

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

WHO SAYS WHAT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE: A SOCIAL  
AND HASHTAG NETWORK ANALYSIS OF THE  
#KHILAFAH AND #خلافة

by  
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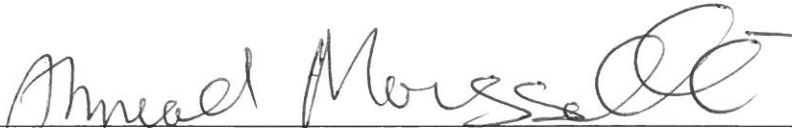
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Kareem Ahmad Rifai for Master of Arts  
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Title: Who Says What of the Islamic State: A Social and Hashtag Network Analysis of The #Khilafah and #خلافة.

The academic study of terrorism has been dominated by a disciplinary method that is entirely strategic; it tends to reflect geopolitics with the academic purpose to identify, combat, and prevent terrorism in all avenues, including media. However, media communication amongst terrorists is not riddled with the incessant planning on means of propagating, attacking, or even recruiting terrorists, as an operational study of terrorism would suggest. In light of the emerging discipline of Sociology of Terrorism, this paper explores the more subtle dynamics of interaction between proponents and opponents of the Islamic State, ISIS, on Twitter. The dynamics in this research delves into the engagements with account to all the modes of interaction: tweet, retweet, favorite, share, and @. Additionally, it will explore quantitatively and qualitatively emerging discourses that are manifested through hashtags. Both methodologies are centralized around a common element: #Khilafah or #خلافة - the Arabic word for Khilafah. By performing a Social and Hashtag Network Analysis over a period of time, we find that tweets that revolve around the respective hashtags are more nuanced and suggest a newer approach in understanding the transnational existence of the Islamic State Phenomena that should challenge the operational studies literature.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as the “the unlawful use of – or threatened use of – force violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives” (Hoffman 1998). The consequential academic interpretation of such definition is twofold: it presents terrorism as a form of operational study and that it is also socially constructed (Turk 2004). The literature that focus on terrorism under the auspice of operational rationale of and defend such a paradigm are preoccupied with its historicization, perpetuation, techniques of violence, mentalities, discourses, religion, purpose, communication, prospect. Ultimately, an operational study is a broad, interdisciplinary tool used for countering terrorism.

Non-social scientists have largely dominated this realm of academia. These academics that fall under an operational studies paradigm speciously employ sociological, social psychological, anthropological, religious, historical, and political concepts and methods to unravel terrorism in hopes to combat it (Turk 2004). The understanding of terrorism through this framework reproduces dangerous results since its focus is tangibility, applicability, and preventability rather than a realistic application in accord with an understood theory of a particular discipline. Turk (2004) states, “By definition, the goal of operational studies is to provide authorities with information needed to prevent terrorist attacks and neutralize terrorists” (p.280) and rather not to discuss and argue theoretical frameworks with a defensive and even holistic or objective aspiration.

This creates an intellectually hegemonic framework disposed to “hyper-criminalization,” (Rios 2014) a perpetual social, political, economic system where socially “deviant” behavior only coupled with a Muslim identity would be condemned to face extreme consequences like embodying the label of terrorist. This is in direct contrast to their non-Muslim counterpart, who may also exhibit “deviant” behavior but their behavior goes unacknowledged or disconnected with the same extreme consequences. In today’s defined age of Fourth-Wave Terrorism and its doctrinal link to religious radicalism (Hoffman 1998, Weigert 2009), the term “terrorist” almost becomes an inherent prerogative to Muslims. To combat this hyper-criminalization, the Western public and academic circles politicize race and personal religious identity and presume the Muslim condition to be a moral, political, and even academic one up for debate.

Muslims in the West and Muslims living under the conditions of “terror” have been influenced because of the operational rationale. In the USA, the policy manifestations of these consequences for American Muslims are subject to racial profiling, FBI entrapment, and the loss of privacy under the Patriot Act. As an international fight, the incessant “War on Terror” has been ineffective and inefficient at fighting terrorism. It has been linked that the consequences of the “War on Terror” has been positively correlated with the number of deaths by suicide bombing 4500% since its formal declaration (Hassan 2015). The paradox: the United States calls it winning (Hassan 2015).

Communication theory and Terrorism falls under the same enveloped understanding as a form of operational study. Social circles that stress the freedom of expression demand to combat terrorist communication through the applicability of censorship on all mediums: mass media, Internet, and social media. This emphasis is solidly rooted in the theoretical perspective that terrorism is inherently “theatrical.” In

“performing” terrorism, we are left with the terrorist transmitter, the targeted intended recipient, and the violent message expressed through a bombing, ambush, and beheading – violent action intended to engage and receive the feedback of the target audience. The literature construes terrorists’ power through propaganda, publicity, strategy, prospective models for action, and the notion that it sets a precedent for fame through violence all in effort to discuss the prospect or role of censorship.

Additionally, the problem with the paradigm of the operational study on terrorist communications leaves us with the assumption that alleged terrorists, organizations, and their sympathizers are incessantly communicating –planning – with each other on when and how to attack the public, recruiting, publicizing, discussing politics which is not necessarily true. In all practicality, the literature is void of the forms of engagement for more routine practices, and in doing such prescribes any engagement, if not all engagement, as sympathetic, a perpetuation, or - by definition – even an act of terrorism itself.

The focus of communication under an operational rationale prompts the discussion of racist undertones because of the apparent social and legal hypocrisy. We find that it treats non-Muslims as innocent even when fulfilling terrorist political agenda. An example on social media took place with, “Should I be scared?? 😂😂 #isis” was Justin Bieber’s response to the Islamic State’s campaigns when they coopted the #justinbieber for the distribution of propaganda videos. The diction is important to note, since his expression is not of fear, but sarcasm. This is denoted by the laughing emoticons. Most importantly, however, is his use of the #isis. Consequentially, this has many implications both theoretically and technologically. By using a hashtag, its functionality is to make the tweet as searchable to a larger audience (Zappavigna 2011).

This purpose of using the hashtag, makes the tweet become part of an ad hoc community that takes part in that discussion that contains the hashtag. Unfortunately, for the time that the tweet was accessible the ISIS hashtag was trending to a grandeur audience of millions of people and followers. Justin Bieber was responsible for their furthered exposure: a direct aid in their political agenda. Ultimately, is he a terrorist or even a sympathizer and should be considered as such? No, but a utilitarian reading of his actions suggests otherwise.

The unfortunate and heinous attacks of September 11 changed the academic landscape with the birth of Sociology of Terrorism. The discipline elucidated that operationalized studies become paradigmatical constructions for inclusionary/exclusionary politics (Hage 2003; Turk 2004). The overarching socio-political dimension is only exacerbated with the financial incentivization of reproducing such academic knowledge (Mills 1956). The burgeoning influence of their “scholarly circles” upon the private military industrial complex has even been deemed in its as “circumstantially unethical” because of the “circumstances involved its pursuit of imperial hegemony in the interest of corporations that seek its assistance” (Bryne 2010, p. 162).

The intention of this thesis, thus, is to extract revealing information on platforms that have alleged associations with what is deemed as terrorist. Rather than labeling the users as terrorists or terrorist sympathizers, the thesis will monitor the quantifiable and qualitative engagements between proponents and opponents with account to a more nuanced understanding of power and semantic dynamics that are inherently void of a presupposition to attack or recruit or presumed even full of political dialogue. Terrorism, terrorist, and terrorist organization are social constructs and purely scientific analysis relies on avoiding the use of judgmental claims on communication as

an inherent act for perpetuating terror or recruitment. This study will shed light and attempt to situate itself beyond the normativity and subjectivity that operational studies have continued to discuss the people, their supportive, and discourses as users media present them and politicians address them. The research views these engagements as a distinguishable and heterogeneous entity bound solely by the rigid technological formations of social media, not as a medium that perpetuates terrorism.

To be clear, this study is not in favor, nor a defense of any particular acts of terror by any definition. Violence in any fashion is strictly not condoned. Nor is the idea of propagating terror or recruiting terrorists – again, by any definition. It is a difficult position to bring objectivity to the entity or their supporters when the official organization is responsible for genocide, violence, rape, human trafficking, and other criminal actions on a grand scale. Yet, this research is in similar position to Hage (2003), who felt the “societal and academic obligation to condemn a particular action of Palestinian suicide bombing”, without contextual relevance to the oppressor/oppressed context of the Israeli/Palestinian situation. It is also pertinent to clarify that the sociopolitical conditions are not comparable; the Islamic State is not portrayed nor perceived as an oppressed system. This thesis does not go to lengths to justify any of their actions, but the situational and academic similarities apparent are posed by Hage’s (2003) question: “Can one talk about by leaving condemnation aside in order to concentrate on explanation, without this being seen as a form of “justification”?” (p. 68)

Pritchard (1949) and Hage (2003) present a social narrative that Muslim extremism and radicalization that the world is witnessing today is a product of external forces - a conglomerate of social, political, geopolitical and economic consequences that drives their rationalization and inclination towards violence (Siebert *et al.* 2015). Presumably, the emphasized focus on the entity itself scapegoats the conditions that

have catalyzed and continually grounds their employable rhetoric to draw supporters and sympathizers on social media. Therefore, this thesis delves into the contextual conditions of the Islamic State, their alleged transnational existence, the juxtaposition between the actual entity and its sympathizers all to highlight the underlying question: is the official Islamic State's social media platforms riddled with the attempted recruitment campaigns, distribution of propaganda, or conduction of virtual terrorism as it has been presented under an operational studies paradigm or are we witnessing societal and academic symptoms of hyper-criminalization of Muslims.

### **1.1. Sub Questions and Objectives**

The evidence presented by Bruns *et al.* (2014, p. 875-876) sets the precedent for this research. Their focus was the Arab Spring and the distinction in Arabic and English social media audiences and their resulting interactions and emerging discourse networks. In similar application to their work (2014), this research focuses on similar fundamental questions:

- Who are the users of #khilafah and #خلافة?
- Is there quantifiable evidence that political proponents and non-supporters of the Islamic State engage and interact? If so, to what extent and how?

This thesis explores interaction on twitter in its various forms. Since presumably there are traces of the Islamic State ideology on the hashtag, rather than solely focusing on the heuristics of propaganda, recruitment, and virtual terrorism, I aim to look at the platform holistically by comparing people, language, and the resulting power dynamisms of the people through their use of language. The semantic and network dynamisms that manifest may be comparatively different than what the members and sympathizers of the Islamic State say about themselves and to whom they

target as recipients of their dialogue. This should not come as a surprise: Seibert *et al.* (2015) find disconnects at some level between the sympathizers and the actual Islamic State Bureaucracy. Moreover, by using conversations to observe and understand their ideology with them and with those who oppose them highlight this highly politicized process and more nuanced and possibly neglected themes.

The emphasis and focus on the propaganda, recruitment, and virtual terrorism are simply part of the dehumanization process: the paradigmatic exclusionary politics that Hage (2003) and Turk (2004) address and warn us against. Although, I will not discount the existence of it; it is solely observed as a heuristic – no furthered information will be collected on it. This thesis is not an effort to “humanize” terrorists as Seibert *et al.* (2015) would call it. It is more so to challenge the operational studies paradigm that compels a dehumanization process and consequently pushes the public and academic discourses further into its orientalist vision (Said 1978): the otherization process of an Islamic Orient.

This intellectualization process produces knowledge and a discourse suggesting that violent strategy as the upmost solution to the criminal entity that it is. I argue against that as a viable solution and in order to do this, I present this thesis amongst a small set of literature situated with the works of Mandour (2015) who attempts to contextualize the vilified separate from the academic and Orientalist discourse. By using a contextual lens, it is possible to know who they are, who their supporters are, through their discussion about them, we may reach one step closer to solving this crisis that has geographically stifled its locality and existentially challenged the international arena.

This thesis is intentionally constructed to contend the operational studies paradigm. First, the Islamic State is identified and historicized in relation to its geopolitical undertones and their roots in Terrorism. Next, the previous literature is



reviewed as it relates to the Islamic State, terrorism, social media and Twitter. The methodology is introduced and then followed by the collected data in Dabiq and the #khilafah and #خلافة. Lastly, interpretations and conclusions are drawn from the literature, data, incorporating my personal anecdotes with the Sociology of Islam group on Google Scholar.

## **1.2. Who is The Islamic State?**

The ideological existence of the Islamic State predates the contemporary conditions that led to its rise. It has many names many of which may correspond with other groups. Islamic State is their formal form of self-identification. Discussion of their legitimate and most contemporary name transcends this research, since who identifies them by what name is simply just a reflection of geopolitics and political allegiance. Their previous classification was the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is commonly confused with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL): the most appropriate name for what they once identified as. The appropriateness stems from their former Arabic acronym – DAESH or داعش – has been used as a tool to undermine their legitimacy. DAESH is a transliteration for ISIL, which undermines their legitimacy and statehood as reflected by the punishment for its spoken usage – death. DAESH commonly used to reference their official self-acclaimed name, the Islamic State. For the sake of the thesis, I will utilize their formal self-identification the Islamic State, and from hereafter will be shortened with IS.

