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Contentious Politics in the Arab Middle East: Jordanian Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition

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Dissertation Abstract:

In which ways do intellectuals affect social and political mobilization? How do they impact the trajectory of contention – the kind of mobilization and its developments - through their ideological work? Prominent intellectuals seem to play a relevant role in contentious politics, yet this role is still undertheorized. In this project, I analyze this question in the context of contemporary Arab Salafism, a particularly literal interpretation of Sunni Islam. I seek to unpack the processes by which prominent Islamist intellectuals impact and shape two Salafi currents originating and operating across Jordan during the 1990s and beyond. The first current is labeled 'Quietist' Salafism, as its members engage mostly in preaching, proselytizing and provision of social services; they refrain from direct political activities or overt confrontation with state authorities. The second current is known as 'Jihadi' Salfism, and espouses instead a confrontational and at times violent stance *vis à vis* state power. I posit that Islamist intellectuals in both instances impact mobilization in similar ways through three main mechanisms: diffusion, whereby they facilitate the spreading and transmission of ideas and concepts formulated elsewhere; elaboration, whereby they build upon the existing body of knowledge on a given subject, providing novel insights, interpretations or at times formulating new ideas altogether; and systematization, whereby they (re)organize the otherwise relatively fragmented or incoherent worldview of their followers and acolytes. Together, these mechanisms compound into a process that I call 'the social appropriation of tradition', by which group members, harking back to elements belonging to a shared and exemplar tradition, rearticulate the central aims of the group to include sustained social and political mobilization. In this way we may properly locate the intellectual efforts of prominent thinkers within a theoretical framework, parsing out and assessing their contribution to episodes of political contention.

Contentious Politics in the Arab Middle East: Jordanian Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition

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DISSERTATION

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science
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Acknowledgments

Of all things I learnt during my time in the PhD program in the Department of Political Science at Syracuse University, two seem particularly compelling to me as I close my thesis. First, one must be struck by the amount of things he or she does not know: pursuing a doctoral degree has been, for me, an exhilarating and humbling experience at the same time, and if I have learnt anything, it has been to maintain an active and alert skepticism to say ‘I don’t know’ many more times than I would have without this training. We do really know little: yet I always look at this more as an engaging opportunity than anything else.

Second, Gavan made it clear in one of the seminars I took with him how the pursuit of knowledge, in our case social scientific knowledge, is never a solitary endeavor, but always a collective one. In my first real attempt to contribute, within the limits of my abilities, to the understanding of social reality, I have truly come to treasure that idea. While, of course, all the faults wherein are only my responsibility, whatever value the present study has must be ascribed to all the people that, in different capacities and at different times, I have encountered in this journey.

In this regard, various institutions made it possible for me to write this work. First of all, the Department of Political Science at SU, which has constantly supported me over 6 years. Then the institutions sponsoring my field research in Jordan: the Moynihan Institute for Global Affairs, the Association for the Study of Middle East and North Africa, and the International Institute of Islamic Thought. Last but not least, the Center for International Exchange and Education in Amman, which made it possible for me to live in the Jordanian capital for two years, granting me in the process a rewarding and enjoyable teaching experience.

I have probably met and interacted with more professors, teachers, peers, colleagues, students and friends over the course of my PhD than I can possibly remember, much less do justice to. However, I must first and foremost thank the members of my dissertation committee.

He has already been mentioned, but I would not like to repeat his name, as that would be unfair to Gavan Duffy. Gavan, in some order, introduced me to social constructivism (a bigger thing than the layman may suspect), always made me feel welcomed in his house, and proved to be a highly unconventional yet all the more true mentor.

Hossein Bashiriyeh has been an inexhaustible source of scholarship, knowledge and rigor for the study of social theory, the Middle East, and all in between. His greatest quality, however, has always been his affability and kindness.

I will never forget when I first started flipping the page of Gramsci’s *Notebooks*, and how they read to me as nothing like I have read before, to the point of having goose bumps: Mark Rupert masterfully opened up to me those pages, which tremendously impacted me both as person and as a scholar.

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the prime reason as to why I completed this work. I will continue to be inspired by his scholarship, intellect and kindness.

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Last, it's been now more than eight years that I have left my home and my family to pursue what I want to do. I have never suspected it was easy for them to let me do so, hence my thanking them is the deepest and most heartfelt of all. I thus dedicate this work to my mother Dorina, my father Antonio and my brother Alberto, who right when I was writing these chapters gave me the wonderful news of a new life coming into our family.

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Table of Contents

Abstract, p. i

Title Page, p. ii

Copy Right Page, p. iii

Acknowledgements, p. iv

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Intellectuals in Contention, p. 1

Salafis: Contentious Politics, Islamism and Gramscian Intellectuals, p. 5

Studying Islamism and Mobilization: an Unavoidable Tension?, p. 11

Theory and the Salafi Case, p. 13

Jordanian Salafism: an Overview, p. 14

Plan of the Study, p. 16

Chapter 2 - A Land of Three Rivers: Combining Perspectives

Geography as a Metaphor, p. 18

On the Study of Religion in Politics, p. 19

Religion, Ideas and Political Contention, p. 21

Evolution of the Field: a Bird's Eye View, p. 24

Framing Theory and the Study of Mobilization and Contention, p. 28

Dynamics of Contention, Cognition and Meaning Making, p. 37

Popular Intellectuals and Alternative Worldviews, p. 40

Defining an Elusive Actor: the Sociology of the Intellectuals, p. 42

Mobilizing Islam, or Why We're Here, p. 50

Chapter 3 - The Social Appropriation of Tradition: A Theory on Religious Intellectuals and Mobilization

Gramsci, Mechanisms and Salafi Scholars, p. 64

Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony, p. 65

Ideology and Discourse, Philosophy and Common Sense, p. 76

Salafi Scholars as Intellectuals: Making Religion into Ideology, p. 84

Mobilizing the Past: the Social Appropriation of Tradition, p. 86

Contention and Mechanisms, p. 90

Final Considerations on Mechanisms, p. 100

Conclusion, p. 101

Chapter 4 - An Introduction to Salafism and the Jordanian Context

Salafism and Jordan: Two Histories, p. 104

Salafism: a Philological Note on a Disputed Term, p. 105

The History Behind the Concept: Salafism as an Emerging Category, p. 111

Salafism: the Geography of a Discursive Field, p. 118

Salafism as Social Appropriation of Tradition, p. 125
Jordan, a Country that Should Not Be, p. 127
The Creation of Jordan, p. 128
Nation Building and State Building, p. 131
Realignment: Political and Economic Shifts at the End of the Century, p. 142
Conclusion - a New Stage, p. 152

Chapter 5 - Leaving Politics is Political: Quietist Salafism and Al-Albani's 'Purification and Education' Project

Introduction, p. 154
Life of Al-Albani, p. 156
At-Tafsiyah wa at-Tarbiyah: Purification and Education as the Cornerstones of a Political Regeneration, p. 161
The Need for an Architect: the Role of Al-Albani as Organic Intellectual, p. 167
Quietist Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition, p. 178
Quietist Salafis and the State: Ambiguity and Latent Confrontation, p. 182
Lost in Translation? Ideologues' Unintended Consequences: Al-Albani and *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM), p. 185
Conclusion, p. 188

Chapter 6 – Relentless Confrontation: Jihadi Salafism and Al-Maqdisi's 'Loyalty and Disavowal' Call

Introduction, p. 190
Life of Al-Maqdisi, p. 193
Al-Wala'a wa al-Bara': Loyalty and Disavowal Setting the Boundaries of the Islamic Polity, p. 197
The Most Influential Jihadi Ideologue: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Revolutionary Praxis, p. 203
Jihadi Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition, p. 213
Jihadi Salafis and the State: Rejection and Adjustment Between the 'Ink of the Scholar' and the 'Blood of the Martyr', p. 217
Lost in translation? Al-Maqdisi and the Surge of Violent Jihadism, p. 224
Conclusion, p. 228

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

Making Contention, p. 230
Three Mechanisms and the Social Appropriation of Tradition, p. 231
Gramsci, Organic Intellectuals and Salafis' Counter-Hegemony, p. 233
Quietist and Jihadi Salafism: Final Considerations on Their Politics, p. 235
A Future Project with Other '*Cattivi Maestri*', p. 238

Bibliography

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Intellectuals in Contention

What roles do intellectuals play in the processes of social action and political mobilization?

More specifically, in which ways do their ideological productions impact the trajectory – the kind of mobilization and its developments - of such processes? The literature on social and political contention has long recognized the importance of ideas in accounting for episodes of collective action – social movements, campaigns, protests, revolutions, civil wars, clandestine political violence, and so on. Scholars proposed terms such as frames, ideologies and discourses to conceptualize the contribution of ideas to the emergence of social action and political contention. However, it is rather startling how relatively few works have theorized the role of individuals and communities at the center of the ideological production connected with social and political mobilization.

I aim at exploring the role of intellectuals, scholars, thinkers connected to episodes of social action and political contention. In particular I will address the role of their ideological productions, i.e. the ideas they produced, the set of discourses in which they were embedded in the course of their intellectual activity. I ask: how do these works spur and sustain social and political mobilization? What is the relationship between ideological, intellectual work and the trajectory of contention among groups and movements who claim to take cues and inspirations from such productions? Put differently, I intend to unpack the processes by which ideas impact political mobilization, specifically ideas formulated by recognized prominent ideologues. I address these questions in the context of Salafism, a contemporary Islamist current.¹ I contend that a specific

¹ I chose the term ‘current’ to indicate Salafism in light of the most frequent way to refer to it in the Arab and Jordanian press, where the Arabic equivalent (*tiyaar*) is commonly utilized.

process, the *social appropriation of tradition*,² describes how Salafis appeal to and deploy a traditional religious reference in order to spur social and political action. In this way we may properly locate the intellectual efforts of prominent thinkers within a theoretical framework, parsing out and assessing their contribution to episodes of political contention.

Salafism is a branch of Sunni Islam.³ Currently, it is arguably the most important trend within the galaxy of political Islam. For example, groups such as *Al-Qa'idah* and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)⁴ are Salafi groups. However, Salafism is not confined to such episodes of armed militancy, nor is exhaustively represented by them. It is instead an approach to Islam. It preaches a literal reading of the Quran and the collection of *ahadith*,⁵ the only two sources it recognizes as legitimate in the Islamic tradition (*turath*).⁶ Salafis do not admit different interpretations or exegesis of these sacred sources. They claim the Qur'anic text and the collection of *ahadith* contain an evident, clear message. It cannot be the object of different – let alone divergent – understandings; there may not be allegorical or metaphorical readings. Because of this literalism, Salafis espouse a rigid and uncompromising understanding of Islam, so that labels such as radical, fundamentalist or extreme can be easily – if not always appropriately or unambiguously – applied to them. They stand for a puritanical approach which seeks to replicate the community life under the Prophet Muhammad and the following three generations of Muslims.⁷

However, while sharing the same doctrinal principles, Salafis also espouse very different attitudes towards politics and society.⁸ In the context of the present study, I will focus on two such

² I would like to thank Gavan Duffy for suggesting me this specific phrasing in one of our numerous conversations on the issue of mechanisms and processes. In particular, he pointed out how it was possible to combine the idea of *social appropriation* in the case of Islamist thinkers by adding a qualifier (*tradition*).

³ This brief presentation of Salafism is for merely introductory purposes. For a more elaborate introduction to Salafism in the Muslim world and particularly in Jordan, see chapter 4.

⁴ See Chapter 6, fn. 12 for a brief discussion about ISIS different acronyms.

⁵ The *ahadith* (singular: *hadith*) stand for the deeds and the preaching of prophet Muhammad. Together, they represent the *Sunnah* of the prophet.

⁶ See Lahoud, Nelly. *Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries*. Routledge, 2005, for a discussion of the concept of *turath*.

⁷ See Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *The Management of Islamic Activism – Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood and State Power in Jordan*, SUNY Press 2000, pp. 113-4.

⁸ See Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29.3 (2006): 207-239. p. 208.

divergent attitudes of Salafism by taking Jordanian Salafis as a paradigm experience. In this context, I will present two movements: first, the case of ‘Traditional’ or ‘Conservative’ Salafis, often times also called ‘Quietist’.⁹ They refrain from direct or institutional political engagement. They choose instead to focus on preaching, praying, studying and a degree of community service. Their impact is therefore more noticeable at the civil society or grass root level where instead their action is concentrated. Therefore, Quietist Salafis may refuse in principle the incumbent regime while resorting to a (temporary) acceptance of the political status quo. They do not challenge or contest openly state institutions and attendant power relations. Subsequently, I will discuss ‘Jihadi’ Salafis, who look instead to establish soon, if not here and now, an ‘Islamic state.’ They articulate this view in spite of - and one might even say because of - state opposition to such a project. This often leads to the adoption of confrontational and violent strategies. Jihadi Salafis represent a minority not only within the vast universe of Islamist groups and movements, but also within Salafism. Nevertheless, their militant political stance and their extreme strategies to bring about social and political change put them in the forefront of academic research as well as news headlines.

I present these two cases in order to show the mechanisms and processes whereby Salafi ideologues and preachers, by virtue of their ideological productions and scholarly work, impact political and social mobilization. From these cases I evince and submit the presence of three mechanisms (*diffusion, elaboration and systematization*) that compound into a process which I call *the social appropriation of tradition*. I present my theoretical framework in Chapter 3. I rely on a Gramscian social theoretical framework within which I articulate my theory of ideologues’ impact on political and social mobilization. I use the language of mechanisms, processes and episodes of contention as outlined in Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam’s *Dynamics of Contention* (henceforth,

⁹ See fn. 2. I use these labels as they are widely adopted in the literature on Salafi movements; however, they remain highly problematic and somewhat improper, as I will observe later on.

DOC).¹⁰ I contend that intellectuals and scholars, through their work and production act as ideologues by:

1. Facilitating the spreading and transmission of ideas and concepts formulated elsewhere. This is where ideologues' scholarly network properties are most in evidence. The literature refers to this mechanism as *diffusion*.¹¹
2. Elaborating on the existing body of knowledge on a given subject. They provide novel insights, interpretations, at times they formulate new ideas altogether. This is where ideologues' creative capacities, scholarship and knowledge are most in evidence. I call this mechanism *elaboration*.
3. Systematizing the otherwise relatively fragmented or incoherent worldview of their followers and acolytes. This is where the ideologues' more systematic and rigorous thinking, as well as their social connection ('organicity'¹²) with the public they address, are most in evidence. I call this mechanism *systematization*.

These mechanisms compound into a specific process, which I label *the social appropriation of tradition*. Social appropriation is defined as "a process by which group members successfully redefine the central aims of the group to include sustained contentious action."¹³ The social appropriation of tradition indicates then a process whereby this redefinition entails harking back to elements belonging to a shared and exemplar 'tradition.' As mentioned above, such tradition is represented by the experience of the early Muslim community. It is an intelligible system of meaning within the Salafi discourse. Some of its elements may resonate to a larger or smaller extent to the wider Muslim publics. It offers references to a past collective experience which provides meaning, purpose, direction and orientation. Salafis' articulation of this discursive tradition as the template for just political and social order exemplifies this process. The social appropriation of

¹⁰ McAdam, Doug, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

¹¹ Tilly, Charles and Sidney Tarrow. *Contentious Politics*. Oxford University Press, [2007] 2015.

¹² For a discussion of the concept of 'organic intellectuals,' see Chapter 3, section "Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony."

¹³ McAdam et al., 2001, p. 27.

tradition represents therefore a process particularly significant in Salafism within the wider context of political Islam.¹⁴

For these reasons, I submit that these mechanisms and processes help us understand the ways in which the intellectual and scholarly productions of prominent Salafi thinkers and preachers impact dynamics of mobilization, action and contention.

Salafis: Contentious politics, Islamism and Gramscian intellectuals

In this dissertation, social and political mobilization stand at the center of analysis. The two movements under examination – Quietist and Jihadi Salafis – at first seem to engage in rather different kinds of activities. It is apparent how Jihadi Salafis operate at the political level as a clandestine and potentially revolutionary group: theirs is a textbook case of contentious politics. Tilly and Tarrow situate contentious politics in the domain at the intersection of politics, collective action and contention:¹⁵ by means of collective action state and non-state actors engage in a struggle over power relations in an episodic, public and informal fashion.¹⁶ The action of the Quietist Salafis instead seems to fit uneasily within this definition: where is the contention if, by definition, they are ‘quiet’? Given that Quietist Salafis developed schools and structured seminars, run research centers, and fund charities, how is their action episodic? At the same time, we have to admit the possibility that political contention may very well congeal in practices and behaviors that are not so immediately and openly ‘contentious.’ As I will show in Chapter 5, Quietist Salafis’ approach to politics – abstention from institutional participation and refrain from direct confrontation with state authority – is merely a tactical, not substantial departure from the Jihadis’ more open posture. Quietist Salafis still look forward to establishing an Islamic state. However, while the Jihadis propose a top-down, immediate usurpation of political power, the Quietists softly advance a bottom

¹⁴ Interview with Dr. Muhammad al-Khair Eiedat, Amman, 5/26/2015.

¹⁵ Tilly et al., 2007, p. 7.

¹⁶ As I will elaborate later, this power struggle is usually (yet not necessarily) brought forth against the state.

up transformation of existing power relations by means of societal and mores reformation. They delay in this fashion, in an indefinite future, the building of the Islamic state.

Hence, one could argue that their choice of being non-political or a-political when it comes to certain bounded domains (institutionalized politics and clandestine violence) is indeed a political choice in a broader understanding of the political – any action which comports or engages in the competition for power.¹⁷ If we consider Quietist Salafis' *modus operandi* in this way, we may posit the following. First, their actions and strategic choices are focused on the social. It is social mobilization and social action. Second, this social action is also political. It does entail competition over power: it aims in the long run to achieve peacefully what the Jihadis want to achieve in the short run at all costs, even violently. Thus, I would still categorize the Quietist Salafis' mobilization within the realm of contentious politics. At the same time I would also refer to it, so to offer a more apt description of their behavior, as social action. There is no contradiction in doing so. Certain kinds of social actions may be instances of political contention. It depends which point during this trajectory we are currently observing, whether consequences and impacts on power relations are more immediate or more remote. We should not regard what Quietist Salafis do (preaching, studying, proselytizing) as non-political, hence non relevant or beyond the purview of the present research. We ought to notice instead when and how the social can be a gateway to the political:¹⁸ in this case to contentious politics.

To examine these two movements, I bring together three streams of research that only rarely, and only recently, have crossed paths. First, the study of social and political mobilization emerges from a rich research tradition that has re-defined over time its main focus: from the study of disorder and mob behavior, to social movements, to contentious politics. As already mentioned,

¹⁷ For an analysis and definition of power and political action, see Stoppino, *Potere e Teoria Politica*. Mulino, 2001.

¹⁸ With specific reference to social movements, see Tugal, Cihan. *Transforming Everyday Life, Theory and Society* 38.5 (2009): 423-458.

Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam¹⁹ propose a new way of addressing the study of political contention. They suggested singling out recurrent mechanisms and processes across contexts as opposed to theorizing conflict processes as a whole. Charles Kurzman²⁰ builds on Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam's work. He advocates placing ideas and perceptions at the center of analysis, exploring how structural features are mediated by actors.

Second, I rely on studies on Islamism. For a long time, research on political contention and research on Islamic activism or politics ran on parallel tracks: it seemed that the many elements they had in common (collective action, social mobilization and contestation) were obscured by their undeniable (mainly cultural) differences by the different locales on which they focused (mostly Western countries for the former, mostly Arab or Muslim countries for the latter). Students of comparative politics and sociology tended to focus on (western, usually progressive or leftist²¹) social movements; area study experts and anthropologists focused on Islamic activism (and more recently on political Islam and Islamism). Moreover, prevalent attitudes and discourses about the progressive nature of western and especially American social movements (minority rights, social justice, anti-war protests and so on) appeared markedly different from an Islamic wave allegedly bent on casting the Arab and Muslim world back into the dark ages.²² This representation may be overdrawn, but it hints both at the geographical and historical confines of social movements theory and at the lack of proper theorizing in the case of political Islam. However, in the last decade, we

¹⁹ McAdam et al., 2001. Tilly et al., 2007. McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, "Methods for measuring mechanisms of contention." *Qualitative Sociology* 31.4 (2008): 307-331. McAdam, Doug, and Sidney Tarrow. "Introduction: Dynamics of contention ten years on." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16.1 (2011): 1-10.

²⁰ Kurzman, Charles. "Structural opportunity and perceived opportunity in social-movement theory: the Iranian revolution of 1979." *American Sociological Review* (1996): 153-170; "The Qum protests and the coming of the Iranian Revolution, 1975 and 1978." *Social Science History* 27.03 (2003): 287-325; *The unthinkable revolution in Iran*. Harvard University Press, [2004] 2009; and "Introduction: Meaning-making in social movements." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81.1 (2008): 5-15.

²¹ Della Porta, Donatella. *Clandestine Political Violence*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 18.

²² See for example one of the most quoted books on the subject: Sivan, Emanuel. *Radical Islam – Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*. Yale University Press, 1985.

have seen a convergence of the two tracks;²³ and, more specifically for the present study, works on Salafism, particularly of the Jihadi kind, have mirrored policy interest on the topic.²⁴

Last, works on the sociology of intellectuals provide coordinates to locate and define the individuals under investigation.²⁵ Gramsci's theory of intellectuals,²⁶ and the research that took inspiration from his foundational insights,²⁷ represent the framework I adopt to theorize about the relationship between Islamist scholars and their publics. The edited volume *Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements*²⁸ offers various contributions regarding the role of intellectuals in Third World countries. In some instances, intellectuals happened to impact in significant ways the trajectories of social action and political contention of different movements by virtue of their ideological productions. I aim thus at providing a more systematic and rigorous understanding of such process by combining insights from these three fields of research.

The proposition that ideas impact politics – in this case, contentious politics – seems quite uncontroversial. The political process model, the dominant paradigm to address the study of contention, lists 'framing' as one of its core components together with political opportunity

²³ Wiktorowicz, 2000; *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Approach*, Indiana University Press, 2003. Beinin, Joel, and Frédéric Vairel, eds. *Social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford University Press, [2011] 2013. Bayat, Asef. "Islamism and social movement theory." *Third World Quarterly* 26.6 (2005): 891-908; *Making Islam democratic: Social movements and the post-Islamist turn*. Stanford University Press, 2007. *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press, 2013. Lacroix, Stéphane. *Sheikhs and Politicians: Inside the New Egyptian Salafism*. Brookings Doha Center, 2012. Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, activism, and political change in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

²⁴ Wagemakers, Joas. "Framing the "Threat to Islam": Al-Wala'wa Al-Bara'in Salafi Discourse." *Arab Studies Quarterly* (2008): 1-22. "Reclaiming Scholarly Authority: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Critique of Jihadi Practices." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34.7 (2011): 523-539. Wiktorowicz, 2006; Meijer, Rojel, ed. *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*, Hurst & Co, [2009] 2014. Lahoud, 2005; Karagiannis, Emmanuel. "Defining and Understanding the Jihadi-Salafi Movement." *Asian Security* 10.2 (2014): 188-198. Rougier, Bernard. *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?*. Presses Universitaires de France-PUF, 2008.

²⁵ Eyerman, Ron. *Between culture and politics: Intellectuals in modern society*. Polity press, 1994. Karabel, Jerome, "Towards a theory of intellectuals and politics." *Theory and Society* 25.2 (1996): 205-233; Kurzman, Charles, and Lynn Owens. "The sociology of intellectuals." *Annual Review of Sociology* (2002): 63-90. Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals*, Vintage, [1994] 2012.

