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MAKING SENSE OF ISIS' GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION

MASTER'S THESIS

Serra CAN

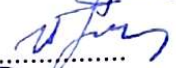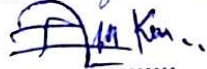**Department: Middle Eastern Studies**

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This work headed "Making Sense of ISIS' Geopolitical Imagination," which has been prepared by Serra CAN, is approved as a M.A. thesis by our jury in majority vote.

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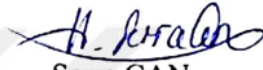I approve that the signatures above belong to the aforenamed teaching fellows.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and elaboration process of this thesis entirely abodes by scientific ethics, and that the utilization of others' work in form of references has been undertaken only in compliance with scientific standards, as any quoted data is free from alteration. This thesis is my original work and no any part of it has ever been presented before at this or at any other university as another thesis.

Serra CAN

19.06.2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ISI   **:** Islamic State in Iraq

ISIL   **:** Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

ISIS   **:** Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

PKK   **:** Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê

PYD   **:** Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat

NSAA   **:** Non-State Armed Actor

VNSA   **:** Violent Non-State Actor

YPG   **:** Yekîneyên Parastina Gel

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Thesis Title: Making Sense of ISIS' Geopolitical Imagination

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This thesis headed "Making Sense of ISIS' Geopolitical Imagination," which consists of three main chapters, focuses on the geopolitical discourse of ISIS, and the territoriality understanding therein. The first chapter provides a conceptual framework against the background of critical geopolitics. In doing so, it unveils how the matter of research in this thesis is approached. The second chapter seeks to examine how ISIS' understanding of territoriality externalizes itself, in particular within the group's own texts (such as its online issued magazine *Dabiq*). In this connection, while definitions such as 'the self' or 'the other' are explored with regard to the term territoriality, the question of how ISIS geopolitically imagines the world is touched upon. Another cornerstone of the second chapter is ISIS' contextualization of certain apocalyptic narratives – ascribed to some religious references – while producing its territoriality discourse. The third chapter builds on the former when analyzing how ISIS maps territoriality, which is centered on its self-construction and otherization strategies.

Tezin Başlığı: DEAŞ'ın Jeopolitik Tahayyülünü Anlamlandırmak

Tezin Yazarı: Serra CAN	**Danışman:** Doç. Dr. Murat YEŞİLTAŞ

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Anabilimdalı: Ortadoğu Çalışmaları

Üç ana bölümden oluşan "Making Sense of ISIS' Geopolitical Imagination" başlıklı İngilizce yüksek lisans tezi, DEAŞ'ın jeopolitik söylemini ve bu söylem içerisindeki topraksallığı merkeze almaktadır. Bu tez çalışmasının ilk bölümü eleştirel jeopolitik literatürünün sunduğu temele dayalı bir kavramsal çerçeve geliştirmiştir. Aynı zamanda bu teze konu olan araştırma mevzusuna nasıl yaklaşıldığı netleştirilmektedir. İkinci bölümünde DEAŞ'ın topraksallık anlayışının özellikle de kendi metinleri (online yayımlanan *Dabiq* dergisi) üzerinden nasıl dışa vurulduğu araştırılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, 'öz kimlik' ile 'öteki' gibi tanımlar topraksallık kavramı etrafında incelenerek DEAŞ'ın dünyayı jeopolitik anlamda nasıl tahayyül ettiği konu edilmiştir. Bu bölümün diğer bir odak noktası topraksallık söylemi üretiminde DEAŞ'ın bazı dini referanslarla temellendirilen birtakım apokaliptik anlatıları nasıl yerleştirdiğidir. Üçüncü bölümde kimlik ve ötekileştirme stratejileri üzerinden kurgulanmış DEAŞ'ın topraksallığını nasıl haritaladığının analizi yapılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: DEAŞ, Şiddet Temelli Devlet Dışı Aktör, Hilafet, Topraksallık Söylemi, Eleştirel Jeopolitik.

INTRODUCTION

Westphalian-style nation states suggest having a territorial perception of themselves as distinct political entities;[1] however, the study of international politics can no longer afford to disregard violent non-state military actors' importance and their *sui generis* perception of territorial conceptions, identity,[2] and state, as they radically challenge the notion of the Westphalian paradigm. Hence, the possibility of *non-state geopolitical imagination** became a new phenomenon, especially after the proliferation of violent non-state actors (VNSAs)[3] – occasionally enjoying territorial control and relative access to arms – in the Middle East during the [post-] Arab Spring era.[4] Many factors play in here. As such, proliferation hints at a significant human resource (recruits employed variably), financial flow, and considerable control over a disputed territory and arsenal. Acknowledging that non-state actors face stark restrictions, and therefore rank on a way lower power level than states, does not rule out the possibility for geopolitical imagination that, to a large extent, may shape their operational development, identity, organizational structure,[5] and foreign relations.

Having said this, the question whether the Islamic State (ISIS) – as a formation hostile to conventional states – threatens the Westphalian world order should be addressed. The answer is yes because ISIS traceably challenges conceptions lying at the core of the Westphalian paradigm. This places ISIS into the category of VNSAs. Nonetheless, at this point, ISIS stands out as an exceptional case, for it has claimed statehood – a

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[1] The Westphalian international order rests upon three pillars, namely sovereignty, territoriality and secularism. Acknowledged by Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, "The New Middle East, ISIL and the 6 th Revolt Against the West," **Insight Turkey**, Vol. 17, No. 3, (Summer 2015), p. 69.

* A geopolitical imagination implies four dimensions. These are: a) territory, b) sovereignty, c) identity, and d) social legality. However, this thesis is confined to the study of the territory tenet of geopolitical imagination.

[2] We adopt the notion that identity is accompanied by territory, as Klaus Dodds argues when saying "National territories have functioned as seemingly stable platforms for the manufacturing and reproduction of identities". See: Klaus Dodds, **Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 94.

[3] Definition of a violent non-state actor or non-state armed actor: "(…) it as an armed group, which is able to exercise successful and sustained control over a territory to carry out concerted military operations in order to achieve political goals. Articulated as such, NSAA's (non-state armed actors) common features would include: being organized and operating outside state control; use of violence to achieve political and military objectives; the irregularity of military actions and semi-state structure to operationalize objectives". See: Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, **Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, and Strategy**, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017 (forthcoming). I am very grateful to the authors for providing me an excerpt from their forthcoming book.

[4] Beyond non-state actors' increasing access to arms – often when state security fails and power vacua emerge, external military supply is also an important aspect. See on this: Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Human Security and the Arab Spring," **Strategic Analysis**, Vol. 37, No. 1, (January 2013), pp. 52-64.

[5] For ISIS' organizational structure see, for example: Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "Deash's Organizational Structure," **Al Jazeera**, 4 December 2014.

'worldwide caliphate,' and in doing so, it has challenged the Westphalian conception of territoriality – a major conception within the Westphalian paradigm. Claiming statehood is not the only proof for this challenge. Instead, beyond taking control over swathes of lands, the imagination of such deviant statehood radically confronts territoriality in its conventional meaning. This confrontation is framed by ISIS' discourse[6] and practice, both involving a *sui generis* type of territoriality. From this point of departure, the central conception, which this thesis focuses on, is territoriality. Henceforth, the central role of territoriality releases the impulse for studying ISIS through the lens of critical geopolitics. For critical geopolitics enables comprehending *if*, *why*, and *how* non-state formations can adopt and externalize geopolitical imagination. Moreover, this thesis tries to test whether a critical geopolitics investigation on ISIS can examine a) the nexus between religion and territoriality b) how such nexus is conceptualized (within a specified discourse of territoriality) alongside religious scripture and realpolitik, and c) how a theo-territorial subjectivity can unfold vis-à-vis antagonistic counterparts. Furthermore, having critical geopolitics as the theoretical backdrop of this research, the placement of ISIS into the context of non-state phenomena including its exceptionality, while exploring its geopolitical imagination, becomes feasible.

Therefore, the question, which this research particularly raises and tries to answer, is whether ISIS has developed a geopolitical imagination pivoted around a caliphate conception, and if so, how such geopolitical imagination is constructed within the wider discourse of the group's apocalyptic vision of international politics.[7] For this purpose, this research mainly focuses on ISIS' own media exhibition as deeming it a primary source, and extricates the group's discourse of territoriality thereof. This is of course based on the research's presupposition that ISIS has a discourse, and because it holds territory – also a discourse of territoriality. In this vein, this research is devoted to the critical analysis of ISIS' geopolitical discourse underpinned by its ideology,[8] whereby it seeks to unpack the group's territorial logic. As it is explicated below what a particular

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[6] Discourse is considered a geopolitical practice here or as Dodds describes "geopolitics is conceived as a form of discourse, able to produce and circulate spatial representations of global politics," see: Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 44.

[7] "Discourse refers to all means of communication with each other. (…) We routinely make sense of places, spaces and lanscapes in our everyday lives-in different ways and for different purposes (…)," see: Maria T. O'Shea, **Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan**, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 6.

[8] "In one sense all geopolitical discourse is ideological, if ideology is defined as an amalgam of ideas, symbols and strategies for promoting or changing a social and cultural order or, as Friedrich (1989, 301) puts it, 'political ideas in action'." See: John Agnew, **Mastering Space**, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 65.

geopolitical discourse means for the methodological approach of this study, the motivation to delve into ISIS' worldview of territorial imagination emanates from the necessity to understand 'the less inconspicuous' behind 'the obvious,' for the latter appears alongside military success and the takeover of places. Whereas the former, to a great share, accounts for what we *obviously* take notice of through various media channels as real incidents on a daily basis. To make it sound epic, this analysis seeks to explore the 'fate-giving backstage' of these incidents. It argues that ISIS' success in territorial expanding is not only due to military operational power and the takeover of lands; however, the group's *weltanschauung* (worldview)[9] enjoyed/enjoys rapid implementation in areas under control. Though disenchanting when pure pragmatism is at play, the interdependency between discourse and pragmatism provides the broader framework of this study. It should be acknowledged that it is not intended to give a full account on ISIS' specific understanding of Islam.[*] Rather far more specified, it is aimed to show how ISIS constructs 'its territorial self' vis-à-vis its 'other'. In doing so, this central question enters the realm of geopolitics, and subsequently the one of critical geopolitics.

Why *critical geopolitics*?

> "Geopolitics, in other words, should be liberated from its Cold War symbolic role and made into ***a semiotic free radical*** which problematizes how geography and politics are brought together to make sense" - G. Ó Tuathail[10]

Gearóid Ó Tuathail early - after the end of the Cold War era - noticed and wanted it to be noticed that geopolitics, a term first used by Rudolf Kjellen in 1899,[11] is nothing confined to a bipolar world. Rather, geopolitics is a 'detectable net' that catches *all interactions* taking place between geography and politics, 'a semiotic free radical'. Due to the classical understanding of geopolitics, this net was catching interactions between state politics and geography. However, the realm of critical geopolitics won over the

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[9] The fact that it has a worldview has been acknowledged at a number of times, most recently and in context of the *Dabiq* magazine (worldview as a longterm aspect) in the recent issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. See: Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, Kay L. O'Halloran and Rebecca Lange, "A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah," **Perspectives on Terrorism**, Vol. 11, No. 2, (April 2017), p. 3.

[*] ISIS' religious references are not a matter of research in this study. Such are solely touched upon when necessary.

[10] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "Critical Geopolitics and Development Theory: Intensifying the Dialogue," **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, Vol. 19, No. 2, (1994), p. 229.

[11] See, for example: Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 24.

former by reviewing this understanding, and launched an inclusive and critical approach, 'a semiotic free radical' that can engage in anything of a geopolitical notion. Therefore, critical geopolitics – often via discourse analysis – inspects complex relationships between 'spatialization strategies in international politics and forms of domination' imposed by elites over populations.[12] To have a better understanding, some basics need to be clarified. For instance, the meaning of geography in geopolitics, which Tuathail explicates as follows:

> All states are territorial and all foreign policy strategizing and practice is conditioned by territoriality, shaped by geographical location, and informed by certain geographical understandings about the world. Geography is not a fixed substratum as some claim but an historical and social form of knowledge about the earth. To consult 'geography' historically was not to view raw physical landscape or 'nature' but to read a book. Though often forgotten today, 'geography' is not 'nature'. Rather, geography is an inescapably social and political *geo-graphing*, an 'earth writing'.[13]

Applying this to current violent non-state actors in the Middle East like the PYD/YPG, Hizbollah or the Houthis in Yemen, first of all, one has to acknowledge that these groups hold considerable territories. Second, given their territorial existence, these groups are able to also practice policy strategizing, including foreign policy making. Third, the geographical location of these groups greatly impacts their meaning-making process of world politics and world territoriality, whereby a particular geographical understanding occurs. Therefore, as Tuathail rightly points out, geography here is not a study of mountains, seas, climates, and other geographical parameters. Beyond that, geography has entered this thesis as a 'social and political earth-writing,' as means of meaning-making of territory.

Although Ó Tuathail mentions here states as producers of geopolitical understanding, the claim of this research is that non-state actors can – when they obtain state-like features e.g. territorial control – develop peculiar discourses of territoriality. This presumes that non-state actors can externalize a certain 'social and political *geo-graphing*' as stated in the quote above regarding states. Moreover, *geo-graphing* can materialize within geopolitical discourse disclosing *geo-power*, what Wolfgang Natter

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[12] Boaz Atzili and Burak Kadercan, "Territorial designs and international politics: the diverging constitution of space and boundaries," **Territory, Politics, Governance**, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2017), p. 119.
[13] Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Vol. 22, No. 2-3, (1999), p. 109.

explains: "Geopolitics, like other discursive formations that articulate geo-power, would be seen to function as an ensemble of technologies of power concerned with the production and management of territorial space".[14] In this sense, taking on ISIS' worldview, it is argued that a specific *geo-graphing* appears and gives insights on the rationalistic backgrounds of incidents. More than that, such backgrounds are a '[re]source' of not only what happened or happens, but what can/might happen, and what didn't/couldn't and cannot happen. Importantly, while considering this, a continuous setback is the necessity of factoring in the group's capacities, internal alteration possibilities, and the effect of external factors.

Still, when taking into account what had happened in ISIS' timeline and how it discoursively framed this, the exploration of questions addressed in this research requires a critical geopolitics perspective. For critical geopolitics, which describes geopolitics as power politics, offers a profitable stance towards contemporary world politics.[15] That is to say that critical geopolitics takes into account, too, what lies beyond paradigm, what is erratic and divergent. To underpin the wide spectrum of engagement of critical geopolitics, Ó Tuathail asserts that "critical geopolitics varies from political economy analyses of world politics to largely textual analyses of foreign policy reasoning, inspired by Foucaultian discourse theory and Derridean deconstruction".[16] For this reason, the methodological approach of this study bases on the belief that a critical geopolitics perspective provides the lens to eye up "*Making Sense of ISIS' Geopolitical Imagination,*" embedded within its discourse of territoriality.

Methodological approach

This study embraces a qualitative holistic method and both an empirical-analytical and interpretative approach. It is empirical-analytical due to the analyzed material, which is the discourse and documentation of ISIS' political standpoint and behavior in *Dabiq*'s

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[14] Wolfgang Natter, "Geopolitics in Germany, 1919-45" in John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell and Gerard Toal (eds.) **A Companion to Political Geography**, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003, p.188.

[15] In Tuathail's words: "Critical geopolitics has long taken the dynamics of globalization, informationalization and 'risk society' seriously, recognizing that a new modernity of 'and' (ambivalence, multiplicity, simultaneity, globality, uncertainty, formlessness and borderlessness) is exploding in our inherited modernity of 'either-or' (calculability, singularity, linearity, nationality, certainty, dimensionality and [b]orders". See: Tuathail, Ibid., p. 109.

[16] Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," p. 123 (footnote).

15 issues.[17] The contents of these magazine issues provide objective authentic knowledge about the self-representation of ISIS, and set the primary source of this research. Furthermore, deductive reasoning is employed, while critical geopolitics – as a theoretical foundation – sheds light on explanatory models tackling categories and conceptions incorporated in *Dabiq*. Apart from that, critical geopolitics makes it possible to develop hypotheses beyond and upon the findings of this research, whereby at any rate, hypotheses always need to be put to test. However, critical geopolitics is the backdrop of many of the explanations given in this analysis. Moreover, the empirical-analytical part of this research is complemented by the interpretative method, especially evident when descriptive explanations of ISIS' discourse take place. Hereby, it is strived to draw connections between ideology, discourse, and action, while trying to present observable outcomes of this ambition.

Accordingly, the geopolitical discourse of ISIS is not only a matter of examination but a means of understanding its operational development. Putting emphasis on this discoursive dimension does not lead to disregard the reality ISIS unfolds; on the contrary, the textual analysis is indispensable for understanding the group's message to the world, its recruitment strategies, and its operational developments. In this connection, text is no longer a script in a conventional sense, it rather breaks and extends the conventional meaning due to its legitimizing power (e.g. *takfir*,[18] declaring somebody apostate and therefore permitted to be killed), similarly to any state when emposing a certain worldview through school books. Accordingly, the method of this research considers geopolitical discourse as something *produced* and therefore *determined*, in the way Foucault understood discourse.[19]

The premise of this methodology is that ISIS' texts and media exhibition, whatever the format, hold important functionalities. To name only one example, intelligence circles

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[17] "From July 5, 2014 to July 31, 2016, Al Hayat Media Centre, the branch of ISIS's Ministry of Media which produces material in English, produced fifteen issues of *Dabiq*". Retrieved from: Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran and Lange, "A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah," p. 2.

[18] See on the use of *takfir* (*takfirism*), for example: Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism," in R Meijer (ed.) **Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement**, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 246-248.

[19] As he once said: "I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. In a society such as our own we all know the rules of exclusion. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is prohibited. (…) speech is not merely the medium which manifests - or dissembles - desire; it is also the object of desire". See: Michel Foucault, "Orders of discourse," Inaugural lecture delivered at the Collège de France, **Social Science Information**, Vol. 10, No. 7, (1971), pp. 8-9.

(websites, analyzing blogs, and specialists) refer to textual analysis when aiming at understanding ISIS' operational behavior. This makes the text something of a guideline. Also the aspect of ISIS being a non-state actor makes it even more necessary to look closer at its discursive repertoire. Here, the difference between state and non-state actors must be clearly envisioned once again. Unlike a non-state actor, a state is based on a legal foundation while being part of an international legal system in which it has as much freedom as it has restrictions. Needless to say, the much contested term *anarchy* in international relations that actually underlines the unknownability of state behavior, markets, militancy development and other aspects, counts for both, states and non-state actors. However, a state is less flexible or has other means to deal with given circumstances than non-state actors. While a state subdues itself to an individual responsibility, for example by signing legally binding treaties, a non-state actor and in particular terrorist organizations can strain their behavioral capacity – geopolitical discourse included – as far as it does not decrease the contentness of their members.

In such flexibility, the challenge which this reserach tackles is the methodological decision of not separating tactics and conceptions of territoriality from each other. Instead, as in the aforementioned example, each incident has a background. This transferred to methodology implies that each tactic of territoriality underlies a conception of territoriality. That is why both dimensions form a comprehensive unity in taking on ISIS' territorial reality and imaginary.

The analyzing approach of this study adopts a view from within – from ISIS' perspective – in order to complete asserted reasons accounting for their success (popularly named as such is sectarian furor or failed states' conditions). As one of the complementary factors, ISIS' *weltanschauung* is strongly cross-linked with how it reads, understands, and interprets religious scripture.[20] At this point, discourse prevails as a legitimizing instrument referring to a sacred source. Arguably, Gertjan Dijkink could call it "ISIS' adaptation of religion to environmental and temporal conditions," as he notes: "(…) we should not search for geopolitical visions in the canonical texts themselves but focus on the continously changing interpretations of the world against

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[20] See on this: Mara Revkin and William McCants, "How does ISIS approach Islamic Scripture?", Experts wigh in Series (15/21), **Brookings**, 13 May 2015.

the background of sacred writings and jurisprudence".[21] This call for caution has been well borne in mind throughout this thesis.

Difficulties in this research

Though this research clearly defends the idea that ISIS' ideological horizon can be extensively examined through the lens of critical geopolitics, it must be confessed that the matter of this research has not been an easy one. In detecting *Dabiq*'s 15 issues, altogether 918 pages with a flood of big images,[22] it is sometimes really hard to understand which comes first: ISIS' imagination or ISIS' particular understanding of religious scripture? Maybe this question can never be answered at a satisfying scope. Propagandistic rhetoric offers a large set of idiomatic tools, however, when delved into these, one can easily get lost inside a complex of labels and terms, which ISIS uses for categorizing territories, worldviews, governmental systems, enemies and 'its self'. So, one may be well advised to determine designative categories from the beginning of reading through the material, for much of it is repetition – recalling same categories over and over again but within labels of different shades.

Also importantly, it is by no means claimed that every member of ISIS is conscious about the conception of territoriality this research has attributed to the group's leadership, however at least, this conception is supposed to be in charge when the group's military conduct must be legalized. Additionally, it is hard to make assumptions on the future of ISIS-controlled areas and people, for ISIS has presently lost its control in Iraq, though the battle for Mosul is still ongoing, and positions held in Syria remain to be freed. Yet, the fact that ISIS has existed in its (former) strongholds must be considered important, for ISIS-members themselves say, "there is now a growing generation of children who lived the era of the Islamic State, who have been implanted with the 'right doctrine'."[23] So, if Stuart Elden is right when saying "the idea of a territory as bounded space under the control of a group of people, with fixed boundaries,

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[21] Gertjan Dijkink, "When Geopolitics and Religion Fuse: A Historical Perspective," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 11, No. 2, (2006), p. 201.

[22] In total 1095 images. See: Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran and Lange, "A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah," p. 4.

[23] Jérôme Fritel (producer), *ISIS, Birth of a Terrorist State* [documentary], **arte**, 28 July 2015, accessed 01.05.2017 via https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgcG2bzEd3I. ISIS is believed to have controlled 9 million people in total (Syria and Iraq) at the end of 2014. See: Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran and Lange, Ibid., p. 9.

exclusive internal sovereignty,[24] and equal external status is historically produced,"[25] then ISIS – though lacking equal external status – contributes (and has contributed) to a historical production of a territoriality, that will persist anyhow in peoples' memories.

Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. After having read this introduction, which equips the reader with the framing of the problem and basic theoretical and methodological understandings applied to this thesis, the first chapter provides the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework formulates the theoretical backdrop shedding light on ISIS' conception of territoriality, which is examined in the second chapter. Subsequently, the third chapter dwells on the mapping of ISIS' territoriality by laying bare specified territoriality templates, which are used in *Dabiq*. Finally, the thesis comes to an end by offering a conclusion, in which findings of this work are presented and evaluated. So, taking the first, the second, and the third chapters into account, following conduct is adopted.

Installing the theoretical framework of this research upon the premise: *space regulation → order → border → sovereign entity*, following structural approach occurs in tackling ISIS' discourse of territoriality. First of all, it should be noted that territoriality is the central concept of this thesis, for it is the pivot of the above given premise. Namely regulating a space conditions a specific conception of territoriality,[26] while order exposes characteristics of this conception, and border after all demarcates and claims a sovereign entity encompassing the space that is ruled by order. As it can be understood from here, territoriality manifests itself in all of these progressive and interlinked components of state formation. However conceding ISIS' lack of legal statehood and its

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[24] In this thesis, we understand 'sovereignty' in the way Emmerich de Vattel does; namely as a form and norm of non-interventionism. See: Dodds, Geopolitics: *A very Short Introduction*, pp. 60-61.

[25] Cited by Boaz Atzili and Burak Kadercan, "Territorial designs and international politics: the diverging constitution of space and boundaries," p. 119.

[26] Regulating space upon a specific conception of territoriality that emanates from religion is explained and exemplified by Roger W. Stump as follows. "At the same time, many constraints on the use of secular space derive from the observance of codified systems of religious law, such as the sharia of Islam or the halakhah of Judaism, which define specific norms of thought and behavior in various realms of daily life. In such cases, the religious control of local social space may be imposed on adherents and nonadherents alike, in some instances by means of formal institutions. The state-funded Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice in Saudi Arabia, for example, enforces various Islamic standards within the context of secular space, including required patterns of gender segregation and the closing of businesses during prayer observances". See: Roger W. Stump, **The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place, and Space,** Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, p. 24.

diminishing control over territory, once established territoriality – partially realized and overall imagined – has to unveil a discourse of territoriality, which is the sub-central mark of this research. Under this mark, it will be investigated what ISIS' discourse of territoriality is, and what kind of categories such discourse implies. Hereafter follows the operationalization of the discourse of territoriality, addressing two elementary questions. First, what are the operational domains of ISIS' territoriality? Second, what are the components of ISIS' discourse of territoriality? Not to foreclose too much, a basic finding in tackling the latter is that ISIS' discourse of territoriality exposes revolutionary, expansionist, revisionist-resisting, and apocalyptic-futuristic components. After making sense of ISIS' territoriality, the focus will be navigated further on its operationalization that unveils specified templates, which concretely frame ISIS' geopolitical discourse of territoriality.

CHAPTER I: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Many attempts at understanding ISIS as a distinct phenomenon have so far unveiled important knowledge about the group, ranging from its organizational evolution to its apocalyptic creed. However, the way ISIS *geo-graphs* the world and *spatializes* international politics and power relations has not yet been matter of an overarching research. Therefore, this thesis undertakes an investigation in this vein, leaning on the wide explanatory field of critical geopolitics.[27]

A considerable literature on ISIS deals with its evolution starting off from the crib of al-Qaeda, and aims at understanding ISIS – with its strategies – at a holistic level, and how it differs from other jihadi organizations. This literature, apart from giving an understanding about ISIS as a new phenomenon, also formulates counter-strategies for the West. As such Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger wrote *ISIS: The State of Terror*, and Hassan Hassan together with Michael Weiss published *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. Similarly, as the title suggests, Peter Neumann's *Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West* after breaking down the history of modern terrorism into four phases, gives recommendations for effective counter-terrorism.[28]

Differently, a journalistic eyecatcher has been Joby Warrick's *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, who among others concentrates on the person Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the founding father of ISI(S).* Moreover, Charles Lister's *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency* focuses on the operational development and the group's expansion to Syria, where other jihadist groups position themselves towards ISIS. ISIS' Syria experience is, too, a cornerstone of Ufuk Ulutaş's work *The State of Savagery: ISIS in Syria*, deeming al-Qaeda strategist Abu Bakr Naji's (pen name) *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass* a guideline for the group's military conduct. Likewise, *The*

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[27] "Critical geopolitics takes its inspiration from Edward Said's Orientalism (1978), which could be justly regarded as the first work of critical geopolitics. In it, Said examines how the Western discourse of Orientalism produced and managed the Orient, constructing it as exotic and inferior". See: Martin Müller, "Text, Discourse, Affect, and Things," in Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp (eds.) **The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics** (49-68), Oxford: Ashgate, 2013, p. 54.

[28] There are of course a large number of articles dedicated to effective counter-terrorism, for example, see: Lina Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding," **Carnegie Middle East Center**, 29 June 2015.

* Zarqawi founded al-Qaeda in Iraq and set in motion the birth of ISIS, when the group was confined to Iraqi territory. ISI abbreviates the 'Islamic State in Iraq'.

