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Paratexts as gatekeepers in online global jihadist translation – The narrative of a blog-based Arabic translation of *Dabiq*

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Abstract

Translation has played a pivotal role in disseminating global jihadist propaganda online from the declaration of global jihad in the late 1990s to its recent manifestation in 2014 with the emergence of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This paper contends that paratextual frames have a significant role in mediating the ideologically charged messages of global jihadist to diverse communities and when contexts change. The article investigates the gatekeeping function of paratexts within a blog-based Arabic translation of ISIS's English magazine *Dabiq* (AZIZ8178 2016a). Drawing upon narrativity (Somers & Gibson 1993; Bruner 1991; Baker 2006a), the translations published in a blog, *AZIZ8178's* are scrutinized to explore the paratextual interventions that frame translated narratives. The results pinpoint a deliberate selection of articles for translation that aligns with the shifting circumstances faced by ISIS on the ground. Moreover, *AZIZ8178's* Arabic version of *Dabiq* is shown to construct a narrative centered on identity, emphasizing internal conflicts and divisions within contemporary Arab communities. It is posited that *AZIZ8178's* paratexts familiarize ISIS radical doctrines within the sociopolitical fabric, potentially inciting fanaticism among the targeted Arabic-speaking audience. The visibility and autonomy of the translator become evident in the paratextual elements of signatures and footnotes, eliciting his jihadist stance.

Keywords: Jihadist translation, paratext, framing, gatekeeping, narrative theory, ISIS

1. Introduction

In 2014, the resurgence of the global jihadism threat was marked by the emergence of the self-branded Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an extremist faction branching off from *al-Qaeda*. This group declared the establishment of what they claimed to be an Islamic caliphate. The dissemination of ISIS's doctrines and positions across the world has heavily relied on multilingual online propaganda disseminated by media affiliates of ISIS or those ideologically aligned with the group. Scholarship across a variety of disciplines, including political science, geopolitics, security studies, and media and communication, has engaged in discussions regarding the digital propaganda campaigns of global jihadists (Torres, Jordán & Horsburgh 2006; Lia 2007; Lieberman 2017). Moreover, researchers (e.g., Gemeah 2016; Ingram 2018; Gatt 2020) have undertaken analyses of the linguistic and discursive features of global jihadist propaganda (texts, audio, visual), as well as the narratives they convey. Nevertheless, while global jihadists label translation as an integral part of their mission (Brachman 2009, 127), the role of translation in mediating their extremist ideology has received relatively limited attention within scholarly discussions.

While scholars (Hijjo & Kaur 2017; Bazzi 2019; Colas 2019; Hijjo & Almann 2022) have addressed translation within the context of global jihadism, their focus has been rather specific. Bazzi (2019), for instance, examined the use of transliteration in jihadist discourse, contending that Arabic Islamic terms are left deliberately non-translated in ISIS English propaganda due to their loaded political and historical significance (7). Colas (2019) argued that English translations of often-transliterated jihadist terms fail to convey the nuanced connotations understood and experienced by jihadist groups. Using dynamic equivalence, he proposed redefinitions for ten jihadi concepts, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive lexicon of jihadist terms. On the other hand, Hijjo and Kaur (2017) and Hijjo and Almann (2022) elucidated the paratextual and textual reframing that takes place in the English media translation of Arabic editorials concerning *Daesh* (ISIS). However, a notable gap exists in the literature regarding online jihadist translation practices. This gap encompasses the agency of translators in advancing the jihadist ideology, their criteria for selecting articles for translation

across languages, and how they frame jihadist material, factoring in the cultural nuances of each target language. This paper seeks to contribute to the extant literature by investigating a case of online jihadist translation: the translation of ISIS's prominent English magazine *Dabiq* (Clarion Project n.d.) into Arabic. It aims to provide a closer examination of how paratextual frames authored by translators play a role in mediating ISIS's radical beliefs to Arabic-speaking communities.

Dabiq, an electronic magazine published originally in English by the ISIS media affiliate *al-Hayāt* (2014–2016), addresses a global audience. It holds significance not only for introducing the new face of global jihad (ISIS), distinct from the founding group al-Qaeda (as discussed in detail in section 2), but also for its launch coinciding with the declaration of an alleged Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq in 2014. The English electronic magazine serves as a key propaganda tool for ISIS, disseminating articles on the principles and laws applied within its purported caliphate, the beliefs and doctrines embraced by its members, as well as detailing the attacks and targets of this extremist group. All of this is grounded in the radical ideological conceptualization of Islam adopted by the group, which challenges the moderate concepts endorsed by established mainstream Islamic religious institutions (as observed by the Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism n.d.). To lend authenticity and legitimacy to its radical ideology, *Dabiq* selectively employs fragments of Islamic scripture and tradition without contextualization (Toguslu 2019, 101). Jacoby (2019) outlined *Dabiq's* cherry-picking of Quranic verses, its focus on a limited selection of classical Islamic scholars, and its denunciation of all contemporary religious authorities. Such fragmentation and selectivity give rise to understandings that contradict established interpretations (*tafsir*) of Islamic texts, framing ISIS's version of Islam as the only valid one. Regarding the selective use of the Arabo-Islamic tradition in ISIS discourse, Gatt (2020, 15) suggests that the "selective reconstruction of intertextualities, religious citations, and historical references" arguably legitimizes ISIS's existence and *modus operandi*.

In mid 2016, an online blog named *AZIZ8178* (2016a) emerged, publishing Arabic translations of a selection (61 articles) of *Dabiq* English issues. These translations, aside from the blog, have been disseminated through various online channels,

including social media platforms and free content-sharing websites. This paper contends that the paratexts of *AZIZ8178* embody gatekeeping practices for *Dabiq's* content, enacted by their translator into Arabic. The paratextual elements are identified based on Gerard Genette's (1997) concept of paratextuality, encompassing any peritextual or epitextual element influencing the perception of the text. *AZIZ8178's* paratexts introduce ISIS's radical beliefs and doctrines in new frames designed to resonate with contemporary Arab communities at the time of posting the translations. Additionally, it is posited that these paratextual translational interventions shed light on the agency and autonomy of the jihadist translator(s) involved.

A descriptive qualitative analysis of the paratextual elements is conducted, aligning with the four defining features of narrativity from a sociological perspective (Somers & Gibson 1993; Bruner 1991; Baker 2006a). This analysis aims to address the main research question (M-RQ): How do the paratexts of *AZIZ8178's* online translations of *Dabiq* reframe the mediated jihadist narratives for the Arabic-speaking audiences? Four sub-research questions (S-RQ) are explored in response to the central inquiry: How did the temporal and spatial configuration of the blog posts contribute to reframing the Arabic translations (S-RQ1)? How did the Arabic-language paratexts (re)prioritize and (re)organize the contents of the English magazine (S-RQ2)? What kind of alterations resulted from the paratextual interventions in terms of the plot narrated in Arabic compared to the English magazine (S-RQ3)? Given the active role played by jihadist translators in promoting the jihadist ideology, what are the paratexts that signify the positioning of the translator(s) in *AZIZ8178* blog (S-RQ4)?

The paper commences with a contextualization of the case study, providing an overview of global jihadism concerning agents, online propaganda, and multilingualism (section 2). Then, it proceeds to outline the theoretical framework and methods employed, including a review of the socio-narrative theory in translation studies and the concept of (re)framing (section 3). Finally, the paper analyzes the paratexts accompanying *AZIZ8178's* Arabic translations of *Dabiq*, examining how they (re)frame the mediated narratives (section 4). The paper concludes by summarizing the findings from the analysis of the paratexts,

acknowledging the limitations and discussing future research opportunities within this domain.

2. Global jihadism: Agents, online propaganda, and multilingualism

Linguistically, the Arabic word *jihād* is derived from the root *jhd* and “means to strive, to exert oneself, to struggle . . . an endeavor towards a praiseworthy aim” (Peters 2016, 1). In classical Islamic literature, there are two types of jihad: the *smaller* jihad pertaining to armed combat or the use of force against adversaries, and the greater jihad involving the inner struggle against one’s evil inclinations (*al-nafs*) (2016, 1).