²⁶ Gramsci, Antonio and Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers, 1971.

²⁷ Billings, Dwight B. "Religion as opposition: A Gramscian analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* (1990): 1-31. Olsaretti, Alessandro. "Beyond class: The many facets of Gramsci's theory of intellectuals." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 14.4 (2014): 363-381; "Croce, Philosophy and Intellectuals: Three Aspects of Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony." *Critical Sociology* 42.3 (2016): 1-19. Reed, Jean-Pierre. "Theorist of subaltern subjectivity: Antonio Gramsci, popular beliefs, political passion, and reciprocal learning." *Critical Sociology* 39.4 (2013): 561-591.

²⁸ Baud, Michiel and Rosanne Rutten, eds. *Popular Intellectuals And Social Movements: Framing Protest In Asia, Africa, And Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

structures, resource mobilization and repertoires of contention.²⁹ In this model, framing would represent the theoretical box within which to locate our interests for the scholars' intellectual productions. However, students of framing processes have not addressed adequately the interactive and intersubjective nature of such process;³⁰ nor they have convincingly argued for the very usage of the concept of framing as opposed to ideology or discourse.³¹ In sum, framing theory has not been able to accommodate satisfactorily the focus on perceptions and ideas emerging from recent developments on social and political mobilization.³²

According to this view, people's perceptions – or, better, shifts in those perceptions – should be a prime focus of any attempt to analyze the emergence and development of political contention or social mobilization. The question then can be articulated as *how* do ideas impact social and political mobilization, as opposed to only *when* or *whether*. Understanding in which ways this occurs requires us to ask which mechanisms and processes we may identify as “heuristic devices”³³ to capture better how ideas contribute to and shape political outcomes.

As I address religious groups and movements that make direct (as the Jihadi) or indirect (as the Quietist) claims onto the political, it is then important to recognize how religious beliefs configure a specific worldview. In this sense, the impact of religion onto social and political life eschews simplistic boxing in one of the containers of the Political Process Model. It is not possible to speak of opportunities, resources, repertoires and frames as if they were hermetically sealed containers, each carrying a necessary ingredient for social and political mobilization.

Transcendental (religious) beliefs and the attendant configuration of a certain ideology stand in

²⁹ McAdam et al., 2001, chapter 1.

³⁰ Steinberg, Marc W. "Tilting the frame: Considerations on collective action framing from a discursive turn." *Theory and society* 27.6 (1998): 845-872; "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners." *American Journal of Sociology* 105.3 (1999): 736-780.

³¹ Oliver, Pamela, and Hank Johnston. "What a good idea! Ideologies and frames in social movement research." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 5.1 (2000): 37-54.

³² Kurzman, 2008.

³³ "The Post-Structural Consensus in Social Movements Theory". *Rethinking social movements: Structure, meaning, and emotion*. Eds. Jeff Goodwin, and James M. Jasper. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, p. 119.

front of formation of motives (frames), perception of structures (opportunities and threats), means (resources) and ways (repertoires) to engage in social and political mobilization.³⁴

I submit that providing a theoretical account as to how religious inspired ideologies inform social action and political contention is of great importance to understand better the phenomenon of contemporary Salafism. To do this, I intend to locate Salafi Islamist thinkers' ideological productions in specific historical, social and economic contexts; and then analyze how such productions impact the emergence and mobilization of Jordanian Salafis.

It then follows that it is important to maintain the centrality of perceptions of structural features in investigations of this kind. In this vein, a Gramscian approach would suggest how the intellectuals' relation to their public is pivotal to understand such perceptions: intellectuals may be defined as social actors producing, elaborating and spreading ideas who influence people's perceptions and worldviews. For these reasons I contend that Salafi thinkers and scholars may be considered such intellectuals within a distinct cultural space or discourse in relation to specific publics. Unpacking this relation is my primary task. Hence, I will outline how the works of prominent Islamists provided coordinates to inform Jordanian Salafis' perceptions of social and political conditions; and therefore how ideological production and social action and political contention are linked.

I do not claim that such relation is a deterministic one; nor do I aim to provide law-like generalizations. I offer a mid-range theory: the social appropriation of tradition explains modern day Salafism social and political mobilization in the context of political Islam. However, why engage in such an endeavor in the first place? I offer three sets of reasons: the first is an issue in terms of approach to non-Western settings; second and connected to the first, there is a theoretical motive to pursue this study; and, last but not least, I will outline the current policy relevance of Salafism.

³⁴ See Wald, Kenneth D., Adam L. Silverman, and Kevin S. Fridy. "Making sense of religion in political life." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8 (2005): 121-143, p. 126.

Studying Islamism and Mobilization: an Unavoidable Tension?

Theorizing about Salafi scholars' impact on political mobilization is a (modest) attempt at 'provincializing'³⁵ the experiences and attendant theoretical explanations originating in western contexts. Most theories about social mobilization are built on the study of Western (North American and West European) experiences. I briefly pointed out how other contexts, including the Middle East, have been comparatively rather neglected. The new, wider perspective in terms of geographical scope is to be welcomed. It not only allows bringing to light unduly unexplored locals, but also better understanding in turn Western cases from a comparative perspective.

However, the challenge remains insofar as the following holds true: there is no investigation that may start *a priori* from an a-theoretical position. There is no scholar simply walking into research collecting information and conjuring up a theory letting the data speak for themselves. If anything, we need a theory to carry out the process of data and information collection to actually decide what to include and what to discard in such a process. We may hence ask: in addressing these instances of political mobilization, which analytical lenses are more appropriate? Social theories (mostly) developed out of cases of mobilization in western countries and settings? Or shall we rely on the insights of the area studies approach and studies on political Islam, with their fine grained descriptions and sensitivity to specific cultural and ideational repertoires?³⁶

I believe it is necessary to ponder over this carefully. One ought to be cognizant of some of the pitfalls that may surface by overlooking the issue. Moreover, there are the tradeoffs that any choice necessarily entails. More specifically, I am concerned about how categories that would fit nicely western experiences and histories (since scholars developed them to explain exactly those

³⁵ Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe, Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, [2000] 2009.

³⁶ A similar distinction was offered by Burke. Addressing political mobilization in the Islamic world, they depicted these two research traditions as distinct 'Weberian' and 'Marxist' approaches. The former takes on ideas and precepts of Islam, is mostly elite focused and pays attention to the role of charisma. In short, it insists on the 'Islamic side' of the phenomenon, to the point of being unsurprisingly dubbed 'new Orientalism'. The Marxist tradition, or 'new social history', considers socio-economic conditions more relevant, and focuses on the 'social movement-social protest side' of the phenomenon. Burke, Edmunds. "Islam and Social Movements: Methodological Reflections", in Burke, Edmund, and Ervand Abrahamian, eds. *Islam, politics, and social movements*. University of California Press, 1988.

phenomena) may be ill-equipped to make sense of other contexts. I do not submit that conceptual coordinates across different contexts are irremediably different and fundamentally alien (a risk that works such as *Orientalism*³⁷ warn us about); rather, I wish to take notice of the hybrid encounter between western modernity and indigenous sensibilities characterizing the post-colonial world.

In other words, I claim that one must recognize that the former colonial world – which I still address as ‘Third World’ in light of the political and critical connotation of such term - has gone through historical experiences that cannot be simply assumed as comparable with the colonizing world; yet at the same time, one must not call for irreducible and essentialist differences in the workings of politics.³⁸ This tension has affected the study of contentious politics in non-western settings.

The recent convergence on social and political mobilization and Islamic activism seeks to provide “insights on Islamic movements [that] can contribute to social movement theory, and insights from social movement theory [that] can assist the study of Islamic movements.”³⁹ However, it should not imply either merely subsuming experiences of Islamic activism under theoretical models first developed from different settings and contexts; neither it should suggest to do away with undeniable cultural differences, whose recognition, in any case, makes the project for a single approach so more challenging. As Kurzman argues, “[t]he field holds itself in tension, unable to deny the obvious cultural differences between Islamic activists and Western scholars, yet unwilling to claim irreducible difference for fear of falling into Orientalist patterns”.⁴⁰

I believe this tension is somewhat unavoidable. As I adopted a Gramscian social theoretical perspective and as I chose Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam’s approach on the politics of contention, I hope that this may allow for culturally specific and idiosyncratic elements to be inserted within and

³⁷ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.

³⁸ See also on this Sangmpam, S. N. *Comparing apples and mangoes: the overpoliticized state in developing countries*. SUNY Press, 2012.

³⁹ Kurzman, Charles. “Conclusion: Social Movement Theory and Islamic Studies”, in Wiktorowicz, Quintan, ed. *Islamic Activism: a Social Movement Theory Approach*, 2004, p. 289.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 296.

inform a rigorous theoretical framework. I remain conscious of the limitations involved in any choice.

Theory and the Salafi Case

Given these premises, the second reason to engage in this research is theory building. Salafism offers indeed an interesting case. Ideologues and thinkers may adopt the same discursive repertoire; but they construct different ideological and political programs and inform different kinds of social actions. My analysis comprises movements and groups from the Arab Middle East belonging to the same broad ideological (doctrinal) system. Muslims who describe themselves as Salafis share the same ideational and doctrinal tenets. These ideological principles show little variation – if any – across different political practices (for example, regardless of whether they engage or not in acts of violence). Wiktorowicz, in an influential article on modern day Salafis, summarized this by claiming that a common *'aqida* ('creed') would allow for various *'manahij* ('practices' or 'programs').⁴¹ Therefore, in relation to the purpose of this study, it would be possible to evince more clearly in which ways a common ideological discursive space may harbor vastly different practices. To put this otherwise, from the common religious-ideological tenets of Salafism we may be able to single out which role ideologues played in shaping trajectories of contention and mobilization. The mechanisms and process I have submitted in this study suggest that they tend not to vary across different discursive practices. Therefore, we may be confronting identical channels to interpret and understand ideologues' impact on social and political life.

Secondarily, this lends to postulate similar mechanisms and processes even beyond the case of Jordanian Salafis. It would follow that the role of intellectuals within episodes of political contention may manifest significant similarities regardless of the context or specific ideological content. I will discuss this in the concluding chapter: I propose expanding in the future this research

⁴¹ See Wiktorowicz, 2006.

on the basis of the results presented in this dissertation- possibly theorizing about ideologues and political contention more in general.

Jordanian Salafism: an Overview

The third reason to undertake this study is the relevance of Salafism in the context of contemporary Islamist movements. It is true that Salafism may represent only a section of a much wider galaxy of Islamic activism (to confine ourselves only to the Sunni world, thus without considering the various branches, for example, of Shi'a Islamic activism). And it is fair to say that Salafis' views may elicit contempt, when not outright condemnation and opposition, in contemporary Middle East. This happens not only when it comes to liberal or secular Arabs, but also amongst fellow Muslims, whose understanding of Islam could well be at odds with Salafism.

Having said this, Salafism is an Islamic current related to a number of important recent developments: the creation of vast charity networks rivaling the ones of older movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood,⁴² the emergence of the '*Sahwah*' movement in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s,⁴³ the rise of Salafist *An-Nour* ('the Light') party in Egypt,⁴⁴ and, last but not least, the rise of notorious formations such as *Al-Qa'idah* and ISIS. Indeed, Salafism represents arguably the most relevant kind of Islamic activism in the contemporary Arab world. Outside these confines, one might even submit how groups such as Somalia's *Shabab* or Nigerian *Boko Haram* are Salafi inspired movements. Understanding how ideologues partake in the processes of social mobilization and political radicalization through their intellectual and scholarly work may shed light on these events and dynamics.

The groups and movements I analyze emerged and operate mostly in Jordan. However, the very features of modern-day Salafism make it hard to restrict its study within nation-state

⁴² Conversation with Sheikh al-Zaid, director and founder of Jami'ah Al-Kitab wa al-Sunna. Amman, June 15 2015.

⁴³ Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Contesting the Saudi state: Islamic voices from a new generation*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Lacroix, Stéphane, and George Holoch. *Awakening Islam*. Harvard University Press, 2011..

⁴⁴ Boehmer, Daniel, and James Murphy. "The Politicization of the Egyptian Salafyya: Principled Participation and Islamist Competition in the Post-Mubarak Era." *IMES Capstone Paper Series* George Washington University: Elliot School of International Affairs, 2012.

boundaries. Groups originating in a given country may end up spreading in other ones; networks form across state borders; and, importantly for this study, ideologues and leaders tend to study, travel and operate all over the region.

In the case of quietist Jordanian Salafis, a number of prominent scholars and preachers (Muhammad Nasir al-Albani, Salim al-Hilali, ‘Ali Hassan al-Halabi) gave birth and sustained the emergence of the socially oriented variant of Salafism. Before Al-Albani moved to Amman from Syria in the early 1980s, Salafism was a rather marginal phenomenon in Jordan. His disciples and followers, after his death in 1999, founded the Al-Albani Center for Methodological Research in the outskirts of Amman. The center quickly became a major institution for the preaching and spreading of traditional Salafism, attracting believers from around the world. This branch of Salafism is still the most numerically significant in Jordan, and winning over more and more adepts as of late.⁴⁵ Traditional Salafis represent a widespread movement featuring a specific way to understand and live Islam. More importantly for the present study, they have engaged in a quite elaborate and thoughtful reflection to explain and justify their position *vis à vis* politics in general and state power in particular. They renounce any kind of direct or institutional engagement with politics, and tend to have generally good relations with the regime.

Jordanian Jihadi Salafis tend to reject instead accommodation with the state and call for a direct – confrontational and often violent – engagement with politics. Largely influenced by Saudi Wahhabism, the first jihadi Salafis appeared in Jordan in the early 1990s. Figures such as Abdullah Azzam, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filastini contributed mobilizing and at times directly organizing radical groups in Jordan and then in the wider Middle East. Notorious

⁴⁵ Estimates about the number of traditional Salafis in Jordan are not easy to come by, as the adherents to the current are not registered or officially affiliated to the movement. Marwan Shahadah, a Jordanian independent researcher and expert on Salafism, would number them between 80,000 and 100,000, although other estimates are as low as 5,000. See Chapter 5 for more details on this point, especially section “Quietist Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition.”

organization such as *Al-Qa'idah fi-l-Bilad al-Rafidayn*⁴⁶ and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria find their ideological roots in Jihadi Jordanian Salafism.⁴⁷

Plan of the Study

In the present study, I examine the episodes of mobilization revolving around two of the most prominent Salafi thinkers in the contemporary Arab world, namely Nasir al-Din al-Albani for the Quietists and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi for the Jihadis.⁴⁸ For the former, we confront an amorphous mass movement; for the latter, the establishment of a vanguardist formation. These two cases are not so much selected to ensure comparability or representativeness; rather, I selected them in that they more readily manifest the phenomenon of interest.⁴⁹ I analyze these two scholars' production and how it was received by their target audiences. Secondary literature, discussions with local experts and Jordanians affiliated with Salafism pointed me to the most relevant works of both scholars. In analyzing such texts, I tried to evince how they sought to outline an ideational construct – an ideology – that could be mirrored in the concrete contentious manifestations I mentioned above.

Discussions with Jordanian academics and researchers were an invaluable source of information, both about the features and trajectory of Salafism at large and in Jordan in particular. I ran some twenty extensive, in depth interviews with individuals of diverse background and experiences: Members of Parliament, ministry officials, party and community leaders, Salafi preachers and *sheikhs*, and, last but not least, Salafis themselves. These interviews allowed me to ponder over how the work prominent Salafi scholars contributed to the emergence of the episodes of contention at hand.

⁴⁶ Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The phrase above stands for the 'Al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers', i.e. Mesopotamia.

⁴⁷ Al-Nijar, Isham and Ibrahim Najah. *Da'esh: As-Sikkin Allati Tadhbah al-Islam* [Da'esh: the Knife that Slaughters Islam], Dar al-Shuruq, 2015, pp. 13-16.

⁴⁸ See respectively Chapter 5 and 6.

⁴⁹ Danermark, Berth, Mats Ekström, Liselotte Jakobsen, and Jan Ch. Karlsson, eds. *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*. Routledge, 2002, pp. 170–17. Maxwell, Joseph A. 2012. *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research*. SAGE, 2012, pp. 93–96.

Finally, the dissertation is organized as follow. In the following chapter, I will offer the literature review I briefly touched upon above. I will then outline in Chapter 3 my theory in detail, elaborating on a Gramscian theory of intellectuals to account for the emergence and mobilization of Jordanian Salafism. Subsequently, Chapter 4 will provide a historical narrative to locate properly the rise of Salafism in Jordan. The two main strains mentioned above will be dealt with in chapter 5 (Quietist Salafism) and 6 (Jihadi Salafism). I will conclude in chapter 7 with final considerations about the theory I proposed, what we can learn about Salafism and its politics, and a possible venue for future research.

Chapter 2 – A Land of Three Rivers: Combining Perspectives

Geography as a Metaphor

Are streams of academic literature akin to lakes or rivers? I suggest looking at them as rivers. I intend to offer a picture of cross-fertilization across disciplinary boundaries: an ‘Academic Mesopotamia,’ a land where fruitful cross-fertilization between the Tigris of the ‘Discipline’ and the Euphrates of ‘Area Studies.’¹ Can the theoretical rigor of Political Science enrich the study of Muslim politics? Can in-depth knowledge of the region contribute to the development of the study of politics?

I am not seeking to bridge entire disciplinary fields: only, I would like to show how a ‘joint irrigation’² is possible and beneficial by making some research traditions work together. Perhaps I am more daring in terms of geographical metaphor, as I intend to bring together not just two, but three rivers!

I look at three major research fields to understand how ideologues influence and impact political contention in the context of political Islam: the study of social mobilization and political contention, the study of the sociology of intellectuals, and the study of political Islam. Of course, these three fields are so vast as to represent seas rather than mere rivers. That is why I zero in on specific subsets of such literatures that more directly pertain to my project. I shall focus on the issue of framing theory when it comes to contentious politics; on the relation between

¹ I borrow this image from Valbjørn, Morten. "Toward a ‘Mesopotamian turn’: disciplinarity and the study of the international relations of the Middle East." *Journal of Mediterranean studies* 14.1/2 (2004): 47-75. See also Teti, Andrea. "Bridging the gap: IR, Middle East Studies and the disciplinary politics of the area studies controversy." *European Journal of International Relations* 13.1 (2007): 117-145; Sil, Rudra, and Peter J. Katzenstein. "Analytic eclecticism in the study of world politics: Reconfiguring problems and mechanisms across research traditions." *Perspectives on Politics* 8.02 (2010): 411-431; and Haklai, Oded. "Authoritarianism and Islamic Movements in the Middle East: Research and Theory-building in the Twenty-first Century." *International Studies Review* 11.1 (2009): 27-45.

² Valbjørn, Morten, cit., p. 48.

intellectuals and social class; and on the main approaches to social and political mobilization in the study of political Islam.

Before doing that, I wish first to discuss the study of religion from a Political Science approach. I do so to explain in brief where I locate my project; and to clarify at the outset how I intend to think about religion as a social phenomenon.

On the Study of Religion in Politics

Why dedicating a section to this topic? For one, Political Science manifested for many decades a limited interest towards the study of religion. Classic modernization theorists represent perhaps the main culprit.³ In their contention, modernization and secularization tended to proceed hand in hand. This proposition resulted in the now much contested and discredited ‘secularization theory’:⁴ the march of progress would increasingly divest religion of any significant impact in modern politics or social life.⁵ Religious institutions and actors would decline in importance. People’s religiosity was bound to fade away. Most Marxist scholars would agree: various articulations of the ‘opiate of the people’ famous dictum foresaw the progressive and eventual demise of religion from the modern world.⁶

³ Rostow, Walt Whitman. *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto*. Cambridge university press, [1959] 1990 and *Middle Eastern political systems*. Prentice Hall, 1971; Lipset, Seymour Martin. "Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy." *American political science review* 53.01 (1959): 69-105. Lerner, Daniel. *The passing of traditional society: Modernizing the Middle East*. Free Press, 1958. For more recent studies, see Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. Cambridge University Press, [2003] 2011.

⁴ For an overview of the different meanings of the term ‘secularization’, see Philpott, Daniel. "Has the study of global politics found religion?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 183-202.

⁵ Berger, Peter. *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Open Road Media, 2011.

⁶ These trends can be traced even further back in European philosophical tradition. Besides Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, we may recall August Comte’s positivism, Frederick Nietzsche’s nihilism and Sigmund Freud psychoanalysis between the mid XIX century and the beginning of the XX century. For all these thinkers, religion was bound to disappear from the emerging modern world, in a process of maturation and growth either social or collective (Marx and Engels, Comte) or personal (Freud and Nietzsche, although the latter’s position on the matter is more ambiguous).

Consequently, social sciences predicting secularization became more secular in their outlook: in line with to their argument, they could not waste time addressing an ever-receding phenomenon. As Wald and Wilcox put it, the secularization of the field, “originates with the nature of political science as an academic discipline, specifically the intellectual development of the field, the social backgrounds of scholars, obstacles to empirical research on this subject, and the agenda-setting process in political science.”⁷ Religion, in a secularizing world, was by definition separated from political power.⁸ But the resurgence of religion in the contemporary world questioned the very assumption that modernity equals secularism:⁹ to understand modern politics, it has become important to understand religion.¹⁰

What has been the result of these efforts? As Eva Bellin suggests, “the subfield [of Comparative Politics] has still failed to reckon with the power of religion as an independent variable, the non-instrumental aspect of religious behavior, and the malleability of religious ideas, as well as their differential appeal, persuasiveness, and political salience over time.”¹¹

⁷ Wald, Kenneth D., and Clyde Wilcox. "Getting religion: has political science rediscovered the faith factor?." *American Political Science Review* 100.04 (2006): 523-529, p. 525.

⁸ This separation is foundational for our current understanding of the study of politics, in both subfields of comparative politics and international relations. The Westphalian system entailed the principle of domestic sovereignty: control of domestic affairs by a single authority (the state apparatus) and a corresponding lack of overarching authority among states. The first provision meant that no rival to the secular authority could exist within the state; hence Church institutions were not to interfere with politics, avoiding intervening in mundane and not transcendental affairs.

⁹ See in particular Berger, Peter L. *The desecularization of the world: Resurgent religion and world politics*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. Once one of the most important theorists of secularization, he honestly recanted his position later on.

¹⁰ Smith, Christian. *Disruptive religion: The force of faith in social movement activism*. Routledge, [1996] 2014; Bellin, Eva. "Faith in politics. New trends in the study of religion and politics." *World Politics* 60.02 (2008): 315-347; Tepe, Sultan, and Betül Demirkaya. "(Not) Getting Religion: Has Political Science Lost Sight of Islam?." *Politics and Religion* 4.02 (2011): 203-228; Grzymala-Busse, Anna. "Why comparative politics should take religion (more) seriously." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 421-442; Philpott, Daniel. "Explaining the political ambivalence of religion." *American Political Science Review* 101.03 (2007): 505-525. Toft, Monica Duffy, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah. *God's century: resurgent religion and global politics*. WW Norton & Company, 2011. In the field of international relations, Hurd, Elizabeth Shakman. *The politics of secularism in international relations*. Princeton University Press, 2009. Some scholars took a different route, developing a political economy approach to religion: see Gill, Anthony. "Religion and comparative politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4.1 (2001): 117-138.