Masterplan: ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory by Brian Fishman aims at reconstructing strategic stages, which are believed to be inspired by Naji's book – originally written in Arabic and translated into English by William McCants, who devoted a book to the end times narrative of ISIS, titled *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, And Doomsday Vision of The Islamic State*. Herein, McCants draws the relationship between ISIS' narrative and Islamic scripture, as he refers to Hadiths and Qur'anic verses employed within the group's discourse.

Apart from secondary literature dealing more generally with ISIS as a terrorist organization, a wide range of articles dedicated to the examination of *Dabiq* has recently attracted attention. To exemplify; the strategic logic of ISIS' propaganda campaign has been analyzed by Haroro J. Ingram.[29] Also considered by Thomas R. McCabe is the discrepancy between the apocalyptic end times vision promoted in *Dabiq* alongside military operations performed against ISIS.[30] On the other hand, the apocalypse is a central element in ISIS' communication strategy, so points Vaughan Phillips.[31] Connected with the apocalypse, too, is Marita La Palm's paper focusing on socio-psychologically influential 'death cults' situated in *Dabiq*.[32]

Discussing who *Dabiq* is actually addressing, Brandon Colas touches upon 'fundamentalist hermeneutics' within *Dabiq* texts, perpetually aiming at a cohesion between religious scripture and the author's intention.[33] Anthony N Celso in his paper headed "Dabiq: IS's Apocalyptic 21ˢᵗ Century Jihadist Manifesto," places the apocalypse on a broader framework of the group's ideology and searches for rationality behind its utopian worldview.[34] The *Dabiq* magazine has also been subject to discourse analysis in a master thesis by Marius Steindal.[35] Other varieties of taking on discourse appeared, for example, in "Islamist narratives in ISIS recruitment propaganda" by Samantha

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[29] Haroro J. Ingram, "An analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq magazine," **Australian Journal of Political Science**, (June 2016), pp. 1-21, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10361146.2016.1174188, accessed 19.04.2017.

[30] Thomas R. McCabe, "Apocalypse Soon? The Battle for Dabiq," **Small Wars Journal**, (July 2016), pp. 1-12.

[31] Vaughan Phillips, "The Islamic State's Strategy: Bureaucratizing the Apocalypse through Strategic Communications," **Studies in Conflict & Terrorism**, (2016), pp. 1-27, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236571, accessed 24.04.2017.

[32] Marita La Palm, "Concerning Features of an Apocalyptic Cult in the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)," **Foreign Policy Journal**, (October 2014), pp. 1-10.

[33] Brandon Colas, "What Does Dabiq Do? ISIS Hermeneutics and Organizational Fractures within Dabiq Magazine," **Studies in Conflict & Terrorism**, Vol. 40, No. 3, (2017), pp. 179-190.

[34] Anthony N Celso, "Dabiq: IS's Apocalyptic 21ˢᵗ Century Jihadist Manifesto," **Political Sciences & Public Affairs (J Pol Sci Pub Aff)**, Vol. 2, No. 4, (2014), pp. 1-4.

[35] Marius Steindal, "ISIS Totalitarian Ideology and Discourse: An Analysis of the Dabiq Magazine Discourse," Norwegian University of Life Sciences (Faculty of Social Sciences), Department of International Environment and Development Studies, 2015.

Mahood and Halim Rane,[36] and "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State" by Harleen K. Gambhir[37] or "The evolution of the ISIS' language: a quantitative analysis of the language of the first year of Dabiq magazine" by Matteo Vergani and Anna-Maria Bliuc.[38]

Underlying Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) approach, Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, Kay L. O'Halloran and Rebecca Lange together brought in light the text and images of *Dabiq* and its successor magazine *Rumiyah*, pointing the differences and similarities between both.[39] How ISIS understands the concept of immigration (*hijrah*)[40] is another research question raised and answered within a *Dabiq* analysis by Matan Uberman and Shaul Shay.[41] Interestingly and coming closer to the matter of reserach of this thesis, Ali Nehme Hamdan's "Breaker of Barriers? Notes on the Geopolitics of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham"* deconstructs the group's Skyes-Picot narrative in light of the historical-geographic context.[42] Yet, ISIS has not been elaborated as a theo-territorial formation against the backdrop of critical geopolitics. Nonetheless, such research would be able to shed light on the group's non-state (territorial) reality.

1.1. *What* does this thesis examine?

As one of the impulses for analyzing ISIS' geopolitical imagination in this thesis, Yosef Jabareen's "The emerging Islamic State: Terror, territoriality, and the agenda of social

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[36] Samantha Mahood and Halim Rane, "Islamist narratives in ISIS recruitment propaganda," **The Journal of International Communication**, Vol. 23, No. 1, (April 2017), pp. 15-35.

[37] Harleen K. Gambhir, "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State," **ISW**, (August 2014), pp. 1-12.

[38] Matteo Vergani and Anna-Maria Bliuc, "The evolution of the ISIS' language: a quantitative analysis of the language of the first year of Dabiq magazine," **Sicurezza, Terrorismo, e Società**, 2. issue, (2015), pp. 7-20.

[39] Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran and Lange, "A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah," pp. 1-19.

[40] "The Islamic concept of *hijra* illustrates the religious meaning of migration. This concept derives from the Hijra of Muhammad, one of the founding events of Islam, in which the prophet and his followers migrated to Medina to escape persecution in Mecca. During Muhammad's rule, hijra to Medina also became an obligation for the faithful, a means of expressing their commitment to Islam. Based on these precedents, Islamic jurists later interpreted hijra as the migration of adherents from *Dar al-Harb,* the "Realm of War" where non-Muslims ruled, to Dar al-Islam, the "Realm of lslam" where the principles of lslamic law prevailed". See: Stump, Ibid., p. 69.

[41] Matan Uberman and Shaul Shay, "Hijrah According to the Islamic State: An Analysis of Dabiq," **Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis**, Vol. 8, No. 9, (September 2016), pp. 16-20.

* Lands, which include Syria, Iraq and the Levant.

[42] Ali Nehme Hamdan, "Breaker of Barriers? Notes on the Geopolitics of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 21, No. 3, (February 2016), pp. 605-627.

transformation"[43] enticed us to treat *Dabiq* contents as means of practical geopolitics, for Martin Müller recalls that Agnew and Ó Tuathail identify 'speeches, policy documents or government records' as practical geopolitics.[44] On that account – if ISIS is considered a policy-producing actor – then *Dabiq* must, to some extent, fall into the category of practical geopolitics. Overall, the brief overview of written work on ISIS and its online magazine *Dabiq* shows that any encounter with ISIS' theo-territorial being and its discourse of territoriality has not yet resulted in a large analysis, which this thesis hence strives for.

This study aims at broadening the discussion of non-state actors' geopolitical imagination. The findings of this research are clealry in favor of a diagnosis implying the possibility for non-state actors to feed themselves of geopolitical patterns and imaginations. ISIS, when examined through the discourse analysis of *Dabiq*, strongly supports the hypothesis that geopolitical imagination is not an exclusive repertoire for 'conventional' states to make use of in their domestic and foreign policymaking. Approaching geopolitical imagination in this way upvalues critical geopolitics as a source of methodology and a horizon-widening perspective.

1.2. *Why* to make use of critical geopolitics?

As indicated in the introductory sentence above, critical geopolitics is the theoretical lens through which ISIS as a theo-territorial formation is elaborated.[45] For, on the critical poststructuralist legacy of Foucault's discourse analysis and Derrida's deconstruction, "critical geopolitics is an effort to think critically about the world

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[43] Yosef Jabareen, "The emerging Islamic State: Terror, territoriality, and the agenda of social transformation," **Geoforum** (Elsevier), 58. issue, (November 2014), pp. 51-55.

[44] Martin Müller, "Text, Discourse, Affect and Things," p. 51.

[45] However, critical geopolitics faces some critique, e.g. from the realm of radical geopolitics. For instance: "One important difference, from the point of view of radical geopolitics, is that critical geopolitics has neglected to identify and examine the causes of government policy, wars and political events, having been more concerned with the task of describing how they unfold and the ways in which they are represented through various discursive strategies. This comes in part from critical geopolitics rejection of 'scientific' approaches and 'explanation' in its study of the human world. However, causal mechanisms are very much part of political affairs although of a different nature than in the natural world. Radical geopolitics argues that international events and politics in general are to a large extent driven by political economic factors, (…)". See: Julien Mercille, "Radical Geopolitics," in Dodds, Kuus and Sharp (eds.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, p. 133. Nevertheless, radical geopolitics concedes that it is insufficient in explaining phenomena like 9/11. See: Ibid, pp. 130-131.

around us and to challenge inherited legacies of imperial practices in the name of greater emancipation".[46]

Importantly, exploring ISIS' worldview through the lens of territoriality presupposes the inclusion of all relationship possibilities between (wo)man and nature. Therefrom, the conception of religious geopolitics as a dissident geopolitical form has been reciprocated within the literature of critical geopolitics, envisioning and including all what has been left out by classical geopolitics. Therefore, critical geopolitics as a discipline that challenges conventional knowledge and premises rooted in the classical understanding of what geopolitics is, has been the dynamic and proposer that prompted us to detect the territoriality discourse of ISIS. Also the fact that international relations do not pay sufficient attention to the diversity of geopolitical realities is another argument leading and pushing towards a critical geopolitics investigation.

Starting off with the evolution of geopolitics, which "(…) is about [the] ideological process of constructing spatial, political and cultural boundaries to demarcate the domestic space as separate from the threatening Other; to exclude Otherness and simultaneously discipline and control the domestic political sphere,"[47] one has to know that geopolitics was of a social Darwinist notion[48] – when it was first formulated and employed as a statecraft technology.[49] Accordingly, the 'other' had to be pushed out of the space (inhabited territories), which the 'self' aspired to as a living space – exclusively for its own. In ISIS' context, this thesis adopts Roger W. Stump's approach on space. Stump argues that religion has the power of regulation on space.[50] Religion is therefore – ISIS-held areas prove such spaces* – the main driver in organizing and configuring space.

Though geopolitics as a practice of thought has far-reaching roots – ever since human geography has shown up, the conglomeration of writings (expressing geopolitical

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[46] Noted by Ó Tuathail in foreword. See: Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, p. xxi.
[47] Definition by Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, cited by Agnew in "The Origins of Critical Geopolitics," in Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp (eds.), Ibid., p. 23.
[48] A showcase for this is Ratzel's take on the 'lebensraum theory,' suggesting that a state is a "super-organism" and "a geopolitical force rooted in and shaped by the natural environment". See: Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 28.
[49] Ibid., p. 1.
[50] Stump, p. 18.
* The almost total exclusion of women from public life or that 'sharia councils,' for example, do not employ women. Also mosques and places of public gathering are 'men-held' spaces.

conceptions like e.g. '*heartland*,' '*rimland*' or '*lebensraum*'[51]) of famous geopoliticians like Halford Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel and Alfred T. Mahan has been termed classical geopolitics.[52] That is to say that classical geopolitics encompasses the geopolitical thought of the 19th and 20th (first half) centuries, until experiencing a break through the wave of post-structuralism in the late 20th century. This break initiated the beginning of a transformation from classical geopolitics into critical geopolitics. Meanwhile, continuous change in the world and world politics challenged the new understanding of geopolitics, as Agnew mentions: "(…) there was also much writing about globalization, both historic and recent, and the importance of actors in world politics other than the quintessential states/empires of classical geopolitics and contemporary international relations theory".[53] This can be interpreted as an advice to factor in non-state formations, too.

However, neither classical geopolitics ceased to exist nor has critical geopolitics flourished upon something new. Rather, critical geopolitics emanated as a critical review of classical geopolitics, stealing its vocabulary not to justify power politics but to explain how it is used to do so.[54] Martin Müller expresses the divide between both regarding their different approaches:

> In placing an emphasis on the construction of meaning in texts, critical geopolitics distinguishes itself from classical geopolitics. Studying location and resources as sources of political power over territory, classical geopolitics considers itself an objective science of how geography influences world politics (Dodds 2010). Phrased in the words of a classical geopolitician: 'geography does not argue. It simply is' (Spykman 1938: 236). It is this purported objectivity and the apologetic justification of power politics and interstate rivalry that comes with it that critical geopolitics protests. Understanding geopolitics as text opens an avenue to see global space as a malleable creation with political purpose and potentially multiple meanings. It does not just exist, set in stone, somewhere 'out there' for us to discover, but is a product of our own making. After all, 'it is humans that decide how to represent things, and not the tilings themselves.[55]

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[51] For more information on the term 'lebensraum' (living space), see: Karl Lange, "Der Terminus "Lebensraum" in Hitler's "Mein Kampf," **Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte**, Vol. 13, (October 1965), pp. 426-437.
[52] Ibid., pp. 1-2.
[53] Ibid., p. 28.
[54] Agnew identifies the benefits of critical geopolitics for research as follows: "The first thing is a conceptual matrix for a geographical analysis of world politics based in ideas about geographical representations and socio-economic resources. Another is an emphasis on the role of vision (even in the mind's eye) in how the world is structured and acted on by political agents of various sorts. A third would be how important the fusion between territory and identity is in modern nationalism and how it still plays a role in dividing up the world". See: Agnew, "Origins of Critical Geopolitics," p. 29.
[55] Müller, Ibid., p. 50.

So, understanding critical geopolitics "(…) as the *critical* sense that world politics is underpinned by a myriad of assumptions and schemas about the ways in which geographical divisions of the world, strategic plans, global images and the disposition of the continents and oceans enter into the making of foreign policy and into popular legitimation of those policies,"[56] this thesis extends the research scope of critical geopolitics onto non-state formations. As such, ISIS is a violent non-state actor who positions itself towards world politics, who communicates and interacts with foreign agents, and who seeks overarching religious justification for doing so.

Thus, this research identifies ISIS as a suitable case for a critical geopolitics analysis. Furthermore, in a Foucauldian understanding, if "geopolitics was re-conceptualized as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics in such a way as to represent it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas,"[57] then tracing back the spatialization of world politics in *Dabiq* must have been a conscious geopolitically motivated geo-graphing – done by ISIS' leadership.

At this point, it is important to know that text, if not discourse in all its forms of appearance, "also afford a view of geopolitics beyond the arena of statecraft by giving access to perceptions of ordinary people, so-called 'popular geopolitics'. (…) popular understandings are tied up in an intricate interplay with elite ones and provide the foundation on which elite texts can draw in order to assert their authority and gain acceptance".[58] In this sense, this thesis deems the *Dabiq* magazine a knotting point between leadership and sympathizers. Though accepting that 'elite texts' such as theological reasonings might not represent full means of popular geopolitics, however, the selection of religious scripture such as certain Hadiths (prophetic sayings) leads one to think that ISIS' leadership systematically makes use of popular religious references, overwhelmingly known to the Sunni mainstream.

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[56] Agnew, "Origins of Critical Geopolitics," p. 19.
[57] So argued by Agnew and Ó Tuathail. See: Ibid., p. 21.
[58] Müller, Ibid., p. 51.

1.3. *How* is critical geopolitics implemented in this thesis?

This thesis argues that *Dabiq* implies a specific earth-writing hostile to the dominant discourse and order of current world politics, and to prove such argument; it discoursively analyzes antagonistic categories, the labelling of territory, and ISIS' self-representation within symbolic theo-territorial ascriptions (e.g. *land of malahim*). Such analysis bases on the assumption that ISIS practices 'dissident religious geopolitics,' and therefore expresses its blacklash to the status quo of international relations in form of a dissident religious discourse. At this point, this thesis makes use of Lari Nyroos' term *dissident geopolitics*, which widens the "three-folded geopolitical world map of meaning" implying practical, formal, and popular geopolitics,[59] however lacking "a framework for geopolitics and religion". Nyroos further states that *dissident geopolitics* is initiated as a "fourth typology making way for the multi-disciplinary nature of geopolitics".[60] More broadly, Nyroos puts *dissident geopolitics* into the category of 'reli*geo*politics,' codifying a subfield of critical geopolitics, which has been designed to examine the engagement of fundamentalists with geopolitics. Though, one can hardly argue that critical geopolitics ignores the power of religion.[61]

Anssi Paasi notes two decades ago that "religion is often significant in the construction of socio-spatial distinctions, even though these distinctions are not the basic point of departure for religious discourse. Religious language nevertheless commonly spatializes the distinction between good and evil (…)".[62] Though Paasi rather thinks of nations and nation-states here,[63] we transmit this thought to the study of non-state phenomena. According to Nyroos, "fundamentalists geo-graph territory (cite the site) through geo-pious practices (cites) and, consequently, create an architecture of enmity within the

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[59] Dodds has well illustrated this schema in a figure. See: Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Intrduction*, p. 46.

[60] Lari Nyroos, "Religeopolitics: Dissident geopolitics and the 'fundamentalism' of Hamas and Kach," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 6, No. 3, (2001), p. 140.

[61] As, for example, Agnew notes: "Religion and geopolitics have always had ties of one sort or another. Much nationalism and imperialism have found purpose and justification in religious differences and in proselytising. As the modern European nation- states came into existence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religious zealotry was both cause and consequence of the concentration of state power and the rivalries between the states". See: John Agnew, "Religion and Geopolitics," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 11, No. 2, (2006) p. 185. He also notes in the same piece that religion appears "as the geopolitical idiom of the time" (p. 188). Another remark by Nyroos is that "Human beings - defined as animal symbolicum that lives 'in a new dimension of reality' created by language and symbolism - have a deep dread of disorder and, hence, religion functions to fulfil the profound need for order". See: Nyroos, Ibid., p. 138.

[62] Anssi Paasi, **Territories, Boundaries And Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border**, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1996, p. 194.

[63] Regarding this issue, he cites Satov, saying: "God is a synthetic personality of a nation. There has never been a God that has been common to all or several nations! Each has its own. When gods become common to several nations, it has always meant the disappearance of a nation". See: Paasi, Ibid., p. 198.

Westphalian international order (sight the cite) in which they are forced to act, which they seek to abolish".[64] On that account, this thesis presumes that ISIS is led by fundamentalists who position themselves as dissident geopoliticians against the Westphalian nation-state system, and such positioning is incorporated within ISIS' discourse of territoriality in *Dabiq*.

1.4. Discourse analysis

Asking what role discourse plays for critical geopolitics, Müller responds that "Critical geopolitics hinges on the assumption that we can read global politics off textual evidence. More than that, it argues that texts are not mimetic but productive of the political world: texts construct geopolitics".[65] Accordingly, critical geopolitics treats discourse as evidence for geopolitical interpretation forms because it makes "space knowable and meaning-full,"[66] while offering poststructuralist instruments to understand discourse and what it implies, both textually as non-textually.[67]

Therefore, this thesis exercises discourse analysis to pick out what ISIS' discourse of territoriality is and implies, however being aware of different approaches regarding its usage, for "discussion of how to formally undertake a discourse analysis of geopolitical reasoning and foreign policy practice is long overdue". So, given the number of possibilities in undertaking discourse analysis, each "(…) needs to be tailored to both the empirical material and the theoretical assumptions underpinning the research project".[68]

In the research case of this thesis, *Dabiq* contents have been searched for meaning ascriptions to territories and identities. Hereby, text and meaning sprung from text are both studied. Thus, importantly, this reserach is built upon text − *Dabiq* contents − yet text does not only offer written word but meanings and connections of meanings, which Gilles Deleuze designated as "extra-textual practice that prolongs the text".[69] In this

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[64] Lari Nyroos, Ibid, p. 141.
[65] Müller, Ibid., p. 58.
[66] Müller, Ibid., p. 55.
[67] "For Foucault, who is the main reference for the concept of discourse, discourses establish truth regimes. They define what can count as true, what remains hidden and what can be seen. Discourses encircle the field of the speakable and determine who can speak and, as a consequence, who has authority. At the same time, discourses produce publics, audiences who identify with one or the other discourse". See: Müller, Ibid., p. 54.
[68] Müller, Ibid., p. 58.
[69] Müller, Ibid., p. 63.

sense, text serves to understand ISIS' sense-making of territoriality and its geopolitics, and in doing so, only textual contents in *Dabiq* are used because a semiotic analysis on the basis of images and designs is not a matter of this work. Importantly, the overarching assumption hereby is that reality or elements of reality of a research phenomenon can be captured through discourse analysis because discourse is partially able to reflect the reality of a phenomenon. Consequently, discourse is not independent or cannot be separated from the phenomenon it belongs to; on the contrary, the phenomenon is the very subject of discourse. It so brings discourse into existence and determines the meanings within. In other words, analyzing the discourse in *Dabiq* can enable us to capture reality or reality elements of the phenomenon 'ISIS'.

To operationalize discourse, if geopolitics is a "theatrical drama in which statesperson* act out roles and have to piece together a credible storyline and performance in front of an audience," then *Dabiq* provides the storyline and the stage of such drama. Stage here means the geographical sites which are used in ISIS' discourse of territoriality. These sites are linked with corresponding protagonists, e.g. the White House and Obama. Furthermore "The analysis of the building blocks of such a storyline, according to Ó Tuathail should examine location specifications, situation descriptions and protagonist typologies of a storyline (..)".[70] In detecting how a story is created in *Dabiq*, location specifications in form of cites occur, and situations are described due to a dissident understanding of world politics. That, on the one hand, implies the reality or status quo of current international affairs, while it on the other hand presents the imagination of a different world – deeply dissident to the former.

1.5. Territoriality in the case of ISIS

With the conception of a caliphate leaning on specific ideological doctrines, which shape the territorial imagination of ISIS, two main determinants are in charge: *Conceptions of territoriality* and *tactics of territoriality*.[71] For the conceptions of territoriality are provided through the ideological repertoire embedded in theo-political

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* Here as elsewhere in this thesis, the analogy to state is indispensable. However, as clarified in the introduction, we argue that non-state territorial formations hold the possibility to practice geopolitics and develop discourses of territoriality – akin to states.

[70] Müller, Ibid., p. 59.

[71] Jabareen, Ibid., p.51.

references and threat perceptions.[72] Here, the focus primarily lies on ISIS' conceptions of territoriality in order to understand its geopolitical vision out of which its tactics of territoriality derive. To properly scrutinize ISIS' religious dissident territoriality, it must be expressed what dissident means in this particular context. Though making a distinction between the self-perception of ISIS and how ISIS is considered by the neutral observer perspective, the fact that ISIS is quite dissident in terms of reinterpreting the actual meaning of conventional concepts such as territoriality, legality, identity, violence and so forth, is a cutting point of both perspectives.[73]

At any rate, ISIS' dissence is formulated in *Dabiq*'s texts, and usually in a reactive fashion because *Dabiq* answers on a great scale, ranging from Islamophobia in European societies to western anti-ISIS coalition strikes on ISIS' strongholds. So the conception of territoriality, which ISIS has developed in *Dabiq*, has two dimensions. The first dimension is religious scripture, whose wording ISIS does not change, but whose interpretation it configures. To exemplify, the conception of a transterritorial *ummah* at the expense of (Muslim) nation-states derives from religion being "the substitute worldview for those who have no tie to a nation-state".[74]

This is meaningful for several reasons. Firstly, it does apply to ISIS' refuse of nationalist conceptions. Religiosity for ISIS is not only an identity basis; however, it provides a sui generis legitimacy for the group. Still, compared to the second dimension, the former proves less flexible. The second dimension implies ISIS' interaction with outside; with the world, with its friends and foes so to speak. Both dimensions offer forms of dissence; while the first is a general form of dissence against all secular conceptions, the second is more specified, 'tailored' according realpolitik, and above all self-producing. By self-producing, it is meant that ISIS distinguishes itself within the intra-territorial context which is Muslim. It willingly distinguishes/excludes/specifies/distances itself from Muslim countries, marking them as *near enemies* whose extinction is preferred over the far enemy's, if they refuse to get on the 'true path' ISIS has offered, *even created*.

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[72] Threat perceptions are vital for the *religeopolitical* self-construction of ISIS, as Dijkink notes: "Only when a threat to the freedom of a group arises that involves an infringement of the life-space by other human groups does religion appear capable of offering inspiration or narratives for describing the world in terms of a territorial struggle". See: Gertjan Dijkink, "When Geopolitics and Religion Fuse: A Historical Perspective," p. 203. However, the infringement of a life-space is surely not the only reason for narratives inspired by religion.

[73] ISIS names it "our *manhaj*" which means "our methodology," implying conceptions and tactics. See interjihadi discussion upon manhaj in Dabiq's 6. issue, pp. 19-23, and also: Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 24, p. 28, p. 30.

[74] Dijkink, Ibid., p. 206.

To describe the relationship between man and nature, may it be how human beings attach meanings to their natural environment or to themselves through reflecting nature (territory), several terms developed out of such train of thought. As such, *geosophy* considered by Maria T. O'Shea includes *all* geographical views within a society, covering a full set of societal identities. Her emphasis lies upon 'subjective conceptions' inherent in geosophy.[75] O'Shea's inductive approach encompassing all geographical views in a society can be traced in ISIS' territoriality discourse as an attempt at taking up all pre-existing geographical views of people in areas under control, however filtering these through ISIS' *ideological selectivity*.[76] For instance, considering Sufi shrines or Shi'a pilgrimage sites as places of idol-worship is nothing new for Iraqi and Syrian Sunnis. So, the consequence of such filtering would mean to render a population's geographical view(s) befitting to the governing leadership, and to form a homogeneous subjectivity on geography, whatever the scope of excluding deviant geographical views. Therefore, the territoriality discourse in *Dabiq* is a testimony of practical geopolitics and, to a considerable extent, popular geopolitics.

The subjectivity,[77] which ISIS' territoriality discourse unfolds, prods at Yi-Fu Tuan's *geopiety* that he paraphrases as a 'special complex of relationships between man and nature'. Within this understanding, if patriotism is a form of geopiety to Tuan, as O'Shea asserts, than other facets of belonging may have similar traits. Thus, the discussion of geopiety can be rigorously widened by introducing terms like sacralization, "*ummah*" (worldwide community of Muslims), "*imamah*" (political and spiritual leadership), and so on.

The term *topophilia*, again from Tuan's repertoire, suggests a slightly different approach to the relationship between man and territory, in which these both become specified. Men (of course women included) adhere to a specified identity, whereas this identity suggests a special relationship with a specified place. In this connection, the conquest of an already characterized place (prior to conquest) may have a different meaning for ideologically indoctrinated (thus ideology is always woven with identity)

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[75] O'Shea, Ibid., pp. 4-5.
[76] Iain Wallace, "Territory, Typology, Theology: Geopolitics and the Christian Scriptures," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 11, No. 2, (2006), 209.
[77] Subjectivity here corresponds to what Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş refer: "(…) ISIL's ontology is neither the state nor the individual but an (utopian) idea of the Ummah, (…) a new multi-national subjectivity of inhabitants". See Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, "The New Middle East, ISIL and the 6 th Revolt Against the West," p. 77.

or as Nyroos would maybe say 'fundamentalist' ISIS fighters. Reporting on the takeover of *Dabiq*, the namesake magazine records the following:

> This month, the soldiers of the Islamic State launched a swift and brutal offensive in the northern Halab countryside. The campaign, entitled "Taking Revenge for the Chaste Sisters," targeted the treacherous sahwāt murtaddīn* who prostituted themselves to America and its regional puppets, stabbing the mujahidin** in the back and subsequently imprisoning and even raping many of the muhājirāt***. The campaign in northern Halab succeeded in liberating a number of towns and villages including Akhtarīn, Turkmān Bārih, Huwār an-Nahr, and Dābiq, whose name our readers will no doubt recognize as the title of our magazine. As mentioned in the introduction to our first issue, the name of our magazine was taken from the area named Dābiq in the northern countryside of Halab, due to the significant role it will play during the events of al-Malhamah al-Kubrā (The Grand Battle) against the crusaders.[78]

For these fighters or 'fundamentalists' understand themselves as the *liberating* unit of an ultimate, single, and exceptional Islamic authority. Wallace emphasis on the meaning and effect of Christian "dispensationalism" appears here, though oddly.[79] Similarly to some Christian dispensionalists, ISIS is convinced of being the God-willing liberator of people and territories fell into the hands of disbelief. Liberating lands also corresponds to what Nyroos says about fundamentalism.