Over the centuries, the concept of jihad, particularly in its martial form, has evolved from early Islam to premodern and modern eras. Consequently, the term has undergone redefinitions and reinterpretations, adapting to contemporary socio-political contexts. In this paper, *jihadism* “refers to a certain form of Islamic social movement—deterritorialized and loosely connected through an ideology—that employs a heterodox form of jihad as a mean to fight secular democratic influences and to assert fundamentalists beliefs” (Armborst 2009, 51–52). Key terms in this definition include “Islamic social movement,” “heterodox form of jihad,” and “fundamentalist.” The first indicates the presence of an ideological agenda seeking social or political transformation, grounded in an assumed connection with Islamic principles, particularly jihad. However, the form of jihad embraced is heterodox, deviating from the classical mainstream conception of jihad and adopting a rather fundamentalist stance—signifying the third key word in this definition—that limits jihad to fight or violence. Extremist groups following this radical or militant interpretation of jihad began to emerge in the late 1970s, adopting principles and doctrines rooted in the legacy of ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb, Mohammed Faraj, and Abdallah Azzam (Armborst 2009, 52).

Adopting this same fundamentalist ideology, al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden declared global jihad in the late 1990s by issuing a “declaration of war against Christians and Jews throughout the world” (Rubin & Rubin 2008, 269).

This jihadist current conceptualizes jihad as “the physical, violent form of struggle, to resist what they see as cultural, economic, military, and political assaults from outside the ummah [the Islamic Nation] and oppression and injustice within” (Knapp 2013, 93). Global jihad marked a significant shift in jihadist objectives: (1) the reorientation of the traditional Salafi conception of jihad, which once aligned with the West, particularly the United States, against Soviet communism and secular Arab nationalism, to antagonism with the West; (2) the transition from focusing on the near enemy to targeting the far enemy; and (3) the expansion of their operational scope from a localized theater to a global arena (International Crisis Group 2005, 16).

The use of multilingual propaganda has been pivotal in advancing and disseminating the global jihadist ideology. With the advent of modern information and communication technologies, global jihadists have engaged in various forms of online militaristic practices, what Bunt (2003) labelled *e-jihad* or the digital sword. These practices encompass activities such as hacking, propagandizing specific worldviews, and utilizing technological tools for logistics and strategic intelligence (Bunt 2003, 26). Over time, global jihadist web media arms have transitioned from hierarchical organizational structures to autonomous networks and voluntary anonymous sympathizers (Lia 2007, 2). The internet has provided them with an unregulated and boundless platform to “craft and disseminate propaganda through seemingly limitless numbers of websites and social media platforms” (Lieberman 2017, 95). These online mediums “were useful not only in terms of recruitment and for the purpose of internal consumption . . . but could be used to transmit a version of events different from that offered by the mass media from the other side of the battlefield” (Torres, Jordán & Horsburgh 2006, 412).

As part of their propaganda campaigns, various global jihadist leaders and affiliated media outlets have called for participation in translation practices. The acquisition of language skills and recruitment of jihadist translators has been deemed essential by jihadist leaders for the success of global jihadist propaganda. For instance, in his call to establish a unified Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) in 2004, Ahmed al-Wathiq Billah listed language skills and translation teams among the qualities and types of people needed for creating such front,

stating: “[t]hose with language skills who can form Jihadi translation teams and help the Global Islamic Media Front to reach more people in more languages” (qtd. in Brachman 2009, 127). The importance of translation in global jihadist propaganda is further underlined in an essay authored by Gharib al-Diyar, another jihadist propagandist who is likely associated with GIMF (qtd. in Brachman 2009, 135). This essay, entitled “The Media Sword Campaign: How Can I Participate? What Can I Do? And What Is My Role?,” encourages “anyone with language skills to help provide translation services” (135–136). Jihadist translations have been undertaken collectively or individually by jihadist propaganda channels (such as al-Qaeda affiliated *al-Sahāb*, *Ansār Al-Mujāhideen* English Forum (AMEF), *Fursān el-Balāgh*) or by independent agents (including sympathizers and supporters). These efforts have resulted in the dissemination of jihadist material in numerous languages, including English, German, Urdu, French, Russian, Pashto, Arabic, and Turkish.

Amid the socio-political landscape following the Iraq war (2003–2011) and the uncertainty prevailing in the wake of the Arab Spring (2010–2011), a new, more aggressive face of global jihad appeared in 2014 with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Levant (ISIL or ISIS, as commonly known in foreign media, or *Dā’sh*, as known in Arabic)—a splinter group of al-Qaeda. In contrast to the decentralized revolutionary approach of al-Qaeda, ISIS adopted a State-building strategy that relied on brutal acts of violence and expanded its list of adversaries to include external forces and internal entities, even Muslim groups and regimes (Arosoaie 2015; Gemeah 2016; Wright 2016). On the front of online propaganda, ISIS represents the third generation of the global jihad movement, utilizing cutting-edge communications technology, including websites and social media accounts, and employing media production with cinematic effects. Additionally, they have leveraged various languages to disseminate their message (Lieberman 2017, 104). ISIS-affiliated and aligned online media channels (such as *al-Hayāt*, *al-Furqān*, *al-Itisam*, *al-Ajnād*, *al-Battār*, *A’māq*), as well as its members and sympathizers, have played a significant role in disseminating multilingual content (videos, audios, digital magazines, and songs/*nashīds*), through various social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, and Tumblr (El-Araby 2016; Site Intelligence Group 2011). These media arms have broadcasted

and published content in nearly 35 languages, as reported by the US-based independent research organization Wilson Center in 2016 (Wright 2016, 16–17).

One of the most influential propaganda publications of ISIS is the English-language magazine *Dabiq*—a focal point of investigation in this paper. Replacing earlier, shorter, and more informal publications (ISN,¹ISR²), *Dabiq* was first published by *al-Hayāt* Media Center, in Ramadan 1435 (July 2014) (Haršányová & Hrušovský 2017, 7)—immediately following the declaration of the Islamic caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi³ in June 2014. The propaganda magazine serves as a primary source for understanding ISIS’s ideology, strategies, doctrines, adversaries, and operations. It also plays a pivotal role in recruiting foreign combatants and inflaming hostilities, including incitements to violence against fellow Muslims. The significance of the name of the magazine and its core aims were explicitly articulated in its inaugural issue as follows:

After a review of some of the comments received on the first issues of Islamic State News and Islamic State Report, *Al-Hayat* Media Center decided to carry on the effort – in sha’allah – into a periodical magazine focusing on issues of tawhid, manhaj, hijrah, jihad, and jama’ah.

It will also contain photo reports, current events, and informative articles on matters related to the Islamic State . . .

As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named *Dabiq* in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was mentioned in a Hadīth describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English). One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near *Dabiq*. (*Dabiq*, issue 1, 3)

¹ Islamic State News (ISN): three short issues published by ISIS in Shaban 1435 (June 2014) covering mainly military operations (Ingram 2018, 6–7).

² Islamic State Report (ISR): followed ISN. Four ISR issues were published in Shaban 1435 (June 2014) featuring “more detailed reporting” and extending coverage to include not only operations in the field, but also “strategic, operational and jurisprudential logic driving them” (Ingram 2018, 8).

³ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: born in Iraq under name Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri, declared as ISIS’s Caliph in June 2014, previously served as Emir of Islamic State in Iraq, an offshoot of al-Qaeda, and founder of Jamaat Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamaah (Counter Extremism Project n.d.).

The title *Dabiq* holds a symbolic significance, referring to the Syrian town where, according to one of Prophet Muhammad's sayings, the ultimate apocalyptic battle will unfold (*Hadīth*). Additionally, this location carries historical significance as it was the site of a significant Ottomans victory over the Mamluks in 1516, a victory that paved the way for the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Arab territories (Dar Al-Ifta n.d.). The choice of this name for the magazine serves as a deliberate linguistic tool employed by ISIS to assert its authenticity and historical entitlement to establish and lead its purported Islamic caliphate.