¹¹ Bellin 2008, p. 316

Wald and Wilcox echo Bellin: the renewed interest in the study of religion and politics “is unlikely to persist unless specialists in the subject tie their work to broader theories of political behavior and change.”¹²

Religion, Ideas and Political Contention

Is then religion a force for maintaining the status quo or to spur change? Well, it depends. Scholars have recognized how religion has Janus-like qualities. Religion as a social phenomenon makes it possible to morph discourses and practices of subservience and preservation into a language for defiance and change. How can this happen? A good starting point is Swidler’s understanding of political culture as a “toolkit for action.”¹³ She argues that in ‘settled’ and ‘unsettled’ lives (periods of relative calm versus times of uncertainty and displacement) the same cultural elements may serve different purposes. In similar ways, Billings and Scott present an overview which more specifically addresses the role of religion as a legitimizing or challenging cultural force.¹⁴

Williams attempts more directly to explain how religion may impact preservation and change. Religion is at the same time culture (in a Geertzian sense of shared system of meaning)¹⁵ and ideology (as a program of action for Swidler ‘unsettled lives’ periods).¹⁶ As culture, Williams claims, “[r]eligion influences political relationships because religion is central in the creation of symbolic worlds.” This creation allows for the “ordering of relations among societal members – part of the essence of politics.” In this sense, religion affects political life ‘behind the

¹² Wald and Wilcox, cit., p. 529.

¹³ Swidler, Ann. "Culture in action: Symbols and strategies." *American sociological review* (1986): 273-286.

¹⁴ Billings, Dwight B., and Shaunna L. Scott. "Religion and political legitimation." *Annual Review of Sociology* (1994): 173-202. See also Billings, Dwight B. "Religion as opposition: A Gramscian analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* (1990): 1-31.

¹⁵ Geertz, Clifford. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic books, 1973.

¹⁶ Williams, Rhys H. "Religion as political resource: Culture or ideology?." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1996): 368-378. I will present a more detail discussion about the term ‘ideology’ in the theory section. For the moment, I am referring to Swidler’s notion.

backs' of participants: "its influence is often effective without the active awareness of those experiencing it."¹⁷ On the other hand, religion can also be ideology, a specific program for social and political action that instead 'pulls people from ahead.'¹⁸ In this vein, the relation between religion, power and political ideologies (often European totalitarian ones) has been explored in particular by Gentile.¹⁹

Smith provides a concise explanation to this peculiar quality of religion. Primarily and initially, religion supports the status quo: it explains what *is* out there. But the very transcendence of religion (its specific and distinct feature vis à vis mere political ideologies)²⁰ indicates a perfect world, the hereafter, that stands for how things *should be* down here: "that which is sacred and transcends temporal, earthly reality, also stands in the position to question, judge and condemn temporal, earthly reality."²¹ To explain how this condemnation leads to mobilization and contestation, we need to account for how ideas operate. This problem is, of course, anything but new, nor does it pertain solely to the role of religion in social affairs. As Berman points out,

"Political scientists must be able to explain the backstory, why some of the innumerable ideas in circulation achieve prominence in the political realm at particular moments and others do not.

¹⁷ Williams, cit., p. 370

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 373

¹⁹ Gentile, Emilio. "Political religion: a concept and its critics—a critical survey." *Totalitarian movements and political religions* 6.1 (2005): 19-32. For a discussion of Islamism in this perspective, see Hansen, Hendrik. "Islamism and Western Political Religions." *Religion Compass* 3.6 (2009): 1026-1041.

²⁰ The necessity of a transcendental element within religion is a matter of debate. Some scholars of religion (see Streng, Lloyd A., "Introduction: What is Religion?" in *Ways of Being Religious*, ed. idem, 1973) do not consider this element to be either necessary or sufficient to define religion – nor exclusive. I disagree with such view, in that I hold transcendence as a necessary feature of religion. Sadly, for reason of space, I cannot delve into this discussion. I will go back to my definition of religion in my theory section.

²¹ Smith, 1996, p. 6.

Since no true intellectual vacuum ever exists, what is really at issue here is ideational change, how individuals, groups, or societies exchange old ideas for new ones.”²²

Therefore, of the multitude of ideas present at any given moment within the space of political culture, some will have a social and political impact, and others will not. Of the ideas affecting social and political outcomes, some will shore up the status quo, others will contest it. In focusing on religious inspired ideas defying the incumbent system, I seek then to connect the ideational domain of political culture to the realm of contention. The Political Process Model (PPM) is now the most accepted model to address such domain. It has grown out of the study on social movements and the theories developed therein (known as Social Movements Theory, or STM). As an interdisciplinary field, SMT welcomed contribution from the social sciences as a whole, and it primarily developed thanks to American based sociologists in the 1960s. The PPM presents a set of elements that inform and explain mobilization and contention - resources for mobilization, political opportunity structures and frames (at times expanded to four to include also repertoires of contention). In relation to religion, Wald et al submit,

“[b]y now a well-established research tradition, SMT provides important clues to the mysteries of religiously based political activity. Most important, the various approaches incorporated under the SMT rubric identify what we consider the central questions that need to be asked in order to account for religion as an idiom of political conflict and offer the potential to treat religiously based movements on their own terms.”²³

However, despite the potential embedded in the SMT in addressing the role of religion in politics; and despite “the growth of disciplinary interest in the religious factor,” Wald and his colleagues reach a rather somber conclusion: this “increased attention highlights the need for a

²² Berman, Sheri. "Ideas, norms, and culture in political analysis." *Comparative Politics* (2001): 231-250, p. 233.

²³ Wald, Kenneth D., Adam L. Silverman, and Kevin S. Fridy. "Making sense of religion in political life." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8 (2005): 121-143, p. 124

stronger infusion of social science theory in this emerging subfield. Despite all the research generated by the relevant disciplines, neither political science nor religious studies have offered a comprehensive explanation for the genesis of religiously based political action.”²⁴

My study is an attempt in this direction. To clarify where I intend to locate this contribution, I will offer here a bird’s eye view of the evolution of the field of social and political mobilization. I shall then focus on the concept of framing and framing theory, where I deem the most outstanding problems to tackle the theme of religion in politics actually lie.

Evolution of the Field: a Bird’s Eye View

The early explorations of collective, non-institutionalized behaviors tended to depict political mobilization (especially in cases of riots, protests and demonstrations, but also social movements) as episodes of suspended rationality, mob behavior and public danger. They were thus considered as relatively marginal phenomena, unduly altering social peace and stability.²⁵ The main theoretical thrust was to explain them as episodes of panic, turmoil dictated by the psychology of mass behavior.²⁶

Social and political mobilization outside channels considered legitimate (often because institutionalized, such as elections) seemed to dismiss also the (potential) righteousness of grievances and needs behind it. Taking grievances seriously phased out the approach predicated on mass psychology. People did not engage in contention because of some sort of suspension of rationality or sheer misapprehension, but because of claims, needs and aspirations – in other words, dissatisfaction with the status quo. However, it became soon apparent that while

²⁴ Wald et al, 2005, p. 122

²⁵ Parsons, Talcott. *Social system*. Routledge, [1951] 2013. Parsons’s structural-functionalism commanded much influence in this regard.

²⁶ Adorno, Theodore W., Eric Frenkel-Brunswik, David J. Levinson DJ and Ronald N. Sanford. *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York: Harper, 1950; Kornhauser, William. *Politics of Mass Society*. Routledge, [1959] 2013; Smelser, Neil J. *Theory of collective behavior*. Quid Pro Books, [1967] 2011.

dissatisfaction and desire to improve one's lot are widespread, mobilization is not. Two major approaches confronted this issue from vastly different angles.

The Marxist approach worked on the concept of 'ideology'²⁷ with the works of Lenin,²⁸ Gramsci²⁹ and Hall,³⁰ amongst others. Marx himself emphasized the limiting aspects of ideology (the ensemble of ideas, conceptions and consciousness derived from the world of material production), as it would impede, for the most part, an emancipatory assessment of power relations.³¹ Marxists' problem was to explain the lack of mobilization – in particular, of the proletariat against the capitalist class – when one would expect to see it given 'objective interests' of given social groupings. Classic Marxist contention spoke of the working-class failure or incapacity to properly understand such interests and then act rationally upon them. The concept of ideology indicated here a partially obfuscated apprehension of social, economic and political life. This misapprehension would hamper not only the possibility of mobilizing to alter the status quo, but even, in the most extreme cases, of conceiving mobilization as a desirable and needed course of action.³² A richer theorization over the origins, functions and workings of ideology shall wait the fundamental contribution of Gramsci, whose work will be made available to the English speaking academic world only after the publication of *Selection from the Prison*

²⁷ I will use myself the term, albeit in different fashion, see Chapter 3.

²⁸ Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich, and Todd Chretien. *State and revolution*. Haymarket Books, [1917] 2015.

²⁹ Gramsci, Antonio and Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers, 1971.

³⁰ Hall, Stuart. "The problem of ideology-Marxism without guarantees." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2 (1986): 28-44.

³¹ Conceptions of the world of the ruling class would sideline ideas opposed to the status quo. At the same time, ideology also entailed a potentially positive and productive aspect. Space limitations do not allow for a more proper treatment of Marxist theory of ideology. I would like to thank Mark Rupert for his comments and indications on this point.

³² Langman, Lauren. "Why Is Assent Willing? Culture, Character and Consciousness." *Critical Sociology* 41, 3 (2014).

Notebooks edited by Hoare and Nowell Smith.³³ We shall return to this when dealing with the Gramscian insights on mobilization, ideology and culture.

A rationalist approach developed more or less at the time of the tumultuous 1960s in the US. Its founding figure was Mancur Olson, with his influential *The Logic of Collective Action*.³⁴ As Hirschman (1982) interestingly pointed out,³⁵ the reception of Olson's work was at first uneven: it explained why mobilization is unlikely to occur while America was witnessing an unprecedented wave of contention! Soon enough however Olson's became an unavoidable work when addressing collective action, famously positing how individual rational calculations – in particular the free-rider problem – made it illogical to start and join social and political mobilization. Therefore, if for the Marxist approach it was rational to mobilize and join collective action, for Olson inspired rational choice theory the opposite was true.

Between the late '70s and mid-80s the study of social movements in particular and mobilization more in general sees the emergence of three perspectives which will eventually congeal in the Political Process Model (PPM). Resource Mobilization Theory (RTM) builds off of Olson's theory and thus continues the rationalist tradition. McCarthy and Zald³⁶ reject the idea of an immediate (and unmediated) causal effect on mobilization of grievances. However, unlike Olson, they suggest to focus on the resources available to the would-be protesters and activists that may solve the collective action problem: financial assets, spaces and locations, access to media and state officials, cohesive leadership, clear program of action, societal allies, etc...

While welcoming the finer grained analysis of social mobilization, students were not satisfied with the RTM approach for two main reasons. First, it did not deal with the kind of

³³ In Italy, Gramsci's 'Quaderni del Carcere' were edited and published between 1948 and 1951 by the Italian Communist Party.

³⁴ Olson, Mancur. *The logic of collective action*. Harvard University Press, [1965] 2009.

³⁵ Hirschman, Albert O. *Shifting involvements: private interest and public action*. Princeton University Press, 1982.

³⁶ McCarthy, John D., and Mayer N. Zald. "Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory." *American journal of sociology* (1977): 1212-1241.

social and political environment in which mobilization emerged and had to confront. And second, it seemed to stress too much the rational side of protests when scholars had reasons to believe – often given their own participation in such movements - how elements such as passions, commitment, identity and visions seemed to be part and parcel of mobilization.

The first problem with RMT gave rise to arguably the most prolific approach within the study of mobilization. Largely in debt with structuralist political sociology of the 1960s,³⁷ the Political Opportunity Structures (POS) approach looked primarily at macro institutional, social and economic parameters to evaluate the likelihood and the kind of mobilization. Elements such as state capacity, regime type, societal cleavages, alliance alignments and capital-labor relations took the center stage in a highly structuralist perspective: the focus shifts here from the rationality of the agents to “conditions” that “cannot be molded by actors’ purposes.”³⁸ And, unlike Marxist scholarship, class struggle and political economy were either de-emphasized or simply structural elements alongside others. Tilly³⁹, McAdam⁴⁰ and Tarrow⁴¹ will contribute most significantly to this research, which will encompass not only social movements, but also macro phenomena such as state formation or collapse, nationalism, democratization and revolution. In particular, Skocpol’s influential work on social revolutions deemed structural

³⁷ See for example Moore, Barrington. *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*, Beacon Press, [1966] 1993. For a similar work in the Marxist tradition, Perry Anderson’s *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 1979, remains in my view the unsurpassed example from a structuralist perspective of contention, regime type and state formation. Anderson, Perry. *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. Verso Books, [1974] 2013.

³⁸ McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly. “Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics,” in Lichbach, Mark Irving, and Alan S. Zuckerman. *Comparative politics: Rationality, culture, and structure*. Cambridge University Press, [1996] 2009, p. 145.

³⁹ Tilly, Charles. *From mobilization to revolution*. McGraw-Hill, 1978.

⁴⁰ McAdam, Doug. *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930-1970*. University of Chicago Press, [1982] 2010.

⁴¹ Tarrow, Sidney G. *Struggling to reform: Social movements and policy change during cycles of protest*. No. 15. Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1983; *Democracy and Disorder: Social Conflict, Political Protest and Democracy in Italy, 1965-1975*, Oxford University Press, 1989.

imperatives so powerful as to render actors' wishes, preferences and outlooks rather marginal and ultimately inconsequential. Hence, "[r]evolutions are not made. They come."⁴²

The POS account was also consonant with the re-claiming of the state as a fundamental locus of analysis which developed in the mid-80s.⁴³ Furthermore, a bridge could be conveniently built with RMT instrumental rationality: "expanding opportunities", brought about by "changes in institutional rules, political alignments or alliance structures that grant more leverage to aggrieved groups with which to press their claims", do in fact "derive their causal force by changing the cost-benefit calculus of insurgents and antagonists alike."⁴⁴

What POS could not satisfactorily answer was the second major weakness detected within the rationalist approach, i.e. the dearth of consideration for actors' perceptions, wishes, passions and identity-based claims. If anything, the structuralist schools seemed to downplay those even more.

Framing Theory and the Study of Mobilization and Contention

It is at this juncture that the study of social and political mobilization and the study of (political) culture converge. Goffman's first adoption of the term 'frame'⁴⁵ was deployed by Benford, Snow and their associates in the mid-1980s in the study of social mobilization.⁴⁶ Framing theory, or more simply 'framing', developed into a voluminous literature out of Benford and Snow's foundational contribution.⁴⁷ Framing theory allowed ideational factors to sit

⁴² Skocpol, Theda. *States and social revolutions*. Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 26, quoting abolitionist Wendell Phillips.

⁴³ Evans, Peter B., Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. *Bringing the state back in*. Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁴⁴ McAdam et al, 2009, p. 153.

⁴⁵ Goffman, Erving. "Frame Analysis." *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, Madrid [1975] (2006).

⁴⁶ Snow, David A., et al. "Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation." *American sociological review* (1986): 464-481.

⁴⁷ Only to report works from Benford and Snow and their associates, see Benford, Robert D, and David A. Snow. "Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment." *Annual review of sociology* 26.1 (2000):

alongside RMT and POS. It tried to do this by “linking together social psychological and structural [*what POS emphasized*]/organizational [*what SMT emphasized*] factors and perspectives in a theoretically informed and empirically grounded fashion.”⁴⁸ How did framing theory propose to do this?

Framing theory pertains to the creation of frames and their deployment in the context of social and political mobilization. Movement leaders, organizers, and political entrepreneurs engage in frames construction. Benford and Snow define frames as “interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment.”⁴⁹ How are frames connected to mobilization? Frames are tools to represent and express grievances and dissatisfaction (‘injustice frames’), providing a diagnosis of the ills affecting a given community or group. They also offer a prognosis, i.e. a solution contrived by movement leaders for potential adherents and bystanders. And last, a frame shall culminate into a call to action, capitalizing on the success of both the diagnosis and prognosis.⁵⁰ In order to perform successfully these functions, a frame has to ‘resonate’ with the target audience. For a frame to resonate, an intervening process, frame alignments, must obtain: “[b]y frame alignment, we refer to the linkage of individual and SMO [Social Movement Organization] interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and

611-63; "Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization." *International social movement research* 1.1 (1988): 197-217; "Master frames and cycles of protest." *Frontiers in social movement theory* (1992): 133-155. Snow, David A. "Framing processes, ideology, and discursive fields." *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, 2004: 380-412; Snow, David, et al. "The Emergence, Development, and Future of the Framing Perspective: 25+ Years Since" *Frame Alignment*." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 19.1 (2014): 23-46.

⁴⁸ Snow et al 1986, p. 464.

⁴⁹ Snow, David A, and Robert D Benford. "Master frames and cycles of protest." *Frontiers in social movement theory* (1992): 133-155, p. 138.

⁵⁰ Benford and Snow, 1988.

ideology are congruent and complementary.”⁵¹ Frame alignment may occur by frame bridging, amplification, extension or transformation.⁵²

Framing theory is to be welcomed in that it adds three important elements for analysis of mobilization. First, it is readily apparent how in this sense frames are eminently individual cognitive constructs. Framing theory allows reinserting agency in a field of inquiry otherwise heavily focused either on a structural level of analysis (with POS); or concentrated at the meso-organizational level (with RMT). Second, it provides a theoretical scaffold for dealing with ideational factors, especially (political) culture. As observed previously,⁵³ scholars have often treated culture as a structural factor, investigating how a certain system of values or meaning would orient agents’ behavior or practice. The impact of agents’ ideas on the structure did not receive a comparable amount of attention. Framing theory analyzes precisely how specific depiction and representation of structural features and of resources contribute to mobilization.

Last, framing theory opens up the systematic study of agents’ cognition and perceptions. In POS, actors simply respond to systemic incentives and constraints. Such structural imperatives are deemed necessary and sufficient to explain mobilization. In RMT, individuals act as instrumentally rational actors to overcome free-riding and collective action problems. With the concept of frames, these considerations are accompanied by assessments of agents’ social psychological dispositions. However, it is at this point, when framing theory invites the investigation of cognition and perceptions, that the theory manifests its weaknesses.

If, as it were, framing theory is to represent the linchpin for the insertion of (political) culture, ideas and cognition in the study of mobilization – and hence allowing my own study to

⁵¹ Snow et al, 1986, p. 464.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 467-476.

⁵³ Fn. 22.

proceed with the analysis of religion in such context – then we should pay close attention to five major problems.

First, the definition of frame I have presented addresses the agent solely as an individual. In studying mobilization, we face a collective phenomenon. How does framing theory connect the individual and the collective levels? Rucht and Reidhardt proposed to consider frames as “collective patterns of interpretation with which certain definitions of problems, causal attributions, demands, justifications and value-orientations are brought together in a more or less consistent framework for the purpose of explaining facts, substantiating criticism and legitimating claims.”⁵⁴ However, they do not indicate how to bridge methodological individualism upon which frames are predicated at the micro level and their macro manifestations as ‘collective patterns of interpretations.’⁵⁵ As Gillan notes, “[t]he ambition of much framing scholarship is to delineate important processes that mediate predictably between political culture, SMOs and individual behaviour. Since frames are identified at the collective level but conceived as causally effective at the individual level such work introduces a problematic dualism.”⁵⁶ Alimi and Johnston provide the terrain to come up with a solution to this dualism: framing, “goes to the heart of all collective action and is the *raison d’être* of the framing approach’s utility, namely, that the shift from quiescence to action presumes a prior shift in shared perception, consciousness, or interpretation of what is necessary and/or possible.”⁵⁷ But Johnston and Oliver consider indeed a problem that, “[f]irst, frames are individual cognitive

⁵⁴ Rucht, Dieter, and Friedhelm Neidhardt. "Towards a 'Movement Society'? On the possibilities of institutionalizing social movements." *Social Movement Studies* 1.1 (2002): 7-30, p. 11.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of methodological individualism and collective phenomena, see Hanson, Stephen E. *Post-imperial democracies: ideology and party formation in third republic France, Weimar Germany, and post-Soviet Russia*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, chapter 1.

⁵⁶ Gillan, Kevin. "Understanding meaning in movements: A hermeneutic approach to frames and ideologies." *Social Movement Studies* 7.3 (2008): 247-263, p. 251.

⁵⁷ Johnston, Hank, and Eitan Alimi. "A methodology analyzing for frame dynamics: The grammar of keying battles in Palestinian nationalism." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 18.4 (2013): 453-474, p. 468.

structures, located ‘within the black box of mental life’ that orient and guide interpretation of individual experience. Second, frames become important in analyzing collective action insofar as they are shared by enough individuals to channel individual behaviors into patterned social ones.”⁵⁸ This observation highlights how the linkage between individual and collective frames of action is implied, rather than explained, in the original formulation of the theory. The mechanisms and processes by which this happens are underspecified.

Second, framing theory harbors a dangerous dualism. Frame is a cognitive and largely unconscious structure while also a strategic and voluntaristic process. Hence, on the one hand framing theory refers to lenses through which social actors – individuals and groups alike – filter and understand events and dynamics. On the other, it stands also for the “‘discursive work’ through which political entrepreneurs position events, causes, or projects within narratives carefully selected from an array of available choices.”⁵⁹ Put otherwise: *frames* are snapshots of reality, mental schemata; *framing* is the process whereby such snapshots come about.⁶⁰ Framing theory does not clearly differentiate between these two different conceptualizations.⁶¹ This problem presents us with a further and third difficulty for framing theory.

This seemingly dualistic ontological nature of frames (structure versus process) makes us wonder: is framing theory postulating a strategic operation in perceptions and grievances construction – or even manipulation and fabrication – at the hands of specific actors? Or is it proposing frames emerge out of deeply held – even emotionally or primordially rooted – feelings about ‘what is out there’ in the hearts and minds of individuals? As Steinberg puts it, “[i]t is

⁵⁸ Oliver, Pamela, and Hank Johnston. "What a good idea! Ideologies and frames in social movement research." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 5.1 (2000): 37-54, p. 41.

⁵⁹ Brown, Gustav. "Does framing matter? Institutional constraints on framing in two cases of intrastate violence." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 19.2 (2014): 143-164, p. 143.

⁶⁰ See also Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow et al 1986; Tarrow, Sidney G., and J. Tollefson. *Power in movement: Social movements, collective action and politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁶¹ Oliver et al, 2000, p. 41.

problematic to characterize social movement framing as both an exercise in the reality construction of genuinely held senses of injustice and identity, while simultaneously holding that activists and SMOs strategically manipulate and align frames to mobilize consensus.”⁶² Other authors have instead argued that the constructivist/strategic dichotomy is not set to limit the utility of framing theory: “While actors instrumentally frame situations so as to press their case, their very understanding of what is instrumental is shaped by taken for granted frames. In that sense, frames are both strategic and set the terms of strategic action.”⁶³ In a similar move, Desrosiers, in studying ethnic violence and framing, claims that, “[f]rame analysts acknowledge that strategic communication takes place amidst very real settings, structures and opportunities, which framing does not claim to study. But while framing theory may not account for these settings, it does shed light on how people make sense of them, interpret them and communicate them. Framing gives us the means to develop an integrated approach to the study of interpretive and communication micro-processes behind episodes of (ethnic) violence.”⁶⁴ In my view, these propositions do not dent Steinberg’s core contention: they simply claim that frames are two things at the same time, and that it is not a problem – while I think, with Steinberg, that it is! While I recognize the plausibility of these arguments, they look less tenable in light of the last two critiques I would like to offer.