> (…) that perceives today's world as a threat and does not recognise the legitimacy of the prevailing order – has flourished and we have witnessed a resurgence of religion that transgresses Westphalian borders. The dissident geopolitics of 'fundamentalism' act in relation to, and against, practical, formal and popular geopolitics, and vice versa.[80]

Speaking of ISIS' geographical formation, an answer to how a particular place in the geographical discourse of ISIS can become a political space must be given. While considering the transformation of a certain territory from a place to a space, it is

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* *sahwa[t]* literally means 'awakening,' and terms a formation spearheaded by Sunni tribal leaders in Iraq who first fought al-Qaeda in Iraq with U.S. backing, and later on ISI(S). For more information on the struggle between the *Sahwa* and ISI(S), see for example: Recep Tayyip Güler and Ömer Behram Özdemir, "El-Kaide'den Post-Kaide'ye Dönüşüm: IŞİD," **Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies**, Vol. 1, No. 1, (May 2014), pp. 113-155. Originally, *Sahwa* is a Sunni movement of thought that emerged in Saudi Arabia challenging the Saudi regime by demanding political reform. See on this, for example: İsmail Akdoğan and Rıdvan Kalaycı, "Suudi Arabistan'da İhyacı Hareketler olarak Sahve ve Vehhabilik," **Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies**, Vol. 1, No. 1, (May 2014), pp. 157-186. By *murtaddīn*, it is argued that the *sahwat* are apostates.
** *mujahidin* are those waging jihad.
*** *muhājirāt* are female immigrants who left their original homes to join ISIS, meant are mostly women from the western countries.
[78] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 15.
[79] I. Wallace, "Territory, Typology, Theology: Geopolitics and the Christian Scriptures," p. 221.
[80] Nyroos, Ibid., p. 140.

important to grasp that space, as Foucault argues, is *socially constructed*.[81] Creating a space requires a process of spatialization. Applying this to ISIS, the group's geopolitical imagination reveals several types of spatialization,[*] which in turn hints at the creation of some presentable spaces. At this point, geopolitical imagination is not merely intended for an unrealized plan but rather to both, the realization *and* prospect of a specific territorial conception. Admissibly, this renders the conceptions of territoriality diverse and complex. So, deconstructing ISIS' territorial conception puts forth a set of realized conceptions as it, equally important, suggests future prospects. To begin with realized conceptions which are *spaces*,[82] it is noteworthy to underline that this research as part of its methodical approach, deals with ISIS' territorial status at a time when the group had reached its expansion climax.

1.6. ISIS' discourse of territoriality: A form of *dissident theo-territorial geopolitics*

Deconstructing ISIS' geopolitical imagination, a clear self-perception and perceptions of enemies on both, the territorial and religious-political levels become apparent. Accordingly, ISIS presents itself as a state in form of a caliphate that only adheres to God's rules, performs the sharia (Islamic law), and so claims the stronghold of the purest Islamic religiousness.[83] By this claim, it creates an image of the highest religious *and* political authority deserving submission of each true-believing Muslim in the world. This particular representation embodied by a deeply dissident nature, on the other hand, determines and localizes enemy categories allegedly hostile to God's rules and those applying them.[84]

Indeed, *Dabiq* is inundated by geopolitical codifications. The myriad of geopolitical etiquettes emanates from the aforetold dimensions of dissence; religious scripture and realpolitik. A geopolitical imagination is built upon self-reflection and enemy perceptions, which imply a process of otherization. Determining the 'self,' the 'other' and the territoriality of both requires knowledge. Such geopolitical determining is in

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[81] Michel Foucault, Ibid., pp. 7-9.
[*] Meant by this are *Dar'ul-Harb, Dar'ul-Islam, Dar'ul-Khilafah, Wilayat, Dar'ul-Kufr* and other territorial conceptions.
[82] "Physical territory is required in order to transform this into a space." See: Gerry Kearns, **Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.70.
[83] Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 12-14.
[84] "God's enemies" or those "hostile to God's rules" are called *tāghūt* (plural form tawaghit). This ascription mostly applies to democratic regimes and their leaders. See, for example, Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 36-39.

fact the production of an alternative knowledge according to Routledge.[85] Anyhow, as Foucault oftentimes emphasizes, knowledge and power imply one and other, and thus geopolitics as a set of meaning-making, the very expression of such meaning-making, and a political technology bases upon knowledge. Such knowledge covers various areas, for it does not only involve cartographic and geographic knowledge but also the cults and cultures, the belief system of peoples and societies, even their behavioral codexes. Otherwise geographical imagination would not make any sense because it always involves the relationship between man and nature. As broad as it sounds, geographical imagination is a product of "world-reading". The meanings which one ascribe to the world, its different zones and spheres, its various populations and climates, all touch upon one's relationship with his/her environment, ranging from the immediate to the far-off.

ISIS' geopolitical imagination unveils the group's positioning in/towards world politics. It divides the world into good and evil while delegitimizing whom it considers evil, which is a large category, and therefore attacks its existence. Unlike the evil, the good embodied by ISIS itself, has an incontestable legitimacy of existence, more than that, it holds the right to expand. As claimants of religion which can only be one, for 'religion' is often used in lieu of Islam, ISIS expresses its steadfastness on expansion through the Hadith saying:

> This religion will reach all places night and day reach. Allah will not leave a home of mud nor fur (i.e. urban and nomadic homes) except that He will enter this religion into it, thereby honoring the honored and humiliating the humiliated with honor by which Allah honors Islam and humiliation by which Allah humiliates kufr [Sahīh: Reported by Imām Ahmad on the authority of Tamīm ad-Dārī].[86]

Accordingly, the Hadith is considered a sign of ISIS' emergence and success. The territorial advance of ISIS, who codifies itself as the embodiment of Islam or faith (*din*), inevitably has to result in the diminution of disbelief (*kufr*). Illustrating geography in such duality, where antagonisms prove vital functionality, ISIS in its ideological approach (not in its operational approach) does not make any distinction between the *near* or *far enemy*. Both are equally evil and legally allowed to be killed, if not

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[85] Paul Routledge, "Critical geopolitics and terrains of resistance," **Political Geography (Pergamon)**, Vol. 15, No. 6/7, (1996), p. 520.
[86] Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 3.

encouraged.[87] Such simplification in establishing antagonism is not rare. Drawing parallels between the discourse of global jihad and the "war on terror," a specific characteristic of the Bush (junior) administration, as Stuart Elden argues was the notion of "with us" against terrorists and those helping them.[88] If so, ISIS makes use of the same premise "either you are with us or against us," namely by proclaiming "either you swear allegiance to the caliph, immigrate to our caliphate or support it by action or you don't, and by this you reject a religious duty, you spurn the caliphate, and therefore you do no longer enjoy the status of a Muslim".[89]

This underlies a crucial strategy that enables ISIS to shed Muslim blood because if Muslims do not obey this command, they automatically lose their inviolacy.[90] Hereby, ISIS allegedly puts the *al-Wala wa'l Bara* principle into practice;[91] however, due to founding premises, this rendered the group even dissident to al-Qaeda hardliners slandering ISIS for killing innocent Muslim fellows.[92] Needless to say, this alienates mainstream Muslims irrespective of their Shiite or Sunni belonging. That is why the application of excessive *takfir* derived from ISIS' very own definition of the *al-Wala wa'l Bara* principle.[93]

As one can quickly notice, ISIS is not only at odds with the West, it rather performs in full awareness extremely dissident behavior against the worldwide community of Muslims in all its diversity.[94] Interestingly, ISIS uses extreme deviations such as beheadings of Sunnis or murderous attacks on holy places of Shiites as means of self-advertisement, acknowledging them as dissident actions (to the majority of Muslims)

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[87] Under the far enemy category, for example: "At this point of the crusade against the Islamic State, it is very important that attacks take place in every country that has entered into the alliance against the Islamic State, especially the US, UK, France, Australia, and Germany". See Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 44.

[88] Stuart Elden, **Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty**, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 6.

[89] This crusade against the Islamic State is the greatest testimony from Allah for the proper manhaj of this Khilāfah. Anyone who says otherwise now should review his faith before death suddenly takes him while he stands with one foot in the trench of the crusaders and the other in the trench of the hypocrites whilst claiming he is in the grayzone! The mujāhid knows no grayzone. As the liar Bush truthfully said, "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." Stated in Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 43.

[90] Dabiq, 7. issue, p. 64 and p. 78.

[91] See: Dabiq, 7. issue, p. 70. This principle is presented in a set of religious tenets, to leave the impression that all inevitably belongs together – may it be *tawhid* or *hijrah* or any other religious conception.

[92] ISIS discredits jihadist competitors on its near abroad due to their tolerance towards the Shi'a. See Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 26.

[93] The generally accepted view is that this principle is originally rooted in Saudi Wahhabism. See: Hassan Hassan, "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context," **Carmegie Endowment**, 13 June 2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context/j1iy, accessed 25.02.2017.

[94] However, it must be acknowledged that ISIS sometimes refers to popular figures known to the Muslim mainstream (like Abdullah Azzam) to prevent a feeling of alienation and the impression of breaking up from jihadi tradition. See, for example: Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 33.

but as some features of its own "jihadi trademark". Furthermore in this deviating, ISIS strives to fulfill the requirements of its imagination of an Islamic state that must conform to the sharia as base of jurisprudence. This has the important function to produce social legality in areas of control, and to hold sway the propagated image of the 'Islamic Caliphate'.

1.7. *Marginal Territoriality:* **Domains and components**

Overall, ISIS embedded in its intra-territorial context, where jihad is one determinant in the making of territoriality, the discussion on the perception of centrality from the margins[95] steps in. For Iraq and Syria both lie on the closer periphery of Muslim centrality. In this connection, O'Shea catches o common point with Devji who argues that jihad as a modern phenomenon befalls on the peripheries of the Muslim world, however, Thomas Hegghammer argues that the Hijaz (Arabian Peninsula) has been the 'real cradle of global jihadism,' while reflecting on the origins of militant Islamism.[96] Even if this is true for Salafist ideology, jihad in form of active struggle happens on the peripheries.* Instead of setting theatres on central areas or on the heartland of the Muslim world[97] (Mecca, Madina, and Jerusalem), jihad holds theatres on the broader outskirts of the Arabian Peninsula.[98] This renders peripheries, so Devji puts forth, more authentic to the Muslim world than Muslim centers within the intra-territorial context.[99] Building upon this authencity, which significantly engages with accountability and legitimacy, ISIS strives for a new regional order prior to its utopian world order. This is what Yeşiltaş and Kardaş describe as 'the sixth revolt against the West'.[100] Nevertheless, the shape of such new order remains questionable because when taking Biggs's assumption into consideration;

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[95] O'Shea, Ibid., p. 19.

[96] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Origins of Global Jihad: Explaining the Arab Mobilization to 1980s Afghanistan," Policy Brief (Harvard Kennedy School – Belfer Center), 22 January 2009.

* Probably Hegghammer aims at the cradle of ideology here, excluding action.

[97] Stump calls it "hearth of Islam," where he includes the Arabian Peninsula highlighting Mecca and Medina, and he adds Damascus, Baghdad, Basra and Mukalla to the map of Islam's hearth. See: Stump, Ibid., p. 59.

[98] "It (jihad), too, is located on the peripheries of the Muslim world geographically, politically and religiously, operating now in places like Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, as well as in Thailand and the Philippines. Like its predecessors, the jihad in our times is also peripheral as a set of practices, being charismatic, heretical and even mystical. And like these holy wars of the past, the jihad, too, attempts to move such populist and non-juridical elements to the centre of the Islamic world as part of its struggle. See: Faisal Devji, **The Landscapes of Jihad**, London: Hurst & Company, 2005, Ibid., 41.

[99] Devji, Ibid., p. 47.

[100] Yeşiltaş and Kardaş, "ISIL and the 6th Revolt Against the West," p. 75.

The modern state consists of agencies and archives for producing and preserving objective knowledge of the ground on which it stands. It exists in the shape of territory, a uniform, homogeneous space demarcated by a linear boundary. And it exists in the imagination as an object symbolized by territorial shape, one piece of a terrestial jigsaw.[101]

ISIS cannot correspond to such description of a territorial state because it cannot claim fixed linear demarcation, neither a homogeneous space, for it continually transforms, becomes bigger and smaller, wider and narrower – if not it completely loses its territorial existence one day. Although ISIS' territorial existence is doomed to death, the more important aspect is the group's imagination of a caliphal state. Such imagined entity encompasses all borders of earth and so is, though utopistically, fitting what Biggs asserted, as well as it dissidently defies these assertions, for Biggs arguments/conclusions emanate from the imagination and existence of different nations independently claiming different territories.

Therefore, ISIS can be considered a dissident phenomenon opposing the state-centered geopolitical imagination. To put it in extreme, ISIS might be (in its territorial reality *and* imagination) what Agnew warns of in the 'territorial trap'. For ISIS defies all geographical assumptions put forth by the state-centered approach to world politics, as there are: (1) "that states have an exclusive power within their territories as represented by the concept of sovereignty; (2) that 'domestic' and 'foreign' affairs are essentially separate realms in which different rules obtain; and (3) the boundaries of the state define the boundaries of society such that the latter is contained by the former".[102]

In the second chapter of this research, is exemplified how ISIS operationalizes its discourse of territoriality. Notwithstanding, the components of this operationalization, which belong to the set of main findings resulted from this analysis, should be named ahead. As such, ISIS operationalizes its territoriality discourse foremost within *history*. Therefore, the discourse of ISIS' territoriality presents the group as a resisting; liberating and justice-establishing adjuster who by God's will came as a gift to the oppressed and victimized Sunni people.[103] Such adjuster is the reverser of history, and

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[101] Michael Biggs, "Putting the State on the Map: Cartography, Territory, and European State Formation," **Comparative Studies in Society and History**, Vol. 41, No. 2, (April 1999), p. 398.

[102] Ó Tuathail, "Postmodern Geopolitics? The modern geopolitical imagination and beyond," in Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby (eds.) **Rethinking Geopolitics**, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 21-22.

[103] Smith tells a similar story about the resisting young intellectual generations of the 19th century, as they understood themselves as revolutionaries against their fathers. He concludes: "Young Italy, Young Poland, Young Hungary and the like, children's crusades against the old order, attested to a European Zeitgeist of revolutionary messianism that

bears the mission to take revenge for all what has been done to the Muslim world by the West. However, revisionism is not reserved to the western world. Instead, ISIS swears fierce revenge towards the intra-territorial context, in which mostly Arab regimes are situated. Those are considered as corrupt and anti-Islamic. That is why the people living under such rejimes 'are hoping for an adjuster like ISIS'. Thus, the adjuster gains the notion of the savior from within the region – as anathema to the discourse of 'humanitarian intervention'.[104]

Second, the discourse of territoriality logically unfolds within *territory*; ISIS unveils an expansionist conduct on territory. More importantly, by expansion it aims at spreading – expanding – its ideology, and the re-design of territory and people. In this sense, the discourse of territoriality within *Dabiq* grants ISIS a revolutionary character because it not only ideally but factually challenges the Westphalian Order, while claiming an alternative sovereignty. This it frames by a 'global Islamic caliphate,' which is involved in a non-state offensive geopolitical struggle. A component revealing in both domains, history and territory, however also hints at a distinct domain, namely *time*, is the apocalyptic-futuristic world-vision, which develops revisionism on history into a sacred prophecy, a storyline for the end times claiming to shape history and territory. But *time* is to be understood differently from history. History in *Dabiq* is not considered as a comprehensive chain of events. It is rather consulted whenever necessary as a jigsaw box of events. Such fundamentalist fashion in history-reading hints at the same logic of meaning-making applied on territory. Time, thus, is to be considered by virtue of the components appearing through the operationalization of discourse. The apocalyptic notion of time therefore links it with the future, the imagination of a real time.

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could only end in terroristic nihilism and ethnic hatred, especially in ethnically mixed areas like the Balkans". See: Anthony Smith, **Nationalism and Modernism**, Oxford: Routledge, 1998, p. 99.

[104] The western world was not unprepared to such revisionism, 'a revisionism in form of a caliphate,' as Sayyid notes. "A study by the National Intelligence Council commissioned by the US Department of Defence outlined eight scenarios for the world in 2020, and one of these scenarios included the establishment of a new caliphate by the grandson of Osama bin Laden (2004: 83–91)." See: Bobby Salman Sayyid, **Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonization and World Order**, London: Hurst & Company, 2014, p. 119.

CHAPTER II: MAKING SENSE OF ISIS' CONCEPTION OF TERRITORIALITY

Controlling Mosul or Raqqa is not a result of mere expansionism. More importantly, territorial control is an indicator for conceptions and tactics of territoriality. Both together form a comprehensive unity, a tool to understand the geographical and geopolitical imagination and realization of ISIS as a whole idea. Within territorial conceptions, the power and functionality of religious references play a crucial role. In this sense, conceptions and tactics of territoriality gain shape through the interplay of theology and politics. Leaving out the tactics for now, the least to say is that conceptions are a source for strategies. Not enough with inspiring the strategical backbone, conceptions provide indispensable legitimacy for strategies (conquest of a specific territory, video-taped beheadings and other publicly executed punishments)[105] which is vital to the group's very existence. For the internal audience has to be constantly satisfied by a rationale complying with religious references. That is why strategy derives from theology and cannot occur independently.

Taking this into account, it can be well argued that ISIS' conceptions of territoriality imply a geographical imagination lying at the heart of the group's interpretation of religious scripture. When ISIS understood as a general implementation of a concept underlying a center and peripheries, *extra-* and *intra-territorial* categories occur. The intra-territorial level encompasses territories of ISIS' self-proclaimed caliphate and Muslim majority countries, with the exception of Israel as a non-Muslim country, on its close periphery – the *near abroad*. On the other hand, the great rest on the world map – when the Middle East is left out – is put into the category of the extra-territorial level, which is the *far abroad* including Muslim but mostly non-Muslim populated countries.

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[105] These strategies are also means of power, its disclosure, and resistance against the dominant nation-state narrative in the contemporary globalized world. "The Islamic State's use of public crucifixions and displays of beheaded enemies are striking examples of what Mark Juergensmeyer refers to as a religious group's attempt to 'break the state's monopoly on morally sanctioned killing' through their own use of force. Violence, then, becomes a 'claim to power' against the state's hold on the legitimate use of force, regardless of whether or not other states recognize the group's right to use force." retrieved from Ben St. Clair, "The Islamic State: A Symptom of a World in Transition", **Fordham Political Review**, 22 October 2014, http://fordhampoliticalreview.org/the-islamic-state-a-symptom-of-a-world-in-transition/, accessed 20.02.2017.

2.1. The *Near Abroad*: An Intra-territorial Level

ISIS' near abroad territory encompasses Iraq, Syria, and their neighboring territories. To Harleen Gambhir, these swathes of lands together form the heartland of ISIS,[106] despite the fact that within some of these territories ISIS hold strongholds but in others it plays no role. For this reason it makes sense to differentiate between the *realized heartland*, which is the *inner circle*, and the *imagined heartland* that encompasses the whole Middle East. ISIS' inner circle is undoubtedly the most important element of its territoriality conception because without holding a territory, the claim of statehood, identity, territorial resistance and many others would not be attainable. The inner circle is the bedrock of its "territorial incarnation" and it typifies an alternative to the conception of nation-states.[107] Notably how Ben St. Clair put this causal chain into words: "In Iraq, the Islamic State manipulated a sense of marginalization among the northern Sunni population and attempted to establish its own territorial space and national identity while asserting a right to sovereignty."[108] So to speak, a deliberate segregation and self-differenciation from other agents on the inner circle and the *near abroad* has been part of ISIS' conceptions and tactics of territoriality. For to realize a hegemonic territorial control, ISIS could not afford to share its claim of being righteous and legitimate with others, in particular with other jihadis. Most evident in this connection is the derailment with al-Qaeda, as Brian Fishman explicates:

> Yet even if the Islamic State's progenitors have not consciously followed the seven stages, the plan is a remarkable forecast. Most importantly, it identified Syria as a geopolitical loophole to al-Qaeda's traditional strategic worldview, which prioritized attacks against the United States in order to sever its support for "near enemy" regimes that the group ultimately aimed to overthrow. The strategic rationale that led al-Qaeda to focus attacks on the United States did not apply in Syria.[109]

Given the priority of the *near abroad*, which is linked to the security and stability of the *inner circle*, the first enemy category ISIS is targetting is the *near enemy* which, of course, is located on its *near abroad*. Crucial to the targetting of the *near enemy* is the

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[106] Harleen Gambhir, "ISIS'S Global Strategy: A Wargame", Middle East Security Report 28, **ISW**, (July 2015), p. 9.
[107] "The 'Islamic State' conquests in Syria and Iraq, and its aspirations to re-establish an Islamic Caliphate require reconsideration of the territorial conception of the nation-state, and provocatively suggest an alternative," Atzili and Kadercan, Ibid., p. 117
[108] Ben St. Clair, "The Islamic State: A Symptom of a World in Transition".
[109] Brian Fishman, **The Master Plan: ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory**, Kindle edition, Yale University Press, Kindle Location: 810.

delegitimization of other jihadist groups though they do not claim any statehood. On this, Gambhir asserts that:

> ISIS's enemies in the Near Abroad are its ideological competitors, al-Qaeda and Iran, as well as sovereign states in the region. ISIS rhetorically compares its current expansion to prophetic and historic battles waged by Muslim rulers in the Arabian Peninsula, Andalusia, and the Levant. In doing so ISIS hopes to revive popular Islamic regard for the religiouspolitical orders that once encompassed the Arab world.[110]

Due to ISIS' expansionism but also its hegemonic worldview, the *near abroad* cannot be shared with other agents, because this would render the creation of own spaces impossible. It would cause a partition of legitimacy, which would damage the group's accountability towards its inner circle and also to sympathizers abroad. Indeed, it would self-destructively annul the anouncement of the caliphate, the most exceptional trait ISIS holds so far within jihadi circles. On that account, a conceptual delegitimization of *near abroad* competitors holds great introvertise as extrovertise importance. For instance, the clarification "We cannot adopt the mindset that jihād is acceptable without da'wah,* or that the hudūd** cannot be established during defensive jihād, or that we are living in an era similar to the Prophet's time in Makkah and must therefore focus on da'wah because there is no jihād"[111] rules out other jihadist approaches, which are sound and common on the *near abroad*. This aims at creating an unvulnerable exceptionalism for ISIS. *Dabiq*'s first issue with the cover 'The Return of Khilafah' addresses its *near abroad*, urging people in the region to join the established caliphate,*** while at the same time distancing itself from regional rival Muslim actors. In this way, it clearly tends to construct itself as the only actor holding legitimacy in religious and political matters. This is a strategy for a totalitarian claim to power. That is why the aggressive language it uses against the *Sahwa* is hardly surprising. For instance, ISIS emphasizes that *Sahwa* forces enjoy American assistance, clearly aiming at

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[110] Gambhir, "ISIS'S Global Strategy: A Wargame," p. 11.
* *da'wah* is the call to Islam, often used to term 'Muslim proselytization'.
** *hudud* is the plural form of *hadd*, which terms punishments stipulated in Qur'anic verses.
[111] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 16.
*** Here it is useful to note that ISIS benefits from the conception of the caliphate because despite all historic examples, a caliphate is de facto formless or shapeless. It can bring continents under one rule, as it can claim statehood solely over a great city. In addition to that, the historical experience of caliphatehood has not determined a center of governing, nor must a caliphate be bound to any religious place. Consequently in theory, a caliphate can be established in any shape aywhere. So, regarding its location and physical scope (territorial existence) a caliphate does not necessitate any legitimization, which ISIS clearly benefits from.

delegitimizing its Sunni competitors.[112] The *near enemy* can have extensions on ISIS' far abroad which it attacks due to the consolidation of the inner circle and finding stable spots on its near abroad. The Afghan wilayat is a suitable case for this:

> The (Afghan) wilayat is led by a former member of the Pakistani Taliban who lost his bid to lead the network and subsequently defected to the Islamic State. Establishing a foothold in South Asia was a direct challenge to Mullah Omar, longtime emir of the Afghan Taliban and, by extension, al-Qaeda, which had been pledged to Mullah Omar since before 9/ 11. Al-Qaeda renewed that pledge in July 2014 as part of its broader rebuttal to the Islamic State's declaration of a caliphate.[113]

To Fawaz A. Gerges, the architect of the *near enemy* concept is Muhammad Qutb who is believed to have called on Muslims to defend *Dar'ul Islam* against "crusading intrusion and cultural invasion". Whereas Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's senior ideologue, and Bin Laden were abolishing distinctions between the *near* and the *far enemy*, Qutb pled for a domestic jihadism.[114] It can be well argued that ISIS adopts Qutb's conception of the *near enemy* on its *near abroad*, nevertheless, it does not undermine the conception of the *far enemy* that is central to al-Qaeda's conception of transnational jihadism. As aforementioned, this is a question of priority and flexibility, thus ISIS – via remote guidance control and realized spaces such as *wilayats[115]* – would "intervene" on its *far abroad* whenever possible.

To understand ISIS' interactions with its *near abroad*, it is likely useful to note how it creates 'its self' (itself) as Derrida would suggest.[116] In this connection, using the Islamic hijri calendar, ushering an allegedly Islamic clothing order and symbols in public life, ensuring the implementation of sharia law,[117] safety, social care,[118] and

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[112] "Presently, Dabiq is under the control of crusaderbacked sahwat, close to the warfront between them and the Khilafah. May Allah purify Dabiq from the treachery of the sahwah and raise the flag of the Khilafah over its land. Amin." Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 5. Also "…the "sahwah" ("awakening"), a term coined by the American pawns to beautify their apostasy and treachery" p. 39. Further, "…sahwāt murtaddīn who prostituted themselves to America…" Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 15.

[113] Fishman, Ibid., Kindle Locations 4518-4522.

[114] Fawaz A. Gerges, **The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 31-34.

[115] To exemplify, a far abroad wilayat on the southern Philippines has been established: See on this, for example: Rainer Werning, "Neue IS-Provinz in den Südphilippinen," **Hintergrund**, 28 June 2016, https://www.hintergrund.de/globales/terrorismus/neue-is-provinz-in-den-suedphilippinen/, accessed 22.01.2017.

