanimously agreed to obliterate them simply because they are Muslims and support IS; and not to shine light on the local-foreign divide, and despite identifying the fighters with their *Kunya* (nom de guerre), which is based on their place of origin (Mironova & Alhamad, 2017), always portrayed them as part of the mix rather than an exclusively-ethnic unit. IS also showed locals sending their sons to 'fight in the way of God[100]' and published dedicated eulogy videos when they died while fighting, not with the intention of mourning but to acknowledge their sacrifices and reward the 'martyrs'. The video entitled "And Verily Lying Leads To Immorality" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) is a prime example where the father, brothers and friends of Abu Hajar, a well-known IS fighter from a village named Al Shola near the city of Deir Ez Zour in Wilayat Al Khayr (IS's substitute name for Deir Ez Zour province), speak on camera about his 'martyrdom' while fighting on the front-lines in Wilayat Al Barakah (IS's substitute name for Al Hasakah

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[94] Abu Hamzah Al Kurdi and Abu Ubaidah Al Iraqi in video entitled "Coverage Of The Atmosphere Of Eid In Wilayat Kirkuk" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2016).
[95] "Eid In The Fortified Strongholds" (Wilayat Homs, 2015).
[96] "Eid Of Mujahid" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015); "On The Frontlines" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015).
[97] "Grandfather's Advice On The Day Of Eid" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2017).
[98] "On The Frontlines" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015).
[99] "My Son Went Ahead Of Me" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016).
[100] *Qital fi sabeel lillah* or 'fight in the way of God' is an important IS motto which is based on the following verse: "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors" (Quran, 2:190).

province) and sing the praises of his character and achievements. The young fighter is shown dying with 'style' – lying on the ground wounded but smiling despite experiencing severe pain while fellow fighters tend to him moments before his death. The staging of such performances can be seen in other 'martyrdom' videos and allude to some of the stories of the 'Companions of the Prophet' who, according to Islamic history books, fought valiantly on the frontlines and often had smiles on their faces before death.

In all, despite the fact that not all local men supported IS and fought for them, IS gave the impression in its videos that local men were kind and hardworking civilians when with their families in towns and cities, but transformed into fearsome warriors when on the frontlines along with their foreign comrades, fighting like an 'impenetrable wall' – a motto IS repeated in many of its videos[101].

Conversions and submissions: In order to expand its outreach and maintain an iron-fist over all communities under its control, IS also embarked on a mission to convert non-Muslim natives of Iraq and Syria to Islam, either by force or by preaching, and documented it in their videos (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014). The treatment of Yezidis at the hands of IS provoked massive international outcry, which IS rejected as 'Western lies and propaganda' and undertook efforts to control damage to its already tarnished reputation by presenting Yezidis as 'submitting to Islam' voluntarily, and a result of its 'honest implementation of Islam'. A clear illustration can be found in the video entitled "Hundreds Of Yezidis Entering (Into The Fold Of) Islam" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014), which was released in the wake of the Yezidi genocide after the fall

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[101] The IS fighting motto comes from the verse of Quran (61:4) which reads: "Indeed, Allah loves those who fight in His cause in a row as though they are a [single] structure joined firmly."

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of Sinjar in August 2014 in which hundreds of Yezidi men were massacred while women and children were taken as sex slaves[102]. The video starts with IS's critical evaluation of Yezidi beliefs – underlining their religious texts, symbols, holy shrines, and rituals, among others. Later, an armed IS media man is shown asking a commander to reflect on mass media reports of an ongoing genocide perpetrated by IS against the Yezidis in Sinjar. The commander rejects the reports as lies and insists that IS protects every infidel living in the Caliphate whether they are Yezidis, Crusaders (Christians) or Jews, except if they are fighting against IS. The video then quotes a *Hadith* which narrates the Prophet as saying that "Muslims should fight people until they profess their faith in one God and Muhammad as His messenger, establish prayers, and give *Zakat*. If they did this (converted to Islam) then they will save their blood and money from me." Later, it shows a group of Yezidis bussed into a school building where they are seated on the floor and made to listen to a sermon. They then profess the Islamic faith by saying "I bear witness that there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Servant and Messenger," and then made to pray in a congregation in the school courtyard. In the end of the video, several Yezidis speak on the camera about their personal decision to become Muslims. However, there is no way to ascertain if the Yezidis converted to Islam by choice because while the video pretends that the Yezidis willingly 'embraced Islam', *Dabiq* magazine's 4th issue (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 15) in contrast admits to the "large-scale enslavement of *mushrik* (polytheist) families" and "their selling by the Islamic State soldiers" as "probably the first since the abandonment of this Shariah law" – perhaps an acknowledgement that while some Yezidis became Muslims when given the chance to, others who refused were simply subjugated.

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[102] UN News (2016). UN Human Rights Panel Concludes ISIL is Committing Genocide Against Yazidis. [Online] Available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/06/532312-un-human-rights-panel-concludes-isil-committing-genocide-against-yazidis [Accessed 6 July 2020].

Another video entitled "From The Darkness To The Light – A Christian Accepting Islam After Escaping Assyrian Prison" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015) presents a Christian man in the presence of an IS cleric who claims that he was not forced or enticed to become a Muslim, did so out of his own will and urges other Christians to follow his decision. The newly Muslim man then offers prayers with a bunch of IS fighters, joins a barbecue feast hosted in his honour, and then speaks on camera again reiterating his decision to abandon Christianity and join Islam as a "natural one based on the truth of faith." He then also poses for the camera and reads the *Shahadah*[103]. In all, IS reiterated its rhetoric in official videos that non-Muslim groups such as Yezidis and Christians are embracing Islam merely out of choice and not compulsion, and uniformly rejected Arabic and Western media reports of coercion and forcible conversion of minorities into Islam.

IS also staged the classic 'good cop, bad cop' act in its videos while addressing the tribes that tried to resist the Caliphate's control over their areas. A good case in point is the *Sh'aitat* tribe, which resisted IS takeover of Abu Hamam village in Deir Ez Zour province in August 2014, and as a result 700 people were brutally massacred by IS fighters (Sly, 2014). In a video entitled "Except Those Who Repent, Believe" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) IS featured not just the massacre of hundreds of *Sh'aitat* tribesmen but also the views of several tribal leaders who expressed their repentance for resisting IS and acknowledged the amnesty granted to people who put down their arms. The video also contains scenes which show a huge cache of surrendered weapons, tribal gathering to mark the peace accord, vehicles carrying people returning to towns, and people chanting pro-IS slogans in

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[103] Shahadah is the Islamic statement of faith which says: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger." It is one of the five pillars of Islam and its reciting is used for entering the fold of Islam (BBC, 2009).

an attempt to portray that the majority of the tribe is on IS's side and the 'few miscreants' that resisted have been effectively eliminated. Another video entitled "Return Of The *Sh'aitat* People in Abu Hamam" (Wilayat Al Khair, 2015) shows families of *Sh'aitat* tribesmen returning to their village in dozens of pickup trucks carrying women and children. Included too are vox-pops of several tribesmen who thank IS leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi for granting general amnesty to the tribe and allowing their peaceful return, subsequently reinforcing IS's official line that any dissent against its rule will be brutally crushed while submission will be met with compassion and rewards.

In all, the locals were portrayed as any other population around the world who were politically oppressed by their regimes before IS liberated and took them under the fold of the Caliphate. They are referred to as "sons of the land" and IS's media portrayed them as loyal people who, after years of oppression under the previous regimes, embraced IS's *Shariah*-based rule which is enabling them not only to lead their routine lives but also to enjoy festive occasions and practice Islam as they always wanted to. It also showed that local population is fully behind IS and sending its brave men to defend the Caliphate and fight its enemies. At the same time, IS also documented its dealing with 'rogue elements of the society' by offering them peace, should they choose to surrender, or war, should they decide to resist.

Foreigners: The Lifeblood of the Caliphate

IS, being an atypical insurgency, combined rebel governance with expansionist territorial ambitions (Gates & Podder, 2015), and relied not just on locals for support, but also invited people from all over the world to migrate and live in its newly established Caliphate. It was not the first time that a rebel government

encouraged foreigners to come and live with them in order to increase their appeal and outreach. According to Borum & Fein (2017), foreign fighters have participated in at least 69 of the 313 known, recorded civil wars since 1815. In fact, IS's appeal for migration of Muslims from all over the world is reminiscent to the "appeal that Zionism had for Jews emigrating to Israel in the post-Holocaust period" (Zerubavel, 2002). Before analysing the influence and projection of foreigners in IS propaganda videos – including fighters among them – it is pertinent to underline the definitions of foreign fighters in order to understand the roles they play in conflicts. Moore & Tumelty (2008), for example, regard foreign fighters as "non-indigenous, non-territorialised combatants who, motivated by religion, kinship, and/or ideology rather than pecuniary reward, enter a conflict zone to participate in hostilities." Malet (2013, p. 9) defines foreign fighters simply as "non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict," while Hegghammer (2011, pp. 57-58) expanding on Malet's definition, describes them as "agents who (1) have joined, and operate within the confines of, an insurgency, (2) lack citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, (3) lack affiliation to an official military organisation, and (4) are unpaid."

IS presented foreigners as one distinct group, mentioning their background only for the purposes of introduction and context but demonstrating them only as 'Muslims' who migrated to the Caliphate to live life according to *Shariah* and help with state building while also encouraging others to do the same. Their presence in the population can be seen in two distinct roles, that is, as civilians leading routine lives while being armed and carrying weapons openly, and as fighters who were an inclusive part of the 'Caliphate's army' yet blurred those lines by giving the impression that all fighting-aged men, whether foreign or local, are fighters and will be drafted to fight if need be. As shown in Table 5.1, their presentation as

civilians in IS propaganda videos comes in three different settings: as individuals or groups, spanning 2 hours and 34 minutes or 18% of the entire case study dataset; participation in fighting where local IS fighters are also present, which is 15% of the population-themed videos; and presence in local events and festivals, which is 2% of the population dataset. This section addresses four major themes foreigners were portrayed in: individual profiles; new life in the Caliphate; double lives as fighters, and marking of festivals.

Figure 5.3: Screengrab from video entitled "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), where an IS foreign fighter from Mauritius can be seen with his children.

Individual profiles: IS published several profile videos of foreigners from both Western and non-Western backgrounds, which consist of very personal accounts of their journeys to the Caliphate. The main intention behind making these videos was to catalogue the lives of selected foreign individuals, who despite coming from diverse backgrounds and telling different life stories, convey to the audience an important message: they were very courageous yet blessed to leave behind their lives in the countries in which they were living, and came to the Caliphate with the

sole desire to live their lives in an Islamic society governed by *Shariah* – examples which need to be emulated by supporters around the world.

A detailed analysis of the individual profile videos included in this case study – six videos published during 2015 when the Caliphate was at its peak – reveals a certain story telling pattern. The videos start with intros in which the subject appears on the screen moving in a particular direction to give the viewer the impression of what 'moving into and living in the Caliphate' looks like, followed by different visuals which are basically glimpses of their new life. For example, the introductory overlay (intro) of the video entitled "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) starts with an individual named Abu Shuaib Al Afriki from Mauritius who appears on the screen sitting in a garden swing with his three daughters smiling. It also shows him teaching his daughters the Arabic language, reading the Quran, taking his children to an amusement park – as shown in Figure 5.3 – and talking to other IS fighters. Similar to this intro is that of the video entitled "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness 2" (Wilayat Al Jazeera, 2015), in which an individual named Dr. Bahauddin Muhammadyan from Iran appears alongside his sons browsing in a grocery store, attending congregation prayers, helping his two younger daughters and a son take rides on the backyard swings, tending to patients as a general practitioner in a clinic, and walking into an orchard wearing olive green fatigues and armed with a rifle just before the title of the video appears on screen.

After the intros, the individuals talk about their backgrounds, their lives before emigrating to IS territory, the ideological reasons behind joining IS, their new lives in the Islamic State, and why other people should come and join them. All the profile videos begin with a formal introduction of the subjects, in which all the six

men give their names, or *noms de guerre* in some cases, and mention where they are from. They then proceed to describe their journeys to the Islamic State, beginning with their reasons for conversion to Islam – in the case of Abu Khalid Al Cambodi from Australia[104], and Abu Suhayb Al Faranci from France[105] and Abu Salman Al Faransi who is also from France[106] – or why they left their homeland despite living among Muslims – in this case Abu Fikri[107], Abu Shuaib Al Afriki[108] and Dr. Bahauddin Muhammadyan[109] who hail from Indonesia, Mauritius, and Iran respectively. On the one hand, the men hailing from the East talk about the societal conditions and what compelled them to move to the Caliphate. For example, Abu Shuaib Al Afriki[110] laments that Mauritius is a hub of "nudity, promiscuity, prostitution, and drugs" and cites them as the main reasons behind his emigration to the Caliphate. Meanwhile, Abu Fikri rhetorically questions the lack of implementation of *Shariah* in Indonesia despite Muslims being the majority. Dr. Bahauddin Muhammadyan criticises the practices of Sufis and some Sunnis while citing his attraction to the Salafi brand of Islam as the main reason for joining IS. On the other hand, the Westerners bemoan the lack of clarity in the religions they previously professed – Abu Khalid Al Cambodi being a Buddhist, and both Frenchmen Abu Suhayb and Abu Salman being Roman Catholics – and claim they embraced Islam as they found it 'spiritually uplifting'. All six individuals mention IS's implementation of *Shariah* as one of the main reasons for emigrating to the Caliphate and starting a new life which is in accordance with the teachings of God and His messenger. They also unanimously condemn the "lies spewed by

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[104] "Stories From The Land Of Living – The Story Of Abu Khalid Al Cambodi From Australia" (Al Hayat Media, 2015)
[105] "Stories From The Land Of Living – The Story Of Abu Suhayb Al Faranci From France" (Al Hayat Media, 2015).
[106] "The Story Of Abu Salman Al Faransi From France" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).
[107] "March Forth Whether Light Or Heavy" (Furat Media, 2015).
[108] "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015).
[109] "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness 2" (Wilayat Al Jazeera, 2015).
[110] "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015).

international media" against IS and warn other Muslims not to pay "any attention to their propaganda and fulfil their religious duty by emigrating to the Land of Islam."

All six profile videos consist of short clips, often played in the background, that depict the foreign fighters carrying out routine daily activities such as shopping, walking or driving in the streets, attending congregation prayers, taking children to amusement parks, to portray the 'normalcy of life under the Caliphate' and project them as human beings not different from the ones watching them. They are also presented as useful members of the State who are answering Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi's appeal, made in June 2014, in which he asked "scholars, judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specialisations and fields"[111] to emigrate to the Islamic State and contribute actively towards rebuilding the society in their individual capacity. In response to that call, Dr. Muhammadyan, for example, is shown working as a general practitioner (GP) and Abu Fikri as an electrician. The rest may presumed to be fighters as they appear wearing military fatigues, and their 'jobs' are not mentioned at all. All individuals profiled in the videos, with the exception of Abu Suhayb Al Faranci, are married. And all the married men have children except for Abu Khalid who is shown walking in a park with a fully-veiled woman who is most probably his wife. All six foreign fighters draw heavily in their remarks from the Quran and *Hadith* in their bid to urge Muslims from all over the world to perform *Hijrah*. The ones who will emigrate to the 'Land of *Khilafah*' are promised sustenance and security[112] while the ones ignoring the message are

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[111] Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, "A Message To The Mujahidin And The Muslim Ummah," posted on *Al I'tisam* official Twitter page, 7 July 2014.
[112] Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) 07:53.

threatened with hellfire and disavowal from God[113]. Additionally, the combatants, namely Abu Khalid and Abu Salman, further encourage Muslims to wage attacks against the 'disbelievers' anywhere they can in order to avenge the death and destruction carried out by the Western coalition against Muslims in general and IS in particular. In all, the profiled IS fighters convey a unified message asking Muslims to emigrate to the Caliphate to live a life under *Shariah* and help rebuild it, and urge those who are unable to do so to attack the enemies of IS in any shape or form possible.

New life: IS also produced several videos which depicted the lives of foreigners that emigrated to the Caliphate from their home countries to start a new life, in order to prove that their decision to migrate was paying dividends as they were living happy lives and were cherished by the State. It was also IS's way of showing that the society is forming human bonds of respect, esteem, and love and friendship based on their love for Islam and the Caliphate. A series of short videos entitled "Mujatweets" illustrate the utopian nature of the Islamic State (Wilson, 2017). For example, "Mujatweets 1" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) shows a foreign fighter from Germany performing *a capella* in German in which he exhorts people to "come join the ranks of the Islamic State" and "live in obedience, full of honour, satisfaction, and to scare the kuffar[114]." As a demonstration of foreign fighters integrating into IS society, "Mujatweets 4" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) shows an unnamed fighter from Germany visiting injured IS fighters in a hospital, making small talk and then on camera urging fellow "brothers and sisters in Islam come to the land of honour and search for *Shahadah*[115]". Similarly, "Mujatweets 8" (Al

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[113] March Forth Whether Light Or Heavy (Furat Media, 2015) 5:39.
[114] Kuffar is the Arabic word for infidels.
[115] Shahadah in Arabic also means martyrdom.

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Hayat Media, 2014) is a Russian-language video which shows foreign fighters from Central Asia preparing meals in a canteen and serving it to other foreign and local fighters along with their children. A young man named Abu Abdul Rahman Al Khurasani speaks on camera and says: "My message to every Muslim is that we call them to *Sham* (Levant) so that you can see with your own eyes what's happening in the land of *Khilafah*. Alhamdulliah! (All praise be to God)."

On the other hand, video entitled "We Will Give A Good Life" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016) begins with the narrative of how people in the West have been terrified of recent terror attacks carried out by IS supporters whereas people living under the Caliphate, unlike their Western counterparts, are living in peace and security and fear no one else except God. The video also puts on a display of brotherhood and camaraderie by showing both local and foreign fighters working in groups, hugging each other and grinning while carrying AK47 rifles in their hands, among other acts. The video then shows the interview of Abu Shaheed Al Belgiki (Belgian) who is rowing a boat along with his pre-adolescent daughter while extolling the virtues of life under *Shariah* rule. Later, a group of foreign fighters exercise on a mini football pitch, pull fishing nets to offload the catch, dive into a lake donning snorkelling gear to get more fish, and then prepare a meal on firewood. The end of the video shows the group of foreign fighters mounting on an anti-aircraft unit and firing it, conveying message to the viewers that foreign fighters are always on guard and ready for combat even if they are away from the frontlines, and signifying their dual role as civilians and combatants.

Marking of festivals: Akin to festival videos focusing on locals, several Eid videos also feature foreign fighters but with one major difference. Unlike locals who appear in IS videos collectively and without any special recognition, foreign

fighters feature in festival videos as 'celebrities' for two important reasons: to show that the emigrants are leading a truly Islamic lifestyle which is possible only within the confines of the Caliphate; and this is the life that awaits the incoming Muslims. A video entitled "Eid Of A Mujahid" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015) elaborately presents the rituals and experiences of a foreign fighter named Abu Yusuf Almani (German) who gets a leave from the front-lines to spend Eid Al Adha with his family. He drives home to be greeted by his father and infant son. He then visits the bazaar to buy sweets and perfumes for Eid. Additionally, he also buys some toys including a toy gun for his son. In the next scene, he dresses his son in a camouflage suit, picks up his AK47 rifle while the young child carries his toy rifle and heads to the mosque for Eid prayers. After offering Eid prayers in a congregation, the German foreign fighter embraces other people present in the crowd including IS fighters. Interesting to note here is the *Anasheed* playing in the background that constantly repeats the word *Ummati,* which means Muslim nation, subconsciously emphasising to the viewers that the diversity of identities existing within the society is the epitome of a true caliphate. He then distributes sweets among fellow IS fighters and proceeds to watch the slaughter of his sheep as part of the Eid's sacrifice ritual. Afterwards, Abu Yusuf is shown distributing the meat among two poor households, including a meat parcel received by a fully-veiled woman. He also visits a hospital with his son and greets injured IS fighters who are receiving medical treatment. At the end of the video, he is shown taking rides with his infant boy in an amusement park and later tossing him in the air to make him giggle – all of this in an overt message to the viewers of how an ideal mujahid father looks like and fulfils his paternal duties at home.

Other videos such as "Eid Of Mujahideen" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016) and "Eid In The Fortified Strongholds" (Wilayat Homs, 2015) show groups of foreign fighters

predominantly from Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Arabian peninsula celebrating Eid on the frontlines by engaging in activities such as prose and poetry exchanges, barbecues, exchanging presents and sipping coffee made over firewood, which is a reflection of Eid traditions in their home countries, and how IS appreciates their observance. A video entitled "Eid Greetings From The Land Of Khilafah" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) starts with a clip of a mosque where people are congregating to offer their Eid prayers. Both locals and foreign fighters are sat along with their children listening intently to the sermon in Arabic. The congregation concludes with the congregation pledging allegiance to IS Caliph Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. The worshippers in the mosque then proceed to hug and greet each other, which is displayed to the viewer as a visual proof that all men living in the Caliphate are brothers regardless of their backgrounds, nationalities, skin colour or social status, and how the bond of Islam unites them. The video then shows an interview with a British fighter named Abu Abdullah Al Habashi (Ethiopian) who mentions the great atmosphere of Eid in the Caliphate, strongly emphasises the fact that "you can really feel the Eid here" and then exclaims: "Lands of *Khilafah*, Allahu Akbar!" His views are echoed by a fellow IS foreign fighter from Finland named 'Abu Shuaib As Somali' (Somalian) who boasts that "the rule of *Shariah* will even come to Finland." His interview is followed by another foreign fighter named Abdul Haleem Al Tunisi (Tunisian) who speaks on camera while his son sits on his shoulders carrying toy guns in his hands. He also exhorts other Muslims to "come to this State, which we dreamed of living in and dreamed of participating in building." The next person to feature in the video is one called Abu Jandal Al Yamani who invites his countryfolk to "come here for

Hijrah[116] and perform jihad with the Islamic Caliphate." The video contains several segments where IS fighters are shown distributing gifts among children including toy guns among young boys and water guns among young girls. In the end, foreign fighters named Abdullah Al Maghribi[117] from Morocco, Abu Hanifah Al Belgiki from Belgium, Abu Abdur Rahman Al Trinidadi[118] from the US, and Abu Shuaib Al Afriki[119] from South Africa constantly repeat the message of moving to the Islamic State and strengthening it. An interesting point to note in this video is that all the foreign fighters are standing amongst children, and some of them are carrying their children in their arms while speaking on camera, which is a subtle message to the audience that children of the Caliphate are hanging out with their role models, that is, the *Mujahideen*. The video ends with a clip of an open air gathering of young men and children where IS foreign fighters sing *Anasheed* and chant IS slogans. It is then followed by an on-screen message that says "I wish you were here" – alluding to IS's constant reminder to its foreign audience of how important it is for them to be in the Caliphate to have all these experiences, which in a way, is similar to promotional tourism videos all over the world that invite tourists to come visit the country and live the experience.

Double lives as fighters: IS produced videos that portrayed foreign fighters in a range of roles, from skilful administrators helping with governance (Ubaydi, et al., 2014) to fearsome fighters that formed "the first wave of attacks," often in suicide bombing roles (Gates & Podder, 2015, p. 4) as they were "more valuable to IS from

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[116] *Hijrah* is the Arabic word for migration but has religious connotations due to the fact that Prophet Muhammad also emigrated to Medina from Mecca in 622AD and laid the foundations of the Islamic state.
[117] In one of the *hisbah* videos he is seen ordering the closure of market on account of Friday prayers.
[118] Explains in another video entitled "Those Who Believed And Emigrated" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) that he is from the islands of Trinidad and Tobago.
[119] Explains in another video entitled "Oh My People Follow Me In The Way Of Righteousness" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) he is from the island of Mauritius.

a military perspective than local recruits," partly because they came "infused with zeal for their mission" (Gartenstein-Ross, et al., 2016, p. 13). Profiles of foreign fighters tend to suggest that they joined out of "social, political, and religious beliefs" with a vast number of them seen as having "elevated status within IS territory, as they have voluntarily given up their 'Western ideals' to join the conflict" (Chassman, 2016, pp. 229, 212). They travelled from all over the world to join IS's jihad and committed acts of extreme violence and savagery on a disproportionate scale as they enjoyed more unfettered access than local recruits who were unwilling to brutalise relatives or neighbours, making the foreign fighters an effective and brutal tool to control local populations (Khalil & Shanahan, 2016).

Thousands of foreign fighters joined IS at its heyday in 2014-15 with figures ranging from a conservative estimate of 11,000 to 15,000 (Ubaydi, et al., 2014), all the way to 36,500 fighters from more than 100 countries including at least 6,600 from Western nations[120], a claim made by then US Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper. Similarly, Russian Federal Security (FSB) estimated the presence of 30,000 foreign fighters, including 7,000 people from Russia and other former Soviet republics[121]. Many of these foreign fighters were placed in important positions by IS including governance, religious guidance, and military (Caris & Reynolds, 2014).

IS media houses released several videos in which they profiled foreign fighters individually as well as collectively, and projected them in active combatant roles

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[120] James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, made this claim in his February 2016 testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee. https://www.armedservices.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Clapper_02-09-16.pdf
[121] Yevgeny Sysoyev, deputy head of the Russian Federal Security (FSB), said at a security conference in Sochi. https://tass.com/world/835147

with a lot of emphasis on camaraderie and attaining martyrdom for a greater cause. One video entitled "Al Ghuraba[122] – The Chosen Few Of Different Lands" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) features a Muslim convert from Canada named Abu Muslim. He denies being a 'social outcast' or 'anarchist' and claims that "before coming to Syria I had money, I had family, I had colleagues" and was living a good life – an apparent attempt to dismiss some studies which suggested that many foreigners who joined IS had a troubled past, including criminal records (Basra, et al., 2016). He also insists that *Mujahideen* are regular people too who get married, have children and have lives "just like other people." The video shows him condemning the Canadian army for being part of the "war against Islam" and details his journey from Canada all the way to Syria where he got married and was killed at the Mennagh Airbase battle front in northern Syria while his wife was expecting their first baby. The video contains recorded clips that show him storming the airbase, the moment he gets hit with an artillery shell, and its aftermath where his dead body is seen wrapped in a blanket with camera zooming into his unharmed face, which is IS's way of embellishing the many religious myths around martyrs including the ruling that their bodies, unlike that of other dead Muslims, need not be washed but placed within the grave as is[123].

Four foreign fighters from the Caribbean Sea island of Trinidad and Tobago are presented in a video entitled "Those Who Believed and Emigrated" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) where they reflect on their Christian background, lament the lack of freedom to practice Islam '100%', and ask fellow Muslims how they will justify their decision to abandon the Islamic State when God will question them on the

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[122] The term *Ghuraba* means strangers, foreigners or weird ones in Arabic.
[123] The chapter entitled "Contemporary Martyrdom: Ideology and Material Culture" in the book *Jihadi Culture* by Thomas Hegghammer covers the myths around Jihadi martyrs in great detail.

Day of Judgment[124]. The video also shows the fighters engaging in a live fire exercise, their children going to school, and one of the Trinidadian children saying on camera that he prefers this school over the one in his home country and would like to be a 'mujahid' when he grows up. Two *Anasheed* videos entitled "The Path Of Jihad" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) and "Come, My Friend" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) in Turkish and Uighur languages respectively show groups of Turkish, East Turkestani and other foreign fighters engaging in heavy combat, reading the Quran, posing with their children, and snapshots of 'martyred' fighters, among many other things, a clever demonstration that despite the dangers and hardships that entail fighting, IS fighters are willingly taking part in the experience and are ready to sacrifice their lives with their 'brethren' for their 'brethren'.

In all, foreigners featured in official videos as part of IS's concerted campaign to entice more Muslims from all over the world to come and serve as the 'lifeblood of the Caliphate'. Like other states in the world that have populations of foreign-origin, including migrants, IS also projected a favourable picture of the *Muhajireen* who moved to the Caliphate for the sake of religion. The only major difference between immigrant population in other countries of the world and IS is that there was no acceptable way out for the foreigners to leave the Caliphate as the return to 'the land of disbelief' was termed as an act of apostasy and punishable by death (Al Tamimi, 2015). Hence, it can be concluded that the analysis of male population living in the de facto state – comprising both locals and foreigners – shows that IS projected them as living together peacefully as civilians and fighting as a unified force, thanks to the chord of Islam and jihad.

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[124] Muslims believe all human beings will rise from the dead on the Day of Judgment, have their souls judged by God, and enter paradise if they are worthy (Wilkinson, 2002).

Children: The Next Generation of the Caliphate

Children have been used by terrorist groups not just for propaganda purposes with the understanding that they are more impressionable (Pinheiro, 2015) and easily influenced (Shuttleworth, 2010), but also as perpetrators of violence in civil wars and acts of terrorism (Singer, 2006). However, IS's use of children is like never before (Capone, 2017) thanks to their grandiose state building project for which young children and teenagers were recruited, indoctrinated, and trained to become the next generation of fighters (Anderson, 2016). While IS videos that featured child executioners received major media attention, there are dozens of videos that project children – both boys and girls from infants all the way to pre-teen years – as carefree, innocent beings who, like the rest of the children in the world, are trying to enjoy their lives with fun and games despite the cruelties of war and destruction around them, barely receiving any mention.

Around 25% of video footage included in the population dataset represents children which is testament to the fact that IS placed heavy emphasis on the display of children in its official videos in order to signal that its population is witnessing growth. The Caliphate's children were projected in three different settings: as innocent children having a good time, which stands at 1 hour and 31 minutes or 11% of the entire population-themed videos; as IS's child soldiers engaging in indoctrination, training, and executions – footage of which spans an hour and 4 minutes or 7% of the entire population dataset; and their engagement with IS officials and fighters, including as their children – 47 minutes or 6% of the entire population dataset. IS portrayed children in two major environs, signalling their dual upbringings: as 'innocent beings' having a great time on ordinary days as well as festivals with their families in places like amusement parks, playgrounds, fields, and picnic spots; and as 'cubs' receiving ideological and combat training in

mosques, seminaries and military camps. The major objective of depicting children in such an unusual light was to let the world know that they are the future of IS and will be raised as the ones who will be capable of taking care of themselves and the Caliphate, which in many ways is reminiscent of Nazi Germany's 'The Hitler Youth'. In other words, IS conveyed the message that the seeds sown by them today shall be reaped by others tomorrow. The following sub-sections analyse the portrayal of 'innocent' male children growing up in the Caliphate, the ones receiving ideological and combat training as 'cubs', and the characterisation of female children.

Age of innocence: IS exploited the images of innocent children enjoying care-free moments as part of its campaign to show that, despite facing constant aggression from its enemies, children remain the top priority of the Caliphate, which is doing its best to provide them happiness and secure their future. Moreover, in order to allay fears and uncertainty among locals and to attract foreigners to migrate with their families or come and start their own, IS painted a rosy picture of the Caliphate which is "brimming with life and serenity" and where children are having fun outdoors along with elders riding horses, running in the fields, having a go on the bouncing castles and trampolines, and enjoying the different rides in a Mosul amusement park, as seen in video entitled "Abundant Provision" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016). Another video entitled "And Advise Each Other To The Truth" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015) depicts children from rural backgrounds engaging in IS-organised 'fun events' where they take part in *Anasheed* (musical) chairs, blowing balloons and other activities and receive different prizes. Almost all videos about festivals such as Ramadan, Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha[125] contain footage where

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[125] For example videos entitled "Atmosphere Of Eid In Wilayat Al Furat" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015), "Atmosphere Of Eid Al Adha In Tel Afar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Eid Greetings From The Land Of Khilafah" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), "Joy Of Eid In The State Of Monotheism" show children engaging in IS-led 'infotainment activities'.

viewers are given the impression that children are the centre of attention and it is their happiness that is paramount to the societal values instilled by IS. Several videos[126] show the 'cute' infants from both local and foreign families and how well-loved they are by their parents and people around them while other videos[127] contain segments where children are taking part in victory celebrations along with adults, often speaking on camera to express their opinion about IS rule and pledge support. Two specific examples can be found in the videos entitled "Mujatweets 2" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) and "Mujatweets 5" (Al Hayat Media, 2014). The former shows local children in a playground receiving ice creams and sweets from IS fighters who then make them repeat pro-IS slogans, while the latter exclusively depicts children of Bosnian and other European fighters holding IS flag, as shown in Figure 5.4, and singing *Anasheed* with one of them holding an AK47 rifle and another holding an IS flag.

Figure 5.4: Screengrab from video entitled "Mujatweets 5" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) where a group of Bosnian children are chanting pro-IS slogans while holding the IS flag.

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[126] "Mujatweets 8" (Al Hayat Media, 2014); "Opinion Of Subjects Living Under The Shadow Of Islamic State" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015); "Those Who Believed And Emigrated" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015); "The Story Of Abu Salman Al Faransi From France" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).
[127] "Expression Of Support For The Islamic State By Tribes In Wilayat Kirkuk" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015), "Glad Tidings Of The Supporters With The Conquests Of The Raptors Of Al Anbar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Good Nights" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Joy Of Mujahideen Over Great Victories" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) and "Living In The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015).

Cubs of the Caliphate: 'Cubs' was IS's preferred term for child soldiers, which the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) describes as follows:

> *"[a]ny person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities" (UNICEF, 2007, p. 7).*

A cursory look at IS propaganda videos gives observers the impression that children received a binary portrayal, either as angels or executioners. However, a deeper analysis reveals that IS's major propaganda objective was to give viewers the impression that many of the children were victims of the aggression perpetrated by IS's enemies and received arms and military training in order to defend themselves and the Caliphate. IS also wanted to convince the viewers that the child fighters are merely seeking revenge from the enemies who killed their parents and loved ones and destroyed their future by attacking their homes and cities.

A video entitled "Constancy Of Muslims Despite The Bombings Of The Crusaders" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016) is one good example. The video shows young children as victims of aerial bombing raids carried out by the US-led and Russia-led coalition warplanes[128] who, as a result of the circumstances, were looking after themselves

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[128] "Constancy Of Muslims Despite The Bombings Of The Crusaders" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016);

and their families by being the breadwinners[129]. To embellish its image of a 'care-giver' and 'nanny' state, IS projected the indoctrination and support of thousands of children in its videos by showing them engaged in religious activities such as offering prayers, reciting the Quran, fasting, preaching, living in boarding schools[130] or attending IS-sponsored public gatherings[131] as acts of upbringing and moral training. Videos such as "And Praise God For What He Has Guided You To" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016) and "Generation Of The Caliphate" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) focus on children's activities in IS-run special schools and seminaries where they learn different aspects of religion, including *Shariah*, *Zakat* and *Da'wah* (preaching), and are then sent into the field to carry out preaching activities, deliver sermons at mosques, lead congregation prayers, distribute *Zakat*, and fight on the frontlines – similar to the duties that were already being performed by men.