The fourth problem is the assumption linking frame and underlying discourse. Frame is predicated on the, “presumption (in analytic practice if not in theory)[...] that this framing

⁶² Steinberg, Marc W. "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners." *American Journal of Sociology* 105.3 (1999): 736-780, p. 743. For a similar position, see also Crossley, Nick. *Making Sense of Social Movements*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2002: “Frames are not objects or utensils in the objective world, which agents can pick up and use like tools. They are constitutive aspects of the subjectivity of social agents,” p. 41.

⁶³ Polletta, Francesca, and M. Kai Ho. "Frames and their consequences." *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (2006): 189-209, p. 190

⁶⁴ Desrosiers, Marie-Eve. "Reframing frame analysis: key contributions to conflict studies." *Ethnopolitics* 11.1 (2012): 1-23, p. 17

discourse is an internally stable enough vehicle for the transmission of meaning so that interpretive strategies for mobilization and action are possible.”⁶⁵ In other words, for frames to explain mobilization they must be steady and coherent. But this assumption is a very demanding one. Any discourse, including the specific discourse out of which frames emerge, is more often than not hardly a stable construct. It is fluid, complex and internally inconsistent. The interactive and communicative process that framing theory claims to detect and depict demands instead a stable, quasi-fixed discourse. It is on such discourse that actors bent on mobilizing their target audience insist and draw from. They do this thanks to the frames they create via the framing process. Thus, stripped down, the communicative process between senders and receivers seems overly simplified in its dynamic: skillful political entrepreneurs at one end, and a receptive public at the other end. In light of these considerations, the concept of frame seems underequipped. It cannot sustain properly the weight of theoretical claims that do not rest on assumptions of discursive cohesiveness and internal consistency. And it cannot account for the attendant proposition of a one way interaction in the context of the framing process. In order to solve this issue, proponents of framing theory have advanced a series of items that may account for frames success, i.e. successful mobilization.⁶⁶ However, we still confront the tautological spin this solution offers: how are frames successful in mobilizing? Because they check all the marks. How do we know they do? Because we witness successful mobilization.

Fifth and last, the concept of frame is not useful to discuss how certain ideas emerge in the first place: focused, as it is, on transmission and reception, framing theory does not shed light on the generation of new insights out of a certain discourse. Frames may still be useful to explain

⁶⁵ Steinberg, cit., p. 848

⁶⁶ These items are centrality, range and interrelatedness, credibility, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity. See Fine, Gary Alan. "Public narration and group culture: Discerning discourse in social movements." *Social movements and culture* 4 (1995): 127-43.

how ideas are parceled out and conveyed to a target audience; but framing theory is thin when it comes to the origin and development of those very ideas. As Gillan noticed, “while claiming to bring the realm of beliefs and values into a theory of social movements criticized for its ignorance of culture, the focus on processes of framing has pushed the ideas themselves to the periphery of that approach.”⁶⁷ Framing theory, in privileging the concept of frames, disposed of the concept of ideology. I contend that the latter is more appropriate when we need to confront issues of ideas generation, development and, ultimately and crucially, influence.⁶⁸

We may for the time being think of ideologies as complex systems of beliefs entailing a social theory and normative prescriptions.⁶⁹ As a social theory, ideologies are not merely snapshots or filter to assess reality. They are constructs to comprehend the ensemble of social reality, connecting its various parts according to a logic or rationale. Gerring notes that ‘consistency’ is one of the very few (mostly) agreed upon features of ideology.⁷⁰ However, this observation merely indicates more constituency vis à vis political culture and discourse; not unassailable or lack of internal contradictions as some understandings of frames propose. Furthermore, as a set of normative prescriptions, ideology spells out the ‘ought to be’ beyond the ‘is.’ In this sense, it fits nicely the study of religion in politics in that, as we discussed before, religion always treads on the verge between mere assessment of reality and call for change in order to bring it in line with a preferred order. Last, ideology allows to study where ideas originate and emerge. This point is crucial in the present project as it requires singling out the loci of ideological production and identifying them in specific societal actors:

⁶⁷ Gillan, cit., 2008, p. 252.

⁶⁸ I will provide a more thorough definition of ideology in the theory section.

⁶⁹ Oliver et al, cit., p. 38.

⁷⁰ Gerring, John. "Ideology: A definitional analysis." *Political Research Quarterly* 50.4 (1997): 957-994, p. 980.

“Social networks, especially among small groups of intellectuals, are central in creating new theories and new ideologies. Rochon [...] calls these networks critical communities, loci of ideological production. He distinguishes this ideological production from movement activities, particularly framing, which promote the ideas to a wider public. In this view, framing does not create ideological change, but can be a way of recruiting people into a context within which ideology can change.”⁷¹

In conclusion, we can say the following. First, “[i]t is essential to appreciate the intellectual aspects of ideology (what Heberle calls the debate of ideas over the centuries) as well as their function in motivating action.”⁷² Second, frames and ideologies do not exclude one another. They are rather complementary concepts, performing different functions. Students of frames have indeed indicated how, “reference to a general conceptualization of ideology glosses over these core framing functions, thereby making the problems of consensus and action mobilization appear less complicated than is often, and probably typically, the case.”⁷³ Hence, I do not advocate for a simplistic substitution of frames with ideology. But I do hold ideology as a more useful concept for the task of my project. This choice stems from two considerations: first, frames may emerge out of ideologies, but the reverse seems hardly the case. Ideologies deserve to be granted more attention. Furthermore, in this study, concerned with the role of intellectuals, frames do not offer enough theoretical leverage to analyze the complex social theories that these individuals and ‘critical communities’ may produce. In focusing my analysis on ideologues at the intersection of religion, politics and mobilization, I prime ideology over frame.

⁷¹ Oliver et al, cit., p. 45.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Snow, David, and Scott Byrd. "Ideology, framing processes, and Islamic terrorist movements." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12.2 (2007): 119-136, p. 129.

Dynamics of Contention, Cognition and Meaning Making

In *Dynamics of Contention* (DOC),⁷⁴ Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam brought to bear the wealth and tradition of the PPM. At the same time, DOC seeks to amend what the authors perceived being the major limitations in the field of social mobilization: a prevailing focus on social movements; the separation between large N studies on wars and civil conflicts and small N studies of revolutions; a western bias in terms of case selection and underlying cultural assumptions; and a strong emphasis on structural factors to explain contention.⁷⁵ Their study is considered a major turning point for the study of social mobilization and contentious politics. The framework they proposed, while criticized at times on accounts of excessive complexity,⁷⁶ introduced the language of mechanisms, processes and episodes.⁷⁷ This innovation entailed a fundamental shift: from the language of causes of contention and attendant covering theories, to pathways or medium-range theorization about causation. Let us examine this work more closely.

In DOC, Tilly and his associates perform three main moves. First, they expand the scope of their research to any social activity that may represent ‘contentious politics.’⁷⁸ Contentious politics is, “the episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects”. Moreover, “at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁷⁵ McAdam, Doug, and Sidney Tarrow. "Introduction: Dynamics of contention ten years on." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16.1 (2011): 1-10.

⁷⁶ Hanagan, Michael, “Contentious Politics – Review”, *Journal of Social History*, 41.3 (Spring, 2008): 761-763.

⁷⁷ I will provide a proper definition of these terms in the theory section. See McAdam et al, 2001, p. 22.

⁷⁸ See chapter 1 for a preliminary discussion on this point.

⁷⁹ McAdam et al, 2001, p. 5. The caveat about the government (which we may understand in this context as the state in its opposition to society) is of course pivotal. Without this, contention could not be relegated to politics solely but also, for example, to household violence, or contention happening within a relatively well-bounded institution, such as a firm or a church. The authors claim that also the adjective ‘public’ offered in their definition insists on the same issue.

Contentious politics entails actors making claims that, if realized, would bear on the interests of a third party.⁸⁰

Second, DOC does not try to get rid of the “classical social movement agenda,”⁸¹ whose main theoretical contribution was the PPM. Rather, they seek to insert dynamism into such model: “[w]here the classic social movement agenda assigned central weight to social change, political opportunities, mobilizing structures, frames, and transgressive forms of action, we try to identify the dynamic mechanisms that bring these variables into relation with one another and with other significant actors.”⁸² The authors are not interested, “in the strength of the correlations between variables but in how variables are linked to one another through causal mechanisms.”⁸³ This claim comes in the contexts of the existing body of knowledge about mobilization. We know the conditions and elements that may engender it. We also know that contention and mobilization take even the most reputed and attentive scholars off guard when they do occur. Timur Kuran has probably provided the most compelling account as to why we are not (and likely never will be) able to predict the emergence of mobilization.⁸⁴ Hence, Tilly and his colleagues do not seek “to identify necessary and sufficient conditions for mobilization, action, or certain trajectories, we search out recurrent causal mechanisms and regularities in their concatenation.”⁸⁵ I focus precisely on the ways (mechanisms) in which specific social actors’

⁸⁰ Ibid. Tilly and Tarrow also described contentious politics as that area of social life at the intersection of politics, collective action, and contention (not a very elegant definition in that they use some of the terms they need to explain, but an intuitively useful one). Tilly, Charles, and Sidney Tarrow. *Contentious politics*. Oxford University Press, [2007] 2015. p. 7.

⁸¹ McAdam et al, 2001, p. 41.

⁸² McAdam et al, 2001, p. 43. Mechanisms are defined as “delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations”, 24. I will elaborate on the concept of mechanisms in the theory section.

⁸³ McAdam et al, 2011, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Kuran, Timur. "Now out of never: The element of surprise in the East European revolution of 1989." *World politics* 44.01 (1991): 7-48.

⁸⁵ McAdam et al, 2001 p. 22

impact mobilization, an attention to the process whereby this happens as opposed to the necessary or sufficient conditions that bring about mobilization.

Third, Tilly and his colleagues “treat social interaction, social ties, communication, and conversation not merely as expressions of structure, rationality, consciousness, or culture but as *active sites of creation and change*.”⁸⁶ Hence, this perspective permits to look at social interactions as discursive practices: the performance of acts – behavioral and speech acts – which intend to communicate meaning.

The work of Tilly and his colleagues mirrors both previous and later developments in the study of mobilization and contention that stress the cognitive and meaning-making aspect of discursive practices. Eyerman and Jamison describe how a cognitive approach would depict social mobilization:

“A social movement is not one organization or one particular special interest group. It is more like a cognitive territory, a new conceptual space that is filled by a dynamic interaction between different groups and organizations. [...] It is apparent that the cognitive praxis does not come ready made to a social movement. It is precisely the creation, articulation, formulation of new thoughts and ideas - new knowledge - that a social movement defines itself in society.”⁸⁷

It is readily apparent how Tilly and his colleagues echoed this proposition in their call for attention to social interaction as a creative site for change. Kurzman further expanded on different occasions on the fundamentally cognitive aspect of mobilization.⁸⁸ For Kurzman, the implications of DOC bring the study of contention to an analysis of meaning-making practices. First, he contends, “[h]umans constantly seek to understand the world around them, and that the

⁸⁶ Ibid, emphasis added.

⁸⁷ Eyerman, Ron, and Andrew Jamison. *Social movements: A cognitive approach*. Penn State Press, 1991, p. 55.

⁸⁸ See in particular his work on the Iranian revolution, where he argues for a cognitive transformation of potential resources for mobilization into actual ones. Kurzman, Charles. "Organizational opportunity and social movement mobilization: a comparative analysis of four religious movements." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 3.1 (1998): 23-49.

imposition of meaning on the world is a goal itself, a spur to action, and a site of contestation.”⁸⁹ Second, “[m]eaning-making is not limited to social movements. All action involves meaning-making, just as all action involves contention. However, social movements may be a particularly conducive site to privilege meaning-making, because their activities foreground resistance to the dominant norms and institutions of society. They raise questions about the possibility of alternative world-views and alternative dispensations.”⁹⁰

Popular Intellectuals and Alternative Worldviews

Who works for such alternative worldviews? Who produces these ‘alternative dispensations’? Mobilizing frames and ideologies do not simply emerge spontaneously within episodes of contention: we can study and research their origin and trajectory. I do not want to recommend a completely voluntaristic process, and I have warned above about such position. But I do suggest that some individuals and actors are more responsible than others when it comes to the production and diffusion of ideas, as well as to their deployment within processes of social and political mobilization.

In addressing this issue, Baud and Rutten propose the figure of “popular intellectual,”⁹¹ an individual closely related to the emergence, development and trajectory of mobilization. They lament how social movements or similar phenomena are often reified, their agency taken for granted: ideas may be taken to rise ‘spontaneously’, with no specific agent bearing some degree of responsibility for it.⁹² Relatively scant theoretical work has been done on the relationship

⁸⁹ Kurzman, Charles. "Introduction: Meaning-making in social movements." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81.1 (2008): 5-15, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁹¹ Baud, Michiel and Rosanne Rutten. "Introduction". In *Popular Intellectuals And Social Movements: Framing Protest In Asia, Africa, And Latin America*, ed. by idem, 1-18: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁹² See also Holland, Dorothy, Gretchen Fox, and Vinci Daro. "Social movements and collective identity: A decentered, dialogic view." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008): 95-126. They contend, “movements are better seen

between episodes of contention (the outcome to be explained) and the individuals (or community of individuals)⁹³ elaborating, systematizing and spreading the ideas and practices along which political mobilization is articulated. While in fact we have a rich literature on contention and mobilization; and while we have, as I will show in this section, a vast literature on the sociology of intellectuals, we lack systematic attempts at bridging these two.

This is unfortunate, Baud and Rutten conclude, in that, “[t]he relationship between intellectual representation and political activities is one of the most politicized issues in social movements and contentious politics. Intellectual work is measured in terms of coherence and veracity; political activity is judged almost exclusively in terms of success. This tension makes the position of popular intellectuals highly complex.”⁹⁴ Popular intellectuals are thus those individuals who, “seek to define the problems of subaltern groups, articulate their grievances, and frame their social and political demands.”⁹⁵

Their usage of the phrasing ‘subaltern groups’ promptly refers to the vocabulary of Italian philosopher and political activist Antonio Gramsci, to whom they refer explicitly. The expression indicates how popular intellectuals are indeed ‘popular’ in a class-based sense:⁹⁶ it stresses the popular intellectual’s position *vis à vis* power, which is a subordinate one insofar as ‘popular’ indicates subaltern groups within a set of power relations. This subaltern position of the popular intellectuals (and therefore not, obviously, of *all* intellectuals) enables and at times

not as relatively unified actors, but, as multiple sources of cultural discourses competing to inform the everyday actions of movement participants,” p. 97.

⁹³ See Rochon, Thomas R. *Culture moves: Ideas, activism, and changing values*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁹⁴ Baud and Rutten, cit., p. 215

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 2

⁹⁶ By this I do not hint at any mechanistic understanding of class-intellectuals relations characterizing some versions of Marxism. The following review on the sociology of the intellectuals will clarify this. When it comes to Gramsci, one would only need to read the various passages within his Notebooks against Bakunin’s ‘Popular Manual’ to have a sense of his deep aversion to any deterministic or economic understanding of Marxism.

compels⁹⁷ them to articulate and put forward alternative worldviews to amend the subaltern position of the groups they hail from and may still be part of.⁹⁸

The work of Gramsci on the intellectuals, and the following reception and development of his insights, is part of a broader literature on the sociology of intellectuals. This research has tried to define these social actors and analyze their function within society. My focus on popular intellectuals considers therefore a more limited segment of this social category (insisting on their more immediate impact on mobilization and contention and recalling their position in relation to power).

Defining an Elusive Actor: The Sociology of the Intellectuals

I offer the following review by latching on the previous discussion on social and political mobilization. In particular, the concepts of frames and ideologies, and the problem they seek to amend in explaining contention, represent elements bridging the study of mobilization with the study of the intellectuals. Considerations regarding ideational and discursive elements implied that structural properties and features are not given. They are perceived, filtered and differently understood by actors variously located in a structure that we may describe in terms of geography of power.⁹⁹ As already noted by Steinberg, framing theory is predicated upon a constructivist ontology, albeit at times not explicitly. Every actor engages in constructing social reality; but in doing this, paraphrasing Orwell, some actors are indeed more equal than others. And in this

⁹⁷ I qualify this stance later on when considering Saba Mahmood's work on political Islam. See fn. 178.

⁹⁸ I will elaborate on this point at length in presenting my theory. For the moment, I offer a brief reflection on Gramsci when he speaks of intellectual and moral reform: "What ensured that not all intellectuals would be simply reactionary and conservative and fail to elaborate new ideologies, 'to organize the intellectual and moral reform?' Part of the answer was in the development of organic intellectuals, which might encourage a congruence of interests and views between the intellectual elite and masses." Olsaretti, Alessandro. "Beyond class: The many facets of Gramsci's theory of intellectuals." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 14.4 (2014): 363-381, p. 377. It is also worth mentioning here how Gerring, op. cit. p. 980, suggests 'contrast' (i.e. standing in opposition to) as amongst the most widespread conceptualizations of ideology.

⁹⁹ Dabashi, Hamid. *Islamic liberation theology: Resisting the empire*. Routledge, 2008. See in particular the introduction.

regard, the intellectual is a social actor whose pronouncements and thinking on society, hierarchy, difference, the public good, identity, sense of right and wrong are particularly relevant and consequential. This happens by virtue of her education, insightfulness, scholarship, erudition or a combination of those; or else thanks to other qualities like personal charisma, eloquence and persuasiveness.

The figure of the intellectual is a relatively recent – modern – construct. Brym locates the first emergence of the term in the XVII century, but it did not gain ground in the common parlance until the late XIX century with the Dreyfuss Affaire in France.¹⁰⁰ A systematic study of the intellectuals had to wait a few more decades with the publication of Julien Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals* in 1928. Its normative bent, evident from the title, makes manifest the tension between a discussion of the intellectuals as they are versus how they should behave.¹⁰¹

Benda lamented the intellectuals' abdication from the role of guarantors of truth and justice, favoring instead material rewards and personal interests. Other contemporary authors will follow this tradition, namely Noam Chomsky¹⁰² and Edward Said.¹⁰³ But for the purpose of the present discussion, more important is the perspective that Benda inaugurated from an analytical standpoint. He portrayed the intellectuals as a 'class in themselves': like the Dreyfussards, this tradition sees the intellectuals as a relatively homogenous group within

¹⁰⁰ Brym, Robert J. "Intellectuals, sociology of." *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Oxford: Elsevier Science (2001): 7631-5, p. 7633 and *Intellectuals and Politics (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge, [1980] 2010, Introduction and chapter 1.

¹⁰¹ Another major work about the sociology of intellectuals published the following year, Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, 1929, espoused the same normative position – in order to favor a dialogue between two opposing ideological currents, utopianism and conservatism. See Mannheim, Karl. *Ideology and Utopia*, Routledge [1929] 2013. Admittedly, the present study is not immune from this problem. I chose to build upon a Gramscian understanding of the intellectuals, whose critical theory contains both aspects.

¹⁰² Chomsky, Noam. *American power and the new mandarins*. Penguin Books India, [1969] 2003.

¹⁰³ Said, Edward W. *Representations of the Intellectual*. Vintage, [1994] 2012.

society, hence featuring its own dynamics, function and interests. On the other hand, other analytical traditions viewed the intellectuals as ‘class-less’ or else as ‘class-bound.’

The focus on intellectuals and social class is one possible venue for the construction of a sociology of the intellectuals. The other one is searching for a definition of the intellectuals in terms of their shared characteristics and features.¹⁰⁴ Camic and Gross define a loose scholarship as ‘old sociology of ideas’ where this attempt featured prominently: what different conceptualizations of the intellectual have in common is “the assumption that in most societies, and certainly in all modern societies, groups of persons can be found exhibiting the defining properties of the intellectuals.”¹⁰⁵ By framing intellectuals this way (“as an objective social category”), the old sociology of ideas “tended to efface important forms of variations among specialized knowledge producers.”¹⁰⁶

In line with most of the scholarship on the subject, I contend that articulating the intellectuals/class relationship allows pondering over the impact, influence and function, if any, of intellectuals on society and politics. Gramsci provides a lucid assessment of the relational character of the intellectual as a societal actor and her function within a power structure:

“[t]he most widespread error of method” is that of searching for “this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities [...] have their place within the general complex of social relations. [...] Perhaps the most vital function of an intellectual is his role as an expert in legitimation.”¹⁰⁷

Karabel similarly claims that this issue is more important than conjuring up a viable definition of the intellectuals: “[a] sociologically rigorous definition of the intellectual will

¹⁰⁴ Eyerman, Ron. *Between culture and politics: Intellectuals in modern society*. Polity press, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Camic, Charles, and Neil Gross. "The new sociology of ideas." *The Blackwell companion to sociology* (2001): 236-249, pp. 241-2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Gramsci, cit., p. 8.

depend, then, neither on specific ideological commitments or personal qualities, but rather on a distinctive location within the larger social structure.”¹⁰⁸ Li echoes this position: “[the task of] defining intellectuals functions more as a project or mobilizing call rather than an empirical inquiry. [...] Who are the intellectuals is itself a site or object of struggle within cultural fields.”¹⁰⁹ Finding a good working definition is no doubt important; however, such definition, comprising the various attributes of the intellectuals, depends upon the position they occupy within a social and political structure. Hence, I am not looking for an ‘ideal type intellectual.’

In the context of a relational perspective, if Benda is considered the father of the class-in-themselves approach, students look at Karl Mannheim and Antonio Gramsci as the classic representatives of the class-less and the class-bound traditions respectively. These three authors, writing in the interwar period, faced the same kind of historical questions: what is the relation between intellectuals and power? Are the intellectuals a force for change or pro-status quo? What is their function in society, and how do they operate within it? The different answers they provided gave birth to three separate, although of course by no means airtight, streams of research.

The ‘new class’ theory, heralded by Yugoslavian dissident Djilas, represented one of the most important developments in the class-in-themselves tradition during the Cold War era.¹¹⁰ This new bureaucratic class dominating socialist regimes acquired in effect an independent status from the social forces (primarily the working classes) it was supposed to emanate from; and it merged the bureaucratic, managerial qualities of technocrats with the theoretical and ideological propensities of the intellectuals. Gouldner further contended how this kind of intelligentsia is

¹⁰⁸ Karabel, Jerome. "Towards a theory of intellectuals and politics." *Theory and Society* 25.2 (1996): 205-233, p. 207.

¹⁰⁹ Li, Junpeng. "Intellectuals' Political Orientations: Toward an Analytical Sociology." *Asian Social Science* 6.12 (2010): 3-15, p. 5

¹¹⁰ Djilas, Milovan. *The new class*. Praeger, 1958.

glued together by a “culture that gains authority not through force but through the power of ideas”, and subverts “all establishments, social limits, and privileges, including its own.”¹¹¹ Subsequent works tried to define more precisely when and how intellectuals become a class, without positing this as an unproblematic point of departure.¹¹² However, this research tradition is in fact predicated on a rather demanding assumption: a commonality of interests, perspectives and strategies of individuals who often instead seem divided by bitter opposition and rivalries. Suffice to think about the classic left versus right ideological divide which blatantly (and perhaps even more acutely so than the general public) affects the intellectuals.¹¹³

The class-less approach is based off of Mannheim’s definition of the intellectuals as “social groups whose special task ... is to provide an interpretation of the world for [the society in which they live].”¹¹⁴ This tradition recognizes how intellectuals do come from various social groups, and how, consequently, their societal and ideological alliances prevent or at least hamper the emergence of a unified intellectual class. At the same time, their links with such social formations are not decisive. In a way, intellectuals transcend class.¹¹⁵ Edward Shils elaborated on a popular theme about intellectuals, i.e. their alienation from society.¹¹⁶ While we cannot assume a class commonality amongst them, “[i]t is practically given by the nature of the intellectuals’ orientation that there should be some tension between the intellectuals and the value-orientations

¹¹¹ Gouldner, Alvin Ward. *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class: A frame of reference, theses, conjectures, arguments, and an historical perspective on the role of intellectuals and intelligentsia in the international class contest of the modern era*. Macmillan, 1979, p. 32

¹¹² Disco, Cornelius. "Intellectuals in advanced capitalism: capital, closure, and the new-class thesis." In Eyerman, Ron, and Lennart G. Svensson. *Intellectuals, universities, and the state in Western modern societies*. University of California Press, 1987.