[116] On Derrida's deconstruction, see: Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, **Literary Theory: An Anthology**, 2. edition, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 257-261.

[117] Especially the notion of sharia-conform governing is a compelling argument for the *inner circle* and also a great motivation for ISIS fighters giving them peace of concsience despite indiscriminate killings. See: Medyan Dairieh (reporter), Vice News (producer), *The Islamic State (Full Length)* [documentary], 26 December 2014, https://news.vice.com/video/the-islamic-state-full-length, accessed 05.03.2017. The use of the Hijri calendar (Muslim calculation of times beginning with the Muslim immigration to Madinah in 622 during the prophetic era) can be seen in all issues of Dabiq (1-15).

family life are all elements attracting audience from the *near abroad* while catapulting ISIS to an alternative 'governing body'. Additionally, the revengeful discourse ISIS conducted against the Shi'a since its early days encountered great resonance amongst the Sunnis. Arguably, this was one of the major drivers for marginalized Sunnis to embrace ISIS. Another important indicator for ISIS' priorities is the fact that *Dabiq* focuses on "*tawhid*, *manhaj*, *hijrah*, *jihad*, and *jama'ah*"[119] covering crucial discussions in the Sunni public opinion. This is likely an aspect that reaches the *far abroad* as well. An outstanding characteristic in the interactions with the *near abroad* is the use of *takfir*. Interestingly, at the beginning of its development – when ISIS was ISI (Islamic State in Iraq) – takfiri voices were not audible. Instead, support from other jihadist groups were fundamental for gaining a foothold in the chaotic environment of Iraq, discoursively as much as financially and also in terms of menpower. One can observe that the excessive use of *takfir* starts after ISI's transformation to ISIS, dating back to the group's emancipation from al-Qaeda.[120] Hatred against the Shi'a is one of the divides with al-Qaeda, and it implies more than mere political revenge.[121]

Throughout Islamic history, during both fundamental eras of caliphal rule – the Umayyads and the Abbasids – Iraq and Syria have been theatres of sectarian violence, political fervor, and also fight for territorial supremacy.[122] This can be deemed a historical continuity, however, the post-Iraq war era was to a large extent designed to the political advantage of the Shi'a due to America's Iraq policy. Nevertheless, ISIS' fight for territorial supremacy manifests itself not only through mere territorial control, however, the mass killing of the Shi'a population, their humiliation, and the destruction of Shi'a and Sufi holy places and sanctities are indicating an attempt at backspacing history.[123] Therefore, backspacing *historically constructed* territory [124] is part of ISIS'

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[118] Health care included, see for example: Dabiq, 12. issue, p. 49.

[119] This appears frequently, however, it is early declared in Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 3. The terms are explained elsewhere.

[120] Zarqawi is believed to have started the 'wave of excessive takfir' against the Shi'a, and he is often quoted in Dabiq when it comes to hatred against Shi'a. ISIS praises him for killing the Shiite cleric Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim in Iraq. See: Dabiq, 8. issue, p. 19.

[121] On the competition between al-Qaeda and ISIS, see, for example: Clint Watts, "Deciphering Competition Between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State," **CTC Sentinel**, Vol. 9, No. 7, (July 2016), pp. 1-6, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CTC-SENTINEL_Vol9Iss711.pdf, accessed 22.01.2017.

[122] Hugh Kennedy, **The History of an Idea: The Caliphate**, New York: Basic Books, 2016, p. 45. Also consultative: Graham Templeton (producer), *The Fall of Mosul* [documentary], 18 July 2016, accessed 26.05.2017 via https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OuxgHojAis.

[123] The destruction of sanctities like the mosques and shrines of Prophet Younis, Jirjis, and Sheeth by ISIS is an example for this. Additionally, these are places ascribed to prophets who are respected by the Sunni mainstream. That is why this implies an intra-territorial discussion on the near abroad. See: **The Guardian**, "Islamic State destroys

governing of territory, it is re-designing territory, creating a new territoriality. In doing so, ISIS reads history through ideological lenses, for it connects 'its self' as – an offspring of the pious generation of Prophet Muhammad – to the present.

As an outcome of spatialization, ISIS de-emphasizes characteristics on the space it rejects, demolishing former identity elements. In doing so, ISIS eradicates important settings of Shi'a and Sufi history, their achieved spaces, their identities, and finally their physical existence. This all happens due to its geopolitical determinism akin to Samuel Huntington, who according to Elden ignores history with much else.[125] To add an impressive comparison at this point, Faisal Devji explains why Sufism poses an anathema to canonical Islam, to which ISIS obviously ascribes itself:

> Unlike the urban world of Muslim law, which was seen in such architectural terms that Islam itself was conceived as a building with five pillars, or as a secure house juxtaposed with the insecure one of war, the landscape of Sufism was dominated by images of caves, ruins and wilderness. These were locations of excess and even disorder that stood in stark contrast to the completely architectonic landscape of a canonical Islam - one that was explicitly tied to political authority.[126]

Accordingly, ISIS strives to create a space – a safe home/house – of religious and political authority which, to ISIS' mind, cannot be separated from each other. In lieu of Shi'a, Sufi or Christian spaces, ISIS imposes itself on these areas; it destroys former identities and redesigns conquered land to something new, which is a part of a (de- and re-) territorialization process. For instance, in Raqqa, ISIS has been converted the Armenian-Catholic Church of the Martyrs into an Islamic center.[127] Creating new own spaces, such it deems Islamic or anti-heretic or radically anti-secular, after eradicating formerly original ones, ISIS unfolds politics on territoriality. Like a state, it constructs and imposes its territorial imagination of 'its self' by issuing school syllabuses, organizing public viewing events or distributing self-advertising pamphlets.[128] This conduct does not only aim at establishing itself as a state but rendering other

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ancient Mosul mosque, the third in a week," 27 July 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/28/islamic-state-destroys-ancient-mosul-mosque, accessed 05.03.2017.

[124] Elden understands territory as a geographically and historically specified conception, and under certain circumstances it can appear as a political technology. See: Stuart Elden, Jochen Mayer and Luise Fischer (transl.), "Die Entstehung des Territorium," **Erlanger Beiträge zur Kulturgeographie**, Vol. 1, No. 1–11, (2011), p. 1 and 3.

[125] Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*, pp. 7-8.

[126] Devji, *The Landscapes of Jihad*, p. 188.

[127] *The Islamic State (Full Length)* [documentary].

[128] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Iraq's Dire Situation," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 13 June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoOze_Nu-v8, accessed 17.04.2017.

alternatives impossible. That is to say that ISIS destroys the imagination of a 'Shi'a homeland' situated on its *near abroad*, which hints at the group's radically homogeneous conception of society. Other minorities like Christians who did not sprung from the stream of Islam are not damned to destruction because they have no appeal of an alternative. For being an alternative means being a threat to ISIS. The attempt to wipe out mainly the Shi'a population derives, apart from historical grievances, from a resistance narrative. Large numbers of Sunnis are sufficiently motivated to engage in the idea that ISIS 'liberates' Sunnis from 'Shiite occupation'. In this way, ISIS presents itself as a justice-maker to deprived Sunnis. Here, ISIS ties up to what the post-Saddam era initiated, as Denise Natali puts it: "The post-Saddam Iraqi state allowed the Baathist-Salafist nexus to thrive. It was driven by a shared sense of Sunni Arab disfranchisement within the entire post-Saddam order, reactions against the 'foreign occupation' and Baathism's deep roots and clandestine networks among Sunni Arab populations."[129]

The notion of resistance and liberation within ISIS' territoriality discourse is not restrained to its *inner circle*, however, it encompasses the *near* and the *far abroad*. As it can be observed, affiliates eventually adapted the same territoriality discourse:

> Finally, to my brothers in captivity: rejoice, you believers, do not falter or grieve. I swear to God we will very soon liberate Cairo and free you from captivity. We will come bearing explosives, I swear we will, so rejoice you believers," said the bomber of the Coptic cathedral in Cairo in December Abu Abdallah al-Masri (real name: Mahmoud Shafik) St Mark's Cathedral, the seat of the Coptic papacy Orthodox "Copts, who comprise about 10 per cent of Egypt's 90 million people, are the Middle East's largest Christian community.[130]

It is not false to say that ISIS adressed Sunnis everywhere on its *near abroad* because due to its conception of *near abroad* territoriality, it wanted to enlarge its *inner circle* and create near supportive rings* by turning marginalized Sunnis on its near periphery into sympathizers. Harleen Gambhir nicely sums this up:

> ISIS in its Near Abroad fuels sectarianism: In particular the organization (ISIS) exploits sectarian tension in both states in order to increase violence, divide adversaries, and fuel an extremist narrative.

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[129] Denise Natali, "The Islamic State's Baathist Roots", *Al Monitor*, 24 April 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/baathists-behind-the-islamic-state.html#ixzz4ZIwi0iGA, accessed 19.02.2017.

[130] **The Straitstimes**, "ISIS posts video of man it says was Egypt church bomber", 20 February 2017 (also accessed date), http://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/isis-posts-video-of-man-it-says-was-egypt-church-bomber?.

ISIS is also releasing propaganda to appeal to marginalized Sunni populations and to provoke security forces in neighboring states such as Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, and Lebanon. ISIS's clashes with Hezbollah along the Lebanese border and terrorist attacks targeting Jordan likely support this effort.[131]

With the announcement of the caliphate ISIS pioneered something like a revolution. This revolution was only possible by the control of territory, which implied and encouraged the control of people. Indeed, territorial control was the precondition on which ISIS built up its legitimacy of *bio-power*.[132] Invading the ruins of failed states, ISIS made both, it granted satisfaction for elementary needs of the population, but in turn demanded their obedience and loyalty to the caliph and the caliphate. The tracking of public disciplining of inhabitants ranges from soft levels like ISIS' famous pick-up convoys or their raising of the blag flag to hard levels like public executions, arm-amputations, beheadings, lashings, and so forth. This power disclosure has effects of govern-mentality and identity shaping as a 'sharia state and community'. It also has the byproduct to burn the powerful image of ISIS into the collective memory of people near and far, while both are likely to be deterred. Remarkably, those who defect are called 'returnees to the Jahiliyyah' (term used by Prophet Muhammad for the pre-Islamic period), as ISIS upvalues loyals and degrades opponents. Referring to prophetic statements and Islamic history is a steady aim at consolidating its puristic Islamic image – the image of *tawhid*.

Geopolitical imagination can to some extent involve historical bitterness. In case of ISIS, its territorial imagination of the *near abroad* strives to go back to pre-*Skyes-Picot* borders, just like Germany during the Hitler era wanted to go back to pre-Versailles borders.[133] Again, as Ben St. Clair well illustrates:

The Islamic State's previous name, ISIL, refers to its territorial claim, which, as NPR reports, has historically included "modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian territories and even the island of Cyprus. Through interviews with the Islamic state conducted for VICE News, Medyan Dairieh explains that this obsession with territory reflects the group's bitterness over the

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* A supportive network throughout the region
[131] Harleen Gamhir, "ISIS'S Global Strategy: A Wargame", p.11.
[132] Stuart Elden, "Governmentality, calculation, territory," **Environment and Planning D: Society and Space**, Vol. 25, (2007), p. 564.
[133] Wolfgang Natter, "Geopolitics in Germany, 1919-45 Karl Haushofer, and the Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik," John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell and Gerard Toal (eds.), *A Companion to Political Geography*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 196.

Sykes-Picot Agreement following World War I and the division of what it considers to be land belonging to the Islamic caliphate. When the Islamic State declared the region a caliphate in June, they asserted their right to govern the region under Islamic law.[134]

Here, the territorial claim is based on a produced legitimacy discourse which is based on the western demarcation of nation-states on the map of the modern Middle East by virtue of the Skyes-Picot agreement. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that in one propaganda video Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi[135] is called 'the breaker of barriers'. For one of his first deeds as caliph was to abrogate the border between Iraq and Syria, subsequently delegitimizing the nation-state concept in favor of 'the unity of Muslim lands'.[136] Al-Baghdadi, while urging Muslims all around the world on immigrating to the caliphate, stated: "Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis".[137] This was a magnificent symbolic rejection of the region's colonial history, while breaking the imposition of the *Skyes-Picot*.[138] Surely, this increased the group's prestige in the Muslim world. Moreover, in the same video, the geopolitical imagination of al-Baghdadi breaking nation-state borders of Lebanon, Jordan, and all other countries one by one until ISIS reaches Jerusalem, is cherished.[139]

Importantly in terms of conceptions of territoriality, Jerusalem lies at the heart of the *near abroad* territoriality discourse, which ISIS has in common with many other jihadist actors. Nonetheless, despite all anti-Semitic propaganda talk, there has not been any serious attempt or sign of an immediate attack on Israel. At the latest, here the group knows to turn back to realpolitik, thus it cannot afford to carry out any attack that would likely provoke a wipe-out of its *inner circle*. According to ISIS' realpolitik, as Jürgen Todenhöfer argues, a two-stage process is envisaged in which the *near abroad* (Todenhöfer says the 'Middle East') has primacy. Again, this runs back to the necessity to consolidate an *inner circle*. Particularly for having the capacity to expand, the *inner circle* must be kept strong. In addition, the strategy of moving away from certain areas

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[134] Ben St. Clair, "The Islamic State: A Symptom of a World in Transition".

[135] See on al-Baghdadi and ISIS' leadership, for example: Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines," 24 January 2016, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/anaccount-ofabubakralbaghdadiislamicstate, accessed 20.11.2016.

[136] A civilian, while saying that the Islamic State turned Syria and Iraq into one Muslim territory (*diyarul wahid lilmuslimin*), recalls the Hadith "there is no any difference between the Arab and the non-Arab except the faith (taqwa)," reminding one of the *tawhid* emphasis in ISIS' discourse. See: *The Islamic State (Full Length)* [documentary].

[137] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 11.

[138] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 13.

[139] *ISIS, Birth of a Terrorist State* [documentary] produced by Jérôme Fritel.

of control may stem from the necessity to reserve capacity in menpower and arsenal, however, this is a matter related to the tactics of territoriality. As part of its expansion strategy, ISIS repeatedly calls for pledging allegiance from abroad, no matter near or far, however, the *near abroad* has again primacy:

> The primary mission of ISIS in the Near Abroad is expansion through the creation of regional affiliates. Practically, the Near Abroad ring reflects the "Islamic lands" that ISIS intends to organize into its territorially contiguous caliphate. ISIS encourages local groups to pledge allegiance to ISIS, unite under a single banner, and designate a leader to whom ISIS can direct resources and sustained engagement. ISIS announced the creation of governorates, or wilayats in Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula in November 2014. ISIS also declared a wilayat in the "Khorasan," or Afghanistan-Pakistan region in January 2015, added the Caucasus on July 23, and may add West Africa as well.[140]

In one documentary produced by Jérôme Fritel, which actually aims at presenting the economic power of the group, ISIS' propaganda discourse comes to fore. Excerpts of propaganda material show ISIS-members screaming '*hayya alal jihad*' (let's wage jihad) – similar to the prayer call – they urge undecided sympathizers to join the jihad and add 'brothers, claim your victory'. Here, they deliberately make no difference between gained victory – likely the established caliphate – and what God has promised as victory that awaits the believers.[141] More important is the propaganda slogan primarily addressing the *inner circle*. Accordingly, one man shouts '*dawlat'ul-Islam*!' and a group shouts back '*baqiya*!' which means that the 'Islamic State' will remain. The screaming of '*baqiya*' is repeated many times, and hints at an important rhetoric enhancing the discursive consolidation of ISIS as a state.[142] For the continuance of the 'Islamic State' is perpetually underlined, though in different contexts. To exemplify, when symbolism is at play: "And the Islamic State will remain until its banner flies over Rome".[143]

During the takeover of Mosul, the first thing ISIS did was to take control over the mosques and their loudspeakers. This has two implications. First, it is a signal that ISIS from now on is the religious authority in the city and because it makes no differece between religion and politics, it also manifests its political authority in doing so.

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[140] Gambhir, "ISIS'S Global Strategy: A Wargame," p.11.
[141] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 27.
[142] *ISIS, Birth of a Terrorist State* [documentary] produced by Jérôme Fritel.
[143] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 44.

Second, by making announcements through the mosques' loudspeakers ISIS shows its will to directly engage and communicate with the immediate *near abroad* to include it into its *inner circle*. It so sets in motion the process of territorial and socio-political integration of a newly conquered place, that it seeks to transform into a space of its own.

Evaluating ISIS conceptually, it can be asserted that ISIS also tears Islamic conceptions from their conventional meanings. Such meanings are common in Sunni mainstream, Salafis included. As Mecham notes; "The group has attracted a great deal of attention because it has brought disruptive innovation into Islamic political thought, both in terms of ideology[144] (using common Islamist concepts in new ways) and what it is doing on the ground (taking and holding wealth and territory)".[145]

2.2. The *Far Abroad*: An Extra-territorial Level

The study of ISIS' *far abroad* requires a 'broad gaze' thus the *far abroad* does not only designate enemy territories which are mainly under non-Muslim control, however, on the *far abroad* territory, there are 'realized spaces' in the name of ISIS. Such realization results from the act of giving *bay'a* – oath of allegiance to the caliph – and sets in motion a process of spatialization, in which ISIS starts claiming territories that lie far away from its sphere of factual control.[146] Hereafter, ISIS' center of power and administration proceeds by integrating units on its abroad periphery due to their *bay'a*, which it uses as a legal conception to justify extra-territorial acquisition. To ISIS, this is an act of legal annexation because local agents (such as Boko Haram) decide, by relaying *bay'a*, to affiliate themselves to ISIS' leadership. That is why *bay'a* – as the materialization of a loyalty oath – plays a key role in ISIS' territoriality discourse. Hence, it grants ISIS the chance for producing a discourse of territorial legality that outstretches itself from the *inner circle* to the outskirts of the *far abroad*. In spite of

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[144] On the group's ideology, see, for example: Kyle Orton, "The Founder Lays Out The Islamic State's Vision," 12 January 2017, https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2017/01/12/the-founder-lays-out-the-islamic-states-vision/, accessed 22.01.2017.

[145] Quinn Mecham, "How much of a State is the Islamic State?", **The Washington Post**, 5 February 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/05/how-much-of-a-state-is-the-islamic state/?utm_term=.88dad04596a7, accessed 20.02.2017

[146] IntelCenter lists 43 global affiliates to ISIS, as of 15 December 2015. See: Intel Center, "Islamic State's 43 Global Affiliates Interactive World Map," 15 December 2015, https://www.intelcenter.com/maps/is-affiliates-map.html#gs.z25A7LM, accessed 20.02.2017.

everything, though relayed oath of allegiance to ISIS is mostly taken as an indicator for territorial expansion,[147] it does not necessarily condition territorial control as Ufuk Ulutaş advises caution.[148] Still, it is a compelling thought to reflect how wilayats shape the territoriality discourse of ISIS. On this, Fishman alludes: "Those commitments (*bay'as*), *Dabiq* argued, reflected the caliphate's transformation from a regional movement in Iraq and Syria into a transnational entity with various regional wilayat (provinces)".[149]

The establishment of wilayats – beyond its propaganda value – have the effect of enabling a mental and territorial self-imposing of ISIS on locals of *far abroad* wilayats. This inevitably invades local territoriality narratives, which can be considered a longterm effect of ISIS' *far abroad* policy. So, the targeted population on the *far abroad* makes a dailylife experience, in which ISIS finds a way of self-representation. This is an underestimated aspect, for it may reveal its importance when so-called sleeper cells get activated, which would fall into the category of tactics of territoriality, or it may at least impact the future of jihad and jihadi discourse, not only in these regions.

Another facet of ISIS' *far abroad* policy is much of an operational importance linked to tactics of territoriality, though underlying a discoursive effectiveness. Meant by this is the individual affiliation of persons,* who carry out terrorist attacks on their own to prove their personal *bay'a*.[150] This implies the possibility to grasp, as Georg Heil describes it, a *remote guidance control*[151] that encourages ISIS to impose itself on its *far abroad*, at least as a constant and erratic threat.[152] As it is stated in Dabiq: "They (the Muslims) have a statement to make that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the

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[147] "Despite these weaknesses, the Islamic State has been able to expand. It does this in two ways: by accumulating pledges of allegiance from other jihadi groups, and by capturing adjacent territory". Retrieved from: Fishman, Ibid., Kindle Locations: 4496-4501.

[148] Ufuk Ulutaş, **The State of Savagery: ISIS in Syria**, Ankara: Seta Publications, 2016, p. 126.

[149] Fishman, Ibid., Kindle Locations: 4175-4181.

* Here 'lone wolfs' and members of ISIS-affiliated small groups (ISIS cell/network) are included. In short, persons of all kind of individual terrorist engagement (in the name of ISIS) are implied, who are not sent from any wilayat or ISIS-controlled areas.

[150] Thomas Joscelyn, "Terror plots in Germany, France were 'remote-controlled' by Islamic State operatives*," **FDD's Long War Journal**, 24 September 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/terror-plots-in-germany-france-were-remote-controlled-by-islamic-state-operatives.php, accessed 23.03.2017.

[151] Georg Heil, "The Berlin Attack and the "Abu Walaa" Islamic State Recruitment Network," **CTC Sentinel**, 22 February 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-berlin-attack-and-the-abu-walaa-islamic-state-recruitment-network, accessed 23.03.2017

[152] Remote guidance control attacks are the ones 'hurting the enemy the most because they happen in the enemy's own land,' from Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 5.

idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature".[153] Making the world* 'understand the meaning of terrorism' can imply many things, and individual commitments in form of terrorist attacks may be one of them. According to this statement, 'terrorism' is an instrument in fighting secular conceptions like nationalism or democracy, what would fall under the category of tactics of territoriality. Importantly and beyond speculation, provocation is a hallmark in ISIS' *far abroad* discourse and strategy. Animating individuals to carry out terrorist attacks on so-called 'infidels' or sending *inner circle* jihadis with the order to attack chosen targets located on the *far abroad*, is a concrete and successful provocation tactic.

Such provocation prompted the French President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls to declare that France is at war against ISIS, talkless of the anti-ISIS coalition shelling ISIS positions from the air.[154] Important to note is that ISIS – via its possibilities of impacting the *far abroad* – creates (through wilayats) spheres of factual connectivity to its leadership, and through claimed terror attacks a decisive influence on the policy conduct of nation-states. An example for this can be France's announcement of the state of emergency after ISIS-members carried out attacks in Paris, and its actual extension up to now.[155] Consequently, as initially put, the *bay'a* conception serves as a stepping stone to impact western societies' territoriality perceptions through remote-controlled attacks, mostly provoking the West by deploying its residents, both citizens as non-citizens. ISIS' spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani ash-Shami made this point very clear, saying:

> So O muwahhid, do not let this battle pass you by wherever you may be. You must strike the soldiers, patrons, and troops of the tawāghīt. Strike their police, security, and intelligence members, as well as their treacherous agents. Destroy their beds. Embitter their lives for them and busy them with themselves. If you can kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone's advice

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[153] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 8.
* Addressing all enemies/opponents, no matter near or far.
[154] Lilian Alemagna and Laure Bretton, "Manuel Valls: «Nous sommes en guerre»," **Libération**, 14 November 2015, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/11/14/manuel-valls-nous-sommes-en-guerre_1413503, accessed 22.03.2017
[155] "Paris attacks: France state of emergency to be extended - PM Valls," **BBC**, 13.11.2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37965708.

and do not seek anyone's verdict. Kill the disbeliever whether he is civilian or military, for they have the same ruling.[156]

This undermines traditional territoriality conceptions such as nation-states and their territorial integrity.[157] Arguably, this in turn gives ISIS the opportunity to fasten its caliphal conception on the territorial imagination of its sympathizers. The more ISIS appears on its *far abroad* – through whatever means – the more it consolidates here an image of horror destabilizing the public opinion of western societies on security and state-reliability, whereas receiving awe-inspiring emotions from sympathizers.

ISIS in its *far abroad* discourse makes frequent use of old images that have been used by al-Qaeda and others before, however, the fact that ISIS differs itself from competitors due to a realized territorial claim, such discourse gains more credibility. This, of course, has also the effect that ISIS designs its territorial discourse upon its territorial gain and loss, because the publishing of *Dabiq* ended with the 15. issue, for ISIS lost control over Dabiq on the course of the still ongoing war.

However, another magazine ISIS publishes – called *Konstantiniyyah* – is still issued. Naming it *Konstantiniyyah* refers to the group's apocalyptic labeling of *far abroad* locations, for the Hadiths that allegedly hint at end times battles, imply Istanbul's ancient name Constantinople (*Konstantiniyyah* in Arabic). Arguably, this might allude the meaning that ISIS does not consider the Ottoman Empire as a legitimate successor of the caliphal era because the city's name has changed at that time. This would likely suggest that ISIS factors out a 500 year of Muslim rule on its *near* and *far abroad* territories, and that there has not been any power change from Christians to Muslims. Similar to Constantinople, ISIS uses Rome as a powerful symbol of 'anti-Islamic space'. Such labelings are frequently deployed geopolitical templates of ISIS' territoriality discourse in *Dabiq*.

To conclude the intra-territoriality on the *near abroad* and the extra-territoriality on the *far abroad*, it can be said that ISIS on both levels showcases similar conceptions such as territorial expansion. Yet, ISIS holds different stances when it comes to the use of resources which refers to 'non-state realpolitik'. Another difference to note is that the

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[156] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 9.
[157] As Elden notes, territorial integrity can be understood as the spatial extent of sovereignty. To the question whether territorial integrity can be gained, Elden responds that this is inherited and that is what international law accepts without objection. He says: "This is endued within the term Uti possidetis (hold what has been provided to you, in other words the status quo)" See: Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory*, pp.39-40 and p.165.

establishment of wilayats is often rendered possible through pre-existing structures, which are not linked to the central command of ISIS' leadership ahead of allegiance. As such, the Sinai Wilayat is a tangible example:

> In the Sinai, the wilayat was built out of a pre-existing jihadi group called Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which itself capitalized on networks from an old Zarqawi ally, the Abdallah Azzam Brigades. After swearing allegiance to the Islamic State, it progressed quickly from small-scale bombings to complex attacks on well-defended military and police installations.[158]

Furthermore, both the intra- and extra-territorial dimensions offer a 'terrain of resistance' but these differ in manner. Within the *inner circle* and *near abroad* scope, ISIS foremost aims at structural stability and consolidating its caliphal narrative on land and people which is a different 'form of resistance' than carrying out attacks or accepting far-laying local agents' allegiance. The latter implies a more opportune nature of resistance, arguably a more flexible one. To make sense of what ISIS' terrains of resistance and contestation are consisted of, Routledge's account proves useful:

> As a cite of contestation, a terrain of resistance is not just a physical place but also a physical expression (e.g. the construction of barricades and trenches), which not only reflects a movement's tactical ineguity, but also endows space with an amalgam of meanings – be they symbolic, spiritual, ideological, cultural or political. A terrain of resistance is thus both metaphoric and literal. It constitutes the geographical ground upon which conflict takes place, and is a representational space with which to understand and interpret collective action.[159]

ISIS' construction of a space does not only happen through territorial gains, not to undermine; its leadership was able to attract a sufficient number of sympathizers, collaborators or simply non-participants who refuse to revolt against them. In doing so, the *inner circle*, yet of great and changing variety when considered migration waves, is home to a 'swarm,' which enfacts the creation of a new territoriality. On this, Routledge points the following: "The swarm, by contrast, is large in number, possessing the properties of concentration, hierarchy and the organization of territoriality". He further states: "By contrast, the swarm openly confronts dominating power by weight of

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[158] Fishman, Ibid., Kindle Locations: 4503-4511.
[159] Routledge, "Critical geopolitics and terrains of resistance," p. 517.

numbers, by territorializing space".[160] Also: "Swarmings have targets, trajectories, leadership, goals and terminations".[161] From here, it seems clear that 'swarming' is a feature of the *inner circle* located in the reach of the *near abroad*.