The other explicit intention of imparting extreme religious ideology was to brainwash and convert them into merciless killers who are driven by conviction and rage. IS projected the children receiving rigorous religious education and high-level combat training and showed their transformation into the next batch of fighters whose dedication and ruthlessness can only be matched with their male handlers – a phenomenon IS labelled as 'Cubs of the Caliphate' in many of its videos, as seen in Figure 5.5. A video entitled "Support The Caliphate" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) shows child soldiers attending a military camp where they undergo various rigorous exercises including mixed martial arts routines, taking prisoners,

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[129] "A Year After The Bombing Started" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015); "Receiving Eid In The Land Of Monotheism" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015); "My Son Went Ahead Of Me" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016).
[130] "Atmosphere Of Ramadan In Wilayat Al Khayr" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Atmosphere Of Ramadan In Wilayat Ninawa" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), and "I Am Leaving You Upon A Clear Path" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016).
[131] Videos entitled "Dawah Convoy For The Cubs Of The Caliphate" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) and "Honouring The Winners Of The Ramadan Competition" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) show children engaging in Quranic recitation and Islamic quiz events hosted by IS fighters and receiving prizes.

and mounting hit and run attacks with live firing involved. In another video entitled "Cubs Of The *Khilafah*" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), dozens of masked and unmasked children are shown receiving weapons training in a wooded area, shooting at targets, crawling under barbed wire, scaling rope ladders, marching in columns while also taking part in religious rituals such as recitation of Quran and *Hadith* related to *Tawhid* (monotheism) and *Jihad*. Later, the children engage in further intense combat exercises such as forward rolls, jumps, and plank runs while carrying AK47 rifles. The video also contains a clip where the 'cubs' are lying on the ground aiming their Kalashnikovs while the instructor fires live rounds on the ground barely a few metres from away from the trainees, perhaps with an aim to instil fearlessness among them. The video entitled "Cubs of the *Khilafah* 2" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015) also contains similar scenes where children receive religious indoctrination in seminaries and then engage in rigorous physical exercises while also carrying their AK47 rifles. This video also includes a charged monologue of a young boy who incites the viewers to carry out jihad and engage in fighting the enemies of Islam by quoting verses from the Quran. Another boy, presumably 6-8 years-old, appears in a military uniform reciting Quranic verses that provoke believers to wage jihad against the aggressors. Additionally, he is shown firing a live round at a target while chanting "We are coming to Rome, God willing!" The video ends with the appearance of another boy who is younger than the one before him saying on camera: "O Baghdad, be patient for we are coming soon!" All these messages are subtle hints that these 'cubs' will carry on fighting even if the current crop of fighters is taken down by its enemies, and will eventually fulfil IS's goal of 'remaining and expanding'.
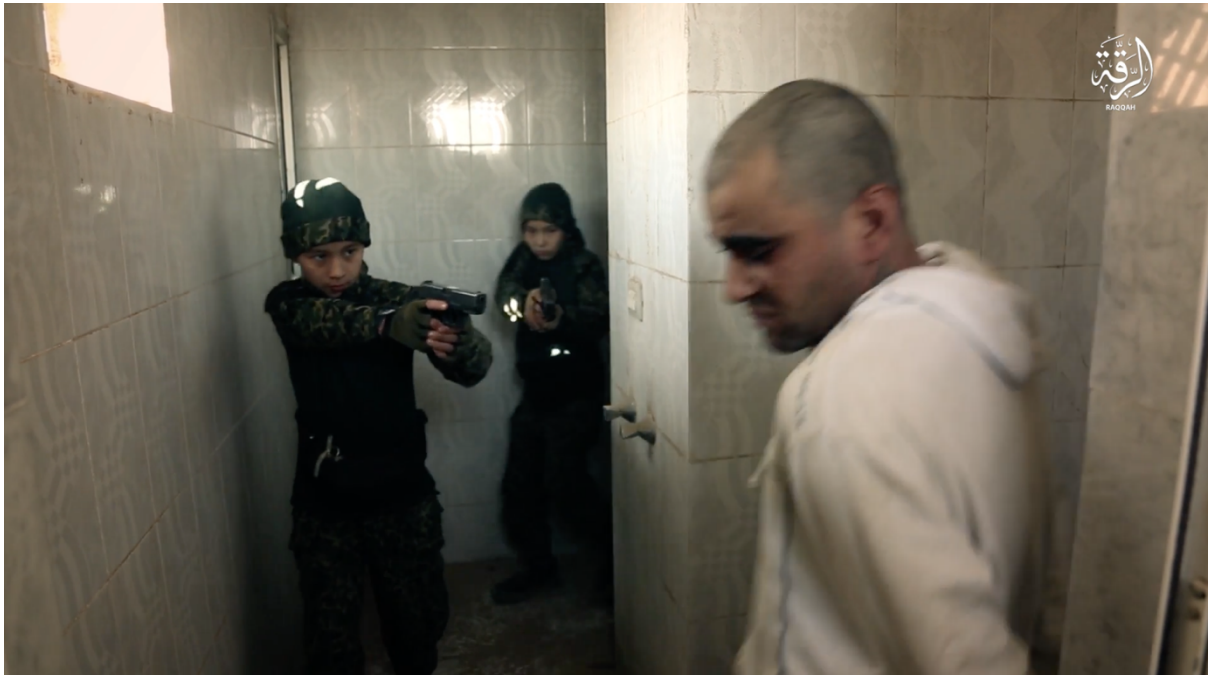
Figure 5.5: Screengrab from video entitled "My Dad Told Me" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016) where "cubs of the Caliphate" are shown executing prisoners in a video game-like sequence.

In an attempt to portray that many children joined IS to seek revenge for the deaths of their loved ones by the hands of its enemies, IS published a 33 minutes-long video entitled "My Dad Told Me 1" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), which features a number of 'cubs of the Caliphate'. It starts with a clip showing a group of heavily armed young children storming a training camp with precision that can only be matched by special forces personnel. In the second scene, a Turkish boy named Talha Al Turki speaks on camera about the set of religious advice his father used to give him and reveals he died fighting the 'PKK apostates' [132] – a derogatory term used by IS for Syrian Kurdish group YPG due to its ties with the PKK and its revolutionary communist and nationalist ideology. The next scene is based in a wooded area where a military instructor teaches the cubs the tactics and techniques required to storm an enemy base. They then watch a propaganda video

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[132] *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (YPG) is Kurdish for People's Protection Units. Turkey has labelled it as a terrorist organisation on allegations of being a *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK or Kurdistan Workers Party) off-shoot. Both parties share a radical left-wing ideology, and advocate autonomy for Kurds in Turkey and Syria.

on a large TV screen. The video features a child named 'Ameen Al Shishani' who reveals his father died in Wilayat Al Barakah fighting what he calls the "Crusader Coalition[133]" and recalls him urging "to fight the enemy" and "not to disobey your mother." The young boy, who is then shown walking in his destroyed home in the next scene, points to a spot and says "this is where my mother and brother died" in an air raid and starts weeping. A total of six boys individually appear in the video and provide descriptive accounts of how their fathers died and what they instructed them to do after their death. The video also contains scenes where the 'cubs' go on a night-time patrol, receive religious indoctrination classes, engage in an array of guerrilla workouts, and take part in live fire exercises. The video culminates in brutal point-blank executions of six handcuffed prisoners[134] by a batch of 'cubs' who 'hunt' them down on different floors of a decrepit building, as shown in Figure 5.5. the intent of which is to make it clear that the 'cubs' are being raised to be as ruthless as the 'lions of the Caliphate' and can commit brazen executions if given the chance.

In all, male children in IS videos are projected on a spectrum of innocence to cruelty, with the explicit intention of giving the world the message that, although their children are innocent and loveable like other children, theirs is a society of brave men and women which is raising a generation of fearless fighters that will protect the Caliphate, if it remains, and will revive it, in case it falls.

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[133] IS named the Syrian Democratic Front (SDF), comprised of armed Syrian Kurdish group YPG and other rebel groups, backed by US-led coalition forces as 'Crusader Coalition'.
[134] Two Syrian Army soldiers, two anti-IS rebels, an alleged PKK spy and a Jordanian intelligence mole.

Young Girls: 'Pearls of Chastity'

The projection of young boys by IS can be deemed as 'men in the making' in that they were shown as brave, fearless, and responsible children who are growing up to become ruthless fighters dedicated to the cause. Along the same lines, IS projected young girls as 'pre-pubescent women' who will grow up to become strong mothers capable of nurturing and nourishing the next generation of the Caliphate and raising them as 'cubs' much like what their mothers are doing. Unlike the absence of women in IS propaganda videos, young girls do appear – albeit in secondary roles – as sisters of the 'cubs[135]', daughters of IS fighters[136], or simply from ordinary backgrounds raised to become ideal Muslim women[137]. While young boys featuring in IS videos are shown in more active and vocal roles, young girls are depicted in subdued roles where they talk less and appear in a limited context. Following two examples perfectly illustrate this observation. Two very young girls, most probably from Bosnia, appear in a video entitled "Mujatweets 5" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) where they are shown wearing shorts and t-shirts looking at the camera and smiling shyly. Some young girls also appear in another IS video entitled "Preaching Forum In Raqqah City" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) where they are shown smiling while wearing floral headscarves with IS bandanas on their foreheads. They appear standing on the side of the main stage covered in floral abayas facing young boys who are standing on the opposite side, and later shown receiving sweets and smiling again.

Moreover, based on the set of videos included in the case study, the screen appearance of young girls gives the observer an impression of a transition where

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[135] "My Dad Told Me" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016).
[136] "We Will Give You A Good Life" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016).
[137] "I Am Leaving You Upon A Clear Path" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016).

they are shown wearing casual clothing or headscarves in the early days of the Caliphate to later appearing in, at least, headscarves and abayas, or preferably, in abayas with niqabs. This clearly alludes to the fact that once IS consolidated its rule and started to impose harsh restrictions on men and women, young girls were also impacted. A video entitled "This Is Our Eid" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015) shows two young girls from the northern Syrian towns of Mar'ea and Manbij respectively, wearing festive clothes and appearing on camera to wish Eid greetings to the viewers, whereas video entitled "This Is Our Eid" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016) contains various clips where dozens of young girls wearing new, festive clothes appear with their families at a Mosul amusement park, playing in the park with other children but not shown enjoying the same activities as young boys. For example, they are not shown driving dodgem cars or shooting at targets with toy rifle guns.

Similarly, several young girls appear in the video entitled "Joy Of Eid In The State of Monotheism" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), and "Abundant Provision" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016) where they are shown running around in open spaces and enjoying the rides. Important to point out here is that while most of them are not wearing any 'Islamic dress' and are playing with young boys who could be their family members or neighbours, but at the same time, a veiled young girl, along with two younger sisters and a brother, is shown singing *Anasheed* in a beautiful voice while the siblings bask in the attention they receive from the audience in the video entitled "Joy Of Eid In The State Of Monotheism" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015). This alludes to IS's official policy, which was to encourage parents to make their young girls cover themselves when appearing in public, despite showing young girls wearing casual clothing in many of its videos. The video entitled "I Am Leaving You Upon a Clear Path" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016) perfectly showcases such official policy. In this 13 minutes-long video, two very young girls appear towards the end

of the video in a segment called 'Crowns of Chastity'. A five-year-old girl – who is fully veiled – is asked on camera about how she feels wearing the 'Islamic dress' to which she answers: "I have been wearing (this) since a long time." The interviewer responds with another question, asking: "Do you wear this to get God's blessings?" to which the young girl responds in affirmation and receives a gift bag. She is followed by another young girl – shown in Figure 5.6 – who is also asked about her age to which she says: "I don't know." When asked if she likes her headscarf and 'abaya (cloak or loose over-garment), she responds: "It is nice." She then receives a gift bag and the segment comes to a conclusion.

Figure 5.6: Screengrab from video entitled "I Am Leaving You Upon A Clear Path" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016) where a very young girl can be seen wearing a hijab.

Important to note here is the discrepancy in the roles they were projected, and the expectations the State had from them. While young boys appear in more masculine roles, whether as 'juniors' and 'cubs' and can be seen all over the place, young girls are shown in soft, feminine roles as 'little ladies' who will soon follow the footsteps of their elders and become stay-at-home mothers to assume the caring and nurturing responsibilities expected by the society modelled by IS.

Women: Invisible 'Other Half' of the Caliphate

Most Islamist groups, especially Salafi-Jihadis, emphasise that the traditional role of a woman is to serve her husband and children as a wife and mother (Ali, 2015) and that is their key responsibility (Winter, 2015). IS, being no exception, emphasised that women's performance of their traditional roles transforms them into "custodians of cultural, social, and religious values" tasked with passing on these concepts along to the next generation (Hall, 2014). Women's role was so important that they were to a certain extent considered as "agents of state-building" that "contributed to Islamic State's expansion efforts as wives and mothers" (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 14). This stance was reflected in the 11th issue of Rumiyah magazine (Al Hayat Media, 2017, p. 15) which published the following text:

> *"Rise with courage and sacrifice in this war as the righteous women did at the time of the Messenger of Allah, not because of the small number of men but rather, due to their love for jihad, their desire to sacrifice for the sake of Allah, and their desire for Jannah [...] The race is at its final stages, so continue your struggle, my dear sister, even if you are trembling or slowing down."*

A manifesto circulated by Al Khansaa Brigade[138] in January 2015, defines motherhood as a woman's "preeminent and divine role." The document also emphasises that it is incumbent on women to "remain hidden and veiled," which is in line with their ultra-conservative ideology. While the unofficial policy statement

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[138] Al Khansaa Brigade was an all-female armed police force which was tasked with enforcing morality by patrolling the streets of major cities like Raqqah and Mosul (Martini, 2019). It also executed activities in intelligence gathering, law enforcement, overseeing slaves, and recruiting (Abdul-Alim, 2015).

disallowed women's participation in any combat roles, it kept open the possibility for such an extraordinary situation by mentioning that "women may go out to serve the community in a number of situations, the most important being: (1) jihad (by appointment), if the enemy is attacking her country and the men are not enough to protect it and the imams give a fatwa for it, as the blessed women of Iraq and Chechnya did, with great sadness, if the men are absent even they are present; (2) The most common reason is for studying the sciences of religion; (3) Female doctors or teachers may leave, but they must keep strictly to *Shariah* guidelines" (Winter, 2015, p. 22).

In the background: In accordance with its official policy, official IS propaganda outlets, including online magazines, are bereft of any visual representation of women and mention them in text just a few times but only as victims of apostates or Crusaders (Nacos, 2015). Official IS videos, published during the Caliphate era, present a similar picture where women are either in the background or their presence is conveyed in subtle ways. In a video entitled "The Day Of Awards" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), a group of fully-veiled women appear in a panoramic shot where they can be seen walking with their children or sitting on grass patches in a busy Mosul amusement park on one of the Eid festival days. In a video entitled "Living In The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), women also appear passing through a street where a child is being interviewed by an IS media man. Similarly, in "Joy Of Mujahideen Over Great Victories" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), a video released in April/May 2015 featuring the impromptu celebrations of IS victories across Iraq and Syria, fully-veiled women appear several times walking in the streets and markets of Raqqah or as pillion-riders with their close male relatives while convoys of IS fighters pass through the streets in a victory parade. Veiled women also briefly appear in videos entitled "Generation Of The Caliphate"

(Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) and "Dawah Convoy For The Cubs Of The Caliphate" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) albeit visible only to the sharp eyed. The video entitled "Stories From The Land Of Living – The Story Of Abu Khalid Al Cambodi From Australia" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) is the only video in the dataset that actually presents a woman in the foreground for a good five seconds. The woman in question is presumably the wife of the Australian-Cambodian IS foreign fighter and walks along with him in a park in Raqqah, as seen in Figure 5.7. Interestingly, the narrator, that is, Abu Khalid Al Cambodi, does not mention anything about his private life or the fact that the woman seen walking with him is somehow related to him.

Figure 5.7: Screengrab from video entitled "Stories From The Land Of The Living - Abu Khalid Al Cambodi From Australia" (Al Hayat Media Centre, 2015) where the Australian-Cambodian can be seen walking with his wife.

Finally on the frontlines: While IS insisted that the role of women is within the confines of their homes, and not outside, the policy was scrapped when the Caliphate was on the verge of collapse following the US-led military coalition's simultaneous operations in Mosul and Raqqah in mid 2017, and female fighters were allowed to mount suicide attacks on enemy targets (Cottee & Bloom, 2017).

The visual confirmation of this ideological shift came in form of an official video released in early 2018 when IS fighters were cornered in a tiny sliver of land in eastern Syria. This exceptional video, entitled "Inside *Khilafah* – 7" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2018), shows for the first time women armed with AK47 rifles sitting in the bed of a pickup truck to be taken to the battlefield. In the next scene, the shaky camera footage depicts a female fighter clad in a black niqab[139] running alongside several armed men through a field apparently seeking position behind an abandoned house. The video then displays the woman stepping up on a berm and shooting with her Kalashnikov rifle at the enemy while another IS fighter beside her is shooting with a scope rifle. The female fighter then steps down the barrier and raises her left arm in the air to make the signature index finger IS gesture[140], as shown in Figure 5.8. Meanwhile, the narrator describes the IS female fighters as "chaste mujahid women journeying to their Lord with the garments of purity and faith, seeking revenge for their religion and for the honour of their sisters imprisoned by the apostate Kurds."

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[139] Niqab is a veil covering the head and face, but not the eyes, usually worn with a loose black garment (abaya) that covers from head to feet https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-23/why-do-muslim-women-wear-a-burka-niqab-or-hijab/5761510

[140] Though the gesture refers to the *tawhid*, "the belief in the oneness of God and a key component of the Muslim religion" IS uses it to affirm an ideology that demands the destruction of the West, as well as any form of pluralism. https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-09-04/isis-has-new-hand-sign-and-it-means-far-more-we-re-1

Figure 5.8: Screengrab from video entitled "Inside Khilafah 7" (Al Hayat Media Centre, 2018) where an IS female fighter is raising her index finger after firing shots at the enemy.

Gan et al. (2019) claim the fact that women fought on the front lines when IS was on its last legs was a clear demonstration of its sheer desperation to make use of everything at its disposal. Lahoud (2014) describes the situation as the classic reflection of the 'Achilles' heel of Jihadi ideology', which admits that while exclusion of women from combat undermines the credibility and justification of their defensive jihad; allowing women to take combat roles makes them deeply unpopular among conversative Muslims and denies potential source of recruitment from this section of the society. Martini (2019, p. 8), in her overview of gender female roles within the Caliphate, concurs with Lahoud and adds that "Islamic State in its most ideological (and utopist) form had shaped specific, ad hoc roles for its women, an emergency status calls for emergency measures, though always justified by Islamic references." Such an extreme positional shift in IS's behaviour is in line with Bloom's assertation that women join extremist groups for reasons such as seeking vengeance on part of their families or if they were wronged by their governments or particular segments of the society. It also alludes to her

finding that women engaged in fighting or carrying suicide bombing attacks receive eight times as much media coverage as those by their male counterparts largely because of existing gender norms and expectations (Bloom, 2007).

The 'Divine' Social Contract – Enforcing a Citizenship Agreement upon the Segments of Society

Religion, as defined by Max Weber, is a political institution that carries a normative order and serves as "a highly effective bond, especially in times of social crisis that often take place when insecurity abounds, enabling the promoter of the religion (the religious producer) to offer a radical interpretation that underlines people's feelings of alienation" (Kfir, 2015, p. 235). As described in the Conceptual Framework chapter, IS imposed its strict interpretation of Islam, according to which the Caliphate's social contract was based on the concept of the *Bay'ah*, or pledge of allegiance, which is a central tenet of Sunni-Salafi political thought. The idea is that the *Hakim* collects *Bay'ah* from the *Ummah* based on the "fiduciary obligation to rule within the limits of God's law" (March, 2013, p. 311). According to March, who quotes Tunisian Islamist politician Rashid Al Ghannushi, the "ruler (including the entire executive apparatus) is thus an agent (*Wakil*) or employee (Ajir) of the *Ummah,* contracted with the sole purpose of helping the *Ummah* discharge its own covenantal obligation to obey God's law" (March, 2013, p. 311). He adds that *Bay'ah* is the voluntary contract between a ruler and his subjects, in which the subjects pledge their obedience to the ruler in return for his protection and provision of justice (2013). Essentially, the Bay'ah is "a recognition of the practicality of popular consent" (Youmans, 2019, p. 57). The ruler sought political sovereignty after his election by a *Shura* (consultative council) representing the masses as a whole. After his election as the caliph, as God's vice regent, he was tasked with guiding his subjects in accordance with *Shariah* (March, 2013). While

IS claimed it had followed the described procedure, its leadership was criticised by a number of theologians for not correctly representing the Islamic thought. However, the ones who supported the group insisted that Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi did meet "the conditions outlined in Sunni law – being a Muslim adult man of Quraysh descent [related to Prophet Muhammad]; exhibiting moral probity and physical and mental integrity; and having 'Amr, or authority," which they argued is "the necessity of practical sovereignty" (Youmans, 2019, p. 57).

According to Gerges, IS implemented a manifesto entitled *Wathiqat Al Madinah* (Charter of the City) three days after the fall of Mosul, which called on the people of Mosul to rally behind their rule. The article 16 of the said manifesto said: "O people, you have tried all secular regimes, including the monarchical, republican, Ba'athist and then the Safavid[141], and now is the era of the Islamic State" (2016, p. 271). According to the charter, the Islamic State was a caliphate, ruled by a caliph, whose name is Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. The caliph is the head of state and the commander of the faithful. He is responsible for ensuring the implementation of Islamic law and the defence of the caliphate. IS forced its subjects to obey the caliph and the orders issued from his office, which it claimed were in accordance with *Shariah*. The subjects were also required to pay taxes, serve in the military, and uphold Islamic religious and moral standards at all times. In return for their compliance, IS promised the provision of safety and security, justice, education, and social welfare services, among other entitlements of a modern citizenship agreement.

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[141] Safavid is a dynasty which ruled Persia from 1502-1736 and replaced Sunni Islam with Shia. It is used as a slur by IS and refers to Iranian state and Iran-backed governments in Iraq and Syria.

While the charter comes across as very modern in its outlook, it was essentially rooted in *Asabiyyah* (group feeling) – a concept first used by renowned Islamic historian Ibn Khaldun who described in his famous book *Al Muqaddimah* that "a collective will only be successful by developing close ties, which strengthens their stamina and makes them feared, since everybody's affection for his family and group is more important" (Mabon, 2017, p. 977). The 12th century philosopher argued that authority is rooted in superiority, which "emerges from group feeling. Only by God's help in establishing this religion do individual desires come together in agreement to press their claims, and hearts become united" (Mabon, 2017, p. 977). As explained in the conceptual framework chapter, IS's citizenship agreement strictly revolved around privileges for Sunni Muslims – regardless of their ethnic, geographic or racial background – as long as they pledged their allegiance to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi and vowed to support him as long as they are alive. On the receiving end of the stick were many non-Sunnis, such as Shias who were labelled as rejectionists; Christians as crusaders; Kurds as apostates, and Yezidis as devil worshippers, and faced state-imposed sanctions such as confiscation of properties, destruction of places of worship, taking of women and children as sex slaves or bonded labour, kidnappings, murders, and other forms of mistreatment and discrimination (Gerges, 2016). However, IS insisted that all non-Sunnis had the option of accepting Islam and entering the fold in order to restore their privileges.

As for the *Ansar* and *Muhajirin* segments of the society, the ones who joined IS, whether in civilian or military capacity, were given certain privileges, for example, local Sunni men in Syria, especially in the east, were provided around $300 a month to join IS as fighters with the option of taking civilian jobs should they choose to stay away from the dangers of the frontline and enforce power over

civilians (Mironova, 2019) while fighters of foreign origin would be paid between $400 and $1200 a month, plus a $50 stipend for their wives and $25 for each child, according to the US Congressional Research Service (Pagliery, 2016). Moreover, IS also coerced different tribes in Iraq and Syria to enter its fold and pledge allegiance to the Caliph and even used financial bribes to coax them into pledging allegiance and surrendering control of their areas (Khatib, 2015). The tribes which resisted IS's rule were punished severely, such as Albu Nimr in Iraq and *Sha'itat* in Syria*,* and faced mass killings and displacement as a result. IS's main intention was to co-opt the tribes by appealing to their tribal and religious identities in order to "create a new form of citizenship in which individuals can have security – physical, economic, social, and religious – as long as they accept IS's message" (Kfir, 2015, p. 241).

While IS's expansion was in full-swing in early to mid 2015 – as it received *Bay'ah* from a number of affiliates located the Middle East, North Africa, West Africa and Central Asia – the fifth issue of Dabiq magazine (Al Hayat Media, 2015) carried a message to its subjects and supporters in its fifth issue and announced the expansion of the Caliphate into Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Sinai Peninsula, Libya, Nigeria, and Algeria, and implied that their citizenship is growing in its worth as the Islamic State is remaining and expanding. It also boasted that "the march of the mujahidin will continue until they reach Rome, by Allah's permission" [Even If the Disbelievers Despise Such]" (Al Hayat Media, 2015, p. 33). The announcement was accompanied by a number of official video releases[142] in which people,

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[142] Examples include "Joy Of Mujahideen Over Great Victories" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), "*Joy Of The Monotheists Over The Victories Of Brothers In Wilayat Al Anbar*" (Wilayat Al Anbar, 2015), "Joy Of The Mujahideen Of The Caliphate Over The Bayah Of Their Brothers In Wilayat West Africa" (Wilayat Homs, 2015), "Joy of Muslims over the Bayah of Brothers in Nigeria" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015), "Bayats Continue and Gifts of Happiness to the Brothers in Nigeria" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015), "Joy of the Monotheists over the Bayah of the People of Africa to the Caliph of the Muslims" (Wilayat Al Junub, 2015).

especially young men, and children, were shown celebrating in the streets by chanting "*Dawlat Al Islam, Baqiyah*" (Islamic State shall remain). However, the citizenship agreement unravelled once IS's territorial control collapsed under the assault of two international coalitions led by the US and Russia respectively, which were also helped by a number of Sunni tribal confederations such as Al Dulaimi, Janabi, Al Ubaidi, Albu Risha, Jabour, and Shammar, among others (Mansour, 2016) who restored sovereignty back to the previous centres of power – Baghdad or Damascus.

Conclusion

Visual analysis of the Caliphate's population – bearing in mind that these performances were staged for the camera, heavily edited, and produced to fit a certain narrative – uncover a society which IS arranged according to its very own norms and grandiose visions of how an Islamic society should look like. Overall, the 97 population-themed videos included in the dataset paint the picture of a compliant local populace that welcomed IS, embraced its *Shariah*-based rules and regulations and lived their lives accordingly, and stayed loyal through thick and thin. At the same time, it shows that the foreigners left behind their lives in their native lands and migrated to help build the Caliphate and defend it. Cognisant of racism and social inequality that continues to plague modern societies around the world, especially the socio-political sensitivities around race issues and colonialism in the West, IS in its bid to exploit these contentious issues painted its Caliphate as "a State where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers,"[143] and urged the oppressed Muslims around the world to come and join their utopia. In terms of gender roles, IS showed that men

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[143] Dabiq issue # 1, (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 7).

are at the helm of society by shining light at their roles as fathers, husbands, workers and fighters. At the same time, women were relegated to work behind the scenes and fulfil their duties in upbringing their children, that is, the next generation of the Caliphate, and were let into the battlefield along with male fighters only as the last resort. As for the citizenship agreement, the performances depicted in the videos suggest that the subjects were overall happy and content while 'living under the shadow of the Caliphate' and were thankful for the fact that they finally got the chance to lead their lives in accordance with Shariah. The case study also concludes that the projections of population living under IS control always gave the impression that it is permanent, expanding, and there to stay as long as the Caliphate is 'remaining and expanding'. In other words, IS population-themed videos – like its other official propaganda videos – "revealed that all conditions of normal life are available, and all people in those areas accept ISIS/DAESH control and are satisfied with the imposed rules, the conditions, and the Sharia" (Shamieh & Szenes, 2015, p. 27).

6 : IDENTIFY, EXPAND, AND PROJECT:
IS'S DISPLAYS OF TERRITORIALITY IN THREE DISTINCT STAGES

IS rose steadily towards the end of 2013 and early 2014 after taking control of the cities of Fallujah in Iraq and Raqqah in Syria simultaneously. At the height of expansion from mid 2014 to late 2015, IS controlled about a third of Syria and two-fifths of Iraq – claiming sovereignty over an estimated area of 88,059 km² (34,000 square miles) and population of 10 million civilians (Revkin, 2018). However, by December 2017 it had lost 95 per cent of its territory, including two biggest urban centres, Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and the northern Syrian city of Raqqah, its nominal capital (Wilson Centre, 2019). This is not the first time in modern history that a designated Jihadi terrorist organisation captured certain territory, claimed statehood but then lost control of it. IS's previous iteration, Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), had declared itself a state in 2006 despite having any considerable territory under its control. It was decimated when its leaders were killed in 2010 (Barrett, 2015). Other Jihadi groups such as Al Shabab, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) also engaged in state building projects in Somalia, Yemen, and Mali respectively (El Damanhoury, 2019) with mixed results. IS's declaration was in line with the contemporary geopolitical phenomenon where militant Islamist organisations went on to proclaim Islamic states, with the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hamas in Gaza Strip, and Boko Haram in Nigeria as prominent examples, described by Honig & Yahel (2017) as 'terrorist semi-states' or 'Jihadi proto-states' by Lia (2015). However, unlike its other contemporary Jihadi rivals who were either driven out by military interventions or collapsed

due to infighting before they could establish any semblance of a state, the Islamic State's proclamation had a most profound impact on global geopolitics not only due to its territorial successes and sheer brutality, which garnered worldwide attention and concern (Jabareen, 2015), but also due to its statebuilding characteristics (Revkin, 2018), and unprecedented control over huge swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria – in fact the biggest for any non-state actor in contemporary history.

This case study explores IS's expansive displays of territoriality based on visual analysis of 77 territory-themed videos included in the dataset spanning around 14 hours in duration. It establishes that IS, as part of its statebuilding project, implemented an expansionist territorial strategy which consisted of three stages, both on the ground and in its visual propaganda, and used them to authenticate its 'remaining and expanding' Caliphate. These three stages were exercise of territorial sovereignty, legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects, and encouragement of its supporters worldwide to emigrate to the nascent State to help rebuild and defend it. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the first stage of IS's territorial strategy, which consisted of identifying the targeted territory and the enemy controlling it with the help of latest technology, such as drones and maps. The second section details the second stage of IS's territorial expansion, which took place through military means, including brazen attacks and fierce fighting with the enemy. The third section reports how IS – after successfully implementing the first and second stages of its territorial strategy – initiated the third stage which consisted of projecting the newly captured population centres, oil and

gas fields, vital civilian and military installations, under its firm control and the inception of a new 'utopian' life.

The case study concludes that the overall objective of IS was to demonstrate the existence of a de facto sovereign state that is capable of capturing, controlling and defending its 'ever-expanding territory', based on the implementation of its 'remaining and expanding' maxim[144], with the help of modern technology, weaponry, and warfare tactics. It also argues that IS wanted to set the foundations of a new territorial, sovereign order, in which borders are temporary, all land agreements are null and void, and the Islamic State solely exercises the right to exist because of its basis in a divine order whereas all other states shall collapse due to their temporal nature. However, it should be noted that the opposite took place, and IS – while trying to downplay its losses – depicted the reversal of fortunes as a test from God. Most importantly, through these staged performances of stateness, IS wanted to send a clear message to its subjects and supporters worldwide that the Caliphate needs their cooperation and support to help rebuild and defend it.

Three Distinct Stages of IS's Territorial Conquest

The importance of acquiring and projecting territorial control for IS can be highlighted from the fact that majority of IS videos included in the territory dataset – 49 out of 77 – not only carry the name of the captured territory in their titles but also focus on the very place and provide viewers glimpses of what the different

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[144] In the 5th issue of Dabiq (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 13) entitled "Remaining and Expanding," IS claimed that "the *Khilāfah* has not only returned, but is remaining and expanding, bringing Muslims of all colours under one banner and one leader to rid their lands of the *Tawāghīt* and raise their swords in unity against the Jews and crusaders." Later in the 12th issue of Dabiq (Al Hayat Media, 2016, p. 17) in a section entitled "*Baqiyah*" (It Will Remain), they claimed that despite the conspiracies and setbacks, "*Dawlat Al Islam Bāqiyah* (Islamic State is remaining)."

stages of IS's territorial control looked like. This section is concerned with IS's

overall conquest of territory and its projection – embodied by IS as 'remaining and

expanding' – which took place in three distinct stages: identification, expansion,

projection. Before getting into the detailed description and analysis of these stages,

it is worthwhile to shed some light on the official territorial declarations made by

then-IS spokesman, Abu Mohammed Al Adnani, in order to understand how they

shaped IS's territorial strategy and the underlying messages behind them,

including their psyops[145]. On the first day of Ramadan 1435 *Hijri* (corresponding

28 June, 2014), IS released an official statement entitled "This is the Promise of

God" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), in which Al Adnani announced that the Caliphate

has been revived under "Caliph Ibrahim, the Commander of the Faithful," the

official title of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, upon the successful capture of Mosul.

Describing the Caliphate, he said: "Its shade covers land from Aleppo to Diyala.

Beneath it, the walls of the *Tawāghīt* (tyrant rulers) have been demolished, their

flags have fallen, and their borders have been destroyed" (Al Hayat Media, 2014).