Academic attempts have been made to make doctrinal and religious connections to a historical past of Wahhabism and the Ikhwan (Kaplan & Costa 2015), a contemporary Saudi Arabian sectarian conspiracy (Alvi 2014), and apocalyptic narratives and its relations to relevant Islamic bureaucracies - in the Weberian sense

(Rougier 2015). However, most research follows a historical narrative and listing of strategic methodologies that outline Abu-Musab Al- Zarqawi's role in its establishment and development through the various socio-political conditions. Although he died before its transparent existence, the Islamic State is his ideological remnant and systematic legacy (Celso 2015; Weiss & Hassan 2015; Fishman 2016). The majority of literature pinpoints the contemporary vision of the IS centers around Zarqawi and his social, and ideological, influence. Their objectives, methodologies and their appeals to the particular audience are all Zarqawi's. Even Dabiq, the IS magazine, explicitly commemorates him as part of their global initiative. Thus, this thesis will follow a similar pattern in outlining the history to illustrate the conditions that fundamentally were the catalysis and fuel for the IS witnessed today.

### ***1.2.1. Brief History of the "Zarqawists"***

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Although not all insurgent groups were Islamists, the influx of 100,000 soviet troops compelled Afghanis to frame the invasion to recruit non-state transnational organizations to join the resistance. The insurgency framed political conditions in an effort to unite the insurgent front against foreign invasion (Malet 2015). Apart from the keynote Islamists, some were monarchists and also clan-based tribal fighters were amongst their ranks (Malet 2015). The call and resulting influx of non-state actors many of whom were Arab transnational foreign fighters brought Zarqawi and Osama Bin-Laden: two relevant players whose narratives are intertwined and relevant to this research because of its heavy focus on terrorism.

Regardless of the political affiliations, resistance became dominated by a religious struggle discourse. A militaristic manifestation of such discourse was the

formation of the Mujahidin: the American funded religious extremist movement that fought against the invasion. (Malet 2015) With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the Arab fighters returned to their countries of origin to ground and further develop Islamist networks. The separate networks of Zaraqawi and Osama highlight the ideological and methodological differences almost as competing elements. The remnants of the bipartisanship nuances highlight socio-political conditions and the reason IS has continued to maintain a stronghold and Al-Qaeda has weakened.

Extremism incubated when these Arab foreign fighters returned to their respective countries of origin. Bin-Laden's networks in Saudi Arabia led Islamic extremism to the Al-Qaeda movement, whereas, Zaraqawi's network remained relatively weak and unheard of in Jordan. Because the Taliban control Afghanistan in 1996, Zaraqawi and Bin-laden returned. Al-Qaeda's far-reaching networks in Afghanistan then garnered an audience of the global theater with the September 11 attacks in 2001. In retaliation, the US invades Afghanistan where Bin-Laden escapes to Pakistan and Zaraqawi flees to Jordan, again where they continue to develop networks and ideologies.

In 2003, the US invaded Iraq and deposed Saddam Hussein sunni and secular dictatorship. The toppled regime led to the disbandment of the military. Jobless and Angry sunni troops joined the already existing extremist resistance towards the American invasion. Coupled with the similar branding of the original Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, foreign fighters also flocked to Iraq. Zaraqawi was a part of this movement.

In his fight against the American military, he became the cruelest but, most successful campaign. His jihadist brand surpassed Bin-Laden's. His powerful social media campaign illustrating the effects violent actions against coalition forces, government and civil Sunnis, Shia, Christian, and Kurdish communities prompted more foreign fighters to join (Celso 2015). His attacks transcended ethnic, political, social

ties; they were conducted upon everyone that was not part of his network. However, he maintained a staunch anti-Shia campaign.

Ultimately, his goal was simple: to cause complete and utter collapse of the state (Celso 2015). His success at exporting propaganda recruited more foreign fighters despite Al-Qaeda's denunciation. Left with no available options for networks and resources, the once former opposing platforms and campaigns united under Zarqawi's leadership. Thus, becoming the Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), even though Bin-Laden, and later Ayman Al-Zawahri, spearheaded the Al-Qaeda central. The non-Iraqi base of foreign fighters made it difficult for local recruitment. Zarqawi's amalgamation of local jihadist groups continued until the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

After the Zarqawi's death in 2006 by American airstrike, his successor Abu Umar al-Baghdadi led ISI (Celso 2015). Celso (2015) also explicitly makes clear that his successor is not the infamous Baghdadi known today. Abu Umar-Baghdadi continued the staunch anti-Shia policy and campaigns to spark state collapse. American interventionist combat strategies included the arming of anti-Jihadi sunni militia which damaged the ISI infrastructure (Celso 2015). ISI was forced to retreat to mixed communities of northern Iraq (Celso 2015). The peripheral communities bounded by their anti-Shia vision drastically weakened, but continued to perpetuate their dogma at a marginal and transnational level of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

The withdrawal of American troops in 2011 coupled without a plan for the Maliki administration cultivated the already sectarian dimension. The ostensibly stable Iraq void of American pressure and a Shia dominated coalition complicated the attempts of cooperation with minority spaces. The Maliki government additionally instigated campaigns that undermined Sunni political opponents, heightening paranoia, and tensions, of a Shia supremacy. Maliki's arrest of Vice-President Tarek al-Hashemi on

accounts for terrorism was the epitome of the overreaction (Celso 2015). In reaction, a Sunni protest movement, transformed to a rebellion near Ramadi, ultimately caused the withdrawal of security forces from the Anbar region. The vacuum paved way for ISIS to establish a stronghold over the Anbar province.

Meanwhile, the Arab Spring began and during so martyred Abu Umar-Baghdadi on account of separate circumstances unrelated to the Arab Spring. Abu-Bakr al Baghdadi, the infamous leader of IS today, replaced him. The Arab Spring shifted the political atmosphere that provided the opportunity for the Iraqi Jihadi front to sweep its way into existing Syrian networks. Al-Baghdadi expanded his networks by recruiting Iraqi prisoners, freeing imprisoned Islamists, and sending a front on behalf of the ISI into Syria. The Syrian front became known as the Jabhat Al-Nusra. However, disenchanted with the progress of other Islamists groups, he demands control and allegiance to his leadership. It is important to note that Al-Qaeda was only incorporated to Zarqawi's legacy in Iraq for branding purposes. Zawahri still led Al-Qaeda central. The radical extremism was still bipartisan. Thus Al-Nusra, with its stronghold in Syria rejects IS acquisition for power dividing territorial gains, members and sympathizers at large. Al-Baghdadi's extension is when the Islamic State of Iraq transforms to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.(or the Levant). Over time, their stronghold became grounded in Raqqa. With expansionist attempts, they begin to refer themselves as just the Islamic State, who draw sympathies from all over the world.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To answer the original questions, the literature review will delve into already existing research that has understood of the roles of social media, politics, and terrorism as it relates to the IS. However, the approach will be molded to reflect necessary objective conditions in understanding interactions and dialogue between and of the supporters and their opponents.

#### 2.1. Terrorism and Social Media

Klausen (2014) states that

*The focus in the Terrorism literature on the theater of terrorist spectacles overshadows the reality that terrorists also use the Internet for the same reasons everybody else does; for organization and planning, proselytizing and entertainment, and to educate the believers. In fact, most of the online communication of terrorists is mundane to the point of appearing innocuous (p.2).*

Klausen's suggestion that the majority of terrorist online communication is ostensibly void of any danger is further supported by the fact that a terrorist, and a general social media user have similar demographics and their respective online behaviors (Marcu & Bălteanu 2014). No visible marker or model of a "well-defined personality profile" that of a terrorist exists (Marcu & Bălteanu 2014, p. 166). Even on known terrorist forums and sites when conducting a content analysis, Weinmann (2006) finds that they refrain from discussing the violence that they themselves have committed and present themselves in a very amiable manner. Therefore, Marcu & Bălteanu (2014) loosely attempted to create a model of the online terrorist identifiable demographics, but

as only relates to age, gender, education and social class. Yet, the development of this model was void of any context of the different socio-political motivators that individual terrorists and organizations embody (Marcu & Bălteanu 2014), thus to include people that exist beyond online structures only to preemptively include them as defense mechanisms.

## **2.2. Political Contentions through Social Media**

The literature suggests that terrorism is motivated by political aspirations, not economic ones (Turk 2004). Therefore, a comparison of the most popular social networking platforms provides the ability to discern which online sources have the most diverse forms of interaction and as a result, have the strongest forms of data. Currently, the two most popular social networking sites are Facebook and Twitter (Marcu & Bălteanu 2014). Statistics from many online sources attribute 1.23 billion active users on Facebook, while; Twitter has 271 million active users (Marcu & Bălteanu 2014). However, the number of active users is simply not enough to determine which site is the best resource for collecting data; nor is it realistic or ethical, which will be discussed later, to use a cross-platform approach - the basis of their platforms, the way they connect people, and the way the “public and shared” space is developed and understood on each site are fundamentally different.

Facebook has multiple ways it promotes interaction between individuals. People use Facebook as a tool to connect to others (Caers *et al.* 2013). When people connect and add each other to their ‘news feed’: the space for viewing and engaging with the list of friends expands (Caers *et al.* 2013). Any form of dialogue is presented on the news feed, and friends are able to interact using Facebook’s capability to comment, share, and or like using the “like” button. However, news feed is restricted to

those people who have been categorized as ‘friends,’ which reduces the accessibility for a publically engaging interaction, even if the profile settings are open to the public (Bruns & Burgess 2012). This is evident by the purpose of Facebook, which is characterized as “‘to create and manage conditions for successful professional communication’” (quoted by Jones 2014 of Spinnuzzi 2009b, p.257)

In the same manner, twitter also has a tendency to be limited to the approved network, resulting in a static relationship (Bruns & Burgess 2012). The ‘friend’ network on twitter is identified in the relationship of ‘Follower/followee’. In this dimension, there are three ways of interacting on twitter: the tweet, the retweet, and the reply (Jones 2014). A tweet is the initial statement made; a retweet is the redistribution of a replica, with or without personal input, of the initial tweet; and the reply is a response in reaction to the initial tweet targeted at a specific user (Jones 2014). However, twitter goes a step further, in a more dynamic, engaging dimension and employs the sui generis “hashtag” (Bruns & Burgess 2012).

The hashtag supersedes the follower/followee constraints in that it allows for users to connect to a separate platform (Bruns & Burgess 2012) that revolves around the “metadata”, or the information reflecting the tweet itself (Jones 2014), and results in the creation of an *ad hoc* community (Bruns & Burgess 2012). Bruns & Burgess (2012) found that using the hashtag is an “explicit attempt to address an imagined community of users following and discussing a specific topic” (p. 4). Zappavigna (2011) defines ambient affiliation in the potential role that “Hashtags play in aligning users during crisis events so that they can share information, share stories and coordinate resources.” This further suggests that hashtags have real online results in collective efforts that reflect a cohesive and uniform affiliation: one that may be used to allege affiliation or sympathies for a terrorist-like embodiment.



Since the hashtag is incorporated as the data of the tweet, it may be viewed in the follower/followee context but also extends to any user who has also used this hashtag (Bruns & Burgess 2012). Trending tweets are comprised of the most used hashtags, therefore, hashtags are utilized to with the intention to be seen – users subscribe to the hashtag resulting in the self-presentation in others’ news feeds who have employed the same hashtag, but also view others’ hashtag.

The fact that twitter has the hashtag feature makes it an excellent resource to collect data on the interactions of interaction of people revolving terrorist networks on social media. As Tinati *et al.* (2014) state, “we can follow the emergent flow of information – what is tweeted, retweeted and hashtagged, and the evolving networks that form and reform *between* people over time” (p. 664). Additionally, my developed intention to acquire data from twitter is substantiated by the research of Jones (2014), Small (2010), Papacharissi & Fatima Oliveira (2012), whose research suggests that twitter exhibits the greatest increase of political discourse than any other social media platform.

### **2.3. Waves of Terrorism and Today’s Islamic State and Social Media**

The first wave in operational studies paradigm is seen as the "creation of a doctrine" where terror and violence were seen as answers to war. The meaning of what it means to be a "terrorist" is to be traced to the language of what terror and terrorism means during the French and Russian revolution (Rapoport 2004). Therefore retrospective reading of 'political' violence during that times, makes operational studies paradigm claim actors of first wave of terrorism as anarchists. The aim was to target political figures who could affect the masses. Therefore violence was used by anarchists based on their understanding of public attitudes to specific political contexts. The

internationalization of violence in this context only meant assassins killing Prime Ministers, and Presidents by traveling themselves from one country to another. This wave is seen to be active during the late eighteenth century and was mostly to address domestic political situations.

The second wave of terrorism found its root in the conclusions of World War I. This can be seen in the light of post-colonial politics where the demand for self-determination was the axis on which the actors carried out violence. Nation-states that were not “ready” for independence were converted into mandates. The 'terrorism' in this sense was the anti-colonial struggle, however it did not always manifest itself into the specific anti-colonial demands, i.e, the 'terrorists' did not have the powers to make the occupiers leave the territory, but then moving was not the sole purpose of violence as well. It had other local strategic interests as well. The most important aspect of second wave was the use of a new form of language to articulate their demands. Hence from labeling themselves as 'terrorists', they called themselves as "freedom fighters". It is imperative to note that governments corrupted the language and continued to use the label "terrorists" to counter any anti-colonial struggle. Finally the use of the language was not just about semantics but was an attempt to articulate a new form of politics where violence of the oppressor and oppressed could be seen in the same light.