¹¹³ On this, Brym 2001, Kurzman, Charles, and Lynn Owens. "The sociology of intellectuals." *Annual Review of Sociology* (2002): 63-90, pp. 77-78.

¹¹⁴ Mannheim, Karl. *Systematic sociology: an introduction to the study of society*. Vol. 8. Psychology Press, 1936, p. 10

¹¹⁵ Kurzman et al, 2002., p. 67.

¹¹⁶ Shils, Edward. *The intellectuals and the powers, and other essays*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972.

embodied in the actual institutions of any society.”¹¹⁷ For Shils the intellectuals seem thus located in space where their distinctive features – theoretical as opposed to manual labor – sit uneasily between, on the one hand, the social groups they come from but from which are now only loosely connected; and, on the other hand, the political power which seeks to recruit them given their knowledge, expertise, charisma and social reputation.

Lastly, the class-bound tradition stresses the importance of social forces and social origins in determining the identity and orientation of the intellectuals. As expected, Marxist scholarship contributed mostly to this approach. Lenin himself had argued for the revolutionary role potentially played by liberal intelligentsia in the quest for enfranchising the Russian proletariat, only to remain disappointed by their more prominent bourgeois character.¹¹⁸ Consonant to his overall social theory, Gramsci is at pains to explain where ideology actually comes from and in which ways it may transform, instead of sustaining, a capitalist polity. He then looks at the function of specific groups within society that partake in fabricating and articulating a certain ‘*weltanschauung*’ (‘worldview,’ the same term used by Mannheim as his thinking and Gramsci’s seem clearly to converge). In the words of Gramsci:

“Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Shils, Edward. "The intellectuals and the powers: Some perspectives for comparative analysis." *Comparative studies in society and history* 1.01 (1958): 5-22, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ In Karabel, 1996.

¹¹⁹ Gramsci, cit., p. 5

I will discuss Gramsci's theory more at length in the next chapter: suffice to say for the moment that it is hard to overestimate his contribution in the study and sociology of the intellectuals. Regardless of one's view on the issue of the intellectuals/class relation, as Karabel points out, "[h]ow Gramsci proposes to transform the participation of intellectuals in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat from a regrettable necessity into a positive asset constitutes one of the most distinctive features of his thought."¹²⁰ In other words, Gramsci's understanding of the intellectuals signals a direct and unavoidable connection between political activism – specifically, but not only, antagonistic or contentious politics – and theoretical, ideological elaboration.

The works mentioned earlier by scholars such as Said and Chomsky take a class-bound approach. Other authors, critical while not Marxist, supported this perspective. Michel Foucault, in his elaboration of the power-knowledge nexus, attributed great importance to the working of the intellectuals.¹²¹ In a striking resemblance to Gramsci's thinking, Foucault looks at the intellectuals not only in the traditional, Dreyfussard way championed by Benda; but also, as the individuals strategically located in the ganglia of societal reproduction, "specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life and work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family and sexual relations)."¹²²

Beyond this tripartite classification, Brym proposed a fourth category: intellectuals "embedded in a shifting network of class and other group affiliations."¹²³ He notices how class-less approaches, by neglecting social ties, have blunt tools to account for the influence of such factors onto the intellectuals, hence making it more challenging to articulate the relational

¹²⁰ Karabel, Jerome. "Revolutionary contradictions: Antonio Gramsci and the problem of intellectuals." *Politics & Society* 6.2 (1976): 123-172, p. 129.

¹²¹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage, 1977, p. 67-69.

¹²² Ibid, p. 70

¹²³ Brym, cit., p. 7633

character of the intellectual vis à vis society. At the same time, class-bound and class-in-themselves approaches shove aside problems of ideological differentiation - either amongst the intellectuals themselves, or in relation to the class they allegedly hail from and should, therefore, represent. Brym claims that this approach “seeks to overcome both these problems by focusing on the intellectual’s web of shifting group affiliations.”¹²⁴ Brym references Bourdieu’s work, in particular his concepts of field of power and cultural capital: “to explain intellectuals’ ideologies and political allegiances, one must trace their paths of social mobility as they are shaped by the capacity of classes, ethnic groups, religious orders.”¹²⁵ From this perspective, therefore, it is rather simplistic to categorize intellectuals as forming a class, or being class less, or being members of a class: “[t]hey are embedded in social networks whose ties to various classes and other collectivities shift over time and help account for their ideologies and political allegiances.”¹²⁶

Brym makes a valid point. I believe it is possible to reconcile Brym’s critique of the classic tripartition with a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the class-bound approach, a reading, as we shall see, consonant with more recent interpretations of Gramsci. Let us consider Eyerman, who agrees with Brym’s argument: “[t]he intellectual is neither a fixed social stratum nor a special attribute of gifted individuals, it is an emergent role constructed and performed by actors out of cultural traditions in historical contexts.”¹²⁷ Thus, refuting a transhistorical definition of the intellectual, Eyerman puts it squarely as a historically and culturally contingent social actor, so to “avoid both deterministic structuralism and a focus on

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 7632

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Eyerman, Ron. *The Cultural Sociology of Political Assassination: From MLK and RFK to Fortuyn and Van Gogh*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 455.

unique individuals.”¹²⁸ Gramsci’s notion of historic bloc, and the attendant concepts of organic and traditional intellectuals, resonates with Eyerman’s insight.

The overview on the sociology of the intellectuals I presented here was merely cursory for two approaches (class-in-themselves and class-less) that I maintain least useful for the development of my project. I submit instead the class-bound perspective, relaxed in its rigid understanding of the intellectuals-social class relation, to be instead the theoretical tradition most conducive to explore the role of intellectuals in episodes of social and political mobilization. Such episodes necessarily entail participation from larger sectors of the population. The class-bound perspective, especially in its Gramscian variant, offers theoretical tools to make sense of the features of the intellectuals-social class relation enabling the former to impact the latter.

Mobilizing Islam, or Why We’re Here

The last river to navigate, contemporary Islamic activism, has been the subject of a great deal of academic research, especially since 9/11. Scholars have devoted time in providing surveys of the field to put order over a cross-disciplinary, and highly contentious, topic.¹²⁹ In a similar vein, I here categorize the main theories scholars formulated. I intend to highlight their different presuppositions and contentions; and thus, based on such discussion, explain why a contentious politics approach is particularly helpful in explaining contemporary Islamic politics. The categories that I propose are not meant to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. They have overlapping boundaries, and some works may fit in more than one category. Nonetheless I hope them to be a useful compass.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ See in particular Volpi, Frédéric. *Political Islam observed: disciplinary perspectives*. Columbia University Press, 2010 and Volpi, Frédéric, ed. *Political Islam: a critical reader*. Routledge, 2013. March, Andrew. “Political Islam: Theory.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 103-123. Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, John Obert Voll, and John L. Esposito. *The contemporary Islamic revival: a critical survey and bibliography*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991. Amin, Husnul. "Making Sense Of Islamic Social Movements A Critical Review Of Major Theoretical Approaches." *Pakistan Historical Society. Journal Of The Pakistan Historical Society* 62.2 (2014): 33-56.

I group the main theoretical strands of Islamic activism under six headings: essentialism, Marxism, social-psychological approach (strain theory), institutionalist approach, globalist accounts and last contentious politics and SMT.

Essentialism

Essentialism is the “belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity.”¹³⁰ This essence is what ultimately explains individuals’ behaviors at a micro level and societal and political outcomes at a macro level.¹³¹ Essentialism contends it is possible, for any given society, to evince such unalterable traits from its foundational texts, particularly holy scriptures, where the coordinates for understanding the world and making sense of life are laid out. It follows that essentialism assumes immutability and constancy against history, change and context. It manifests the traits of Said’s ‘orientalism’¹³² in its attempt to explain why predominantly Muslim societies have not conformed to the dicta of modernization theory.¹³³ In choosing between “Mecca and mechanization”, Muslim societies (must) opt for the former.¹³⁴ In this view, Islam shows its fundamental incompatibility with modernity. It refutes its values, opposing progress and proposing a stultifying adherence to a sacred tradition. As March put it, for the essentialist camp “there is an inevitable alienation from the modern secular nation-state because of its incongruity with more authentic and essential Islamic expectations.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Cliff, Brian “Essentialism,” (1996), available at <http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/essentialism/>

¹³¹ Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Three Leaves Publishing, 2005, p. 22.

¹³² Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books (1978). For a critique, see Varisco, Daniel Martin. *Reading Orientalism: Said and the unsaid*. University of Washington Press, 2012.

¹³³ Bernard Lewis remains probably the most outspoken and famous scholar embracing an essentialist approach. See Lewis, Bernard. "The return of Islam." *Commentary* 61.1 (1976): 39; "The roots of Muslim rage." *The Atlantic* 266.3 (1990): 47-60; *The crisis of Islam: Holy war and unholy terror*. Random House Incorporated, 2004; *What went wrong?: Western impact and Middle Eastern response*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹³⁴ Lerner, 1958, p. 11.

¹³⁵ March, 2015, p. 104.

Contemporary Islamic activism (also and especially in its militant and violent manifestations) is thus the emergence of such true, naked essence: Islam is necessarily political, secularization is not and cannot be within its horizon.¹³⁶ Muslim societies can achieve modernization only by disposing of such backward cultural understandings: but one is left wondering how can they modernize if those traits are ingrained in their very essence? Opposition and clash seem thus inevitable in this schema since essence and identities are not negotiable or reconcilable items across different cultures and civilizations.¹³⁷

The critiques leveled against an essentialist approach contributed to its sidelining, at least within academia.¹³⁸ In the words of Sayyid: “Saïd’s critique concentrates on castigating Orientalism for its monolithic caricature of Islamic phenomena.” He concludes saying that this critique has “produced a theorization of Islam which seemingly rejects essentialism.”¹³⁹

Are we throwing away the baby with the bathwater? Are there not any valuable lessons we can draw from the essentialist literature? Were we to deny any importance to the foundational text, we would also imply a fundamental irrelevance of such text, specifically in its content and core message.¹⁴⁰ As I will illustrate, this is one of the perils of other approaches that tried to

¹³⁶ Campanini, Massimo. *Islam e politica*. Bologna, Mulino, 1999.

¹³⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Penguin Books, 1997. Huntington and Lewis’s work are predicated on a conceptualization of culture rather at odds with the one I subscribe to (an approach that some label ‘culturalist,’ where culture functions as the key independent variable in explaining political outcomes. See, for example, Pye, Lucian W. and Sidney Verba. *Political culture and political development*. Princeton University Press, [1963] 2015, and Almond, Gabriel Abraham, and Sidney Verba. *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Princeton University Press, [1963] 2015.)

¹³⁸ I need to qualify the domain of rejection of essentialism as in public discourse it seems it still enjoy much credit. Essentialism is predicated on simple dichotomies (along the basic axis ‘us versus them’), a Manichean world easy to decipher and comprehend in the midst of complexity, transition and displacement. As anecdotal evidence, in my native Italy, the works of Oriana Fallaci – a late journalist and polemicist espousing virulent anti-Islamic rhetoric – became best sellers after 9/11 and the Paris attacks of 11/13/2015. Fallaci, Oriana. *La rabbia e l’orgoglio*. Bur, 2014. Talbot, Margaret. “The agitator: Oriana Fallaci directs her fury toward Islam.” *The New Yorker* 5 (2006).

¹³⁹ Sayyid, Bobby S., and Salman Sayyid. *A fundamental fear: Eurocentrism and the emergence of Islamism*. Zed Books, 2003, pp. 36-7.

¹⁴⁰ Whether Islam, or any beliefs system, can be characterized by a presence of a ‘core’ is a matter I have not personally settled yet. On the one hand, the dangers of essentialism seem to be lurking at all corners by advancing such proposition; on the other hand, denying the presence of a core risks diluting the content of any given beliefs system to the point where it loses any relevance if substituted with another belief system, a proposition that seems

counter essentialist contentions. A qualified and more sophisticated essentialism may instead claim: “[t]here can be little doubt that Muslim consciousness has a certain leaning towards politics which stems directly from the spirit of Islamic precepts.”¹⁴¹ Sadik al-Azmeh speaks in fact of ‘orientalism in reverse,’¹⁴² Bassam Tibi separates clearly Islam and Islamism along classic western categories: the former a religion, the latter a political ideology. While Islam as a faith does not conflict with modernity, Islamism is inherently (‘essentially’) opposed to secularism, liberalism, pluralism, etc...¹⁴³

Marxism

Be that as it may, the reaction to the most vulgar forms of essentialism spurred alternative theories about Islamic activism, advancing radically different positions. An orthodox Marxist approach would portray Islam as a tool at the hands of capitalists to control and subdue the working class. In this way, Islam is both stripped of inherent autonomous agency and of its assumed specific political bent as essentialism would claim. In a sense, Islam would not be any different from other world religions in maintaining and fostering - as a superstructural element - unequal power relations in the context of capitalism.¹⁴⁴ However, Islamic activism fits uneasily in this model. Political Islam has been in fact more of a language of resistance and defiance than submission (going back here to the Janus-like qualities of religious discourse).¹⁴⁵

highly implausible. The legacy of Weber’s work on this issue is of course most relevant. Do beliefs systems impact political outcomes? See for a discussion of his concept of ‘elective affinities’ Howe, Richard Herbert. "Max Weber's elective affinities: sociology within the bounds of pure reason." *American Journal of Sociology* (1978): 366-385.

¹⁴¹ Enayat, Hamid. *Modern Islamic political thought*. IB Tauris, [1982] 2005, p. 3.

¹⁴² Al-Azm, Sadiq Jalal. “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse.” *Khamsin*, 8 (1981): 5-26.

¹⁴³ Tibi, Bassam. *Islam between culture and politics*. New York: Palgrave, 2001; *Islamism and Islam*. Yale University Press, 2012. See also Al-Azmeh, Aziz. *Islams and modernities*. Verso, [1993] 2009.

¹⁴⁴ For a classic on the subject, see Rodinson, Maxime, and Brian Pearce. *Islam and capitalism*. [1966] 1976. See also Gellner, Ernest. "Islam and Marxism: some comparisons." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* (1991): 1-6.

¹⁴⁵ For an exploration of the Marxist literature transition from orthodox to revisionist regarding the role of religion, see Tuğal, Cihan. "Islamism in Turkey: beyond instrument and meaning." *Economy and society* 31.1 (2002): 85-111.

Turner has linked the rise of political Islam to the penetration of neoliberal practices in the post-colonial state.¹⁴⁶ Butko offers a Gramscian analysis to present political Islam as a counter hegemonic project: Islamists' success is rooted in their appropriation of religious symbols, discourse, and language to express socioeconomic grievances, utilizing them as instruments to enact radical political change.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, most works in this tradition still take Islamist ideology to be just a (spurious) reflection of underlying socio-economic conditions, hence at the end of the day irrelevant as an explanatory element.

The Socio-Psychological Paradigm and Strain Theory

The socio-psychological approach elaborates on the dislocations and traumas that modernization wrought on non-Western societies. In ways similar to the developments of Western Marxism with the Frankfurt School, this paradigm looks at the consequences of modernization writ large, exploring domains such as anomie, alienation, and cultural displacement.¹⁴⁸ In particular, it attributes to Islam the function of a coping mechanism in relation to the psychological strains engendered by the failure of diverse modernization projects in the Third World. The kind of modernization that these countries experienced has been economically uneven, socially disruptive and culturally problematic. Islam helps coping with the most dire consequences of economic and societal exclusion (recalling here some of the Marxist

¹⁴⁶ Turner, Bryan S. "Class, generation and Islamism: towards a global sociology of political Islam." *The British Journal of Sociology* 54.1 (2003): 139-147; and "Islam, capitalism and the Weber Theses." *The British Journal of Sociology* 25.2 (1974): 230-243. For a similar argument, Mitchell, Timothy. "McJihad: Islam in the US Global Order," *Social Text* 73: 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 1-18.

¹⁴⁷ Butko, Thomas. "Unity Through Opposition: Islam as an instrument of radical political change." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8.4 (2004): 33-48. For a dissenting view, Kandil, Hazem. "Islamizing Egypt? Testing the limits of Gramscian counterhegemonic strategies." *Theory and society* 40.1 (2011): 37-62.

¹⁴⁸ Beinin, Joel, and Joe Stork. *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*. IB Tauris, 1997.

scholarship insights). Moreover, it makes sense of cultural uprootedness spurred by rapid mass urbanization and industrialization of formerly largely agricultural societies.¹⁴⁹

Ayubi argues that the post-colonial Arab state failed to win over its subjects with a successful modernizing project:¹⁵⁰ a failure to modernize, especially to spur sustained and widespread economic development, generated resentment, anger, frustration and disillusionment. Islam and its political manifestations represent the language that the masses adopted to express such sense of mistrust in the post-colonial state and its developmental project.¹⁵¹ According to Zubaida, nationalist or socialist movements may have well played the same function, had they not failed in opposing imperialism, and if “their leaderships and ideologies” had not been “subordinated to and utilized by the ruling cliques and . . . consequently tainted.”¹⁵²

The social-psychological paradigm accounts for a host of dynamics stemming from (uneven) modernization, if not in a relatively parsimonious fashion. Besides, Islam is not pinned down as an inherently political, let alone violent, religion, again taking cues from Marxist approaches. However, there are two main problems. First, it takes Islam as a residual category. A politicized Islam is what’s left on the plate of viable psychological comforts and political ideologies after all the others have failed: liberal democracy, (Arab) nationalism, (Arab) socialism, third-worldism, Soviet or Chinese inspired communism, etc... Islamic discourse as a force with its own agency and force is thus either dismissed or greatly downplayed. It is at best a

¹⁴⁹ This literature has been especially influential in the study of the Iranian Revolution. See Arjomand, Said Amir. *The turban for the crown: The Islamic revolution in Iran*. Oxford University Press, 1988; and Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism: essays on the Islamic Republic*. University of California Press, 1993.

¹⁵⁰ Ayubi, Nazih. *Overstating the Arab State, Politics and society in the Middle East*. IB Tauris, 1995.

¹⁵¹ Ayubi, Nazih. *Political Islam: religion and politics in the Arab world*. Routledge, 2003. For similar arguments, see Dekmejian, R. Hrair. *Islam in revolution: fundamentalism in the Arab world*. Syracuse University Press, 1995 and "The anatomy of Islamic revival: legitimacy crisis, ethnic conflict and the search for Islamic alternatives." *Middle East Journal* 34.1 (1980): 1-12.

¹⁵² Zubaida, Sami. *Islam, the people and the State: essays on political ideas and movements in the Middle East*. IB Tauris, 1993, p. xviii. See also, "Islam and the Politics of Community and Citizenship." *Middle East Report* 221 (2001).

reaction to external forces (colonialism, neoliberalism, industrialization, you name it), not an independent element in historical developments.¹⁵³ Confronted by the vexed question, ‘why Islam and not something else?’ strain theory risks sliding into culturalist arguments about the rootedness of Islam in this or that society. Second, if Islam is a mechanism to cope with ‘uneven (economic, political, social) development,’ then political Islam is too an ‘uneven’ response, a symptom of a disease that does not conform to the norm. Again, here political Islam - and the agency of social actors who campaign for it so forcefully - is basically an epiphenomenon.

Institutionalist perspective and the inclusion-moderation thesis

While economic underdevelopment and uneven modernization are ubiquitous in the Third World, it seems that Muslim societies display unique traits in terms of their political militancy. Hafez discards explanations based on economic accounts - whether grounded in class struggle logic or wider strains of economic and social modernization. He claims instead that the repressive, authoritarian nature of most regimes¹⁵⁴ in Muslim countries is the primary cause of the rise of Islamic militancy: “Muslims become violently militant when they encounter exclusionary states that deny them meaningful access to political institutions and employ indiscriminate repressive policies against their citizens during periods of mass mobilization.”¹⁵⁵ Hafez’s thesis brings back state institutions and their functioning at center stage.

Exclusion breeding militancy mirrors the inclusion-moderation thesis: mechanisms of political inclusion for Islamist groups seem to decrease their adoption of militant and violent

¹⁵³ Voll, John O. "Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab world: Egypt and the Sudan," 345-402, in Marty, Martin E., and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms observed*. Vol. 1. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

¹⁵⁴ For a similar point on the nature of Middle Eastern regimes, see Bellin, Eva. "The robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in comparative perspective." *Comparative politics* (2004): 139-157; and "Reconsidering the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring." *Comparative Politics* 44.2 (2012): 127-149.

¹⁵⁵ Hafez, Mohammed M. *Why Muslims rebel: Repression and resistance in the Islamic world*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, p. xv. Ayubi had already discussed this connection, while never linking state repression, exclusion and militancy in any explicit fashion (see fn. 141).

strategies for attaining power.¹⁵⁶ However, despite its parsimony and clear suggestions to policy makers,¹⁵⁷ institutional arguments do not address properly a number of problems. Schwedler has outlined how the inclusion moderation-thesis is plagued by teleological assumptions and definitional issues.¹⁵⁸ Hafez's work presents the same issues: moderation is understood primarily (only?) as abandonment of violent and militant practices; there is no discussion of ideological shift occurring: it is simply assumed it follows strategic adaptations. In this way, we have no tools to understand radical, but not violent or militant movements, such as, in our case, quietist Salafis. Consequently (and from an anti-essentialist perspective), can we address Islamic social and political manifestations which are not violent and militant kind? Furthermore, shifting the focus from political economy to political institutions simply presents the researcher with the same set of problems: is political Islam an epiphenomenon, a tool for(militant) mobilization? If we ask 'why Islam and not something else?' do we have a better - or even just different - answer than the ones provided by Marxist approaches or strain theory? I do not think so. Islamic activism is a mere mode to express anger, frustration or articulate opposition and resistance, a reaction with no independent agency. Indeed, Hafez claims that there is no basic difference in terms of dynamics of militant mobilization between Islamists and other kinds of groups.

¹⁵⁶ Buehler, Michael. "Revisiting the inclusion-moderation thesis in the context of decentralized institutions The behavior of Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party in national and local politics." *Party Politics* 19.2 (2013): 210-229. Gurses, Mehmet. "Islamists, democracy and Turkey: a test of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis." *Party Politics* 20.4 (2014): 646-653. Driessen, Michael D. "Public religion, democracy, and Islam: Examining the moderation thesis in Algeria." *Comparative Politics* 44.2 (2012): 171-189.