Around the same time, IS fighters carried out the symbolic demolition of an Iraq-

Syria border post after declaring it as the relic of "Sykes-Picot era" with Abu

Mohammed Al Adnani vowing that "the borders will be erased from the map"

alongside his deputy, Abu Omar Al Shishani, who also echoed a similar message in

which he declared his happiness in "destroying the borders placed by the

Tawāghīt to prevent the Muslims from travelling in their lands." These

announcements were made in order to give its subjects in Iraq and Syria, as well as

its supporters living around the world, the message that the 'long-awaited

caliphate' has been established, thanks to the conquests, and now is the time to

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[145] Pysops is contraction for psychological operations which are tactics intended to manipulate one's
opponents or enemies, such as the dissemination of propaganda or the use of psychological warfare
(Oxford Dictionary of English, 2019).

simultaneously rebuild the State and expand territory. Capitalising on the successes of its territorial strategy, the Caliphate reached its peak of control in mid 2015, which IS marked by releasing a video entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015). In this video, IS reiterated that "the *Khilafah* was established in the year 1435 AH (2014 AD), its leader from the tribe of Quraish is Shaykh Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi," boasted that "its territory is already greater than Britain, 8 times the size of Belgium, and 30 times the size of Qatar. It is a State built on the prophetic methodology, striving to follow the Quran and Sunnah," and illustrated its claim with the help of a map, as shown in Figure 6.1.
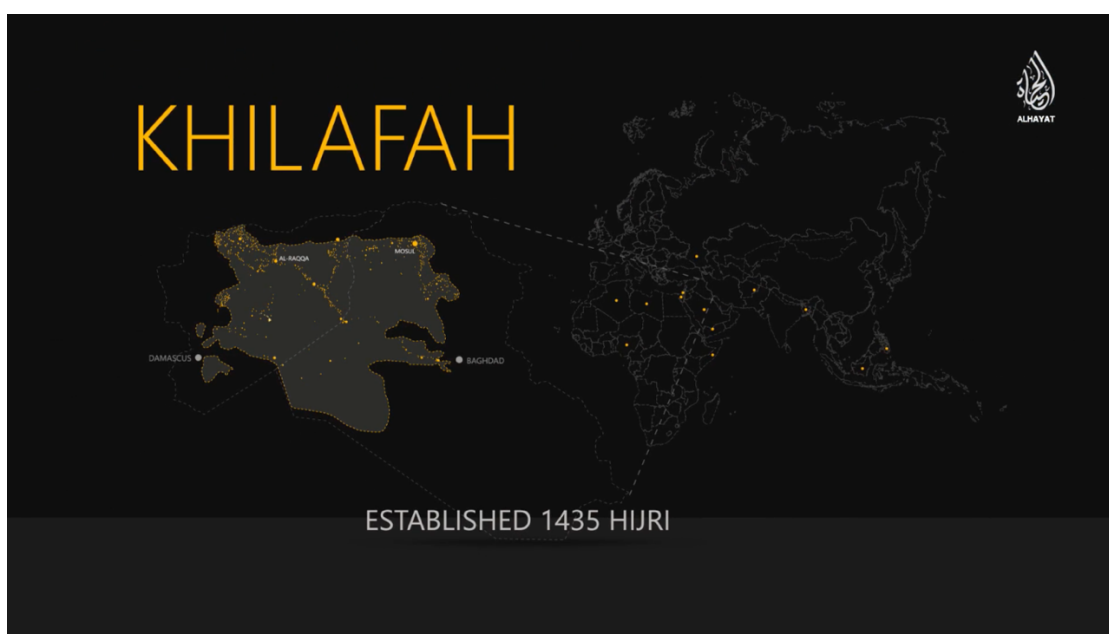
Figure 6.1: Screengrab from the video entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) *in which IS demarcated its territory.*

The message delivered again by IS was to reassure to its subjects and supporters that the Caliphate is expanding despite the challenges posed by its enemies, and it shall prevail as it is the "promise of Allah for those who never bow to anyone except Him." However, in July 2016, when its territorial authority started to crumble due to separate US-led and Russia-led coalition operations, IS published another video entitled "The Structure Of The *Khilafah*" (Al Furqan Media, 2016),

in a bid to downplay the losses and accentuate its 'sovereignty' by claiming control over a total of 35 *Wilayaat* (provinces) with 19 of them based in Iraq and Syria.

Table 6.1 illustrates the overall portrait of the Caliphate's performances of territory that were projected in three distinct stages: first by identifying the territory, second by attacking and acquiring the identified territory, and finally projecting control over it, as explained in the sections below:

Table 6.1: List of performances in the Territory case study

PERFORMANCES OF TERRITORY	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
Stage 1 - Identification	**0:27:02**	**3%**
Aerial views	0:19:50	2%
Maps	0:07:12	1%
Stage 2 - Expansion	**8:46:04**	**64%**
Attack/fighting	5:45:19	41%
Enemy	2:10:25	16%
War booty	0:42:14	6%
Border post/boundary/barrier/checkpoint	0:08:06	1%
Stage 3 - Projection	**4:51:26**	**35%**
IS fighters/flag/leaders	3:53:11	28%
Civilian endorsement	0:20:10	2%
Journalist reporting	0:15:31	2%
New border = "peaceful" life	0:13:47	2%
Historical narrative	0:08:47	1%
Not Coded	0:10:54	1%
Coded	13:45:28	99%
Total length	**13:56:22**	**100%**

Stage 1: Identification of Territory

The analysis of the territory dataset reveals a certain story-telling pattern repeated throughout the majority of videos. While some of the videos feature attack footage straightaway, many videos start with a certain narration where the targets marked for the offensive are identified and explained. This is followed by sequences of brazen attacks and intense fighting, which then culminate in a victory, and

ultimately IS proceeding to project the conquest as part of its 'remaining and expanding' motto. IS projected the first stage of its territorial expansion strategy in its videos with the help of aerial views, which were obtained from drones. At the same time, IS also made an elaborate use of maps to clearly define the territory it was marking for conquest. However, it seldom explained why the attack is important for its strategic and tactical military objectives[146]. The following two modes were used by IS to advance its militaristic and propagandistic gains, while also emphasise its territorial sovereignty:

Aerial views: IS's use of technology in order to improvise its warfare capabilities has been well-documented (Beccaro, 2018) with data collected by Bunker (2015) suggesting that IS conducted its first drone operations as early as summer 2014, and by spring 2015, it had used drones in campaigns involving Fallujah, Kobani and Raqqah countryside. The use of aerial footage obtained from drones to plan and execute military operations is also documented in its official propaganda videos, spanning around 20 minutes and featuring in 19 out of total 77 territory-themed videos.

The analysis of territory-themed videos reveals that IS used drones for three major military objectives, that is, surveillance, show of force/control, and combat by weaponising them, in addition to the political objective of expressing sovereignty. IS conducted surveillance operations with the help of its drones in order to obtain information about the enemy's positions, personnel strength, equipment such as tanks, armoured personnel carriers (APCs), missile launchers, and artillery, and its

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[146] For example, in video entitled "Battle Of Abu Hisan Al Khathami - Liberation Of Qaryatayn" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015) IS explained that the town is located in the heart of Syrian desert, has a sizeable Christian population, and that their militia is encircling the city with 7 checkpoints.

supply routes, among other things, which proved crucial in the attack/fighting stage of its territorial conquest. At least eight different videos[147] document surveillance of enemy positions and movements, including a video entitled "So He Left Them Behind – Capture Of Base Outside Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2014), which features a drone footage providing the aerial view of the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) Brigade 93 base in Ain Issa near Raqqah. Based on the surveillance footage captured from the drones, as well as from the high rise buildings around the base, the video then shows IS carrying out several suicide bombing raids and storming the military base, resulting in the killing and capturing of an unknown number of Syrian Army soldiers. Similarly, six other videos feature drone footage that identify several other military bases and oilfields located across Iraq and Syria, followed by footage of intense fighting and subsequent capture of the targets by IS fighters, further signifying the importance IS attached to drones for surveillance purposes and success of its missions.

Apart from identifying targets, IS also used footage obtained from drones to amplify its military strength and project its enemy in a vulnerable position, as part of its psyops – as prescribed in its 'management of savagery' manual. A good example is the video entitled "Fighting Lions" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2017), which shows drone footage of IS fighters hitting an Iraqi Army/Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)[148] base, causing heavy damage and then running away with captured war booty in armoured vehicles, giving viewers the hint that the enemy was

[147] "Battles Of Brave People Around The Walls Of Airport" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015); "Knights Of Victory 3 – Liberation Of Workers Area In East Fallujah" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015); "Now Comes The Fighting" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015); "Resurrection Of The Brigade" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017); "Revered Glory – Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016); "The Knights Of Storms" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2017); "Victory From God And An Imminent Conquest 2" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).
[148] Hashd Al Sha'abi, Arabic for Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), is an umbrella organisation which, according to an official spokesman, includes around 142,000 fighters in 50 or so groups (Mansour & Jabbar, 2017).

nothing more than sitting ducks in the middle of the desert and IS struck them with impunity. Other videos such as "Appointment At Dabiq" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "The Epic Battles Of Constancy 3" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2016), "Resurrection Of The Brigade" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017), and "The Knights Of Storms" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2017) also contain drone footage that focuses on IS's military convoys, equipment, and personnel. Apart from the show of force, IS also used drone footage to simultaneously strengthen its claims of control over certain territories when disputed by the mainstream media, and project its territorial sovereignty. One prime example is the video entitled "Inside Ayn Al Islam (Kobani)" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014), which consists of extensive drone footage that supplements the news report compiled by John Cantlie, a British journalist who was taken captive by IS and was dispatched to northern Syrian town of Kobani[149] in November 2014 to refute media reports that IS had failed to rout Kurdish YPG fighters and capture the city. The video begins with an IS drone hovering over the Kurdish-majority town, presented as a proof that the entire city is under IS fighters' control and the battle is over. The drone, which flies over the residential areas of the town close to the Syrian-Turkish border, identifies grain silos – as shown in Figure 6.2 – on the other side of the border and then spots the location from where John Cantlie is reporting. The news report also contains another aerial shot taken from the few high rise buildings standing in the town, which shows the destruction caused by heavy fighting and alleged aerial bombardment carried out by US-led coalition warplanes.

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[149] IS named Kobani, officially known as Ayn Al Arab, as Ayn Al Islam during its conquest in 2015.

Figure 6.2: Screengrab from video entitled "Inside Ayn Al Islam With John Cantlie" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014) which shows an IS drone hovering above the skies of Kobani in northern Syria along the Turkish border.

Overall, by using drones to obtain aerial views and documenting them in its videos, IS demonstrated key aspects of its military prowess, such as the fact that it is a compact fighting force that is equipped with modern means of warfare, and is keen to exploit the weaknesses of its enemies in order to gain advantage over them. IS also conveyed the message that it is opportunistic enough to address its militaristic short-comings. For example, IS's lack of air power and limited air defence capabilities were compensated by its adaptive use of modern drone technology. At the same time, IS also relied on drones to express its political goals, such as the display of territorial control and sovereignty over land and skies and include them in official videos for propaganda purposes.

Maps: IS consistently used images of maps and natural landscapes in its digital publications, for example, *Dabiq* magazine, to delineate its "physical geographic territory" as part of its efforts to instil pride in the physical state and not just the services it provides as a state (El Damanhoury, 2016, p. 5). As part of the

identification stage of its territorial expansion, maps identified targets in several videos, just like drones, to emphasise IS's military adeptness and precision. Videos such as "So He Left Them Behind – Capture Of Base Outside Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2014) and "Be Steadfast And Excel In Steadfastness" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2016) begin with IS commanders gathered around a large table-size map in a control room, as shown in Figure 6.3. They are shown identifying mission targets and chalking up an attack strategy, which is later complemented with footage that displays scenes of victory and 'crushing defeat' of the enemy. Several other videos[150] make repeated use of Google Maps and other open-source apps to identify the targets, and provide a description and backgrounder of the mission before moving on to the battleground scenes, followed by footage that shows the capitulation of those targets.

Figure 6.3: Screengrab from the video entitled "So He Left Them Behind – Capture Of Base Outside Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2014) where IS commanders are planning to storm a Syrian army military base near Raqqah.

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[150] In videos like "Resurrection Of The Brigade" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017), "Revered Glory – Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), "The Triumphant Victory In The Conquest Of Tel Afar" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), "Victory From God And An Imminent Conquest" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Victory From God And An Imminent Conquest 3" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016), "Yarmouk Camp And Reality Of The Conflict" (Al Battar Media Foundation, 2015), and "Battle Of Abu Hisan Al Khathami – Liberation Of Qaryatayn" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015).

Apart from identifying targets, IS also used maps to chart its territorial control and assert sovereignty. While IS presented itself more as an ideological organisation than territorial (Barrett, 2015), it did project its territory on maps in order to bolster its territorial claims. A good example is the video entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) in which IS delineated its territorial boundaries, as shown in Figure 6.2, while another video entitled "Revered Glory – Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016) features a map of Iraq and Syria and points out the cities under its control. IS also used maps to discard borders drawn by the colonial powers back in the early 20th century, and projected itself as an entity that saw maps only as a point of reference and not a sacrosanct document that represented the sovereignty of States. In video entitled "The End of Sykes-Picot" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), IS drove home this point not only by identifying the Sykes-Picot border on a map but also visiting it on the ground to demonstrate the actual demolition of a border post along the Sykes-Picot line and its absorption into the Caliphate. Similarly, a video entitled "One Nation" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017) also touches upon the "infamous Sykes-Picot colonial agreement" between England and France. The video features a history teacher who gives his students a lecture about the historical borders while drawing them on a classroom marker board. The video also shows how IS captured several border towns and posts along the Sykes-Picot line by first locating them on the map and then providing the battle footage that documents their capture. In video entitled "The Appointment at Dabiq" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), IS identified on a map its affiliates located in the Middle East, namely the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Sinai, Libya and Algeria, as proof of its expanding regional footprint and global outreach. In all, IS depended on modern technology, such as drones and maps, for three main objectives: political, such as denoting its expanding territory, and demonstrating that it is replacing the old territorial order (such as Sykes-Picot

Agreement) with its "remaining and expanding" strategy; military, conducting reconnaissance to explore the weaknesses of its enemies to wage deadly attacks and conquer territories; and psyops, to give its opponents a clear message that they are being watched from the skies, and that defeat awaits them.

Stage 2 – Expansion of Territory

On IS's roadmap – shown in Figure 5.1 – stages 1 and 2, that is, emigration and forming a community of faith, relate to the population-side of State, while 'destabilising of the enemies' and 'consolidation of control' are stages of territorial nature, all of which lead to the last stage, that is, the establishment of the State. Both stages, as the titles suggest, depend on warfare and military power to achieve, which brings IS's combative skills and tactics into picture, and makes it ever so important to analyse them. Beccaro argues that studying IS's warfare is essential "because too often and too simply, the group is labelled as terrorist" (2018, p. 207). While conceding that IS uses terrorism as a tactic, he insists that the Islamic State itself is 'not a terrorist group' and likens it to a 'protean organisation' that is waging a 'hybrid' warfare, which in contemporary notion means 'irregular warfare', that is, warfare waged by 'non-state actors'. Irregular warfare incorporates a full range of modes of warfare, which include the use of conventional capabilities, hit and run tactics, terrorist acts, criminal activities with the use of different kinds of weapons ranging from small arms to more sophisticated missiles, and propaganda/media coverage (Hoffman, 2007, p. 8).

After explaining the identification stage in the previous section, this section focuses on the expansion stage of IS's territorial strategy, which was mainly achieved by engaging in irregular warfare such as suicide bombings, stormtrooper raids, hit and run attacks, among other modes of fighting. The objective of this

section is to analyse IS's modes of irregular warfare documented in its official videos that enabled the group battlefield successes, led to conquests and expansion of territory as a result. It also discusses the staged 'breaking of the borders' performance that featured in several IS videos and how IS used these symbolic psyops to reinforce its 'remaining and expanding' narrative. It is pertinent to mention here that the analysis in this section is based on footage that shows IS's full-fledged expansion, spanning around two-thirds of the entire territory dataset, thus underlining the importance of this stage in IS's overall territory strategy. The following sub-sections expose several irregular warfare tactics IS deployed in order to wage attacks on its enemies, engage them in fierce fighting, kill and capture enemy fighters, seize war booty, and gain control over the territory.

Suicide bombings: IS extensively used suicide attacks due to their effectiveness and low-cost as a weapon enabling them to strike the desired targets with precision (Beccaro, 2018). According to Hoffman (2003), suicide attacks have been previously used as kind of precision-guided munitions (PGM) by non-state actors. Analysis of official IS videos points to the fact that suicide attacks were IS's answer to the stand-off weapons used by their adversaries, such as surface-to-surface missiles, anti-tank guided missiles, attack helicopters, and airstrikes. It is important to note here that suicide bombs, among many of its warfare advantages, cannot be defused by the enemy, and helps the perpetrators penetrate deeply into enemy territory, as depicted in IS propaganda videos. According to Bunker & Sullivan (2004), suicide bombing is to IS tactically what cruise missiles are to US-led coalition, as they allow irregular fighters to strike areas far beyond the main theatre of operation. IS's extensive use of SVBIEDs as well as standalone suicide bombers demonstrates the group's ability to use low technology in order to wreak havoc on the enemy while taking it by surprise at the expense of improving their

own battlefield efficiency. According to Beccaro (2018, p. 215), "SVBIEDs have the same advantages of suicide attacks, but they increase IS's fire power." Moreover, acts of suicide bombings are high value psyops as they depict a lone suicide bomber in an almost invincible mode, the one who manages to cross all the lines, and causes widespread physical, material and psychological damage to the enemy.

Apart from the identification of military targets, IS also used drones to capture the footages of suicide missions, as shown in Figure 6.4, and to time the initiation of other stages of the attacks, such as dispatching stormtroopers or insertion of heavy weaponry into the battlefield such as tanks, armoured personnel carriers (APCs), artillery, anti-aircraft/anti-tank missiles, and other equipment. A total of 28 videos included in the territory dataset contain 63 instances of SVBIED attacks, signalling IS's heavy reliance on suicide bombings as an effective weapon. Several videos[151] published by IS feature drone footage of SVBIEDs driven unhindered into columns of military vehicles or fortifications positioned in the countryside belonging to both the Iraqi Army or its allied PMU militias, Syrian Arab Army (SAA) or its allies, and US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), causing heavy damage and often prompting enemy soldiers to flee for their lives. The drone footage is often followed by clips of artillery and anti-tank fire on multiple enemy positions and escalation of firefights.

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[151] In videos such as "Victory From God And An Imminent Conquest 2" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "The Epic Battles Of Constancy 3" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2016), "Raids Of The Predators 2" (Wilayat Al Anbar, 2016), "Revered Glory – Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), "Course Of Battle In Wilayat Hamah" (Wilayat Hamah, 2017), "Staying Until The Establishing Of The Hour" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2017), and "Knights Of The Desert" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2017).

Figure 6.4: Screengrab from video entitled "Knights of the Desert - 3" where the aftermath of twin SVBIED attacks on the Iraqi army is captured from an IS drone.

Apart from mounting SVBIED attacks in rural settings, IS also documented the launch of such attacks in densely populated towns and cities as part of their urban warfare tactics, as shown in several videos[152] where sprawling urban areas were attacked with no regard for civilian population in the immediate vicinity. The suicide bombing footages featured in many IS videos projected SVBIED attacks as effective, lethal weapons that resulted in the deaths of many enemy fighters while prompting others to retreat from the battlefield in humiliation. The videos also show that the suicide vehicles themselves were modified and fitted with extra armour in order to withstand incoming enemy fire and ensure better success rate. It is important to note here that many of the SVBIED attack footages show that the enemy was taken by complete surprise as no visible countermeasures (such as erecting roadblocks, checkpoints or placing anti-vehicle mines) were in place to

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[152] In videos such as "Course Of Battle In Manbij" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016), "Course Of Battle In East Hadithah" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016), "Knights Of Victory 3 – Liberation Of Workers Area In East Fallujah" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015), "Raids Of The Predators 2 – Ramadi" (Wilayat Al Anbar, 2016), and "Battle Of Abu Hisan Al Khathami – Liberation Of Qaryatayn" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015).

thwart such attacks. As a result, the videos show a great deal of carnage and mayhem among IS's adversaries. However, what is also significant to mention here is the fact that none of the failed or thwarted suicide bombings are shown in the videos, therefore giving viewers the impression that all suicide bombings carried out by IS forces were a total success.

Stormtroopers: In contrast to suicide bombing missions, *Inghimasioun*[153] (stormtroopers) are tasked with causing maximum damage to the enemy and return alive if possible, though be prepared for certain death (Pieslak & Lahoud, 2020). According to Bloom et al. (2016, p. 31), *Inghimasioun* "represent an effective form of psychological warfare – to project strength, pierce defences, and strike fear into enemy soldiers' hearts." Compared to 63 instances of SVBIED attacks featured in territory-themed videos, a total of five attacks were presented as *Inghimasioun,* which indicates that IS found it easier to recruit suicide bombers and send them on suicide bombing missions rather than to train stormtroopers and conduct sudden assaults with precision. Similarly, while profiles and farewell messages of several suicide bombers were included in the videos, due to their high propaganda value as recruitment tools, none of the *Inghimasioun* were personally featured in the videos, probably due to anonymity reasons and secrecy around mission objectives. Several videos included in the territory dataset[154] show *Inghimasioun* attacks taking place in tandem with SVBIED attacks, and at times,

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[153] *Inghimasioun* are soldiers trained specially for carrying out a sudden assault. The term comes from the Arabic word *Inghimas* which means to plunge or immersion. IS, in a video entitled "Al Inghimasioun – Pride Of Ummah" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015), defines them as: "One or more people plunge into an enemy position in which they are outnumbered, usually resulting in their death. *Inghimas* operations usually target fortified locations or urban buildings to kill important leaders. *Inghimas* operations are considered to be a lethal weapon by which to make the enemy shudder. As such, just one *Inghimas* fighter can make an entire army collapse."
[154] In videos "Fallujah The Defiant – Cemetery Of The Invaders" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015), "Beneath The Shades Of Swords" (Wilayat Homs, 2016), "The Epic Battles Of Constancy 3" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2016), "Dust Of War 3" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017), "Staying Until The Establishing Of The Hour" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2017).

suicide bombings being used as a diversion tactic to help stormtroopers penetrate enemy lines and displace them – an indication that they were more effective and precise in accomplishing mission objectives compared to suicide attacks but difficult to execute with precision. There is also one recorded instance of a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) when a car laden with TNT explosives was remotely detonated next to a building presumably used by the SAA in Yarmouk refugee camp, located in southern Damascus[155], though it is unclear why IS preferred an VBIED attack instead of other modes of attack.

Armed drones: State actors have long been using drones to surveil and even attack non-state actors by armed drones. However, IS's use of weaponised drones to conduct attacks and target their enemies, which includes both state and non-state actors, can be seen as an effort not just to surprise the enemy but also to turn a new page in non-state warfare (Plaw & Santoro, 2017). According to Beccaro (2018, p. 217), "in February 2017 alone, IS executed 15 drone attacks in Iraq in just two days." "The Blazing Raids" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2017), is one specific video which contains three instances of drones dropping grenade-sized munitions on different enemy positions in Iraq's Salahuddin province, including a direct hit on an armoured personnel carrier (APC). However, the carefully edited video does not show the enemy suffering from any serious personnel casualties or material losses except for a melee. Another video released by A'maq news agency in August 2017 shows an IS drone dropping grenades on cache of weapons and munitions stored by the Syrian army in a stadium in Al Mayadeen city which led to massive explosions. Botz-Bornstein (2017, p. 5) believes the drones used by IS for attacking

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[155] "Raid For Liberating Yarmouk Refugee Camp" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015).

the enemy "were not military ones but self-made objects derived from commercial types."

Other attack modes used by IS fighters shown in multiple IS videos include intense hand-to-hand combat, and full-blown use of modern heavy weaponry such as tanks, APCs, artillery, anti-aircraft/anti-tank missiles, heavy machine guns, technicals (also known as non-standard tactical vehicles), rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), sniper rifles, and other advanced weapons. These weapons were often snatched from the sides that were backed by the US or Russia. This indicates that IS's military planners and commanders relied on diverse tactics against its enemies who ranged from conventional armies such as the Iraqi and Syrian armed forces, to non-state and semi-state actors such as the Syrian-Kurdish YPG forces or SDF, Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga, Iraqi PMUs, FSA, and various Jihadi groups. The videos also show that IS military planners also took other geo-political factors such as terrain, nature and significance of territory into consideration.

Border: Apart from including attack/fighting sequences, IS also showed the capture of border posts, boundaries, barriers, and checkpoints in its videos to demonstrate the political objectives of its territorial expansion strategy, as shown in Figure 6.5. Though exclusive scenes of borders, boundaries, and check points comprise just 1 per cent of the entire territory-themed videos dataset, they constitute as highly significant performances of the second stage of territorial expansion due to the fact IS projected them as proof of the success of the 'remaining and expanding' strategy and implementation of its ideology of a borderless, frontier state.

Figure 6.5: Screengrab from video entitled "Breaking Of The Borders" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014) where IS fighters drive a truck through a berm dividing the Iraq-Syria border.

In total, six videos feature 38 different scenes that display several barriers, border fronts, boundaries, border walls, and checkpoints located in different regions across Iraq and Syria. "Breaking Of The Borders" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014) is an important video which shows an Iraq-Syria border crossing (Tal Safuk) visited by two senior IS commanders, namely Abu Mohammed Al Adnani – official IS spokesman – and Abu Omar Al Shishani – a former Georgian army officer and IS *Shura* member (Barrett, 2015). Al Adnani delivers a short speech in the presence of dozens of fighters and vows to "destroy the walls, fill the ditch, remove the barbwire, and erase the borders from the map and from the hearts" and declares them the "idols of nationalism" that demonstrate "humiliation." At the same time, Al Shishani in a slightly longer Russian-language speech expresses joy over "destroying the borders that were placed by *Tawaghit* to prevent the Muslims from travelling in their lands." He also declares the "beginning of the final stage" and urges the "sons of the Islamic State and the *ummah* to defend the Islamic State and establish the *Khilafah*." The video also includes a segment in which an old man sheds tears and says that "today the border is open and I can see my

family. By God I have not seen them for 15 years." "The End Of Sykes-Picot" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) is another important video that spells IS's agenda on borders and demonstrates the actions the group is taking to implement them. The video starts with an IS foreign fighter from Chile named Abu Safiyyah, who says the following on camera: "Right now we are on the side of Al Sham (Syria). As you can see this is the so-called border of Sykes-Picot. Al Hamdulillah[156] we do not recognise it and we will never recognise it. Inshallah this is not the first border we will break. Inshallah[157] we will break the other borders also but we start with this inshallah!" He then labels Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi as the "breaker of barriers" and adds: "Inshallah we will break the barrier of Iraq, Jordan, *Lubnan* (Lebanon), all the countries inshallah until we reach Quds (Jerusalem) inshallah. This is the first of many barriers we will break inshallah." After crossing over the boundary,[158] he stands next to a map painted on a wall which depicts Iraq-Syria borders and declares: "This is all *Dawlah*[159]. One country *Inshallah*. One *Ummah Inshallah*. There is no more border." The destruction of border post with the help of explosives is later shown in the video with the Chilean foreign fighter again promising to keep razing the borders until Jerusalem is reached. Another video entitled "One Nation" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017) shows IS taking control of the strategic Al Tanf border crossing, which is located very close to the Syria-Iraq-Jordan border triangle, after defeating the SAA's Fourth Battalion. The video also shows cranes dismantling concrete border walls between Iraq and Syria, an act which is then endorsed by an unnamed tribal elder who claims that after demolishing the "Crusader imposed" Iraq-Syria border "everyone is identifying themselves only as Muslims and are being proud of Islam," unlike in the past when

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[156] *Al Hamdulillah* is Arabic for "All Praise be to God."
[157] *Inshallah* is Arabic for "God Willing".
[158] The crossing is named *Ma'bar Tal Sufuk*, which means *Tal Sufuk* border crossing in Arabic. It was retaken by Iraq's PMUs in June 2017 (Halab Today TV, 2017).
[159] *Dawlah* is Arabic for state.

people used to call themselves Iraqis or Syrians. Another video entitled "Preaching Tour Of The Frontline Points" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015) also identifies the boundaries of the Caliphate although the main content is related to a group of IS fighters who visit fighters positioned on the frontlines for outreach and morale-building purposes.

In all, IS demonstrated in its videos that the borders between Iraq and Syria do not exist anymore, thanks to its expansionist ideology, and that the people living in the Caliphate are direct beneficiaries of its 'breaking of the borders' policy by travelling and trading freely between the two countries. Interestingly, IS did not apply the same policy of dismissal and aggression towards its borders with Turkey, as numerous news reports suggest the Caliphate's border with Turkey served as a vital trade, supply, and access route (Phillips, 2014), and with Israel, when it apologised for carrying an attack on Israeli positions in Occupied Golan Heights and never attacked again (O'Connor, 2017). IS also extensively documented the expansion of its territory in its videos, which solely took place as a result of battlefield successes thanks to the irregular warfare waged by its fighters who made use of suicide bombings, stormtrooper assaults, artillery, tanks, and other heavy weaponry in order to attack and fight its adversaries, defeat and capture the territories under their control, and seize their military resources.

Stage 3 – Projection of Territory
After the completion of expansion stage, IS propaganda videos keenly displayed the final stage of its territorial strategy, which consisted of projecting the 'new reality', that is, the inception of a utopian life or what IS dubbed 'the life under the shadow of the Caliphate'. According to Winter, IS's heavy dependence on the "utopia narrative is unambiguous," due to "the fact that this theme is more

prominent than any other is a significant, though expected, finding: Islamic State's millenarian promise is the fulcrum of its global appeal" (2015, p. 30). The underlying message projected in IS videos is that the third stage of its territorial strategy is the result of the sacrifices made by IS fighters who meticulously identified and planned attacks on enemy targets, fought the enemy 'valiantly' and shed a lot of 'sweat and blood'. This enabled them to capture the territory and allow Muslims to 'live freely under the banner of the Caliphate'. As shown in Table 5.1, the third stage of IS's territorial strategy spans 35 per cent of the entire case study dataset. The videos project IS's territorial control mostly by planting its flags in newly captured towns and cities, and leaders/fighters speaking on the camera to proclaim that the enemy has been overpowered and the Caliphate will 'remain and expand, by the will of God'. IS also used, albeit sparingly, civilian endorsement, journalistic reporting, and some serene views of the newly captured territory to project the glimpses of 'new life in the Caliphate' in order to entice more and more Muslims around the world to come and join them. The following sub-sections provide a description of performances that were used to project the third stage of territorial strategy, termed by IS as 'consolidation' as shown in Figure 5.1.

IS flags/leaders/fighters: Analysis of the territory dataset videos shows that a considerable part of IS's demarcation of territorial control was made through the use of its black and white flag, named *Rayat Al Tawheed* (the oneness flag) or *Rayat Al Khilafah* (the caliphate flag),[160] planted on frontline locations such as the

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[160] The flag used by IS is sometimes mistakenly called the "Flag of the Prophet" though the flags of the Salafi-Jihadi organisations, including IS, are said to be different from the flag of Prophet Mohammed. According to a Hadith, the flag of the Prophet is called *Rayat Al Uqab* (flag of the eagle) in which the *Shahadah* (statement of oneness of God) appears in full on a horizontal line. It is used as the official flag by many Islamist organisations, including Al Qaeda.

top of a communication tower[161], quarry crane[162], water tank[163], dam walkway[164]

and a hilltop[165] by IS fighters. In many other videos, IS fighters themselves

appeared on camera and delivered rousing speeches in which they thanked God for

the relentless victories, and vowed to keeping fighting till all the "tyrants are

overthrown and all lands captured, and the *Khilafah* is established upon them."

Some videos[166] presented dead IS fighters as 'martyrs of the conquest' in the end of

videos with a solemn *Anasheed* playing in the background instead of visual

confirmation of captured targets mentioned in the video titles, perhaps as an

acknowledgement that no territorial gain is possible without the losses of its

fighters or signify their importance in the victory. While many videos showed what

the newly captured territory looked like, other videos[167] offered the news in

peculiar ways, such as IS fighters slaughtering cattle as a token of gratitude to God

for the conquest instead of offering any visual confirmation of control in captured

territories, perhaps because the conquest was still incomplete but declaring victory

beforehand had a higher propaganda value.

Civilian endorsement: Terror groups that engage themselves in state-building

activities do so by "relying heavily on civilian employees and on the support and

cooperation of the local population" (Revkin, 2018, p. 112). IS's desire of seeking

civilian support and projecting it in their propaganda videos is deeply rooted in the

influential Jihadi book entitled "The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical

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[161] "Jurf Al Sakhr – Incinerator Of The Rejectionists" (Wilayat Al Junub, 2014).
[162] "Knights Of Victory 3 – Liberation Of Workers Area In East Fallujah" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015).
[163] "Tour Inside Armoured Brigade 93 Base After Its Liberation" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2014).
[164] "Tour Of Liberated Territories – Mosul Dam And Shingal" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014).
[165] Yarmouk Camp And The Reality Of The Conflict" (Al Battar Media Foundation, 2015).
[166] In videos such as "Aspects Of Battle From South Ain Al Islam (Kobani)" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), "Course Of Battle Around Al Khayr Airport" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Storming Office Of The Peshmerga In Wilayat Kirkuk" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015), and "Be Steadfast And Excel In Steadfastness" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2016).
[167] In videos entitled "Battle Of Abu Ammar Al Fahdawi" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015) and "Hawijah Saqr Captured Thanks To God" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass," which appeared under the pseudonym Abu Bakr Naji in Sawt Al Jihad[168], Al Qaeda's online magazine, in 2004 (Soufan, 2018, p. 104). The publication argued that the "Islamic insurgency progresses from localised insurrection to a broader *Mujahideen* movement." The writer also called upon the *Mujahideen* to develop rebellions in rural areas where government forces are weak in order to seek the establishment of *Shariah* rule. "Once popular support is gathered, *Mujahideen* must use their rural safe havens to build armed capacity to weaken Muslim apostate governments until they collapse," Naji urged while also predicting that the "victorious *Mujahideen* will eventually unite into a caliphate to conquer the globe" (Celso, 2014, p. 2).

Several videos included in the territory-themed dataset contain footage that project widespread civilian support. Around 2% – or only 20 minutes of duration – of the public endorsement is explicit and is displayed in different forms, such as processions, assembling of road-side gatherings to welcome military convoys, vox-pops, token animal sacrifices[169], and other actions. This was projected in the videos to demonstrate that IS enjoys the support of masses and is the driving force behind their territorial successes. Other videos such as "Celebrations Of Ansar Over The Conquests Of Predators In Al Anbar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) and "Joy Of The Monotheists Over The Victories Of Brothers In Wilayat Al Anbar" (Wilayat Al Anbar, 2015) show military parades taking place in newly captured towns of Al Anbar province, civilians speaking on camera and expressing their joy over the conquests, and IS fighters lining up in the streets and prostrating on the ground as a token of gratitude to God for the territorial gains. Meanwhile, video entitled

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[168] *Sawt Al Jihad* (Voice of Jihad) is an Al Qaeda online magazine that first appeared in 2004 to tout the accomplishments of Mujahideen (Seib & Janbek, 2011, p. 27).
[169] "Battle Of Abu Ammar Al Fahdawi" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015).

"Tour Of The Liberated Territories – Mosul Dam And Shingal" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014) goes one step further and shows scenes where young men in an unnamed town mingling with IS fighters, and hammering down a poster of Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani with their shoes, which is an act of expressing contempt in Arab culture.