Vietnam war became the catalyst for the initiation of the third-wave of terrorism. This wave was categorized by nationalist struggles in various part of the so called 'third world' and the West. However unlike the first wave, here the ethnic ties were much more strongly embedded in the language of national liberation and were manifested in the internationalization of violence and mobilization as well. Palestinian Liberation Organization is a good example. However there are a few things which were quite new to this wave. For instance, women were seen as fighters and not necessarily

as messengers and scouts. The meaning of violence also underwent a change and had meanings of punishment attached to it. This means that not only high profile people were made as targets but there were also civilian atrocities and because of this this phase is also referred to as the phase of 'internationalism of terrorism'. There was a change in the politics of language as well. The third wave or "new-left" were challenging the politics of neo-imperialism at many places and there were posing threats to hegemonic powers. And in order to counter this discourse United Nations started using the word "terrorist" and "terrorism" in it's official documents, for example - "International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing".

The fourth wave of terrorism has religion at its core and has a special focus on Islam. It is with this fourth wave of analysis that terms like, "political Islam", "Islamism", Islamic fundamentalist" and "islamic extremism". The key aspect of this wave was that all other forms of struggles, i.e. - anti-colonial, nationalist, ethnic, and even anarchist were seen as subordinate to Islam and could only be understood when seen through an "Islamic" prism. The Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 and the religious mobilization of people in Afghanistan are seen as the founding pillars of this wave. This wave is directly pitched against any form of secular credentials of any revolution, i.e. Islam and secularism cannot share same socio-political visions of governance. This wave is pitched directly against Western foreign policy in the Middle East.

Fourth Wave Terrorism, Weigert (2009) summarized, as the contemporary wave of terrorism and is twofold in its characteristics: exclusively modern component, with historically traditional roots. The traditional manifestations of fourth wave of terrorism uses religious legitimacies, increasing forms of violence, and the parameters are unbound geographically (Weigert 2009). On the other hand, in its relation to

modernity, there is a strong use of communication, simpler notion of travel and border crossing, and the availability of weapons of mass destructions (Weitgert 2009).

These structural, definitive, and labeling mechanisms used to nuance phases of terrorism and their conditions that they reflect are social constructions (Turk 2004). Even the literature is confused as to what to label IS: does it fall under the Fourth Wave Jihadist paradigm or has their capabilities and prowess warranted a class of their own? Or Are they one of the first as members of the fifth wave as suggested by Kaplan (2015)? Kaplan (2015) suggests that IS shift towards targeting the women and children, pragmatically applied through their manipulative and recruiting possibilities on social media, is just a reflection the academic shift in defining them.

The focus of this study explores the IS's socially self-prescribed hashtag. Because the operational rationale and people view them as a power front, in which they also want to present themselves – or possibly how the public and operational rationale views them - as a powerful front, as part of this fourth wave of terrorism since they rely extensively on their propaganda, social media and an unprecedented amount. In an age, where the global phenomena is focused on ridding of IS territory on a physical front and online presence, Republican Presidential Candidate Marco Rubio's platform highlights both. He that illustrates their power and a way to stop it. Rubio states,

*In essence, subjecting them to high-profile, humiliating defeats, where we strike them, we capture or kill their leaders, we videotape the operations, we publicize them, because this is a group that heavily uses propaganda to attract fighters and donors from around the world. And they are presenting themselves as this invincible force, and we need to cut off that narrative. It isn't true. And that's important.*

This American reactionary expression through geopolitical policy is attempting to mirror the alleged power of their propaganda online. The characteristics of their propaganda vary with distinguishing purposes, types, and audiences. Vitale & Keagle

(2014) state, “historically, jihadist movements adopted video content as an important part of their strategy, but ISIS’s embrace of social media and youth culture gave these videos a new videogame-like quality” (p. 9). In this strategy it presents the emphasis and appeal toward a youth in their territorial fight, whether the insight is prospective or just a mere form of optimistic socialization.

Additionally, the IS campaigns are technologically very adaptive, which also hints at their youthful nature. Not only do they campaign on the top social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, but also host accounts in numerous of the other social networking apparatuses. For example, the very active presence on Ask.fm, a site that with highly reflective demographics of a teenage population indicates its attempt to appeal to a younger generation (Vitale & Keagle 2014).

#### **2.4. The Islamic State on Twitter**

Brookings (2014) conducted an overarching study on the twitter census, finding its prevalence on twitter is fairly pronounced. With a confirmed 46,000 twitter accounts, and an expectation that it is in fact could be 90,000 accounts suggests they have numerous players that are linked in ideology and reflect upon it on Twitter. The spread is also not limited, where the average profile had an upwards of 1,000 followers. This suggests that follower/followee relationships are in limited-closed circles, which is to be expected since 95% of twitter users have less than 100 followers.

The number of online accounts in fact has largely in part to do with knowledge production, more so than forms of propaganda techniques used to promote fear in the adversarial public. The Brookings research (2014) and Carter et al. (2015) found yet again recruitment strategy through presentation of power.

Their presentation of power and propaganda is demonstrated in images they

have of themselves that reflect their infrastructural capacities in a constant war zone that lacks available resources (Klausen 2014). Klausen (2014) finds that members of ISIS in Syria and Iraq often tweet cases on how they charge their phones. On the other hand they present their availability of resources where members present about how they have available resources as a convincing tool makes the transition simple from moving into the battle zones.

Real time circumstantial and battle discussion occurs through the disseminators, rather than from news on the official account (Brookings 2014, Klausen 2014, Carter *et al.* 2015). Disseminators are not official account holders, nor are they fighters. Disseminators perform as their name suggests: disseminate knowledge. This has paved a way for an understanding beyond the realm of terrorism but allows for a more micro level analysis: a fairly original phenomenon. Carter *et al.* (2015) found a shift in understanding religious authority as they pertain to IS. Like many religious figures today in their online presence, IS also begun make its existence. Twitter accounts had numerous numbers of followers who spewed religious rhetoric hinting at the necessity of this form online version of Jihad had witnessed authoritative figures that were far more practical (Carter *et al.* 2015) rather maintaining a technological puritanism similar to that of the Prophet's as espoused by relatively similar Wahabbi discourse under the Najdi Ikhwan (Habib 1978)

Online version of Jihad manifests on particular hashtag campaigns that proponents of IS took part in. Vitale & Keagle (2014) outline the process of which the proponents engaged with general users of the innocent hashtag “#Brazil 2014” and “#WC2014” revolving discussion of the world cup 2014. However, after numerous forms of engagement, in fact, the hashtag was coopted. These hashtags shifted from innocent discussions of the World Cup to tools for recruitment and spreading

propaganda. The strategies to coopt it did not go unnoticed; there were active and constant dynamic engagements with opponents on this shared space. The power of “backtracking” the hashtag presents this evidence (Zappavigna 2011). In doing such invigorates twitter’s algorithmic capabilities grows the popularity, and thus, the visibility. Since the continuous use of a hashtag only promotes its accessibility on the “Latest” hashtag trends, by definition any form of discussion and engagement only supports the argument that in fact it is perpetuating forms of online and spreading terrorism. Vitale & Keagle (2014) state that, “ISIS’s strategic use of hashtags in these tweets caused each to trend on Twitter, promoting further engagement of the topic and bringing more notice to the cause (p. 7)”

Engagement did include their adversarial networks. Normally, polarized ideologies on social media rarely crossover (Boyd & Yardi 2010), but the public discourse, sensationalist media, and academic circles under the operational rationale might agree to the idea that the engagement with IS introduces a newer face. In particular, majority Sunni groups, Anonymous and the Conservative right-Wing Westerners embody this form of online retaliation against IS. This is done through campaign operation that also utilizes the hashtag technique, as suggested by the earlier Marco Rubio claims. Additionally, right-Wing Westerners have always used humorous approaches in attempt to coopt it, but now Anonymous has joined their efforts to “troll” IS by declaring that December 11<sup>th</sup> is IS troll day.

The purpose for all of the emphasis of IS twitter campaigns is elaborated by Brookings (2014) in the concluding remarks for the overall agenda where a juxtaposition of the pros and cons of censoring these tweets. Despite the engagement between proponents and the opponents of the IS, yet, despite there is an elaborate form and narrative for discussion that does not always result in violence but lead to the

potentiality for socialization and deradicalization, which does occur as evident by the cases of the British teenagers who attempted to flee and return home.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This thesis couples the content analysis of Dabiq with the social network, semantic and hashtag analysis in search of any “terroristic” remnants, ie. ideologies, discourses, frameworks, that resonate throughout the utilization of the hashtag in any engagement with the public. Dabiq can be used as the representational mechanism on how they view themselves because they write it about themselves for themselves and propaganda/recruitment purposes. The multi-faceted research is in hopes for a triangulation to verify and nuances between propaganda, attempted recruitment, and virtual “terrorism” and just political dialogue amongst proponents and opponents of the IS. The polarized ideological juxtapositions – in a Clash of the Civilizations rhetoric (Manhar 2015) – sparked the supplemental relational study of people and their networks: Social Network Analysis and Hashtag Network Analysis.

Using hashtags, there are three powerful, cross-disciplinary methods to potentially gather the data to the question. However, each data collection technique is unique in its functionality, but also weak in its limitations. Each approach has a usable method in exploring the questions. One method dives deep into the hashtag that explores the interactions of the actors (Hansen *et al* 2010) while the other method explores the broadness of the Twittersphere through examining emerging Hashtag networks (Al-Khalifa 2013). This research attempts to go beyond the network relations of agents, as presented by Klausen (2014) and Carter *et al.* (2015) but in effort to



quantify and qualify the discursive interactions between proponents and opponents of the IS regardless of semantic context. However, to do such and using the operationalize what is deemed as terrorism to the online sphere and through the lens of quantitative Big Data and qualitative nature of “wide-data” (Small 2010, Tinati *et al.* 2014).

### **3.1. Dabiq Overview**

Dabiq is the IS official magazine. It is a coherent and aesthetic presentation ultimately to be clearly used as a tool for propaganda. Their discussions of various topics, mainly politics and Jurisprudence, to address and legitimize its existence through religious narratives are not groundbreaking. Al Qaeda and other militants adopted similar methods of distributing magazine propaganda – *Inspire* is Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s version. However, the diverse media strategies intentionally used to target specific demographics highlight its vigor to recruit individuals to their political cause. This explains why the booklet is available publically in many languages on the Surface Web; TOR and other web-browsers of the Dark Web are not needed to access it. In fact, sites like Jihadology and the Clarion Project greatly influenced its accessibility to a broader audience (The Carter Center 2015) that prompts the question for censorship.

Dabiq was created by the IS’s very own media center, named al-Hayat. The Carter Center (2015) alleges that Dabiq’s evolution is rooted in AQAP’s *inspire*. Because of its wide circulation via International dissemination for knowledge production and Jihadi sources and forums, it grew from as low as 30 pages to 80 pages. Additionally, the average number of articles merely doubled in each publication. External forces like international recognition have only perpetuated IS’s routinization to publish every lunar month. However the most recent publications have yet to be made for the months of March and April. This warrants tangential questions of how

geopolitical strategies have influenced institutional development and their prowess to publish.

The organization's framework and legitimization builds on an Islamic history narrative. Social, political, and economic conditions of Muslims today are framed, and may also reflect, the times of the Prophet Mohammad since his expression and message for Islam, similarly, were suppressed. IS presents the Hijra (translated to Migration) to Jihad (translated to struggle and fight) for ultimately the Muslim ummah (translated to community) to be reunited as the sole and viable solution. Its main target is to recruit the disenfranchised transnational Muslim Ummah to join (The Carter Center 2015). The targeted disenfranchised transnational Muslim is not exclusively local to communities under Western Nation-States, as it has been perceived by their heavy use of English and other Western languages. In fact, issue 7 and issue 12 explicitly discuss the socio-political conditions in Bangladesh and Japan, respectively, drawing on political circumstances to make appeals to an Asian Muslim demographic audience.

Dabiq ploys on a religious apocalyptic symbolism: an Armageddon narrative. Dabiq is named after a small village near Aleppo where the final winning battle against the Muslims is allegedly to take place. The religious undertones stem from Zarqawi's rhetoric, which cite him at the beginning of every issue. The importance of Dabiq's location and religious context is only a continuation of the thought legacy mentioned before. As he riled up the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, he mentions, "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq" with the ultimate expansionist goal from Iraq to Syria. This sets the stage and grounds the rhetoric for publications where surely his remnant discourses on anti-Shia, anti-Western, transnational migration, and violence, are common themes to be expected on social platforms because it is alleged that IS

presents a powerful media recruitment campaign. This thought legacy was important because the operational rationale paradigm focuses on such variables and makes them an independent, rather than dependent one.

Lutai (2015) traces their discursive tools used to legitimize the IS existence and, thus, sovereignty through Dabiq. Its eloquence is paired with themes that resemble their allegations to political sovereignty following the Nation-State model. The IS promote a nation-state appeal by addressing the political apparatus which places them in a similar light to that of the international conditions. They address the fact that they have an existing theocracy with a capital city and a leader, whether appointed democratically or not. They recognize the heterogeneity of the ‘ummah’ and decide to focus on the most common element: Islam where jurisprudence and Shariah are the political systems that govern their atmospheres both at a local level and advocate it at an international level.

Issues discussed in Dabiq are not uniform, despite the visible elements of religious discourse in all the articles. The target, the focus and content of the publications transformed in relation to external conditions (The Carter Center 2015, Mandour 2015). The Carter Center (2015) address that there is quite the evolution that is contingent on how it is being received from the global audience. As mentioned before, there was a focus on the notions of hijrah, jihad and Ummah. However, the ratios of which these manifested and were prioritized depended greatly on the issue. Sahar Mandour intersectional feminist analysis contests the Al-Hayat’s prowess “despite global mainstream media centralizing women in its shock-dominated coverage of ISIL” it took until the 7<sup>th</sup> issue for an address of women to take place. However, even Mandour asserts fundamentally that Dabiq reacts to the external coverage and discussion of Dabiq.