The caliphate with its complex territoriality dimensions is ideally spatially synonymous with *Dar'ul Islam*, where the political system of rule for the 'land of Islam' is to be implemented. Elden presents Hasan al-Turabi's* definition of an 'Islamic State,' which sheds light on ISIS' caliphate conception.

> He contends that "the phrase 'Islamic state' itself is a misnomer," because "the state is only the political dimension of the collective endavor of Muslims." He argues that "Islam does not allow for any limited allegiances either social, ethnic, or territorial, and that the "universal characteristics of an Islamic state" derive from the Koran and the political practice of the Prophet Muhammad and therefore constitute an "eternal model… His view is that "nationalist values that divide people on bases of color, geography, or national interest. . . are values fundamentally at odds with Islam." He therefore claims that the characteristics of this organization in its ideal form are not nationalistic but rather an incorporation of the community of believers, the umma. AI-Turabi therefore concedes that "there is an Islamic concept of a territorial state which is not coextensive with the whole umma," but insists this is for realistic reasons rather than nationalistic ones.[162]

2.3. ISIS' Territoriality unveiled in its Apocalyptic Worldview

Due to ISIS' territorial worldview, the world is physically and mentally divided into two camps; the believers and the infidels, as al-Baghdadi put it:

> 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 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 mobilized by the jews.[163]

Starting from this simple but essential territorial conception, the application of *Dar'ul Harb* and *Dar'ul Islam*, both legitimizing tenets of this world-view(ing), encourages the

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group's expansionist conduct.[164] Hence, *Dar'ul Harb* is a specific conception of territoriality that legitimizes attacking 'the space of the other,' which is labelled 'enemy soil' due to this conception.[165] To ISIS, *Dar'ul Harb* designates a territory that waits for an 'Islamic invasion' in order to be freed from disbelief or *shirk* (idolatry), for *shirk* is also located (in the lands of shirk).[166] Admittedly, this sounds as if a territory can 'beg' for an 'Islamic takeover' because by the division explained above, within the territoriality conception of ISIS territory receives a personification. For instance, on the course of the invasion of Raqqa, Dabiq described it as "(…) the first wilāyah completely rid of the Nusayrī army – an achievement Allah saved for the Islamic State by His grace".[167] Such personification becomes evident in the use of terms like 'Muslim lands' or 'lands of kuffar (infidels)'.[168]

Rooted in the premise that all creatures belong to God only, and likewise do all territories of earth,[169] the notion of 'liberating landscapes' appears very important.[170] Thus from here arises the legitimacy to take over lands. ISIS representatives, though acknowledging territorial and military setbacks, strongly defend the idea that one day the world will be guided by Islam, and the earth will be subdued to divine control. This is the realization of the group's idealistic imagination of the world. Although this had never happened before throughout Islamic history, ISIS believes in this conception and legitimizes this by referring to its apocalypse doctrine,[171] which it mainly leans on Hadiths such as: "You will invade the Arabian Peninsula, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. You will then invade Persia, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. You

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[164] "Shaykh Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi (rahimahullah) anticipated *the expansion of the blessed jihad* from Iraq into Sham," (Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 5). Here, the expansion only implies the *inner circle*. Yet, ambitions for a larger expansion are proved by conceptions as well as tactics of territoriality.

[165] According to 'VP01,' Simeonovic and Celenk regarded Germany as darul harb, a land of war, and repeatedly mentioned that attacks in Germany were justified and sought to encourage them. Retrieved from: Georg Heil, "The Berlin Attack and the "Abu Walaa" Islamic State Recruitment Network".

[166] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 16.

[167] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 21.

[168] "…the crusaders strike the lands of the Muslims…" used by ISIS' spokesman (al-Adnani), see Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 9.

[169] As al-Baghdadi cited one Qur'anic verse (Al-A'raf: 128) underpinning his claim "the earth is Allah's" See Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 11.

[170] This notion is frequently put forth whenever a place has been taken over. For example, see (the report on wilayats): Dabiq, 11. issue, pp. 28-30.

[171] ISIS' apocalypse doctrine is revolutionary, revisionist and millennialist in predicting a godly justice for the future that is about to come in order to revise past failures of mankind. As Smith recalls Kedourie's take on nationalism and millennialism, he notes that millennialism (terms predominantly apocalyptic tendencies within Christianity) seeks to overcome the "corrupt and oppressive past," and its most important trait is that it aims at abolishing "the distinction between the public and the private". It further "seeks to institute a new morality of absolute purity and brotherhood". See: Smith, Ibid., pp. 110-111. For an extensive account on ISIS' apocalypse doctrine, see: William McCants, **The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, And Doomsday Vision of The Islamic State**, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015.

will then invade Rome, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. Then you will fight the Dajjal,* and Allah will enable you to conquer him" [Sahīh Muslim].[172]

Accordingly, the mission ISIS has imposed on itself calls for following 'God's plan,' which – if ISIS does so – will be granted divine support, and is therefore infallible. Sooner or later 'God's plan,' which entails the apocalypse, will manifest itself, whoever may 'despise' it.[173] Also in attempting to rationalize its apocalyptic forecast, *Dabiq* puts in words; "Since the collapse of the mushrikīn* in Arabia, Persia, and India at the hands of the Sahābah and the Tābi'īn,** the bulk of all jihād was against the cross-worshipping Romans with Shām playing an important role in all the wars between the Muslims and crusaders. And this will be the case until their tāghūt cross is broken by the Masīh 'Īsa*** ('alayhis-salām)". As it can be well understood from here, the "lands of Sham," which include Syria Iraq and the Levant provide the main stage for the theatre of the apocalypse.

The introduction of *Dabiq*'s first issue essentially outlines ISIS' conception of territoriality and reflects the group's worldview or *weltanschauung*,[174] which it makes a priority to be outlaid for its audience. In doing so, ISIS does not only codify itself and the other, however, it spatializes its creation of 'the self' and 'the other' on the map of its apocalyptic narrative. Below, we refer to ISIS' own apocalyptic map that augurs ISIS' plan for five years, from 2015 onwards. This fancy outlook is undoubtedly unrealistic, however, it holds a clear apocalyptic imagination of expansionism, which enables and unveils politics of a radical otherization.[175] ISIS' making use of ancient names of places, some religious references, and Islamic history underpins its revisionist character. Moreover, as do other ISIS-made maps,[176] this map emphasizes the

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[172] Used in Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 44.
[173] The ones despising the apocalypse are many. Just to give two examples, see for the near asperser: Dabiq, 13. issue, p. 45. For the far asperser, see: Dabiq, 15. issue, p. 75.
* Those who fell in idolatry.
** *Sahabah* are those who made direct contact with the Prophet, enjoying his friendship. The *Tabi'in* are the second generation after the *Sahabah*, who made contact with the *Sahabah* and so learned about the life and teachings of the Prophet from first accounts.
*** Prophet Jesus
[174] Agnew uses this term equally to geopolitical ideology - when ascribing it to the Catholic Church. John Agnew, "Deus Vult: The Geopolitics of the Catholic Church," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 15, No. 1, (January 2010), p. 46.
[175] Murat Yeşiltaş, "Apokaliptik Jeopolitik, Radikal Antagonizma ve IŞİD," **Ortadoğu Analiz**, Vol. 71, No. 7, (November – December 2015), p. 66.
[176] For example, see Steffani Jacobs, "8 ISIS Facts You Absolutely Need to Know," **Scout warrior**, 10 September 2014, http://www.scout.com/military/warrior/story/1461461-8-isis-facts-you-absolutely-need-to-know, accessed 16.05.2017.

deligitimization of nation-states, secularism, Westphalian territoriality, and other modern state system tenets.

Figure 1: ISIS' own map[177]

Mapping 'its self' and its enemies on an apocalyptic narrative, a theatre scene on the territorial imagination of end time battles and hence ISIS' world hegemony gets evoked. This scene, then and now, awaits a great battle that will decide over the glory of one fighting side, and finally determine the victor who represents the realization of God's will on earth. As the facilitators of this great battle, ISIS deems itself the representant of God and the bearer of God's flag, which it will pass on to the *Mahdi* (Messiah) who will fight and win over the false side. In al-Muhajir's words: "I do not doubt for a moment – and Allah knows such – that we are the army that will pass on the banner to the slave of Allah the Mahdī. If the first of us is killed, then the last of us will".[178] This future prospect is quite important because it lends accountability to the legitimacy discourse of ISIS, for it does not necessarily aspire to be the de facto realizer of the apocalypse and the victor over the false side. Rather, ISIS provides the human resource currently preparing for the end times, because glory is certain, however its exact timing is stipulated in God's knowledge only.

With reference to a Hadith inter alia in *Sahih al-Muslim*, 'the other' is presented by 'the Romans' and 'the self' by 'the best people on earth' who 'will never be afflicted with fitnah (sectarianism)' and on whose side ''Isa Ibn Maryam (Jesus) will fight' after

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[177] Retrieved from http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/dynamic/1/590x/secondary/ISIS-MAP-329655.jpg, accessed 29.05.2017.
[178] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 35.

descending from heaven.[179] The scene extends itself to 'Constantinople' (Istanbul), another space of war in ISIS' conceptions of territoriality, suggesting the expansion of the scene, the battle, and the caveat that nobody should stay indifferent to such theatre.[180] As betokened in the future prospect, ISIS' reading of religious scripture creates a flexible, convergent, and rational relationship between the present and the future. Accordingly, ISIS-militants or western military (and all those fighting ISIS on the battlefield) must not de facto embody 'the best people on earth' or 'the Romans,' instead they, as precursors and in particular ISIS as preparer of the apocalypse,[181] represent both parties[182] in conflict to each other. As it can be sensed from here, the roles of 'the self' and 'the other' are already set and given ahead of operation or the scene in play. This illustration is a visualizable ideological pattern that steadily comes up in communicating with the *inner circle* and sympathizers abroad. Although not much importance has been given to this prediction, picking it up clearly aims at its recognition value given the Hadith's popularity in the Sunni world.

As already put, when ISIS understood as a general implementation of a concept underlying a center and peripheries, *extra-* and *intra-territorial* categories occur. Given these categories, ISIS' dissident nature in a territorial sense is twofold, namely externally dissident in challenging western states and societies due to their secular conceptions,[183] while ascribing imperial characteristics, racism, and colonial ambitions

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[179] Such apocalyptic foretelling is revealed within Christian scripture as well. Wallace notes the following: "A central belief is the expectation, based on a literal reading of Revelation chapter 20, that Christ will return to reign over the earth together with faithful believers for a one-thousand year period immediately prior to the final judgment." See: Wallace, "Territory, Typology, Theology: Geopolitics and the Christian Scriptures," p. 220. Also bolstering this argument is the political Christian mantra 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus' (there is no salvation outside the Church), reminded by Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, "The New Middle East, ISIL and the 6thRevolt Against the West," p. 79.

[180] This can be found in many issues of Dabiq. See, for example: Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 4-5, and 15. issue, p.7.

[181] It is important to note that Dabiq is only one theatral symbolic amongst many. So, after the fall of the Dabiq village, ISIS was/is able to modify its discourse given its flexible meaning-making of scripture. Therefore "In Issue 3 of *Rumiyah*, the fall of Dabiq is rationalised in a feature article titled 'Towards the Major Malhamah (battle) of Dabiq' (*Rumiyah*, Issue 3, pp. 24–26). This article warns that ISIS's enemies are deluded in thinking that the fall of Dabiq was a psychological victory as this was only the "minor battle of Dabiq" and not the "Major Malhamah of Dabiq" (*Rumiyah*, Issue 3, p. 25), which has yet to take place". See: Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran and Lange, Ibid., p. 9.

[182] Belief and disbelief, regardless of ethnicity and nationality, are frequently presented as main categories throughout Dabiq. An example: Dabiq, 11. issue, p. 20.

[183] See, for instance, Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 4: "Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī (rahimahullāh), who said, "O soldiers of the Islamic State, O youth of Muhammad (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam)… Today we are upon the doorstep for a new era, a turning point for the map of the region, rather the world. Today we witness the end of the lie called western civilization and the rise of the Islamic giant. This is exactly what Bush warned against in his last speech in front of veterans when he said, 'The region is changing into one that threatens civilization with destruction,' meaning the civilization of shirk and kufr, the civilization of usury and prostitution, the civilization of humiliation and subjugation. And he said regarding the soldiers of the Islamic State in Mesopotamia, 'They strive to reestablish a khilāfah expanding from Spain to Indonesia'." The rejection of secular conceptions is of an all-encompassing type. It

to them.[184] On the other hand, ISIS' internal dissidence manifests itself in addressing its Muslim audience,* which is located on three different zones; the *inner ring*, the *near abroad*, and the *far abroad*.[185] Both, the dissence towards the extra-territorial as intra-territorial addressees is tried to be examined at various points throughout this thesis.

If ISIS-controlled areas form a territorial entity and the caliphate is to be considered upon the claim of being a space, ISIS' geopolitical struggle can be retraced starting from its inner circle going further onto the peripheries. Turning upside down democratic and western values while also following expansionist politics, ISIS challenges its *far abroad* located on its broader periphery, which is the West (western countries altogether), and consequently its *near abroad* on its closer periphery, the modern Middle East or the Islamic world, which it considers the extension of the West and the product of western politics, wherefore the caliphate conception occurs as a legitimate project to unite 'true Muslims'. Ostensively put in Dabiq:

> At the onset of Ramadan in 1435, the mujahidin, who were engaging fierce battles against the Crusaders, their allies, and their puppets in Iraq and the Levant, reached a level where all conditions required to announce the Caliphate were met. So with great joy, the lost obligation was revived and the Muslim world could once again be united, by Allah's grace, around a single imam, Ibrahim Ibn 'Awwad al-Badri.[186]

Yeşiltaş, while elaborating ISIS' expansion,[187] hints at the functionality of the conception of a caliphate (interlinked to tactics of territoriality) which is a crucial conception of territoriality:

> Caliphate is useful for the aversion of hierarchy of sovereignty which has been built around the political unit of nation state in the Middle East as well as forcing the borders of the nation state to a radical change. Such a theo-political narrative lies behind ISIS's attack to the political order of Sykes-Picot, and its challenge to the current political sovereignty understanding which has been formed

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includes administrative as well as societal levels, for symbols of recognition like the Nobel Peace prize are discredited as 'hypocritical,' see Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 42.

[184] See, for example: Dabiq, 9. issue, pp. 20-23.

* This type of dissidence is multilateral and will be explained in detail on the course of this thesis.

[185] As Yeşiltaş formulates: "In this sense, ISIS has a total war and terror strategy that consists of three geographical rings: 'interior ring' consisting of Iraq and Syria, 'near abroad ring' consisting of larger Middle East and North Africa, and 'far abroad ring' consisting of Europe, America and Asia." See: Murat Yeşiltaş, "ISIS: Geopolitical Management of Terrorism," 2 November 2016, http://muratyesiltas.com/isis-geopolitical-management-terrorism/ accessed 13.02.2017.

[186] Dabiq, 15. issue, p. 27. Ibrahim Ibn 'Awwad al-Badri is the full name of would-be caliph al-Baghdadi.

[187] "Meanwhile, the Islamic State announced the expansion of the Khilāfah to Sinai, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, and the Arabian Peninsula, accepting the bay'āt (oaths of allegiance) of the mujāhidīn (fighters of jihad) in those lands". See Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 12.

around secular nation-state unit. Challenging the west-centered secular order with the promise of a new religious universality on the axis of caliphate and so-called jihad, ISIS is in search of changing the rules of game in the field of geopolitical war in line with a hybrid war doctrine.[188]

ISIS' territorial perception, encompassing the broader context of its state concept, offers a dissident plan. Indeed, it is a plan since the group is following an apocalyptic end times vision of the world, at which the ultimate line between good and evil or those 'obedient to God's will' and those 'fighting God's will,' will irreversibly occur according to *Dabiq*:

> The flag of Khilāfah will rise over Makkah and al-Madīnah, even if the apostates and hypocrites despise such. The flag of Khilāfah will rise over Baytul-Maqdis* and Rome, even if the Jews and Crusaders despise such. The shade of this blessed flag will expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny of jāhiliyyah, even if America and its coalition despise such…[189]

In this sense, due to ISIS' territorial understanding, the territory of earth is theoretically divided into the land of believers and the land of infidels, the *kuffar*.[190] Of course, by a deeper look, distinctions in these categories such as *murtads* (apostates), *mushrikin* (polytheists) or devil-worshippers become evident. As a major determinant in these distinctions the concept of *tawhid* is at play. Therefore, the label *muwahhidin*,[191] naming those who firmly adhere to *tawhid* (believing in the absolute unity of God) is hardly an accidental usage, particularly in the self-attribution of ISIS.

Coming back to the essential division of territory through religious criteria, ISIS is mapping its enemies consisting of a wide range of other-believing or non-believing people and groups them under the *near* or the *far enemy* title. Speaking of ISIS' conception of territoriality, it totally cracks down on the borders of *Skyes-Picot* both, physically/operationally as discoursively. What is meant by discourse is that ISIS challenges the hegemonic narrative of given borders embodied by Westphalian type nation-states.[192] That implies not only that ISIS at full strength challenges existing

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[188] Murat Yeşiltaş, "ISIS: Geopolitical Management Of Terrorism".
* *Baytul-Maqdis* is used for al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.
[189] Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 3
[190] "land of kufr" and "land of Islam" are both expressed by Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali. See Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 16.
[191] A supra-identity which is used for all ISIS-sympathizers around the world, see: Dabiq, 7. issue, p. 37.
[192] Though to some, ISIS' emergence resembles the formation of nation-states. See Ben St. Clair, "The Islamic State: A Symptom of a World in Transition".

borderlines but also those who had drawn them, their inheritors,[193] and all those staying ignorant to these "illegitimate" borderlines, which are splitting the Muslim *ummah* (worldwide community of Muslims) and 'Muslim lands,' which ought to form one territorial-legal entity; the *Dar'ul Islam*.

2.4. Territorial Genesis: ISIS as Generator of the Apocalypse

The apocalypse doctrine does not only serve in justifying antagonism, offering a certain territorial worldview or providing legitimacy and switchover facilities for operational and administrative behavior. However, beyond completing the group's territorial logic, another remarkable point is that ISIS – thanks to the apocalypse – does not need to explain why it has been established in Iraq and later on in Syria. To oppose the suspicious idea that ISIS, as a God-guided group could have emerged elsewhere, the Hadith saying "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, ..." gives enough grounds for a deterministic rationale, as it is too argued in the magazine interpreting that the battle in Dabiq will pave the way to conquer Constantinople and Rome thereafter. As suggested in *Dabiq*, ISIS was born on a territory it labels 'the land of *Malāhim*,' indicating territories that will witness end time battles between believers and infidels:

> Allah's Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "You will have a treaty of security with the Romans* until you both fight an enemy beyond them. And you will be victorious, you will gain war booty, and you will achieve such without losses. Thereafter you will return until you lodge at a pasture land full of rocky mounds. A man from the Roman Christians will then raise the cross. He will say, 'The cross has prevailed!' A man from the Muslims will then say, 'Rather Allah has prevailed,' and then he will angrily rise and crush the cross which is not at a distance from him. Then the Romans will betray the treaty by rising against the breaker of the cross and striking his neck. The Muslims will then rise and rush to their arms. They will then battle. Allah will bless this party of Muslims with shahādah. The Romans will say to the Roman leader, 'We are sufficient for you against the Arabs.' They will then gather for the Malhamah (the grand battle before the Hour). They will come for you under eighty banners, with each banner there will be twelve thousand people [Sahīh: reported by Imām Ahmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, and Ibn Hibbān on the authority of Dhī Mikhmar].[194]

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[193] E.g. "American crusaders and their apostate agents," see: Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 28. The Notion of inheriting is an extension of ISIS' enemy perception which it similarly applies to the Shiite population in Iraq and Syria (Alawites) who it considers descendants of *Rafidhis*, those "deviating from the right path in favor of idolatry."

* Romans is a sub-identity ascribed to all Christian-born people, no matter if they left Church, do not pratice their religion or define themselves as seculars without religious sensitivity – unless they convert to another religion.

[194] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 56.

So reformulating the group's understanding, the reason why ISIS emerged in Iraq and Syria is not because it could not have been possible otherwise, but because it was 'God's will' as the Hadith 'proves'.[195] This is considered a part of the fulfilment of the apocalypse. Accordingly, starting from "where the spark has been lit," ISIS aims at stretching its power all over the world and time or losses have no significance within this future prospect. John Agnew in his take on the geopolitics of the Catholic Church reveals a similar wish for expansion. However, this is based on the rationale of 'the enlargement of a sacred space,'[196] unlike ISIS' territorial logic in which all lands already belong to God, but yet the group "has been chosen to reconquer and liberate it from the hands of the infidel other".[197] The credo is that sooner or later the group will have to succeed for God has promised it.[198] In the end, the apocalypse is more than an ideological obsession. Once accepted, it goes beyond a primitive enemy-ally scheme, targetting the territorial imagination of its addressees. It suggests and localizes territorial enemy categories, whereby it lends potential supremacy on territory to 'the self'. Agnew would call it "claiming a vertical space for themselves in the material world,"[199] similarly to expressing the way how Christian churches come to a conclusion in terms of representing divinity in the material world.[200] Though highly paranoid to foreign eyes, the apocalypse ensures a comprehensive and logical divine plan for those believing in it. Therefore, the apocalypse is a multifunctional conception of territoriality which – regardless of its utopic objectives – holds practicable implementation possibilities.[201] One of these implementations is that by controlling a territory – like the

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[195] See the embedment of this Hadith in ISIS' apocalyptic exegesis in Dabiq magazine, 1. issue, p. 5.

[196] For more elaboration on "sacred space," see: Stump, Ibid., pp. 25-28. Stump also notes that a sacred space can engage in secular practices like trade for example. As such, the *Haram* (environment around the *Qaba* (main place of Islamic pilgrimage) in pre-Islamic times as after Islam has been a sacred space, however, it was "also considered a neutral setting for trade and diplomacy between rival groups". Ibid., p. 60.

[197] "The central conundrum for the Church (as for all churches and most religious traditions) is that its focus on expanding and deepening its "sacred space" to bring as many people into its communion as possible before the Day of Judgement (..)," See: Agnew, "Deus Vult: The Geopolitics of the Catholic Church," p. 43.

[198] As the maintenance and expansion of the Islamic State was argued by 'Umar al-Baghdadi: "It will remain because Allah ta'ālā promised in His precise revelation," see Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 33. Similarly in an interview with Jürgen Todenhöfer, Abu Qatada (German ISIS member working at the group's propaganda apparatus) mentioned "We will conquer Europe one day," see: Interview with Jürgen Todenhöfer, **CNN**, 22 December 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=430W_imRQXw, accessed 23.02.2017.

[199] Agnew, "Deus Vult: The Geopolitics of the Catholic Church," p. 40.

[200] For the Bible as Anssi Paasi notes, "contains many references to boundaries and their pre-ordained and historical nature. On the whole, it has been argued that modern nationalism took a number of concepts from Old Testament mythology, beginning with the idea of a 'chosen people' (Brennan 1990, 59)". See: Anssi Paasi, *Territories, Boundaries And Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*, p. 194.

[201] Dabiq was/is clearly a part of a territorial conception: "After the group announced its expansion from Iraq into Syria in 2013 - long before IS seized Dabiq from Syrian rebel fighters in August 2014 - the group's videos began to

size of UK at the time of its climax, if not bigger[202] – ISIS partially realized itself and so complied with its promises. This had a huge persuasive impact on its near and far audience given the cohesion between discourse and practice. For it created its own space, its *apocalyptic lebensraum*,[203] fulfilled its genesis, and subsequently added accountability to its discourse,[204] and legitimacy to its existence.[205] Both gave ISIS the possibility to brand itself with a new compelling profile, obviously attracting more foreign fighters than any other terrorist group has ever been able so far. Not enough with that, ISIS managed to make a relevant number of people believe that it was ushering in a new victorious era,[206] one of the long desired return of the caliphate.[207]

In terms of reality, time and conditions were ripe for ISIS to flourish. It is often said that ISIS when it was to become ISI and later on too, had availed of the power vacuum left behind after the U.S. invasion. This is true, however, it implies that ISIS filled this vacuum with an alternative[208] – the very makeup of land and people – as Stuart Elden

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cite the prophecy routinely, suggesting that the town was in its sights." Retrieved from: "Dabiq: Why is Syrian town so important for IS?," **BBC**, 4 October 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30083303, accessed 20.02.2017.

[202] At its grandest moment, the Islamic State governed approximately six million people in Iraq and Syria, spread across a territory roughly the size of Great Britain. See: Fishman, Ibid., Kindle Locations 4213-4214.

[203] *Lebensraum* (living space) is a conceptualized term by Friedrich Ratzel within his usage of "*Biogeographie*" (literally biogeography). See: Gerhard H. Müller, "Das Konzept der 'allgemeinen Biogeographie' von Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904): Eine Übersicht," **Geographische Zeitschrift**, Franz Steiner Verlag, (1986), p. 8. Lebensraum stemmed from social Darwinist ideology, suggesting that 'to survive states need to expand their living space,' see: Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, p. xx. Apocalyptic expansionism has other examples. As such Jerusalem was one particular case for Romans who strived to conquer it, not for economic grounds or because Jerusalem had military strategic importance. Quite differently, Jerusalem was the utmost symbol of the divine what was a source of legitimacy at that time.

[204] For instance, one ISIS militant recalls that the promise of 'their sheikh' who is most likely al-Baghdadi has realized while he is walking on the abolished border between Iraq and Syria. See: *The Islamic State (Full Length)* [documentary]. "It (ISIS) kept to its promise and destroyed the border obstacles that formerly separated the lands of Iraq from Shām". Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 26.

[205] ISIS acknowledges its need of territory: "Furthermore, the people today have failed to understand that imamah in religious affairs cannot be properly established unless the people of truth first achieve comprehensive political imamah over the lands and the people." See Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 25. Also consider: "Thereafter, the hopes of Khilafah became an undeniable reality, one that allowed no room for anyone claiming any excuse to resist the authority of the imam except to be dealt with by the decisive law of Allah. The victories in Ninawa, al-Anbar, Salahuddin, al-Khayr, al-Barakah, and elsewhere, all aided the declaration made by the Islamic State on the first of Ramadan 1435H, in which the Khilafah was officially announced" Ibid., p. 40.

[206] Al-Adnani rigorously announced: "The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation… – the time has come for them to rise," Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 9.