While the videos mentioned earlier express support for IS in explicit ways, there are also videos that show implicit support for IS from people who were tired of the poor treatment received from previous governments and welcomed the change. The video entitled "Breaking Of The Border" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014) features a young man driving a pickup truck who is stopped and asked by the cameraman to produce his travel documents to which he responds: "I do not need any passport. All of this is the Islamic State, thanks to God." Later, he explains that before IS, the Iraqi army heavily restricted civilian movement by asking lots of questions and identity papers at checkpoints, and humiliated them. When asked by the cameraman about the current situation, he praises God again for improving the situation and credits IS for not bothering them with unnecessary checks and questions about their movement. Similar sentiments are also echoed by an unnamed fruit vendor in the video entitled "One Nation" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017), who condemns the customs policies of Iraqi authorities and credits IS for ensuring seamless travel and uniform price control across the border communities. In all, IS presented massive civilian support as one of the main reasons behind their territorial conquests and signalled that the consolidation stage is taking place in a popular and smooth fashion, thanks to the cooperation and submission of its subjects, as touched upon earlier in the Population case study.

New life: IS, in many of its territory-themed videos, placed great emphasis on the aftermath of battles that led to the capture of a given territory, for example, towns, cities, military bases, oil and gas fields, dams, and other vital infrastructure. The video entitled "Inside Halab With John Cantlie" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) is one good example of how IS presented towns and cities which were captured after intense battles, and the beginning of a new era in the lives of people under its control. The 12 minutes-long video shows devastation of an unnamed town in Aleppo province, presumably Al Bab,[170] due to the alleged aerial bombing. The video also shows spectacular greenery and pristine views of banks alongside River Euphrates located in Aleppo countryside, and features scenes of well-stocked markets, crowded mosques, a busy courthouse, and town streets where people are pursuing their daily lives. In other instances, IS tried to alter the socio-cultural features of the newly occupied places. For example, in videos such as "Sinjar – Graveyard Of The Disbelievers" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015) and "The Triumphant Victory In The Conquest Of Tel Afar" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), IS documented the blowing up Yezidi and Shia places of worship after conquering the towns from the enemy forces, and presented it as the 'new reality' which is devoid of its enemies and anything associated with them. The Government case study focuses on the demolition of ancient historic sites and worship places of minorities and points to the 'new reality' forced upon the locals by IS. One of the reasons IS took such drastic steps against its adversaries was to ramp up psychological warfare, demoralise them, and force their eviction.

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[170] Hall, J. (2015). British ISIS hostage John Cantlie appears in latest propaganda film which he ominously calls 'the last in this series' and in which militants are shown fishing and drinking tea. Available at: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2946148/British-ISIS-hostage-John-Cantlie-appears-latest-propaganda-film-ominously-calls-series-militants-shown-fishing-drinking-tea.html [Accessed 2 August 2020].

IS published a video entitled "Tour Of Liberated Territories - Mosul Dam And Shingal" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014), which showed its fighters raising flags over several key buildings in towns around Mosul, Shingal, and the all-important, Mosul Dam, as shown in Figure 6.6, after routing the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and its allies from the area. IS also released videos such as "Tour Inside Armoured Brigade 93 Base After its Liberation" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2014) and "So He Left Them Behind – Battle of Liberation of Brigade 93" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2014) to amplify its military conquests and power, and exaggerate the enemy's losses. The former video features a guided tour of the newly captured Syrian army base which is loaded with heavy weaponry such as tanks, anti-aircraft batteries, anti-tank cannons, ammunition, and other military equipment. The latter shows the aftermath of the fall of the base in which dozens of enemy soldiers were summarily executed and several captured tanks driven away. At the peak of its territorial control, IS published videos such as "Preparation of the Terrorists Against the Enemies of the Religion" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) which included the interview of an IS commander who spoke about its military prowess while military convoys marched in the background, presumably in the streets of Mosul.

Figure 6.6: Screengrab from video entitled "Tour Of Liberated Territories - Mosul Dam And Shingal" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014) where IS fighters are walking over one of the headworks of Mosul Dam.

When the Caliphate started to collapse at an alarming rate by early 2016, IS released video reports dismissing such claims as rumours. A good example is a 2 minutes and 58 seconds-long video entitled "Tour Of Fallujah Under IS Control" (A'maq News Agency, 2016), which bizarrely portrays life continuing as normal in the city, people busy at work in the bazaars, IS-run media centres frequented by visitors, trucks getting washed up in garages. Towards the end of the video, a civilian appears on camera and denies reports of chaos in the city while insisting that everything is under IS control. Additionally, IS also produced several videos which showed its fighters mounting fierce attacks on enemy positions and causing considerable damage while escaping with plentiful war booty, despite the fact that they were retreating from other parts of Iraq and Syria. Several videos[171] published towards the fall of the Caliphate in mid 2017 contain footage which show IS

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[171] In videos such as "Course Of Battle In Wilayat Hamah" (Wilayat Hamah, 2017), "Dust Of The War 2 - Mujahideen Storming Nusairi Positions In Villages" (Wilayat Hamah, 2017), "Dust Of The War 3 - Attacks Of Mujahideen On Nusairi Army In South Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017), "Frightening Fires 2 - Attacks Of Caliphate Army On Apostates In Hameema Area" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2017), "The People Of Giving – Attack On Eastern Palmyra" (Wilayat Homs, 2017).

fighters countering SAA offensives in the Wilayaat of Hamah, Raqqah, Homs and Al Khayr (Deir Ez Zour) despite losing territory. Similarly, IS videos also show its elite forces and suicide bombing squads combatting US-backed forces such as the Kurdish Peshmerga, the Iraqi army and its allied PMFs[172], and the Kurdish YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)[173] to defend the Caliphate. Likewise, IS also projected its military campaign against Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups in video entitled "Staying Until The Establishing Of The Hour" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2017), claiming that its forces were mounting renewed attacks against the 'apostate militias' and stopping them in their tracks. These claims were made at a time when IS was facing heavy defeats in northern Syrian towns such as Al Bab, Dabiq, Jarablus, and others at the hands of Turkish-backed militants.

In all, IS's performances of territorial control had multiple motives. Chief among them was to portray that its strategy of 'remaining and expanding' is yielding results, the enemy is on the run, the local population of the newly conquered towns and cities are embracing IS with open arms. It also wanted Muslims from all over the world to immigrate and help build the Caliphate, and despite facing defeat, assured its subjects and supporters that, regardless of the 'media's propaganda', it was still in control of territory and shall not surrender.

Conclusion

The visual analysis of the staged performances of stateness depicting the Caliphate's territoriality, based on 77 territory-themed videos, extensively showcase the existence of a State which encompassed towns and cities, deserts,

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[172] "The Knights Of Storms - Storming Of Hashd Bases In South Shirqat" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2017); "Fighting Lions" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2017); "Resurrection Of The Brigade" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2017).
[173] "Attack On PKK Troops Near Al Omar Oilfield" (A'maq News Agency, 2017).

hinterland, agricultural lands, canals, dams, and gas/oil fields, among other physical resources. The case study concludes that IS acquired the territory by implementing a territorial strategy, that involved three important stages, namely, identifying enemy targets and territory; attacking and fighting the enemy and defeating it; and projecting the captured territory. These stages overlap with stages three and four of the overall IS masterplan – laid out in the first ever issue of *Dabiq* magazine (Al Hayat Media, 2014) as shown in Figure 2.1 – that is, destabilising the tyrant, and consolidating control. IS staged these performances of stateness emphasising territoriality in its official propaganda not only to authenticate its presence, but also to signal territorial sovereignty, and assure its subjects and supporters worldwide that the Caliphate is 'remaining and expanding' and needs their cooperation and support to help rebuild and defend it. The final stage of IS's masterplan, termed as *Khilafah,* is analysed in detail in the next case study, with exclusive focus on its three governance branches: administrative, law and order, and services.

7 : IS'S GOVERNANCE SYSTEM:

AN 'IRON FIST IN A VELVET GLOVE' RULE

As underlined in the Territory case study, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi's declaration of the Caliphate on 5 July 2014 was part of his grand strategy of taking control of territory through military conquest and then reinforcing it through governance (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). Under the *Khilafah*, which roughly existed for three years from mid 2014 to mid 2017, IS boasted of running a holistic system of governance, which included religious, educational, judicial, security, welfare, and infrastructure projects, among others (Caris & Reynolds, 2014), and documented the implementation and execution of its governance project in its multimedia publications, including *Dabiq* and *Al Naba* (El Damanhoury, 2019) and videos, as part of its efforts to coerce the local population into submission while also attracting emigrants from all over the world who could come and rebuild the nascent State (Gambhir, 2014).

This case study illuminates IS's staged theatrical performances of modern stateness, which is based on an extensive visual analysis of 131 governance-themed videos in the dataset that together account for 19 hours of content as shown in Table 7.1. This case study depicts the three main aspects of stateness – that is, monopoly on violence, state capacity, and citizenship agreement – in action, and also demonstrates that IS laid heavy emphasis on its claims of running an effective modern government based on the 'prophetic methodology', hallmarks of which were the moral police, gold currency, and the wealth tax, among others. For analytical purposes, the chapter is divided into three major sections, with each section comprehensively assessing the staged theatrical performances of major branches of IS governance, that is, law and order, services, and administration, by

first underlining the modern concepts of the three respective branches, and then

delivering an extensive analysis of the performances depicted in the official videos.

Table 7.1: List of performances in the Governance case study

PERFORMANCES OF GOVERNANCE	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
Law & Order	**08:58:58**	**47%**
Hisbah	3:10:39	17
Army	1:06:37	6
Alleged criminal(s)	1:03:26	6
Security forces/police	1:00:58	5
Punishment	0:38:23	3
Preaching	0:12:47	1
Confiscated goods	0:06:06	1
Rewards	0:05:26	1
Services	**05:39:51**	**30%**
Civic	1:02:19	5
Healthcare	0:56:41	5
Tribal leaders/elders	0:56:32	5
IS mediator(s)/official(s)	0:37:39	3
Religious	0:31:02	3
Media & public information	0:25:45	2
Education	0:24:27	2
Food/water/agriculture provision	0:23:40	2
Currency	0:13:56	1
Financial	0:07:50	1
Administrative	**01:56:54**	**10%**
Bureaucracy	0:57:49	5
Zakat	0:33:55	3
Judiciary	0:25:10	2
NOT CODED	0:18:08	2%
CODED	18:46:05	98%
Total length	**19:04:13**	**100%**

The chapter draws a few important conclusions. First, IS was keen on documenting

major aspects of its state-like performances of law and order, services, and

administration branches to prove to its subjects as well as supporters worldwide

that it is fully committed to providing *Shariah*-based modern governance. Second,

IS resorted to routinely staging theatrical performances of modern stateness in its

propaganda videos. Some examples include featuring civil servants working in

plush government offices, civilians getting their queries heard in different branches of government, and officials enforcing strict promulgation and implementation of state policies with especial regard to law and order. The official videos also project non-human aspects of governance such as government buildings, official vehicles, flags, mosques, public infrastructure etc. in order to hide the fact that the Caliphate faced low state capacity while under high public scrutiny, and therefore unable to engage in substantive performances of stateness. The situation is not unique to IS as other states around the world often resort to theatrical performances when faced with similar situation (Ding, 2020). Third, the case study confirms the notion that IS, despite insisting on a strict early-Islamic (Salafi) identity and inner workings, implemented the goal of statebuilding by deploying all the modern tools and resources available to today's states, such as, currency, information technology, infrastructure, media and communications, natural resources, taxation, and weaponry, among others, but packaged it as something unique to themselves with a lot of emphasis on the enforcement of a 'divine system' that heavily depended on ruthless policing, medieval punishments, and incessant propaganda. The use of overly supportive civilian sentiment across the governance-themed videos also suggests that IS expunged dissent while eagerly exploiting the vulnerability of its subjects in a way that gave supporters worldwide the impression that people living in the Caliphate are content with the 'Islamic system' and will defend it with their lives because of their love for Islam and *Shariah*. The case study reiterates that the overall objective of IS was to project in its videos a 'fully functional government' committed to the safety, security, and well-being of its subjects, as prescribed in *Shariah*. IS also wanted to urge Muslims around the world to migrate to the Caliphate and help contribute to strengthening it, which finally came into existence thanks to the blessed prophecy

of Mohammed made more than 1400 years ago[174], and the sacrifices made by its martyrs. Most importantly, IS wanted to leave a lasting legacy for all the future Salafi-Jihadi organisations with statebuilding aims.

Law and Order, Services, and Administration – Main Branches of IS Governance

Under IS's governance structure, shown in Figure 7.1, the caliph was on the top, and was projected as a custodian of the divine law. He derived his authority from the Quran and Hadith but did not declare himself as the absolute power (March & Revkin, 2015). According to an official IS video entitled "The Structure Of The Khilafah" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2016), "the caliph is tasked with following major duties: uphold and spread the religion; defend the homeland; fortify the fronts; prepare the armies; implement the *Hudud* (Islamic penal code); and enforce the people's adherence to the rulings of Shariah," as shown in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.1: Overall structure of the Caliphate as laid out in video entitled "The Structure Of The Khilafah" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2016).

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[174] A feature entitled "From Hijrah To Khilafah," published in the first issue of Dabiq (Al Hayat Media Center, 2014), attributes a Hadith in which Prophet Mohammed predicted the establishment of a caliphate based on the prophetic methodology.

The *Shura* (consultative council) was there to aid the caliph and had the power to remove him if he fails to fulfil his obligations (March & Revkin, 2015). The other powerful body under the caliph, mentioned in the same video is the 'Delegated Committee' whose task was to communicate the orders issued by the caliph and ensure their execution. The members on this panel comprised of "upright individuals who are cognisant, administratively skilled, and knowledgeable." The 'Delegated Committee' supervised the *Wilayaat* (provinces), the *Dawawin*[175] (departments), and the committees and offices of the Islamic State, as shown in Figure 7.1. IS's *Diwans* "issued directives and were organised into functional areas, such as education, finances, health, media, public services, and tribal outreach" (RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 16).
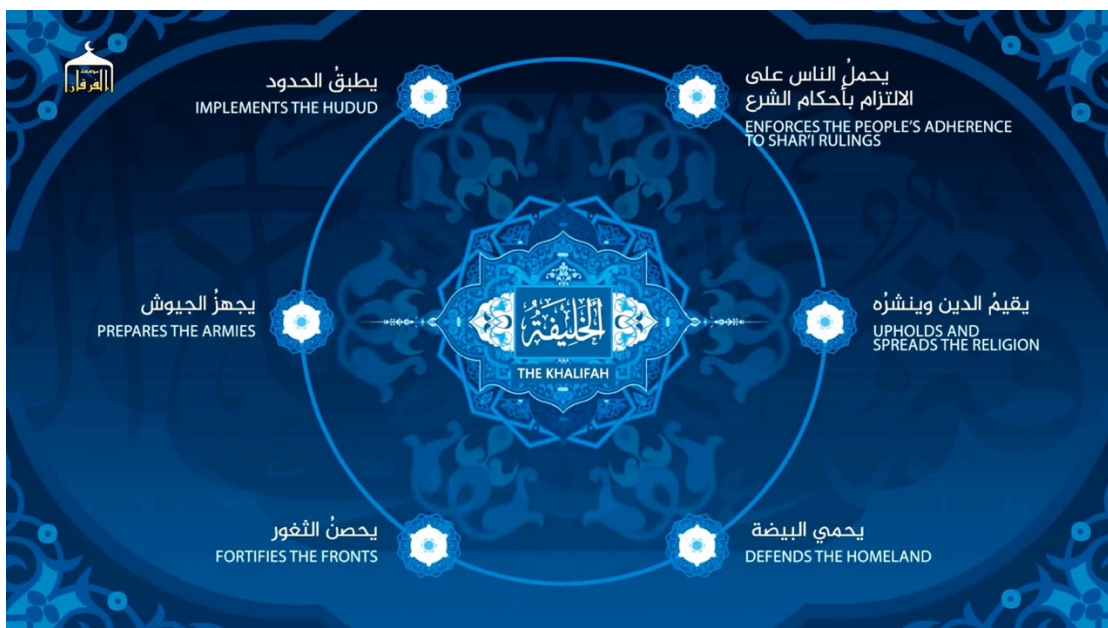
Figure 7.2 - Screen grab from video entitled "The Structure Of The Khilafah" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2016) where it mentions the duties of the caliph.

"The Structure Of The Khilafah" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2016) video identifies a total of 35 *Wilayaat* under IS's control with 19 based in Iraq and Syria and 16 located distantly in other countries in Africa and Asia, as shown in Figure

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[175] *Dawawin* is the plural for the word *Diwan* in Arabic language.

7.3. According to this official IS video, *Dawawin* – under the direct supervision of the 'Delegated Committee' – were based in every *Wilayat* and enshrined with protecting the rights of subjects, and protecting the people's religion and security. A total 14 *Dawawin* are mentioned in the video: *Diwan* of Judgment and Grievances (judiciary); *Diwan* of *Hisbah* (law enforcement); *Diwan* of *Da'wah* and *Masajid* (outreach and mosques); *Diwan* of *Zakat* (alms); *Diwan* of Soldiery (army); *Diwan* of Public Security; *Diwan* of Treasury (finance); *Diwan* of Media; *Diwan* of Education; *Diwan* of Health; *Diwan* of Agriculture; *Diwan* of *Rikaz* (oil, gas and mineral resources); *Diwan* of *Fay'* and *Ghana'im* (war booty); and *Diwan* of (civic) Services. The video also mentions the functions of 'The Offices and Committees' as having "the authority to deal with various matters of the State and is comprised of specialised personnel" under the supervision of the 'Delegated Committee'. The five committees mentioned are listed below: The *Hijrah* Committee (emigration board); Committee for the Affairs of Prisoners and *Shuhada'* (martyrs); Office for Research and (*Shariah*) Studies; Administration of the Distant *Wilayaat*; and the Office for Public and Tribal Relations, as shown in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.3 - Screen grab from video entitled "The Structure Of The Khilafah" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2016) where it names the Wilayaat under IS control[176].

One of the biggest factors that distinguish IS from other Jihadi groups is its evolution "from being just a purveyor of violence to being a social service provider" (Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 65) which IS went to great lengths "to highlight its attempts to bring successful governance to the people living within the territory it controls" (Ubaydi, et al., 2014, p. 67), and as a proof documented it in hundreds of videos published during the Caliphate years. Table 7.1, which is based on the coding and visual analysis of 131 governance-themed videos included in the dataset, shows that law and order, spanning almost 9 hours of duration and comprising almost 50% of the content, is the most important branch of IS's government, with *Diwan* of *Hisbah* (17%) as its premier department assuming the main role of *Shariah* (Islamic law) enforcement while the Islamic Police and other

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[176] The names have been translated into English from Arabic.

security apparatuses (5%) were tasked with maintaining order. The videos also document IS's imposition of law and order by featuring confessions of alleged criminals (6%) who were later handed capital punishment (3%) such as floggings, amputations, and executions. The governance-themed videos also contain performances of the IS's army (6%) but only as an institution that is defending the Caliphate from its enemies on the frontlines while the bulk of their military activities featured in territory-themed videos, as duly reviewed in the Territory case study. The second major branch is services, which spans 5 hours and 40 minutes and comprises almost a third of governance-themed content. In its videos, IS heavily focused on the provision of services such as the rehabilitation and improvement of public infrastructure (5%), healthcare (5%), social cohesion between tribes (5%) and mediation (3%), supervision of religious affairs (3%), food, water and agriculture (2%), education (2%), media and public information (2%), introduction of sovereign currency (1%) and regulation of financial affairs (1%). Meanwhile, IS also projected the performances of its third branch of governance, that is, administration, spanning around 10% of overall governance-themed content, with bureaucracy (5%), Zakat (3%), and judiciary (2%) receiving coverage. The performances of the three major branches is analysed in detail below.

Law and Order – Enforcing the Good and Purging the Evil

Law and order can be considered as the backbone of all modern societies without which they can succumb to anarchy and disintegration. According to Poggi (2008, p. 88), "law is understood as a set of general, enforceable commands and prohibitions, which plays a significant (though variable) role in the construction and management of states." In all modern states, law chiefly performs the following basic functions: clampdowns on anti-social behaviour, controls the

access to and disposition of material resources between individuals or groups, establishes polities, decides issues of policy, and institutes public agencies and offices by controlling their operations (Poggi, 2008). Law and order is the most dominant branch of IS government as its performances comprise almost half of the entire coverage in governance-themed videos. According to Winter (2022) this trend reflects IS's totalitarian tendencies and its obsession with the imposition of *Shariah* and maintaining law and order. Law enforcement consistently served as a key component of IS's governance since its inception in mid 2014 (El Damanhoury & Winkler, 2018), with police, courts, and prisons featuring prominently like in any modern legal system (Revkin, 2016). However, it was *Diwan Al Hisbah* – being the core department – that regulated the society and steered the direction of governance, as explained below.

Hisbah: The Arabic verb '*ha-sa-ba*' is the origin of the word *Hisbah*, which means "to calculate, to compute, to work out, or, to count" (Oxford Arabic-English Dictionary, 2019). The concept of *Hisbah* in Islam originates from a set of Quranic verses which oblige every Muslim to call for what is good or right and to prevent or denounce what is wrong or evil. The Quran (3:104) states: "And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful." Later in the same chapter, it says: "You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in God" (Quran, 3:110). Consequently, IS mentioned it as one of the main duties of the caliph in the video entitled "The Structure Of The Khilafah" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2016), and declared *Hisbah* as the department that "is responsible for overseeing the public by ordering them to perform good deeds when they are neglected, preventing them from evil deeds when they are committed, and obligating them

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what is in accordance with the *Shariah*." The importance of this department is further highlighted by the fact that footage totalling 3 hours and 10 minutes showcase many of its performances, as shown in Table 7.1, making it the apex institution of IS's governance model, thanks to the immense power it exercised over people's public and private lives. IS's *Hisbah* performances showcased in the governance dataset videos can be roughly classified into (a) ordering good deeds (b) punishing bad deeds (c) obligating to follow *Shariah*, as the paragraphs below demonstrate. Apart from advising people to commit good deeds while refraining from evil, *Hisbah* was also tasked with imposing law, protecting consumer rights, confiscating contraband and prohibited items, and ensuring complete observance of Islamic values, among many other duties. It relied on support from other departments such as the police and security forces.

The typical duties of a *Hisbah* official are demonstrated in the video entitled "A Visual Report on the Role of Hisbah Men in the Maintenance of the Muslim Community" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2014), where an unnamed *Hisbah* official speaks on camera about the prevention of polytheistic practices, segregation of men and women, and ensuring that scales in the markets are not tampered with, among other things. The video ends with several *Hisbah* officials visiting the banks of Euphrates river and advising boys and young men to cover their torsos and thighs while swimming. Several other videos show *Hisbah* officials always wearing a distinct uniform and travelling in marked vehicles, as shown in Figure 7.4, while performing duties such as distributing leaflets in bazaars[177], visiting barber shops to ensure beards are not shaved[178], asking young men to sport beards[179], educating

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[177] "Protect Yourselves And Your Family From A Fire" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016).
[178] "The Men Of Hisbah – 3" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).
[179] "Upholding Virtue To Deter Immorality" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016).

shopkeepers about *Zakat* payments[180], and ordering people to close their

businesses and go to the mosques to offer their prayers[181], among others. One of

the main objectives of *Hisbah* officials was to regulate the lives of the subjects of

the Caliphate in line with IS's extreme ideology by punishing those who were not

complying with IS-imposed rules while, at times, rewarding those who were

obeying the laws.

The religious police force was also tasked with the all-important mandate to

"promote virtue and prevent vice to dry up sources of evil, prevent the

manifestation of disobedience, and urge Muslims towards well-being" (Caris &

Reynolds, 2014, pp. 15, 16). IS considered the imposition of *Hudud*[182] (Islamic

penal code) as the most effective way of demonstrating its commitment to

implementing *Shariah* and bringing law and order to war ravaged societies of Iraq

and Syria. However, the dataset shows that IS was less concerned about tackling

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[180] "Zakat Expenditures" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015).
[181] "Until They Change What Is In Themselves" (Wilayat Hamah, 2017).
[182] The Quran defines *Hudud* as a range of certain acts that are considered crimes against God or His religion and stipulate certain punishments.

serious crimes such as bribery, fraud, price-fixing, racketeering, smuggling, and other corrupt practices that were plaguing the lives of ordinary citizens on a daily basis, and instead focused more on curbing 'crimes' such as unlawful sexual intercourse between married individuals (punishable by public stoning), wine consumption (punishable by public flogging), and theft (punishable by the amputation of hand and/or foot of the thief) (Landau-Tasseron, 2015). Researchers believe the major reasons for such priorities is the fact that IS was itself benefitting from criminal activities such as kidnapping, racketeering, smuggling, and other illicit schemes (Khalaf, 2014). At the same time, the group was more concerned about its public image as the enforcer of *Shariah* and found punishing people accused of alleged 'crimes' easier than arresting and punishing powerful people who were committing financial or other high-profile crimes. Several videos[183] catalogue instances of capital punishments meted out to alleged 'criminals' who committed adultery, fornication, homosexuality, murder, theft, abstained from fasting during Ramadan, consumed alcohol, and other 'transgressions', an example of which can be seen in Figure 7.5. Several videos show *Hisbah* officials reading out sentences in front of a crowd, including young boys, with an alleged criminal present on site, and then carrying out punishments such as beheadings by swords and long knives [184], executions at point-blank

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[183] Including "And That He Will Surely Substitute Their Fears With Safety" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Authority Of The Caliphate In Wilayat Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), "Authority Of Shariah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2016), "But Who Is Better Than God In Judgment" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2014), and "Enjoining What Is Right And Forbidding What Is Wrong" (Wilayat Homs, 2016),

[184] "Aggressive Response To Those Who Helped In The Bombings Of The Tyrants" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015); "And That He Will Surely Substitute Their Fears With Safety" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015); "Arrest Of An FSA Fighter Working For The Jordanian Intelligence Arrested By IS Security Service" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

range[185], amputations[186], floggings[187], defenestration[188], exploding of individuals and their homes[189], stoning[190], among other brutal punishments. There are also several short videos with specific titles such as "Enforcement Of Hadd Punishment," which point to the implementation of certain capital punishments and their justification according to Quran and *Hadith*. The governance-themed videos also contain footage spanning around an hour – 6% of the entire coverage – that feature alleged criminals and their taped confessions used by IS judiciary as proof of guilt and the basis of carrying out the sentences.

Figure 7.5 - Screengrab from video entitled "Authority Of The Shariah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2016) where Hisbah officials are administering 40 floggings on men accused of fornication.

IS official videos also emphasise that *Hisbah* is also keen on improving the lives of its subjects by ensuring that the daily products consumed are unadulterated, fit for use, and meet modern consumer guidelines as found in other societies around the world. IS's various media outlets documented *Hisbah*'s extensive consumer

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[185] "And Wretched Is That Which They Purchased" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015).
[186] "And That He Will Surely Substitute For Them After Their Fear Security" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).
[187] "Authority Of The Caliphate In Wilayat Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015).
[188] "But Who Is Better Than God In Judgement - Establishing A Limit Upon The People Who Commit Sodomy" (Wilayat Homs, 2015).
[189] "Bombing The Homes Of Apostates" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015).
[190] "But Who Is Better Than God In Judgement – 2" (Wilayat Homs, 2015).

protection duties including the seizure of prohibited goods and destruction of expired items. The video entitled "Control And Inspection In Wilayat Ninawa" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) shows a couple of officials from *Hisbah*'s 'Office of Control and Inspection' wearing their trademark dark brown vests, and setting off on a patrol of a bazaar somewhere in Wilayat Ninawa where they visit several shops in the vicinity, and check the production and expiration dates of foodstuff on display in supermarket shelves, as seen in Figure 7.6. In the video, an official explains that the jurisdiction of the bureau includes monitoring of people's belongings and markets, preventing them from selling banned items, prohibiting businesses from cheating, maintaining monopoly over prices, selling basic goods at exorbitant prices, and making transactions that involve uncertainty, deception, risk or hazard – a practice known as *Gharar* in Islamic jurisprudence[191]. The video shows a *Hisbah* team inspecting a restaurant, ice factory, butchery, supermarket and some stalls at the fruits and vegetables market and issuing a number of on-the-spot notices and fines for alleged violations. The video also includes the views of a butcher and fruit vendor who praise *hisbah*'s focus on ensuring that the customers always get a fair deal. IS was particularly sensitive about *Dhabiha* – the Islamic form of slaughtering animals or poultry to obtain halal meat (permissible meat)[192] – which requires killing of the animal through a cut to the jugular vein, carotid artery and windpipe – as explained by a *Hisbah* official in the video entitled "Opening Of A Slaughterhouse In Palmyra" (Wilayat Homs, 2016). Establishments found flouting the rules around *Dhabiha* risked fines and heavy punishment[193]. Several other videos included in the dataset show *Hisbah* teams raiding and

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[191] Kenton, W. (2019). *Gharar*. Investopedia.com. Available at: https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gharar.asp [Accessed on 22 Apr. 2020].
[192] Eardley, N., (2014). What is halal meat? BBC News. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-27324224 [Accessed on 22 Apr. 2020].
[193] The video entitled "Bureau Of Control And Investigation" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) shows the closure of a butchery for selling meat unfit for consumption.

confiscating suspected sites where contraband items such as cigarettes, tobacco

products and alcohol were stored, and later burnt in open grounds[194] -

performances which gave its subjects and supporters the message that their

government is heavily invested in their health, in general, and consumer rights, in

particular. It also wanted to convey the message that their government can be

trusted in full like all other modern governments around the world.

Figure 7.6 - Screen grab from video entitled "Control And Inspection In Wilayat Ninawa"
(Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) *where Hisbah officials can be seen inspecting a supermarket in Mosul.*

Not stopping at consumer products and contraband items, several videos[195]

document *Hisbah* officers destroying shrines, worship places of religious

minorities, graveyards with tombstones, historic archaeological sites, and other

objects such as trees, after deeming them as forms of 'idolatry' and 'polytheism',

and insisting that they "violate the monotheistic spirit of Islam", as seen in Figure

7.7. In reality though, it was IS's way of uprooting its enemies such as the

Christians, Shias, Sufis, Yezidis, and other religious minorities, and tearing them

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[194] Videos include "Burning Of Cigarette Cartons In Al Qaim" (A'maq, 2016) and "And Advise Each Other To The Truth" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015).

[195] Videos include "The Axe Of Abraham" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), "Smashing Of Idols" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015), "The Promotors Of Virtue And Preventers Of Vice 3" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), and "Removing Manifestations Of Polytheism" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015).

apart from the social fabric. As an all-powerful institution of the Caliphate, *Hisbah* basically served as the 'hands of the government' that strictly implemented *Shariah*, maintained law and order, and enforced Islamic practices. This was based on its mandate enshrined in IS's governance model – as a *Diwan* that was under the direct supervision of the 'Delegated Committee' (RAND Corporation, 2017), second only to the caliph himself (MEMRI, 2017).

Figure 7.7 - Screen grab from video entitled "The Axe Of Abraham" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016) *where a Hisbah official is speaking on camera while an earth digger in the background can be seen destroying the historical remains of the ancient Assyrian city of Dur Sharrukin near Mosul.*

Army: Official IS videos showcasing its military prowess underline two major objectives. First, a concerted information operations (IO) campaign to project its army as part of its political objectives, that is, establishment of the Caliphate. Second, to embellish and exaggerate the successes of its military operations to influence friendly, neutral, and opposing forces and populations (Gambhir, 2016). IS projected its army as an important component of its governance model, which was tasked with defending the Caliphate and expanding its territory. In some

governance-themed videos[196], its army is shown driving through towns and cities equipped with heavy weapons, fighting on the frontlines, guarding the borders[197], and at times its personnel succumbing to death and 'embracing martyrdom'[198]. This projection was part of the narrative that the establishment of Caliphate is possible only through Jihad and martyrdom. Some IS videos[199] weave a narrative that the army is also defending the Caliphate in order to preserve and expand its monetary system, hallmarks of which are *Zakat* and gold dinar. There are also videos[200] which shower praise on IS media men, who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with fighters, busy filming while heavy fighting continues on the frontline. However, the detailed role of its army is projected in territory-themed videos, as described in the Territory case study.

Figure 7.8 - Screen grab from video entitled "And That He Will Surely Substitute For Them After Their Fear Security" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) *where Islamic Police officers are inspecting a truck at a road block in an unnamed area of Wilayat Al Khayr.*

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[196] Videos such as "Knights Of Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), "Zakat – The Truth Of Money And The Duty Of Imam" (Wilayat Homs, 2016), and "And Advise Each Other To Truth 2" (Wilayat Al Fallujah, 2015).

[197] "Inside The Khilafah" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2017).

[198] "Best Nation" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015; Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015).

[199] Videos such as "And Donate More For Charitable Causes" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2016), "And They Give Zakat" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015), and "The Rise Of The Khilafah – Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015).

[200] "Revelations Of Satan" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015); "Oh Mujahid You Are Also The Media Man" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2015).

Public security: IS maintained local police forces, known as *Al Shurta Al Islamiyyah* (Islamic Police), in all *Wilayaat* of the Caliphate whose main task was to maintain safety and security. According to De Graaf and Yayla, the police were established for accountability, functional, legitimacy, political, and reputational purposes, and served as "an essential component of the Caliphate's appeal to people living under the rule of ISIS" (2021, p. 16). One video entitled "Tour Of Diwans Of The State" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016) explains some of the major duties of the Islamic Police included the registration of general complaints and disputes between people, such as cases of defaulting on loan payments, patrolling entrances/exits of towns and cities, and foiling illegal activities such as smuggling and theft. The police carried out their public safety duties by conducting regular patrols inside towns and cities and maintaining checkpoints (March & Revkin, 2015) as shown in Figure 7.8. They also served as the judiciary's executive body by implementing legal rulings (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). Several governance-themed videos credit the Islamic Police for restoring safety and security[201] in newly captured towns and cities by deploying personnel and establishing checkpoints in order to restore normalcy and encourage the return of displaced citizens who fled their homes, and patrolling the streets[202] to ensure the lives and properties of its citizens remain protected.

Apart from maintaining safety and security, IS also projected its police department's performances in a modern fashion – a force that was keen on gathering intelligence and surveillance of suspects, and investigating the cases of

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[201] Video entitled "Return Of Life To Ain Issa – 2" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).
[202] "Review And Spread Of The Soldiers Of The Caliphate In The City Of Mosul" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2014); "Two Years Since The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016); "And He Will Surely Substitute Their Fears With Safety" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

accused based on evidence, including ones obtained through forensic methods[203].