The Carter Center (2015) noted the externalities that influenced Dabiq. Carter Center (2015) divided Dabiq's first five issues as separate from the latter 7 that were analyzed. Topical trends in Dabiq first five issues largely addressed internal issues, and slightly addressed on the attacking the West premise. In their latter issues, their focus shifted from internal dialogue, or a form of self-promotion, to denouncing and even delegitimizing other groups in the Middle East (The Carter Center 2015). Dabiq emphasized these criticisms on the Jawlani and Sahwah, who are members of Jabhat al-Nusra and Sunnis against IS, respectively. Moreover, they also incorporated their anti-Western rhetoric by covering the multitudes of terrorism (The Carter Center 2015).

The content analysis of Dabiq that is employed draws on a quantitative content analysis. This methodology coupled with Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967) is applied interpret particular themes that resonate in Dabiq. Because Dabiq is written and published in multiple languages, all of which are assumingly the same, English is the preferred doctrine. This method allows for the research to focus on the language as communication while incorporating the contextual circumstances and political undertones (Hsieh & Shannon 2014). This paper employs a method that is "for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon 2014, p. 1278).

### **3.2. Social and Semantic Network Analysis**

The first step used was to identify a single hashtag, as a reference point for what has been alleged as a medium for terrorism. The expression of terrorism, as it has been deemed, through a religious ideology is the safest way to ensure that the notion that is prefaced - there will be clear claims of religiously justified violence in their offline claims for politics based on their developing discourse. In addressing the

question, the original hashtag selected would be “#khilafah.” There are structural formations, social institutions, news agencies, political and individual agents that present or address #khilafah, where the specificity of agents in discussion are not entirely of concern; the scope of the thesis is to observe the interactive trends between proponents of the Islamic State (IS) and opponents of IS and with themselves through the twittersphere, and in particular, through #khilafah.

#khilafah is chosen because of the inherent position and context in relation to the IS. By definition the khilafah is the theocratic government that succeeds the historical one that Prophet Mohammad established. However, in contemporary geopolitical contexts this is indicative of the IS. Its physical and virtual presence is demonstrably located in Syria and Iraq (Brookings 2014), which are the origins of ISIS, an acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Therefore we can safely assume that the self-identified khilafah will present themselves on #khilafah platform.

There are multiple interfaces to collecting the data, however, the chosen service to collect the data, and perform analytical tasks is the open access software known as NodeXL, mainly because of the accessibility and even more so, its simplicity (Hansen *et al.* 2010). NodeXL gathers, collects, and organizes twitter information either through tweets, users, hashtags, or even keywords (Hansen *et al.* 2010). NodeXL will then be used to acquire a sample of this data of #Khilafah and # خلافة through a particular time. It is my contextualized hypothesis, based on the works of Jones (2014), Small (2010), Papacharissi & Fatima Oliveira (2012), who found that political chaos and instability result entice a greater use of hashtags, especially political hashtags. Therefore, the data collected began with the Paris attacks.

A supplemental program aided in the collection of the data. This programing software allowed for the data to be stored, molded, and applied over a series of time. A

Social Network Analysis is generally snapshot, where actors are connected at a single moment. As suggested by programmers at NodeXL, the use of the program allows for the data to become more fluid and dynamic over the span of time collected.

The tweets were collected over a vast series of time. They comprised of 64,875 tweets. The first 18,000 tweets begin with the recent Paris attacks. NodeXL is capped at 18,000 tweets for one time; therefore, tweets were collected over a decided series of time to gain the total number of tweets. The final tweets collected ended on the March 24, 2016. This date is two days after the Brussels bombing. Because of the approaching of the upcoming presidential elections and their heavy emphasis on IS as a growing threat, we will surely only witness more discussion on both fronts. Additionally, the constant demand by right-winged discourse to encouraged Muslims to apologize or actively and demonstrably campaign against has forced Muslims to resort to similar methods of political hashtagging and take a stance. IS users have been alleged to instigate and welcome opening up discussion to promote their agenda.

Using a separated and focused dataset, a preliminary Social Network Analysis was be performed to monitor the forms of engagement between actors under the particular hashtag. At this point, it will be possible to identify, verify, and even pinpoint the conversational “disseminators,” but as mentioned before, the main concern is to observe if any interaction takes place between users who employ the particular hashtag and interact with users who hold contrasting ideals in both language groups. This is measurable and quantifiable.

More importantly, NodeXL provides the opportunity to analyze the resulting discourse that the actors partook in. This form of expansive creative and agential discussion is known as ‘wide-data’ (Small 2010). Unlike big data, where the focus was diving deep into the single hashtag of #Khilafah or # خلافة by analyzing the tweet, how

it was used, wide data approaches data collection by analyzing the emerging networks (Small 2010, Khilafah 201h). Also, by using #Khilafah or # خلافة as a starting point, rather than focusing on the tweet, a “snowballing” route will be used to acquire the data. For example, when a researcher snowballs for interviews, the first interviewee is the reference point for all other interviewees. The same concept is applied into this approach of ‘wide-data’ (Small 2012), which is also the computational algorithm utilized by NodeXL to conceptualize the emerging patterns. When tweeting #Khilafah or # خلافة it is not necessarily the only hashtag that is used - tweets are up to 140 characters and Khilafah consumes only 8 while خلافة, even less with 5. According to Jones (2014), when employing politicized hashtags, users tweet with more than one. The research will embrace the connecting hashtags. This computer algorithm enables us to view and quantify the patterns, trends emerging hashtags – summarized discourses that are coupled and are connected to the hashtag #khilafah or # خلافة (Zappavigna 2011).

NodeXL does not have the accessibility to characterize the resulting hashtag discourses. Further analysis is restricted to handwork through the lens of grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967). This provided the ability to observe the expansive twittersphere that revolves around #khilafah or # خلافة . Grounding theory’s applicability is twofold; it allows the qualitative data to “speak for itself” and in doing so allows me to recognize myself in positionality to the data set (Glasser & Strauss 1967).

After the data was collected, the data was imported into another freeware software: Gephi. Simply, Gephi took the data from NodeXL and interprets, analyzes, the data and allows the opportunity to beautify it. It provided the creative agency to illustrate what needed to be said, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

#### 4.1. Dabiq Data

Dabiq was coded, themed, and built on the earlier information addressed by the Carter Center (2015); Lutai (2015) and Mandour (2015), as the main scholarly works that have been done on Dabiq. Probably the most highlighted element was addressed the relationally dichotomous undertones that manifested (The Carter Center 2015, Mandour 2015). Because this thesis is about relations through relational ideologies, I explored the Dabiq's continued Huntington Clash of the Civilization (Mandour 2015) rhetoric of which Dabiq implores in appealing to a transnational Muslim Ummah. This is what IS says about themselves at an institutional level, which is later ideologically compared to what Muslims perceive the khilafah vis-à-vis its existence on #khilafah and # خلافة .

Because the main themes of Hijrah, Jihad, and Ummah were addressed in the Carter Center (2015) this paper found these themes. However, unlike the Carter Center (2015), that attempted theologically to define these concepts through the historical narrative that they represent. That literature transcends this thesis; thus, religious and theological undertones are not connoted. They are perceived as simply relational inclusionary/exclusionary political manifestations, discourses, and mechanisms that prompt recruitment. For example, Hijrah: who is migrating where and from? Jihad against whom and why?

The Carter Center (2015) conducted works on the first 12 issues, where relational quantitative content analysis was done. Because the Carter Center (2015) divided the topical themes based on issues 1-5 and then 6-12, this schematic resonated well with this thesis and the employed methodology. They (2015) found that IS's focus



over time shifted from the earlier attacks against the West to a stance that critiquing groups in the Middle East; in the same way that this thesis found it. However, their values and ratios comparatively differed. The percentages of relational values that this thesis found are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

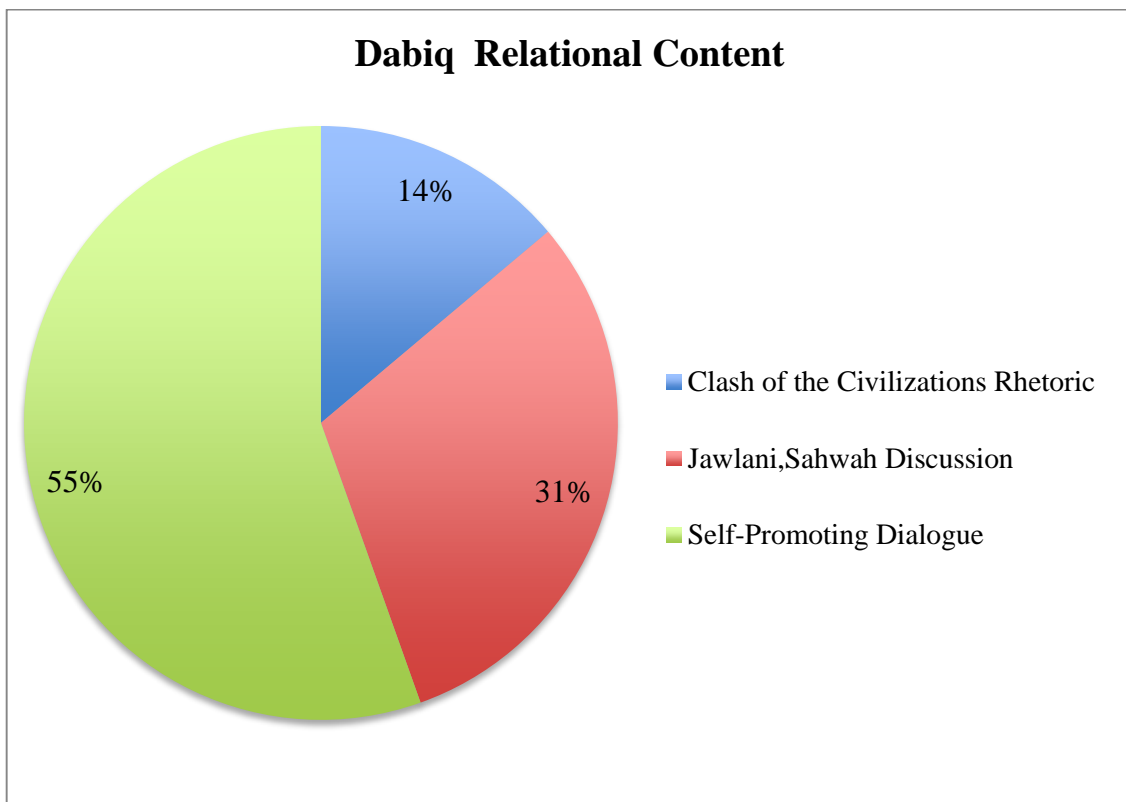


Fig.4.1. Dabiq Relational Pie Chart

#### 4.2. Social Network Analysis

The expansive quantitative methodology used fosters calculation of the “top-down” and “Bottom-up” approaches of individuals and hashtags (Scott & Carrington 2011, p. ). Previous research uses one methodology or another, but to reduce the limitations of however, the vastness in its methodological scope requires at the very least a simplified explanation of the tools used prior to analysis and resulting

interpretation of the data. To further illustrate and simplify each critical metric, an example of a classroom filled with students will be used (Scott & Carrington 2011 p. ).

Impartial to the type and approaches of the network analysis, networks are divided into vertices and nodes. A vertex connects the node – the actor - regardless of interactional type. This paper assigns the nodes as individuals, but also as a reflection of semantics through the hashtag. Thus, nodes are bound and this connection, the vertex, is manifested through the tweet in its various technological characteristics: tweet, retweet, favorite, reply share, and the actual 140 semantic characters used.

The Top-down measurements of size and density reflect a holistic image of what is to be interpreted from the network. These critical and simply calculated indicators hint of interpretative generalities that measure the entire network. In essence, it provides for the understanding the whole structure in respect to its solidarity and robustness. It measures “the notion of cohesive groups” addressed in the foundations of sociology. Durkheim’s “Collective Conscience” and Tonnies “Gemeinschaft” are some of the early sociological frameworks and theoretical attempts at defining what is quantitatively illustrated through density (Scott & Carrington 2011 p. ).

Size is pertinent in defining density. Density is the measurement of overall connectedness in a network. It is reached by dividing the number of actual ties by the possible number of ties. The resulting ratio of 0 to 1 is a respective reflection of the sparsity or density of the network. To illustrate this, the closeness of a classroom involving 9 students is far simpler and more inclined to communication, interaction, being the same, than if the classroom had 200 students (Scott & Carrington 2011 p. ). Density is directly linked to the size.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 are the respective density graphs for #khilafah and #خلافة. It is apparent that some nodes and edges are connected, disconnected, clustered, colored,

shaded, smaller and larger than others. As mentioned before, a node's size is the most relevant indicator. However, in this graph the different shades of green used are synonymous indicators of size. The varying shades of green illustrate a node's degree and the frequency of interaction that takes place. In other words, the greener a node and its connecting edges reflect the higher the degree it is. In contrast, the whiter a node and its connecting edges reflect a lower degree of interaction.

The average density is 0.09 for #khilafah and 0.1304 for #خلافة. The number of users who employed the respective hashtags indicates that the people involved in the network are very disconnected from one another and only slightly engage beyond their subcommunities.