[207] See the cover of Dabiq's first issue "Return of Khilafah," in this vein the announcement of the *caliphate* and *jihad* are completing each other, as stated "The sun of jihad has risen," Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 9.
John Batchetor, "ISIL is more than just a police state", **Al Jazeera**, 27 April 2015, http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/4/isil-is-more-than-just-a-police-state.html, accessed 20.02.2017.

[208] On the effect of the caliphate conception on Muslims, it is worthwile to cite Sayyid, saying "The assertion of a Muslim subjectivity when there is no overarching political structure that can represent this subjectivity at the global level creates a condition in which a substantial group of people are increasingly alienated from the world order. (…)The diasporic condition of Muslims, however, does not admit a spatial redemptive return, as they are not connected to any specific territory, and, because the homelessness of Muslims is global, there is no specific place to return to.2 Thus, for Muslims redemption lies not in a return to a homeland but a rooting in the world. That is, a resolution of the discrepancy created by assertive subjectivity and its marginalisation within the world order requires

hints at: "The US "order giving" was indeed plagued with mistakes. The constitution failed to integrate Iraqi land and people into one entity. The US brought political and territorial decomposition to Iraq instead of reconstituting and securing its territorial integrity".[209] Again reality tells that terrorists benefit from the materialization of power vacua, which Elden codifies as "physical safe havens" that emerge "when states grant them access to territory, or when they (terrorists) gain access to ungoverned, ill-governed, or under-governed space: within states that lack effective control over their own territory". He further states: "Non-physical safe havens for terrorists can exist within cyber, financial, and legal systems".[210] In case of ISIS both are at play, a physical and a non-physical safe haven.[211] The latter is supposed to last longer than the former, while perhaps making a legend of the former when lost to enemies. Some even see enough grounds to foretell the coming of a 'digital caliphate,' however, time will tell what the 'ISIS experience' means for the further development of jihadism and the world exposed to it.

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an overarching political structure able to suture Muslims as Muslims to the so-called international community. The caliphate seems to promise such a rooting". And "In other words, the end of the diasporic condition of the ummah means not a return to a homeland but the restoration of a great power". See: Sayyid, Ibid., p. 118 and p. 121.

[209] Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory*, pp. 136-137.

[210] Elden, Ibid., p. 53.

[211] To get a clue on non-physical havens of ISIS, see a review on Abdel Bari Atwan's book: *The Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* by Benjamin Biebl in **Asian Affairs**, Vol. 47, 2. issue, (2016) retrieved online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03068374.2016.1171613, accessed 18.04.2017. Further on non-physical havens of jihadi groups, see: Manuel L. Torres-Soriano, "The Caliphate Is Not a Tweet Away: The Social Media Experience of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," **Studies in Conflict & Terrorism**, Vol. 39, 11. issue, (2016), pp. 968-981.

CHAPTER III: MAPPING ISIS' TERRITORIALITY

As told above, *Dabiq* has unveiled a specific discourse of territoriality, which we attempted to show in chapter II. In this discourse, ISIS' earth-reading and world-view[ing] are underpinned by specified territorial categories and templates. Therefore, when analyzing ISIS' earth-reading, a classification and typification strategy of territory and people becomes apparent. To classify and typify territory and people, which in fact is the operationalization of ISIS' territoriality; following sub-templates are applied in mapping ISIS' territoriality: a) ISIS' self, b) ISIS' other, c) Muslim lands/nation, d) lands of kufr/nation of kufr/lands of taghut d) liberation, resistance, and immigration. We begin with the latter in order to depict the broader territoriality context into which *Dabiq* places ISIS' 'self' and its 'other'.

3.1. *'Liberating Muslim lands:*[212] *A sacred resistance'*

To its Muslim audience, ISIS offers a promising alternative to *Skyes-Picot*.* Thus, it presents itself as the unique true-believing authority that is able to restore the honor of Muslims,[213] unlike 'failed Muslim states' (groups and individuals included) which are plagued by corruption and obedience to the West.[214] Here as elsewhere in the making of ISIS' territoriality, the interaction between ISIS' leadership or what Atzili and Kadercan would translate into 'elite,' and the people it holds under control is of tremendous importance. Arguably, ISIS may follow a certain territorial design what Atzili and Kadercan define as "the process by which elites, in interaction with their own society and their competitors, intentionally and systematically constitute and institutionalize territoriality, and hence also territory".[215] Accordingly, pre-ISIS territory would fall into

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[212] Most at times when ISIS fighters capture a territory, they name it "liberating" in order to beautify and use a legitimizing language. See Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 47.

[*] In doing so, ISIS redraws and therefore deterritorializes and reterritorializes landscapes in Iraq and Syria, what poses a great threat and challenge to the territorial status-quo in the region.

[213] As al-Baghdadi emphasized in his first speech as caliph: "O Muslims everywhere, glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your head high, for today – by Allah's grace – you have a state and Khilafah, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership." retrieved from Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 7.

[214] This is expressed through the label "samma'in," meaning apostate "avid listeners" of the genuine infidels. See, for example, Dabiq, 12. issue, p. 51.

[215] Boaz Atzili and Burak Kadercan (2017) "Territorial designs and international politics: the diverging constitution of space and boundaries," p. 120.

the category of 'external delineation and constitution,' exemplified through 'colonizing designs'.[216] Abu Bakr an-Naji, the author of 'Management of Savagery,'[217] which is by some believed to be a handbook for ISIS' military strategies,[218] touches upon such classification:

> "When the caliphal state fell, some of this savagery appeared in some of the regions. However, the situation stabilized soon after that on account of (the order) the Sikes-Picot treaty established. Thereupon, the division of the caliphal state and the withdrawal of the colonial states was such that the caliphal state was divided into (large) states and small states, ruled by military governments or civil governments supported by military forces".[219]

Dabiq casually mentions Naji and his book due to Zarqawi's praise of him, saying: "It is as if the author knows what I'm planning". Though this might rather be a matter of research when exploring ISIS' tactics of territoriality, it should be acknowledged that ISIS does not consent on everything Naji has suggested. For instance: "Although Nājī's book describes very precisely the overall strategy of the mujāhidīn, Nājī fell into some errors in his discussions on issues related to the takfīr of parties who forcefully resist the Sharī'ah and its laws".[220] Within discourse – may it be the territoriality discourse – ISIS' particular and uncompromising reading of religious scripture and thus its understanding of Islam has predominance. And here again, ISIS does not share its totalitarian claim of being the single and absolute authority over religious scripture and jurisprudence.

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[216] Atzili and Kadercan, Ibid., pp. 122-123.

[217] The Management of Savagery was first published by Mu'askar al-Battar, an al-Qaeda propaganda outlet based in Saudi Arabia that published many of al-Adl's articles during the same period. Hakaymah also knew Zarqawi personally, having escaped with him from Afghanistan and Pakistan after 9/ 11. Taken together, the master plan and The Management of Savagery offered strategic and operational plans for Zarqawi's war in Iraq and beyond. See: Fishman, Ibid., Kindle Locations 835-839.

[218] Ulutaş stated that "ISIS mostly followed the roadmap drawn by Naji in his book, the *Management of Savagery*, and put Naji's work into practice". See: Ufuk Ulutaş, Ibid., p. 93. It might be argued that some advises in Dabiq are inspired by Naji's 'Management of Savagery'. For example: "In short, these phases consist of immigrating to a land with a weak central authority to use as a base where a jama'ah can form, recruit members, and train them. (If such a land does not exist or hijrah is not possible, the place can be formed through long campaigns of nikayah attacks carried out by underground mujahid cells. These attacks will compel apostate forces to partially withdraw from rural territory and regroup in major urban regions.) The jama'ah would then take advantage of the situation by increasing the chaos to a point leading to the complete collapse of the taghut regime in entire areas, a situation some refer to as "tawahhush" ("mayhem"). The next step would be to fill the vacuum by managing the state of affairs to the point of developing into a full-fledged state, and continuing expansion into territory still under control of the taghut" retrieved from Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 38.

[219] Abu Bakr Naji (pen name), William McCants (transl.) **The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass**, John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, 2006, p. 12. Accessed online via: https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf, lastly retrieved 16.04.2017.

[220] Dabiq, 12. issue, p. 39.

As mentioned in the last *Dabiq* excerpt, the use of *takfir* (declaring somebody an apostate) is a feature through which ISIS deliberately differs itself from other Sunni jihadis on its *near abroad. Takfir*, for ISIS, is a trademark like extreme brutality. Though ISIS excommunicates Muslims who stay loyal to their governments instead of joining them through immigration (*hijrah*) or supporting them by financial means, it keeps considering landscapes as 'Muslim territory'.[221] Interestingly, ISIS promotes itself as the liberating and saving force any Muslim should adhere to, while on the other hand, it swears by full revenge – a priori accepting to have been abused, dishonored by the West, and so become its victim.[222] Oddly enough, one could argue that ISIS draws power from its powerlessness.[223] At this point, the concept of a *resisting formation* takes place,[224] for ISIS defends a 'pious and righteous resistance for the sake of God and the liberation[225] of 'true Muslims' and their lands,' while aiming at regaining justice, honor, power, and self-determination. From its early days on, ISIS has emphasized its resisting character labeling itself 'the Strangers,' a reference to a Hadith saying that "Islam began as something strange and someday it will return to something strange so blessed be the strangers".[226] Accordingly, ISIS points that only a few people will be able to find the 'true path' leading to God, and those who do, will be rejected and discriminated by the great majority of people, which is interpreted as a sign for being on 'God's side'.[227]

This arguably creates a considerable symbolic attraction for sympathizers and enhances their adoption of the idea of a *sacred resistance* against the 'disbelieving' West and its collaborators. Factoring in Paul Routledge's argument,[228] the discourse of a sacred resistance, may it be against Shiites, Christians or atheist seculars, suggests a 'terrain of

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[221] For example: "Then, by Allah's grace, the mujahidin gained control over territory larger than many states claiming "legality" today, lands formerly under control of the historical Umawi khulafa' of Sham and 'Abbasi khulafa' of Iraq". Retrieved from Dabiq, 1. issue, p.40.

[222] Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 8-9.

[223] An issue that Manfred Schneider investigated under the rubric 'paranoiac reason,' see: Manfred Schneider, **Das Attentat: Kritik der paranoischen Vernunft**, Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2010.

[224] Paul Routledge, "Our resistance will be as transnational as capital: Convergence space and strategy in globalising resistance," **Geo Journal** (Kluwer Academic Publishers), Vol. 52, (2001), p. 25.

[225] Liberation here aims at both, the factual and abstract dimensions. Factually, ISIS "liberated" jailed sympathizers for example in Nineveh province, calling them "prisoners of Ahlu's-Sunna" clearly linking these individuals to themselves. Similarly, taking areas with Shi'a population (like Tal-Afar with a Shi'a minority) is also deemed a liberation for Sunnis. The abstract dimesion designates the moral liberation that means to conduct a live agreeable to God's rules. See: Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 13 and 17.

[226] Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 26.

[227] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 5.

[228] "More specifically, a terrain of resistance represents an interwoven web of specific symbolic meanings, communicative processes, political discourses, religious idioms, cultural practices, social networks, economic relations, physical settings, envisioned desires and hopes". See Paul Routledge, "Critical geopolitics and terrains of resistance," p. 516.

resistance,' which applies to the *near abroad*. Even though ISIS may not be understood as a typical resistance that would pop up on one's mind at first, it is — by its dissident nature — a specific form of resistance. In fact, any kind of jihadist movement or organization is a form of resistance. That is why quoting Routledge at length can help for a better understanding, though he takes social movements as the initial point, what makes it a different study than one of VNSAs (violent non-state actors): "Every resistance, therefore, has a microtexture that articulates and shapes everyday experiences and desires of the oppressed; their memories and imaginations; their cultural symbols; their tactics of the habitat; that which inspires and motivates social movement actors".[229]

So, taking these adhering 'strangers' who either joined the group from the near environment (e.g. defecting individuals from al-Nusra and other jihadist organizations) or immigrated from abroad, a specific community has emerged. So to speak, ISIS' leadership formed an inner circle of loyals, potent enough to impose power and control over the native population in Iraq and Syria. Noteworthy that this *inner circle* composed of leaders and loyals created, in Foucault's terms, the bedrock of the possibility for ISIS to hold *bio-power*[230] (*la biopolitique*) on its alleged 'citizens'. By virtue of an obvious power vacuum whose effects cannot be overemphasized, ISIS seized territory and a considerable population upon which it imposed a self-styled caliphate. In this connection, the act of state-building and its conceptual embodiment as a 'worldwide Islamic caliphate' is revolutionary, resisting, and profoundly dissident. Though we know that the caliphate as a government model was officially put to an end with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, ISIS links itself to the Ummayad and Abbasid caliphate copying some of its symbols, whenever useful.[231] For example, *Dabiq*'s mention of the tradition of minting coins during the Ummayad period can be read as a sign for such strived linkage. It is said in *Dabiq* that "'Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwān, however, ordered the minting of coins specific to the Muslims that did not contain any of the imagery of the Persians and Romans, whether altered or otherwise,"[232] and further noted: "Any country needs its own currency and a move by the Islamic State to gold dinars would be

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[229] Paul Routledge, "Critical geopolitics and terrains of resistance," p. 523.
[230] Stuart Elden, "Governmentality, calculation, territory," p. 564.
[231] The wearing of black clothes or the flag with the prophetic stamp are prominent examples. See also al-Baghdadi's symbolic designation of sympathizers in North Africa. Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 31.
[232] Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 18.

a smart one in today's turbulent markets". On that account, financial website Quartz wrote, "The gold dinar taps into a deep history of Islamic coinage that stretches back almost to the time of Muhammad himself. The Islamic dinar appeared in 696 AD, when the Umayyad empire – based in Damascus – stretched from the Iberian peninsula to the Indus River in South Asia".[233]

However, restoring the caliphate in this way also means to establish a new alternative rather than going back in history (caliphal era). The major challenge by such alternative posed to the outer environment (the *near* and *far abroad*) is that ISIS as an armed non-state actor rules out all varieties of statehood in its conception of territoriality except its own understanding of the caliphate model.

3.2. *'Hijrah'*: A Complementary Conception to Jihad, Bay'ah, and the Apocalypse

The *hijrah* (immigration upon divine order), which has been given the cover page of *Dabiq*'s third issue, is a key conception and tactic in ISIS' territorial imagination. As a legal category, the immigration to 'ISIS lands' is obligatory (*fardh-'ayn*).[234] This means that whoever calls himself a Muslim but ignores this order, will face a divine retaliation in the hereafter. That is why Muslims who settled on the *far abroad* are instantly urged to immigrate and 'emancipate' themselves from the 'dishonoring rule of the infidels,' as voices *Dabiq*. Using the holy month of Ramadan as an occasion,* it is stated accordingly;

> And O you who continues residing in the lands of kufr under the authority of the crusaders and the
> tawāghīt, in the shade of their manmade laws, hearing them revile Allah's Sharī'ah day and night in
> their media and describe it as backwards, oppressive, and barbaric, do not allow another Ramadān
> after this one to pass you by except that you have made hijrah from the lands of kufr to the lands of
> the Islamic State![235]

On the other hand, *hijrah* is a 'honorable duty' for each 'true-believing' Muslim to join the 'ranks of the Khilafah' by leaving the 'ranks of infidels'. Noteworthy, *Dabiq*

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[233] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 59.
[234] The hijrah is also defined as 'immigrating to Allah,' see: Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 6.
* Speculatively, addressing religious feelings of Muslims during Ramadan may have a pragmatic backdrop, for Ramadan – especially in societies where religion is rather a cultural adaption – may render culture-affine people more susceptible to ISIS' call for *hijrah*.
[235] Dabiq, 10. issue, p. 29.

reminds that Ibn Taymiyyah – who is one of the utmost esteemed Salafi scholars to ISIS – said that the *hijrah* is a tradition of Prophet Abraham.[236] *Hijrah*, as a complementary conception within ISIS' geopolitical imagination (and thus *weltanschauung*), is integrated in the territoriality discourse alongside with jihad and *bay'ah*:

> So those who left their tribes – the best of Allah's slaves – rallied together with an imām and a jamā'ah upon the path of Ibrāhīm. They gathered together in the land of malāhim shortly before the occurrence of al-Malhamah al-Kubrā,* announced their enmity and hatred for the cross worshippers, the apostates, their crosses, their borders, and their ballotboxes, and pledged allegiance to the Khilāfah, promising to die defending it. (…) So if the muhājirīn of the Islamic State in their thousands are the dogs of Hellfire (Khawarij), then who are the ones referred to in the hadīth as being "those who break off from their tribes" and "the best of Allah's slaves?[237]

Here the '*hijrah*' is first a 'sin-erasing form of worshipping God'[238] and a form of making jihad, a divine service, which upvalues the believer to 'the best of Allah's slaves,' and further it is a manifestation of the *bay'ah*, while defying the enemy. Moreover, the *hijrah* is a preparation stage in awaiting the doomsday. This is important because the *hijrah* – apart from meaning the time and act of immigration – is above all taking position on the map of the apocalypse. Thus, it symbolizes the escape from the wrong side – fleeing the lands and people that oppose God – to finally reach the purified lands of the caliphate, 'the land of God's rule'. Notably, the status of being a 'muhajir' (immigrant) cannot get lost or undone when one leaves the land of the caliphate upon the approval of an ISIS authority. This is also leaned on prophetic history, as *Dabiq* states:

> As for one who travels to a land outside of Shām for jihād on the order of the amīr, his journey is an act of obedience which does not nullify his hijrah to Shām or his residence within it. This is the case even if he is killed outside of Shām, just as the companions were killed as they advanced against the enemy and plunged into the enemy's ranks outside of Madīnah, in spite of having made hijrah to Madīnah and in spite of Madīnah's virtue over all other places in the world except Makkah. And Madīnah is more virtuous than Shām.[239]

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[236] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 10. Here, the Hadith with the space codification of 'the land of Ibrahim's hijrah' is recalled: "The hijrah of the strangers to Shām was in adherence to the path of Ibrāhīm (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) who established for them the tradition of declaring enmity and hatred towards the mushrikīn and their tawāghīt. Abdullāh Ibn 'Amr (radiyallāhu 'anhumā) said that Allah's Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "There will be hijrah after hijrah. The best people on earth will be those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm's hijrah. Then there will remain on the earth the worst of its people. Their lands will cast them out, Allah will hate them, and the fire will gather them together with the apes and swine" [hasan – reported by Imām Ahmad, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Hākim].
* Doomsday
[237] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 11.
[238] Dabiq, 3. issue, pp. 23-24.
[239] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 11 (footnote).

To show how *hijrah* is strongly interlinked with jihad, *Dabiq* makes use of an alleged Hadith saying; "Matters will run their course until you become mobilized armies: an army in Shām, and an army in Yemen, and an army in Iraq," and also "Go to Shām, for it is the best of Allah's lands, and He draws His best slaves to it. And if you do not, then go to your Yemen and drink from your wells. For Allah has guaranteed me that He will look after Shām and its people".[240] As it can be seen from here, the *inner circle* and its encompassing *near abroad* both hold a peculiar position (location value) within ISIS' territoriality understanding. If 'Sham' (*near abroad* plus *inner circle*) is 'the best of Allah's lands,' and 'the lands of the victorious group,'[241] it is foremost so because this area is ruled by 'the best of His slaves,' connoting a notion of chosenness. More than that, this chosenness is open for anyone who strives to immigrate to the caliphate. As noticeable from *Dabiq* quotes, the *hijrah* clearly supports the imagination of an apocalyptic prospect, which grants it a considerable legitimacy. Therefore, the reiterate occurrence of territorial etiquettes/templates like 'lands of Malahim' or 'lands of taghut' aims at cohering *bay'ah*, jihad, and *hijrah*, and present them as one cohesive body of action. Thereof the apocalyptic doctrine is tried to be attributed to prophetic history:

> He (Prophet Muhammad) fought both the Arabs and non-Arabs in all their various colors. He himself left to fight and took part in dozens of battles. He never for a day grew tired of war… His companions after him and their followers carried on similarly. They did not soften nor abandon war, until they possessed the Earth, conquered the East and the West, the nations submitted to them, and the lands yielded to them, by the edge of the sword. And similarly, this will remain the condition of those who follow them until the Day of Recompense. Our Prophet (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*) has informed us of the Malāhim near the end of time. He gave us good tidings and promised us that we would be victorious in these battles. He is the truthful and trustworthy, sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam. And here we are today seeing the signs of those Malāhim and we feel the winds of victory within them.[242]

The *inner circle* as ISIS' *heartland* has priority over *near abroad* locations, however, so does the aforementioned Hadith suggest, if one cannot undertake the *hijrah* to the caliphate, *near abroad* territories like Yemen should be consoling options. This

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[240] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 11.
[241] "Shaykh Hamūd at-Tuwayjirī (rahimahullāh), in commenting on some of the narrations about the tribulations and battles in Shām, said, "In these narrations is evidence that the bulk of at-Tā'ifatul-Mansūrah (the victorious group) will be in Shām near the end of times, because the Khilafah will be there. Abū Dharr (radiyallāhu 'anh) said that Allah's Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "Shām is the land of congregation and dispersal [meaning resurrection]" [sahīh – reported by al-Bazzār and others]". Retrieved from Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 10.
* Special form of greeting Prophet Muhammad.
[242] Dabiq, 9. issue, p. 53.

seemingly portends to a hierarchy of spaces within ISIS' geopolitical imagination. Besides, the *hijrah* – as a complementary conception to the apocalypse doctrine – is a process inducing the great apocalypse. This process is the realization of the two ranks, belief and disbelief, embedded in the dichotomous worldview of ISIS. After the accomplishment of this process, various battle settings will occur, which are named in a Hadith, which *Dabiq* refers to:

> Allah's Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) has informed of battles that will ocur in places within Shām and its vicinity, such as al-Ghūtah, Damascus, Dābiq (or al-A'māq), the Euphrates River, and Constantinople (which is near Shām), as well as Baytul-Maqdis (Jerusalem), the gate of Lod, Lake Tiberius, the Jordan River, Mount Sinai, and so on. And he (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) linked this blessed land with many of the events related to al-Masīh, al-Mahdī, and the Dajjāl. Abud-Dardā' (radiyallāhu 'anh) said that Allah's Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "Indeed the camp of the Muslims on the day of al-Malhamah al-Kubrā will be in al-Ghūtah, next to a city called Damascus, one of the best cities of Shām" [sahīh – reported by Imām Ahmad, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Hākim].[243]

To illustrate this research's analytic framework of ISIS' territorial imagination, a cognitive map has been developed below on the basis of realized and imagined spaces. The prevailing argument in this framework is that such map results from the understanding that tactics and conceptions of territoriality unmask a comprehensive interplay, however, tactics have not been a matter of research in this thesis. Still, to grasp a holistic understanding of ISIS' territoriality nucleus within its geopolitical imagination, the figure below touches upon realized spaces alongside imagined ones.

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[243] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 9.

Geopolitical Categories	Spaces
broad gaze	*Realized*
Inner circle	Caliphate, *Dar'ul Hijrah*
Near abroad	Wilayats (like Sinai, Sirte, Horasan)
Far abroad	Wilayats (like Ifriqiya, Philippines)
Conquered territories	*Dar'ul Islam*; the space where ISIS' sharia jurisdiction has been implemented. *Lands of Malahim*; ready settings for the Apocalypse.
Spheres of influence	*Dar'ul Harb*; space of hybrid intervention (e.g. remote guidance control[244])
	Imagined
Near abroad	Makkah, Madina Quds, Konstantiniyyah (defeat of the *near enemy*)
Far abroad	Rome, Vatican, White House (defeat of the *far enemy*)
Global scale	Making the earth God's space (ISIS' world domination)

Figure 2: ISIS' territorial design: A cognitive map of ISIS' territoriality discourse

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[244] Also mentioned by ISIS itself in Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 39. (e.g. 'Ansbach plot')

3.3. 'The *self*' built upon *Imamah* and *Ummah*

ISIS' conception of the caliphate rejects any division between the political and religious leadership. Instead, both together form the *imamah*. The *imamah* is a well-known religious conception, which is to be found in Sunni and Shiite traditions, though within different exegeses.[245] It theoretically comes after and as compensation of the *nubuwwah* (prophecy). Accordingly, the *imam* is the responsible authority to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet. In ISIS' case, the *imam* is synonymous with the caliph, so is the *imamah* with the *khilafah*, the caliphate. Therefore, the conception of the *imamah* implies both, the leadership in person and the space ruled by the leader which encompasses the territories of the caliphate (*Dar'ul-Islam*). To ISIS, sufficient records in religious scripture prove that the pious leader must claim both, the religious and the political authority over his subjects.[246] It is noteworthy that in *Dabiq*'s first issue a whole article of nine pages is dedicated to the conception of the *imamah*.[247]

How ISIS explicitly understands this conception might be what Hassan Hassan describes as the mixture of the political ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood,[248] though ISIS extremely opposes Morsi or Haniyeh,[249] converged with the inheritance of the *Salafiyyah*.[250] That is to say that political activism is induced by piety and both can no longer separate. Apart from declaring the caliphate, promising to rule and govern by sharia law or al-Baghdadi's prophetic lineage, the concept of the *imamah on the path of Prophet Abraham*[251] is a theo-political conception that suggests a firmly monotheistic understanding of religion and world politics.[252] For, beyond the devotion to the unity of

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[245] To have an introduction on this, see: Wendell G. Johnson, "In Search of the Caliphate*," **Journal of Religious & Theological Information**, (9 March 2017), pp. 1-9, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2017.1281066, accessed 18.04.2017.

[246] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 23

[247] Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 20-29.

[248] This might be deemed Islamism or political Islam, which Dalacoura explains in the context of the Middle East as follows. "Islamism – otherwise termed 'political Islam': the ideology that aims to reform society and politics along religious lines given in the Koran and Islamic legal and cultural traditions – in principle rejects the secular concept of the nation-state and deems the state illegitimate (…) Islamism, and especially Islamic fundamentalism, based on the notion that the umma (community of believers) must overcome the state because it is an artificial creation which fragments the natural unity of believers, questions the very foundation of the political establishment in the Middle East". See: Katerina Dalacoura, "Islamist Movements as Non-State Actors and their Relevance to International Relations," in Daphné Josselin and William Wallace (eds.) **Non-State Actors in World Politics**, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 235-236.

[249] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 39. See also the condemnation of Hamas in Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 21.

[250] Hassan Hassan, "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context".

[251] Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 20-21.

[252] "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

God, this conception demands obedience to one absolute leader who is the caliph, albeit many administrative responsibilities are transferred to local operatives, leaders or 'emirs' on *near/far abroad* wilayats. However, given the fact that all emirs (near or far) and operatives in ISIS' governing body pledged allegiance to the caliph, and are due to this oath bound to his command, any partition of power and authority is ruled out.

The hierarchy of command when visualized looks like a triangle of which the bottom are ISIS' soldiers obeying local emirs, who stand under the command of the God-willing caliph. Thus the whole construct of command is quite simply themed: "for to obey the amīr is to obey Allah".[253] So, the totality in obeying God corresponds to the totality of obedience on earth shown to the caliph. Importantly, this reflective relation has a central implication in ISIS' conception of territoriality. The belief that all of earth belongs to God creates a vertical divine claim of territorial control, while on the other hand the caliph – as God's shadow on earth – draws on the horizontal claim of territorial control. Hence in accordance with ISIS' *weltanschauung*, the horizontal claim of territorial control is the extension and materialization of the vertical, which stems from 'God's gaze'.