IS showed its security apparatus, known as *Al Jihaz Al Emni*, foiling spy rings in videos entitled "Story Of Slaughter In Albu Kamal City" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016) and "Revelations Of Satan" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) respectively. The videos, which can be considered as prime examples of staged theatrical performances and seemingly inspired from popular American crime scene investigation (CSI) TV series such as FBI[204] Files, America's Most Wanted and Dateline NBC, feature security officials arresting men on suspicion of being spies and involve reconstruction scenes where suspects re-enact their activities on camera without giving viewers the impression that their cover has been exposed and bear no visible signs of torture. The videos then present the interrogation and confession tapes of suspects with torture marks visible. The accused are then executed brutally by IS police forces dressed in black uniforms at the end of the said videos. Several other videos[205] document IS Police officers meting out harsh punishments to alleged spies and collaborators accused of helping their enemies to conduct air raids and bombings.

In the light of the staged performances of IS's law and order branch mentioned above – namely the *Hisbah*, army, police, and the security apparatus – it can be concluded that the said institutions were presented as efficient, ruthless and uncompromising when it came to implementing *Shariah*, maintaining peace, foiling espionage, and defending the borders. They were also never shy to use extreme measures in order to ensure that their duties are met and fearsome reputation is maintained. The videos clearly suggest that the overall official

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[203] Video entitled "Guardians Of The Subjects" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2016).
[204] Federal Bureau of Investigation.
[205] "Aggressive Response To Those Who Helped In The Bombings Of The Tyrants" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015); "Arrest Of An FSA Fighter Working For The Jordanian Intelligence Arrested By IS Security Service" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015); "Authority Of Shariah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2016)

objective of the law and order branch was to protect the Caliphate from internal and external sabotage, and implement *Shariah* to its fullest capacity by often resorting to extreme brutality and retribution in order to discourage dissent and disorder, promote fear and submission among its subjects, and maintaining monopoly on violence, which is the first attribute of stateness as described in the Conceptual Framework.

Public Services – Building Blocks of the Caliphate

The basic understanding of service in civic sense is "a system supplying a public need such as transport, communications, or utilities such as electricity and water" or "a public department or organisation run by the state" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Modern governments provide services to people living within its jurisdiction, either directly or by financing private provision of services. In modern states, the term 'public services' include sectors such as water and power, fire services, education, environmental protection, housing, transportation, healthcare, among others (Lumen, 2008). Apart from the extensive projection of governmental activities related to its law and order branch, IS also showcased the provision of services such as agriculture, civic infrastructure, education, electricity, finance, food and water, healthcare, media and public information, religious affairs, tribal relations, and others, in various *Wilayaat* of the Caliphate. The coverage of public services accounts for almost one-third of governance dataset and exclusively documents its delivery to the general public. Following are some of the major departments whose theatrical performances of providing services to the citizens of the Caliphate featured prominently in governance-themed videos:

Civic services: IS documented the rehabilitation and improvement of public infrastructure projects in its official videos – spanning around an hour in the

dataset – and highlighted the performance of *Diwan* of Services, which implemented the all-important task of rebuilding and rehabilitating towns and cities of the Caliphate that IS claims were ravaged by war and neglect by previous regimes. Videos entitled "Return Of Life In Ain Issa – Part 1 & 2" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) are textbook examples of how IS documented its implementation of infrastructure projects soon after capturing a town from the enemy as part of its campaign to win hearts and minds of the local populace. Part 1 provides a glimpse of daily life under IS rule, for example, members of public carrying on with their livelihoods. Some of them also speak on camera about the new system and describe why they prefer it over the old one. Part 2 begins with an unnamed *Emir* speaking about the conquest of the town and how thousands of people have returned to live under the Caliphate while clips of routine activities play in the background. The video also includes the views of an official from the town's services department who speaks about the restoration and repair of roads in Ain Issa while footage showing workers repairing roads, painting traffic islands, and distributing food play in the background. "Work Of Diwan Of Services In Sarrin" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015) is another example of IS's department of civic services in action. In the 7-minute long video, an unnamed IS official sets the agenda of public works to be carried out in Sarrin area of Wilayat Aleppo and in the very next scene, he is shown repairing a water pipeline along with other workers and then switching on the water supply – a subtle reminder that IS officials' match their deeds with words in order to serve the populace. The video then shows municipal workers removing dirt from roadsides, uprooting weeds, watering the road surfaces after clearing the rubble, installing an artwork on a roundabout, checking wires and restoring power, planting of new saplings and flower plants, and replacement of lampposts. The video also shows unknown men waving IS flags on an intersection and entry gate to Sarrin, and ends with an unnamed man, most

likely a civilian, listing the public works carried out in the town and thanking everyone for providing the services.

Several other videos[206] also depict an army of workers entering towns and cities to perform tasks such as cleaning and levelling of roads, removal of trash from pavements and dividers, and uprooting of wild bush from roadsides. The IS officials who appear on camera frequently cite *Hadith* about maintaining cleanliness and order, and restoring the infrastructure to an excellent condition – shown in Figure 7.9 – often accompanied by expressions of appreciation and gratitude by members of public.

Figure 7.9 - Screengrab from video entitled "Aspects Of Refurbishing The Streets And Paving Of The Roads" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) where workers can be seen paving roads under IS officials' supervision.

Apart from documenting the implementation of infrastructure projects after the capture of towns and cities, IS media also emphasised its functioning governance, especially that of its *Diwan* of Services, in the face of US-led coalition and

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[206] "Service Works In Al Bab City And Its Suburbs" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), "Aspects Of Refurbishing The Streets And Paving Of The Roads" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Servers Of The Subjects" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Services Authority Repairing And Opening A Road In Al Abbasiyah Village Leading To The City Of Al Ma'dan" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

Russian/Syrian air forces bombing raids on IS-run territory. Several videos[207] specifically document the aftermath of air raids on key infrastructure points of towns and cities such as bridges, hospitals and markets as well as residential areas and mosques. They always depict the extent of damage and destruction – both in terms of human lives and material loss – and project public outrage over the indiscriminate nature of bombings that mercilessly targeted children, elderly and young people. The main intention of these videos was demonstrating to the viewers how swiftly IS authorities moved to provide medical support and restored the damaged infrastructure, while also reinforcing their rage and sympathy at the same time.

Healthcare: Unlike factual reporting by major international publications such as CS Monitor (Soguel, 2015), The Century Foundation (Miller, 2016), and many others about the state of healthcare under IS control which revealed dilapidated hospitals, shortage of medical staff, and medicines to unbearably high cost of treatment, IS propaganda videos extolled the virtues of the healthcare provided to people living in its Caliphate (AIVD, 2016). The healthcare-related videos included in the dataset span a total of 54 minutes, which is around 4% of entire governance-themed footage. Several videos showcase the Caliphate's 'state of the art' healthcare sector, which caught the attention of international media. One prominent video, entitled "Health Services In Islamic State" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), features a hospital in Raqqah, the de-facto capital of the Caliphate, which houses an injury wing, an x-ray division, a physiotherapy unit, an acupuncture department, a kidney department, a paediatric department, and a medical school.

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[207] Videos such as "Aftermath Of Crusader And Nusairi Aerial Coalition Bombing On Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015; Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), "Aftermath Of The Bombing By Safavid-Crusader Coalition On Muslims" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015), and "Crusader Bombing Of Bridges Of Albu Kamal City" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015).

Several doctors on IS payroll claim healthcare services is a top IS priority and how hard they are working on improving the sector despite all the challenges posed by its enemies, including aerial bombing of hospitals and clinics. The video shows patients undergoing treatment, getting x-rays and ultrasounds done, and receiving physiotherapy from an Indian doctor named Abu Muqatil Al Hindi (Indian), who also pleads on camera to other healthcare professionals from all over the world to emigrate to the Caliphate and help rebuild the healthcare sector.

Another doctor named Abu Yusuf Al Australi (Australian) in the paediatric department – shown in Figure 7.10 – echoes Al Hindi's call by urging other Muslims to come over and lamenting the fact that people are ignoring the plight of the subjects of the Caliphate who are "suffering from not necessarily the lack of equipment or medicine but mainly a lack of qualified medical care" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015). The sound of a crying baby can be constantly heard in the background while the Australian doctor speaks on camera, which is IS's way of subtly reminding its viewers of the constant dangers faced by the fledgling Caliphate and how they can help by taking practical actions, such as emigrating or conducting attacks on its enemies. The video also makes a claim that doctors from all over the world, including female doctors, are working alongside local doctors for the Islamic State Health Service (ISHS) without presenting any evidence to back it up. "Healthcare Services Under The Shadow Of Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015) is another video which shows patients receiving blood transfusion, dentistry, and operations. It includes interviews with medical professionals – including a doctor, surgeon and technician – who claim healthcare facilities have tremendously improved under IS rule and people no longer need *Wastah* (personal connections) to get medical treatment. In the end, a segment shows the preparation of healthy meals for patients in a hospital-run canteen, and concludes

with an appeal made by a technician to healthcare professionals around the world to emigrate to IS territory and help rebuild the healthcare sector. Another video entitled "Medical Facilities In Wilayat Al Khayr" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), features the interview of a British doctor named Abu Umar Al Muhajir, who refutes media reports about the chaotic state of medical services in the Caliphate and claims that "really good medical service is being provided here."

Figure 7.10: Screengrab from video entitled "Islamic State Health Service" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) which shows Australian national Abu Yusuf at work in an IS-run hospital in Raqqah.

When the Caliphate began to unravel, IS produced several other videos[208] which documented the aftermath of aerial raids conducted by US-led and Russian-led coalition warplanes and showed the urgent medical care provided to civilian victims in hospitals, and long-term medical treatment provided to disabled and injured IS fighters. Overall, IS portrayed its healthcare system as one which, despite being capable of treating the victims of incessant bombings and coping

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[208] Videos such as "Aftermath Of Crusader And Nusairi Aerial Coalition Bombing On Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), "Aggressive Response To Those Who Helped In The Bombings Of The Tyrants" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Rehabilitation Of The Disabled" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), "Swear To God We Will Seek Our Revenge" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

with the war-time situation, desperately needed qualified healthcare professionals from abroad in order to sustain itself and match the global standards.

Education: IS placed great importance on influencing children, labelled as the next generation of the Caliphate, and made education outreach an important cornerstone of its governance model with core motivation to train them (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). Despite the general assumption that being an organisation that adheres to extremist Salafi ideology, IS did project in its videos that it is open to imparting modern education to children, provided they excel in Islamic education at the same time. The video entitled "Reopening Of Schools Under The New Curriculum" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) is a good example, in which three unnamed education officials speak on camera about the introduction of a revamped curriculum which not just focuses on subjects related to Islam but also imparts Arabic and English language lessons. The video also includes a clip where children can be seen attending an English language class, as shown in Figure 7.11.

Figure 7.11: Screengrab from video entitled "Reopening Of Schools Under The New Curriculum" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015) which shows pupils learning English language in an IS-run school in Wilayat Al Khayr.

Mostly unknown to outside world, IS education system was divided into four tiers: (i) introductory where kids enrol till 5th grade; (ii) middle which is further divided into two sub-levels; (iii) prep school which is also divided into two sub-levels, namely, *Shariah* and secular studies; and (iv) comprehensive, as documented in video entitled "Tour Of Diwans Of The State" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016). Apart from imparting what IS calls 'worldly education', videos such as "Education Session Of The Cubs Of The Caliphate On The Frontline" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014) present dozens of young boys rote learning the Quran, and reading other subjects such as the Creed, *Sunnah* (Prophetic tradition), and Salafi-Wahhabi concepts[209]. Several other videos[210] document the educational activities of the 'Cubs of the Caliphate', who were raised with the objective of becoming 'true Muslims' and 'marching forward with the banner of the Caliphate[211]'. IS replaced the decades old secular educational system run by the Ba'athist regimes in Iraq and Syria respectively with its 'modern Islamic teachings', which were rooted in medieval Salafi ideology, in order to ensure the supply of a highly indoctrinated youth that was ready to lay down their lives for the Caliphate's cause.

Religious services: *Shariah* outreach was one of IS's first and foremost actions upon capturing a territory and bringing the population under its control (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). IS's video productions show *Diwan* of *Da'wah* and *Masajid* (outreach and mosques) imparting religious education to children while also

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[209] 'Nawaqid Al Islam' (Arabic for Nullifiers of Islam)[209] is one such concept which was preached by Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab, an influential 18th century Salafi cleric and founder of the extremist Wahhabi movement. This concept is about the acts that invalidate any Muslim's religious belief and turns him/her into a polytheist (An Najmi, 2016).

[210] Videos such as "Windows To The Epic Land – 28" (Al I'tisam Media, 2014), "Tour Of Diwans Of The State" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016), "Invite To The Way Of Your Lord" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), and "Two Years Since The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016),

[211] "Two Years Since The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016).

ensuring that fighters and other young men received religious education through its *Shariah* institutes in order to maintain the Salafi ideological supremacy in the society. IS published several videos[212] featuring teenagers and young men attending religious schools to excel in '*Shariah* and religious sciences'. IS also published several videos[213] where it documented dissemination of religious knowledge to men of all ages, as shown in Figure 7.12. As men exercise more authority and responsibility over their families in traditional Iraqi and Syrian societies, IS targeted its male subjects with religious indoctrination and re-education activities to maintain a tight grip over the wider society.

Figure 7.12: Screengrab from video entitled "Administration Of Da'wah And Mosques" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) shows an IS official administering a religious exam at a Shariah institute in Wilayat Ninawa.

Media and information: The performances of Diwan of Media included in the dataset detail the department's tasks such as obtaining visuals from the frontline[214], establishment and running of media points in towns and cities under

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[212] "Shariah Institute in Wilayat Kirkuk" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015), "Shariah Institute In Wilayat Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), and "Sons Of The Caliphate Taking Shariah Sciences Course" (Wilayat Al Fallujah, 2015).
[213] "Best Nation" (Al Furqan Media, 2014), "Developers Of The Land" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Administration Of Dawah And Mosques" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), "Rulers Ruling In Accordance Of The Laws Of God" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016), "Building Blocks Of The Caliphate" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017).
[214] "Oh Mujahid You Are Also the Mediaman" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2015).

IS control[215], running of an FM radio station[216], and messages of several IS fighters addressed to mediamen[217]. IS promoted its media outlets, as well as products, with the explicit purpose of serving as the sole source of news and views to its subjects while all other media sources, such as satellite news channels, were outlawed and dish antennas confiscated by *Hisbah*[218] to ensure an information embargo on its citizens and to keep them ignorant of current events while the Caliphate collapsed.

Treasury: IS's Department of Treasury was responsible for the financial operations of the Caliphate, and was tasked with collecting taxes and managing the spoils of war, yet it received negligible coverage in governance-themed videos. One of the major reasons for such sparse coverage could be the fact that IS extracted revenues from questionable sources such as the sale of crude oil and other mineral resources on the black market[219], ransom money from kidnappings[220], sale of archaeological artefacts[221], and confiscation of assets and resources in conquered areas[222]. The only source of income IS projected in its videos is through the collection of *Zakat*, thanks to "the honest and generous deposits made by its subjects under the influence of preaching carried out by the State," as claimed in the video entitled

[215] "Building Blocks Of The Caliphate" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017); "Two Years Since The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016).
[216] "Al Bayan FM Radio Broadcasting" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015).
[217] "Messages To The Knights Of Media" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).
[218] As shown in videos entitled "And Warning The Believers About The Banning Of Dish Antennas" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Protect Yourselves And Your Families From a Fire" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016), and "Until They Change What is in Themselves" (Wilayat Hamah, 2017).
[219] "Oh Mujahid You Are Also The Media Man" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2015).
[220] Rasheed, A. (2015). ISIS: Race to Armageddon. Vij Books; US Dept. of Treasury. (2014). Remarks of Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen at The Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, "Attacking ISIL's Financial Foundation" https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2672.aspx; Looney, C. (2013). Al-Qaeda's Governance Strategy in Raqqa. JoshuaLandis.com. Available at: https://www.joshualandis.com/blog/al-qaedas-governance-strategy-raqqa-chris-looney/ [Accessed 26 Nov. 2019]
[221] Giovanni, et al. (2014). How Does ISIS Fund Its Reign of Terror? NewsWeek.com. Available at: https://www.newsweek.com/2014/11/14/how-does-isis-fund-its-reign-terror-282607.html [Accessed 26 Nov. 2019]
[222] Lefler, J. (2014). Life Under ISIS in Mosul. iswiraq.blogspot.com. Available at: http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2014/07/life-under-isisin- mosul.html. [Accessed 26 Nov. 2019].

"Zakat Expenditures" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015). The videos featuring the performances of IS's Treasury Department attempt to paint the Caliphate as one that reflects the glory of the past caliphates, like that of Omar, the second righteous caliph (634-644 AD) and Omar II (717-720 AD) the famous Omayyad caliph known for their financial acumen and reforms, including land and taxation.

Currency: One major hallmark of IS's Department of Treasury was the introduction of the Islamic currency in 2015, which according to the video entitled "The Rise Of The Khilafah – The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015) came into existence after the "Shura Council of the Khilafah tasked the Treasury of the Islamic State with returning the true and ultimate mediums of exchange and *Sharai'* (based on *Shariah*) measures of all goods and services for the *Ummah* through the minting of the silver dirham and gold dinar." The Caliphate's very own currency was presented in several official videos[223] in the following denominations: two gold coins; 1 dinar gold coin weighing 4.25 grams of 21 carat gold, and 5 dinars gold coin also weighing 4.25 grams of 21 carat gold; three silver coins: 1 dirham coin weighing 2 grams of silver, 5 dirhams coin weighing 10 grams of silver, and 10 dirhams coin weighing 20 grams of silver; and two copper coins: 10 *fulus* coin weighing 10 grams of copper, as shown in Figure 7.13, and 20 *fulus* coin weighing 20 grams of copper. In the video entitled "Inside The Caliphate" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2017), IS announced the "rolling out of the copper *fils* denomination of coins into the marketplace to help facilitate smaller financial transactions in a *Sharai'* manner," set the value of 1 silver dirham to 100 copper *fils*, declared that "all goods and financial transactions must now be priced

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[223] Videos include "Demolition Of The Thrones Of The Infidels With The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Al Junub, 2015), "Irritation Of The Infidels Over The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "The Dark Rise Of Banknotes And The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015), and "The Rise Of The Khilafah - Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015).

and conducted using the new Islamic currency", and included contracts, wages and services, and Islamic State services into the equation. However, apart from showing the minting of the official currency, IS failed to put together the full-fledged use of its dinars/dirhams/*fils* in daily transactions across the Caliphate as a proof of its adoption and common usage by the populace.

Figure 7.13: Screengrab from video entitled "The Rise Of The Khilafah – Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015) *which shows illustrations of IS's newly launched currency.*

Several official IS videos[224] present the currency more like a souvenir where civilians are shown gathering around the bearers to catch a glimpse of it and express their joy on camera over its introduction, as shown in Figure 7.14. One

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[224] Videos such as "Irritation Of The Infidels Over The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) and "Demolition Of The Thrones Of The Infidels With The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Al Junub, 2015).

video[225] features several civilians who reckon that the gold dinar will be a game changer in the global financial system, which "will go on to replace the US dollar and euro to become widely used from Far East to Far West." Several official IS videos[226] feature exclusively the views of subjects over the 'return of gold dinar' but fail to show any scenes where the currency is in actual use. IS's announcement of the gold dinar is testament to the fact that it was more of a propaganda scheme than an actual attempt to replace the use of existing currencies – such as Iraqi dinar, Syrian pound or the US dollar – with a sovereign currency that carried an intrinsic value and worthy of use for transactional intent and purposes (Lokmanoglu, 2020).

Figure 7.14: Screengrab from video entitled "Irritation Of The Infidels Over The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) where a Hisbah official is having a look at the gold dinar along with some civilians.

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[225] Video entitled "Irritation Of The Infidels Over The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015).

[226] Videos include "Joy Of Aleppo Over The Return Of Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), "Joy Of Muslims Over The Return Of Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Joy Of Righteous Over The Introduction Of Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), "Joy Of Subjects Over Implementation Of Gold (Dinar)" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015), "Joy Of Subjects Over The Introduction Of Gold Dinar" (Wilayat Fallujah), and "Joy Of Subjects Over The Return Of Gold Coins" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015).

In all, if the law and order branch was portrayed as maintaining control over the society by employing stern measures, the services were presented as an effective and visionary branch of government that did its best when it came to the provision of modern necessities and facilities to its subjects, and portrayed it as a key indicator of its performances of stateness. The launch of the gold dinar by the services branch was depicted as a monumental project that is capable of disrupting the global order. However, based on the performances analysed in the videos, it can be deduced that while the services branch struggled to perform stateness due to low state capacity, the gold dinar dismally failed to launch as the sole currency of the Caliphate, let alone disrupt the global financial system.

Administration – God-Fearing Officials Driven to Establish A Welfare State
All modern states are dependent on "an administrative apparatus operating according to a distinct logic" (Scheuerman, 2006, p. 88) in which "all members of the political community… take part in discourse" in a meaningful way while enjoying "fundamentally equal chances to take a position on all relevant contributions" (Habermas, 1996, p. 182). In typical modern understanding "courts deliver judgments" while "bureaucracies prepare laws and process applications," (Habermas, 1996, p. 357). Recent conflicts such as the Syrian civil war have shown that certain non-state actors were keen on performing stateness with the help of "institutions, signifiers and services that materially constitute and discursively (re)produce political authority" such as "establishing checkpoints that control the movement of people and goods, taxing local businesses, founding courts to resolve local disputes, coordinating agricultural production and organising schooling" (Martínez & Eng, 2018, p. 237). In areas under its control, IS established alternative structures to replace them with the Iraqi and Syrian ones with a view of "providing basic services, restoring daily life to the status quo ante, and fill the

administration void that was created" (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014, p. 4). The following sub-sections provide analysis of IS's administrative activities, starting with bureaucracy. The Diwans of Treasury, Public Security, Soldiery (Army), and Media made up the bulk of the civil service, with *Wali* of the Caliphate's *Wilayaat* implementing the decisions of central administration through a network of *Emirs* operating at a highly localised level (Abu Hanieh & Abu Rumman, 2015). This "bureaucratic, systematised approach to maintaining power" gave IS the statebuilding capacity to expand and consolidate its rule in areas captured from its adversaries (Shapiro & Jung, 2014).

Bureaucracy: In simplest terms, bureaucracy is defined as "a system of government in which most of the important decisions are taken by State officials rather than by elected representatives" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). In any modern state, bureaucracy serves as the prime instrument that helps the governance model succeed in achieving its goals, limited as they may be (Müller, 2008). Weber defines government as the institution that decides policy and initiates new laws while bureaucracy, as the administration department of the government, is one that carries out policies and implements decisions. He saw bureaucracy as a "structured hierarchy in which salaried officials reached rational decisions by applying rules to the facts before them," and carrying out the "day-to-day tasks of administration" (Simpson, 2008, p. 54).

Unlike most insurgent groups of the past that dismantled the local government after successfully seizing territory, IS maintained and expanded upon existing local institutions (Callimachi & Prickett, 2018). Like any other modern State, bureaucracy was the spine of many of IS's *Dawawin*, as reflected in several official IS videos, demonstrating IS's heavy reliance on the performances of its

bureaucrats and what the general public thought about them. Bureaucrats working for different *Dawawin* may have had different tasks to deal with but when it came to screen appearances, videos consistently showed them elaborately dressed, sat in neat and tidy offices which were equipped with the latest technology such as desktop computers, printers and scanners, and well supplied with stationery and other office materials, as shown in Figure 7.15.

Figure 7.15: Screengrab from video entitled "Marriage Contracts Office In Wilayat Ninawa" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015) where a bureaucrat is speaking on camera in a well-equipped office.

Oftentimes, the videos depicted the bureaucrats attending to visitors and documenting their complaints in detail. The bureaucrats also spoke on camera about the authority and nature of the work carried out in the offices and the due diligence they undertook to get their work done. The carefully edited videos are interspersed with scenes of clerks filling out forms and recording necessary details and signatures/thumb impressions of the complainants. The videos equally feature complainants' views where they express complete satisfaction with the present system while condemning the past practices. All bureaucrats featured in the videos usually speak in a similar fashion – in line with IS's hierarchical structure and theological foundations – by starting the conversation with quotes from the Holy

Quran and *Hadith*, giving a brief description of their jobs, extoling the efficiency and virtues of the system, and emphasising the impact it is having on the people's lives. Their performances are subsequently endorsed by members of the public who are asked questions about the nature of their complaints, how well they were received by the bureaucracy, and the level of satisfaction after getting their matters settled. Except for the video entitled "Verily Only The Rule Of God" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015), which includes views of a man filing a complaint against an IS soldier but does not provides any other details, not a single video airs any dissenting views against the system, which proves that masses had no choice but to pay lip service in order to get their work done, and in certain cases, save their lives.

Besides focusing on the appearances and performances of bureaucrats, IS videos also demonstrate the bureaucratic practices carried out in several *Diwans*, in order to convey the message to general public that IS's system runs on the ideals of accountability, diligence, efficiency, and transparency, unlike the systems of the past which were corrupt, inefficient, opaque and slow. One video entitled "Office Of Monitoring And Investigation" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) embodies the point and displays how IS put bureaucracy at the heart of its governance. In the said video, an unnamed bureaucrat, again neatly dressed and sitting in a well-equipped office, quotes a verse from the Quran (5:2) which says: "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression." The video then mentions the sub-divisions of the Office of Monitoring and Investigation Bureau such as health, management, computers (IT), while adding that the Office of Monitoring and Investigation is part of the *Diwan of Hisbah*. It then proceeds to show the field work carried out by the bureau officers such as inspections of consumer foodstuff in shops, confiscation and removal of expired items, visiting abattoirs and evaluating meat quality, and carrying out scrutiny of scales and weighing machines

to ensure they were not tampered with by the shopkeepers. In the end, the unnamed IS official says the details of all such inspections are recorded in the database and archived, which in other words, delivers a message to its viewers that IS is implementing modern governance based on the prophetic methodology. Another example is the video entitled "Building Blocks [Of The Caliphate]" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017), which showcases the bureaucratic practices of the State employees while also mentioning different offices of the Caliphate, such as the Office of Employment and the Office of Works, where the staff registers, maintains, and audits employment records, as well as expenditures and budgets of different *Diwans* and offices. Several other videos also document the extensive bureaucratic procedures, such as filing paperwork, record keeping and archiving – performed by the *Diwans* and offices of agriculture[227], bakeries[228], health, *hisbah*[229], media, police[230], public and tribal relations[231], traffic[232], and others. This was part of IS's efforts to assure its subjects at home and supporters worldwide that it keeps tabs on the practices of its employees to ensure that, unlike other states where bribes and corruption are notoriously common, they are working under the instructions of *Shariah*. It also wanted to make it clear that their good or bad performances were appraised and rewarded/punished as part of the Caliphate's system of accountability and transparency.

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[227] In video entitled "Agriculture In Wilayat Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), and "And Donate More [for Charitable Causes]" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2016).

[228] In video entitled "Administration Of Bakeries And Ovens In Wilayat Raqqah" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).

[229] In video entitled "And Warning The Believers About The Banning Of Dish Antennas" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Authority Of The Caliphate In Wilayat Al Jazirah" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), "Best Nation" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015).

[230] In video entitled "And That He Will Surely Substitute For Them After Their Fear Security" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

[231] In video entitled "And Reform Yourselves - Meeting With Tribal Leaders" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Fair Compromise Over Dispute Between Three Villages" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

[232] In video entitled "Traffic Police In Wilayat Ninawa" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015).

Judiciary: It is the branch of government which administers justice according to the law. The term refers broadly to the system of courts, judges, magistrates, adjudicators, and other support personnel who run the system. In modern states, a functioning judicial system enables the courts to apply the law, settle disputes, acquit innocent people, and punish law-breakers in accordance with the set of laws of the land. It is one of the key aspects of modern societies that enables them to uphold peace, maintain order, and ensure good governance by preserving its citizen's rights. The independent functioning of judiciary – without fear or meddling by powerful interests – ensures its ability to deliver justice and enforcement of its rulings (Queensland Parliament, 2015).

The establishment of courts based on *Shariah* was one of the top IS governance priorities and a major component of its caliphate vision (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). IS, in its official videos, demonstrated the implementation of a judicial system that was impartial, swift, and accessible to everyone, and had its basis in the Quran, *Hadith*, and other sources of Islamic law. In a bid to emphasise transparency, the videos also feature the views of complainants on camera explaining how their complaints – even if they are against IS fighters or officials[233] – were well-received, and resolved swiftly and impartially, while also condemning the judicial systems of the past regimes. At times, the complainants are interviewed outside of the premises to give the viewing audience the impression that their views were given without any coercion or duress. Officials, both identified or otherwise, emphasise on camera how decisions were made after listening to all sides while reiterating that all subjects are judged the same under *Shariah* imposed by IS.

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[233] As featured in video entitled "Verily Only The Rule Of God" (Wilayat Kirkuk, 2015).

Zakat: It is one of the five major pillars of Islam and provides the basis of Islamic social welfare in order to solve social problems such as poverty, unemployment, catastrophes, indebtedness and inequitable income distribution at family, community and state levels (Dogarawa, 2008). *Zakat* is seen as the mechanism behind the Islamic equivalent of modern welfare state. Wilensky (1975) describes the welfare State as being run by a government that assures minimum standards of income, nutrition, health, housing and education to its citizens as a political right and not charity. Similar to the imposition of a wealth tax on high-income earning citizens in the modern states, well-off Muslims are obligated to pay a certain percentage on the total sum of their money and assets to the state under *Shariah* with the long term goal of improving living standards and eliminating poverty (Dogarawa, 2008).

IS took credit for reviving this centuries-old Islamic policy in several of its propaganda videos (Alkhouri & Kassirer, 2015), and portrayed it as one of the main sources of income for the government. Just like the introduction of gold dinar, revival of *Zakat* was hailed by IS as a major achievement of its governance model. A number of *Zakat*-specific videos[234] document IS officials collecting the money from business owners, farmers, jewellers, landlords, landowners, shepherds, and other well-to-do individuals and entities, as shown in Figure 7.16. They then register the collections in the *Diwan*'s database, and deposit the sums in *Bait Al Maal* (Treasury). The videos also include face-to-face conversations between IS officials and citizens who candidly disclose the estimated value of their assets, let IS officials calculate the amount of *Zakat* applicable, duly accept the amount quoted, and pay the amount in cash immediately – a procedure portrayed

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[234] "Zakat – Right Of The Money And Duty Of The Imam" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "Zakat – Truth Of Money And The Duty Of The Imam" (Wilayat Homs, 2016).

by IS as a sign of deep trust and transparency between the rulers and the ruled. The views of payees are also included in the videos where they express satisfaction over the experience and praise IS for reviving the Islamic system. The videos also show IS employees carrying out surveys, often during their visits to remote hamlets and villages in the countryside, to find households that are entirely dependent on *Zakat*. The surveying scenes are followed by visuals where workers are shown packing foodstuffs and other necessities in large bin bags, loading them onto trucks, and distributing them among needy families in cities as well as remote rural areas. The segments of collection of *Zakat* and other charitable donations, as well as its distribution, are almost always followed by scenes of IS bureaucrats registering the details in their database in order to emphasise the transparency and honesty of the entire process.

Figure 7.16: Screengrab from video entitled "Only The Charities" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015) where an IS official is enquiring a jeweller about Zakat payments.

In all, IS demonstrated in its videos that its third major branch, administration, is run by God-fearing, honest and pious bureaucrats and officials who are striving hard to create a welfare state where both rich and poor are governed by the ideals of *Shariah* and receive justice regardless of their status and background. It also

hailed the revival of *Zakat* not just as a historic step but also one that is a panacea for many of modern society's ills.

Conclusion:

The visual analysis of IS's 131 governance-themed videos included in this case study clearly showcase a government that was committed to performing stateness that ensured monopoly on violence, enhancing state capacity, and enforcing citizenship agreement by implementing modern governance through its three distinct branches, that is, law and order, services, and administration. As the final stage of IS's territorial roadmap, shown in Figure 5.1, the chapter noted that IS, just like other modern states, emphasised heavily on the theatrical performances of the state, for example, civil servants working in government offices, civilians engaging with different branches of the state, and the display of different state symbols and machinery at work to give viewers the impression that the Caliphate is remaining and expanding, thanks to the efficient, honest and transparent practices of IS's *Shariah* rule. Such projections, albeit one-sided and propagandistic in nature, offer a rare glimpse into IS's governance, which become extremely important due to the absence of any major on-the-ground reporting and assessment that was carried out from within the confines of the Caliphate. Another major finding confirms the notion that IS, despite its insistence on a strict early-Islamic (Salafi) identity and inner workings, presented itself like a modern state by documenting the implementation of statebuilding goals and deploying all the tools and resources available to today's modern states, such as, currency, information technology, infrastructure, media and communications, natural resources, taxation, weapons, among others. At the same time, IS presented itself as a revolutionary state that brought peace and security to a war-ravaged society through the enforcement of a system that heavily depended on ruthless policing,

medieval punishments and incessant propaganda, all in the name of Islam. In its videos it also portrayed both sides of its justice system, punishment and forgiveness, although the former received way more media projection than the latter. The absence of any representation of women in governance videos, despite the gender constituting half the population, reveals IS's priorities and future intentions, where children were groomed to become the next 'generation of the Caliphate'[235], that is, fighters and suicide bombers. The use of civilian sentiment across governance videos, always in appreciative and endorsement roles, also shows that IS eagerly exploited the vulnerability of its subjects, and demonstrated to the world, especially its supporters abroad, that people living under the 'shadow of the Caliphate' fully support the 'Islamic system'.

The next case study focuses on the Islamic State's capacity to engage into relations with other states, that is, its foreign policy, and provides an in-depth analysis of the different facets of its policies towards different world and regional powers while also reflects on its engagement with other Jihadi organisations and bringing them under its fold.

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[235] "Two Years Since The Caliphate" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016).