To delve into the densities, the data was subject to further categorization based on the Clauset-Newman-Moore formula, a computational algorithm that develops networks based on “clear communities within this network that correspond to specific topics” coupled with the application of grounded theory (Glasser and Strauss 1967) to confirm the existence of political affiliated networks (Zappagovina 2011). The illustrative powers of the Yifan-Hu force directed the clustered communities based on both semantics and interactions the overall density was divided into two camps: the sympathizers and opponents of the actual IS entity.

- *Social Network Analysis Data – Top Down*

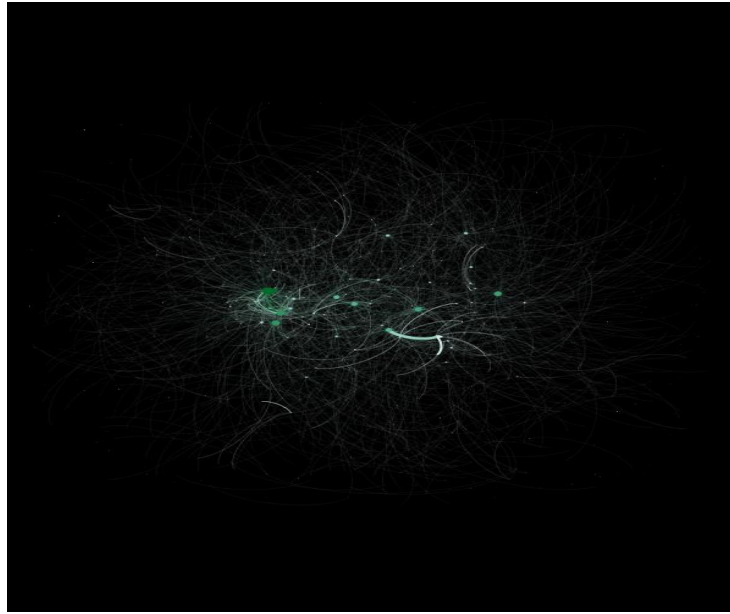


Fig.4.2. Density Graph of #khilafah

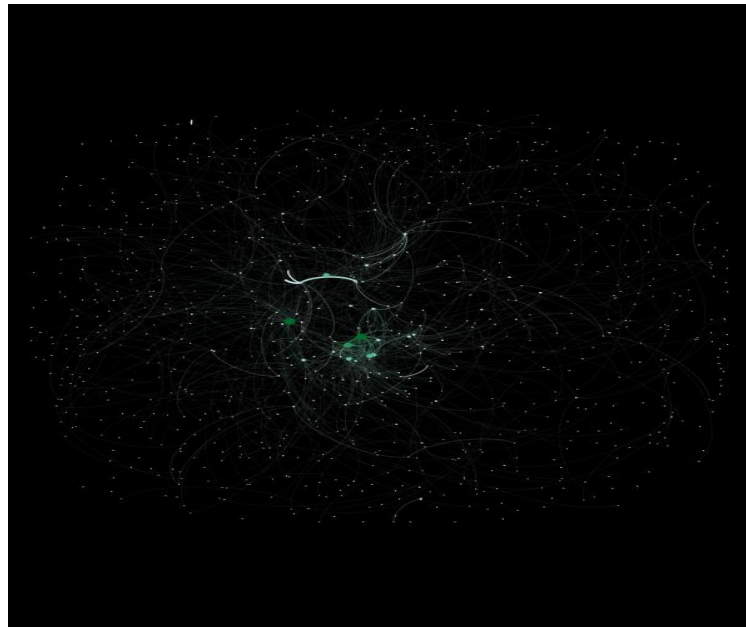


Fig.4.3. Density Graph of #جلافة

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 are illustrative of the engagements and compositions of the entire network. In graph 3 sympathizers of the #khilafah make up 27.51% and illustrated by the color blue, meanwhile, the opponents make up the color pink. The

same color scheme applies to Graph 4 #خِلافة, where percentages of the proponents make up 27.27% while the opponents make up 72.38%.

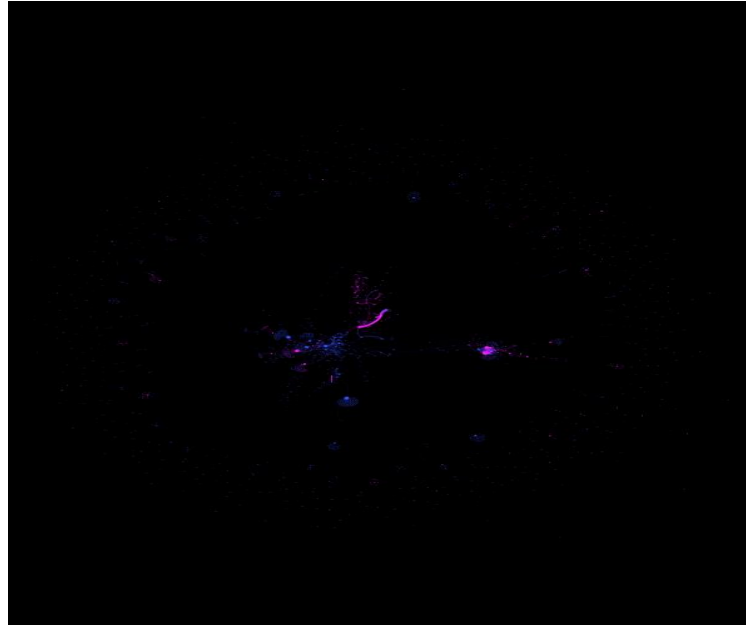


Fig.4.4. Cross-Political Engagement on #khilafah



Fig.4.5. Cross-Political Engagement on #خِلافة,

Politically affiliative networks were further built upon on the basis of the predetermined semantics, as illustrated in Figures 4.6 and 4.7 for #khilafah and #خلافة, which was further categorized into two components amongst the sympathizers. This is in large part because no non-political engagement was found amongst the opponents. This analysis is technique in using NodeXL is not unprecedented, Himelboim, McCreery & Smith (2014), employed Semantic Analysis to divide the conversation based on keywords, word pairs in the tweets. Figures 4.6 and 4.7 are density graphs that divide the conversation from political dialogue and non-political dialogue. 86.15% of #khilafah is political dialogue; meanwhile 13.85% is more the mundane void of political conversation. The offshoot of pink is reflective of the politics, while the green is indicative of non-political engagement. The same of which applies for graph #خلافة,. Further analysis is discussed in the Semantics section.

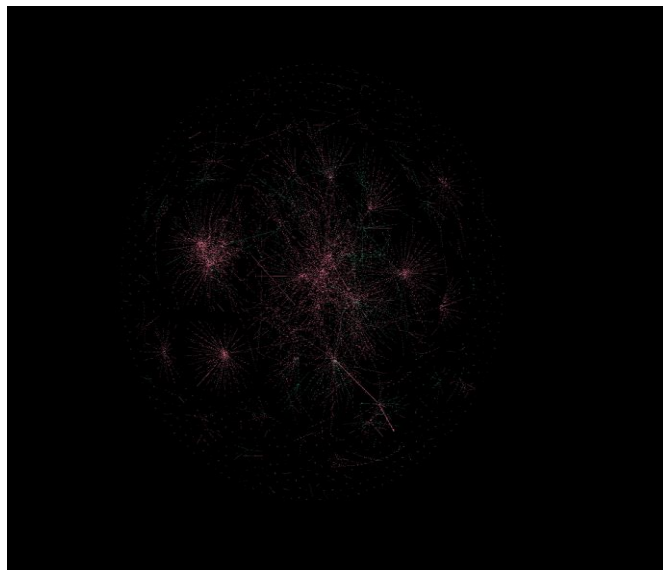


Fig.4.6. Graph of political-nonpolitical discussion on #khilafah

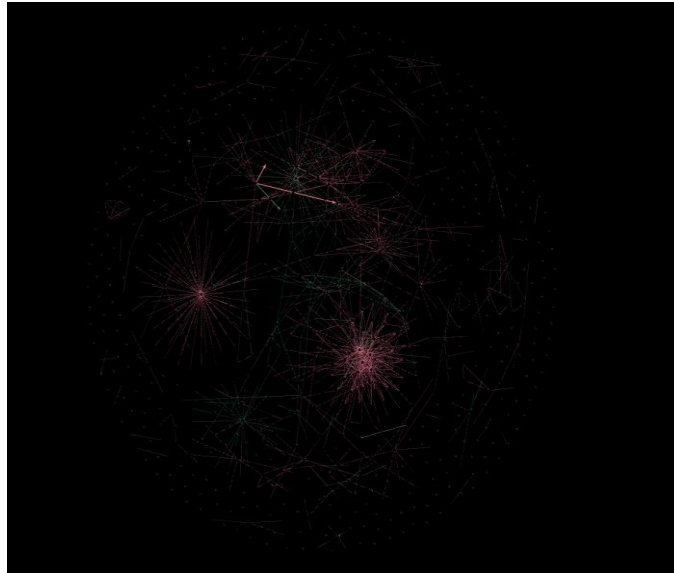


Fig.4.7. Graph of political-nonpolitical discussion on #خلافة.,.

The overarching model presents itself less reflective of social phenomena when the overall graph density is quite low. Clearly, multiple reasons may account for this: 1) simply, the nodes are not interactive 2) size is large and networks are not so connected 3) the network is divided into subcommunities with little engagement that transcends their neighborhoods. The first of the bottom-up approach that allows for further understanding of the density is the clustering coefficient, the amount that a node clusters within a network. Eigenvector centrality is also rooted.

The Bottom-Up approach is more nuanced because its scope is limited to its focus: the individual node is studied relation to the other nodes in the same network. Linton's (1978) formulaic expressions divide the stratification of a node's pertinence and power into distinctions: centrality and prestige. Centrality is a node's involvement with other nodes, while the prestige is a node's receiving ties. The Power and dynamisms – the relevant metrics - in the network is eloquently presented by the quote:

*If the Centrality of the particular entities is portrayed by means of the size of the symbols, then a reading of the graphic representation*

*provides additional information about who is involved in an especially large number of relationships (degree), who can reach many agents via particularly short paths (closeness), and who controls an especially large number of the shortest linkages to an adjacent network (betweenness) (566).*

### 4.3. Social Network Analysis - Bottom-Up Metrics

Figures 4.8 and 4.9, respectively, list the top actors and their power relations with each other for #khilafah and #خلافة as ranked greatest to least. Measuring the degrees, eigenvector centralities, and clustering coefficients drew these bottom-up metrics; thus, power dynamics manifest. The table also depicts whether the node is vigilante or sympathizer of an IS politics.

Name	Degree	Eigenvector	Clustering	Proponent/Vigilante
abayabuhamzah	18	0.043026		proponent
fightextremism	26	0.059099	0.07368421	vigilante
terror_monitor	34	0.048793	0.033	vigilante
womenforkhilafa	14	0.045839	0.33333333	proponent
janx53	24	0.038242	0.0026455	vigilante
muslimah_htm	22	0.034766	0.28888889	proponent
muslim_spring	18	0.033027	0.28888889	proponent
sayeed1342	13	0.033027	<b>0.07352941</b>	proponent
world4khilafah	10	0.030423	0.19444444	proponent
islam	17	0.028328	0.16363636	proponent
realdonaldtrump	13	0.023276	0.3	n/a
abo3aeshaalans7	20	0.019002	0.5	proponent
donutgulang	24	0.018561	0.14285714	vigilante
ahmad_noorani	23	0.018017	0.5	vigilante
usmancheema01	34	0.01766	0.32967033	proponent
saadianaveed2	25	0.016957	0.12681159	proponent
hussansyed	18	0.016935	0.07352941	proponent
asif_salhddin	14	0.015517	0.66666667	proponent
pkintellectuals	15	0.015242	0.66666667	proponent
yusuf_htismi	16	0.014681	0.04761905	proponent
ccckij1117	11	0.014065	0.33333333	proponent
g00_00_0al	17	0.013142	1	proponent
yonniyama	14		1	proponent

Fig.4.8. Top Actors in #khilafah



Name	Degree	Eigenvector	Clustering	Proponent/Vigilante
abayabuhamzah	18	0.043026		proponent
fightextremism	26	0.059099	0.07368421	vigilante
terror_monitor	34	0.048793	0.033	vigilante
womenforkhilafa	14	0.045839	0.33333333	proponent
janx53	24	0.038242	0.0026455	vigilante
muslimah_htm	22	0.034766	0.28888889	proponent
muslim_spring	18	0.033027	0.28888889	proponent
sayeed1342	13	0.033027	<b>0.07352941</b>	proponent
world4khilafah	10	0.030423	0.19444444	proponent
islam	17	0.028328	0.16363636	proponent
realdonaldtrump	13	0.023276	0.3	n/a
abo3aeshaalans7	20	0.019002	0.5	proponent
donutgulung	24	0.018561	0.14285714	vigilante
ahmad_noorani	23	0.018017	0.5	vigilante
usmancheema01	34	0.01766	0.32967033	proponent
saadianaveed2	25	0.016957	0.12681159	proponent
hussansyed	18	0.016935	0.07352941	proponent
asif_salhddin	14	0.015517	0.66666667	proponent
pkintellectuals	15	0.015242	0.66666667	proponent
yusuf_htismi	16	0.014681	0.04761905	proponent
ccckij1117	11	0.014065	0.33333333	proponent
g00_00_0al	17	0.013142	1	proponent
yonniyama	14		1	proponent

Fig.4.9. Top Actors in #خلافة.