Dabiq magazine, comprising 15 issues with page counts ranging from approximately 40 to 80 pages each, was published between Ramadan 1435 (July 2014) and Shawwal 437 (July 2016). These issues covered various phases of the group's history, spanning "from the announcement of its so-called caliphate and the zenith of its territorial gains through a period of ultimately devastating resource, personnel and territorial losses" (Ingram 2018, 12). The magazine was primarily disseminated through social media, web forums, blogs, and free filesharing platforms.⁴ In addition to the English editions of the magazine, certain issues of *Dabiq* were published in other languages such as Arabic, German, Russian, and French, either by *al-Hayāt* Media Centre or other ISIS-affiliated channels.

Notably, at least three issues of *Dabiq* (specifically 4, 5, and 6) were released in Arabic in late 2014 and 2015 by the ISIS-aligned media arm known as the *al-Battār* Media Foundation. Nevertheless, various online jihadist collectives or individuals took an interest in translating the magazine's articles into Arabic. One such online translation effort, *AZIZ8178* blog's Arabic translations of *Dabiq*, is the focus of investigation in this paper. *AZIZ8178* presents a curated selection and translation of *Dabiq* articles into Arabic, featuring new framing and altered prioritization. This case study is particularly noteworthy due to its relevance in

⁴ The English version of *Dabiq* was also offered for sale in Amazon online stores between May and June 2015, but was then suspended after the retailer removed the content from its website (Masi 2015).

shedding light on the gatekeeping role of paratexts in mediating the jihadist message. Additionally, the study of this case offers insights into the distinctions between structured and autonomous jihadist media/translation networks, a topic previously explored by Lia (2007).

Section 3 below offers a discussion of the theoretical framework used for the analysis of the case study selected.

3. Reframing narratives in translation

The socio-narrative theory (Somers & Gibson 1993; Bruner 1991; Baker 2006a, 2007, 2013, 2014; Harding 2013) provides a robust framework for understanding translation within the context of power dynamics and conflicts. From a sociological perspective, narratives serve as the fundamental building blocks of comprehending the world, as they not only represent but actively shape our understanding of reality (Bruner 1991, 5). Narratives, in essence, are stories that construct our identities, guide our interpretation of events, and influence our actions (Somers & Gibson 1993, 2). In this light, translation is viewed as a narrative process that constructs and makes reality accessible in a different language (Baker 2014, 159). Through the acts of narrating and re-narration, translation becomes not merely a reproduction of texts but a means of crafting cultural encounters (Baker 2013, 23–24). Elliott (2012) underscores that each translational act either silences or vocalizes a certain narrative, thus placing the inevitable responsibility on the shoulders of the translator, an agent who must navigate between different narratives (45). Harding (2013) highlights the relevance of applying the socio-narrative approach in translation studies, especially in contexts involving power dynamics and social or political conflicts. According to Harding (2013), this approach posits that any textual or linguistic unit is intricately intertwined with its social and political context, and examining it within such a context unveils power relations and contestations among the parties involved (107). In contemporary social and political conflicts, translation is recognized as “central to the ability of all parties to legitimize their version of events” (Baker 2006a, 1).

Somers and Gibson (1993) categorized narratives into four types: ontological, public, conceptual, and meta. Ontological or personal narratives are the stories employed to make sense of oneself and define one's identities (30). Public narratives extend beyond individuals to encompass larger entities (such as groups, institutions, organizations, nations, governments) (31). Conceptual narratives are the constructs and explanations developed by researchers and scholars, such as Darwinism or clash of civilizations (Somers & Gibson 1993, 32; Baker 2006a, 39–40). Meanwhile, meta or master narratives transcend geographical boundaries, exemplified by concepts like capitalism, the rise of nationalism, Islamism, or terrorism (Somers & Gibson 1993, 32; Baker 2006a: 44–45). Translation and interpretation play a pivotal role in the propagation or contestation of these diverse narrative types. As Baker asserts, “[c]learly narratives do not travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries and do not develop into global meta narrative without the direct involvement of translators and interpreters” (2006b, 467). Translation is of great value in this movement of narratives from personal to public, then to meta or master, facilitating the mobility of narratives across different circles within the same community or on a global scale. This typology was further refined by scholars such as Boéri (2009) and Harding (2012). They introduced two additional categories: respectively, professional narratives (distinguishing between professional and non-professional accounts) and local narratives (pertaining to specific events, individuals, times, and places).

Beyond the dissemination of narratives, translation also participates in (re)framing mediated narratives. Hermans, Harding, and Boéri (2022) define framing as one of the active processes of “re-arranging and reorienting texts so as to fit them out for their new environments” (18), thus recontextualizing the mediated messages. Baker (2006a) characterizes framing “as an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality” (106), which is synonymous with the construction of narrative, as discussed earlier in this section. Translators can, through their choices and interventions, reframe mediated narratives, resulting in the creation of a new reality or narrative distinct from the source text. While overt textual interventions may be “relatively rare,” translators employ various strategies,

including “the selection of material to be translated and . . . various methods of framing the translation including paratexts, timing of the release of translations, where translations are placed and so forth” (Baker 2006b, 476–477). Baker (2007) highlights the significance of paratexts in reframing the translated narratives, arguing that paratextual devices create frames that contextualize the narrative they surround, setting up “an interpretive context for the reader or hearer” (158). A frame for a narrative, similar to a frame for a photograph, influences how it is experienced and interpreted (Baker 2010, 353).

Socio-narrative features, as defined and explained in Baker (2006a) based on the work of Somers and Gibson (1993) and Bruner (1991), offer a set of analytical tools for scrutinizing how translational choices reframe mediated narratives. These features enable the study of explicit or implicit interventions made by translators and their impact on reinforcing or subverting source narratives. For the analytical purposes of this paper, the four defining features of narrativity (temporality, relationality of parts, causal emplotment, and selective appropriation) are outlined below.

- *Temporality*. Temporality encompasses three aspects: the sequential context of a given narrative, historical references to recognized narratives, and temporal and spatial framing (Baker 2006a, 51, 55, 112). Narrative and history are intertwined, and Hermans, Harding and Boéri (2022) suggest that some narratives gain acceptance based on factors such as recognition and resonance (23). References to recognized historical narratives—like the Islamic Caliphate in pertinence to the subject of this paper—lend momentum and credibility to the mediated narratives. Moreover, Sadler (2018, 3273) pinpoints that the temporally and spatially specific events are basic to the understanding of a narrative. This implies that paratextual elements like the translation’s date and place, as well as the contemporary socio-political context, contribute to our comprehension of the mediated narrative.

- *Relationality*. The second feature indicates that isolated events derive meaning only when viewed in relation to the overarching narrative in which

they are embedded (Baker 2006a, 61). Individual elements can only be fully understood within the context of their larger wholes (Sadler 2018, 3269). Another critical aspect of a given narrative's relationality involves the positioning of participants. Baker (2006a) contends that repositioning participants, whether textually or paratextually, reframes the translated narrative and impacts its relationship to broader narratives (132).

- *Causal emplotment*. Causal links—the third feature of narrativity—“explain how situations came to be and project what their implications will be” (Sadler 2018, 3269). This feature examines the weighing and explanation of events in relation to one another (Baker 2006a, 67), which can be altered through translation. Hermans, Harding, and Boéri (2022) propose the term “causation,” rather than *causality*, since the former accounts for a complex chain of causes, rather than “a cause-and effect pattern,” with focus more on the question of *how*, instead of *why* (28–30).

- *Selective appropriation*. The fourth and final feature of narrativity discussed herein is selective appropriation. Baker (2006a) defines this feature as the inclusion or exclusion of certain elements in a narrative based on different factors (time, space, people, values, etc.) (71–72). On the paratextual level, this selectivity can manifest in the inclusion or exclusion of texts, authors, languages, or cultures to be translated (114).

The agency of the global jihadist translator and the gatekeeping role of paratexts are examined within the framework of the theoretical framework discussed above. The four defining features of narrativity are employed as main methods to examine the paratextual framing of the case study—AZIZ8178's Arabic version of *Dabiq*. Moreover, the analysis elucidates how the reframed mediated narratives operate within the contemporary sociopolitical context of contemporary Arab communities, as expounded in section 4.

4. AZIZ8178's Arabic translations of *Dabiq* — Paratextual frames

The AZIZ8178 blog, launched in mid-2016, undertook the translation and publication of several *Dabiq* English articles into Arabic. This translation initiative, hosted on WordPress, was spearheaded by Abdulaziz Shamr, also known as Aziz Shamr. Shamr's work comprised four posts of *Dabiq* Arabic translations, all published between May and June 2016. This study is concerned with the last post (AZIZ8178 2016a), which was released on June 29, 2016, and encompasses all the articles translated and posted by Shamr in the order they appeared on the blog.