8 : LOTS OF (FOREIGN) POLICIES FOR HAVING NO (FOREIGN) RELATIONS: IS'S (IN)CAPACITY TO CONDUCT RELATIONS WITH OTHER STATES & NON-STATE ACTORS

The announcement of the establishment of a Caliphate in July 2014 came on the back of a string of territorial gains that helped IS seize large parts of Iraq and Syria – developments which sent shockwaves across the world. The international community, after unanimously condemning the declaration, woke up to an unprecedented dilemma: how to deal with an armed group – labelled as an international terrorist organisation due to the threats it poses to global peace and security – which just declared the territory it controls to be an independent, sovereign State? (Potyrała, 2017). Due to the fact that any recognition of IS's Caliphate had the potential of shaking the entire "normative structure of the international system" to its core (Ahram, 2019, p. 164), "States of the world were not interested in recognising the Caliphate or in conducting any sort of relations with it" (Shany, et al., 2014, p. 7). Nevertheless, it did not stop them from 'dealing' with IS, albeit in extremely combative ways, such as imposing sanctions, initiating military operations to uproot it from the captured territories and unleashing hostile rhetoric against the newest Jihadi non-state actor on the international stage. In retaliation, IS resorted to further violence and terrorist attacks while utilising non-traditional channels of communication, such as online magazines and videos, and posting it on social networks in order to ensure its actions and policies were seen and heard across the world by its supporters and enemies alike. It also resorted to engaging in what is known as pariah diplomacy or rogue state diplomacy in IR, which refers to the foreign policy and diplomatic practices of states that are considered pariahs or rogue by the international community, especially ones declared by major world powers such as USA. These states are

often subjected to isolation and face widespread disapproval due to their actions, policies, or behaviour, which can be deemed in violation of international norms and standards. Its leadership also engaged in diplomacy and sought Ba'yah from other Jihadist organisations around the world, namely Ansar Bait Al Maqdis, Ansar Al Shariah, and Boko Haram while also established affiliates in Afghanistan, West Africa, Greater Sahara, and the Caucasus.

This case study – based on the analysis of 69 foreign policy-themed videos which together account for around 12 and a half hours of content – inquires the capacity in which IS entered into relations with other states and the policies that were directed at them while also analysing its relations with other non-state actors around the world and the diplomacy it engaged in to turn them into its overseas '*Wilayaat*' (affiliates). The first section presents an overview of the pariah or rogue state diplomacy, reflects on IS's performances related to foreign relations, and then proceeds to analyse IS's foreign policy, especially its 'Extinction of Grayzone' doctrine, which constantly presented war and aggression as the only way to implement its strategy of 'remaining and expanding' the Caliphate. The second section dissects IS's bellicose foreign policy towards neighbouring countries and international powers published in its official videos, and uncovers the underlying reasons behind them. The third section sheds light on IS's relations with a number of Jihadi organisations outside of the Caliphate with emphasis on Ansar Bait Al Maqdis, Ansar Al Shariah, and Boko Haram.

The case study concludes that IS's engagement with other states was based on total rejection of international norms that are grounded in mutual recognition of independence and sovereignty of states, and therefore resorted to 'us vs them' rhetoric. As a result, all other states never considered negotiating with IS while the

Caliphate did not, conditionally or otherwise, offer a dialogue for peace to any of its opponents – state or non-state actors alike – as it considered entering into relations with others as an act of deviance and apostasy.

IS's Response to the Fourth (non) Criterion of the Montevideo Convention

The matter of IS being an independent entity has been a contentious issue. While IS in its propaganda releases showed nothing but contempt for international norms and conventions, including other nations' right to sovereignty and independence, it also expressed its willingness to engage with international community, albeit on its own terms and conditions. According to Ahram & Lust (2016, p. 19), though the Caliphate avoided any notions of permanent borders, it did much "to look and act the State" by adopting "many of the characteristics typical of governance in the Arab world." In the first ever statement that carried out the announcement of the Caliphate, Abu Mohammed Al Adnani (2014), IS official spokesman, proclaimed:

> *"We clarify to the Muslims that with this declaration of Khilafah, it is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to khalifah Ibrahim and support him (may Allah preserve him). The legality of all Emirates, groups, states, and organisations, becomes null by the expansion of the Khilafah's authority and arrival of its troops to their areas."236*

Moreover, in a video entitled "There Is No Life Without Jihad" (Al Hayat Media, 2014), Abu Muthanna Al Yemeni, an IS fighter from the UK with Yemeni background, claimed that he resides in a State which has "implemented the

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236 The speech was first released as an audio file entitled "This Is The Promise Of Allah" and then published as a document by Al Hayat Media Center.

Shariah in both Iraq and Syria" and declared that "we do not understand any borders" with a vow to "even go to Jordan and Lebanon with no problems" on the orders of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. In another video entitled "A Message From Brother Abdullah Al Moldovi" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), IS sent a clear message that "the Islamic *Khilafah* is an entity which does not recognise the borders" which makes it the only true caliphate in the world, and contrasted it with the Taliban's goal of establishing the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' within the borders of Afghanistan, which disqualifies it from being a caliphate due to its acceptance of and adherence to Afghanistan's borders. Hence, he declared the Caliphate in Iraq and Syria is the only real Islamic state in the world.

Pariah/Rogue State Diplomacy

The term 'pariah' can come across as both inexact and menacing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it refers to 'a member of a despised class of any kind; someone or something shunned or avoided; a social out- cast' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Pariahs are actors whose behaviour causes disorder in international society. Pariah diplomacy refers to the methods by which members of the international community or those standing outside of it engage in extra-legal and disorderly conduct and invoke consternation among other sovereign entities in international politics. While pariah diplomacy does not necessarily always challenge the interests and values of the wider international community in principle, it can compel or persuade members of the international society of an alternative basis for coexistence. Certain states and non-state actors that seek to challenge the legitimacy of prevailing norms, values, and the international order, often do so by refusing to conduct their relations in the manner that, which, from their perspective, is advantageous to others, or compromises their own founding principles or ideology, and hence deepening of the unjust terms of relations.

Pariah, or rogue state, diplomacy undermines international order as the state/non-state actors challenge the efficacy of international institutions, of which diplomacy itself is particularly significant one (Banai, 2016). States are often termed as pariah/rogue by others based on a number of reasons such as their human rights record, purported support for terrorism, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction programme or aggressive foreign policies, blatant violations of international laws, and non-cooperation with international institutions, among others. Some examples of rogue states, that are part of the international community, yet treated as pariah states arguably include Belarus, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela, among others while increasing sanctions imposed against Russia has also made it a pariah state among Western nations.

It is important to highlight that the above mentioned behaviours that lead to the pariah status of a state were also displayed by IS during its three-years along existence as a Caliphate. International law professors such as Shany, Cohen, and Mimran (2014) believe that IS displayed independence in affairs related to running the Caliphate. For example, the economy was run on plundering of captured territories, appropriation of funds and valuables from banks and other financial institutions, and revenues generated by selling fuel extracted from oil and gas fields seized from the governments of Iraq and Syria. These claims are also supported by a report published by The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (2014, p. 152), which disclosed that the Islamic State "is financially independent and no longer finds it necessary to rely on donations" and cited several resources the Caliphate relied on for its new-found independence. As for political independence, IS did not consider itself "subordinate to any other State, and that other extremist Sunni organisations, such as Al Qaida and Hamas, see it as a distinct entity that should be denounced" (Shany, et al., 2014, p. 8).

However, Potyrała, though accepting the fact that the group had control over significant territory and population in Iraq and Syria and aspired to further expand into neighbouring countries, insists that IS was not independent either in "internal and external sense" and that its authority was limited and depended on external factors, thus truly lacking the "capacity to enter into official international relations with members of the international community" (2017, p. 116).

As explained in the Conceptual Framework chapter, a state may remain a 'non-entity' in the international arena if it does not receive formal recognition from other recognised states (Potyrała, 2017) even if the entity in question may be actually functioning as a state – perhaps better than other recognised states in the international community. As a result, it is deprived of diplomatic privileges such as "being a member of international organisations, concluding treaties, the right of legation and the right to send and receive consular officers," among many others (Potyrała, 2017, p. 109) – essential credentials of statehood status. Therefore, there exists no uniform standard that objectively takes the claim of statehood into consideration and grants international recognition to new states accordingly (Tierney, 2013). IS, right after the establishment of the Caliphate, demanded the recognition of its 'supreme authority' from the rest of the world, though not as an equal member state of the international community. At the same time, it refused to "recognise the legal independence of other states" (Nielsen, 2015, p. 3), insisting that it violates their religious principles which grants them the right to control territory and create a 'pure' and 'expansionist' caliphate governed according to the laws of *Shariah* (Cronin, 2015). As a result, the Caliphate did not receive any form of recognition by the international community and both sides refused to conduct relations with each other (Shany, et al., 2014).

In all, IS was fully aware that it will never be recognised by the international community due to its extreme ideology and actions, therefore unwilling to accept and observe the rules and norms of international law concerning statehood. However, it did utilise the capacity it had to make its policies clear towards neighbouring countries and major international powers as well as non-state actors in the Jihadi sphere, as discussed in sections below.

Foundations of IS's Foreign Relations

The previous three case studies, based on the first three criteria of 1933 Montevideo Convention, demonstrate that IS projected its control over a permanent population and considerable territory which was run by an effective government, performances of which were broadcasted in hundreds of official videos. Taking that into account, it becomes additionally significant to explore IS's capacity to engage in relations with other states and non-state actors, and chart out its foreign policy. It is important to underline that the capacity to engage in relations with other states merely implies the entity's capabilities to conduct foreign affairs – meaning such capacity could lead to ties in the future without the implication of other states necessarily agreeing to establish and maintain diplomatic, economic, political, social or other relations with the entity in question (Novogrodsky, 2018). Modern states acknowledge, tacitly or explicitly, that they cannot control all people and territory by themselves. Therefore, they ascribe to what is known as the 'principle of sovereign co-existence', which "enables the enduring practices of comity, diplomacy, and the mutuality of recognition necessary for functioning State-to-State relations" (Novogrodsky, 2018, p. 58).

Before proceeding to analyse IS's foreign policy towards other states and non-state actors in detail, it is important to describe the overall makeup of IS's foreign policy

dataset and briefly explain how it reflects the Caliphate's foreign relations doctrine. Table 8.1, which is based on the analysis of 69 foreign policy-themed videos, depicts that roughly half of IS's foreign policy, spanning six hours, was communicated by their fighters, officials, and leaders – both locals and foreigners – in different formats such as on-camera interviews, vox-pops, reading communiques, and others. The other half of IS's foreign policy was communicated through other performances such as the use of interview excerpts aired on foreign media and imagery of enemies of IS speaking against the Caliphate (16%); IS subjects expressing their views on camera (10%); and projection of different methods of implementing its solutions to meet its foreign policy and national security objectives such as engaging in warfare, carrying out terror attacks abroad, and attracting Muslims from around the world to the Caliphate (8%), among others.

Table 8.1: List of performances in the Foreign Relations case study

PERFORMANCES OF FOREIGN RELATIONS	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
IS fighter(s)/vox pop/message	6:06:38	49%
Enemies of IS	2:02:20	16%
Civilian voices	1:16:12	10%
IS solution(s)/juxtaposition	1:02:06	8%
Historical narrative	0:35:33	5%
Enemy's admission of guilt	0:22:18	3%
Civilian suffering	0:19:34	3%
Punishment(s) for enemies	0:19:16	3%
What God/prophet/scholars say	0:18:49	3%
Veneration	0:12:05	2%
Media reports	0:10:10	0%
Policy statement(s) (by current/former IS leader)	0:07:45	0%
NOT CODED	0:16:03	2%
CODED	12:05:43	98%
Total length	**12:21:46**	**100%**

Figure 8.1: Screengrab from video entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) displaying the flags of anti-IS global coalition members.

'Extinction of Grayzone' – Foundation of IS's Foreign Policy Doctrine

The basis of Islamic State's foreign relations is rooted in its exclusionary doctrine which it explained in a feature published in the 7th issue of *Dabiq* (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 54). It starts with a quote of Osama bin Laden who famously said: "The world today is divided into two camps. Bush spoke the truth when he said, 'Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.' Meaning, either you are with the crusade or you are with Islam." It then claims that the "announcement of the Islamic State's expansion to Shām followed by the subsequent announcement of the Khilāfah" has brought "the grayzone to the brink of permanent extinction" (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 54). The editorial argues that Muslims no longer have "any excuse to be independent of this entity embodying them and waging war on their behalf in the face of *Kufr (unbelief)*" and that any stance of neutrality or independence would entail 'major sin' and doom them (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p.

54). It also notes that the establishment of the Caliphate in Iraq and Syria has "pushed the sincere mujāhidīn to abandon their former leaderships, who were too busy burying themselves alive in the garbage dump of history," (Al Hayat Media, 2014, p. 54) which is reference to different foreign-backed groups such as FSA, *Ahrar Al Sham*, *Jaish Al Islam*, and many others, whose leaders and fighters were branded by IS as the *Sahwat*[237]. According to Kadercan, IS's 'Manichean vision' is identical of Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' which was projected with the hope of provoking Western states and their allies into "actively degrading the so-called grayzones within and beyond their territories" (2019, p. 4).

The Caliphate, being an ideological state, was guided by its 'prophetic methodology' according to which IS claimed to have taken every step – from its existence to governance to military operations and foreign relations. According to Byman, IS pursued foreign relations like that of a revolutionary state, "aggressive and inciting alarm among neighbours" (2016, p. 129). The bedrock of IS's foreign relations, which also determined the course of its policies, is also contained in the following statement which was released by their leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi and published in *Dabiq's* inaugural issue:

> *"O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of Kufr and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of Kufr, all*

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[237] IS first coined the term *Sahwat* for the Arab Sunni tribes of Iraq who once collaborated with U.S. forces against the Islamic State of Iraq during 2000s (Lahoud, 2017). IS included Syrian groups to the mix and started attacking them as early as 2013 (Weiss & Hassan, 2015).

being led by America and Russia, and being mobilised by the Jews" (Al

Hayat Media, 2014, p. 10)

'Monotheists' Standing Alone Against the 'Polytheists'

IS, completely aware of the international community's condemnation and refusal to accept its status as anything more than a terrorist group, did not, officially or otherwise, seek ties with any other state in the world or membership of UN or any other international organisations. It also did not signal any intention of agreeing to the 'principle of sovereign co-existence'. Instead, it adopted an antagonistic and defiant approach towards the rest of the world, which was conveyed it in its official propaganda releases. One of their foundational policy videos entitled "No Respite" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), explain the Caliphate as "a State built on the prophetic methodology, striving to follow the Quran and Sunnah, not a secular State built on man-made laws whose soldiers fight for the interest of *Taghut* legislators, liars, fornicators, corporations, and for the freedoms of sodomites." Later in the video, the narrator says: "We are uncompromising in our call to *Tawhid* (monotheism). We only bow to Allah unlike the countless deviant factions raising their false banners and changing with the winds of *Jahili* (pre-Islamic polytheistic) politics." The video also notes that Iran, Turkey, and Russia – despite their differences with the West – have joined the 'Coalition of Devils' (the US-led Operation Inherent Resolve) and surmise that such a move is "because the *Millah* of *Kufr* (religion of infidels) will always unite together to fight against the truth." It then proceeds to show the flags of 60 countries, as shown in Figure 8.1, which joined the anti-IS coalition and quotes a *Hadith* which says that 12,000 soldiers will gather under 80 banners for an apocalyptic battle on the hills of Dabiq in northern Syria. The video ends with the following message: "Gather your allies, plot against us, and show us no respite. Our ally is the greatest. He is Allah and all glory belongs to Him."

Similarly, video entitled "The Religion Of Disbelief Is One" (Al Hayat Media, 2016) offers an introduction of all the enemies of IS, and claims that they have teamed up against the Caliphate despite their mutual differences. The video insists that IS's *Jihad* against its enemies is based on the instruction of God in Quran (9:36)[238]: "And fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively." The video also vows to continue fighting as asked by God in Quran (8:39): "And fight them until there is no mischief and the religion is entirely for Allah. And if they cease, then verily, Allah sees what they do."

'Us vs Them' – IS's Policies Towards Neighbouring/Regional Countries and Global Powers

After declaring the 'Extinction of the Grayzone' doctrine as the hallmark of their relations with every entity, local or foreign and state or non-state, IS embarked upon a mission of defining its policies on many of the issues confronting the Caliphate, including its stance towards major regional adversaries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, as well as major Western powers such as the USA, UK, France, and Russia. The following sections provide accounts of IS's foreign policy towards key regional and international states.

Saudi Arabia

If IS considered Iraq and Syria as its existential enemies, it deemed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as its biggest ideological rival due to the differences in the two entities' interpretations and applications of the same Salafi-Wahhabi theology. As

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[238] In the video entitled "The Religion Of Disbelief Is One" (Al Hayat Media, 2016) IS mistakenly referred to the verse as 35 instead of 36 of Surah Al Tawbah (The Repentance) and 38 instead of 39 of Surah Al Anfar (The Spoils of War).

a result, IS referred to the rulers of Saudi Arabia – Al Saud family – as Al Salul on derogatory grounds not only because of the phonetic similarity between both terms, but also the perceived similarity of characters: Abdullah Bin Ubayy Bin Salul was a major adversary of Prophet Mohammed but pretended to be his ally, which earned him the title 'chief of the hypocrites' (Winter, 2015). Historic narratives also suggest that a chapter in Quran entitled *Al Munafiqun* (the hypocrites) was revealed unto Mohammed to warn him against the plots hatched by Bin Salul and his associates (Al-Islam.org, 2014).

IS produced several documentary-style videos in which it denounced the entire existence of Saudi Arabia as a kingdom and derided the past and present Saudi rulers as well as the ruling elite. An analysis of at least a dozen videos declaring the foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia reveals that IS levelled the following four major historic accusations against the Saudi regime: (a) ruling the country based on laws most of which are contrary to *Shariah*; (b) respecting international laws; (c) aiding and supporting the 'Crusaders'; and (d) running a banking system based on usury, which is forbidden under Islamic laws. Concurrently, IS also denounced the recent cultural reforms in the kingdom and urged the youth of the Arabian peninsula to reject the new wave of debauchery and 'expel the polytheists' from the region. A key video entitled "Malicious Seed In The Imprisoned Land Of Two Holy Mosques" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) details IS's opposition to the Saudi regime and offers a critical commentary of the history of Saudi Arabia and its creation in the 20th century. The video starts with the narrative that the British Empire wanted to control the Arabian peninsula – the birthplace of Prophet Mohammed and House of Islam – hence they supported the rise of Al Saud dynasty with military and other resources, and directly helped them capture large parts of the peninsula and declare 'Saudi Arabia' – a kingdom named after the Al Saud dynasty – in 1932. It

also mentions the meeting between King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud – the founder of Saudi Arabia – and then US President Franklin Roosevelt on board the USS Quincy in 1945, as shown in Figure 8.2, which founded the kingdom's strategic relationship with the United States. The video refers the alliance as the 'Petrodollar system' due to US-Saudi oil trade, a system which IS claimed to have disrupted by introducing the gold dinar[239]. IS officials appearing in several videos accuse the House of Saud of committing treachery by abandoning the teachings of Mohammed ibn Abd Al Wahhab (an 18th century preacher who founded the Wahhabi ideology), partnering with Israel and abandoning the cause of the liberation of Jerusalem, and aiding the U.S. in its continuous wars against Muslims. Similar criticism of the Saudi regime also appears in the video entitled "Land Of Revelation Be Patient" (Wilayat Al Fallujah, 2016) which additionally condemns the Saudi support for Syrian Jihadi groups like Jabhat Al Islamiyyah, a military alliance between Jaish Al Islam and Ahrar Al Sham, and Jaish Al Fatah, a military alliance between Jabhat Al Nusra and Ahrar Al Sham. In contrast, IS attempted to project itself as fulfilling the prophecies of Mohammed and implementing the orders he supposedly issued 1400 years ago in other videos.

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[239] In video entitled "The Dark Rise Of Banknotes And The Return Of The Gold Dinar" (Al Hayat Media Center, 2015).

Figure 8.2: Screengrab from video entitled "Malicious Seed In The Imprisoned Land Of Two Holy Mosques" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) *which shows US President Franklin Roosevelt on board the USS Quincy with Saudi King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud in 1945.*

In the video entitled "House Of Salul – No Loyalty (to Muslims), No Disloyalty (to Infidels)" (Wilayat Al Junub, 2015) an IS fighter named Abu Shakur Al Shami refers to a *Hadith* in which the Prophet urged Muslims to expel the polytheists from the Arabian peninsula[240]. He then speaks about the atrocities committed by Saudi forces in Yemen and notes that their "airstrikes have not differentiated between innocent Muslims and Houthis" while condemning the latter as 'rejectionist polytheists' – a term reserved by IS for Shias. IS constantly advocated the extermination of Shia population, both fighters and civilians alike regardless of their ages or gender, due to their religious beliefs which run counter to its Salafi-Wahhabi ideology, and attacked their 'polytheistic religious rituals[241]' observed in the Kingdom's Eastern Province, including the processions that mark the martyrdom of Hussein, and commended the suicide bombing of a Shia mosque

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[240] Ibn 'Abbas said that the Prophet (ﷺ) gave three instructions: "Expel the polytheists from Arabia, reward deputations as I did". Ibn 'Abbas said "He either did not mention the third or I have been caused to forget it. Al Humaidi said on the authority of Sufyan that Sulaiman said "I do not know whether Sa'id mentioned the third and I forgot or he himself did not mention it." (Sunnah.com, 2012)

[241] In video entitled "Expel The Polytheists From Arabian Peninsula" (Wilayat Al Anbar, 2015).

near the Saudi-Yemen border[242]. IS also urged Muslims of the Arabian peninsula, especially from the regions of Nejd, Hejaz and Bahrain, to emigrate and join their brethren in the Caliphate[243], and boasted that soon it will go on to establish Diwan of Hajj and Umrah[244] "in the Peninsula of Mohammed (Arabian peninsula) by the will of God," which in other words meant that IS will keep remaining and expanding until they capture Mecca and Medina, the two holiest sites of Islam.

In the video entitled "Expel The Polytheists From Arabian Peninsula" (Wilayat Al Anbar, 2015), IS reiterated its claim of expelling 'Shia polytheists' from the Arabian peninsula and showed a suicide bomber who rammed his SVBIED into an Iraqi army border post that purportedly 'borders the Arabian peninsula'. Interesting to note here is that a drone footage shows the attack but the exact location of the border post is not provided which indicates that the attack had more symbolic than strategic value. IS also celebrated the death of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, who died on 23 January 2015, by publishing two videos entitled "Interviews About The Destruction Of The Tyrant Of The Arabian Peninsula" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) and "Joy Of The Monotheists Over The Death Of The Head Of The Apostates" (Wilayat Salahuddin, 2015). These two videos show several civilians, including foreigners, expressing their joy over the death of the 'tyrant' and cursing him for his role in targeting Muslims in the region including Afghanistan, Yemen, and more importantly the Caliphate. An unnamed man confers him the title 'Traitor of the Two Holy Mosques' which contrasts his official title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" – a trope often targeted at Saudi kings by their detractors. The overall message consistently echoed in several IS videos[245] is the call for the

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[242] In video entitled "Wish My People Could Know" (Wilayat Homs, 2015).
[243] In video entitled "And Verily Tomorrow A Close Sight" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015).
[244] In video entitled "And Verily Tomorrow A Close Sight" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015).
[245] In videos such as "A Message To My People 2 – Expel The Polytheists From The Arabian Peninsula" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015), "Messages To The Land of Two Holy Mosques" (Wilayat Al

overthrow of the Saudi regime for its role in aiding Western interventions in the Middle East, their violations of Islamic laws, and their support for anti-IS forces.

Turkey

Ankara's ties with IS have been under suspicion and scrutiny for a very long time. Ahmet Yayla (2018, p. 1) claimed in an article that Turkish border cities "became the chief logistical hubs for foreign fighters seeking to enter Syria and Iraq to join IS", and accused Ankara of treating IS fighters for free at hospitals across south-eastern Turkey, while facilitating the purchase of oil smuggled by IS. Several news reports and documentaries revealed how IS supporters from all over the world first travelled to Turkey and then got smuggled into the Caliphate, often with the knowledge and tacit approval of Turkish intelligence agencies and border guards (Stein, 2016). Capitalising on the rising power of Islamist and ultra nationalist parties in Turkey, and amidst transformation of the secular state to an Islamist-dominated model, which, according to Maziad & Sortiriadis, is evoking a "culturally hegemonic form of political Islam (as well as a form of militant Jihadism)" (2020, p. 1), IS released several Turkish-language videos which denounced the current state of Turkish politics and urged the Turks to join IS and emigrate to the Caliphate.

One video entitled "Turkey And The Fire Of Nationalism" (Al Hayat Media, 2015) is a 17-minutes documentary that provides not just a backgrounder on Turkey's recent history, including the advent of Islam in Anatolia region from the Arabian peninsula, but also includes political commentary which is highly critical of modern Turkey's founding father, Kemal Ataturk, who replaced the Ottoman

Jazirah, 2015), "The Place Where Revelations Came" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), and "They Are The Enemy Beware Of Them" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015).

empire with a staunchly secular republic after the end of World War I. Addressing the rise of Islamism and ultra-nationalism in today's Turkish republic, the video features a series of unnamed IS fighters, including a scholar as shown in Figure 8.3, who criticise aspects of Turkey's secular political system and the abandonment of its Ottoman caliphate model – founded in 1299 and disbanded in 1923 by Kemal Ataturk. They also label the nationalist 'Pan-Turanism' ideology as a *Jahili* concept, and hold it responsible for the "crusader dominance over Muslim lands and people that has led to the severing of fraternal faith-based bonds between them."

The video then switches to narration mode and provides a brief account of Turanism, its pagan origins, including the 'worshipping of idol Bozkurt' (grey wolf), and how it became part of the Turkish heritage. Appealing to the sentiments of a segment of Turkish society that reminisces the Ottoman Empire and seeks its return, Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan is then condemned in the video for growing ties with world leaders such as then US President Barack Obama, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Pope Francis, former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Russian President Vladimir Putin, by an unnamed figure – looking more of a leader than a fighter due to his elaborate screen appearance[246] as shown in Figure 8.3 – who. The video also claims that the "evil *Jahili* nationalism" led to the decline of Islam, and as a result the Turkish people started to seek honour elsewhere until "came the custom of substitution," which is a reference to the establishment of the Caliphate. The video provides an overview of the major causes of decay in Islam in Turkey, including the polytheistic practices adopted by

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[246] IS fighters appearing on screen have a distinct style of dressing which seemingly points to the hierarchy between the ranks, for example, IS clerics appear wearing pashmina headgear, have books in the background, and include more references from Quran and Hadith in their address while fighters usually appear in military fatigues, carrying weapons, speak in plain language and focus more on rhetoric. Also read "IS Clerics – Managers of the Shariah Project" section in Population case study for more details.

the Ottoman Empire towards its decline in 19th century and the "infiltration of (Sufi) cultish whims and practices," which led to the "end of the Muslims' state." The video also includes excerpts of Kemal Ataturk's founding speeches in which he rejected 'revelations from heaven' (Quran), and pledged to transform Turkey into a secular state which will become a role model for future generations. The narrator claims Ataturk was a Jewish secularist who left "the Turks with only poverty and loss." Interestingly, unlike other unfounded claims made by IS, some historical accounts do suggest that Ataturk had Dönmeh ancestors, that is, Jews who converted to Islam (Scholem, 2007). The video also addresses the 'Kurdish question' by claiming that the calls of Kurdish nationalism were nurtured by the Jews and urges Kurdish people to cling to Quran and Sunnah and unite "under the Imam of Muslims and their authority in the *Khilafah*." It also accuses Turkey, a "member of the crusader alliance NATO," of waging a war with Muslims in Afghanistan and other countries, and acting as the West's "strong arm in the region."

Figure 8.3: Screengrab from video entitled "Legislation Is Not But For God" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) where an unnamed Turkish man, believed to be a scholar, speaks on camera. He also appeared in another video entitled "Turkey And The Fire Of Nationalism" (Al Hayat Media, 2015).

As part of its efforts to entice Turkish Muslims to cross the border and move into the Caliphate, an unnamed Turkish IS fighter claims that life in IS territory is 'stable' with markets full of products and people are buying and selling commodities, and insists that the "traffic police, public services, Islamic courts, and every other diwan is functioning properly while Muslims happily take strolls in the parks." The video ends on the declaration that the "Islamic State is not in need of you but it is rather you who are in need of living under the wing of this religion" and strongly urges Turkish Muslims to strengthen the Caliphate and continue migrating to the "House of Islam." Similar harsh criticism of Turkish politics also appears in the video entitled "Legislation Is Not But For God" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), which labels it as a system based on the "set of slogans and propaganda of the infidels" and calls on Turkish Muslims to boycott the elections and support IS's 'jihad against the enemies of Islam'. The video condemns Turkey's government and foreign policy and compares it with IS's Caliphate which is run according to the rulings of *Shariah*. It again urges Turks and other Muslims to come to the Caliphate "if they want to live in a State that rules according to Quran and Sunnah; want (to live in a) Caliphate (under a caliph), away from unbelief and its followers."

IS failed to capture Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani in late 2014, and suffered considerable losses in northern Syria at the hands of US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Russia-backed SAA, and its allied militias during late 2015 and early 2016. As a result, Turkey decided to intervene militarily and replace IS forces with Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other Jihadi groups[247] in

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[247] Operation Euphrates Shield was executed by TAF (Turkish Armed Forces) and FSA components. The elements from the TAF consisted of conventional units of the Land Forces Command and battalions of the Special Forces Command (SFC). The FSA constituents were formed by *Ahrar Al Sham*, the *Sultan Murad* Division, *Jaish Al Tahrir*, *Al Mu'tasim* Brigade, the *Nour Al Din Al Zinki*

northern Syrian provinces of Aleppo, Hasakah and Raqqah, a move that was heavily criticised by IS in its propaganda videos. One such video entitled "Cross Shield" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016) offers a take on FSA-led military campaign entitled 'Operation Euphrates Shield', which was backed by the Turkish Army. It contains a very aggressive stance towards Ankara and, interestingly, begins with an excerpt from Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi's speech in which he denounces Turkey's role against the Caliphate, condemns its cooperation with US-led coalition forces by allowing them to use Turkish soil against IS forces in northern Iraq and parts of Syria, and warns of grave consequences for Turkish President Erdogan, which was a clear indication that the top IS leadership viewed Ankara's move as a clear betrayal. The video also features a series of clips in which IS fighters are shown fiercely attacking Turkish-backed FSA fighters in Aleppo countryside, including a string of SVBIED attacks on enemy installations. The video also includes a rousing speech delivered by then IS spokesman Abu Hasan Al Muhajir in which he urges IS fighters to continue fiercely attacking the enemies of IS, especially the 'apostate forces' backed by Turkey. The video shows the bodies of several civilians, including children, and squarely blames the "slaughter of Muslims on the indiscriminate shelling by the apostate Turkish army." Moreover, the video also features an impassioned speech by Abu Hasan Al Turki, a Turkish foreign fighter, in which he asks the Turkish 'monotheists' what they are waiting for, declares Turkey as the 'land of jihad', and urges them to "set alight, demolish, and blow up the country just like their soldiers and allies are doing in the Caliphate and every day killing of our brothers." In the end of the video, two captured Turkish soldiers named Fathi Shahin and Saftar Tash are burnt alive with a warning of further such reprisals if Turkish President Erdogan does not change the course of his policy towards IS.

Movement, the *Salahaddin* Brigade, and the *Hamza* Division. A total of about 4,000 TAF troops and 7,000 FSA militants directly participated in OES (Yeşiltaş, et al., 2017).

Jordan

The rift between IS and the Hashemite Kingdom dates back to the days when Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, born in the Jordanian city of Zarqa, founded Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006 and masterminded a triple suicide bombing in Amman in 2005 which led to the deaths of 57 people (Ma'ayeh, 2015). The rivalry came to its head when Jordan joined the US-led Coalition's air force campaign against IS and started bombing targets in IS-controlled territory. IS declared its policy towards Jordan in a video entitled "Healing The Believers' Chests" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015) which was released in the aftermath of its burning alive of Jordanian air force pilot Muadh Al Kasasbeh who was captured by IS forces on 24 December 2014 after his F-16 warplane crashed into a lake near Raqqah while conducting a bombing mission (Smith-Spark & Martinez, 2015). The 22-minute video begins with a clip from an interview of Jordanian King Abdullah II with Charlie Rose of CBS 60 Minutes[248], in which the monarch admits that every single Jordanian pilot volunteered to target IS. The video condemns the US-led NATO campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq and accuses Jordan of acting as "a launchpad for the forces attacking Iraq whose people tasted the torment of death and destruction" while blaming its special forces and intelligence units of aiding the 'crusaders'. Interesting to note here is that the video carefully omits any mention of the Taliban or Al Qaeda in the Afghan context as such a move would legitimise their jihad against occupation forces in Afghanistan, and weaken IS's claims that its affiliate Wilayat Khurasan is the sole Jihadi representative in the Central Asian country. The video also includes an on-camera confession by Al Kasasbeh in which he appeals to the families of other pilots to stop sending their sons on bombing

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[248] The interview was broadcasted by CBS This Morning on 5 December 2014 when Jordan's King Abdullah was in Washington DC to meet then US President Barack Obama.

missions that strike 'Islamic targets' in order to avoid the fate that awaits him. After juxtaposing details of different laser-guided missiles with images of dead and injured children, so as to show the proof of destruction caused by the sophisticated Western weaponry, the video then shows a sequence where Al Kasasbeh is wearing an orange jumpsuit and walking amidst the rubble of damaged buildings, seemingly caused by airstrikes, as seen in Figure 8.4. The scene is interspersed with images of civilian deaths, presented as Muadh's flashbacks, who is then put in a cage, sprayed with inflammable liquid and then burnt alive. A tractor on stand-by drops the debris on the cage when the immolated pilot was undergoing immense pain and breathing his last breath. In order to defend such a controversial public execution, the video then quotes a ruling attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah, a renowned historical Salafi ideologue, which says: "If in public exemplary punishment there is a call to [the unbelievers] to believe or a deterrence for them from hostility, then it is here [a matter of] carrying out the prescribed punishments and legal jihad." The video also offers a reward of 100 gold dinars to whoever kills a Crusader pilot.
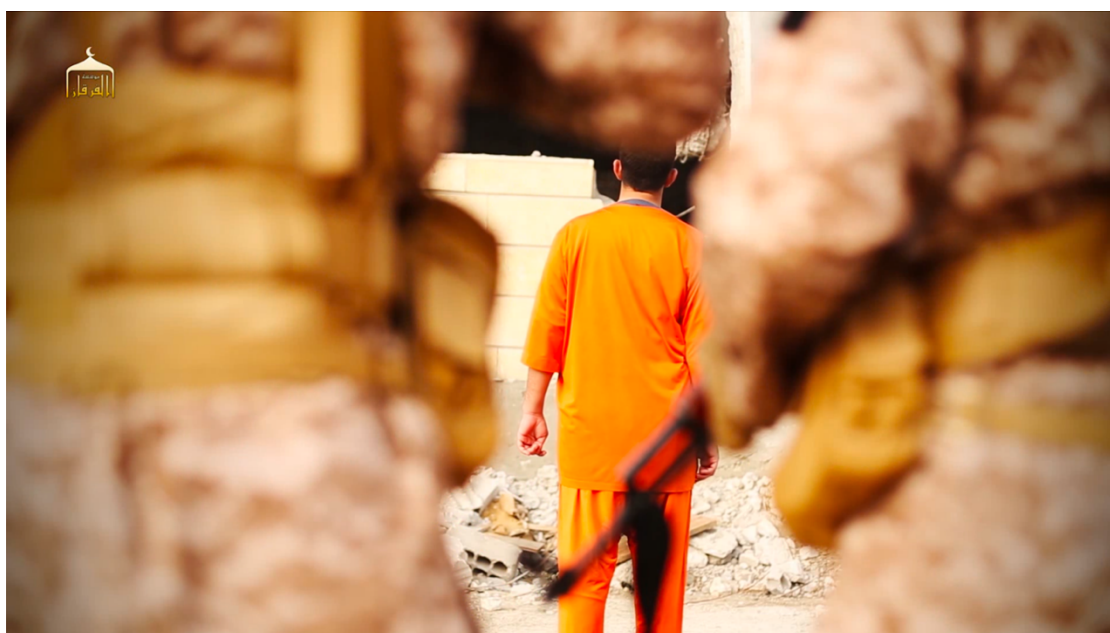
Figure 8.4: Screengrab from video entitled "Healing The Believers' Chests" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2015) in which slain Jordanian air force pilot Muadh Al Kasasbeh can be seen inspecting a damaged building under the watch of IS fighters.