#### 4.4. Semantic Analysis

As mentioned before, the semantics are the connectors between nodes. The edge -in its various technological functions are evident by Figures 4.2 and 4.3: the-top down approach. Figure 4.10 illustrates the nuances in non-political dialogue between Sympathizers. No non-political dialogue was used of opponents of the IS. between political and non-political dialogue. To come to such illustrations, the method followed the works of Himelboim, McCreery & (2013) who employed Semantic Analysis to divide the conversation based on keywords, word pairs in the tweets. For confirmatory analysis, Grounded theory (1967) was on utilized word pairs. The following results were categorized into the following categories: Education & personal fitness, food,

discussion video quality, companionship & intimacy, weather complaints, women's rights and attempted propaganda and political talk. Section 1 is the Education & personal fitness at 38%, section 2 is the discussion on video quality, section 3 is the expressed desire for intimacy and emotion, section 4 is the where so and so made up this percentage, so and so this percentage. Figure 4.11, illustrate the non-Political tweets amongst proponents of a #خلافة, where only food and companionship/intimacy were discussed.

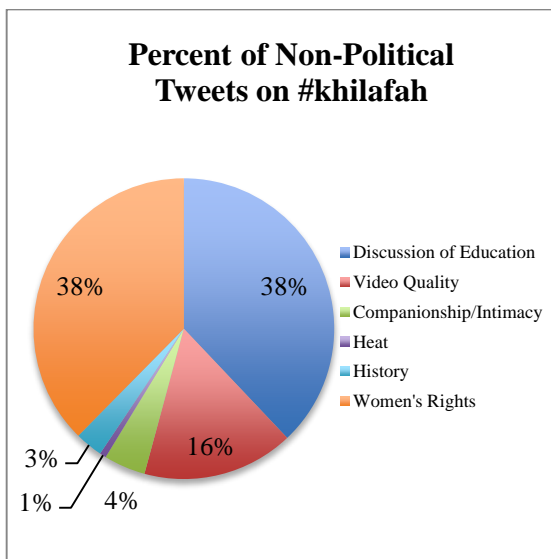


Fig.4.10. Non-Political Tweets on #khilafah

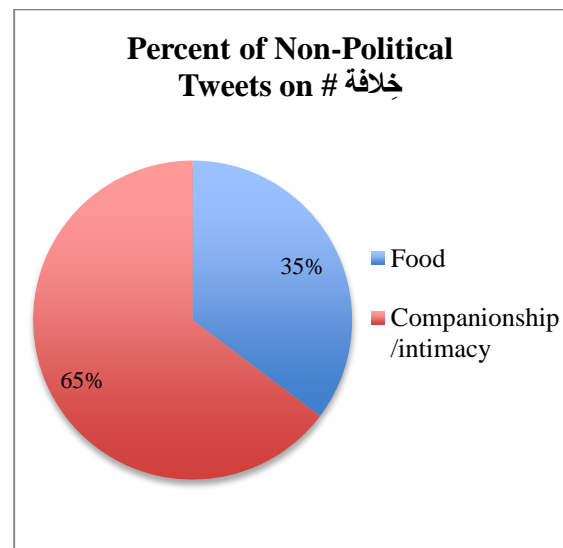


Fig.4.11. Non-Political Tweets on #خلافة

#### 4.5. Hashtag Network Analysis – Top Down

Figures 4.12 and Graph 4.13 are the respective density graphs for #khilafah and #خلافة. As evident by the labels, it is important to highlight that no longer are the connected nodes users, but emerging hashtags. It is apparent that some nodes and edges are connected, disconnected, clustered, colored, shaded, smaller and larger than others. As mentioned before, a node's size is the most relevant indicator. However, for

aesthetic purposes, the different shades of green used are synonymous indicators of size. The varying shades of green illustrate a node's degree and the frequency of interaction that takes place to other hashtags, the illustrated coupled effect. In other words, the greener a node and its connecting edges reflect the higher the degree it is. In contrast, the whiter a node and its connecting edges reflect a lower degree of interaction.

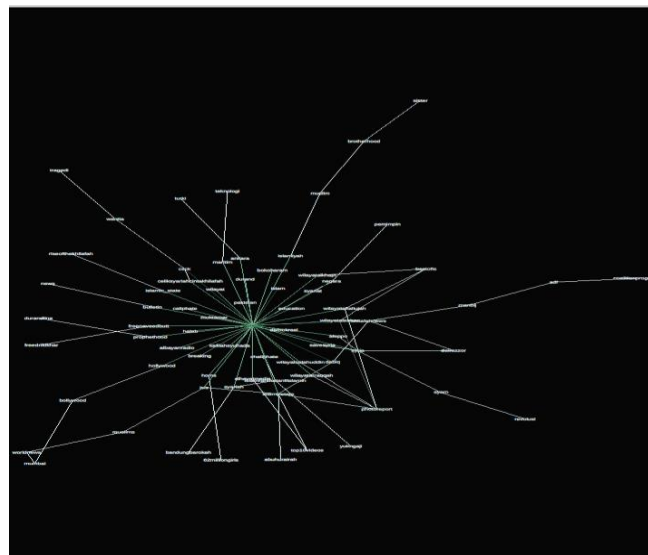


Fig.4.12. Graph of Coupled Hashtags with #khilafah

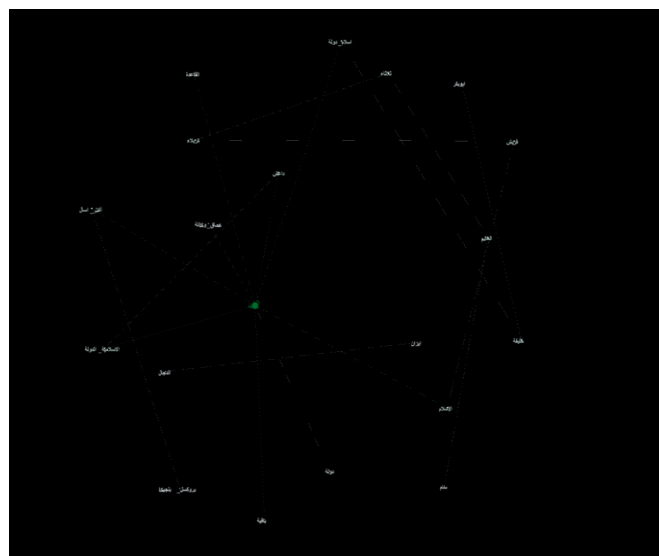


Fig.4.13. Graph of Coupled Hashtags with #خِلافة.

The average density is 0.0498 for #khilafah and 0.3275 for #خِلافة. The average numbers of connected hashtags were 78 for #khilafah and 12 for #خِلافة. The data collected shows that a more diverse employs the #khilafah. To delve into the densities, the data was subject to further categorization based on the Clauset-Newman-Moore formula, a computational algorithm that developed networks based on “clear communities within this network that correspond to specific topics” coupled with the application of grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967) to confirm the existence of hashtag networks (Zappagovina 2011).

#### **4.6. Hashtag Network Analysis – Bottom Up**

The removal of the centered nodes for #khilafah and #خِلافة Measuring the degrees, eigenvector centralities, and clustering coefficients drew these bottom-up metrics; thus, power and relational dynamics manifest. By drawing on the hashtags categories, it is clear that the most powerful coupled hashtags on the networks are #Syria for #khilafah and #سوريا on #خِلافة. The interpretations of the power dynamics still applies despite that no longer are nodes people, but are hashtags. Because hashtags are what connect the #khilafah or #خِلافة, it becomes possible to trace the routes of recruitment as a heuristic. It becomes clear that recruitment attempts take place on #khilafah, and not #خِلافة

The content of these hashtags are reflected in the Figures 4.14 and 4.15. The bar graph is chosen because of the coupling: these are percentages. The way coupling works is that they could be coupled all together or just separately. This thesis only accounts for coupling ratios as mutually exclusive categories, even though they could have been utilized all at once. Quantifiably, the hashtags are divided into Geography, Religion, Politics (English), Politics (non-English), Anti-IS politics, Western

Propaganda, and other not related. It is the not-related hashtags and Western propaganda that are used as heuristics to determine attempted recruitment.

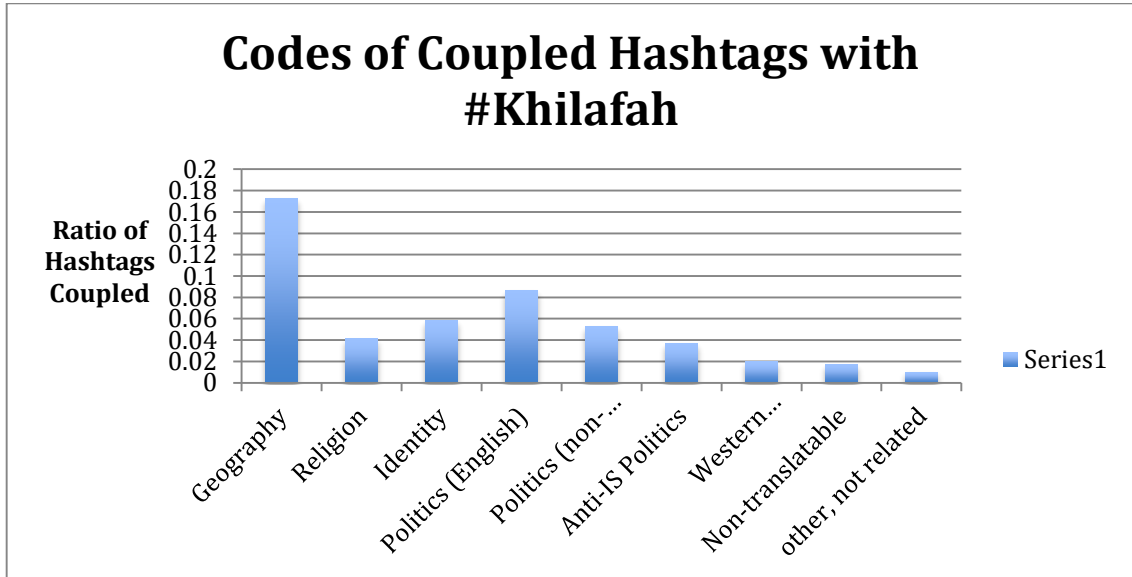


Fig.4.14. Ratio of Hashtags with #khilafah

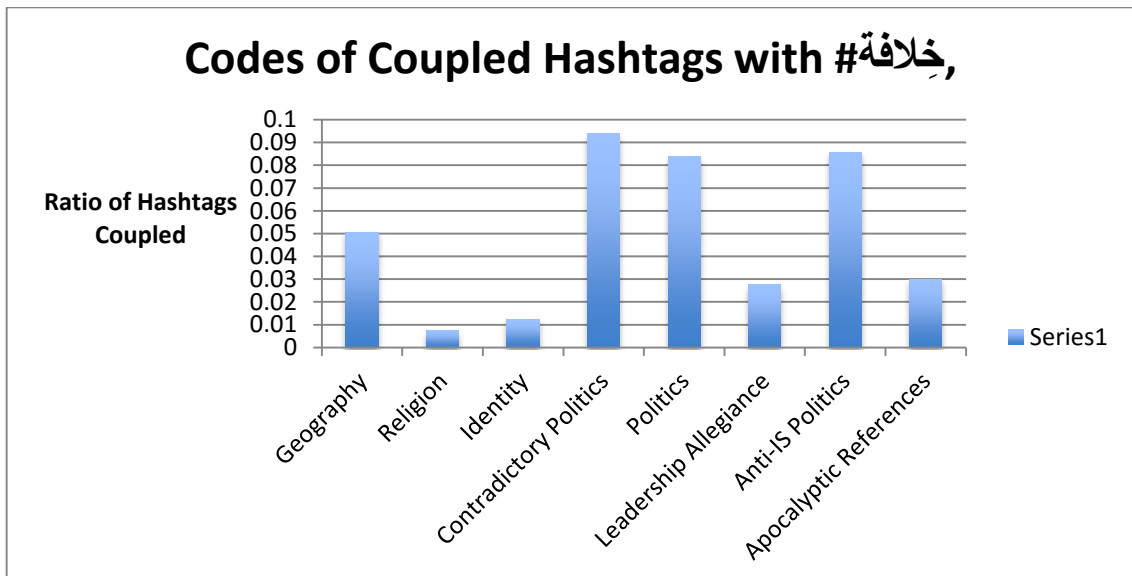


Fig.4.15. Ratio of Hashtags with #خِلافة

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA INTERPRETATION

The data interpretation is stratified in two forms of analysis. The first of which is the technological Social dynamics between members who sympathize with the IS and the non-Sympathizers, whom are labeled as Vigilantes. By definition, vigilantes are non-Law enforcement who wants to implement the law. The second part of the data interpretation is the themes that manifested from political and non-political dialogue of IS sympathizers. Vigilantes did not express a non-political dialogue. Moreover, to suggest that there was no deemed evidence of attempted recruitment would be academically dishonest. However, the number of times that it was accounted for was just as much as the number of times that nonpolitical dialogue took place. In fact, its power – closeness, betweenness, and eigenvector centralities - were in as much the same. This was measurable through the hashtag which corresponded with earlier literature and the Justin Bieber account. Recruitment is clearly a hashtagging practice; meanwhile vigilantism is mainly a user targeted practice. The subsequent chapter explores this phenomenon.

#### **5.1. How Do The Users of the Hasthag Tweet?**

##### ***5.1.1. Entrenched IS Sympathizing Communities***

Based on the data, the interpretation that is available falls under the existing literature. The low network densities supplemented by the bottom-up metrics of the degrees, closeness centralities, betweenness centralities, eigenvector centralities, and clustering coefficients illustrate the dynamisms of clustered communities. The bottom-

up metrics and the research then labeled political affiliations based on Zappavigna (2011) and political/non-political dialogue based on grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967) and the Clauset-Newman-Moore formula in both English and Arabic.