In this final post, Shamr published Arabic translations of 61 articles from various issues of *Dabiq* sequenced randomly regardless of the issue dates of the English sources. The format chosen for posting the translations included the title of each article in Arabic, a poster representing it, and a link directing readers to the full Arabic text hosted on Tumblr. The primary sources (*Dabiq* issues and AZIZ8178's translations) were accessed online by the author of this paper in mid 2017–early 2018. A word of caution must be noted, as they may no longer be accessible due to intensified security measures targeting jihadist content on the internet.

Taking a socio-narrative lens, this selected case study is scrutinized through the paratexts in order to explore how narratives in the Arabic version (AZIZ8178's translations) are framed compared to the English version (*Dabiq* magazine issues). To define paratextual elements, this paper adopts Gerard Genette's (1997) concept of paratextuality, encompassing titles, prefaces, interviews, illustrations, typographical choices, as well as factual elements such as the author's age, sex, awards, the work's date, genre, or other "implicit contexts," whether they are authorial, generic, or historical (7).

Batchelor (2018) further explains Genette's concept of paratextuality as "any element which conveys comment on the text, or presents the text to readers, or influences how the text is received . . . [they] may be physically attached to the text (peritext) or may be separate from it (epitext)" (12). The paratextual elements in AZIZ8178's translations of *Dabiq* are scrutinized using primarily the tools of narrative features, with secondary reference to narrative typology (discussed in section 3). It should be recalled that organizational Arabic translations of at least three issues of *Dabiq* (4, 5, 6) were issued in late 2014 and 2015, by *al-Battār* Media

Foundation, an ISIS-aligned media channel. Hence, the examination makes use of a comparison between *AZIZ8178* and *al-Battār* to discuss the distinct positionings of jihadist translators, distinguishing between autonomous and organizational translators, as introduced by Lia (2007).

To address S-RQ1, the first analytical tool deployed in the analysis is the narrative feature of temporality. The epitextual element of the work's date defines a new temporal configuration for *Dabiq* narratives in Arabic. All *AZIZ8178* blog posts containing links to Arabic translations of *Dabiq* articles date back to mid-2016 (see figure 1). In contrast, the first issue of English *Dabiq* was published in July 2014, with the last issue released in September 2016. Accordingly, Shahr's Arabic translations were posted on the blog almost two years after the English magazine's inception and only months before its publication ceased. This newly framed temporal configuration coincided with ISIS's significant territorial losses, along with key figures and fighters, due to intensified counter-operations led by the US-led coalition and local governments. These counter-operations were mainly conducted by Iraqi and Syrian forces and US-led coalition. By the end of 2016, ISIS had lost 43% of its territorial caliphate in Iraq and Syria (Wright 2016, 12). During this period, the focus shifted more toward "attacks at home" rather than individuals traveling to join the caliphate (*hijra*) (Chulov 2019). It should be noted also that Shahr's publication of *Dabiq* translations came after the distribution of at least three issues (4, 5, 6) of *Dabiq* in Arabic by the ISIS-aligned *al-Battār* media in late 2014 and 2015, a time that witnessed the peak of ISIS's influence.

Posted on June 12, 2016 by azizshahr

مجلة دابق - العدد 14 الإخوان المرتدون

على مدى العقود القليلة الماضية، ظهر سرطان مدمر، وتطور، وانتشر في محاولة ليغرق الأمة بأكملها في الردة. مع بداية نشأته في مدينة مصرية عام 1928م، سرعان ما امتد إلى جميع أنحاء مصر ليصل إلى الشام، والعراق،

الرافضة: من ابن سبأ إلى الدجال - دابق العدد 13

Posted on May 26, 2016 by azizshahr

الرافضة واليهود

قال التابعي عمر الشعبي رحمه الله "المتوفى في 104هـ":
(أحذرك الأهواء المضلة، وشرها الرافضة، فإنها يهود هذه الأمة، يبغضون الإسلام، كما يبغض اليهود النصارية، ولم يدخلوا في الإسلام رغبة ولا رهبة من الله، ولكن مقتاً

ترجمة مجموعة من مقالات مجلة دابق

Posted on June 12, 2016 by azizshamr

مُلاحظة: البوست يُحدِّث دورياً

مِن النفاق إلى الرِّدَّة: اندثار المنطقة الرمادية -

العدد 7



ترجمة مجموعة من مقالات مجلة دابق

Posted on June 29, 2016 by azizshamr

مُلاحظة: البوست يُحدِّث دورياً

الإخوان المُرتدّون - العدد 14



Figure 1. Temporal configuration – AZIZ8178 translations posted two years after *Dabiq's* first release

Furthermore, the socio-political landscape in mid-2016, coinciding with the release of AZIZ8178's translations, painted the MENA region as a fertile ground for active or potential jihadists targeted by jihadist propaganda. During this period, various Arab countries (Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon) grappled with turmoil, aggression, and civil conflicts stemming from the aftermath of the Arab Spring wave. Fraihat and Yaseen (2020) assert that in the post-Arab Spring era, the region witnessed the emergence of distressing trends such as widespread violence, armed conflicts, proxies, sectarian politics, terrorism, and mass migration. According to Global Terrorism Database (2022), the number of terrorist attacks surged in the MENA region between 2012 and 2017.

Against this backdrop, AZIZ8178's endeavor, within this specific temporal configuration, can be read—from the lens of Baker's (2006a, 2007) work on translation and conflict and Bunt's (2003) on e-jihad—as a means to support the jihadist group and reach out to Arab jihadists, sympathizers, or potential recruits. This effort can be viewed as a manifestation of leveraging translation skills to disseminate ISIS ideologies and bolster the group's position during a temporal configuration when it faced considerable challenges on the ground.

AZIZ8178's Arabic translations of *Dabiq* also tend to redefine the spatial configuration of the mediated narratives, shifting from a transnational focus to a more Arab-centric perspective. The English magazine primarily addresses transnational communities, encompassing both supporters (ISIS recruits, weak, or confused members) and adversaries (the West and US-led global coalition, Shiite, Muslim apostate regimes, rival jihadist groups) (Ingram 2018, 14; Droogan & Peattie 2017, 617; Colas 2017, 178–180). In contrast, *AZIZ8178*'s translations reconfigure the spatial configuration to center on Arab communities. This transformation becomes more evident when comparing the titles presented in the blog post with those of the *Dabiq* issues. To ascertain this shift, a search was conducted for occurrences of three key words associated with the Arab region: "شام" ('Sham/levant'), "إسلام" ('Islam') and "الدولة/الخلافة" ('Islamic State'/Dawla/Khilafa). The results revealed multiple occurrences of these three words were found in *AZIZ8178*'s Arabic version, whereas the English version contained either zero or one occurrence of these terms, as illustrated in figure 2 below. These terms not only signify a spatial orientation toward the Arab region but also underscore historical references to the revered Caliphate from the Islamic golden age. This new temporal and spatial configuration, discussed above, necessitates additional paratextual framing, which contributes to the production of an appropriated version of *Dabiq* in Arabic, as elaborated further in the analysis.