¹⁵⁷ One of the main contentions of this literature pertains to indiscriminate repression of Islamist groups, which is very likely to alienate more moderate groups and radicalize further the more extreme ones. See Ashour, Omar. *The de-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements*. Routledge, 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Schwedler, Jillian. "Can Islamists Become Moderates?: Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis." *World Politics* 63.2 (2011): 347-376; and *Faith in moderation: Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Also, Cavatorta and Merone argue for the presence of the inverse mechanism: see Cavatorta, Francesco, and Fabio Merone. "Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from fundamentalist to conservative party." *Democratization* 20.5 (2013): 857-875. For a post-Arab Spring account, see Volpi, Frédéric, and Ewan Stein. "Islamism and the state after the Arab uprisings: Between people power and state power." *Democratization* 22.2 (2015): 276-293.

Here again we return to inherent tension when studying Islamic politics. On the one hand, I would not want to single out Islamic activism as a *sui generis* phenomenon, as an essentialist position would recommend. On the other, not recognizing the weight and role of (Islamists') ideology runs the opposite danger of not considering its role at all.¹⁵⁹ It ends up providing an account fitting all militant groups in all contexts. In other words, Hafez did not need to paraphrase Gurr's title *Why Men Rebel* and simply adopt it fully.¹⁶⁰ Can we exclude ideational factors so brazenly?

Let us consider Moaddel's work. He wished to explain the origins of different political ideologies (liberalism nationalism, Islamic modernism, Islamic fundamentalism) in the Muslim world, trying to locate the "proximate conditions for ideological production."¹⁶¹ He looks at two variables: the nature of the target of a discourse-based ideology (a pluralistic versus a monolithic target) and the location of the target in relation to the state (state institutions or civil society). The model is rather complex in its theoretical premises and the causal claims advanced are, at best, soft and qualified. This might explain its relative unpopularity. But it is a daring attempt to combine ideologies (their origins, content, and dissemination), the political (including institutional) conditions for their emergence.

Globalist

However, by and large, the reactions to essentialism we have considered thus far downplay ideology and religion as important elements in their discussion. The approach I label as 'globalist' offers instead a response along ideational lines. It originates within the wider debate on modernization and secularization I briefly mentioned at the beginning of this

¹⁵⁹ See for example Hafez, cit., p. 21, where Islamist frames of mobilization merely respond to structure and strategy, and they do not inform or shape behaviors.

¹⁶⁰ Gurr, Ted Robert. *Why men rebel*. Routledge, [1970] 2015.

¹⁶¹ Moaddel, Mansoor. *Islamic modernism, nationalism, and fundamentalism: episode and discourse*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

chapter.¹⁶² A globalist perspective inserts the rise of Islamic activism and militancy in the context of global religious resurgence. *The Fundamentalism Project*¹⁶³ is the manifesto of such scholarship (if anything for the sheer ambition of a five-volume endeavor). This project sought to make sense of what it referred to as “‘modern’ religious fundamentalism”¹⁶⁴ (a label somewhat discarded in more recent studies): “modern becomes a ‘code word’ for the set of forces which fundamentalists perceive as a threat which inspires their reaction.” Modern religious fundamentalists oppose in particular “secular rationality, religious tolerance and relativism, individualism.”¹⁶⁵

The globalist perspective takes cues from the socio-psychological paradigm as it considers the unsettling effects of modernization. It primes religion as force which provides meaning and purpose against the Weberian iron cage. Religious tradition plays an important role in this sense: “If the group or leader appeals to a sacred text or tradition, how is this source interpreted and applied?”¹⁶⁶

The Fundamentalist Project and works with a similar ethos¹⁶⁷ make a powerful case for de-essentializing Islam as the only religion with marked political impact. However, this positive trait tends to conflate Islamic revivalism with religious resurgence more in general. We therefore lose leverage to assess whether there is, indeed, *something* about Islam or Islamic revivalism and

¹⁶² See also Sahliyah, Emile, ed. *Religious Resurgence and Politics in the Contemporary World*. SUNY Press, 1990 and Keddie, Nikki R. "The new religious politics: where, when, and why do “fundamentalisms” appear?." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40.04 (1998): 696-723.

¹⁶³ Marty, Martin E., and R. Scott Appleby. *The Fundamentalism Project*, 5 vols. University of Chicago Press, 1991. For a debate on the *Fundamentalism Project*, see Munson, Henry R. “Not All Crustaceans are Crabs: Reflections on the Comparative Study of Fundamentalism and Politics,” *Contention*, 4:3 (Spring 1995), 151–66; Appleby, Scott R. “But All Crabs are Crabby: Valid and Less Valid Criticisms of the Fundamentalism Project,” *Contention*, 4:3 (Spring 1995): 195–202; and Munson, Henry R. “Response to Appleby,” *Contention*, 4:3 (Spring 1995): 207–9.

¹⁶⁴ The label ‘fundamentalist’ has been somewhat discarded since the publication of the *Fundamentalist Project*. As a term originating in Christian Protestant circles, it seemed to fit poorly religious traditions in vastly different contexts. Moreover, the strict scriptural adherence to holy texts (the ‘fundamentals’ of religion) may characterize some, but not all, forms of modern, militant religious resurgence.

¹⁶⁵ Marty et al., 1991, p. vii.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. ix.

¹⁶⁷ See fn. 10

what that might be. The politicization of Islam has received much more attention than any other similar trend amongst world religions. And second, while the contributors are at pains in granting fundamentalists (including Islamists) a degree of agency, the main thrust remains trapped within the archetype depicting Islamism as a reaction to the dynamics of modernity, rather than as parts and parcel of the construction of such modernity in the first place.

Roy and Kepel offer a globalist view of Islamic politics. The institutional solutions that political Islam proposed so to confront the challenges of modernity are awfully weak,¹⁶⁸ therefore, globally, Islam is on a retreat as a viable political alternative.¹⁶⁹ One consequence is the relegation of Islam to the private sphere, away from the public sphere of politics, a move Roy calls “neofundamentalism.”¹⁷⁰ Ismail contests this position spelling the decline (even demise) of political Islam: this is not only confined to the sphere of institutional politics, but pertains to all domains of life where Islam is making inroads as a civil society rooted phenomenon. The failure to found any viable ‘Islamic State’ is not decisive evidence for the regression of political Islam.¹⁷¹ Also contesting the French scholars are Mandaville and Mamdani: the historical and global trends that brought about the emergence of political Islam and Islamism in particular are here to stay.¹⁷²

But again, a globalist approach does not provide sharp theoretical tools to single out specific features that make Islamic revivalism at the center of current world politics. Confronted with the question ‘why Islam and not something else?’ it may fall into essentialist explanations, but rather it provides an all too vague ‘because of religion’ answer.

Contentious politics/SMT

¹⁶⁸ Roy, Olivier. *L'échec de l'Islam politique*. Esprit, 1992.

¹⁶⁹ Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The trail of political Islam*. IB Tauris, [2001] 2006.

¹⁷⁰ Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The search for a new ummah*. Columbia University Press, [2004] 2006.

¹⁷¹ Ismail, Salwa. *Rethinking Islamist politics: Culture, the state and Islamism*. IB Tauris, 2006 and "The paradox of Islamist politics." *Middle East Report* 221 (2001): 34-39.

¹⁷² Mandaville, Peter. *Global political islam*. Routledge, 2010. See also Mamdani, 2005.

No single research tradition can, on its own, aptly explain phenomena as complex as Islamic activism, and the literature on contentious politics is not different. Yet the adoption of this perspective is relatively recent: it may have learned lessons from previous studies and tackled some outstanding problems more convincingly. Pioneered by Bayat¹⁷³ and Kurzman¹⁷⁴ in the late 1990s, we can consider Wiktorowicz's edited volume the manifesto of this approach.¹⁷⁵ I have discussed above the main contours of SMT and contention politics, and I maintain that this perspective to study Islamic activism has the potential to:

- Insert Islamic mobilization within the vast domain of social and political mobilization. It allows comparing Islamic activism with similar or equivalent phenomena and hence doing away with essentialist claims.
- Relate such mobilization to political institutions and socio-economic conditions. POS provides theoretical leverage to do just that.¹⁷⁶
- Offer a nuanced perspective of actors' motivations. They may behave strategically as rational actors (as RMT submits). At the same time, SMT has highlighted how identity

¹⁷³ Bayat, Asef. *Street politics: poor people's movements in Iran*. Columbia University Press, 1997; "Revolution without movement, movement without revolution: Comparing Islamic activism in Iran and Egypt." *Comparative studies in society and history* 40.01 (1998): 136-169; *Social movements, activism and social development in the Middle East*. No. 3. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2000; "Islamism and social movement theory." *Third World Quarterly* 26.6 (2005): 891-908.

¹⁷⁴ Kurzman, Charles. "Structural opportunity and perceived opportunity in social-movement theory: the Iranian revolution of 1979." *American Sociological Review* (1996): 153-170; "Organizational opportunity and social movement mobilization: a comparative analysis of four religious movements." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 3.1 (1998): 23-49.

¹⁷⁵ Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach*. Indiana University Press, 2004. See also another important edited volume, Beinin, Joel, and Frédéric Vairel, eds. *Social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford University Press, [2011] 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Munson, Ziad. "Islamic Mobilization." *The Sociological Quarterly* 42.4 (2001): 487-510. Clark, Janine. "Social Movement Theory and Patron-Clientelism Islamic Social Institutions and the Middle Class in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen." *Comparative Political Studies* 37.8 (2004): 941-968.

construction, sense of purpose and meaning making are part and parcel of any mobilization effort.¹⁷⁷

- Point out, decisively for this project, how actors adopt, (re)elaborate and deploy elements from a shared discursive space, as framing theory and discourse dialogical analysis focus on these very aspects.¹⁷⁸

Importantly, Meijer lastly adds: “SMT, although a research program that also derives from the West, is far less morally committed to a certain political model, and is politically unbiased and therefore more open and flexible than civil society theories, which are imbued with Western liberal political values and goals.”¹⁷⁹ Mahmoud similarly contends it is “crucial to detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics.”¹⁸⁰ In this sense a contentious politics approach is well suited to appraise a movement such as Salafism. A “normativity of freedom”¹⁸¹ would impel us to see a struggle for progressive emancipation inscribed into social and political mobilization – and thus be ill-equipped when addressing a phenomenon which is not progressive, such as Salafism.

But contentious politics and SMT (while perhaps originating with a built-in bias for progressive politics) are not necessarily tied to that spirit. I am striving not to superimpose pre-

¹⁷⁷ Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, activism, and political change in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

¹⁷⁸ Armbrorst, Andreas. "Radicalisation and de-radicalisation of social movements: The comeback of political Islam?." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 62.3 (2014): 235-255. Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Framing jihad: Intramovement framing contests and al-Qaeda's struggle for sacred authority." *International Review of Social History* 49.S12 (2004): 159-177. Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam democratic: Social movements and the post-Islamist turn*. Stanford University Press, 2007. Ahram, Ariel I. "Symbolic frames: Identity and legitimacy in Iraqi Islamist discourse." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 11.1 (2008): 113-132. Karagiannis, Emmanuel, and Clark McCauley. "Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami: Evaluating the threat posed by a radical Islamic group that remains nonviolent." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18.2 (2006): 315-334.

¹⁷⁹ Meijer, Roel. "Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously: Social Movement Theory and the Islamist Movement." *International Review of Social History* 50.02 (2005): 279-291, p. 288.

¹⁸⁰ Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press, [2006] 2011, p. 14. See also Bacik, Gokhan, and Umit Kurt. "New Islamic movements and amodern networks." *Culture and Religion* 12.01 (2011): 21-37 and Tuğal, Cihan. "Transforming everyday life: Islamism and social movement theory." *Theory and Society* 38.5 (2009): 423-458.

¹⁸¹ Mahmood, 2011, p. 10.

conceived notions about the nature of politics and meaning making. I believe that the flexibility and reach of a contentious politics approach allows steering clear from unwarranted assumptions about the intentions and purpose of the actors we are dealing with.

Chapter 3 - The Social Appropriation of Tradition: A Theory on Religious Intellectuals and Mobilization

Gramsci, Mechanisms and Salafi Scholars

In the introduction, I outlined the basic contours of my theory, the social appropriation of tradition. Here I offer a more comprehensive presentation. I develop it out of the discussion of Chapter 2, where I showed how I intend to combine insights from the study of political contention, Islamic activism and sociology of the intellectuals.

I will proceed as follows: first, I continue my examination of Gramscian intellectuals. In particular, I describe their features referring to the ensemble of their social relations. In order to do so, I will summon here classic concepts of the Gramscian vocabulary, such as philosophy of praxis, historical bloc and hegemony. Second, I define ‘ideology’ and ‘discourse,’ which I relate to the Gramscian analogues of ‘philosophy’ and ‘common sense’ respectively. I do this to move from a theoretical discussion about the intellectuals to a political one about mobilization. We may then look at prominent Salafi ideologues and thinkers as popular religious intellectuals.

Last, I present the process of social appropriation of tradition. I present the three mechanisms - *diffusion*, *elaboration* and *systematization* - that compound in such a process. Borrowing from DOC insights,¹ I submit that these mechanisms and process explain how the works and pronouncements of specific social actors (intellectuals, here represented by Islamist ideologues) may spur and sustain social and political mobilization.

¹ See Chapter 1 and in particular Chapter 2, section “Dynamics of Contention, Cognition and Meaning Making.”

Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony

We have already encountered Gramsci (1891-1937) in the previous Chapter: a social theorist who spoke (amongst a host of other things!) about mobilization and intellectuals.² I here outline the basic contours of his social theory so to as clarify in which ways I think about mobilization, intellectuals, and the relation between the two.

As a Marxist scholar, Gramsci's understanding of historical materialism is profoundly different from, and at times even at odds with, the more economically deterministic version of Marxism heralded in the 1920s and 1930s by the Soviet experience.³ Such a mechanistic and structurally over-determined framework would never suit him. Gramsci maintains that human beings emerge out of a complex and contradictory history and attendant social relations, which cannot simply be reduced to the realm of material production.⁴ Human activity is always at one time material and ideational/philosophical (as Gramsci indicates, there is no separation between *homo sapiens* and *homo faber*). It is at this juncture that we should recall the Marxian notion of ideology,⁵ an integral part of any human activity and inseparable to material life. In this sense, he is mostly concerned with the role of people in working out their own emancipation, under specific historical circumstances and social relations, not as passive objects in the thralls of pre-ordained historical developments.

² See Chapter 2, in particular section "Defining an Elusive Actor: The Sociology of the Intellectuals." Gramsci's own persona defies easy categorizations. He was certainly a social theoretician, yet that would hardly describe him properly: also a philosopher, a political activist, a politician (as Member of Parliament and secretary of the Italian Communist Party), a journalist and a polemicist.

³ For an overview of different Marxist perspectives, in particular with reference to historical materialism and the state, see Thomas, Paul. *Alien Politics: Marxist State Theory Retrieved*. Routledge, 1994.

⁴ As Rupert suggests: "Gramsci's historical materialism understands history as a complex and contradictory story of social self-production under specific social circumstances. In line with more dialectical interpretations of Marx, Gramsci denies that there exists any transhistorical human nature, and insists that what we are in any given place and time is produced through the 'complex of social relations' in which historically situated persons live their lives, (re-) produce their social existence, and develop their self-understandings," see Rupert, Mark. "Reading Gramsci in an Era of Globalized Capitalism." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 8.4 (2005): 483-497, p. 488.

⁵ See Chapter 2, section "Evolution of the Field: a Bird's Eye View."

Indeed, for Marx himself human beings are fundamentally relational and social.⁶ Gramsci follows in these footsteps. He tries to develop a theory that combines human agency and social structure in a non-reductive and non-deterministic fashion. He does so by elaborating further on the idea of acting and doing, evidently rooted in Marxism with its emphasis on labor as creative endeavor, yet as I contended never divorced from certain understandings of the world – a certain ideology. In fact, by virtue of acting and relating to others, each individual partakes in the (re)production of community and society at both the material and ideational levels. The societal relations thus emerging represent a structure. Within this structure, each individual is endowed also with the potential to impede or subvert societal (re)production (recalling, again, the potentially positive aspect enshrined within the Marxian idea of ideology). However, the structure does not determine *a priori* individuals' willingness and capacity to preserve or change society, although it surely influences them by offering possibilities and presenting constraints.⁷ In other words, Gramsci intends to steer clear both from unbridled voluntarism⁸ and structural determinism.

A Philosophy of Praxis

The 'philosophy of praxis' represents the crowning of this effort. In one of the most famous passages of the *Notebooks*, Gramsci explains what he means by it: "[i]n this way we arrive also at the equality of, or equation between, 'philosophy and politics', thought and action, that is, at a philosophy of praxis. Everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies and the

⁶ See Fulton, John. "Religion and politics in Gramsci: An introduction." *Sociology of Religion* 48.3 (1987): 197-216, in particular p. 198.

⁷ This idea has been subsequently refined and popularized by Giddens, amongst others. See Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press, 1986.

⁸ I discussed the issue of voluntarism in Chapter 2 when dealing with the concept of 'framing.' See section "Framing Theory and the Study of Mobilization and Contention."

only 'philosophy' is history in action, that is, life itself.”⁹ Let us examine this passage. Life is thought (philosophy) and action (politics): it is thinking combined with and expressed by doing, that is a ‘philosophy of praxis.’ There are then two main corollaries. First, insofar as history is the unfolding of life and lives, the philosophy of praxis is history itself. Second, any history - and thus any life - is inherently political:¹⁰ the philosophy of praxis implies that any life experience is imbued within politics.

Therefore, politics cannot be separated from considerations regarding history. In order to relate theory and history, Gramsci proposes the concept of ‘historical bloc.’ It indicates a configuration of power articulated in a set of social and economic relations, institutions, values, norms and practices - put in Marxist parlance, a specific arrangement of structure and superstructure. In the context of a given historical bloc, every individual will make experience of life in relation to her position within such power laden structure (whence the structural influence on human agents): a certain societal position and activity will orient (though never determine!) a certain worldview.¹¹ It follows that individuals sharing the same position are likely to experience similar lives and thus develop similar and shared worldviews. These emerge within the confines of incumbent ideational and material circumstances, and insofar as they attribute shared meaning(s) to life, they must be collective and not individual.

⁹ Gramsci, Antonio, ed. by Anthony Buttigieg. *Prison Notebooks*. Columbia University Press, 2011, Q7 §35. Henceforth, when quoting directly from Gramsci’s *Notebooks*, I will provide the references to locate passages as they have been classified throughout different editions (both in the original Italian and in English). Lacking the usual structure of a published monograph, Gramsci’s work is scattered over 30 such notebooks, and he usually provided numbers for different paragraphs within each notebooks. Therefore, the notation ‘Q’ indicates the notebook (from the Italian ‘Quaderno’) and the symbol ‘§’ indicates the specific paragraph.

¹⁰ I made reference to this conceptualization of politics in Chapter 1 (see section “Salafis: Contentious Politics, Islamism and Gramscian Intellectuals”), describing the political import of Quietist Salafis’ only apparently apolitical stance. Gramsci’s understanding of politics is eminently critical and not liberal in its theoretical approach.

¹¹ For a particularly illuminating essay on this topic, see Hall, Stuart. “The Problem of Ideology. Marxism without Guarantees.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 1986.

The philosophy of praxis as a theory of acting and thinking implies that every human being is a ‘philosopher,’ in the sense that everyone has the capacity to partake in such a collective creation of certain worldviews, or ‘conception of the world’ as Gramsci refers to them (see the excerpt below). Holding human beings as philosophers in this fashion does not say whether these worldviews will be antagonistic or quiescent to the incumbent power structure; nor whether they will be simplistic or sophisticated, widely shared or harbored by a tiny minority. What we can say is that,

“Each man [...] carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a ‘philosopher’, [...] he participates in a particular *conception of the world*, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.”¹²

Organic and Traditional Intellectuals

Who are then the intellectuals in this scheme? As I have discussed in the previous Chapter, Gramsci maintains that every social class in a historical bloc gives birth to its own ‘organic’ intellectuals who express the identity of the class and articulate its interests, aspirations and grievances.¹³ This process means that some individuals, *qua* philosophers, have the potential to emerge as organic intellectuals out of a certain class. Not everyone does; but everyone might, as everyone is a philosopher participating, to lesser or larger extent, to conjuring up ‘conceptions of the world.’ Hence, to be an intellectual is to perform such function for and on behalf of a social class. It is in this sense that Gramsci’s intellectuals are ‘class-bound.’

¹² Gramsci, et al., 1971, p. 9. Emphasis added.

¹³ In Gramsci’s own words: “Every social group, coining into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.” Gramsci and Buttigieg, 2011, Q12, §1.

Gramsci's intellectual is an emerging category, that is to say fluid and evolving. He offers the famous distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals:¹⁴ yet the two are more like poles of a continuum rather than dichotomous categories. Traditional intellectuals are not qualitatively different from organic ones: they too emerged as organic intellectuals out of historically bound social classes, but they became "progressively detached from their original functions in relation to a specific socio-economic structure, as the latter declined and began to be replaced by another."¹⁵ A classic example would be the priesthood of the Catholic Church. The priests were the organic intellectuals within a specific historical bloc (feudal Europe). They contributed sustaining and preserving that power arrangement by justifying the domination of feudal lords and bishops' temporal clout. As that historical configuration declined with the rise of modern capitalism, their function and attendant position within society changed too: "[i]ntellectuals who were once organic to one class thus became ever-more detached from the world of production."¹⁶ The traditional intellectual is not an irrelevant actor; rather, her connection to up-and-coming social and economic forces is progressively severed. But given that the embeddedness within a societal class grants the intellectual her ability to be an impactful force within society, the traditional intellectual has thus lost much of the capacity to do so. In fact, for Gramsci, the organic intellectual partakes directly to societal and political processes:

¹⁴ Gramsci's elaborates this division as follows: "The 'organic' intellectuals, which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development, are for the most part 'specializations' of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence." As for the traditional intellectuals, Gramsci says, "[h]owever, every 'essential' social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of a development of this structure, has found (at least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence [that is, the traditional intellectuals] and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms." Ibid.

¹⁵ Olsaretti, Alessandro. "Beyond class: The many facets of Gramsci's theory of intellectuals." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 14.4 (2014): 363-381, p. 369.

¹⁶ Olsaretti, ibid. See also Hier, John. *Contemporary Sociological Thought: Themes and Theories*. Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005, pp. 41-43.

indeed, she is the product of such processes. There is no retreat into the ivory tower for a truly organic intellectual.

Intellectuals and Subalterns

Consequently, the intellectual is not a discrete category.¹⁷ It is a relational one, and a matter of degree. This move prevents Gramsci from recklessly falling into a vanguardist position, where an enlightened minority of ‘professional intellectuals’ (think of the Leninist party type) offers solutions to the masses.¹⁸ These would be then relegated to a position of subalternity not only *vis à vis* the ruling class, but also in relation to their own intellectuals. Gramsci, always keen to confer the subaltern agency in the revolutionary process,¹⁹ proposes a relation between the (organic) intellectuals and the masses characterized to a degree by reciprocity as opposed to sheer domination of the former on the latter.²⁰ This relation is therefore fundamentally interactive, pedagogical and mutually influencing: “the impact of the social context – and ultimately of the masses – on the production of ideas by high intellectuals, [...] happens through influence on the theoretical agenda of intellectuals and influence on their recruitment pool. The subaltern cannot speak themselves but do influence intellectual production, however, indirectly.”²¹ I thus concur with Olsaretti when he states, “much of Gramsci’s theoretical effort consisted of understanding the importance of the individual intellectual’s contribution, while qualifying it within the social context in which it took place.”²² The nature of these social

¹⁷ See Chapter 2, section “Defining an Elusive Actor: the Sociology of the Intellectuals,” for a definition of the intellectual as a relational category, not as a set of properties.