In *Dabiq*'s words: "Through the course of this discussion, we can see that the Islamic State is the entity that most emulates the *millah of Ibrahim** with regards to *imamah* in the areas where it exists".[254] However, one should bear in mind that the imagination of a 'spatial connectivity' between the creator's and the creation's position, and the resulting localization of the sacred on earth has not been recently invented by ISIS. For Michael Biggs notes concerning earliest spatial perceptions the following:

> Most familiar to rulers would have been the *mappamundi* (literally, cloth of the world) which graced cathedrals and court chambers. It depicted a sacred, cosmological space, where Earth and Heaven cleaved together. The map was oriented (literally) towards Paradise, a definite place. Space was

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requirements". See: Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 21. The people of Abraham and he himself also play an important role in Christian scripture due to Abraham's agreement with God: "…involving God's covenant with Abraham, the father of a "Chosen People" who are to occupy a "Promised Land". And further: "The person and work of Jesus Christ is presented as the fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham, and to be "in [relationship with] Christ" is to be an inheritor of its blessings". See: I. Wallace, Ibid., p. 214 and 217. Maybe it should be said at this occasion that Derrida, for instance, deemed 'the Abrahamic' the very condition of religion. See, for example: Gil Anidjar, "Introduction: "Once More, Once More": Derrida, the Arab, the Jew," in Jaques Derrida (ed.) **Acts of Religion**, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 4. That is perhaps why it is not a coincidence when Prophet Abraham and his legacy (in the Qur'an) have been unilaterally claimed by ISIS' discourse in Dabiq.
[253] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 11 (footnote).
* *Millah of Ibrahim* is a Qur'anic term for the religion of Prophet Abraham, symbolizing pure monotheism.
[254] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 27.

depicted in accord with its quality, so Jerusalem occupied a preponderant area and was often depicted as the center of the world.[255]

Being connoted with the *millah of Ibrahim* suggests that ISIS is the best possible realization of an alleged God-willing ideal. Recalling Gertjan Dijkink's words: "when the nation is sacred it has become analogous to God,"[256] 'the self' implying the *ummah* or *jama'ah*, which is the Muslim nation 'is sacred and thus analogous to God' because it embodies 'God's will on earth'. Therefore, in the light of Tuan's geopiety, 'the self' allegorizes the juncture between God and nature, the cutting point of the vertical and the horizontal gaze[s]. As an intra- and extra-territorial challenge, ISIS' conclusion that the *imamah* equally includes political and religious leadership[257] is at odds with secular conceptions.

Such discrepancy is not solely valid between ISIS and the West, it also includes Muslim-populated countries, be they governed by secular law, sharia law or both, for Katerina Dalacoura concludes: "Islamist movements want to take over the state, not to abolish it".[258] This, despite sharing some core religious understanding in terms of conceptions and methods, contradicts ISIS, who strives to abolish the 'conventional state'. So, speaking of both religious conceptions (*ummah* and *imamah*) and 'realpolitik aspirations,' for ISIS to realize them, account for such intra-territorial divide. This reaches the extent that establishing and holding the *imamah* is presented as a major fault line between real believers and those who pretend to believe (all Muslim opponents), which primarily targets opposing agents in its intra-territorial context:[259]

Moreover, the imamah mentioned in the above verse isn't simply referring to imamah in religious affairs, as many would wish to interpret. Rather, it's inclusive of imamah in political affairs, which

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[255] Michael Biggs, "Putting the State on the Map: Cartography, Territory, and European State Formation," **Comparative Studies in Society and History**, Vol. 41, No. 2. (April 1999), Cambridge University Press, P. 377.
[256] Dijkink, "When Geopolitics and Religion Fuse: A Historical Perspective," p. 194.
[257] The concept of *imamah*, as it is called in Dabiq's first issue is discussed herein at length. See: Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 20-29.
[258] Dalacoura, Ibid., p. 246.
[259] The intra-territorial extent is of great importance for ISIS. To exemplify, ISIS does not aim at provoking theological opposition to its practice of religious conceptions, which it makes clear when saying; "And upon every scholar who calls to, or writes about, the obligation to follow the millah of Ibrahim ('alayhis-salam), is to not detest the imamah of The Islamic State today, and to not seek to undermine it or destroy it". See Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 27. ISIS also strives to satisfy sympathizing jihadists, who might be addressed by opposing scholars or ideologues, when assuring them of the victory 'promised by God'. See: Dabiq, 1. issue, pp. 34-35.

many religious people have shunned and avoided on account of the hardship it entails itself and on account of the hardship entailed in working to establish it.[260]

In constructing 'the self,' ISIS discovers itself as the accomplishment of the God-willing government model, while building upon this a discoursive preeminence through 'God's eyes'. In geopolitical terms, one may argue that here the 'self's gaze' and 'God's gaze' fuse together. That is why the Qur'anic reference to Prophet Abraham's story is of great functional value.[261] It *per se* legitimizes and solidifies the existence of ISIS as the legitimate adjuster of order, first on the Middle East, and next on the rest of the world. In the bold-typed interpretation of verse 124 of *Surat'ul-Baqarah*, political leadership has been given primacy in order to do justice to religious requirements. It is therefore stated: "Furthermore, the people today have failed to understand that imamah in religious affairs cannot be properly established unless the people of truth first achieve comprehensive political imamah over the lands and the people".[262]

Rejecting the pre-existing Middle Eastern order and state structures in favor of something new and radically dissident might be what Devji identifies as the 'democratization of authority'. By this, he does not hint at a conventional democracy-building, rather he describes a "fragmentation of traditional authority and the resulting openness to new beliefs and practices that is to be found explicitly as a Sunni enterprise".[263]

As indicated in the methodical approach of this work, discourse holds essential functionalities and religious references are far more than propaganda material. In this connection, the example of the *imamah* reference is a demonstrative case to show the multifunctionality of religious references and applied discourses. The *imamah* is attended by the conception of the Muslim *ummah*, which ISIS translates into 'Muslim nation'. The Muslim nation includes all true-believing individuals regardless of their color, physical appearance and abilities, language, nation, and culture. This comes close

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[260] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 25.
[261] *Surat'ul-Baqarah*, verse 124.
[262] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 25.
[263] Devji, Ibid., p. 51. Devji on illuminating the 'democratization of Islam': "As we have seen, the jihad abandons the authorities and heartlands of Islam by taking to the peripheries, assuming there a charismatic, mystical and even heretical countenance that dismembers the old social and religious distinctions of Islam. But the jihad also infiltrates these central lands and authorities from the peripheries, thereby disaggregating their very centrality to democratize Islam and disperse it globally". Ibid., p. 61.

to what Wallace refers to as 'transterritorial community (the people of God)'.[264] For disregarding national borders and national identities put together with an inclusive community understanding provides the possibility to connect individuals of all genres by one denominator, namely faith. However, ISIS' interpretation of the *ummah* and the 'nation of *kufr*' that stands outside the *ummah* has fundamental roots in the Islamic jurisprudence tradition, the *fiqh*. The assumption that believers form a nation and non-believers form another nation is excerpted from *Hadiths*.[265] Here again, ISIS picks up and makes use of a popular record, which has huge recognition value within the Sunni mainstream.* After explicating what the *imamah* stands for, the Muslim *ummah* is urged on serving and strengthening this leadership in defiance of the secular world: "(..) the Muslim Ummah (nation) should strive to be united behind a single imam (leader), fighting under his banner and empowering him to guard the landmarks of this religion and implement the Shari'ah (law) of Allah".[266] Therefore ISIS understands 'the land of the *ummah*' as the space where sharia jurisdiction is implemented, and the *ummah* as the community of self-sacrificing believers, as *Dabiq* cites Zarqawi:

> The Imām, Abū Mus'ab az-Zarqāwī (may Allah accept him) said: "So I swear by the One to Whom I will return, that there is no real jihād in Iraq except with the presence of the muhājirīn, the sons of the generous ummah, those who have left their tribes, those who bring victory to Allah and His Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam). So beware of losing them, for with their departure will be the departure of your strength, and the departure of the barakah and pleasure of jihād. You need them and they need you" [Ayanqusuddīn wa Ana Hayy].[267]

Speaking about ISIS' conception of the *ummah* or the Muslim nation, Anthony Smith's distinction of the sacred dimension of a nation[268] compellingly calls for consideration. Due to this distinction, the sacred dimension consists of 'the idea of chosenness,' 'sacred territory,' 'ethno-history' and 'national sacrifice,' which ISIS implies all of them, however in a non nation-state character. Applying Smith's paradigm to ISIS, the idea of chosenness prevails in the group's self-representation to its audience. While all

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[264] I. Wallace, Ibid., p. 209.

[265] For further information, see: Ahmet Özel, **Darulislam Darulharb: İslam Hukuku'nda Ülke Kavramı**, 3. edition, İstanbul: İz Publishing, 2014, p. 98 and p. 187.

* While making use of such term, we are perfectly aware of the fragmentation within the Sunni world, however, the use of common religious references and a distinct historical approach to religious scripture (Sunni exegesis and *fiqh* traditions) enable the talk of a Sunni mainstream.

[266] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 24.

[267] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 5.

[268] Cited in Dijkink's article. Ibid., p. 194.

of the world is at odds with this small group of believers holding modest means for defense, not to speak of creating a state, 'by God's will they made the impossible possible'. The territory ISIS holds becomes sacred as it gets purified from all kinds of idolatry, while imposing *tawhid* and *shari'ah* in order to make territory 'God's space'. A symbol of tawhid is ISIS' flag that it raises over popular or important buildings of grasped territories as a demonstrative anathema to opposing identities (as of the Kurdistan Democratic Party).[269] This flag is the only legal flag on ISIS' territory, other flags are clearly forbidden,[270] which lets one draw the deduction that ISIS does by no means share political and territorial sovereignty – not even a claim thereof. Moreover, the territory which was Muslim territory before, however modified by various incidents (like during the American invasion), experiences a process of purification and sacralization through the 'spilled blood of the honorable mujahidin'. For, *Dabiq* illustrates: "Indeed, a building constructed upon the skulls of shuhadā'* and whose earth was cemented with the blood of the virtuous, is a building of truth tougher than the immovable mountains, and a lofty standing more honorable than the stars".[271]

On the other hand, ethno-history in ISIS context turns into Islamic history, however, due to its ideological approach ISIS takes what it prefers, irrespective of historical facts. The lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, the rule of the Righteous Caliphs altogether with the era of the Salaf are deemed 'the golden ages of Islam' which ISIS claims inheritage of.

Moreover, national sacrifice for ISIS means to do anything necessary – not least suicide attacks – to work for the *ummah*'s good which includes all individuals around the world who gave their *bay'ah* to the caliph. One crucial sacrifice for the *ummah* must be *hijrah*, which is a distinguishing feature upvaluing 'the self' to the degree that it overpasses even the *ummah* of Madina (at times of Prophet Muhammad), as put in *Dabiq*:

> Contemplate – may Allah have mercy upon you – the states that existed throughout history, both the Muslim states and the mushrik states. Were any of them established by the emigration of poor strangers from the East and the West, who then gathered in an alien land of war and pledged allegiance to an "unknown" man, in spite of the political, economic, military, media, and intelligence

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[269] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 19. and p. 22.
[270] Aaron Y. Zelin, "*An Introduction to ISIS / The "Islamic State" – Origins, Objectives & Operations*" [seminar], The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 13 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIm76e1vMv0, accessed 17.04.2017.
* Plural form of shahid, the Arabic word for martyr.
[271] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 5.

war waged by the nations of the world against their religion, their state, and their hijrah? And in spite of the fact that they did not have any common "nationality," ethnicity, language, or worldly interests, nor did they have any prior acquaintance! This phenomenon is something that has never occurred in human history, except in the case of the Islamic State! And nothing like it will ever occur thereafter except in relation to it; and Allah knows best. Even in the case of the Madīnah state, which was established by the blood of the Sahābah (radiyallāhu 'anhum), then most of its muhājirīn were from Quraysh. They had a number of things that bonded them including lineage, marriage, language (and dialect), acquaintance, history, and the land of Hijāz. They also commonly shared many of these things with the Ansār of Madīnah even before Islam. But if you were to go to the frontlines of ar-Raqqah, al-Barakah, al-Khayr, Halab, etc., you would find the soldiers and the commanders to be of different colors, languages, and lands: the Najdī, the Jordanian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Somali, the Turk, the Albanian, the Chechen, the Indonesian, the Russian, the European, the American and so on. They left their families and their lands to renew the state of the muwahhidīn in Shām, and they had never known each other until they arrived in Shām! I have no doubt that this state, which has gathered the bulk of the muhājirīn in Shām and has become the largest collection of muhājirīn in the world, is a marvel of history that has only come about to pave the way for al-Malhamah al-Kubrā (the grand battle prior to the Hour). And Allah knows best.[272]

This quote sufficiently points that 'the self' is exeptional at many levels. For it unites all people of different nationalities and ethnicities under the banner of the caliphate. Thus, this banner apart from the unity of God, symbolizes the unity of a 'transterritorial faith community'. In contrast to the international system of nation-states, which is familiar to the majority of people, these 'strangers' chose a radically dissident alternative, which is 'the self,' and while joining 'the self' they became part of it themselves. In this context, the ceremonial scene of burning national identities (passports) after reaching the caliphate is not mere symbolism. It is an avowal for entering the 'citizenry of the Islamic State,' which is somewhat of a 'territorial bay'ah,' because here for the person who chooses to join ISIS, emerges a de facto belonging to the 'lands of the caliphate,' while declaring former citizenship and territorial belonging void. The powerful message of such odd self-determination mostly delivered to western nations contains the voluntary renunciation of the former 'national self,' and all aspects linked to it. This is somehow revolutionary because it reflects that one engages in something unknown at the expense of everything formerly known. Arguably, the risk level might be an indicator for the level of personal commitment.

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[272] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 5.

To illustrate the challenge ISIS poses to national conceptions, ISIS' attacking of western states' accountabilities by (inter alia) James Foley's story proves impressive. After a long description of his situation and expectations left to be met by his government, Foley allegedly wrote to his family: "I guess all in all, I just wish I wasn't American".[273] Likewise, John Cantlie allegedly said: "Britain is a small country, an island nation with old traditions that used to mean something. Now? I don't know. It's not until you get into a situation as extreme as this that you start to doubt everything you thought you ever knew".[274] Here are two different types of subverting and invalidating the nation-state. First, the immigrant leaving the nation-state for the Islamic caliphate, whose decision in favor of such dissident and risky alternative can be interpreted as a serious criticism directed to national conceptions.* Second, hostages who desperately wait for their nation-states to negotiate with ISIS for their release. However, when left to despair, these individuals can also turn against their national belongings. ISIS uses both types to discredit who it identifies as 'the other,' although the first type has much more credibility.

Taking reality and imagination simultaneously into account, 'the self' gains shape through the *imamah*, *ummah*,[275] and *hijrah*. This is the moment when the term '*jama'ah*,' meaning the community of Muslims, steps into the constructing of 'the self'. However, it can be said that ISIS uses notions like *millah*, *ummah*, and *jama'ah* as synonyms for each other.[276] While doing so, it basically collects many suitable religious references able of pointing at 'the self', and in this way minimizes the possibility for deviant interpretations on the basis of different terms. In other words, the variety of terms in Hadiths such as *millah*, *ummah* or *jama'ah* that might be caused by different historical contexts, are not incumbent upon further exploration but considered as parts of one interpretation.[277]

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[273] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 40.

[274] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 54.

* This can vary from individual mistrust towards one's nation-state to ideologically motivated denial of all modern state-citizen conceptions, however, ISIS while changing the content makes use of secular formats in its bureaucracy apparatus.

[275] The *Imamah* when understood as a caliphate (for ISIS undertands it that way) is popularly attended by the *ummah*. Within Islamism, it is a theoretical cornerstone that leadership and community are two complementary conceptions. See on this, for example: Sayyid, Ibid., pp. 117-132.

[276] It should be noted that by *jama'ah* ISIS sometimes refers to the local community that it has built after its call for hijrah. See: Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 38. *Ummah* was occasionally used for ISIS jihadist fighters by Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir. See Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 35.

[277] The term *jama'ah* is implied in the popular announcement of allegiance to al-Bahdadi: "Therefore, in obedience to the order of Allah ('azza wa jall) and in obedience to His Messenger (sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam), ordering not to

Distancing itself from other jihadist attempts, ISIS' narration of former history of the jihad leaves the impression of failed and incomplete efforts. By debunking the failures in the Afghan jihad,[278] ISIS upgrades 'the self' vis-à-vis its jihadist clientele. Thus, 'the self' successfully lined up fighters from all around the world, which is a stark image of defiance against nation-based concepts that is attentively registered by the *far enemy*: "ISIS has created a multi-ethnic army; almost a foreign legion, to secure its territory".[279] In addition to that, 'the self' unlike former jihadist groups is also able to revive the *tawhid* (belief in the pure unity of God), and rule in accordance with *al-Walaa* and *al-Baraa* principles[280] because it embodies the *jama'ah* "that gathered upon the Kitab and Sunnah with the understanding of the Salaf, free from the extremities of the murji'ah and khawarij".[281] However, there is a different approach to the past of jihad on areas under ISIS' control because establishing de facto control over territories and environments, which are marked by Sunni jihadist resistance against foreign aggression, necessitates the recognition of the former rationale. That is why ISIS acknowledges the importance of Fallujah for instance: "This defiant region had long been a stronghold of the mujāhidīn in their fight against the US invasion more than a decade ago, continually terrorizing US forces and their allies during the course of their war in Iraq. Indeed, cities such as Fallūjah are the very reason that it was long considered polical suicide for Obama to put "boots on the ground".[282]

ISIS' permanent claim of being the true followers of the *Salaf** and their inheritage suggests a historical self-ascription,[283] as Gertjan Dijkink puts it: "… the recognition of 'golden ages', periods that embody the inner or true virtues of community. Finally the

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divide and to stick to the jamā'ah, we declare the bay'ah to the Khalīfah Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Awwād Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī al-Husaynī, (…)" See Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 22.

[278] Faisal Devji notes on this: "So we know that there was not much love lost between Arab fighters and their Afghan hosts, who were often viewed by the former as little more than savages". See: Devji, Ibid., p. 63.

[279] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 33.

[280] See on this: Joas Wagemakers, "Framing the Threat to Islam: Al-Wala' wa al-Bara' in Salafi Discourse," **Arab Studies Quarterly**, Vol. 30, No. 4, (Fall 2008), pp. 1-22.

[281] Dabiq, 1. issue, p. 35. ISIS' labeling of 'Murci'ah' aims at all those who approve the further development of Islamic jurisprudence (ijtihad) like the Hanafiyyah school of fiqh, and 'Khawarij' is a label ISIS uses for deviant jihadi groups like the Jawlani Front (See: Dabiq, 12. issue, p. 51.) and also those who discourage from jihad. See, for example: Dabiq, 11. issue, p. 13. 'Khawarij' is also used for 'deviant innovators,' meaning those who understand Islam quite differently than ISIS does. See: Dabiq, 11. issue, p. 17.

[282] Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 10.

* *Salaf* or *Ahl'us-Salaf* means pious forefathers adhering to the prophetic tradition.

[283] The claim to be "the Salaf of the end times" is rationalized through the following stance: "History repeats itself by Allah's divine decree. This is the sunnah (established way) of Allah in His creation". See Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 32.

idea of national sacrifice, blood spilled for the nation as commemorated in monuments for the glorious dead, reminds us of the nation's immateriality and eternity".[284]

Ideological intransingence is a big deal for ISIS' self-constructing. Unlike the enemy who "deceptively calls for pacifism and the freedom of choice,"[285] ISIS stays steadfast on what it declares and believes. Therefore 'the self' cannot be destabilized. It is exceptional and the one who correctly understands the *da'wah*, the divine message of Islam.[286] So 'the self' symbolizes the safe home/haven for those adhering to the same body of thought. This it proves as being 'God's executive power' in establishing divine rule, who 'realizes' the tawhid on the territories it conquers. As a proof for this, the destruction of tombs are documented in *Dabiq*, while it is not missed to remind that ISIS operatives are explaining locals why such destruction is necessary and legitimate.[287]

The self is also the transformer of territory, for it changed the name 'Ayn al-Arab (Kobani), a Syrian border area, into 'Ayn al-Islam,[288] suggesting the 'victorious changeover from secular language and conceptions into religious ones. As it is stated in *Dabiq*; "Aynul-Islam was the major focus of the Islamic State because it was determined the PKK would be the main ally of the crusaders in this stage of their crusade due to the supposed battle experience of PKK fighters and the purely secularist ideology of their party, one that considers the Jewish state to be an ally of any future Kurdish state".[289] This proceeding as for the conceptions of territory means that ISIS due to examples like Kobani consolidates itself as the order-giving entity and ascribes a religious identity to this place, removing its former ethnic (Arab) connotation.

In sum, 'the self' is entirely religous. Religion is the very essence of 'the self'. By adopting the religion as the ultimate self-constructor, 'the self' must refuse all standing as anathema to religion. Therefore nationalism is one of its most detested antagonism, as ISIS' spokesman felt the need to underline this point regarding the Kurds in the

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[284] G. Dijkink, Ibid., p. 194.
[285] Dabiq, 2. issue, pp. 8-9.
[286] Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 10.
[287] Dabiq, 2. issue, pp. 14-17.
[288] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 25.
[289] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 42. (Interestingly, when read inbetween the lines, the recognition of the state of Israel is considered a sign of apostasy.)

Middle East, an often alienated nation due to their ethnicity, however the fourth largest one in the region:[290]

> Finally, we do not want to forget to direct a message towards our Muslim people and brothers from the Kurds in Iraq, Shām, and elsewhere. Our war with Kurds is a religious war. It is not a nationalistic war – we seek the refuge of Allah. We do not fight Kurds because they are Kurds. Rather we fight the disbelievers amongst them, the allies of the crusaders and jews in their war against the Muslims. As for the Muslim Kurds, then they are our people and brothers wherever they may be. We spill our blood to save their blood. The Muslim Kurds in the ranks of the Islamic State are many. They are the toughest of fighters against the disbelievers amongst their people.[291]

Free from nationalism and racism, ISIS views 'its self' as a unified structure upon belief, as it is stated by al-Muhajir, inspired by a Hadith saying that all Muslims are interconnected.[292] The religious bond and unity of a transterritorial, transnational (in transgressing nations) and 'loving for God's sake' community, calling itself 'ahlu's-Sunnah,'[293] challenges the 'superficially constructed national bond' of nation-state societies.

3.4. *'The Other'*

"Make frequent mention of the grudges you have against the enemy, for they increase your boldness. Remember that the enemy raped your mothers and your sisters, prevented you from Jumu'ah and congregational prayers, and cut you off from trade and agriculture. In short, he didn't leave you with anything of the religious and worldly affairs," advised Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir,[294] former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, implying that the enemy does not grant 'the self' any right of existence. The enemy should be therefore considered as an existential threat. Indeed, this existential threat is 'the constructive other' who theoretically renders 'the self' possible. For instance, speaking in ISIS' terminology, there would not have been any belief without disbelief, and no *tawhid* without idolatry. 'The other' – as a subcategory including all enemy

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[290] O'Shea, Ibid., p. 17.
[291] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 9.
[292] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 12.
[293] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 32. Generally, *ahlu's Sunnah* is a loose term designating those who adhere to the prophetic tradition as understanding religion and adopting a pious lifestyle.
[294] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 11.

distinctions – is an 'enemy of God,' against which the mujahidin of the caliphate must fight,[295] conditioning that 'the self' must be something like the 'ally of God'. Unsurprisingly, self-attributions like 'lions of Islam,' 'lions of tawhid and aqidah' (belief),[296] 'heroes of Halab,'[297] are to be found especially in the enemy discourse of ISIS – upvaluing 'the self' and insulting 'the other'.

On the *near abroad* as on the *far abroad* 'the other' has many facets. One of them is the betraying *murtad* (apostate), perpetually labelled so are Nusayris or Alawites and the Peshmerga,[298] unlike Yazidis who are called 'devil worshippers'.[299] These enemy framings are frequently used for the *near enemy* category, who is understood to have put itself into the 'murtad kuffar' (apostate disbeliever) rank. This rank has to be defeated and expunged from the *near abroad* in order to achieve a pure homogeinty on the ranks of 'the self':[300] "We will never have victory against the aslī kuffar* except after also fighting murtadd kuffār in addition to the aslī kuffār. The Islamic victories that took place during the era of al-Khulafā' ar Rāshidīn came only after cleansing the Arabian Peninsula of the apostates".[301] By this statement, ISIS refers 'its self' to the 'glorious ages' of Islamic history, which has been afore identified as a corresponding factor to Smith's term of 'ethno-history'. This reference, too, includes the allusion that it is now ISIS who embraces the caliphate tradition, and is therefore the legitimate inheritor of the prophetic methodology (*manhaj*). So, claiming the prophetic method and the heritage of the Righteous Caliphs is a strategy to develop a legitimacy rationale that is supposed to legalize attacking and killing deviant Muslims. To do this, these Muslims must be labelled apostates. Accordingly, apostates are deviant competitors, and some of them found their places on jihadi battlefields. ISIS often calls them 'innovators,' meaning that they try to reform religion or induce new theological

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[295] "And all praise is due to Allah for humiliating His enemies at the hands of the mujāhidīn of the Khilāfah". See Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 25.

[296] Dabiq, 13. issue, p. 49.

[297] Dabiq, 9. issue, p. 28.

[298] Described as "…gangs of mercenaries related to the Marxist PUK and allied with the Marxist PKK – a "terrorist" organization according to the tāghūt laws the West "believes" in". See Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 14. The PKK is labelled as 'apostate,' see Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 25.

[299] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 18 and 20. Also called a 'pagan minority,' see Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 14.

[300] One may note that the usage of rank is somewhat associated with the ranks –the praying arrangements- inside a mosque but also with the ranks on a classical battlefield. Arguably, both associations might be volitional. See such usage for example: Dabiq, 14. issue, p. 46, p. 57, p. 60. For the enemy "the ranks of Shaytan (devil) and his troops," see: Dabiq, 14. issue, p. 13. This suggests that' the self's rank is the 'rank of God'.

* Genuine non-Muslims like Christians, Jews or atheists who have never been Muslims before.

[301] Dabiq, 13. issue, p. 42.

approaches and applications that allegedly contradict traditional Salafi jurisprudence.[302] In fact, this is an example for how ISIS operationalizes its conceptions of territoriality because 'the other' on the *near abroad* is the most imminent threat, and its extinction is thus preferred over the defeat of the *far enemy*.