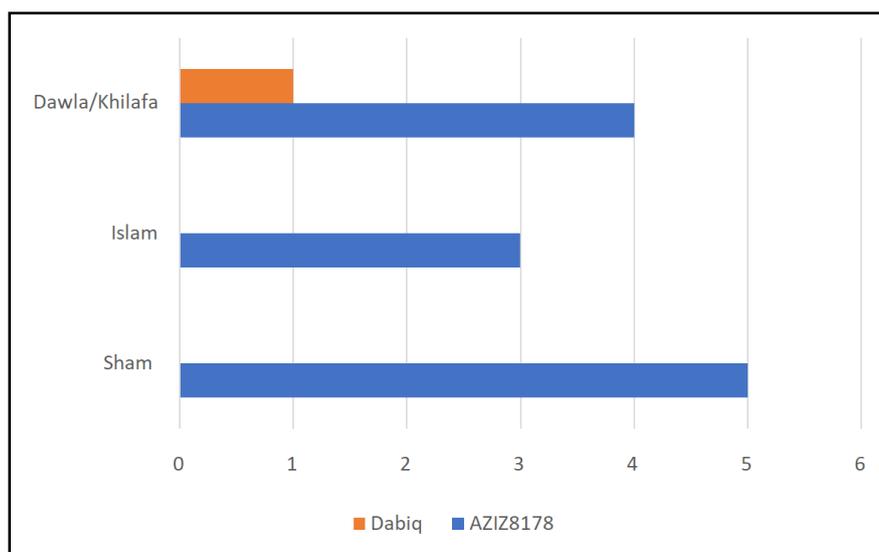


Figure 2. Spatial configuration – Occurrences of key words

To address S-RQ2, the second analytical tool used to scrutinize *AZIZ8178*'s paratextual elements was selective appropriation. This narrativity feature, as outlined in the previous section, pertains to the inclusion or exclusion of elements in the translated narratives, when compared to the English version. Within this framework, selective appropriation is explored alongside sequencing, a closely related aspect of temporality that deals with the order in which the narrative is presented (Baker 2006a, 52).

Selectivity and sequencing of the articles translated are major paratextual gatekeeping mechanisms that filter the content of *Dabiq* for the Arabic-speaking audience. A total of 290 articles were published in the fifteen issues of the English version of *Dabiq* (Wignell et al. 2017, 18). Out of this comprehensive collection, only 61 articles were translated and posted on *AZIZ8178* in Arabic. To provide a more accurate representation, the fourteen articles published in issue 15 —published in September 2016, months after *AZIZ8178* ceased publishing new posts— are excluded from the total for the English-version magazine. Consequently, the translated articles constitute approximately 22% of the total content. These selected translated articles were published on *AZIZ8178* in one single post dated 29 June 2016, forming a collection arranged in a vertical order that does not adhere to a chronological or issue-specific sequence.

Moreover, most of the translated articles belong to the most recent issues of *Dabiq* (issue 7 and above), as depicted in figure 3. The blog post itself serves as a distinct publication featuring selected articles from various *Dabiq* issues rendered into Arabic. This collection is sequenced differently from the English magazine, and also diverges from the approach taken by *al-Battār*'s Arabic translations, which adhered to the structure and format of the English version.

It may be surmised that the earlier *al-Battār* translations of *Dabiq* issues 4, 5, and 6 may have influenced *AZIZ8178*'s focus on later issues. Nonetheless, this emphasis on later issues could also be attributed to the fact that *Dabiq* underwent a notable transformation starting from issue 7. From this point onward, the magazine featured more in-depth articles and introduced additional sections (Ingram 2018, 11–13). Another interesting point is that issue 14 contained the highest number of translated articles, followed by three other

issues (9, 11, and 12). The prominence of these four issues in terms of translated articles corresponds to the 4th phase of *Dabiq*'s thematic focus shift, which emphasized the near enemy and conflicts with local outgroups, including other jihadist organizations (Droogan & Peattie 2017, 614–615).

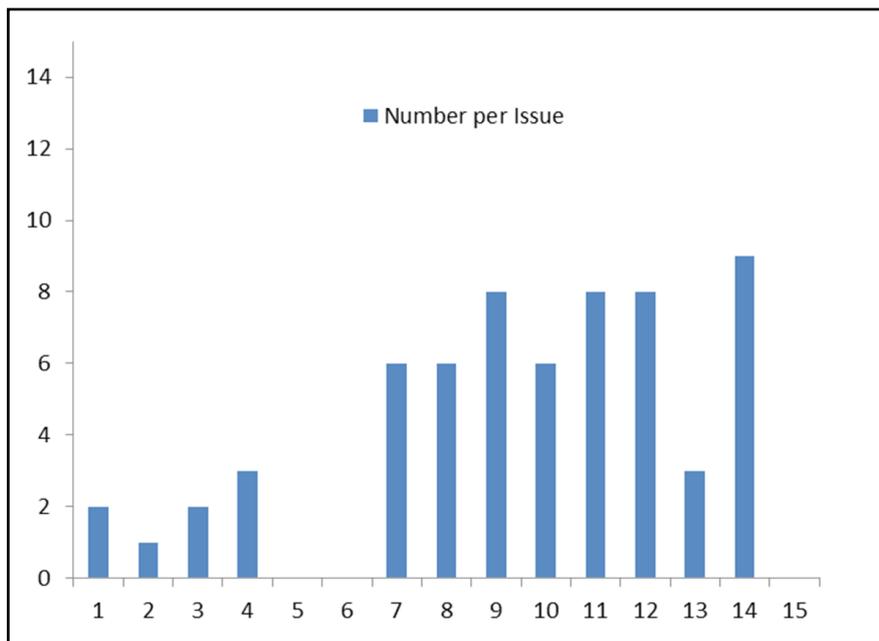


Figure 3. Number of translated articles per issue

This thematic shift aligns with the socio-political landscape of Arab communities during that period (mid-2016). As discussed in the earlier sections regarding temporal and spatial configuration, many Arab countries were grappling with instability, turmoil, and internal divisions in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Moreover, the later issues of *Dabiq* predominantly dealt with near enemies, bringing issues of identity into focus (Ingram 2018, 14), an issue of great significance in the Arab communities.

For a closer scrutinization of the selective appropriation and sequencing in *AZIZ8178*'s translations of *Dabiq*, the translated collection posted on June 29, 2016, can be categorized based on their vertical order and topic/theme into three parts: head (first 7 articles), body (middle 40 articles), and tail (last 14 articles), as depicted in figure 4. The head section comprises Arabic translations of in-

depth analytical feature articles from the later issues of *Dabiq* (7 and above). It is worth noting that feature articles typically do not appear at the outset of the English version of *Dabiq*, and are usually preceded by forewords and reports on operations.

The feature articles in the head section predominantly address political themes related to Arab regimes and local out-groups (Islamists, Shiite, rival jihadists, insurgents, revolutionists), interwoven with ISIS's radical conceptualization of key Islamic terms. Consequently, these articles appear to legitimize ISIS's radical viewpoint, portraying Arab political forces and currents as *murtaddīn* ('apostates') and *munafiqīn* ('hypocrites') who cooperate with the *kuffār* ('infidels') (Western forces and crusaders) against the Islamic *Ummah* ('nation').

For example:

1) "الإخوان مرتدون," translated from the English source article "The Murtadd Brotherhood," which classifies the Muslim Brotherhood organization as a *murtadd* ('apostate') outgroup;

2) "الرافضة: من ابن سبأ إلى الدجال," translated from "The Rāfidah From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal," which declares *takfīr* ('infidelity') against Muslim Shiite sects; and

3) "تحسبهم جميعاً وقلوبهم شتى," translated from "You Think They Are Together, But Their Hearts Are Divided," which denounces all allies to the West in the Muslim communities, whether regimes, organizations, parties, groups, or insurgencies, describing them as traitors, *tawāghīt* ('tyrants'), and *murtaddīn* ('apostates').

The selection and positioning of these feature articles at the forefront of the translated collection may be interpreted as an attempt to resonate with the target Arabic-speaking audience by addressing their prevailing socio-political conditions, as if ISIS's radical ideology was being contextualized within these Arab-specific backgrounds.

The body section of the collection (as shown in figure 4) maintains its focus on the near-enemy and jihadist conceptual narratives. However, it incorporates more articles centered on religious themes and matters related to *sharī'a* ('Islamic divine law'). In addition to discussing apostasy and hypocrisy in relation to the near-enemy, these articles delve into broader Islamic concepts. Among them:

(1) The concept of jihad ('struggle/fight for the sake of God') in "الإسلام دين الحسام لا دين السلام," translated from "Islam is the Religion of the Sword, Not Pacifism";

(2) *Ribāt* ('stronghold') in "فضائل الرباط في سبيل الله," translated from "The Virtues of Ribat for the Cause of Allah"; and

(3) *al-wala' wa al-bara'* ('loyalty and disavowal') in "الولاء والبراء مقابل العنصرية الأمريكية," translated from "Wala and Bara versus American Racism."