IS also projected in a series of videos[249] the public reaction over its decision to execute the Jordanian pilot by burning him alive, which also doubles as an effort to justify their decision and minimise the damage caused to their already notorious reputation worldwide, especially in the Muslim world. The videos feature what appears to be official religious clerics who first build the case against the coalition airstrikes in general, and the one carried out by Jordanian air force pilot in particular, by citing widespread civilian casualties resulting from such attacks, glimpses of which are shown in the video as proof. They assure the viewers that the "chests of believers have been healed" by immolating Al Kasasbeh, and justify the brutal execution by referring to a verse in the Quran (9:14), which says: "Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them and satisfy the breasts of a believing people." The clerics also provide additional justifications by claiming that Prophet Mohammed's successor Abu Bakr – the first caliph of Islam – ordered the burning of individuals, and so did Ali – Mohammed's son in law and the fourth caliph of Islam – and Khalid bin Al Waleed, who was the commander-in-chief of the Muslim army during the reign of Abu Bakr.

IS, in several of its follow up videos, reiterated its stance of following the footsteps of Allah's Messenger in his harshness towards the disbelievers, and emulating the examples set by his companions who punished people with fire in retaliation for the purpose of terrorising and making examples out of them. A video entitled "Cross Shield" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2016) quotes a verse from Quran (16:126), which

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[249] In videos entitled "Message To Jordan" (Al I'tisam Media, 2015), "Joy Of The Muslims Over The Burning Of Jordanian Pilot" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), "Joy Of The Muslims Over The Retribution From Jordanian Pilot" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2015), "Interviews About Jordanian Pilot" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015) and "Message From Muslims To The Family Of The Pilot" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

says: "And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed." Interestingly, the second part of the very verse says: "But if you are patient – it is better for those who are patient," which IS conveniently ignored while defending the immolation of Al Kasasbeh. The unnamed officials appearing in many of the videos describe two camps of people who received this news: the former celebrating and expressing joy over the death of a man bent on killing innocent civilians while the latter grieving and condemning the justified revenge carried out by IS. They also directly address Al Kasasbeh's family and ask them to contemplate about the deaths and maiming of countless civilians, including women and children, by the bombs dropped by the pilots that are part of the US-led coalition against IS, and clarify that Muadh was killed for aiding and abetting the 'crusaders' who are carrying out attacks against Muslims. The videos also feature opinions of several civilians, including underage boys, who express their satisfaction over the immolation of the Jordanian pilot and justify the killing on the basis of retribution.

Israel

IS time and again faced criticism for not being anti-Israel with some opponents even claiming that IS received support from Tel Aviv and did not stage any significant attacks despite occupying the territory bordering the Zionist state (Perry, 2016). In fact, former Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon claimed in an interview that IS apologised for launching an attack on Israeli forces in Occupied Golan Heights in November 2016 (O'Connor, 2017). IS, partly in response to criticism and also to reinforce its anti-Semitic ideology, published a number of videos that condemn both Jews and Israel, and issue threats of attacks in future.

One video that illustrates IS's antisemitism is entitled "Breaking Of The Borders And Slaughtering Of The Jews" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015). This 17-minute long documentary features a historical narrative that accuses the Jews of plotting against Prophet Mohammed and distorting the texts of Torah and Gospel. It also reiterates a *Hadith* attributed to the Prophet in which he urges Muslims to expel unbelievers from the Arabian peninsula, and sheds light on the Zionist movement which led to the creation of Israel in 1948. The narrator mentions another *Hadith* about the Armageddon when Muslim armies will clash with the Jews and annihilate them completely. The video then features an IS fighter from Palestine named Abu Sa'ad Al Maqdisi who accuses Israel of seeking protection not just from powerful Western countries such as the USA, but also from the Arab leadership, and quotes the late Jihadi ideologue Al Zarqawi as saying that "we are fighting in Iraq while keeping our eyes on Jerusalem." The IS fighter also incites Palestinians to keep attacking the Israeli occupation forces and glorifies the attacks on Israeli civilians waged by Palestinian men armed with knives and other basic weapons. He also denounces Hamas for compromising Islamic principles by joining the democratic process and seeking power to implement its un-Islamic agenda. In the last scene of the video, the masked fighter, dressed in olive green overalls resembling that of the Israeli armed forces, as seen in Figure 8.5, addresses the audience in Hebrew in which he says that "Jews are Muslims' enemy number one" due to their occupation of Muslim lands and pledges to liberate those lands with slaughter and bloodshed. He also mentions the breaking of the Sykes-Picot border and vows that IS will keep breaking all the borders until they reach Palestine. The video ends with a footage set in an unnamed captured town where an IS fighter claims out of joy that God willing they are coming over to Al Quds (Jerusalem).

وهذه رسالة جادة مهمة وواضحة لجميع اليهود، العدو الأول للمسلمين

Figure 8.5: Screengrab from video entitled "Breaking Of The Borders And Slaughtering Of The Jews" (Wilayat Damascus, 2015) where an IS fighter from Palestine named Abu Sa'ad Al Maqdisi speaks on camera.

Several other videos condemn Israeli aggression towards Palestinians, advocate further attacks on both Israeli civilians and military personnel, incite suicide bombings and stabbings against the Jews, and accuse Hamas of abandoning jihad and surrendering to the Jews[250]. IS also vowed[251] that it will soon "unfurl the flag of the Caliphate over Al Aqsa Mosque" in Occupied Jerusalem as a proof to dispel claims that it is complacent towards Israel and is receiving active support from the Zionist state.

Iran

One of the countries that responded very early to the IS threat was Iran which sent arms to Kurdish Peshmerga, dispatched its military advisers to Iraq and Syria, mobilised Iraqi militias and sent tonnes of weapons to aid their operations against

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[250] In videos entitled "Return The Terror To The Jews (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), "A Message To Our People In Jerusalem" (Wilayat Aleppo, 2015), "A Message To The Defiant In The Third Holiest Land" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2015), "O Jews We Are Coming" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015) and "Where Are The Insurgents Of Palestine" (Wilayat Homs, 2015).
[251] In video entitled "O The People of The Land of Egypt" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).

the Caliphate (Collard, 2014). Due to the historical animosity of Salafi Jihadis towards the Shia sect – who form the majority of Iranian Muslims – and Iran's role as their guardian in the Middle East and beyond, IS perceives Tehran as bad an enemy as the USA, if not worse (Axworthy, 2015). IS published several videos that not just feature historical narratives against Shias and the patronage they receive from the Islamic Republic of Iran, they also condemn their campaign against the Caliphate and warn of dire consequences. In the video entitled "Persia – From Yesterday Till Today" (Wilayat Diyala, 2017), IS presents the historical narrative of how Islam reached Persia after the defeat of Sassanid Empire at the hands of Arab Islamic armies in modern day Iraq in 7th century AD, and blames Safavid kings for the massacres of Muslims in Persia and the forceful imposition of Shia faith upon the masses. It claims that these massacres led to the eradication of Sunni Islam from the country while also accuses the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties of continuing the persecution of Islam and promoting Shia beliefs as the official religion of Persia. The video then focuses on the Islamic revolution of 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah and turned Iran into a 'tyrannical theocratic republic'. The narrator then denounces the top Iranian leadership, as shown in Figure 8.6, and accuses it of fomenting unrest in other parts of the Muslim world through its proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas. The video also claims that at least 18,068 Sunnis have been hanged by the Shia regime since it came to power in 1979 without elaborating how it obtained the specific estimate. The video also lambastes Shia beliefs towards Prophet Mohammed's wives and companions – a major bone of contention between the two major Islamic sects – and urges Sunnis in Iran to rise up and carry out attacks in major Iranian cities. It then proceeds to condemn US-Iran nuclear deal and warns Iran to end their for support for PMUs, Kurdish militias and other groups in Iraq and Syria or face consequences. The video also claims that IS has reached very close to the Iraq-Iran border after

capturing several locations in Iraq's Diyala province, and plays a few clips of clashes between IS and Iran-backed forces and caskets of Iranian soldiers, including high-ranking General Hameed Taghvaee, claiming that they died while fighting IS. The video includes the beheading of three alleged Badr Organisation fighters, backed by Iran and part of the PMUs, and ends with a *Hadith* which says: "You will attack Arabia and Allah will enable you to conquer it, then you would attack Persia and He would make you to conquer it" (Sunnah.com, 2009).

Figure 8.6: Screengrab from video entitled "Persia – From Yesterday Till Today" (Wilayat Diyala, 2017) which denounces the Iranian political leadership.

Another anti-Iran propaganda video entitled "Crematorium Of The Magi" (Wilayat Al Junub, 2017) accuses Iran of filling the void after the toppling of Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein in 2003 and turning Iraq into its proxy, thanks to Iraqi politicians such as former prime ministers Nuri Al Maliki and Haider Al 'Abadi. IS was also very critical of Iran's propping up of PMUs in Iraq and accused them of suppressing the Sunnis in the country. Reigniting the historic rivalry between the Sunnis and Shias, IS constantly targeted Shia religious beliefs and denounced them for believing that "the Quran is a defective and undivine book." The video also mentions the attacks carried out by IS fighters in Tehran on 7 June 2017 and

venerates the four IS fighters who were killed by Iranian security forces. The video also includes a message in Farsi language urging the Sunni Iranian youth to leave the country and migrate to the Islamic State in order to perform jihad against the 'rejectionist' state.

North African States

In a handful of videos addressing North African countries and their socio-political affairs, one representative example is the video entitled "Countries Of The Islamic West" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2016). In this video, IS's rhetoric starts with a historical narrative of how Islam reached the northern edges of the continent from the Arabian peninsula and spread from the banks of Nile to the shores of Atlantic Ocean during the reigns of early Muslim caliphs.

Other IS propaganda videos[252] sternly accuse the North African leaders of spreading apostasy, rejectionism and moral decadence, including music concerts, luxury cars, banking system, football fan culture, nationalism, pro-LGBTQ+ movements, among others, and uses its clerics to quote a few historical Islamic decrees about the rule of tyrants and the importance of waging jihad against them in order to incite the North African youth. The clerics specifically incite IS supporters to attack policemen and armed forces in order to free the 'Muslim prisoners' locked up in jails. The videos also address the political issues related to North African states, especially the role of Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia and dubs them a 'secular party' instead of an Islamic one, while urging Tunisians to entirely boycott the democratic process and rise up against the secular system.

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[252] In videos entitled "Countries Of The Islamic West" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2016), "Land Of Conquerors" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2016)

Videos such as "They Bewitched The Eyes Of The People And Struck Terror Into Them" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) and "To The Knights Of The Islamic Maghreb" (Al Furat Media, 2016) also focus on Western colonial oppression of North African states, especially Libya, urge Muslims to repeat their struggle against the Western colonisers, and denounce all Islamist militias in Libya for their opposition to IS in the country. The video condemns both former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi and current President General Abdel Fattah Al Sisi for their perceived 'anti-Islamic' activities, and lambastes Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al Zawahiri for his support to Muslim Brotherhood. In all, IS considered all the North African leadership – whether democratically elected leaders, monarchs, or military dictators – as its enemies and urged its supporters to overthrow them in order to install a caliphate.

Western powers

Much of IS's propaganda videos is directed at Western countries, especially at the USA, UK, France, and Australia. IS refers to them as the 'crusader coalition' due to their role in mobilising a coalition of fighters and using them in anti-IS military campaigns. IS used a number of ways to convey its policies towards Western countries, including the use of hostages and featuring them in a series of propaganda videos. One such example is that of kidnapped British journalist John Cantlie, as shown in Figure 8.7, who IS used as a mouthpiece to convey its foreign policy towards the American and British governments. After his abduction in late 2012, IS first featured Cantlie in September 2014 in a six-episodes video series entitled "Lend Me Your Ears" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2014), in which he succinctly put forward IS's foreign policy talking points from his perspective as a long-term prisoner and observer. In the first episode of the series, Cantlie claims that he has been abandoned by his government, and quotes Michael Scheuer,

former CIA officer turned vigorous anti-intervention campaigner, who condemned then US President Obama for getting involved in a war with IS without having a clue about it. Cantlie adds that "Obama and his allies were well and truly caught by surprise" and warns of a "potential mess in the making" not seen since Vietnam war.

Figure 8.7: Screengrab from video entitled "Lend Me Your Ears" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2014), in which John Cantlie appears on camera wearing an orange jumpsuit.

In second episode of the series, Cantlie attacks Obama's policies towards IS, including the decision to arm the "undisciplined, corrupt, and largely ineffective fighting force" known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and points to reports of FSA indirectly selling Western-supplied weapons to IS. Cantlie rejects Obama's claims of slaughter committed by IS fighters and counter-claims that IS "did not kill the Christian and Yezidi women and children of Mosul and Sinjar" – terming it as an undeniable fact. He also makes it clear that IS regards Shias not as Muslims but apostates "who claim to be Muslims while worshipping the dead." He reiterates that the Islamic State does have a vision, refuting Obama's claim in which he deplored IS for not having any vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in

their way, and insists that "they have created an autonomous and functioning Caliphate."

In the third episode, Cantlie continues with his criticism of Obama's foreign and military policy against IS and cites an article published on Warontherocks website[253] in which the author said that "ISIL is an inherently resilient organisation." Cantlie then claims that the "IS do not mind if nobody attacks them or if everybody attacks them. They are patient and time means little to them" while adding that, instead of relying on financial donors for funds, IS makes "financial gains from war booty and battlefield successes." He mentions the executions of his three previous cellmates and quotes IS as saying that "the deaths are retaliations for the airstrikes" which is "in response to your (Western) aggression." The captured journalist maintains that for the "Islamic State, it is a win-win situation. If these executions force public outcry or a policy change, that is a huge victory. And if they only goad our governments into dropping more bombs and spending millions more dollars, making our countries weaker in the process, then that is a victory too." He also condemns then British Prime Minister David Cameron for not negotiating his release and using the deaths of Western hostages to fan the flames of war against IS, while adding that IS fighters eagerly await the arrival of Western soldiers in Iraq and Syria.

In episode 4, Cantlie points out the war-weariness of the Western public and blames their governments of engaging in more wars rather than addressing the economic difficulties of the populace. He also accuses the Western media of "drip

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[253] Fishman, B. (2014). *Don't BS the American People about Iraq, Syria, and ISIL.* WarOnTheRocks.com. Available at: https://warontherocks.com/2014/08/dont-bs-the-american-people-about-iraq-syria-and-isil/ [Accessed on 8 June 2020]

feeding the public until... what a surprise! We are embroiled in a full-scale war."

Cantlie labels the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as 'failures' and sarcastically asks if

it is worth spending trillions of dollars more to "avoid another spectre of 9/11?" He

assures the viewers that the *Mujahideen* are "very happy to sit back and watch the

West bankrupt itself fighting them." Cantlie also rejects reports published in

Western press which paint a grim picture of life under the Caliphate while adding

that millions of people are living in the lands controlled by IS. He also implies that

both the Western governments and media are engaged in a "cunningly symbiotic

relationship" in order to whip an anti-IS war hysteria.

The fifth episode of "Lend Me Your Ears" talks about the state of captives held by

IS and how six European countries negotiated the release of 16 prisoners while the

US and the UK refused to engage into any talks in order to free their citizens.

Cantlie reveals that IS had made an offer to free the American and British hostages

in exchange for the release of "Muslim prisoners and their transfer to the

Caliphate". He reads from what he claims was an exchange of emails between IS

and the families of the American captives, which points out IS's demand of getting

Pakistani neuroscientist Dr. Afia Siddiqui released from the US jail. Cantlie

reiterates that "our governments have chosen not to negotiate with the Islamic

State through our families and friends and refused to secure any deal for us,

making us feel worthless."

In the sixth and final episode of the "Lend Me Your Ears" series, the British

journalist discloses news of a botched rescue mission undertaken by US special

forces on 4 July 2014 to free American and Britisher prisoners from IS captivity.

He contrasts the use of force to free hostages held by IS to that of negotiations with

the Taliban to free US Army soldier Beaudry Robert Bergdahl in exchange of five

Taliban members released from the Guantanamo Bay detention centre. Interesting to note here is that Cantlie avoids using the word Taliban and says "Afghans" instead, again alluding to IS's policy of not giving any credit to its Afghan Jihadi rival. He decries the fact that the American and British governments decided to use force to get him and his fellow captives rescued and as a result James Foley, David Haynes, and Steven Sotloff lost their lives. IS beheaded the three prisoners separately and published the execution videos as gross propaganda statements. In the end of the video, Cantlie denounces the US and UK governments for abandoning them and not discussing their situation "with the families of hostages, with the Islamic State, and treating our lives like some sort of gamble." He vows to continue to speak out against the "deceitful arrogance of our governments for as long as the *Mujahideen* allow me to live."

Separately, IS released a video entitled "A Message To America" (Al Furqan Media Foundation, 2014), in response to the alleged botched US special forces operation to free American captives, as mentioned by Cantlie. In the video, IS condemned then US President Obama for directing the US air force to attack IS, and featured a footage of James Wright Foley in which he asked his friends, family, and loved ones to "rise up against his real killers – the US government" and calls upon his brother, who is an active US armed forces serviceman, to think about the lives getting destroyed as a result of the actions of US army, including himself. The video also features the so-called 'Jihadi John[254]' – a man dressed in black overalls and facemask and holding a knife in his left hand believed to be Kuwait-born, London-based Mohammed Emwazi. He claims in his short speech that the US-led coalition is "no longer fighting an insurgency but an Islamic army and state that

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[254] Verkaik, R. (2016). Jihadi John – The Making of a Terrorist. Oneworld. London.

has been accepted by a large number of Muslims worldwide" and proclaims that any aggression towards IS was effectively an aggression towards Muslims. He then proceeds to behead the American prisoner and in the next scene presents Steven Joel Sotloff, a dual US-Israeli citizen alive on camera, warning his life also depends on Obama's next actions.

Once the US-led coalition's anti-IS campaign reached its peak, IS released several videos[255] that not just feature audio messages of slain IS spokesman Abu Mohammed Al Adnani, in which he likened IS to the early Islamic empire which fought the Roman (Byzantine) and Sassanid (Persian) empire, but also show IS fighters locked in fierce fighting with US-led SDF forces, includes clips of suicide bombings on coalition positions, as they inched closer to Raqqah, IS's de-facto capital. IS also used footage of civilian casualties, especially young boys and girls, as proof of US-led coalition's indiscriminate attacks. It also presented Dr. Abu Yousuf Al Australi, IS fighter from Australia shown in Figure 8.8, who treated patients as a doctor yet fought on the frontlines as a soldier. In the video entitled *"The Fertile Nation 2" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017)*, he incites other Muslims to wage lone-wolf attacks in their own countries. In its videos directed at the US-led coalition, IS fighters claimed they are happy that (then) US President Donald Trump was sending troops to Iraq and Syria which will finally give them a chance to attack and seek revenge directly. IS also used groups of foreign fighters from Western countries in its videos, including in the video entitled "Wait, We Are Also Waiting" (Al Hayat Media, 2014) which was shot on a hillock overlooking the northern Syrian town of Dabiq[256], who urged other Muslims to migrate to the

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[255] In videos entitled "The Fertile Nation 2" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017), "Inside The Khilafah – 2" (Al Hayat Media, 2017), "Inside The Khilafah – 6" (Al Hayat Media, 2017).
[256] IS propaganda put the name Dabiq on the forefront of its propaganda claiming it is mentioned in the 'End of Times' prophecies attributed to Prophet Mohammed (McCants, 2016).

"land of Muslims and fight in the path of Allah against the whole world which has gathered against the Muslims."

Figure 8.8: Screengrab from video entitled "The Fertile Nation 2" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2017) where IS medic Dr. Abu Yousuf Al Australi appears in the trenches dressed as a fighter.

IS also justified major terror attacks in Western cities and termed them as retaliations in response to their military operations in Iraq and Syria. Several videos[257] not just feature clips of terror attacks claimed by IS and project the aftermath of terrorist incidents, such as bloodied scenes of carnage and confusion, but also reveal footage where more fighters can be seen receiving combat training to carry out further terror attacks. IS's strategy behind publishing such videos was to sow fear and provoke anti-Muslim policies in the West, such as former US President Donald Trump's visa ban against citizens of six Muslim countries, which was reportedly welcomed by IS[258] and instead coax Muslims to seek revenge on IS's behalf. Some videos[259], while documenting the indiscriminate destruction of

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[257] In videos entitled "Blood For Blood" (Al Battar Media Foundation, 2016), "France Blew Up 3" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015), "My Revenge" (Al Hayat Media, 2015), "If You Want To Save Your Life Either Convert To Islam Or Pay Jizyah" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015).

[258] Engel, P. (2017) *ISIS is reportedly calling Trump's travel ban 'the blessed ban.'* Business Insider. Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com.au/isis-trump-blessed-ban-2017-2 [Accessed on 1 August 2020].

[259] In videos entitled "On Their Footsteps" (Furat Media, 2016), "The Most Effective For Us And The Most Horrible For Them" (Wilayat Ninawa, 2016), and "The Failed French Bombings" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015).

civilian lives and property caused by airstrikes carried out by the US-led and

Russia-led coalitions, also feature interviews of bereaved civilians, as shown in

Figure 8.9, that condemn the indiscriminate air strikes and deem IS's terror

attacks as 'retaliatory and justified'. IS videos also contain profiles of terror attacks

in Western countries and their perpetrators, and include their recorded 'pre-

martyrdom videos' in which they urge other Muslim men to carry out terrorist

attacks to avenge the crusader assaults and civilian deaths taking place in the

Caliphate.

Figure 8.9: Screengrab from video entitled "Betrayed By Your State" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2016) which features the account of an alleged civilian from a Syrian town named Al Quriyah in Deir Ez Zour province who claims that an airstrike killed his entire family and destroyed his home.

Russia

Islamic State's rivalry with Russia technically began in October 2015 when Moscow

initiated its aerial campaign to support the Syrian army and shore up President

Bashar Al Assad's dwindling territorial control over the country at that time.

However, in the video entitled "The Caucasus – The Disease And The Medicine"

(Al Hayat Media, 2016), IS recounts Chechnya's wars of independence, which took

place from 1994-96 and again from 1999-2004, and claims that at least 100,000

Muslims died. It claims that another 200,000 suffered casualties while 500,000 had to flee their homes due to Russian President Vladimir Putin's atrocious war that also uprooted the Chechen separatist movement. IS also condemns Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's regime and accuses it of spreading 'polytheistic Sufi practices' in Chechnya and other neighbouring republics. Russian aerospace bombing campaign reached its peak following IS's recapturing of Palmyra in December 2016. In a video entitled "Total Bankruptcy" (Furat Media, 2017) IS claimed it downed Russian helicopters near Homs and Palmyra, and blamed intense Russian bombing for the deaths of thousands of civilians and the displacement of hundreds of civilians from Aleppo. It also mentions the evacuation of civilians on the so-called 'green buses' after Jihadis led by *Jabhat Al Nusra* and *Ahrar Al Sham* withdrew from the area following a deal between Russia and Turkey. Rejecting the deal, IS claimed it has executed several 'Russian informants' as part of retaliation attacks and presented a captured Russian intelligence officer named Evgeny Petrenkov who on-camera confessed to his involvement in the plot of infiltrating into an elite group of Chechen fighters led by Omar Al Shishani and assassinating him. The end of the video features the beheading of the alleged Russian agent which is carried out by a Russian-speaking man who threatens further executions as revenge for the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his accomplices. In the video entitled "Blood For Blood" (Al Battar Media Foundation, 2016) IS also claimed the bombing of Russian airline Metrojet aircraft, in which 224 people lost their lives, and warned Russia of further revenge attacks should it continue aiding the Syrian regime forces.

IS's Engagement with Non-State (Jihadi) Actors

Since the declaration of the Caliphate in July 2014, IS transformed into a terrorist phenomenon for a number of reasons, chief among them is the pledges of

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allegiance it received from major Jihadist organisations around the world, and the diplomacy it engaged in in order to incorporate them into its Caliphate as 'external provinces' (Zenn, 2019). These external provinces became even more vital to the Islamic State project after the total dismantlement of the Caliphate by the end of 2018, and became an integral part of IS's legacy. During its heyday, IS drew a large number of fighters, including leaders, to its ranks from North African countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. An estimate suggests that 7,000 fighters comprised the Tunisian contingent, making it "the largest foreign contingent fighting in Syria" (Soufan, 2018, p. 80).

The following sub-sections take a stock of IS's policy towards other Jihadi organisations that were operating in an independent capacity before the establishment of the Caliphate in July 2014, and the diplomacy it engaged in order to co-opt these non-state actors. It is important to clarify that IS's own affiliates such as Islamic State in Arabian Peninsula (ISAP), Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP), Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) are not included in this study as they were founded by IS's supporters or by former Al Qaeda members who defected from Al Qaeda International (AQI) due to internal feud or policy differences, and operated as IS-affiliates ever since their inception in 2014.

Ansar Bait Al Maqdis

Ansar Bait Al Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem, ABM) was a Salafi-Jihadist group based in Egypt's Sinai peninsula, which also borders Israel. The group –
whose roots date back to the clandestine network of battle-hardened Jihadis in Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s and ties to foreign-trained militants engaged in their fight against the Egyptian security establishment – was founded in 2011 in the

wake of the Egyptian Revolution, and quickly became one of the most active militant groups in the country (Jumet & Gulmohamad, 2023). ABM exploited the grievances of local Bedouin tribes in north Sinai and sought to establish an Islamic Emirate in the Sinai peninsula and to liberate Jerusalem from Israeli occupation, and started carrying out a number of attacks against Egyptian security forces, as well as against Israeli targets.

ABM pledged allegiance to IS Caliph Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi on 10 November 2014, and became an official province of IS with its name changed to Wilayat Sinai (Kingsley, et al., 2014). It was the most significant *Ba'yat* for IS as it came from a group which had already "proven itself to be the sole and uncontested Jihadi actor" in the region (Awad & Tadros, 2015, p. 1). The video entitled "Ba'yat to the Caliph Ibrahim Ibn Awwad al-Badri," (Wilayat Al Fallujah, 2014) shows a masked man, believed to be group commander Abu Osama Al Masri (Mohamedou, 2018), reading a statement in which he pledged allegiance on behalf of the group, and said: "We have no choice but to welcome the invitation of God's caller. We therefore, pledge religious and political loyalty to Caliph Ibrahim." The video was released on the back of territorial conquests by IS in Iraq and Syria and was seen as a major boost for the Caliphate, as it gave it a foothold in Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula bringing it very close to Israel's borders. The video was also significant because it indicated ABM's abandonment of its goal of establishing an independent Islamic Emirate in the Sinai Peninsula. While IS showed jubilation amongst its ranks over the pledge it was widely condemned not just by Al Qaeda but also by the Egyptian government. ABM's *Ba'yat* marked a turning point in the group's history as it was previously seen as a relatively localised threat, but its pledge of allegiance turned it into a global player. IS also published a number of other videos such as "They Bewitched The Eyes Of The People And Struck Terror Into Them" (Wilayat

Al Khayr, 2016) and "To The Knights Of The Islamic Maghreb" (Al Furat Media, 2016), in which it emphasised the affairs in Egypt, and praised its affiliate for waging a 'forceful' armed insurgency against President Sisi's military regime. The video entitled "Indeed With Hardship Comes Ease" (Wilayat Fallujah, 2016) is another good example which begins with an historic narration of Egypt's pre and post-Islamic era but heavily focuses on its attacks on the Egyptian security forces in the country's north-eastern Sinai province.

As a result of joining IS, Wilayat Sinai's attacks became more frequent and sophisticated. The newly-founded external province went on to carry out a number of high-profile attacks in the years that followed, including the killing of 30 Egyptian soldiers in October 2014; downing of Russian-operated Metrojet flight 9268 in October 2015; massacring of 300 worshippers at a mosque in Egypt's North Sinai Governorate in November 2017; and an assassination attempt on Egyptian Interior Minister Magdy Abdel Ghaffar in December 2017, among others. The external province's operational capacity was severely downgraded by the time of Al Baghdadi's death in October 2019, thanks to a wide-ranging counterterrorism campaign named 'Comprehensive Operation – Sinai' waged by the Egyptian army (Saul, 2019).

Ansar Al Shariah

After the fall of Libyan autocrat Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, thousands of Libyans travelled to Syria to take part in the civil war on behalf of Jihadi organisations such as *Jabhat Al Nusra* in late 2011. Later they formed their own distinct fighting force known as the *Katibat Al Battar Al Libi* (the Libyan Battar Brigade) (Colquhoun, 2016). This force ultimately merged into ISIS when Al Baghdadi announced a forced merger between JaN and ISI in April 2013 (Lister, 2016). Eventually, many

of the Libyan fighters subsequently returned to Libya and merged with members of

the pre-existing Jihadi group *Ansar Al Shariah* with its branches in three regions

of Libya rebranding themselves as Wilayat Barqah, Wilayat Fezzan, and Wilayat

Tarablus respectively (Mohamedou, 2018). The Libyan group offered *Ba'yat* to IS

in November 2014 in a video entitled "The Pledge of Allegiance to the Caliph of the

Muslims" (Wilayat Mosul, 2014), and announced that it is mounting operations in

the Libyan provinces of Cyrenaica, Fezzan, and Tripolitania. IS broadcasted a

video entitled "Where are the Insurgents in Palestine" (Wilayat Homs, 2015) where

it showed footage of battles taking place in Libyan city of Derna, and in another

video entitled "Carrying of the Musk and the Blowing of the Bellows" (Wilayat Al

Khair, 2016) documented operations of *Hisbah* offices in its affiliate provinces.

The IS-affiliate's mostly local but many foreign fighters captured entire portions of

the major Libyan towns of Derna (late 2014 to mid-2015), and Sirte (February

2015 to December 2016) before they were driven out from major strongholds in

joint US-Libyan militias offensives that ended in December 2016. In total, the

Libyan *Wilayaat* existed from October 2014 till December 2016 (RAND

Corporation, 2017). According to Zelin, the IS affiliates managed to produce only

four videos between 2017 and 2019, down from publishing nearly 50 media

products between 2015 and 2016. They still remain a moderate threat despite the

demise of the Caliphate roughly five years ago (Warner, et al., 2020).

Boko Haram

Boko Haram was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri in Nigeria in 2002.

After the death of its founder in 2009, the group transformed into a violent non-

state actor in north-eastern Nigeria and spread its terrorist activities to

neighbouring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The group is formally known as

Jama'at Ahl us Sunnah lid Da'wah wal Jihad[260]. The colloquial name Boko Haram roughly translates as 'Western education is forbidden' in Hausa language. It promotes a Salafist-Jihadist brand of Islam and seeks to establish a caliphate in Nigeria (Celso, 2014). Its leader Abubakar Shekau pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi on 7 March, 2015 (BBC News, 2015), and rebranded it as IS West Africa Province (ISWAP). IS published a number of videos[261] with much fanfare in which it showed Abubakar Shekau reading Bay'at in broken Arabic and promising to wholeheartedly follow Al Baghdadi's directives. However, severe differences emerged between the group's leadership in north-eastern Nigeria and IS's central leadership in Raqqah very soon, which led to the Shekau's replacement with Abu Musab Al Barnawi as the *Wali* of ISWAP (Counter Extremism Project, 2023). According to internal sources, IS accused Shekau of deviance and misguidance, specifically over his continued use of female suicide bombers and excommunication of his internal critics. IS's statement also accused him of embezzling ISWAP's funds and denounced him for his excessive *Takfiri* interpretations, which justified violence against Muslim civilians (Zenn & Pieri, 2017).

Boko Haram carried out several large-scale attacks inside Nigeria to achieve this goal, including an attack on the UN headquarters in Abuja in 2011, the abduction of nearly 300 schoolgirls in Chibok in April 2014, and the multi-day massacre of the northern town of Baga and surrounding villages in January 2015 that killed

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[260] Arabic for 'Group of Sunnis for Preaching and Jihad'.
[261] "Joy of the Monotheists with the Ba'yah of the Nigerian Mujahideen" (Wilayat Dijlah, 2015), "Joy of the Muslims in Wilayat Raqqah over Nigeria Mujahideen Giving Ba'yah to the Caliph" (Wilayat Raqqah, 2015), "Joy of the Muslims over the Ba'yah of Nigeria" (Wilayat Al Jazirah, 2015), "Joy of the Soldiers of the Caliphate over the Ba'yah of their brothers in Nigeria" (Wilayat Al Khayr, 2015), and "Ba'yahs Continue And Gifts of Happiness To The Brothers In Nigeria" (Wilayat Al Furat, 2015), "Joy of the Mujahideen of the Caliphate over the Bayah of their Brothers in wilayat West Africa" (Wilayat Homs, 2015), "Pleasure of Muslims over the Bayah of Brothers in Nigeria" (Wilayat Al Barakah, 2015).

approximately 2,000 civilians (Counter Extremism Project, 2023). Boko Haram also attacked a military base in Borno state in November 2018, which left more than 100 soldiers dead and mass looting of weapons, equipment, and vehicles. The split between Boko Haram and ISWAP divided the loyalties of militants between Shekau and Al Barnawi, with the latter's followers amassing under IS's banner. The two factions engaged in some fierce battles, one of which resulted in the death of Shekau and several of his associates. On 7 June, 2021, ISWAP released an audio recording which claimed that Shekau was killed in a standoff on 18 May, which resulted in the Boko Haram leader detonating an explosive and killing himself (Reuters, 2021). Despite the infighting, both factions have been mounting deadly attacks against the Nigerian government and civilians, and also made incursions against armies and civilians of neighbouring countries in Lake Chad Basin (Warner, et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The visual analysis of IS's 69 foreign policy-themed videos included in this case study confirms IS's foreign relations' foundational belief that the Caliphate did not deliberately seek recognition from the international society due to its self-declared status of a 'super-state' that transcended all other sovereign nations. IS also rejected the modern international system and associated it with 'apostasy'. While its attitude of an exclusive super-state failed to win any dialogue and legitimacy from the international community, including from regional countries and world powers, IS remained undeterred and refused to enter into relations with other states, despite having the capacity such as an effective government and independence, until its collapse in mid 2017. In the words of Stephen Walt, IS's Caliphate was reminiscent of former 'revolutionary states' that were driven by a "paradoxical combination of insecurity and overconfidence" knowing that their

"position is tenuous and that opponents may seek to crush them before they can consolidate power" yet believing that "that they can beat the odds and overcome far more powerful opponents" (Walt, 2015). The chapter also shed light on its engagement in rogue state diplomacy, thanks to its atrocious human rights record, acts of terrorism on foreign soil, pursuit of aggression against neighbouring states, and total disregard for international laws and institutions. At the same time, IS communicated with a number of non-state Jihadi actors in North and West Africa that resulted in those groups pledging allegiance and joining the Caliphate, which benefitted the former more than the latter.