Likewise, immediate targets often become those who are deemed traitors because the enemy category of 'traitor' is an intra-territorial one. Therefore, 'traitors' are mostly located on the *near abroad* periphery and must be extinguished from the arena of competition. They should not be given any opportunity to pose an alternative to ISIS on the immediate periphery of the *inner circle* because ISIS understands the caliphate as a 'solely Muslim polity' that does not tolerate any other theo-political entity run by Muslims.[303] For example, *Dabiq* codifies territories on which places 'traitors' are located or entrenched by the name of the dominant tribe ruling these areas. An example is 'Shu'aytāt* villages'.[304] Explicitly targeting enemies by their local identities suggests and reproduces discursive superiority over other local narratives. In *Dabiq*'s words, enemies on the close peripheries of the *inner circle* are characterized as the following: "Then there will remain outside of the Islamic State only he who is obstructed from it by mountainous waves of envy and arrogance, so that he drowns in the methodologies of the hypocrites, the rumormongers, and the weak-hearted, and he aids the sahwāt of apostasy, following rukhas (concessions) on his path to heresy".[305]

Within the effort to homogenize sympathizers inside the *inner circle* as one *jama'ah* under one *imamah* lingers the counterpart of homogenizing the enemy, as it becomes evident in ISIS' discourse during the intergration of Nineveh: "As a result of the murtaddīn of the town of Zawiyyah allying themselves with the Rawāfid* to begin a new sahwah, the soldiers of the Islamic State carried out an assault on their locality,

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[302] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 18
[303] Sayyid, Ibid., p. 120.
* Name of a tribe in Deir ez-Zor region, Syria.
[304] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 14.
[305] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 14. In order to legally target dozens of people, the concept of "*tawa'if mumtani'ah*" which suggests the homogeinty of the enemy is apllied. This category deems all people located on the traitor side – if they did not leave it within the given time - as legal military targets. ISIS names this approach "the prophetic and siddiqi (from Abu Bakr es-Siddiq) methodology". See Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 13.
* *Rawafid* or *Rafidin* is the plural form of *rafidi*, literally meaning 'those who left and refused'. The term's is historically rooted in the narration of a dissenting group supportive of Caliph 'Ali, however defamig his precursor Caliph 'Umar and others.

killing dozens of their fighters and commanders, with many more fleeing the onslaught".[306]

This is an inference to 'the two camp' premise, however, the distinction between the *far* and the *near* enemy is in fact not a matter of factual antagonistic diversity but the result of a pragmatic approach, suiting the group's tactics of territoriality. For legitimizing the fight against the *near enemy* and its priority, ISIS consults the Qur'anic verse saying "O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers".[307] In doing so, the exegesis of Ibn Kathir is preferred: "Ibn Kathīr (rahimahullāh) said, "Allah ta'ālā has commanded the believers to fight the disbelievers one after another, beginning with those who are closest to the lands of Islam, then the nextclosest, and so on".[308]

In this way, the closest enemy states which are, except Iran and Israel, the Arab states, targeted as 'apostate'[309] or 'kufri' regimes.[310] Their heads of state are insulted as, for instance the former Emir of Qatar was called an 'American lapdog'.[311] Their airforce is labelled 'murtad airforce,'[312] and their media a 'bewitching media'.[313] The take on the enemy's media is even bolstered with Hadiths like 'some eloquence is sorcery,' or "Indeed, what I fear most for my Ummah is every articulate munafiq,*" denoting that these are apostates.[314] Naming Arab regimes apostate regimes severes on the course of *Dabiq*'s further issues. For example, within a strong imagery it is clearly suggested to kill the 'imams of kufr,' targeting Arab politicians and religious scholars.[315] A similar hardening can be observed in the hatred against the Shi'a, for one cover is devoted for the 'Rafidah'[316] only, which terms the utmost defamation of Shiites.[317]

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[306] Dabiq, 2. issue, p. 41.
[307] *Surat'ut-Tawbah*, verse 123.
[308] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 11 (footnote).
[309] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 35.
[310] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 41.
[311] Hamad Bin Khalifah Al Thani, Emir of Qatar until 2013, see: Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 25.
[312] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 34.
[313] The specific target here is the Arab al Jazeera newspaper. See Dabiq, 6. issue, p.39
* A *munafiq* is someone who hides his real creed while counterfeiting a fake identity. This term mostly refers to those who pretend being Muslims while internally rejecting Islam.
[314] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 41.
[315] "Beware of those "imams" who are calling you to the gates of Hell. They appear as "Muslims" and speak the language of "Islam," but they call to disunity and to being distant from the Sunnah of Allah's Messenger. Indeed, they call to the worship of false gods, the reverence of the ways of those whom Allah hates, and the abandonment of standing in one rank with the Muslims against the enemies of Islam! They replace the explicit text of the Sunnah with the indirect sayings of fallible men, some honest yet misquoted scholars of old, but mostly contemporary heretics of severe deviance. They will tempt you to the many paths of Satan and away from the Straight Path of Allah". See Dabiq, 15. issue, p. 26.
[316] Dabiq, 13. issue, cover page.

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The *far enemy* – put under the rubric of the extra-territorial level – is typically portrayed as the 'crusader,'[318] while the near enemy like Shi'a militias or the Iranian regime are characterized as 'the safawi* dogs of the crusaders'[319] and much else. As it can be sensed from here, in othering the enemy, far or near, ISIS sometimes pragmatically tends to claim an alliance against itself formed by different enemy types. An example for this is ISIS' accusation that the PYD formed local committees inside Kurdish areas in coordination with the Asad regime.[320] Likewise, the claim; "Jayshul-Mujāhidīn," "Jabhat Thuwwār Sūriyā," "Liwā Thuwwār ar-Raqqah," the FSA Military Councils (…) are all sponsored by and connected to the apostate Syrian National Council."[321] At this point, though needless to say, ISIS manifests a deeply paranoiac enemy perception. However, recalling Manfred Schneider, everything has to make sense in the enemy conception derived from a 'paranoiac reason'. That is why generalizations, stark conspirative tendencies, and ruthless categorising belong together in a cohesive approach of the world. Such approach does not tolerate coincidences, risks, fallibility or divergency possibilities.[322]

This becomes very evident in the otherization discourse of ISIS, expressed in *Dabiq* for example by alluding 'the fading grey zone'. Under this title, ISIS targets foremost its jihadist competitors by making use of the language with which it has been vilified by western media; "Since the beginning of this crusade on the media frontline, self-styled jihadist ideologues and quasi-mujāhidīn have tried to position themselves in an area that is neither Islamic State nor Sahwah… only to be sucked into the trenches of the apostate media and religious scholarship of the Arab tawāghīt".[323] Accusing 'the other' of ascriptions like being 'self-styled' or 'quasi'[324] deliberately provokes the association of western media outlets calling ISIS a self-styled caliph or a quasi-state.[325]

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[317] See on ISIS' enframing of the Shi'a as one major antagonistic faction: Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman, Banan Malkavi (transl.), **The 'Islamic State' Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the struggle of Global Jihadism**, Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq, 2015, pp. 75-84.

[318] Dabiq, 3. issue, p. 35. "Crusader" as a concept of enemy has roots in the Afghan jihad and rendered popular by Osama Bin Laden. This enemy category, therefore, can be seen as part of the jihadi tradition.

* *Sawafi*[*ds*] refers to the Iranian dynasty (1501-1736), which made Shi'ite Islam the state religion.

[319] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 18.

[320] Here as elsewhere: Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 41, or Dabiq, 9. issue, p. 31.

[321] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 21 (footnote).

[322] Similar approach can be found in Bible-based geopolitics, as Agnew hinted at: "What is more: they have no doubt. Doubt is for softies and unbelievers". See: John Agnew, "Religion and Geopolitics," p. 186.

[323] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 43.

[324] "Terms such as 'failing states' and 'quasi-states' have been used to imply that some countries in regions such as West and Central Africa can neither claim exclusive control over their territory nor secure internal order. In other words, Western governments frequently represent states such as Somalia and/or the Democratic Republic of Congo

In degrading the enemy, ISIS often relies on similar patterns. It frequently confronts the 'the other's faithlessness' with 'the self's piety'. Here, faithlessness implies disbelief and lack of courage. For instance, *Dabiq* notes: "During Berzani's rule, Kurdistan was developed into the greatest killer of fighting spirit – a land of desire and dunyā. Unlike the Peshmerga of the past, their current fighters are fainthearted mercenaries void of any creed who only wait for their meagre wages. For this reason, the Islamic State was able to drive them out of Wilāyat Nīnawā easily".[326] Belief is supposed to provide the courage, motivation, and above all God's support, whereas disbelief is doomed to failure, for the biggest reason of failure is not having God on one's side. In this sense – being backed by God – ISIS calls its expansionist aspirations a 'battle against the kufr'.[327]

Making use of generalization proves indispensable in the otherization process. For, when pragmatism is at play, there is no room for reflecting on nuances. As for ISIS, the Houthis in Yemen – now a politically motivated faction adhering to Zaidi-Shi'a – are grouped together with the Twelwer-Shi'a, which is the official religious school (sect) in Iran. However, these both have great theological differences. Whatever the differences, al-Baghdadi named Houthis 'Rafidah;'[328] 'the forsaken nation,' while urging his sympathizers in Yemen to be 'harsh on them' because they are 'kuffar murtaddin'. Moreover he guaranteed, if his addressees follow his command, they will be 'the people of (divine) support'. The caliphal instruction thus is as follows: "Strike their shirk with your tawhid".[329] The Shi'a 'Rafidah' are 'heretics' who have a 'buried hatred for Islam,' concludes *Dabiq*.[330] The same language is applied against the Shi'a population on *the near abroad*, including Iran's. Other actors on the *near abroad* periphery[331] like the

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as inadequate and, moreover, unable to regulate flows of drugs, money, and arms trafficking. It is important to recall, however, that some of the earliest geopolitical writers such as Kjellen objected to this excessively legalistic conception of sovereignty precisely because it neglected the fact that the geographies of global politics were extremely varied". Retrieved from: Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 58.

[325] For example: Martin Chulov, "What next for Islamic State, the would-be caliphate," **The Guardian**, 3 September 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/03/islamic-state-caliphate-what-next accessed 09.04.2017.

[326] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 41.

[327] Dabiq, 4. issue, p. 28.

[328] ISIS' use of '*Rafidah*' is quite flexible and opportunistic. See, for example: Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 20.

Contemplating the diffaming ascription of being *rafidah*, ISIS apprehension of this category is as follows: "The ruling of apostasy on the Rafidah does not mean they had ever been Muslims but rather, that they are dealt with much more severely, as they must either enter into Islam or face the sword, as opposed to the kuffar asliyyin who can sometimes be allowed to remain upon their kufr in certain circumstances (treaties, slavery, etc.) See: Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 31 (footnote).

[329] Dabiq, 5. issue, p. 28.

[330] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 44.

[331] Also Pakistan is considered an apostate state, see Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 43.

Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen is labelled 'Bankrupt Brotherhood,' depriving them of being Muslim. Similarly, the leaders of Ahrar ash-Sham are called 'Saluli Sahwat'.[332] By all means, the priority given to the *near enemy* is overwhelming in the enemy discourse of ISIS, for as already mentioned, it is the Sunni jihadi groups amongst near enemies who pose a threat by offering an alternative to ISIS. Such alternative may include several things ranging from ISIS-opposing local identities to external affiliations. Considering opposing jihadi groups, ISIS takes a particular stance. Because apart from being immediate military challengers located on close rings around the orbit of the inner circle, these groups produce a counter discourse – if not opposing geopolitical imaginations. Therefore arises the necessity for ISIS to deligitimize them whatever it takes – may it by their 'manhaj (method) of pragmatism':

> They casted doubts on the mujāhidīn's ability to face the disbelievers, even warning that Mosul would fall and advising the women to leave the city. Others, meanwhile, continued to insist upon their manhaj of "pragmatism," claiming that it's not "pragmatic" to try to fight the kuffār head-on, and that the Muslims ought to conceal their intention to implement the Sharī'ah and should take part in democracy in order to gain power. This, of course, is no different than the statement of the munāfiqīn* mentioned above, "You have no ability to remain upon the religion of Muhammad, so return to the religion of shirk." Yet others believed that they lacked the ability to fight the crusaders, so they instead resorted to seeking the aid and protection of those very crusaders against another enemy, even if doing so entailed cooperating with the crusaders against Muslims![333]

Secular *near abroad* enemies such as the PKK – often codified as apostate – is accused of extending its ethnic hatred onto a hatred against Islam. The otherization of PKK-Kurds therefore has several reasons. First, because they ally with genuine infidels against ISIS. Second, they defend a secular state with an ethnic character, and third, they publicly voice their hatred of Islam and Islamic law;

> PKK advances have been coupled with ethnic cleansing carried out against Arabs and Turkmen for the sake of establishing a purely Kurdish "American Kurdistan." The secularist Kurds' hatred of Arabs in particular leads them to hate Islam by extension and even sympathize with the Jews and their Jewish state! Despite this fact, the statement released by the Sahwāt condemning the PKK does not make takfir on them, nor does it denounce their hatred of Islam and the Shari'ah. Rather, it focuses

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[332] Dabiq, 6. issue, pp. 22-23.
[333] Dabiq, 14. issue, p. 48.

exclusively on a nationalist issue, denouncing their oppression of Syrian Arabs and Turkmen, and declaring that they do not approve of dividing "the Syrian nation".[334]

ISIS' and the PKK's geopolitical imagination represent a clash of conflicting geopolitical worldviews, for they share the same map of distinctively imagined territoriality. Given the ethnic and religious diversity in ISIS' *near abroad*, each religiously deviant group is listed under a particular enemy category. When it comes to the Druze, a religious minority in the Middle East, ISIS categorizes them due to a juristic opinion (*fatwa*) of Ibn Taymiyyah;

> Shaykhul-Islām (Ibn Taymiyyah) explaining that the Druze cannot be considered ahl dhimmah,* that they are worse than the Jews and Christians, and that if they repent and accept Islam then the Muslim authorities should be cautious of them due to their practice of taqiyyah** and accordingly take precautionary measures in dealing with them. How much more so if they have not repented! In another fatwā in which he mentioned the extreme kufr of the Bātiniyyah*** (who include the Druze and the Nusayriyyah) and their treacherous alliance with other kuffār (the crusaders and the Tatars) against the Muslims, he said, "Their harm upon the Ummah of Muhammad is greater than the harm of the war-waging kuffār like the kuffār of the Tatars, the Franks [European crusaders], and others … There is no doubt that jihād against these people and the implementation of the hudūd upon them are from the greatest acts of obedience and obligations. This is better than jihād against those who do not fight the Muslims from the mushrikīn and Ahlul-Kitāb,**** for the jihād against these people is from the jihād against the apostates. As-Siddīq***** and the Companions****** began with the jihād against the apostates before the jihād against the kuffār from Ahlul-Kitāb. The jihād against them preserves what has been conquered from the Muslims' lands and so no one who intends to fight against the Muslims can enter these lands. As for jihād against those who have not fought us from the mushrikīn and Ahlul-Kitāb, then it is to further manifest the religion.[335]

When recalling the past, ISIS blames again near enemies of having brought the caliphate to an end, and prevented its revival. Hereby, it argues that Shiites and mystical Sufis 'damaged' Islam by their 'heretic creed,' and thus disguised the truth. This underlies a discoursive strategy of defaming other legitimacy claimants on the *near*

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[334] Dabiq, 10. issue, p. 31 (7th footnote).
* *Ahl Dhimma* designates the non-Muslim monotheistic group of believers who submits to Islamic governance and therefore enjoys security in exchange for a specific tax, the *jizyah*.
** Hiding one's real creed, while counterfeiting a fake identity.
*** A subcategory for all mystical sects, including Sunni *Sufis*.
**** *Ahlul-Kitab* is a Qur'anic term that categorizes monotheists such as Jews and Christians as 'owners of the book' or those who have been addressed by divine revelation.
***** The nickname given to the Prophet's closest friend who was the first caliph (of the Righteous Caliphs) after his death, Caliph Abu Bakr.
****** Companions of Prophet Muhammad, who are called 'al-Ashab' in Arabic.
[335] Dabiq, 13. issue, pp. 9-10.

abroad, which could probably be traced as a strategic step in Naji's 'Management of Savagery'. However, this would rather go into the realm of territoriality tactics. Nevertheless, such discoursive emphasizing should be noted;

> After the fall of the Khilāfah hundreds of years ago, the Sharī'ah was no longer applied in its completeness. Aspects of kufr crept into Muslim lands by way of Sūfī and Rāfidī infiltration. Grave-worship became widespread and the authority of Allah was challenged by Turkish, Persian, and even Arab kings. People like the Sūfīs* Ibn 'Arabī, who pantheistically claimed that Allah is everything and that everything is Allah, and Ibn Sab'īn, who criticized Allah's Messenger g for saying, "There is no prophet after me" [Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from Abū Hurayrah], were left untouched by the rulers of Muslim lands, while genuine scholars of Islam – like Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Burhān – were imprisoned for defending the religion.[336]

The major enemy on the *far abroad* is undoubtedly the 'crusader,' whose international anti-ISIS alliance is called 'crusader alliance,'[337] and together with 'crusader media,'[338] this category is summed up in the connotation 'forces of kufr'. Moreover all those supporting crusader regimes through 'votes, polls, and taxes,' no matter whether adhering to Islam or another religion or to none, render themselves legally violable and so become legitimate targets of ISIS.[339] One may argue that ISIS' *far enemy* discourse does not fundamentally differ from the one of al-Qaeda. Popular patterns evoke popular hostilities. Therefore while speaking about 'barbaric Jews,' ISIS argues that it is a 'matter of time and patience' until the fight will be extended to Palestine, where jews 'hide behind gharqad trees'.[340] Within this anti-Semitic enmity, ISIS portrays a relationship of Jews and the territories they are upon on a particular way. Saying that Jews will hide behind trees suggests that 'nature will hand them over to ISIS'. So, even nature backs ISIS because how could it be otherwise when God is on one's side? This might be a stimulus to widen the horizont of 'geopiety'.

While fretting at Christians, the most prevailing reason for hatred is their accusation of idolatry (*shirk*). To ISIS, worshipping others next to God – or ascribing them divine features – destroys the true belief, which is tawhid. That is why Christian-populated

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* Muslim (Sunni) mystics.
[336] Dabiq, 14. issue, p. 12.
[337] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 32.
[338] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 41.
[339] Dabiq, 6. issue, p. 41.
[340] Dabiq, 12. issue, p. 46.

territories are called 'Christian lands of disbelief'.[341] Interestingly, ISIS finds it important to know the diversity within self-labelled enemy categories. Hence, *Dabiq* reflects on inter-Christian debates, ranging from 'from pagan Christianity to Roman idolatry'.[342] The 15. issue of Dabiq discusses at length why Christianity is a corrupt belief, why it failed, and why its theological transformations unveil this failure (pp. 46-63). At the end of this issue, ISIS defends its 'truth,' and for strengthening it refers to an interview made with an ISIS immigrant, who has converted to Islam (pp. 64-69).

In conclusion, 'the other' altogether, according to Dabiq, aims at dividing Muslim lands within the format of nationalist states under the 'jahili* banners' (national flags) and 'puppet Arab regimes' are well serving this aim.[343] Therefore, the *inner ring* has to keep its steadfastness and consolidate intself on 'reconquered Muslim lands'. This must immediately be supported by the *near abroad*, which is frequently called upon following the call of the caliph to join the caliphate through eluding out of 'ignorant swarms,' calling themselves Muslims or 'even worse' jihadis. Importantly, while 'the self' is unique, 'the other' is manifold. When illustrated, 'the other' is like a jigsaw that occasionally splits up to different pieces, and at times unites as a single tableau, a nation – 'the nation of disbelief'. The 'jigsaw pieces' are many, however they resemble each other and 'unite upon falsehood,'[344] whereas 'the self' is unique because it is 'steadfast upon truth'. To exemplify how ISIS aims at homogenizing enemy categories, the imagery of a Sufi celebrating the Prophet's birthday – 'a sinful novelty in religion' (*bid'ah*) - proves useful because in doing so, he 'imitates' Christians.[345]

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[341] Dabiq 15. issue, p. 20
[342] Dabiq, 15. issue, p. 52.
* Literally 'unknowing,' a pejorative adjective referring to pre-Islamic times.
[343] Dabiq, 9. issue, p. 20.
[344] Dabiq, 15. issue, p. 47.
[345] Dabiq, 15. issue, p. 48.

CONCLUSION

'Extra caliphatus nulla salus et nulla persona'

This thesis started off with the research question whether ISIS as a non-state actor has a geopolitical imagination that it strives to realize. If so, the consequence was to be that such geopolitical imagination considerably shapes the operational development, identity, organizational structure, foreign relations, and political discourse of the group. The latter has been a myriad of analyzable content out of which this thesis took its primary source. In line with this was another question asking whether ISIS – as a formation hostile to conventional states – threatens the Westphalian world order, and if it does, what the scope of such threat is. Putting these research questions into the framework of critical geopolitics, the exploration of this thesis, too, attempted at enlarging the multidisciplinary scope of the latter. Thus, a second layer in setting research goals was the *if*, *why* and *how* critical geopolitics can help exploring ISIS. Accordingly, while figuring out how much of the theoretical repertoire of critical geopolitics corresponds to our research case, some recommendations regarding the possibilities for critical geopolitical investigation have unfolded.

Theoretically speaking, in this thesis, critical geopolitics enabled comprehending *if*, *why*, and *how* non-state formations – taking the case of ISIS – can adopt and externalize geopolitical imagination. In addition to that, the placement of ISIS into the context of non-state phenomena, and its exploration as such became feasible through the lens of critical geopolitics. This thesis traced that ISIS developed a geopolitical imagination pivoted around a caliphate conception, and constructed this within the wider discourse of the group's apocalyptic vision of international politics. It also highlighted that ISIS traceably challenges traditional conceptions like territoriality or sovereignty, which by virtue of the Westphalian paradigm are integral elements of modern national statehood.

One central argument of this research was that ISIS' success and its territorial expansion were not merely rooted in the group's manpower, access to arms, military experience or adaptability to changing conditions. However, all these aspects do greatly account for the group's takeover of lands; the fact that ISIS' *weltanschauung* has been immediately exposed in areas under control, and that it has been broadcasted internationally, as being

a magnet for sympathizers, raise enough grounds for such *weltanschauung* to be dwelled on as an important contribution to the group's success. In this sense, ISIS' specific *geo-graphing* of the world, which meanings it ascribes to territories and people, the way it positions and constructs 'its self' throw light on the rationalistic background of incidents. As such, the meaning-making of the Kobani conquest or 'Ayn al-Arab has been exemplary. Changing secular names of places into religious ones, destroying tombs and sanctities, banning all flags except the group's own black flag are all incidents underlying a specific *weltanschauung*.

This thesis identified ISIS' *weltanschauung* as a multifunctional corpus of conceptions. Within this corpus, a set of conceptions of territoriality has been discovered as a basis of rationales, justifying and explaining the group's governing and military conduct. Nevertheless, we do not argue that all military conduct is linked up with such corpus. Yet, beyond any notion of determinism, a fair share of military strategy on territory, which we – referring to Jabareen – prefer to name *tactics of territoriality*, has been connected with the *conceptions of territoriality*. As a finding of this thesis, *conceptions of territoriality* present a '[re]source' of not only what happened or happens, but what can/might happen, and what didn't/couldn't and cannot happen. This unveils a partial but important predictability of the group's military conduct. Therefore, may it be to understand better violent non-state actors (VNSAs) or to increase the effectiveness of counter-terrorism, this thesis recommends to study the *weltanschauung* of VNSAs, and inherent conceptions thereof. So, taking the initiative herefrom to examine *tactics of territoriality*, which go beyond the scope of this thesis, would be a fruitful effort contributing to both the study of states and non-state formations.

Another recommendation this thesis has to make is that critical geopolitics with a past of more than 20 years opens the avenue for unconventional research. This does not mean that critical geopolitics holistically refutes theories or disregards systematic methodology; on the contrary, it pleads for meticulously detailed investigation sometimes at the expense of traditional mindsets. For it observes, too, what lies beyond paradigm, what is erratic, and what is divergent. In doing so, critical geopolitics critically tests long established theories in political sciences, extending their applicability when possible onto unclassified phenomena.

The analysis of the discourse of territoriality in ISIS' *Dabiq* magazine revealed that such discourse is comprehensively operationalized on three main domains, which are *history*, *territory*, and *time*. ISIS' discourse of territoriality becomes operational on history when territory is idealized and 'revised' in relationship with Islamic history, beginning with the prophetic era and ending up in the Umayyad caliphate. Second, the discourse of territoriality unfolds operationalization on territory while rejecting and resisting the pre-Skyes-Picot world order and the traditional conceptions of the Westphalian paradigm. Third, time is a double-edged domain of operation because, on the one hand, ISIS refers to an idealised prophetic era revising the past and the future, while it on the other hand puts forth a futuristic divine plan as an extension of prophecy and the fulfilment of religion. ISIS' use of these domains unveiled a set of components, describing the *theo-territorial self* that has been constructed alongside its discourse of territoriality. These components are:

- Being revolutionary: Challenging the Westphalian Order by claiming alternative sovereignty – framed by alternative political order ('global Islamic caliphate') – involved in a non-state offensive 'geopolitical struggle'
- Being territorially and ideologically expansionist
- Being revisionist & resisting: Dissidence towards the past and the present:
  a) intra-territorial dimension (opposing Muslim entities)
  b) extra-territorial dimension (opposing non-Muslim entities)
- Being apocalyptic – futuristic: Presenting 'outmoded ideas' (like the return of Jesus to earth) on a 'futuristic tableau'

Overall, this thesis broadly propounds the following:

- ISIS is a violent non-state actor led by a fundamentalist leadership, aspiring for statehood, which has exposed a dissident form of geopolitics; *religious geopolitics*.

- The *Dabiq* magazine has been identified as an authentic primary source underpinning the group's worldvision, theo-political narrative, and rationale explaining/justifying its military conduct.

- The examination of *Dabiq* has revealed a set of antagonistic categories and a strategy of otherization, while on the other hand, it laid bare a theo-territorial identity; a self-construction embedded inbetween the *imamah* and the *ummah*.

- ISIS – given the number of foreign fighters and sympathizers – succeeded in gathering an international transterritorial community, as this notion of transterritoriality became regionally consolidated through the abolition of the Iraq-Syria border, and internationally through the establishment of *wilayats*.

- Finally, ISIS has been able to not only pose a serious security threat, ranging from states on its near abroad to those on its far abroad, however more sustainably, it has been conceptually potent enough to present an alternative to the Westphalian system. On that account, non-state territorial identity formations and new governing conceptions can emerge wherever states fail to meet the needs of their citizens.

Therefore, ISIS has been considered a deviant phenomenon opposing the state-centered geopolitical imagination. To put it in extreme, ISIS might be (in its territorial reality *and* imagination) what Agnew warns of in the 'territorial trap'. For ISIS defies all geographical assumptions put forth by the state-centered approach to world politics. As a new reminder of an old premise, it can be argued that ISIS initiates a third absolute claim of exclusiveness based on its subjectivity. Namely, after 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus,'* and 'extra stato nulla persona,'* ISIS argues that there is neither salvation nor legal personhood beyond the borders and order, thus the space of the Islamic Caliphate. So, the geopolitical imagination of ISIS is formulating *'extra caliphatus nulla salus et nulla persona'*.

* Literally meaning "there is no salvation outside the Church".

* Literally meaning "there is no legal personhood outside the state".

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