These articles assert the core ideological values claimed by ISIS (*jihad*, *ribāt*, *al-wala' wa al-bara'*) that allegedly co-relate with the Islamic heritage. The selection of these articles may be seen as a call for steadfastness and determination among ISIS members and sympathizers of Arab origin, particularly in the face of intensified counter-terrorist efforts during that period.

Notably, the body section includes translations of the full four parts of "The Allies of alQaidah in Sham" series, published across five consecutive issues (8–12). These translations, presented in a row in the body, consistently emphasize issues related to local out-groups. Moreover, historical articles that draw parallels between historical events from the Islamic heritage and current situations are also part of this section. Examples include:

1) "من صفحات التاريخ: السرايا والغزوات والانتصارات في رمضان" translated from "The Expeditions, Battles and Victories of Ramadan"; and

2) "من صفحات التاريخ: إنذار صريح من السلف للمرتدين" translated from "An Explicit Ultimatum from the Salaf to the Apostates."

These historical references seemingly connect contemporary jihadist narratives of ISIS with established public and meta-narratives within the Islamic tradition.

Interestingly, some forewords and IS reports that used to be on the first pages of *Dabiq* English issues appear toward the end of the body section in the Arabic version. Samples of these articles are:

1) "فرسان الشهادة في بلجيكا الافتتاحية" translated from "The Knights of Shahadah in Belgium";

- 2) "الإرهاب العادل: الافتتاحية" translated from "Just Terror"; and
- 3) "عملية أبو رمضان المهاجر: افتتاحية" translated from "Abu Ramadan AlMuhajir Operation."

They narrate attacks, military operations, or biographies of *shuhadā'* ('martyrs') and *mujāhidīn* ('jihadis') involved in these operations. The re-prioritization of these narratives toward the end in the Arabic version can be attributed to the redefinition of the temporal configuration. Most of these attacks and operations occurred during ISIS's peak period (2014–2015). They were suppressed in the Arabic version, which was posted at a time when ISIS was facing intensified counter-campaigns and losses, as elaborated earlier.

In the tail section, the far enemy theme takes center stage, with approximately 64% of the translated articles placed at the end of the collection focusing on the crusades or the West. This section commences with translations of eight "In the Words of the Enemy" articles, which reappropriate ISIS's far enemy statements to craft a narrative that supports and promotes the jihadist group.

One of these translated articles, titled "مجلة دابق - العدد 14 من أفواه الأعداء," and translated from the English source article "In the Words of the Enemy – Issue 14," reappropriates a report by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (United Nations 2016) on ISIS to highlight alleged ISIS strength. In another article, "مجلة دابق - العدد 8 من أفواه الأعداء," published in English as "In the Words of the Enemy – Issue 8," the jihadist group re-narrates statements made by some American politicians about ISIS to seemingly showcase the jihadist group's power and control over territories.

Surprisingly, this section concludes with the translation of a feature article. When examining the title and the subject of this feature article, "الصليبية الأخيرة," "تأملات في الحملة," translated from "Reflections on The Final Crusade," the mystery is unraveled, as it centers around the topic of the crusades (far enemy). A few other translated articles included in the tail touch upon jihad in various parts of Asia. In summary, the selectivity of the translated articles placed in the Tail reaffirms the temporal and spatial context of AZIZ8178's Arabic version of *Dabiq*, with minimal emphasis on the themes of the West or the far enemy.

Issue	Name	Type	Seq.
Head			
14	The Murtadd Brotherhood الإخوان مرتدون	Feature	1
13	The Rāfidah From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal المرافضة: من ابن سبا إلى المجلال	Feature	2
12	You Think They Are Together, But Their Hearts Are Divided تحسبهم جميعاً وقلوبهم شتى	Feature	3
11	From the Battle of Al-Ahzab to the War of Coalitions من معركة الأحزاب إلى حرب التحالفات	Feature	4
9	And Allah Is the Best of Plotters ويكفرون ويكفر الله والله خير الماكرين	Feature	5
8	Irijā': The most Dangerous Bid'ah and Its Effect on the Jihad in Sham الإرجاء، أخطر البدع، وأثره على الجهاد في الشام	Feature	6
7	The Extinction of the Grayzone من النفاق إلى الردة: اندثار المنطقة الرمادية	Feature	7
Body			
14	Kill the Imams of Kufr in the West قاتلوا أئمة الكفر في الغرب	Article	8
10	American Kurdistan كوردستان الأمريكان	IS Reports	9
10	Parents Tawhid and Our Duty to Our ديننا واجبتنا تجاه والدينا	Article	10
9	Healthcare in the Khilafah الرعاية الصحية في دولة الخلافة	IS Reports	11
9	Cause of Allah The Virtues of Ribat for the فضائل الرياط في سبيل الله	Article	12
9	Conspiracy Theory – Shirk شرك نظرية المؤامرة	Article	13
7	Islam is the Religion of the Sword لا دين الا للسلام	Article	14
11	Wala and Bara versus American Racism الولاء والبراء مقابل العنصرية الأمريكية	Article	15
11	Danger of Abandoning Dārul-Islām خطر ترك دار الإسلام	Article	16
11	The Evil of Division and Taqlid أفة التفرق والتقليد	Article	17
9	Sham: Part II The Allies of al-Qaidah حلفاء القاعدة في الشام: الجزء الثاني	Article	18
10	III The Allies of al-Qaidah in Sham: Part III حلفاء القاعدة في الشام: الجزء الثالث	Article	19
11	The Allies of al-Qaidah in Sham: Part 4 حلفاء القاعدة في الشام: الجزء الرابع	Article	20
12	The Allies of al-Qaidah in Sham: The End حلفاء القاعدة في الشام: الجزء الأخير	Article	21
11	Mahdi of the Rāfidah: The Dajjal مهدي المرافضة: الدجال	Article	22
13	Know Your Enemy: Who Were the Safawiyah من صفحات التاريخ اعرف عدوك: من هم الصفويون؟	History	23
12	Baqiyah من صفحات التاريخ: باقية	History	24
11	From Jihad to Fasad من صفحات التاريخ: من الجهاد إلى الفساد	History	25
10	The Expeditions, Battles and Victories of Ramadan من صفحات التاريخ: السرايا والغزوات والانتصارات في رمضان	History	26
9	The Flags of Jāhiliyyah من صفحات التاريخ: أرايات الجاهلية	History	27
8	AbuBakr As-Siddiq's Monumental Stance من صفحات التاريخ: موقف أبو بكر الصديق التاريخي	History	28
7	An Explicit Ultimatum from the Salaf to the Apostates من صفحات التاريخ: إنذار صريح من السلف للمتدينين	History	29
14	Lessons from The Fitnah of the Mongols من صفحات التاريخ: دروس وعبر من فتنة المغول	History	30
10	The Qawqazi Caravan Gains Pace البيعة من القوقاز: القافلة القوقازية تواكب المسير	IS Reports	31
8	Bay'ah from West Africa البيعة من غرب إفريقيا	IS Reports	32
8	Soldiers of Terror جنود الرعب	IS Reports	33
12	Abu Junaydah al-Almani من المؤمنين رجال: أبو جندب الأمانى	Believers	34
14	Abu Jandal al-Bangali من المؤمنين رجال: أبو جندل البنگالي	Believers	35
14	The Blood of Shame by John Cantlie دماء العار – جون كانطلي	Special	36
14	The Knights of Shahadah in Belgium فرسان الشهادة في بلجيكا الافتتاحية	Foreword	37
12	Just Terror الإرهاب العادل: الافتتاحية	Foreword	38
9	Texas Attack هجوم تكساس: افتتاحية	Foreword	39
8	Abu Ramadan AlMuhajir Operation عملية أبو رمضان المهاجر: افتتاحية	Foreword	40
7	Execution of Japanese Hostages إعدام الرهائن اليابانيين: افتتاحية	Foreword	41
1	Dabiq Magazine التعريف بالمجلة: افتتاحية	Foreword	42
3	The Liberation of Dabiq The Punishing of Shu'aytat for Treachery & تأديب الشعوب لتفضها العهد وتحرير دابق	IS Reports	43
4	The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour إحياء الرق قبل قيام الساعة	Article	44
7	The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot حرق الطيار المرتد	Article	45
9	Prostitutes Slave-Girls or أسبانيا أم بغايا لام سمية المهاجرة	Women	46
13	Not Reflect on the Qur'an Do They أفلا يتدبرون القرآن	Article	47
Tail			
12	In the Words of the Enemy من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	48
14	In the Words of the Enemy من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	49
11	Words of the Enemy In من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	50
8	Words of the Enemy In من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	51
7	Words of the Enemy In من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	52
3	Words of the Enemy In من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	53
2	Words of the Enemy In من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	54
1	In the Words of the Enemy من أفواه الأعداء	Enemy	55
12	The Revival of Jihad in Bengal إحياء الجهاد في البنغال بنور الخلافة	Article	56
14	Interview with the Amir of the Khilafah's Soldiers in Bengal مقابلة مع أمير جنود الخلافة في البنغال، الشيخ أبو إبراهيم الحنيف	Interview	57
12	Advice to Mujahidin: Listen and Obey وصايا للمجاهدين: السمع والطاعة للشيخ عيسى العوشن	Article	58
4	Was Placed for Me in the Shade of My Spear My Provision وجعل رزقي تحت ظل رمحي للإمام ابن رجب الحنبلي	Article	59
4	Reflections on The Final Crusade تأملات في الحملة الصليبية الأخيرة	Feature	60
10	Caravan of Islamic State Knights in the Lands of the Crusaders Join the الحق بركب فرسان الدولة الإسلامية في ديار الصليبيين	Poster	61