This chapter showcased all of the Caliphate's major foreign policy statements published in official videos issued by its clerics, fighters, and leaders, and noted that they were based on its 'Extinction of Grayzone' doctrine, which echoed its constant rhetoric for war and aggression in order to implement its strategy of 'remaining and expanding', which made it impossible for other states to reason and negotiate with IS "because maximally expansionist goals effectively eliminate the range of possible bargains" (2015, p. 44). According to Novogrodsky (2018, p. 58), states around the world adopt the principle of sovereign co-existence based on their tacit or explicit acknowledgement that they cannot control all people and territory by themselves, and therefore engage in the "enduring practices of comity, diplomacy, and the mutuality of recognition necessary for functioning State-to-State relations." However, IS – since its founding – "consistently rejected demands that it conform to the international community's notion of what it means to behave like a sovereign (Novogrodsky, 2018, p. 55), thus posed an existential threat to the international order until its dismantlement in 2018 (Nielsen, 2015). Novogrodsky (2018, p. 45) believes that IS "employed organising principles that appear to satisfy the first three elements of the four-pronged Montevideo test" but when it comes to

the fourth factor, that is, the ability to enter into relations with other states, IS consistently spurned all attempts to engage with the international community, seek their recognition, and establish bilateral ties. As a result, it did not "become a full player on the world stage within the meaning of international law" (Novogrodsky, 2018, p. 58) but still managed to cause much consternation in many countries around the Middle East, North and West Africa, and Western Europe due to incessant terrorist attacks carried out by its supporters. All of the 69 videos analysed show IS vowing to wage war against its enemies until they were defeated. In all, while the previous three case studies make it clear that IS attempted to meet three vital attributes of any viable state, that is, population, territory, and government, this case study found that IS, despite possessing the capacity, had no intention of engaging into relations with other states as doing so would have meant granting tacit acceptance and recognition to the international order, which would have betrayed its principles. At the same time, the chapter revealed that IS's engagement in rebel diplomacy managed to co-opt major Jihadi organisations such as Ansar Bait Al Maqdis, Ansar Al Shariah and Boko Haram, which are based in Egypt, Libya and Nigeria respectively, and helped expand its reach beyond the confines of the Caliphate, which to this day serves as its legacy despite its demise in 2018.

9 : CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter discusses the core findings of the thesis in relation to the research questions by taking a stock of all the chapters, explains major contributions to the literature, and proposes future research endeavours. It consists of four sections. The first section summarises the core research project. The second section discusses the gaps identified in the literature and conceptual contribution of the study. The third section presenting the major empirical findings gleamed from the four case studies and discusses the project's contribution to the literature. The final section suggests avenues for future research.

Summary

This project aimed to provide an in-depth visual analysis of IS's state-like performances based on the assessment of 374 official IS videos. To facilitate the conceptual understanding and empirical analysis of IS's performances of modern stateness, this thesis developed an original conceptual framework, and applied an innovative methodological approach to the dataset, which resulted in generating insightful findings and perspectives of the four aspects of the Caliphate.

The Introduction chapter set the tone for discussion by noting that while IS's 'Islamicness' has come under intense scrutiny due to its controversiality, its 'Stateness' remains an under-studied aspect which this thesis aims to address. It emphasised that IS naming itself as 'Islamic State' or *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah* (الدولة الإسلامية) in Arabic is proof that it claimed to be a State in the truest sense of the word in front of the world – including its subjects at home, supporters abroad, and enemies worldwide – and presented evidence in shape of official propaganda

releases not just to back it up in but also to seek recognition from its subjects and supporters for statebuilding purposes. It reiterated the importance of the project due to the fact that it is the first of its kind that looks into the Caliphate's state-like performances and provides a visual longitudinal analysis based on hundreds of official videos, spanning from its declaration in mid 2014 to its dismantlement in July 2017. It was outlined very clearly in the introduction chapter that the thesis, in any shape or form, seeks to deliver a judgement on whether IS was a State or not due to the fact that IS's credentials as a State are fraught with difficulty, highly problematic and deeply contentious (Grasten & Grzybowski, 2023). It also added that there remain big question marks around how much like a State IS actually performed given that in its heyday access to IS-controlled territory to verify such claims was almost impossible, and even to this day it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to visit the parts of Iraq and Syria where they once ruled in order to ascertain and measure its existence as a State due to the unstable political and security situation – a point also raised by Longobardo (2017) in his analysis on IS's statehood status.

The introduction chapter made it clear that the study takes into account IS's claims of state-like existence based on its heavy projection in their visual propaganda content and is based on the following line of arguments: First, IS claimed to be a state and wanted to be recognised as one. Second, IS was not interested in seeking a place within the international community, and instead sought recognition from its subjects at home and supporters around the world by projecting itself as a modern state that is akin to other modern states around the world but with the clear exception that it is ruled under *Shariah*. Third, IS's state-like actions – defined in the thesis as 'performances of modern stateness' and explained in detail below – were projected to millions of people around the world, including its

subjects at home and supporters abroad, in order to seek their recognition as a state while also garnering support for statebuilding purposes. And finally, the state-like performances IS projected in its official videos should be treated as theatrical and not substantive due to the fact that IS faced high public scrutiny while having to deal with low state capacity. This notion is rooted in the reasoning that while all modern states engage in performances of modern stateness, both substantive and theatrical, in order to express and maintain their legitimacy and sovereignty in front of domestic and international audiences (Ringmar, 2016), their performances depend on two major factors, that is, state capacity and public scrutiny, based on which they tend to be more substantive or theatrical (Ding, 2020). Additionally, this project also draws attention to the 'staged' aspect of IS's theatrical performances – underlining the fact that the state-like performances in IS propaganda videos were carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited by IS's media operatives in order to project IS in a favourable light to its audiences, thus broadcasting visual content that was a fusion of fact and fiction.

In pursuit of proving the above-mentioned arguments, the introduction chapter then outlined the major hypothesis: First, historically, the bulk of statemaking in the West occurred as a result of warmaking, therefore, any geopolitical entity claiming to be a state that itself emerged from war and conflict can be described well by using Western concepts of state. Second, there is a clear distinction between 'becoming a state' and 'attaining statehood' and that the Montevideo Convention is merely the criteria for the former. Third, statehood status cannot be attained until a state demonstrates its independence and garners recognition from other states without which even fulfilment of the criteria set under Montevideo Convention is rendered useless. Fourth, statehood concerns the state's external attributes whereas stateness refers to its internal attributes, and therefore, sides of

the same (State) coin, and that the Montevideo Convention – as the criteria for state – can be used to determine statehood or stateness but additional conditions apply. Fifth, any state's performances of stateness are both theatrical and substantive in nature. States could be performing one or the other more depending on the level of state capacity and public scrutiny. Moreover, theatrical performances by states can be/are staged as every state likes to project itself in a positive light.

The literature review chapter set on reviewing the current state of the art and examining how the 'State' aspect of IS has been explored in existing literature, including the state-like performances in its propaganda, while identifying the gaps that currently exist, especially with regards to IS's 'performances of modern stateness'. Divided into three sections, the review first presented a concise historical background of the self-proclaimed Caliphate along with its significance among violent Jihadi organisations. The second section focused on the literature that wholly or partially examines different aspects of the 'State' of IS. The final section shed light on research that addresses IS's state-like performances projected in its media products, such as print/online publications and videos.

The findings of the review noted academia's high interest in challenging IS's 'statehood' narrative which came at the expense of analysing its 'performances of modern stateness'. The review also confirmed an over-emphasis on IS publications such as Dabiq and Rumiyah magazine while overlooking its audio-visual materials, with only a handful of studies on IS videos whose scope remains limited to

assessing certain aspects, with much emphasis on violence[262], production quality[263], and propaganda style[264]. Moreover, very few studies have focused on tracing the ebb and flow of the Caliphate, especially its digital domain[265], from its inception in 2014 to its extinction in 2017. Last, this review highlighted the dire need to further develop current research on IS's thematic content, with emphasis on its stateness and their projections in the propaganda videos. While it acknowledged that two important studies by Anfinson (2020) and El Damanhoury (2020) respectively have shed light on IS's displays of statehood as published in its flagship Dabiq magazine, the review argued that the State aspect can be better understood by analysing its performances of modern stateness that are grounded in the visual analysis of official IS videos. It concluded by underlining that the project was undertaken in order to comprehensively address the key gaps identified above, that is, further in-depth exploration of the State aspect of IS, contextualising its State-like performances, while also making a contribution to the growing literature on visual analysis of IS's multimedia products, especially its videos.

The conceptual framework chapter commenced with the quest to provide an exhaustive answer to the basic yet fundamental question: what is the 'State'? Acknowledging the fact that it has always been difficult to define the 'State' (Mitchell, 1991), it provided a brief history of the state and described that historically territory, population, government, and sovereignty served as the

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[262] Studies by Winter (2014), Tinnes (2015), Barr & Herfroy-Mischler (2017), Auchter (2018), and Sweeney & Kubit (2020) primarily focused on the depiction of violence in IS videos, such as executions.
[263] Study by Robinson & Dauber (2018) researched IS videos' production quality.
[264] Studies by Dick (2019), Leander (2016), Venkatesh et al. (2018), Winkler & Pieslak (2018) analysed different aspects of propaganda in IS videos.
[265] Studies by Almohammad & Winter (2019), Lakomy (2017), Milton (2018), Munoz (2018), Nanninga (2019) and Winter (2015) assess the decline in IS's visual propaganda output based on certain time periods.

fundamental attributes of state across major civilisations, including the Chinese, Indian, Islamic and Western civilisations. It later took note of the complications around the concept of state in international law and underlined that little progress has been made by the international community on matters related to formally defining the terms 'state' and 'statehood'. As hypothesised that the bulk of statemaking in the West occurred as a result of warmaking, the section engaged in literature that touches upon warmaking and statemaking in the West, and demonstrated that the Western concepts of state are well-suited to analyse IS's claims of being a state for the very reason that it too emerged as a result of an illegal invasion and protracted civil war.

The conceptual framework's second section provided an in-depth examination of the Montevideo Convention as it is the only criteria of state. It disclosed that despite the lack of clear definitions of state and statehood, international law does offer an 'objective' criteria for any geopolitical entity to become a state and attain statehood based on its fulfilment. The section then shed light on the fact that despite the presence of Montevideo Convention, there still remains a huge difference between becoming a state and attaining statehood status due to issues faced by claimant states when it comes to demonstrating their independence and seeking recognition from other recognised states. The issues around recognition were found to be complex, and therefore a deeper analysis was performed to understand its other concepts and forms under Sociology and IR theory. It was noted that recognition has normative as well as psychological dimensions and that it constitutes as a vital human need (Taylor, 1992). The section then proceeded to take stock of IS's politics of recognition, based on Honneth's recognition theory (2007), and found that it too was seeking recognition, albeit from its subjects and supporters, by pushing narratives of respect, esteem, and love and friendship for

the Caliphate in its propaganda content on the basis that it is the only true Islamic state which has been established upon the prophetic methodology, therefore worthy of recognition.

The third section presented an in-depth understanding of the relatively novel yet complex concept of stateness. It presented a number of definitions of stateness, chief among them Fukuyama's concept, and established a comprehensive definition of stateness that will be applied while analysing IS's state-like performances in the upcoming case studies. The section also identified monopoly on violence, state capacity, and citizenship agreement as the three essential activities state engage in to perform stateness. A quick peek at the contemporary history of stateness in Iraq and Syria revealed that Ba'athist regimes used a mix of Arab nationalism, socialism, symbolism, and historicism for statebuilding purposes. They eventually lost out to a technology savvy ideological rival whose performances of modern states centred on justifying its monopoly on violence, building and expanding state capacity, and offering a citizenship agreement that was based on its harsh interpretations of Islam. IS projected these performances of modern stateness to its subjects at home and supporters worldwide in order to seek their recognition and help for statebuilding purposes. The section was wrapped up by making a detailed case of how statehood and stateness are extensions of the concept of state and refer to its external and internal aspects respectively. By this token, it was explained that Montevideo Convention, which remains as the sole criteria for becoming a state, can be used to determine statehood if the claimant state can also prove its independence, and receive recognition from other recognised states. At the same time, a claimant state's stateness – attributes of which are outlined as establish stateness by maintaining monopoly on violence, building and expanding state capacity, and enforcing a

citizenship agreement on its subjects – can also be measured if it fulfills the Montevideo Convention first.

The last section made the case that IS state's performances of modern stateness were more theatrical in nature than substantive as it was faced with low state capacity while being under high public scrutiny, and most likely those performances were staged as every state likes to project itself in a positive light. It pursued this argument by first exposing the dual meanings of performance in Sociology and IR literatures while maintaining its emphasis on the theatrical. Once the dual meanings of performance were clear, the section unravelled different concepts of performance legitimacy pursued by states around the world, and concluded that when faced with low state capacity and high public scrutiny, states often pursue theatrical performances in order to "persuade citizens of its virtue, if not its efficacy" (Ding, 2020, pg. 532). The section then explored Lee Ann Fujii's 'performative analysis' framework, which is based on the analysis of the massacre at My Lai during the Vietnam War, the rape and killing of two women during the Rwandan genocide, and a lynching that took place in rural Maryland during 1930s USA respectively, and demonstrates that individuals/states often engage in the process of putting on a show for attention-seeking purposes and convey their desired messages. It concluded with the explanation of how states record and broadcast their theatrical performances of stateness, which may be entirely scripted, meticulously directed, and heavily edited in order to convey a subtle message to the audiences that the state is actively performing its duties.

The methodology chapter outlined the extensive process, which first started with the downloading of over 600 official IS videos. The videos were screened and catalogued after the downloading was complete. Only the videos projecting

performances related to the Caliphate's population, territory, governance, and foreign relations – in line with the four criteria set by the Montevideo Convention – were selected for the purposes of further analysis while all others were excluded. This resulted in the formation of a dataset comprising 374 videos spanning around 63 and a half hours[266] in total. The dataset was divided into four 'stand-alone' categories based on the four criteria of modern stateness. It was subject to further assessment to find out other characteristics such as genres, languages, and technical aspects. All 374 videos, after their identification and classification, were then coded according to the performances contained within them. This led to the revelation of a quantitative snapshot of all four case studies, including a list of performances according to their screen time – thus signifying their importance in the given case study.

The outcome of the extensive coding and organisation of the dataset performed in this chapter not only sets the stage for an in-depth visual analysis in the case studies, it also demonstrates that the dataset is a comprehensive reflection of IS's visual culture, study of which will be an invaluable addition to the Jihadi visual turn witnessed at the beginning of the 21st century; and that the methodology showcased above bolsters the project's main argument that IS carefully scripted, meticulously directed and heavily edited 'staged theatrical performances of stateness' in its official videos, and then broadcasted them to its audiences with the intention of winning the hearts and minds of locals while also attracting Muslims from around the globe to join its state-building project.

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[266] Precise time duration is 63 hours, 31 minutes and 24 seconds.

Empirical Findings

The Population case study – based on the extensive coding and resultant visual analysis of the 97 population-themed videos included in the dataset, together accounting for 14.5 hours of content – set on presenting a comprehensive portrait of the Caliphate's population. The chapter found that IS projected an image of a vibrant population living under its control, which was in many ways similar to other permanent populations around the world as it was established over existing populations of Iraq and Syria after successful conquests. However, at the same time, it noticed depictions which were unlike other populations living in modern states around the world, with many factors that distinguished it from other contemporary societies, such as an extreme interpretation of Islam that gave IS's leadership, especially the Caliph, extraordinary control over the population. The case study highlighted the portrayal of society as *Dar Al Islam* (House of Islam), which was established after the implementation of its territorial roadmap – first step of which is *Hijrah* (emigration). It then enables *Jama'ah* (forming a community of faith) to take shape, which along with *Samm* (listening), *Ta'ah* (obedience), and *Jihad,* led to the consolidation of the *Khilafah*. The case study revealed that IS deliberately blurred the civilian-military lines in the society and pushed both local and foreign men into the flames of an 'existential war' in which the whole world ganged up against IS and its supporters, and the only way out was fighting till achieving 'victory or martyrdom'. The detailed visual analysis undertaken in this case study, which includes mapping the gendered norms projected in the videos, highlighted a disproportionate portrayal of different demographics of the society. It confirmed the superior status conferred on men – exalted not just as fathers and breadwinners in civilian roles but also as fierce fighters laying down their lives for the cause of 'remaining and expanding' the Caliphate. At the same time, the case study noted a transition for the young boys –

manifested as the 'generation of the Caliphate' – who were first portrayed in soft roles as innocent, little ones playing in amusement parks, but later took up the aggressive, masculine roles of executing enemies of IS as child fighters when the Caliphate started to unravel. The case study unveiled how the young girls – labelled as 'pearls of chastity' – were portrayed in the videos, ranging from wearing casual 'Western' clothing and appearing alongside young boys to wearing headscarves, face-veils and loosely-fitted, head-to-toe black garb. It also noted that both young boys and girls were portrayed as transitioning from the age of innocence to cognisance by undergoing training to assume their future roles – with videos showing boys turning into capable, battle-hardened fighters while girls' movements restricted to home and tasked with raising the next generation of the Caliphate. Unsurprisingly, this chapter also confirmed the 'hidden status' of women whose confinement to their homes was seen as a contribution to state building by fulfilling their duties exclusively as 'wives and mothers'. Moreover, the case study included an exceptional video that was published when the Caliphate was on its last legs, which revealed how a number of female fighters were sent to the battlefield to fight alongside men. The case study also highlighted an important aspect of stateness, which was the citizenship agreement IS enforced upon its subjects under the *Bay'ah* principle, and the impact it had on the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, including the privileges bestowed upon the Sunni population whereas depriving all other minorities of their rights and relegating them to second class citizenship, unless they embraced IS's version of Islam. The overall objective of IS, this case study noted, was the portrayal of a 'vibrant population under its control' that saw them as the legitimate authority and supported their vision of a strong, welfare-based, tightly-knit, and an equal 'Islamic' society. At the same time, performances of modern stateness contained

the population-related videos sent an explicit invitation to Muslims around the world to migrate and help build the Caliphate.

The Territory case study explored IS's expansive displays of territoriality based on visual analysis of 77 territory-themed videos included in the dataset spanning around 14 hours in duration. It established that IS, as part of its statebuilding project, implemented an expansionist territorial strategy which consisted of three stages, both on the ground and in its visual propaganda, and used them to authenticate its 'remaining and expanding' Caliphate. These three stages were exercise of territorial sovereignty, legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects, and encouragement of its supporters worldwide to emigrate to the nascent state to help rebuild and defend it. The chapter concluded that the overall objective of IS was to demonstrate the existence of a de facto sovereign state that was capable of capturing, controlling and defending its 'ever-expanding territory', based on the implementation of its 'remaining and expanding' maxim. It noted that IS set to achieve this challenging objective with the help of modern technology such as drones, maps, weaponry, and warfare tactics. The chapter underlined that IS wanted to set the foundations of a new territorial, sovereign order, in which borders were temporary, all land agreements were null and void, and the Islamic State solely exercised the right to exist because of its basis in a divine order whereas all other states were bound to collapse due to their temporal nature. However, the opposite took place, and IS – while trying to downplay its losses – depicted the reversal of fortunes as a test from God. Most importantly, the case study argued that it was through these staged performances of stateness that IS wanted to send a clear message to its subjects and supporters worldwide that the Caliphate needed their cooperation and support to help rebuild and defend it.

The governance case study was the biggest in terms of number of videos included for visual analysis and their overall duration. This was mainly due to the fact that IS documented in great detail its performances of governance over the territory it controlled and promoted it as a proof of its efficacy and legitimacy. Building upon an extensive visual analysis of 131 governance-themed videos in the dataset that together account for 19 hours of content, this case study showcased a government committed to performing the three major aspects of stateness, that is, ensuring monopoly on violence, enhancing state capacity, and enforcing citizenship agreement by implementing modern governance through its three distinct branches, that is, law and order, services, and administration. It noted that the performances shown in official IS videos did not take place in isolation but were highly coordinated efforts between different departments of the government – including civil servants, political leaders, public services workers – all of them staged in order to demonstrate that they are meeting the targets and achieving better results while improvising at the same time. The chapter argued that IS's performances of modern stateness presented in the official videos projected improvisation and innovation in services and welfare, for example, the use of forensics to solve burglary cases, and widening of the *Zakat* net while providing assistance to the poor living in the furthest corners of the Caliphate in a number of videos in order to cement its status as a 'modern state'. The case study noted that IS, just like other modern states, emphasised heavily on the theatrical performances of the state, for example, civil servants working in government offices, civilians engaging with different branches of the state, and the display of different state symbols and machinery at work to give viewers the impression that the Caliphate is remaining and expanding, thanks to the efficient, honest and transparent practices of IS's *Shariah* rule. Such projections, albeit one-sided and propagandistic in nature, offer a rare glimpse into IS's governance, which become

extremely important due to the absence of any major on-the-ground reporting and assessment that was carried out from within the confines of the Caliphate. Another major finding of this study confirms the notion that IS, despite its insistence on a strict early-Islamic (Salafi) identity and inner workings, presented itself like a modern state by documenting the implementation of statebuilding goals and deploying all the tools and resources available to today's modern states, such as, currency, information technology, infrastructure, media and communications, natural resources, taxation, weapons, among others. At the same time, IS presented itself as a revolutionary state that brought peace and security to a war-ravaged society through the enforcement of a system that heavily depended on ruthless policing, medieval punishments and incessant propaganda, all in the name of Islam. Its governance-themed videos also portrayed both sides of the justice system, punishment and forgiveness, although the former received way more media projection than the latter. The absence of any representation of women in the videos, despite the gender constituting half the population, revealed IS's priorities and future intentions, where children were groomed to become the next 'generation of the Caliphate', that is, fighters and suicide bombers. The use of civilian sentiment across governance videos, always in appreciative and endorsement roles, also showed that IS eagerly exploited the vulnerability of its subjects, and demonstrated to the world, especially its supporters abroad, that people living under the 'shadow of the Caliphate' fully supported the 'Islamic system'.

The fourth and final case study – based on the analysis of 69 foreign policy-themed videos which together account for around 12 and a half hours of content – inquired the capacity in which IS entered into relations with other states and the policies that were directed at them while also analysing its relations with other non-state

actors around the world and the 'rebel diplomacy' it engaged with them in order to co-opt them into its overseas '*Wilayaat*' (affiliates). It found that the Caliphate did not deliberately seek recognition from the international society due to its self-declared status of a 'super-state' that transcended all other sovereign nations. IS also rejected the modern international system and associated it with 'apostasy'. While its attitude of an exclusive super-state failed to win any dialogue and legitimacy from the international community, including from regional countries and world powers, IS remained undeterred and refused to enter into relations with other states, despite having the capacity such as an effective government and independence, until its collapse in mid 2017. The foreign relations case study revealed how IS used civilian casualties caused by the US and Russia-led coalition airstrikes as a justification to carry out deadly terror attacks abroad against civilians, and documented them in great detail in its propaganda videos. The chapter surmised that IS was adept in projecting civilian voices as a show of support for its repressive regime despite not making it a secret that it crushed dissent in a most brutal fashion fathomable. It also noted how IS selectively quoted its enemy's statements and gave them a spin in ways which only amplified its capabilities and exaggerated its power. It considered specific examples where IS slyly referenced the verses of Quran and narrations from *Hadith* when it suited its agenda but resorted to vigilante justice when Islamic teachings did not suit its narrative, for example the death by burning of the captured Jordanian pilot and Turkish soldiers. It also asserted that – while the previous three case studies prove that IS staged performances of stateness and broadcast them in its official videos to demonstrate that it meets the three vital attributes of a viable state, that is, population, territory, and government – the Caliphate deliberately refused to formally enter into relations with other state despite having the capacity to do so for the very reason that seeking the international community's recognition as a

member state, that is, statehood, would also mean granting tacit acceptance and recognition to its opponents' values, such as democracy and secularism in the case of Western countries or religion-sanctioned autocratic regimes in case of many Middle East and North African states – thus jeopardising its own state building project in the process. Instead, as the case study outlined, IS chose to pronounced its policies towards its enemies in its official propaganda, as part of its performances of stateness, in order to legitimate itself in the eyes of its subjects and entice its supporters worldwide to move to the Caliphate and help rebuild and defend it.

The case study also shed light on its engagement in rogue state diplomacy, thanks to its atrocious human rights record, acts of terrorism on foreign soil, pursuit of aggression against neighbouring states, and total disregard for international laws and institutions. At the same time, IS communicated with a number of non-state Jihadi actors in North and West Africa that resulted in those groups pledging allegiance and joining the Caliphate, which benefitted the former more than the latter. This chapter showcased all of the Caliphate's major foreign policy statements published in official videos issued by its clerics, fighters, and leaders, and noted that they were based on its 'Extinction of Grayzone' doctrine, which echoed its constant rhetoric for war and aggression in order to implement its strategy of 'remaining and expanding', which made it impossible for other states to reason and negotiate with IS. The case study also noted that all of the analysed 69 videos depicted IS issuing threats to wage war against its enemies until they were defeated. In all, while the previous three case studies make it clear that IS attempted to meet three vital attributes of any viable state, that is, population, territory, and government, this case study found that IS, despite possessing the capacity, had no intention of engaging into relations with other states as doing so

would have meant granting tacit acceptance and recognition to the international order, which would have betrayed its principles. At the same time, the chapter revealed that IS's engagement in rebel diplomacy managed to co-opt major Jihadi organisations such as Ansar Bait Al Maqdis, Ansar Al Shariah and Boko Haram, which are based in Egypt, Libya and Nigeria respectively, and helped expand its reach beyond the confines of the Caliphate, which to this day serves as its legacy despite its demise in 2018.

Contribution to the Literature

From a methodological perspective, this project is the first ever longitudinal study that involved a large number of videos for visual analysis. The use of Montevideo Convention as a framework to assess the performances of stateness is also a novel approach as previous studies[267] have used it only as a criteria for determining statehood.

The project made use of a database of 374 videos, which were published by IS from July 2014 to July 2017, and covers the entire duration of its existence as a Caliphate. It supplements the work of existing studies on IS's total media output during a specific time period, including the ones by Winter (2015), Zelin (2015) and Nanninga (2019). This study, in terms of its scope, has contributed to the literature on IS, especially the one that deals with its visual propaganda and aspects related to the 'stateness of Islamic State'. It also went into great lengths to analyse and assess how IS projected its performances of modern stateness in official propaganda videos, and the purposes behind such performances.

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[267] See research conducted by Anfinson (2018) and El Damanhoury (2019).

The project also showed that, with the help of a robust qualitative data analysis software like MAXQDA, conducting a thorough visual analysis can be a fruitful endeavour, especially when it involves 374 videos total duration of which is around 63.5 hours. The software was helpful not just in terms of importing videos and extensively coding them, but also offered valuable quantitative analytical tools that yielded very interesting facts and figures, and comprehensively supplemented the qualitative analysis.

This study is very important as it tackled the state-aspect of IS for a number of important reasons: First, IS is the first Jihadi organisation in the 21st century to have had declared itself a Caliphate and ruled over a large territory inhabited by millions of people under *Shariah*, and that no other Jihadi organisation, except arguably the Taliban, ever came close to reaching such a feat in contemporary history. Second, IS undoubtedly is one of the most technology savvy Jihadi organisations of the 21st century, and their documentation of different aspects of the Caliphate are unprecedented in many ways. Third, at its heyday, IS's Caliphate was the largest de facto state in control of a major terrorist organisation, which refused to accept borders of modern states and claimed extraterritorial jurisdiction over Muslims worldwide based on its specific interpretation of Islam. In short, the fact that IS's Caliphate was unlike many de facto states which were founded and run by proscribed terrorist organisations in modern history, especially Jihadi ones, warrants a special status in the list of de facto states worldwide, therefore worthy of undertaking an in-depth research.

This thesis argued that IS wanted to seek recognition of subjects across the territory and supporters all over the world of its existence as a state by producing documentary evidence in video form and broadcasted it to convince them to help

with statebuilding. It carried out an in-depth visual analysis of 374 official IS videos – instead of audio files, magazines or photosets – because of the reason that videos are a highly dynamic form of content that contain more information, are easy to digest, offer multi-sensory experience, manage to get viewers' attention, and attain it for a longer time. Moreover, the influence of videos in the age of social media is an undeniable fact. It is not a secret that we now live in a world where most people prefer videos over images or text, thanks to the popularity of social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, TikTok, YouTube and others, where most of the users spend more time online watching videos. Therefore, conducting visual content analysis of IS's official videos not only helped uncover IS's storytelling patterns, it also offered greater depth compared to images and text published by the *Jihadi* group. The videos, that span around 63.5 hours, are based on intricate depictions of a number of situations that were masterfully captured by IS's media operatives from different angles, and reveal nuances that may not be visible in a single image or set of images published in Dabiq/Rumiyah magazine or Al Naba newsletter. The propaganda videos published by IS's media outlets not only exhibited depth in conveying a more complete picture and allowed for a deeper understanding of the subject matter, the combination of audio, visuals and narrative elements in videos were surely included to evoke strong emotional responses among viewers. The use of various audio cues, voiceovers, and *a capella* created an atmosphere that heightened the emotional impact of the content and effected the mood of the user. More importantly, compared to images or magazines, IS's propaganda videos effectively demonstrated complex actions and concepts, and skilfully portrayed stories in different modes such as step-by-step sequences, abstract events, and real-life situations, which provided the viewer a clearer understanding of the subject matter. In short, this project learnt how IS videos combined various elements to create a more immersive experience for its

viewers, and for that very reason, it managed to manipulative hundreds, if not thousands, of IS supporters and compelled them to migrate to the Caliphate and help rebuild and defend it. In a nutshell, videos have been historically used by states and non-state actors alike, especially terrorist organisations, for propaganda purposes, and IS is no exception in its use as a medium for propaganda and recruitment purposes.

In terms of insights into how Montevideo Convention serves as the basic criteria of state, which can be applied to any claimant state, its application on IS revealed some fascinating insights. If mere projections of population, territory, government, and foreign policy of the Caliphate in its official videos are taken into account, there is little doubt that IS comes across as a state, fulfilling the four internationally recognised criterion in a number of possible ways. The fact that IS sought the performances of modern stateness to portray itself as a modern, 21st century state, and repeatedly projected the three major aspects of stateness, that is, monopoly on violence, state capacity, and citizenship agreement, shows that it was arguably well-versed with contemporary statebuilding models, as well as cognisant of standards of governance, albeit wrapping them up under an Islamic garb. However, what IS could barely hide was the fact that the Caliphate was faced with constant low state capacity issues while under heavy public scrutiny. Case in point is the implementation of the gold dinar, which was one of the prized hallmarks of the Caliphate. While it was introduced with much fanfare, and noted in the Governance case study as a 'spectacle' which was shown to a handful of subjects by IS operatives more like a souvenir, perfectly illustrates the 'low state capacity vs high public scrutiny' paradox. It can only be speculated that IS leadership was fully aware of the capacity issues it faced but was still deeply interested in theatrical performances, therefore, it resorted to public spectacles such as outdoor

punishments, preaching in common spaces, hyperactivities of its moral police, and the presence of media kiosks on thoroughfares in order to keep reminding its subjects that their expectations of being ruled under Shariah are being met with absolute dedication and vigour, and that all the shortcomings should be blamed on the infidel enemy and their apostate allies. And when faced with an imminent collapse, IS's leadership had nothing else to make excuses for but to claim that rise and fall of fortunes is nothing but a test from God. The fact that an extremist organisation went on to create a de facto state, and survived for three years before collapsing under the weight of coalitions led by world super powers just demonstrates that history will remember IS as an insurgent organisation that came very close to upsetting the international norms and rules based order. No other non-state actor in recent history has come this close, with the exception of, perhaps the Taliban.

In all, this body of work simultaneously contributes to a growing body of research which concerns IS's state-aspect, performances of modern stateness, statebuilding project, propaganda videos, etc. and makes a crucial contribution towards the longitudinal study of the visual Caliphate. As this project delivers valuable insights into the organisation's visual propaganda and recruitment strategies, which can be useful in efforts for countering violent Jihadi propaganda and de-radicalisation, its findings can also help understand how the blueprint of the Caliphate might inspire and influence future Jihadi movements with statebuilding ambitions. In short, this thesis is original, significant, and timely.

Further Academic Research

This research studied IS using Western concepts of state, sovereignty, statehood, and stateness. It is therefore proposed to replicate the present research, but

analyse IS under the Islamic concepts of state, such as the caliphate. This would allow for a more systematic and comparative analysis of IS's model of governance, with added emphasis on the historic role and duties of the *Khalifah* as the ruler, the presence of the *Shura* as the consultative council, the existence of *Hisbah* as the law and order enforcement body, the imposition of *hudud* as the penal code, the influence of *'Ulama* in the judiciary and policy-making, the use of *Da'wah* as a social cohesion tool, the implementation of *Zakat* in the financial system, the introduction of gold-based Islamic currency, the prohibition of usury, the dependence on historical narratives to devise foreign policy, and the role of Jihad as a mechanism for warmaking and statemaking purposes, among other Islamic aspects.

Additional research is clearly warranted into visual propaganda, especially the videos, published by other *Jihadi* groups that are into state-building business, such as Al Shabab in Somalia, Al Qaeda in Yemen, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham in Syria, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Therefore, wider and more in-depth research is recommended that analyses state-like performances of Jihadi groups, and more importantly studies projections of their population, territory, government, and policies towards their ideological allies as well as rivals.

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Appendix A: List of Official IS Videos Cited in the Thesis

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