¹⁸ For a discussion on Gramsci’s approach and vanguardism, see Rupert, 2005, and Karabel, Jerome. “Revolutionary contradictions: Antonio Gramsci and the problem of intellectuals.” *Politics & Society* 6.2 (1976): 123-172.

¹⁹ “Probably the most innovative aspect of Gramsci’s theory of intellectuals is his belief that the fundamental task of the intellectual was to assist the proletariat in bringing its conception of the world into harmony with its practical activity.” Karabel, 1976, p. 168.

²⁰ See Stoppino for a discussion of power along the poles of ‘domination’ and ‘exchange.’ Stoppino, Mario. *Potere e Teoria Politica*. ECIG, 2001 [1983].

²¹ Olsaretti, 2014, p. 372. For a similar contention, see Rupert, 2005.

²² Olsaretti, *ibid*.

relations, culturally rooted in a historical bloc, configure a mutually influencing process between intellectuals and masses while always recognizing the preeminence of the former over the latter when it comes to constructing (more) coherent worldviews.

Therefore Gramsci grants the intellectuals explicit political tasks, namely “to organise the reform of moral and intellectual life [...] to fit culture to the sphere of practice itself can accelerate the historical process that is going on, rendering it more homogeneous, more coherent, more efficient in all its elements.”²³ To illustrate this task, we need Gramsci’s most famous theoretical concept, hegemony, and explore what is the role of the intellectuals in sustaining or disrupting it.

Hegemony

Hegemony works at two levels: “first, internally, the formation within the social group of self-discipline and self-government, that is, the self-constitution of the group into a coherent and active political actor; and second, externally, the extension and dissemination of the group’s conception of the world throughout the society.”²⁴ Intellectuals, as we have seen, elaborate precisely on the identity of their class; and then disseminate its worldviews - its preferences, desires, claims, morals, and so forth. They are, for Gramsci, at the center of the hegemonic process. As Fulton argues, “[t]here is a direct connection in Gramsci between social control and intellectual elaboration. That which is hegemonic in the thought and behavior of people is also an intellectually detailed and integrated system of interpretation and organization, though this integration and detail exist outside the people and in the intellectuals.”²⁵

²³ Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 365.

²⁴ Fontana, Benedetto. “The Democratic Philosopher: Rhetoric as Hegemony in Gramsci.” *Italian Culture*, 2005, p. 99.

²⁵ Fulton, 1987, p. 205.

In other words, a class exerts hegemony, and hence becomes the ruling class (*classe dirigente*), when its values and worldviews are internalized by its own members as well as by the other classes - which become then subaltern as a consequence of this internalization. The hegemony the ruling class won over the subalterns is the product of a dialectical and symbiotic relation between coercion and consent (in Gramsci's words, "consent armored by coercion"). The 'political society' is the domain of coercion: it represents, in a capitalist modern society, the security apparatus of the state - its police, courts, secret services, prison system, and so on. The 'civil society' is instead the domain of consent: institutions such as the family, the educational system, the media, the Church, trade and professional unions, NGOs, clubs, entertainment industry, etc... As the union of coercion and consent results in hegemony, so the union between political and civil society results in the 'integral state' (*lo stato integrale*).

It must be noted that political society, civil society and integral state are for Gramsci fields where hegemony is produced and reproduced: hegemony is never a *fait accompli* or a permanent feature of a historical bloc. It is instead a continuous stream of practices, discursive and coercive, aiming to ensure the perpetuation of hegemony itself. Intellectuals organic to the ruling class perform their function by offering dispensations about either the necessity, or appropriateness, glory, prestige, desirability, potential, success of the incumbent power configuration. But, crucially, in those very fields (political and civil society) it is possible to wage 'wars'²⁶ to resist hegemony: or, more appropriately, to wage a counter-hegemonic struggle.

Counter-Hegemony

²⁶ I am using the expression used by Gramsci, as I illustrate below.

The subaltern classes (hence those classes not wielding power in relation to the ruling class) are the ones Gramsci expects to lead this charge.²⁷ As we have mentioned earlier, everyone harbors the potential, *qua* philosopher and thus capable of crafting worldviews, to question and challenge established power relations, even hegemonic ones. I will elaborate on this below when addressing the issue of common sense.

The subalterns may direct the struggle for the hegemony to the institutions of coercive power (for example, the Bastille in Paris in 1789 and the Winter Palace in Petrograd in 1917). This is the ‘war of movement,’ a direct strike at the heart of the political society. Or else, they may engage in a ‘war of position,’ which is therefore “characterized by a series of moral and intellectual contests, whose ultimate goal is the construction of social and political reality.”²⁸ This strategy would challenge not the coercive side of hegemony, but the consensus that shores it up.

Whether it is war of movement or war of position, organic intellectuals of the subaltern classes are the ones who propose a rationale, a strategy, and a future vision to start waging the struggle. As Ives and Green argue,

“In Gramsci’s view, it is necessary for subaltern groups to produce their own category of organic intellectuals and linguistic innovations as effectively as dominant social groups create their organic intellectuals, in that the intellectuals remain in contact with, or organic to, the social groups’ life experiences so as

²⁷ This position in Gramsci is consonant with his Marxist convictions: we should expect mobilization out of social groups who most have to benefit from change. This argument is opposed by rationalist theories of mobilization. See Chapter 2, section “Evolution of the Field: a Bird’s Eye View.”

²⁸ Fontana, 2005, p. 116.

to provide organisation, direction, and leadership in the movement to achieve political power and hegemony.”²⁹

It is in this sense that Baud and Rutten proposed the figure of the ‘popular intellectual,’³⁰ an organic intellectual who can perform specific functions pertaining to mobilization: popular intellectuals “seek to define the problems of subaltern groups, articulate their grievances, and frame their social and political demands.”³¹ Again, this contention clearly stems from the original formulation of Gramsci about the organic intellectuals: “they aim, unlike traditional (status-quo oriented) intellectuals, to replace existing conceptions of the world.”³² In order to do so, they help making “critical an already existing [cultural] activity.”³³ In Gramsci’s social theory, intellectuals are strategically located in relation to social and political mobilization and can thus act upon those: “[i]ntellectual is thus understood as a situated social practice, not a fixed quality, and *intellectuals* by the specific social relations which constitute that practice. Like Gramsci, I view these social relations, and thus intellectuals, in connection with social movements, collective forces for social change.”³⁴ The intellectuals’ function is linked to social and political forces, dynamics, processes to which they fundamentally partake, but that they cannot determine, influence or shape in any deterministic fashion.

For these reasons, Gramsci’s theory of the intellectuals represents a solution to the conundrum of ideology as false consciousness. The subalterns may launch a counter-hegemonic project not because of hard and fast laws of historical development, nor because of the

²⁹ Green, Marcus E., and Peter Ives. "Subalternity and language: Overcoming the fragmentation of common sense." *Historical Materialism* 17.1 (2009): 3-30, p. 25.

³⁰ See Chapter 2, section “Popular Intellectuals and Alternative Worldviews.”

³¹ Baud, Michiel and Rosanne Rutten. “Introduction.” In *Popular Intellectuals And Social Movements: Framing Protest In Asia, Africa, And Latin America*, ed. by idem, p. 2.

³² Reed, Jean-Pierre. "Theorist of subaltern subjectivity: Antonio Gramsci, popular beliefs, political passion, and reciprocal learning." *Critical Sociology* 39.4 (2013): 561-591, p. 563.

³³ Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 330.

³⁴ Eyerman, Ron. *Between culture and politics: Intellectuals in modern society*. Polity press, 1994, p. 6. Emphasis in the original.

enlightened guidance of revolutionary professionals, but because of the connections and interactions with organic intellectuals. As Reed argues, Gramsci “theorizes a *dialectical and referential relationship* between the philosophy of praxis and subaltern thought [...] as a necessary and strategic step for the development of counter-hegemony,” which, “while necessarily guided by working class organic intellectuals, needs to develop from below. This requires the latter social actors to consider existing subaltern cultural practices as potential political resources.”³⁵

Counter-hegemony, in this sense, is a process whereby, “socially and historically given worldviews associated with the status quo are critically disarticulated from within an existent ideological complex,” a struggle to change “cultural and material conditions.”³⁶ This can be accomplished in that the philosophy of praxis “teaches that reality does not exist on its own, in and for itself, but only in an historical relationship with the men [sic] who modify it.”³⁷ Organic intellectuals become the link between subalterns’ potential to mobilize and actual mobilization: “only when there is a genuine dialogue between intellectuals and nonintellectuals, that an effective political force, a ‘historical bloc’, capable of transforming society can come into being.”³⁸

In doing so, they act as popular intellectuals. Consistent with Eyerman and Jamison’s³⁹ contention that social movements are first and foremost knowledge production endeavors, Olsaretti claims, “Gramsci sought to integrate the study of high intellectuals’ contribution to knowledge with that of broader intellectual groups dedicated to the organization and dissemination of knowledge produced by high intellectuals and ultimately link it to the culture or

³⁵ Reed, 2012, p. 565, emphasis in the original.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 566.

³⁷ Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 346

³⁸ Crehan, Kate. "Gramsci's concept of common sense: a useful concept for anthropologists?." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16.2 (2011): 273-287, p. 276.

³⁹ Eyerman, Ron, and Andrew Jamison. *Social movements: A cognitive approach*. Penn State Press, 1991.

common sense of subaltern masses too.” Therefore, Gramsci’s sociology of intellectuals is, “especially relevant to whether and how subalterns ‘can speak,’ that is, how they interact with knowledge production, and how they can resist hegemonic forces, thus engaging in counter-hegemony.”⁴⁰

Ideology and Discourse, Philosophy and Common Sense

I have illustrated how organic intellectuals may preserve hegemony or, as popular intellectuals, wage a counter-hegemonic project; and I have argued they do so by virtue of ideational endeavors - their ideological production. I intend here to clarify what I mean by that. What do intellectuals actually do to influence politics? I propose ‘ideology’ as a term more suitable than ‘frames’ to understand intellectuals’ role in social and political mobilization.

Ideology

Yet, what do I mean exactly by ideology? In fact, there are few more debated terms in the social sciences than ‘ideology’!⁴¹ Ideology is first and foremost an ideational construct. It is a set of ideas and propositions individuals and groups actively put forth when pondering over politics and society. Since I have made ample references so far to Marxist terminology and its deployment of a specific definition of ideology, I want to clarify I do not utilize the term in that fashion. The Maxian and Marxist concept of ideology will provide nevertheless cues and inspiration to reflect upon the enabling and constraining elements of any ideational construct.

I consider ideology a political project: it aims at sustaining or altering power relations.

Surveying the vast literature on the concept of ideology, Gerring observed that the academic consensus posits *consistency* as its prime attribute: ideology is coherent, cogent,

⁴⁰ Olsaretti, 2014, p. 365. I will elaborate on the concept of ‘common sense’ below.

⁴¹ The literature on the concept of ideology is virtually boundless. For two introductory and survey works, see McLennan, David. *Ideology*. University of Minnesota Press, 1986 and Larrain, Jorge. *The Concept of Ideology*. University of Georgia Press, 1979.

systematic, articulated. Gerring also added *stability*, *contrast* and *explicitly political subject matter* as corollaries: therefore, ideology tends to be steady and endure over time; it rivals other ideologies; and it is not equivalent with kin concepts such as ‘political culture’ or ‘worldview.’⁴² These characteristics ought not to be understood in absolute terms, but rather relatively to less coherent, more fleeting and perhaps only partially political ideational constructs.⁴³ Hanson echoes this view when he claims that ideologies are, “*proposals...to define clear and consistent criteria for membership in a proposed polity.*”⁴⁴ When talking about social and political mobilization, Oliver and Johnston define ideology as “a system of meaning that couples assertions and theories about the nature of social life with values and norms relevant to promoting or resisting social change.” Consequently, “ideology links a theory about society with a cluster of values about what is right and wrong as well as norms about what to do.”⁴⁵ Therefore, ideology is basically social theory plus normativity. I find Gerring’s core features of ideology consonant with Oliver and Johnston’s definition for its deployment in social movement theory.

Where do ideologies come from? An almost tautological answer would point at ideologues, whose main business is the crafting of ideologies! As I have argued, Gramsci’s assistance is crucial here: we can think of ideologues as intellectuals who propose ideas about

⁴² Gerring, John. "Ideology: A definitional analysis." *Political Research Quarterly* 50.4 (1997): 957-994, p. 980.

⁴³ For example, Almond and Verba’s idea of ‘civic culture’ is not an ideology: it does not rival or oppose other political cultures, it is not explicitly political (although it purportedly impacts politics), and it is not a coherent system to analyze and make sense of social reality. See Almond, Gabriel and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture. Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Princeton University Press, [1963] 2015. We can see also how Quietist Salafis’ ideational system can be considered an ideology: it is a system that purports to explain society and accounts for the meaning of life at large; it is relatively coherent, it is opposed to rival ideational systems (such as Jihadi Salafism or liberalism); its refutation of institutional politics does not mean they do not engage politics at other levels. More on these issues in Chapters 4 and 5.

⁴⁴ Hanson, Stephen. *Post-Imperial Democracies: Ideology and Party Formation in Third Republic France, Weimar Germany, and Post-Soviet Russia*. Cambridge, 2010, p. xix. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Oliver, Pamela and Hank Johnston. “What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research.” *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 4.1 (2000): 37-54, p. 43.

society by means of a descriptive and normative theoretical framework.⁴⁶ Yet they cannot simply fabricate such ideas *ex nihilo*. Ideologues conjure up and devise ideologies always within the constraints and possibilities of a given discursive setting. This setting, so to speak, is the stage where and out of which ideologies appear: it is an ideational structure, and like any structure it limits and enables at the same time.⁴⁷

Let me elaborate on this point as I am about to link ideology with discourse. Like Oliver and Johnston, Moaddel contends that ideology is a set of organized signs. What are these signs about? They address “historically significant problems,” but the content of any given ideology cannot be reduced to such problems: “as ideologies are expressed by signs, the arbitrary status of signs means that its meaning is not derived from its social referent - the signified - but from its relation to other symbols, or signifiers within a discursive code.”⁴⁸ In my view, here Moaddel dismisses too readily the ‘social referent,’ that is the non-discursive item to which the sign refers. The arbitrary status of signs does not imply their perpetual instability: not in relation to one another, or in relation to the signified. In other words, ‘historically significant problems’ may not tell us about the specific content of an ideology, but surely they must be taken into account!

Discourse

Moaddel is right however when he claims that ideology is inscribed in, derives from, and is articulated along a ‘discursive code.’ Just like ideology, the term ‘discourse’ has been the object of great deal of investigation. As I have discussed in my presentation of framing theory, scholars have made use of the concept of discourse in theorizing about frames. The problem, I

⁴⁶ To clarify: an intellectual can be an ideologue, but not necessarily. An artist, for example, may carry out the function of organic or traditional intellectual as Gramsci envisioned, yet she may not do so via the production of ideological work. Also: a demagogue is not an ideologue. The former’s thinking and pronouncements about society and the normative are not grounded in any consistent, coherent and stable social theory.

⁴⁷ See fn. 5.

⁴⁸ Moaddel, Mansour. *Islamic modernism, nationalism, and fundamentalism: episode and discourse*. University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 26.

contended, was considering discourse as a relatively stable and coherent system of signs and meanings.⁴⁹ Instead discourse is, for lack of better terms, much messier! It is a system of signs that unlike ideology is not organized. It lacks consistency and coherence, it is not as stable, and it is not necessarily political. Discourse offers no social theory, and there are no clear normative injunctions.

Yet discourse is fundamental to understand both the emergence and the working of ideology itself: we may think of discourse as the raw materials that ideology seeks to refine - much like obtaining gasoline from crude oil, getting rid of water, rocks, and other unnecessary residuals. Similar to Moaddel, other scholars contended that discourse consists of “the fundamental categories in which thinking can take place. It establishes the limits of discussion and defines the range of problems which can be addressed.”⁵⁰ Just like ideology, discourse is historically bounded while not historically determined; and just like many ideologies may be present at any given moment, so too we confront a multiplicity of discourses.

Spillman further elaborates upon how discourses exist and produce meanings in history: “the particular meanings and values which emerge in discursive fields exist in historically specific repertoires that we create and recreate: in this sense, culture is contingent and creative.”⁵¹ Therefore, the concept of discourse helps making sense of the relation between historical circumstances and the emergence of specific ideologies. Discourse intervenes in the relation between structural determination and cultural autonomy. As I have argued, a good theoretical account should, “avoid reducing meanings [i.e., the agents’ cultural activity] to social

⁴⁹ See Chapter 2, section “Framing Theory and the Study of Mobilization and Contention,” especially fn. 63.

⁵⁰ Wuthnow, Robert. *Communities of discourse: Ideology and social structure in the reformation, the enlightenment, and European socialism*. Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 13.

⁵¹ Spillman, Lyn. “Culture, social structures, and discursive fields.” *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 15.1 (1995): 129-54, p. 140.

structures; but it should also avoid reducing social structures to meanings.”⁵² Gramsci’s notion of ‘historical bloc’ answers this concern, combining structural coordinates and dispositions with agents’ ideas and practices.

How then is discourse connected to politics and contention? Bakhtin claimed that the struggles over meaning occurring in a discursive field “are at the core of ideology in action. Discourse is ideological when the meaning it provides offers understandings about power, difference and hierarchy.”⁵³ Hence, ideologies emerge out of discourse as ideational constructs which talk coherently about power. In a creative (and often conflictual) effort, individuals and communities can mold discourse into a more consistent and compelling ideational product that refers to power relations. We call such product ideology. In this sense, ideology is a political action: it thought and action, like the philosophy of praxis suggested. It is important to notice the following: what I have said so far does not imply that, “ideologies are acted upon all the time, or that political action is primarily the product of ideologies. The significance of ideology,” Mullins states succinctly, “is not that it causes one to do but that it gives one cause for doing.”⁵⁴ Focusing on ideology, in other words, does not mean to forgo other, non-ideational element. Quite the contrary: it compels us to look closely into how social agents arrange, discuss, understand such elements in their intellectual and ideological effort to preserve or change a certain power configuration.

Philosophy and Common Sense

⁵² Spilmann, 1995, p. 134.

⁵³ Steinberg, Marc. “The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners.” *American Journal of Sociology* 105.3 (1999): 736-780, p. 745.

⁵⁴ Mullins, Willard. “On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science.” *American Political Science Review* 66.1 (1972): 478-510, p. 509.

Gramsci's social theory bears striking resemblance with the accounts of ideology and discourse I presented here. Gramsci proposed the concepts of 'philosophy'⁵⁵ and 'common sense'⁵⁶ to explain how a hegemonic project may succeed. Common sense is the subaltern's fragmented, unsystematic and accepted worldview.⁵⁷ Much like discourse, it provides people coordinates as well as the raw material to make sense of their world and lives; but it does so in an incoherent manner. The contradictory nature of common sense "is not the product of some sort of intellectual or psychological deficiency on the part of the masses. Rather, the contradictory nature of common sense is largely defined by the contradictory nature of the ensemble of social relations, economic exploitation and the various exclusions they produce and reproduce."⁵⁸ Insofar as common sense processes and makes sense of this ensemble (congealing, for example, in the worldviews discussed above), it harbors the potential to rearticulate (or 'disarticulate,' as Reed⁵⁹ suggests) those very power relations and thus challenge them: while politically quiescent, common sense might ground and undergird counter-hegemonic mobilization.⁶⁰

This process is all but an automatic or mechanic transition; it is not either ideationally or materially determined. To mobilize the subalterns against existing power relations, common sense needs be systematized into what Gramsci calls 'philosophy:' "[t]he disjointed and unreflecting character of common sense has drawbacks [...] for its usefulness as a tool of mass political mobilization. The common sense of the subaltern masses, lacking the coherence of

⁵⁵ This should not be confused with Gramsci's own 'philosophy of praxis,' which belongs more properly to Marxist historical materialism.

⁵⁶ The rendition of the Gramscian expression 'common sense' in English may give rise to ambiguities. The Italian expression he used, 'senso commune,' indicates a widespread, popularly held set of beliefs, that has none of the connotations of expediency and pragmatism of the English expression.

⁵⁷ As Green and Ives, 2009, explain: "Gramsci describes common sense as a 'fragmentary collection of ideas and opinions' drawn from differing philosophies, ideologies, religion, folklore, experience, superstition, and from 'scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered into common usage,'" p. 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Reed, 2012, pp. 565-6.

⁶⁰ Green and Ives, 2009, p. 9.

philosophy, is necessarily limited for the sake of mobilization, and it is indeed closely associated with the subordinate status of the groups that rely only on this form of worldview.”⁶¹ In other words, common sense is more easily a way to acquiesce rather than a way to change. And yet, there is no other route: as Gramsci argued, “the starting point must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which has to be made ideologically coherent.”⁶² You cannot force your way against the common sense (as any politician campaigning will readily attest...).

We can thus establish a parallel between philosophy and ideology on one side and common sense and discourse on the other. These two sets mirror and complement each other, insisting on different perspectives when we analyze social and political mobilization: ideology and discourse highlight specific ideational elements that spur and inform contention; philosophy and common sense ground those elements in a larger social theory within which we can locate the intellectuals and the masses.

To better illustrate this parallel, let us consider the following:

“[p]hilosophy cannot be in opposition to common sense [...], nor is there a fundamental qualitative difference between philosophy and common sense, but there is nevertheless an important difference of degree between the two. Philosophy, in fact, has the hallmarks of an *ideological* construct belonging to hegemonic groups and pertaining to their leadership functions.”⁶³

Philosophy in Gramsci is thus akin to ideology: it is coherent, systematic, and explicitly political. At the same time, to sustain hegemony or to spur counter hegemony, philosophy needs

⁶¹ Olsaretti, Alessandro. "Croce, Philosophy and Intellectuals: Three Aspects of Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony." *Critical Sociology* 42.3 (2016): 1-19, p. 7, emphasis added.

⁶² Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 421.

⁶³ Olsaretti, 2016, p. 7. Emphasis added.

to relate to the common sense of the masses. If we think about common sense as a discursive field, we can claim it is the space where a host of meanings and cognitive coordinates are generated and arranged. Common sense as discourse means therefore that other meanings and different assessments of social reality can be created within and out of it. Common sense is not inert matter. It is endowed with political potential:

“the heterogeneity and relatively apolitical nature of common sense could be reorganized into more stable symbolic forms that could function as weapons in the political arena. Importantly, both dominant and subordinate groups can produce ideologies; much of Gramsci's work is on the importance of the intellectuals who produce both ruling and challenging ideologies.”⁶⁴

The importance of intellectuals lies precisely in their capacity to craft ideologies drawing on common sense. Common sense is a reservoir intellectuals can exploit and draw upon in the context of their socio-political function. This dynamic does not entail a top-down process (imparting wisdom and purpose on abject masses). Were this the case, we would fall into what Mullins was warning us against (a simplistic take on ideology as the first or even the sole cause of social action) or into what Karabel deemed a dangerous vanguardist position. To understand how ideology impacts social and political mobilization we need to think about a more complex dialogical affair, as Steinberg would put it.⁶⁵ Constructing (counter) hegemony requires connecting two social groupings with different capacities and skills, yet complementary rather than opposed to each other. Crehan further clarifies:

“Those who live the harsh realities of subordination, however capable they may be of everyday resistance, cannot, in Gramsci's view, themselves come up with the coherent, effective counter-narratives necessary if the existing hegemony is to be overcome. But it is just as true that

⁶⁴ Williams, Rhys. “Religion as a Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 35.4 (1996): 368-378, p. 373.