The previous literature found that people's online behavior and their networks are closed. Neither sympathizers nor even alleged members of the IS the disseminators transgressed from beyond their closed networks. If we are to observe that social networks as these limited groups, closed by external conditions like language and technology, it is people's socialization processes and positionality that influence people's interaction with members who transcended their networks.

Therefore, at most, if people who did identified with the IS engaged beyond their networks still exhibit interactions; these may be explained through the social psychological manifestations of Groupthink Concurrence-Seeking Tendency ( ). Groupthink is the psychological results of intense group ideological cohesion, where alternative discourses, narratives, paradigms, course of action are unwelcomed through both evasion and a lack of recognition ultimately influencing group-decision making processes. Competing ideological circumstances recognized and viciously challengeable, meanwhile the same or synonymous forms of the IS narratives and discourses are reinforced technologically. For the sympathizers interaction whether semantic or technological all fell under ideological discourses that they all shared. tweet, retweet, favorite, reply to interact with discourses like ie. West is bad or the Khilafah is the solution to all problems.

Although, this psychological phenomenon explains has application in the realm of social media. It explains why people rarely crossover beyond their own networks despite the shared ad hoc community of the hashtag: an opportunity and space for real political dialogue. Realistically, these sympathizer networks became so entrenched in

their political, geographic, and linguistic spaces where dialogue of any kind becomes reinforcement of their anecdotal and social paradigms within the group. The low densities, high clustering coefficients with longer - as opposed to a shorter – closeness centralities and higher – as opposed to smaller - betweenness centralities and stronger – rather than weaker – Eigenvector centralities that connect them to other nodes or subcommunities, especially to different political neighborhoods is evidence of this. What we have is in actually the ‘Small world Phenomena’ where it suggests exactly that. The large complex world of #khilafah and #خِلافة where sympathizers are just politically affiliated members of the same political identity whom mainly ideologically develop through the exchange of thoughts, reinforcement of social ties, creation of identities, and group decision making. Further research may delve into the mutually constituting processes of in/out group dynamisms in constructing identities.

### ***5.1.2. Vigilante Groups and the Paradoxical Power of Vigilantism***

The Small world Phenomena loses its “smallness” as a direct result of the dynamisms of powerful vigilante groups who utilize the platform as a means to condemn the ideologies and actions of the IS. Users janx53 and terror\_monitor on the #khilafah platform and abir7777 on the #خِلافة are some of the most prominent members of such political affiliations as evident by their relational bottom-up metrics, implying their involvement with actors transcends their clustered networks.

The vigilante groups target sympathizers and by doing such they also link sympathizers to the broader network. With high degrees, closeness centralities, and betweenness centralities, and strong eigenvector centralities they are on the forefront of users of #khilafah. The danger in the vigilantism process is that it is also politically correct. As mentioned before, the sympathizers of the #khilafah are politically incorrect,



void of real nuanced discussion the differences between Islamism in its Al-Qaeda vision and that of their known political adversaries – IS.

The identity politics and semantics embody geopolitical underpinnings. Under IS territory, by not addressing the official name IS it is punishable by death. Opponents to the IS oppose them in such a fashion, by utilizing nomenclature that undermines their legitimacy – ISIS, ISIL, DAESH. This decision of maintaining a politically incorrect to address them has been expressed by John Kerry, who explicitly refers them to DAESH as to continually undermine them and their legitimacy. This discourse also resonates with the media, and most people remain misinformed. In fact, arguably the media incessantly refers them to ISIS or DAESH, when even at the most fundamental level that is geographically inconsistent semantically. Vigilante groups do not fit this narrative. They are politically aware on #khilafah – and often times audaciously identify themselves as Kufar: the Arabic translation for heretics.

Yet, the vigilante groups express a political reality, and employ aggressive undertones when doing such. #Khilafah coupled with #DAESHBAGS – a ploy on the word “douchebag:” a female hygiene product referenced and culturally indicative of a pompous male. The melding of douchebags and DAESH, the English pejorative acronym ISIS, is used, at the very least, to instigate conversation as evident by the high number of out-degrees - the IS Sympathizer targets – and low clustering coefficients.

Other examples include #IPayMyJizyaWithAGlock47, which refers to the Jizya is the tax that belongs to non-Muslims when under a historical sharia-oriented governance and a Glock 47 is a hand-held gun. When used in such a fashion, the user implies that a Muslim is forcibly going to demand their payment of Jizya, and secondly, they would shoot, possibly even kill, the Muslim who demands it. These are examples of a larger aggressive technique who draw on language to critically and verbally attack

sympathizers of the IS. Their vigilante techniques target individuals, despite the fact that recruitment, propaganda, and virtual terrorism takes place through hashtags and not through users. These are ineffective, and generally counterproductive, methods at stopping terror or their sympathetic notions, as they would hope, and often times just are ignored – probably largely misunderstood due to the language barriers. I would like to address the fact that majority of the #khilafah users are from South Asia. Further information of this demographic is discussed in the section on Political disconnects between IS and its sympathizers.

Vigilante Users of #خلافة exhibited different interactive patterns. Opponents of the Islamic State manifested patterns were rarely aggressive, and rarely directed at users. They have low out-degrees, low betweenness centralities, and low eigenvectors. Arguably, their presence is negligible, almost non-existent. In fact, it was so miniscule, that it might have created a rift in the Yifan-hu algorithm, which is why we see two entirely separate networks in the graph.

Semantically, the Vigilante groups framed their language without the violent and aggressive undertones. A majority cited similar disenchantment with the global politics of Muslims, but posed questions to the proponents of #خلافة that could be visible attempts to deradicalize. Most of the questions were rhetorical, or manifested that way. The questions were of similar discourses such as the one as, “هل هذه هي الخلافة؟ هل الإسلام فعلا مطالبة العنف؟”. This presumably translates to this as “is this really the caliphate?” does Islam actually require the use of violence” Although, grammatically incorrect, it pinpoints and highlights the nuances in rhetorical questions that are prompting dialogue, and not contention. This might place space for a deradicalization process.

Although, the aggression on #khilafah is not moralized, what is perceived as dangerous is their political correctness. In fact, just by utilizing the respective hashtag as a platform to outreach to a particular audience illustrates their political awareness of the dialogue that exists with people who identify as IS and their opponents. As mentioned before, the vigilante groups put the IS sympathizers on the forefront of the dialogue as a method to expose the sympathizers. Even on some level they became the very “disseminators” of IS knowledge that they were hoping to take down. An example of this is the is during the Islamic Summit Conference during 16 March, 2016 who some IS sympathizers expressed solidarity with. Although IS’s official stance would be staunchly against it, that was not made aware until after the nuancing and categorization of Islamist groups by Vigilantes.

## **5.2. What is Being Said: Themes from Political Dialogue**

### ***5.2.1. The Political Disconnect from the IS Enterprise and Their Sympathizers***

This thesis examined Dabiq as an institutional tool that reflects the official IS’s ideologies, objectives, and a form of distributing knowledge. Because The Carter Center’s (2015) research on the recruitment strategies claims that Dabiq is a “compliment to Daesh’s social media campaign,” this paper found that in fact Dabiq is a staple in the IS enterprise, one where it is necessary in defining the IS as the mechanism its effort to propagate and recruit. Seibert *et al.* (2015) argument of the ideological disconnects between the entity it is and the sympathizers can be reaffirmed here.

Sympathizers simply identify with a community even though it is transnational and online. Dabiq Conversations and themes of the West, of other Islamist movements and even fellow muslims, even resonating did not have the same semantic undertones, violence, anger, hatred towards the non-Muslims and even Shias, who were rarely

addressed.

Most transnational discussion took place discussing their grievances and deaths with the situation in Syria through their expression and connection with the coupled hashtag. #Khilafah was outpoured and coupled with #SaveSyria. That is not to say they were expressing a politically motivated sentiment but much rather disheartened with the problems that were occurring in Syria, and only proposed the Khilafah as the solution.

Secondly, their situational circumstance advocated for a “glocalized” caliphate practice advocating for political systems where an Islamic state is the sole solution for politically disenfranchised and economically marginalized muslims in the South Asian countries. #Pakistan and #FreeNaveedBhutt were some of the more “glocalized” elements at the hashtag level. This “glocalization” conflict with the transnational stance that IS promotes in Dabiq. In fact, the use of the official IS hashtag explicitly asks for its use, was not coupled addressed to be used as explicitly stated in Dabiq, is not found, nor is it referenced. The hashtag proposed in the English issue was in *It was #أخبار\_الخلافة*, which was not even present in the Arabic platform. With its absence we should be able to infer of a disconnect between its official existence and its users who use the #khilafah as they do not read Dabiq.

### ***5.2.2. Transnationally Romantic***

A geographic depiction illustrates the social roots of the sense of Transnationalism. This sense of transnational ‘ummah’ is supposedly Arab, but its basis extends beyond any Arab, or even a western transnational Islamic community. This is evident by the fact that 27.54% #khilafah tweets are from South Asia: Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In part of that network, the larger part of the demographic came, from mainly women, from Indonesia and Malaysia, who stress the problematic

discourses presented in a Eurocentric vision of feminism that allegedly empowers objectification of women through the social freedoms of particular clothing attires.

These women like Muslimah\_htm and womenforkhilafa control the outpouring of political content. An exemplary use of #womenforkhilafah #khilafah, coupled specifically on #internationalwomensday was used. International Women's Day was on March 8, 2016. However, coupling of such hashtag was calculated for a heuristic of coopting the hashtag for their political agenda. Despite its common usage during the month of March, its relevance wide scale of hashtags cannot be considered as efficient recruitment because its practical non-impact, with low between centralities, low eigenvector centralities, low levels of closeness as a hashtag. Further analysis was delved into particular characters that dispose recruitment tendencies. Their transnational vision is not only linked a khilafah, but to an international community at large, except for one that empirically forgets the context of Iraq.

Although, not all women Regardless of the context from South Asia, this vision of the transnational 'umma' seems to almost neglect the #Iraqi context, appearing 13.4 times less than the Syrian counterpart. This is also evident by the frequented #CELIKSYARIAHCINTAKHILAFAH and #CSCK its acronym transliteration that references Syria. Although, its meaning is not understood, its coupling with #Syria and #khilafah make it clear their vision corresponds with a khilafah in Syria; moreover, by failing to utilize a similar hashtag for Iraq. Although the actual meaning of what is being said is not addressed, but the fact that its existence one without the synonymous for Iraq is evident that a transnational identification mainly exists with Syria.

Although, many members under this category felt the need to stress how the Khilafah would solve their the systematic and cultural problems they face, the notion of hijrah was neglected, unlike in Dabiq where it is clearly overemphasized as the solution

–as an active effort to convince people to make the unidirectional migration to the Levant. They neglect the Dabiq always coupled promoting Hijra with a doctrinal fear, where fear was not even a technique utilized online.

### **5.3. What Is Being Said: Themes from Apolitical Dialogue**

The literature that finds that terrorists rarely participate in questionably legal or unethical online behavior can also be extended to include their sympathizers who remain in their embedded networks. Interestingly enough, non-political dialogue did exist on a heavily political platform, both technologically inclined (Citation needed) and as the politically motivated ad hoc community it is.

#### **5.3.1. Food**

Two findings which conflict the operational studies narratives of which they produced are the notion of Food and Sex slavery amongst users on #khilafah. First off, Klausen's (2015) assertion that the image of the IS soldier holding a carton of Nutella is a tool for propaganda is undermined by the number of tweets that actually reference food, found above, even in both language platforms. Their (2015) presumption was taken was that because Nutella is beloved by a Western public, it is a mechanism to attract people to the IS who should not feel worried about their previous luxuries. However, the fact remains that the discussion of food did not have pronouncements of powerful dialogue, were quite common, and remained embedded in the more routine in closed networks that existed mainly in the Levant. Without alleging, we can assume that it is these tweets were actual members, are under the territory of which on the geotagging features. Discussion of food was also found in Arabic, but to a much lesser

extent. If utilizing the hashtag as a medium for propaganda, they would have used food related semantics coupled this hashtag for its relatively weaker connection to other hashtags or networks.

### ***5.3.2. Love and Companionship***

Moreover, another finding was the expression of tweets that expressed desires for love, intimacy, and companionship and did not fall under the discussion of Sex slavery. This is in contrast to one of the justifications of sex slavery mentioned in Dabiq by Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhajirah. Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhajirah writes the idea in her piece titled, "Slave-Girls or Prostitutes". The idea was to legitimize the idea of sex slavery as announced in her statement, "The right hand's possession (mulk al-yamīn) are the female captives who were separated from their husbands by enslavement. They became lawful for the one who ends up possessing them even without pronouncement of divorce by their harbī husbands." This finding corresponds with the public claim and previous research that perceive the members or even their sympathizers as "empty", or "unfulfilled" (Seibert *et al.* 2015) – filled with emotional vulnerabilities.