Figure 4. Classification of translated articles into head, body, and tail

Regarding S-RQ3, the feature of causal emplotment is employed to examine the narrated plot resulting from the above explained instances of selectivity and sequencing. The selective appropriation discussed above led to different weighing of events, compared to the source English magazine. Thus, a new trajectory of causal emplotment was created in the Arabic version. The weighing of *Dabiq* in English can be understood from the three phases of the magazine's life cycle: (1) religious legitimacy, (2) anti-Western themes, (3) local out-groups and internal conflicts (Droogan & Peattie 2017, 614–615). However, in the *AZIZ8178*'s Arabic version, these phases are somewhat inverted, as illustrated in figure 5. The weighing in the Arabic version begins with local outgroups and ends with anti-Western themes, with religious legitimacy in between.

As previously explained, *AZIZ8178* prioritized the articles that embed ISIS's radical ideology in the prevailing socio-political context, placing a significant focus on identity. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring upheavals, there was a notable exploitation and construction of new identities (ethnic, religious, tribal) within the mediated narratives. This construction of identities contests any shared sense of community (Colombo 2016, 471), consequently contributing to notions of division, violence, and fundamentalism.

In discussing the narratives of insecurity and instability in the Middle East post-Arab Spring, Monier (2015) postulates that "identity, when used as a basis . . . draws on 'othering' and difference in constructing perceptions of threat" (12). This phenomenon exacerbates the sense of sectarianism (such as Sunni vs. Shiite, Muslim vs. Christian).

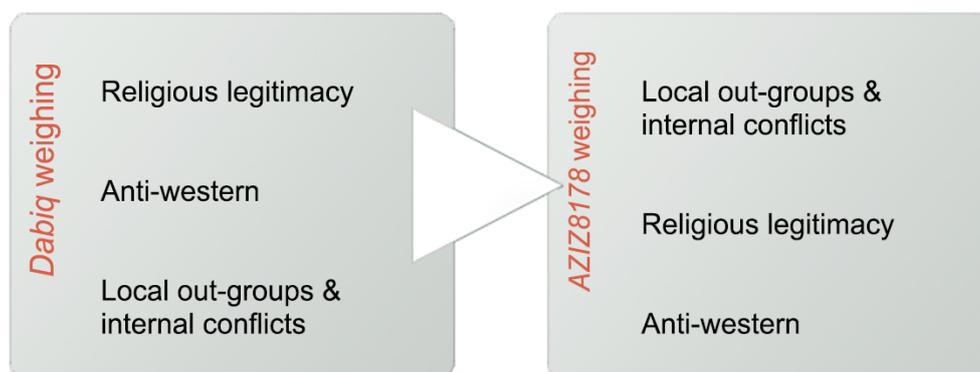


Figure 5. *Dabiq*'s vs. *AZIZ8178*'s weighing of events

Following the emphasis on local and internal conflicts, the Arabic version presents ISIS's interpretation of key Islamic concepts within a series of jihadist conceptual narratives. These narratives appear to legitimize the group's principles, actions, and goals. While religious legitimacy is the primary focus in the English magazine's life cycle, *AZIZ8178* places less importance on this aspect in the Arabic version. Instead, the new weighing tends to start by stirring up fanaticism, placing internal conflicts and identity at the forefront. Subsequently, ISIS's radical view of Islamic concepts and matters related to Sharia law infiltrates the narrative to challenge prevailing ideas and doctrines of mainstream moderate Islam.

Furthermore, the Arabic version gives the least priority to ISIS narratives concerning the far enemy (the West), ISIS attacks and operations, and personal experiences of *mujāhidīn*, when compared to their prominence in the English magazine's life cycle. The downplaying of narratives on ISIS attacks and operations can be attributed to the group's losses and counter-operations on the ground during that period. Meanwhile, narratives on the far enemy were presumably given the least attention because they did not align with the socio-political context of the target audience.

To address S-RQ4, the analytical tool of relationality is employed to investigate how the translator's positioning is portrayed within the mediated narratives. This aspect has two dimensions: the relationality of parts and the repositioning of participants. The latter—which is relevant herein—concerns “the way in which participants in any interaction are positioned, or position themselves, in relation to each other and to those outside the immediate event” (Baker 2006a, 132).

Paratextual elements, such as signatures, labels, and footnotes, are analyzed to assess how the translator/agent is repositioned in *AZIZ8178* translations relative to the editors or authors of the English magazine. The agent (Aziz Shamr) is also analyzed in comparison with *al-Battār* media that undertook Arabic translation of three early issues of *Dabiq*. While *AZIZ8178* blog lacks a clear About section, possibly due

to concerns about security crackdowns, there are subtle clues provided by the translator or blog author that can be analyzed. The translator's name, "azizshamr," is prominently displayed in a large, bold font at the top of the blog page alongside the title "Author," as illustrated in figure 6. Moreover, both the translator's and the designer's signatures are included at the end of the extensive post containing the translations. These signatures read: "الترجمة: م. عبدالعزيز شمر" (translation by M. AbdelAziz Shamr') "التصاميم: م. ابو عبدالله" (Designs by M. AbuAbdallah') (AZIZ8178 2016a), with "م." (M.) most probably standing for *mujāhid* ('jihadi'). Additionally, Shamr's signature is found at the end of almost every translated article. The presence of this paratextual element (signature) serves to position Shamr as a visible agent in the translation process. Additionally, the jihadi labels preceding the names suggest a potential affinity to the jihadist ideology.



Figure 6. Translator's signature appearing on the blog page and at the end of each translated article

Despite the possibility that these names may be pseudonyms concealing the true identities of the agents, the use of signatures and names in the by-lines contradicts the typical style employed by ISIS propaganda channels. Generally, media arms affiliated with ISIS adhere to a monolithic, centralized, and structured style, where authors, contributors, or editors are not identified in most English articles (Bunker & Bunker 2018, 26). Moreover, the name “Aziz Shamr” deviates from the identification system commonly followed by ISIS, which, as noted by Gatt (2020, 92), follows a traditional Arabic nomenclature consisting of *kunya*, *nasab*, and *nisba*. Shamr’s style also differs from that of *al-Battār* media, which did not disclose the identities of any of the translators involved in its three published Arabic issues of *Dabiq*, maintaining the unified organizational style of ISIS media producers.