This finding on the emotional vulnerabilities, ie. Loneliness, is also indicative of counterterrorism techniques used by Counterterrorism agencies. Recently, there has been recent exposure that some FBI techniques used to entrap Muslims into becoming loyal IS sympathizers. FBI agents posed as women and were "honeypotting" men to join the IS. Both Western Counterterrorism Agencies and IS ploy on these emotional vulnerabilities for political agendas. This form of seductive entrapment exploited these feelings and desires for companionship ultimately to push the men to pledge allegiance to the official IS organization.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. General Remarks

The evidence presented on how dialogue takes place and what the dialogue consists of is only a small part of the overall academic discussion necessary to understand the IS phenomena. The understanding of the IS and their sympathizers on social media through their content without real understanding of communication dynamisms has espoused a void in the literature, which this thesis aimed to expose and address. It is part of that narrowed focus to concentrate solely on the IS and their sympathizers without taking a step back and looking at the whole technological structure. Arguably, the content of a political tweet as a form of propaganda, recruitment or virtual terrorism is irrelevant if it does not, or weakly, travels across networks, which is what this research found. Moreover, this thesis explored the dialogue that is considered non-political to find that it in fact does exist on highly political networks from highly political people. De facto, defensive aspiration for counter terrorism wants to label this dialogue as homogenously political and predisposed through religion. It is not necessarily the case as the non-political dialogue that is found is the process of transnational community “ummah” building (Seibert *et al.* 2015) – an Imagined Community (Anderson) - discussed on a shared ad hoc platform (Zappagivna 2015).

Possibly a limitation, but the data collected comes at a time when the Islamic Caliphate both virtually and offline is on a serious decline. Since last year, Twitter has shut down over 125,000 profiles that are allegedly terroristic. Meanwhile, Iraqi, Syrian,



and Kurdish military campaigns accompanied with the coalition of airstrikes continue to make strides in their fight against the grounded IS. Moreover, a member of the Google Scholar Group “Sociology of Islam” highlights that their “fear factor” - cinematic appeal- is dwindling making it difficult to even express associations or sympathies with them. Additionally, their “virtualness” as part of the “Virtual Caliphate” is migrating from the surface web to the depths of the deep web. Even that is diminishing due to the instability of the deepweb and insecurity and misguidance for the public to access it. The “War on Terror” and even the “War on CyberTerror” campaigns begs the question of defining what the IS actually is through its promising defeat. Certain technological features cause the consequences of anti-terror campaigns at the huge cost to Muslims and an even including a newer face of online marginalization of non-Muslim women whose names are ISIS.<sup>1</sup>

The notion put forward by academic and public discourse on IS’s capabilities to export recruit, or promote propaganda, are really just empowered by the anti-CyberTerror campaigns. This scholarship that their ideology is effectively, and efficiently exportable is undermined by the fact that IS has only drawn in 21,000 foreign fighters: a marginal fraction of the greater Muslim Ummah, largely of whom use the internet and were not radicalized. Moreover, most of the national Arab and even transnational fighters have a history of fighting really on a path for continuing their warring like attitudes. In fact, IS’s official transnational connections to other terrorist groups are nominal and linked together in through a technological politic. In the grand scheme, not a substantial number have joined through an online experience in aspiration for a newer religious venture.

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<sup>1</sup> ISIS is the name of an Egyptian Goddess. In effort to fight terrorism, Facebook has shut down many users whose names happen to be ISIS. There even has been an active fight to reclaim the name from the group.

This is why I conclude that the operational studies discourse is problematic, especially when defining what the Islamic State actually is. To define it, this thesis went against the operational studies literature of solely defining the IS through what is most transparent: religion with strong communication skills. As mentioned in the literature review, under the operational studies paradigm, scholarship placed the IS as employers of a 4<sup>th</sup> wave of terrorism: a religious form with a modern component of strong communication platforms. Kaplan & Costa (2015) address practical and systematic nuances and ultimately identifying them in a unique category of 5<sup>th</sup> wave of terrorism.

There are academic nuances that transcend operational studies, but still remain suggesting religion is the root cause. Ahmad Moussali further nuances the terrorism studies stratifications, but still presumes that IS is embedded in religion. Moussali's comparison of IS to Wahhabism comes with the assumption that Wahhabism is inherently religious (Moussali 2009), which in of itself is contestable. Moussali states, "I don't say they are not coming out of Islamic tradition that would be denying facts. But their interpretation is unusual, literal sometimes, very much like the Wahhabis" (Muir 2016). Both of Moussali's analysis and operational studies paradigm suggests terrorism is rooted in Islam and linked to Wahhabism, an ideological product of Saudi Arabia (Alvi 2014).

It is hard for me to defend such an epistemological approach because of the data that was found. There was a strong political disconnect between IS and their sympathizers. This disconnect is a signifier that ideology, through propaganda/virtual terrorism/recruitment, is not as easily exportable as the operational studies of terrorism would suggest. IS and their sympathizers maintain strict rigidity to remain grounded vis-à-vis demarcated online networks resonates on the political tweets and connecting hashtags ad hoc community which do not reflect the universalist ideological values at

large. Moreover, the disconnect is indicative of the fact if the message not received as intended. If an ideology is acculturated, was the initial ideology – at its essence – ever universalist?

Some sociologists on Sociology of Islam on Google Scholar confide in this idea that they are a Global Revolutionary movement that ploy the transnational rhetoric but have no real ties to utilize it. They seem to suggest that a theoretical level this ideology is Universalist, but in all practicality it remains local. A member suggests that it is partly because of their weakening capabilities to export their own brand, draw in serious recruiting numbers, and the closed locality of their territory, of which IS once branded as the Iraq and Syria.

If the IS have weak transnational ties, and even weaker communication platforms, I contest the idea they fall under a 4<sup>th</sup> wave of terrorism. In fact, the data can be interpreted to suggest as being labeled as a quasi-Nationalist, or ideologically closer to a 3<sup>rd</sup> wave. Not to suggest that religion and nationalism are mutually exclusive, however, if scholarship wants to measure the levelness of each, my understanding is that it the IS maintains a nationalist stance that prevails through religious discourse. Realistically, this debate is a “Is a Zebra black with white stripes or white with black stripes” and transcends the scope of this thesis.

Contesting strong communication comes with the data. Contesting religion/Wahhabism as the source of the problem can be constructed through an anthropological/sociological literature. Habib (1978) asserts that the Saudi State-Building process was contingent on a form of tribalism: The Bedouin Ikhwan of Najd. This is not an original motion put forward because Pritchard (1949) also witnessed an “Islamic” radicalized Nation-State building process that was foundationally rooted in Tribalism. Arguably, both movements built Nation-States from their tribal cultures

using a “terrorist” religious discourse. Abualrab & Mencke (2003) takes it a step further in suggesting that Wahhabi discourse is a nationalist discourse that was anti-Ottoman, anti-British, and slightly Arabist, similar in the early rise of Jamal Abdul-Nasser’s anti-Colonialist process and formation, but not ideology. Regardless of roots for a radicalization process and the culturally weak exportation, the conceptual products should be delinked from what is being perceived as Wahhabism, and thus Islam. Extending on Edward’s (2015) philosophy, the culture that manifests amongst the IS is unrecognizable to its cultural origins of Wahhabism. I therefore, appreciate, Moussali’s “like Wahhabism,” and not calling it Wahhabism itself. Yet, I propose we take it a step further and not make the ideological comparison because the Contemporary Saudi Wahhabism and the IS just too dissimilar in their social manifestations.

The purpose of the contestation of this discourse is twofold: to dissuade a discourse that has alleged it is the main product of Saudi cultural/religious hegemony (Alvi 2014) and to dissuade the discussion from furthered “hypercriminalization” of Muslims. When academic scholarship remotely links IS to Wahhabism or under any Islamic umbrella, the solution becomes targeting Islamic undertones and any ideology that contains a Wahhabi spirit.

My goal was simple. It was to decouple Islam, Wahhabism, and the IS because the labels Wahhabi/Salafi/terrorists have become interchangeable lexicons for a Muslim who is against a particular dominant policy orientation and is against the prevailing Nation-State discourse dominated by Western hegemony. Meanwhile the American domestic/foreign policy solutions continue to hypercriminalize the “mini” terrorists like IS and their sympathizers, especially pertaining discourse of social media recruitment. In doing such, the United States and an operational studies paradigm incessantly continues to shift the discussion away from the real “Islamic” terrorists like the Muslim,

Secularist State actors in the Middle East and the despotic Gulf Regimes whose regimes are equipped with the monitoring capabilities to stop it. Moreover, I would also extend this argument to include it is of a sad devout negligence and a scapegoat of responsibility to recognize the role American foreign policy that has played as a strong perpetrator of such terrorism in the first place. To be clear, the IS are not perceived as part of the “Freedom Fighters” discourse against the West. They embody the very inorganic, imported, and Colonialist attitudes; employing heinous techniques irrelevant to their cause; in hopes of international recognition of their nation-state (Lutai 2015), - the Islamic “State” - a very enclosed and rigid “bakkiya” perception of their defined geography of Iraq and the Levant.

This thesis situates itself amongst the academic realms of Sociology of Islam on Google Scholar group and Mandour (2015), which challenges the fact their existence belongs to solely religious component. The Western/Eastern binary that both Western discourse and the IS draw and attempt to challenge the existing literature. This thesis observed that this relational sociology is also triangulated with the themes and forms of relational discussion, ie to the West and East, available in Dabiq, where this paper found that in fact very little remnants otherwise existed. In terms of the vigilantism on Twitter, I suggest that everyday users no longer use it as a political platform to harvest any type emotion towards the IS sympathizers. This needs to be linked to broader academic and social circles, where we shift the political dialogue - but not the humanitarian one - to no longer scapegoat the geopolitical conditions of which created and continues to fuel IS’s existence.

## **6.2. Limitations**

The largest limitations to this proposed methodology is that it lacks

generalizability. First off, using twitter as the sole platform for collecting data as a representative of social media serves multiple purposes, but it has little power for generalization. The main purpose for using twitter is the sui generis and highly engaging hashtag. However, the hashtag interaction is unique in of its own, and is not even reflective of the phenomena on the largest social media site: Facebook. Facebook does, but not in its cultural functionality, not utilize a hashtag feature, but instagram does. Additionally, the terrorist interactions of tweet, retweet, or reply, revolving around the hashtag itself is not a means of representing interactions on other forms of social media. Although, all social media platforms have the similar interface to comment, like, share, and reply, the fact that twitter has a central point, the hashtag, for engagement distinguishes itself.

Another limitation of the data is the tool used to acquire the data: NodeXL. The tweet collector NodeXL, is a ‘snapshot’ of a certain time period – it is not constantly updated (Hansen *et al.* 2010). The moment the service is utilized is at that moment it collects the population. Regardless of whether the entire population of #Khilfah or # خلافة is collected, with the dynamic of the Internet being as it is, more people tweet with the hashtag than the sample that NodeXL captured. NodeXL does not accommodate for furthered use of the hashtag. In the same context, NodeXL creates patterns and trends through the scope of one hashtag: #Khilafah and # خلافة , which I deemed the pivotal point worthy of study. It is the central point of study, but may not be reflective of any real interaction. For one, it is different than #Ummah, and so are the political claims, which might influence modes of interaction.

Additionally, in its performance, it has been harshly criticized (Driscoll & Walker 2014). In their research, they compared the acquiring data of both freeware applications and other private third-party application: Gnip. Gnip was significantly

more capable of acquiring the data and recognizing certain patterns, trends, and linking the quantitative information (Driscoll & Walker 2014). In partnership with Twitter, Gnip sells this information, but at an exuberantly high price, which is even unaffordable to the researcher with funding (Driscoll & Walker 2014). The research of Hansen *et al.* (2010) also found that NodeXL is somewhat weaker in performing the tasks it is proposed that it can do, especially with foreign-language hashtags.

Another limitation occurs the moment the constricting of the population parameter of #Khilafah and # خلافة to a non-random sample revolving around the mere numbers of days of based on a political context. It cannot be assumed that the non-random sample is reflective of the grander interactional phenomena that constantly occur through social media. Additionally, it is clear that even today that the #Khilafah and # خلافة for a while had been hijacked by the adversaries because the hashtags tweeted by the proponents for the Islamic State have shifted to their self-identified hashtag of to avoid trolling, coopting, and even the ever so recent Anonymous hacks that made them lose their online grounding and credibility.

I thus acknowledge all of these limitations and one should also add that of his positionality. Using the lens of grounded theory, I will be unintentionally bringing my thoughts, biases, and even worldview into the analysis (St. Pierre & Jackson 2014). The studying the scope of terrorism on social media is too large for a MA thesis; I personally chose one that is relevant geopolitically, and personally as a Syrian, a personal decision to understand the IS and their supporters. The IS does exist, but its stronghold is known to be in Syria, and although I am not quick to condemn their actions, I will do so because of the official organizations crimes that they have committed.

Yet, there are many other hashtags that reflect Islamic terrorists and their claims to political institutions. Some include #JabhatAl-Nusra, as a reflection of Al-

Qaeda religious politics or #Boko Haram as a particular segment of the IS. However, I was not limited to Islamic claimed modes of terrorism, but as an adherent to Islam it was also definitely a strong motivator to nuance the discussion and expose it.

Additionally, in context of the hashtags and tweets and applying NodeXL, it is impossible to calculate for all various forms of hashtags and tweets that I could begin with. Not only is the Internet infinitely deep, it is also infinitely wide as a result of human creativity and agency. Hypothetically speaking, if people creatively appropriate new nuanced hashtags to reference the IS, it is impossible to decipher for all of the ways they do it in the future, which essentially renders the data set incomplete because of the growing dynamic of the Internet. #Khilafah has many associative forms, from both sides, which may not be reached by snowballing. Interaction and dialogue would decrease the further the hashtag becomes constrained to the initial viewing by the limited 'follower/followee' relationship.



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