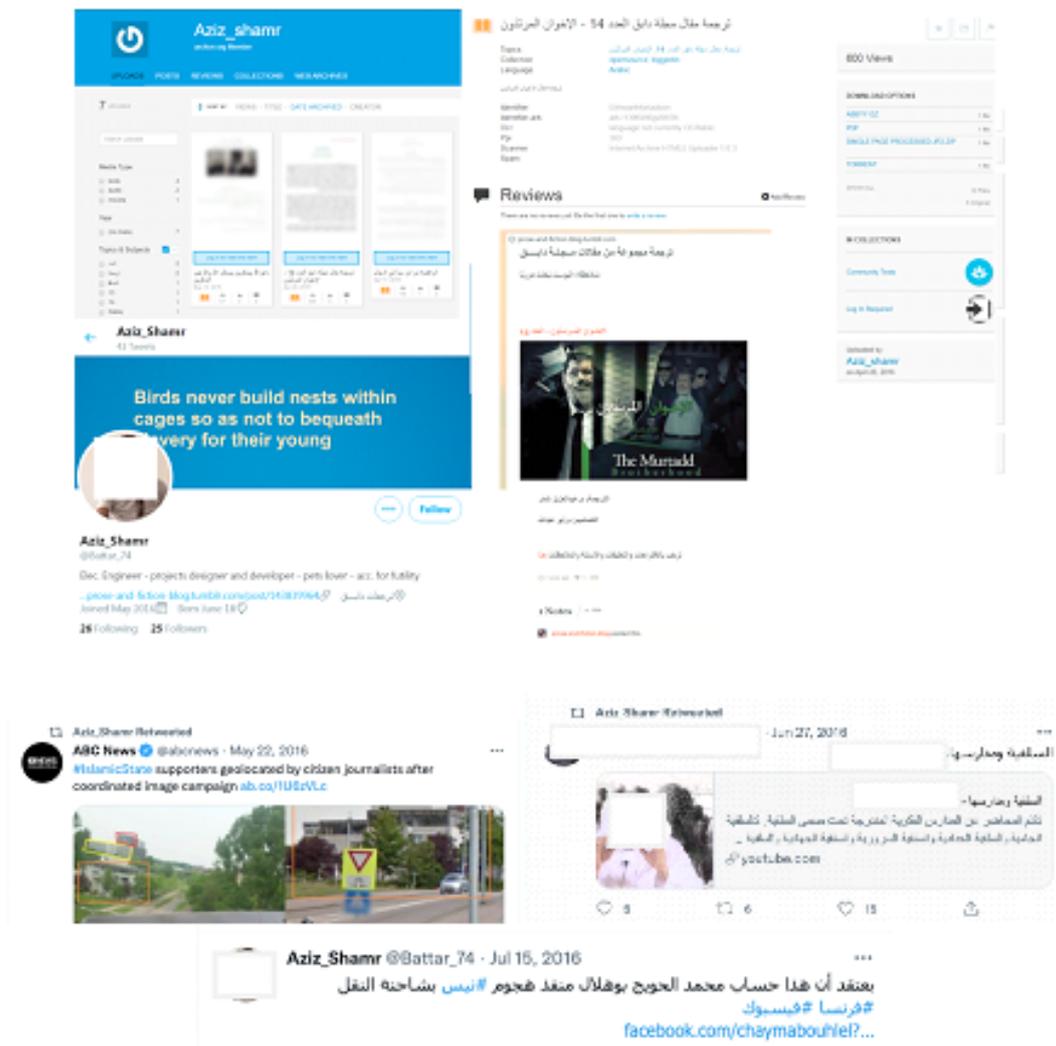


Figure 7. Positioning – Autonomous jihadist translator

Applying Lia's (2007) classification of jihadist media producers, Aziz Shamr can be categorized as a voluntary, anonymous sympathizer who took on the task of translating *Dabiq* into Arabic to expand and promote ISIS's jihadist narratives. The available data⁵ extracted from the blog and other social media accounts associated with the name Aziz Shamr (see figure 7) indicate that the agent of translation is a supporter and sympathizer of the ISIS jihadist ideology. Shamr's support for the ISIS group and its affiliates is evident in his posts, which, in addition to the Arabic translations of *Dabiq*, primarily revolve around topics related to Salafism, martyrdom, and the Islamic State. Nevertheless, Shamr's autonomous style and visible positioning, as discussed earlier, stand in contrast to the unified organizational style typically adopted by both *al-Hayāt* Media (the English magazine publisher) and *al-Battār* Media (producer of three Arabic issues of the magazine).

Footnotes represent another peritextual element accompanying AZIZ8178's Arabic translations of *Dabiq*, solidifying the translator's positioning as an active and autonomous agent. In numerous instances, the translator (Shamr) supplemented the translated material with his own comments for the purpose of providing clarification. For example, when translating an article from *Dabiq*'s issue 9, Shamr explains what the editor means by "the grayzone" (54). Shamr translated the word in the text as "الحالة الرمادية," then added the following note in Arabic: "المحرر يقصد حالة الحياد" (*the editor means neutrality') (AZIZ8178 2016b), explaining his interpretation of the word. In another footnote accompanying the translation of an article in *Dabiq*'s issue 7, the translator commented on one of the editor's notes by adding a specific *Hadīth* that substantiates the argument (the use of the sword in Islam), as illustrated below.

He [Prophet Muhammed] also declared that his worldly provision was placed for him in the shade of his spear and that the best livelihood for the Muslim in the future is what he takes with his sword from the kafir enemy³.

⁵ It should be noted that, in this study, the analysis is conducted according to available data from Shamr's blog and accounts. There are no available means to verify if such data are authentic or faked, which is one of the limitations faced in the study.

³ See pages 10–13 of issue #4 of *Dabiq* and pages 29–30 of issue #3. (*Dabiq*, issue 7, 22)

كما بيّن [النبي محمد ص] أن رزقه الدنيوي جعل تحت ظل رحمة، وأنّ خير ما يأتيه المسلم في دنياه هو ما يناله بسيفه من العدو الكافر.³
 3- انظر الصفحات 10-13 من دابق العدد الرابع، والصفحتين 29-30 من العدد الثالث.

* المُترجم: الحديث المُشار إليه هو قول النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: “أظلتكم فتن كقطع الليل المظلم، أنجي الناس منها صاحب شاهدة يأكل من رسل غنمه، أو رجل من وراء الدروب أخذ بعنان فرسه من فيء سيفه [صحيح: المستدر ك على الصحيحين] (AZIZ8178 2016c, emphasis added)

These instances of footnotes serve as unmistakable indicators of the distinctive role that Shamr plays as an active and visible agent in the translation process, setting him apart from the translations produced by *al-Battār*, which notably lack this type of agency. Furthermore, these interventions provide some evidence of Shamr’s alignment with the jihadist ideology and illustrate his keenness to add additional comments and elaborations that allegedly validate ISIS’s extremist conceptualizations of Islam.

5. Conclusion

This article presented a product-oriented research study on online jihadist translation through the analysis of the paratexts surrounding the Arabic translations of ISIS English magazine *Dabiq*, published in AZIZ8178. Based on the data collected from the blog AZIZ8178, the article concludes that the translation endeavor supports ISIS’s jihadist ideology. The paratexts reframe the Arabic translations and suggest that the translations may have been carefully tailored to the time of publication (mid 2016), a period when ISIS was grappling with significant challenges and losses on the ground. Additionally, various paratextual frames were strategically employed as gatekeepers to refine the content of *Dabiq*, making it more relevant to the prevailing socio-political landscape of Arabic-speaking communities.

AZIZ8178 prioritized the inclusion of in-depth articles that intricately interwove the radical jihadist ideology with the existing local internal conflicts and divisions within the Arab communities. Meanwhile, content related to the far enemy (the West) or discussion of victories, operations, and attacks carried out by foreign fighters was subdued in the Arabic version. Additionally, some paratextual frames signified the positioning of the translator as an autonomous jihadist sympathizer. This was evident in the signatures and footnotes appended to the translations published by AZIZ8178, breaking away from the typical organizational subordinated style often found in the translations published by ISIS-affiliated media channels.

This paper has elucidated a case of online jihadist translation that successfully readapted the mediated message to suit the target audience and the evolving socio-political context. Nevertheless, the paper is limited to a product-oriented analysis that relied on paratextual data. Thus, future research may track the textual analysis of AZIZ8178 translations to complement the findings. Furthermore, this study has classified the jihadist translator involved based on previous literature on jihadist web media arms, which may serve as a foundation for further interdisciplinary investigation and comparison with literature on activist translator communities. This area is ripe for additional research, aiming to define and categorize the different groups and individuals involved, with a focus on their nature, structure, and practices.

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