⁶⁵ Steinberg, 1999.

intellectuals cannot themselves devise these narratives unaided. It is their interaction with the subordinated [...] that educates the intellectuals.”⁶⁶

There is nothing mechanical about the interaction between the subaltern and the intellectual, as there is no unmediated and direct correspondence between sets of social, economic and political issues and the ideologies that arise to address them.⁶⁷ That is why in the same context (the same ‘historical bloc’) we witness the proliferation of competing ideologies out of the same discursive fields. Ideology, as Spilmann noted,⁶⁸ is a creative effort: while we may be able to conjure up ways in which this effort is carried out, its specific content cannot be known *a priori*. Steinberg correctly pointed out that ideologies ‘talk’ to each other and to the environment writ large they inhabit.⁶⁹ In this process, they change both themselves and their environment – they have, in other words, social and political impact.

Salafi Scholars as Intellectuals: Making Religion into Ideology

In reviewing the political science approach to religion,⁷⁰ I observed how religion can be both ideology and culture.⁷¹ Religion manifests some of the properties of other ideational systems. For example, like nationalism or communism, it provides meaning. At the same time, religion uniquely features transcendence, an other-worldly bent not akin to even radical secular formulations of nationalism (the individual living also vicariously through the nation, and vice versa) or communism (the workers’ utopia located in a yet to be achieved perfect future). I contend in fact that, in order to be conceived, such secular formulations do not presuppose the presence of any element transcending human beings: the nation is nothing but the sublimation of

⁶⁶ Crehan, 2011, p. 275.

⁶⁷ See again Moaddel 2005 on this point, especially the introductory Chapter.

⁶⁸ See fn. 48.

⁶⁹ Steinberg, 1999, p. 745.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 2, section “Religion, Ideas and Political Contention.”

⁷¹ In particular, see Williams, 1996.

a collectivity of individuals; a communist society is attained by the change of existing power relations amongst social classes. Religion needs instead postulate a space located outside the purview of humankind, independently existing, that is, from any consideration about individuals or social (human) constructs alike.⁷²

I saw fit delving a bit more into my understanding of religion because I want to clarify the ways in which it is similar, and the ways in which it is different, from other ideational constructs. How shall we then treat religion given what I have submitted so far? How do Gramscian social theory and the vocabulary I proposed above help us deal with religion as a social phenomenon? Williams again puts it succinctly:

“[Gramsci] kept ideology and culture analytically distinct by separating the relative articulation and coherence of ideology from the practical lived aspects of culture/common sense. He took religion seriously as a source of social power because of its abilities to combine the experienced, everyday, ‘life-world’ of the people with an intellectually elaborated theoretical system. In that sense, religion is a tremendous political resource, combining the emotional and cognitive elements of action with a universalist legitimation.”⁷³

In relation to the philosophy of praxis, Fulton further argues: “religion is always political for Gramsci. It is part of the interior character of religion as a total praxis, a form of power and activity in society.”⁷⁴ Intellectuals can tap of course into the political potential of religion. They can use religious discourse as a tool to promote subservience or rebellion. Such discourse would provide cultural references, symbols and signs to explain social reality (a social theory) and an ideal socio-political order (normative dispensations). Hence, when the elaboration upon religious

⁷² I have, of course, no pretention to solve or delve into the debates around the definition of religion. I only wish to acknowledge I am aware my formulation is, from a religious studies perspective, problematic and open to much criticism.

⁷³ Williams, 1996, p. 374. See also Fulton, 1987, p. 214.

⁷⁴ Fulton, 1987, p. 202.

discourse is carried out by thinking about authoritative meaning, and thus power relations and hierarchy, these intellectuals can act as popular intellectuals and ideologues.

In this sense, we can consider Salafi scholars and thinkers as organic intellectuals, and thus capable of impacting politics and society. They are authoritative religious figures seeking to provide consistency, coherence and purpose to an unsystematic and fragmented popular common sense featuring important religious referents, symbols and narratives in its fabric. They do so by virtue of their pronouncements on a number of issues affecting communal and personal life. Unlike non-religious actors, they refer to and draw from a religious discursive field to craft their ideological constructs.

What do Salafi scholars actually do? What is the result of their political action and thinking - of their 'philosophy of praxis'? In other words, how do they impact social and political mobilization?

Mobilizing the Past: Social Appropriation of Tradition

Salafi scholars, *qua* organic intellectuals, have elaborated an ideology through their works and pronouncements. They explain current social reality (ideology as social theory); and they offer a template to discern right and wrong (ideology as normative dispensations).⁷⁵ This template is grounded on a past experience – a tradition – that offers solutions to rectify current ills, both mundane and spiritual. On the basis of such tradition, they call for action. We can notice how tradition here is not paired, politically, with status quo, submissiveness or preservation. Tradition instead may undergird change, dissidence and outright rebellion.⁷⁶ We may dismiss the pairing dichotomy tradition/status quo versus modernity/change: as Asad

⁷⁵ See fn. 43.

⁷⁶ The literature has long recognized this property of tradition. See for a foundational piece Calhoun, Craig. "The radicalism of tradition: Community strength or venerable disguise and borrowed language?" *American Journal of Sociology* (1983): 886-914.

suggested, “one needs to recognize that when one talks about tradition, one should be talking about, in a sense, a dimension of social life and not a stage of social development.”⁷⁷ The tradition that Salafis summon, far from being a historical relic, is instead a living, felt and most prominent dimension of social life.⁷⁸ It is, in other words, present and embedded in the discursive cultural reservoir of the individuals and communities Salafis seek to address. As Gramscian theory would contend, this tradition is part of their common sense.

It is precisely such religious tradition (the perfect community of the early days of Islam, as I will illustrate more in details in the following Chapters) that Salafi scholars can make into the backbone of their ideology. They can build a political project upon an apparently inchoate vision and seemingly politically inert material. In this way Salafi scholars act as ideologues, religious and popular intellectuals, as they spur and sustain social and political mobilization.

As I have stressed repeatedly, there is nothing automatic or certain about this process; but within it, organic intellectuals do play a “central role” in the “articulation and reinvention of intellectual traditions in new contexts.”⁷⁹ In this study, Salafi thinkers and scholars are precisely such intellectuals: they reach back to a religious tradition and make it into a project aiming to impact existing social and political relations.

I call this process the ‘social appropriation of tradition.’ In choosing these terms, I hope to capture the commonalities that any given political project manifests across historical, cultural and geographical theatres; and, at the same time, I intend to illustrate the peculiarities and idiosyncratic features that render such political project historically and empirically different from others. It is in this sense that I am here proposing a mid-range theory. In fact, the process of

⁷⁷ Talal Asad’s interview with Sabah Mahmoud, available at <http://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/asad.html>

⁷⁸ See also Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God*. Ballantine Books, 2001, and Brown, Nathan. *Rethinking tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁹ Eyerman, 1994, p. 33.

‘social appropriation’ is defined in the literature on social mobilization as the act of redefining the aims and purpose of a group (in this case, a group of believers) in order to engage in contentious action.⁸⁰ I add to this general proposition the term ‘tradition.’ This formulation thus points to the pivotal element underpinning such redefinition of aims and purpose. Or to put it more bluntly: not all political projects (one might even say most!) rely on an ideal tradition that is to be re-enacted in the present.

The redefinition of aims and purposes entails tilting the Janus-face quality of religious discourse in favor of social or political commitment. Therefore, religion should not inspire retreat from this world, a contemplative attitude, or total restraint from social and political life. The religious community shall instead be *also* of this world in an effort to adhere more properly and confirm more adequately to the - presumed - truthful religious message. In this way, religion as a discourse to account for the mundane *in light of* the transcendent is made also into an ideology so that mundane social life *conforms with* the transcendent.

This move characterizes, as Armstrong argues, any religious ‘fundamentalism.’ For Salafis, this congruence between here and hereafter (i.e., between mundane and transcendent) was realized in the early days of the Muslim community: attaining once more that condition is therefore not only possible because already realized, but also necessary because divinely mandated.

We can thus understand the socio-political import of religion as a constructed and willing act on the part of those who propose such redefinition of group’s aims. As I have argued, this import stems from the inherent socio-political potential of religion, within its discursive reservoir featuring opportunities as well as constraints for the emergence of different choices, attitudes and

⁸⁰ See page 3 and fn. 10 in Chapter 1.

practices towards the mundane. Therefore, in this way, a religious-based ideology features at the same time both otherworldly and all-too-worldly (social and political) elements.

The literature on Islamism explored in Chapter 2 tries, basically, to make sense of this combination: contemporary Salafism is no different from other religiously inspired phenomena emerging within the context of modernity, and it rests firmly within the galaxy of Islamic-based social and political movements. From a theological set of propositions about the nature and attributes of god - the discipline of *kalam* - Salafism morphed into a social and political phenomenon⁸¹ concerned not only with the proper understanding of the contours of Islam at a philosophical or metaphysical level, but also with the implications for social and political life that such contours entailed for the believers in their daily, mundane social existence.

As it is readily apparent, the cherished separation of private and public in western secular discourse is discarded altogether, not only challenged: once Islamism has brought back religion into the realm of the mundane, how is that necessarily not also social and political? Or, to put it otherwise: if the process of secularization is a historical development peculiar to the West (with all the caveats I highlighted in Chapter 2 notwithstanding), is it not just as possible to imagine and indeed witness other articulations of the mundane/transcendent pair?

Salafis' understanding of tradition, in this framework, is pivotal. It is, as I contend, the chief idiosyncratic feature of Salafism at large - what, for example, distances this current from other Sunni movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. They offer the possibility, even claim the necessity, to bring back that hallowed time to steer clear from the misguided path along which history has seemingly ventured. Lahoud, with Asad, contends that, "the *turath*⁸² does not only imply the history of a tradition that extends to the present; it also conveys the active sense

⁸¹ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of such historical and intellectual development.

⁸² See fn. 4, Chapter 1.

of seeking to shape a political present by interpreting its identity in terms of a particular image of its past.”⁸³ The contention I am putting forward is stronger than Brown’s claim where, “[a]gainst the Enlightenment [...], tradition is not an enemy of change, but the very stuff that is subject to change.”⁸⁴ He is right, but what he is missing is that tradition itself can be the template for change and the reason behind it. It is precisely in this way that a religious tradition is appropriated to enter the present social and political realm.

We can read the social appropriation of tradition as an attempt by Salafi scholars to bridge a normative philosophy of religious inspirations with consonant and conforming practices in the realms of society and politics. It is a war - of position or of movement - for the hearts and minds, a war to radically reconfigure power relations. It is a counter-hegemonic project carried out by organic intellectuals together with and for the sake of the subalterns.

Contention and Mechanisms

How does the social appropriation of tradition come about? In the introduction Chapter, I briefly presented the three mechanisms (*diffusion*, *elaboration* and *systematization*) by which the intellectuals’ ideological productions result in a specific process of social appropriation. I here offer a more exhaustive discussion. To begin, I will recall the concept of mechanism and processes proposed by Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam.

Tarrow and McAdam explained⁸⁵ that in *Dynamics of Contention* (DOC)⁸⁶ they were not looking for causal explanations along the lines of a positivist or naturalist ontology.⁸⁷ This move forgoes the search for grand theories: it does not seek recurrent patterns whereby mobilization

⁸³ Lahoud, Nelly. *Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries*. Routledge, 2005, p. 3

⁸⁴ Brown, 1999, p. 4.

⁸⁵ McAdam, Doug, and Sidney Tarrow. “Introduction: Dynamics of contention ten years on.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16.1 (2011): 1-10.

⁸⁶ McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁸⁷ See also fn. 81, Chapter 2.

unfolds, but recurrent ways in which the elements highlighted in the PPM⁸⁸ relate and interact with one another. They define these ways as mechanisms, “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.”⁸⁹ Wight offers a similar and complementary view: “[a] mechanism can be any real entity - whether an institution, an agent’s psychological or biological condition, or a discourse - that is the operative or motive part, process, or factor in a concrete system that produces a result.”⁹⁰ In this sense, we ought not to consider causation as constant correlations that we need to account for by proposing law-like generalizations. Instead, causation can be the activation of items present within the fabric of social reality, leveraging on the “dispositional properties or tendencies of elements.”⁹¹ Mechanisms compound into processes, that is “regular sequences [and combinations] of such mechanisms that produce similar [generally more complex and contingent] transformations of those elements.”⁹² Mechanisms and processes form a continuum⁹³ rather being discretely separated events.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ ‘Political Process Model,’ see Chapter 2, section “Evolution of the Field: a Bird’s Eye View.” See also Holland, Dorothy, Gretchen Fox and Vinci Daro. “Social Movements and Collective Identity: A Decentered, Dialogic View.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81.1 (2008): 95-126: “The goal is not so much to retrospectively predict the emergence of movements and their waxing and waning, but rather to identify important processes at play in producing historically particular outcomes,” p. 119.

⁸⁹ Tilly et al., 2001, p. 22.

⁹⁰ Wight, Colin. “Theorizing the mechanisms of conceptual and semiotic space.” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 34.2 (2004): 283-299, p. 288.

⁹¹ Banta, Benjamin. “Analyzing Discourse as a Causal Mechanism.” *European Journal of International Relations*, 19.1 (2013): 459-481, p. 463. Both Banta and Wight ground their work in a critical realist ontology, first inspired by the work of Roy Bhaskar. Given the already vast ground covered in terms of theory, I will not venture in further discussions of this philosophy. I would only highlight the following points. Critical realism posits a stratified social reality, distinguishing between the real, the actual, and the empirical. It then posits the existence of unobservable by looking at events that reveal them. Unlike neo-positivism, critical realism does not deem possible to make experience of the world outside discourse, and refuses, as we’ve seen, causation based on correlation; and unlike post-structuralism, it does maintain the existence of a world outside discourse, and rejects the impossibility of talking of *any* kind of causation. See for an overview Archer, Margaret, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier and Terrence Lawson. *Critical realism: Essential readings*. Routledge, 2013. See also Sayer, Andrew. *Realism and social science*. Sage, 2000.

⁹² Tilly et al., 2001, p. 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁴ Tilly and Tarrow discuss the issue of ‘scale’ in differentiating between mechanisms and processes. Depending on which event we are investigating (a small rebellion, for example, as opposed to a nation-wide revolution), we shall consider the same class of events as either mechanisms or processes: in a revolution, what was a process in small

I then contend the following: some social actors - (organic) intellectuals - can activate certain mechanisms, that compound into a process; in doing so they contribute in engendering social and political outcomes. In this study, Salafi scholars and thinkers are such actors. They operate within a discourse (namely, a religious discourse) which features some ‘dispositional properties’ and ‘tendencies.’⁹⁵ It is their intellectual efforts and consequent ideological productions that build and articulate an ideology out of such discourse.⁹⁶ It is, again, a project to morph religion into a mundane plan of social, political - indeed, contentious - action, and that I have described above as the process of ‘social appropriation of tradition.’

This focus on discourse and ideology is not tantamount to claim primacy of ‘ideational’ elements over ‘material’ ones. Instead, it merely indicates how cognition is a fundamental aspect of mobilization⁹⁷ and how such cognition - of both ‘material’ and ‘ideational’ circumstances - is filtered and articulated through discourse. Consistent therefore with a critical discourse analysis perspective (CDA),⁹⁸ I use the concept of mechanisms to tease out how the ideational and the material affect and relate to one another. I do intend to stress how reductionist views on either

rebellion may only be a mechanism compounding in even larger processes. See *Contentious Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2015 [2007].

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the specific features of Salafi discourse, see Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ This point is of particular interest in the debate about the propensity of Islam for politics. As I have discussed in the literature review on Islamism, one of the most prominent students of political Islam, Hamid Enayat, argued that Islam contains within its discursive fabric various elements featuring ‘a certain leaning towards politics’ (see fn. 139, Chapter 2). In light of what I have illustrated so far about religion and discourse, I would argue for the possibility, given some specific dispositions and properties of the principles of Islam, to make it into a full-fledge political project. In other words, Islam is no political ideology; but contains seeds that can be grown into one that we now usually call Islamism.

⁹⁷ This was posited by Kurzman and then recognized by Tarrow and Tilly when they described all mechanisms as cognitive mechanisms, thus abandoning their previous differentiation between environmental, relational and cognitive (Tilly et al., 2001, p. 25). See Kurzman, Charles. “The Post-Structural Consensus in Social Movements Theory”. *Rethinking social movements: Structure, meaning, and emotion*. Eds. Jeff Goodwin, and James M. Jasper. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, and Tarrow and Tilly, 2007.

⁹⁸ CDA is a discourse analysis methodology developed, amongst others, by Norman Fairclough. Unlike a poststructuralist approach to discourse, CDA recognizes the presence of non-discursive elements that need to be considered alongside discourse. See in particular Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press, 1992; “Discourse, social theory and social research: the discourse of welfare reform.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4, (2000): 163-195; “Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Gee, James Paul and Michael Handford, Routledge, 2012. CDA is then closely related to critical realism in their shared understanding of a complex, at one time material and discursive, social reality. See fn. 89.

ideational or material factors end up being unduly narrow and, ultimately, incomplete and sterile to understand social processes.

The three mechanisms compounding into the process of social appropriation of tradition are *diffusion*, *elaboration* and *systematization*. These are the most fundamental ways I submit intellectuals impact social and political mobilization via their ideological productions. To put it otherwise, it is what their pronouncements do in order to spur people to act contentiously. Let me discuss each one of them.

Diffusion

Tilly and his colleagues had long signaled three similar mechanisms to account for the communication and transmission of ideas, repertoires of contention, and meaning making practices across different sites. In their work, diffusion is primarily the spread of forms of contention; brokerage indicates the “production of a new connection between previously unconnected sites”; and coordinated action is “two or more actors’ engagement in mutual signaling and parallel making of claims on the same object.”⁹⁹ As I address more narrowly the role of intellectuals and thinkers, I feel safe in subsuming these three mechanisms under one heading, to which I still refer as ‘diffusion’ given its intuitive appeal.

Diffusion is the spreading and dissemination of ideas, concepts, interpretations, debates and, potentially and ultimately, ideologies. According to Baud and Rutten, diffusion is the “‘flows of meaning’ between local, national, and global fields,” within which, “it is clear that popular intellectuals often function as crucial nodes.”¹⁰⁰ As Collins argues, intellectual production thrives and flows through personal contacts:¹⁰¹ the mechanism of diffusion aims

⁹⁹ Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 31.

¹⁰⁰ Baud and Rutten, 2004, p. 209.

¹⁰¹ Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies*. Harvard University Press, 1998. See also Rochon’s concept of ‘Critical communities’ Chapter 2, section “Defining an Elusive Actor: the Sociology of the Intellectuals.”

precisely at capturing this flow and exchange. Diffusion highlights the contribution and importance of communication via networks in fostering the process of social appropriation. Brym contends, as he makes explicit reference to communities of intellectuals, that “they are embedded in social networks whose ties to various classes and other collectivities shift over time and help account for their ideologies and political allegiances.”¹⁰² An intellectual will thus inhabit more than one network at any given time: diffusion insists on the importance of networks with his peers and colleagues as well as mentors and teachers. She will learn from, teach to, discuss with other thinkers and scholars. She will engage in debate, publish rebuttals and defenses; support or disown specific ideas; proffer accusations and even condemn rival ideologies. As the intellectual does so, she is - even if unbeknownst to her - spreading and circulating ideas about a certain understanding of social reality and about ways to change or preserve it. Or, to put it otherwise: the intellectual’s production functions as a *trait d’union* amongst different cognitive approaches to social reality, and offers to a new public what was previously confined to another locale (broadly defined: another country, region, institution, and so on).

Elaboration

The networks in which the intellectual is embedded is not only horizontal (her peers or colleagues) but also vertical, indicating her followers (students, acolytes, potential or real). The mechanisms of elaboration and systematization pertain more directly than diffusion to this set of relations. Intellectuals who want to spur a counter hegemonic process face two tasks: one is to “criticize the fragmentary and contradictory elements of common sense and to give it greater coherence, transforming it into ‘*buon senso*’ or ‘good sense.’” The other one is, “to elaborate

¹⁰² Brym, Robert J. "Intellectuals, sociology of." *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Oxford: Elsevier Science (2001): 7631-5, p. 7633.

new worldviews that have to become widely accepted and thus to permeate common sense.”¹⁰³

Systematization pertains to the first task. I here concentrate on the second, elaboration.

This mechanism addresses the more strictly scholarly and intellectual contribution of the popular intellectuals. In a sense, it is recalling the more usual understanding of intellectuals as men and women of letters, akin to the original Bendian conception. Elaboration, just like diffusion, is ultimately about cognition. It is how the intellectual perceives and ponders over existing historical circumstances¹⁰⁴ by way of addressing pressing philosophical, political, social or religious issues with the intent to either resist or spur change. Elaboration is a creative cognitive process: it is thus at the core of social and political mobilization as the effort to produce new meanings and new knowledge.¹⁰⁵

Elaboration is where ideology takes shape. It is not tantamount with invention: the production of ideas is never quite the manufacturing of completely new ideas. Ideologues and thinkers have scholar and intellectual backgrounds that shape their thinking and constrain their capacity to formulate entirely original ideologies.¹⁰⁶ Scholars, thinkers and ideologues refer to other authors at all times, resurrecting, discussing, drawing on or refuting previous works; they might do so even with entire scholarly and intellectual traditions. The mechanism of diffusion intends to trace the debt owed by intellectuals to their peers. Elaboration seeks instead to assess the amount of such debt.

¹⁰³ Olsaretti, 2014, p. 375.

¹⁰⁴ The Gramscian ‘historical bloc.’

¹⁰⁵ As contended by Eyerman and Jamison, 1991. See also Casas-Cortés, María Isabel, Michal Osterweil and Dana E. Powell. “Blurring Boundaries: Recognizing Knowledge-Practices in the Study of Social Movements.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81.1 (2008): 17-58, “[social movements] are important sites of knowledge creation, reformulation, and diffusion. We call these diverse practices ‘knowledge-practices.’ This hyphenated term aims to escape from the abstract connotations usually associated with knowledge, arguing for its concrete, embodied, lived, and situated character.”

¹⁰⁶ For a useful parallel with frames, Desrosiers, Marie-Eve. “Reframing frame analysis: key contributions to conflict studies.” *Ethnopolitics* 11.1 (2012): 1-23, especially p. 4.

However, intellectuals elaborate also upon non-scholarly items: they have also a social background. As I illustrated above, we may think of this background as the popular common sense, a discursive field that lacks the theoretical sophistication of a full-fledge ideology but that nonetheless provides some of the building blocks for the ideological construction of the intellectuals. Again, the concept of organic intellectual represents the bridge between lower and higher culture (i.e., philosophy and common sense). She thus elaborates (adds on, intervenes) over these two levels, the scholarly debate and the popular common sense, with her specific, personal, idiosyncratic contribution. In fact, with a careful inventory of pre-existing elements, we can point to whatever ideational novelty the intellectual has put forward: “[o]nce one has carried out this type of reading and has identified all that which is social and historical in a certain philosophy, there is ‘a residue,’ which is the individual contribution of that specific philosopher [...] the individual traits of the philosopher influence the specific form taken by the socio-historical trends in a given philosophy.”¹⁰⁷

Elaboration deals with the refining and tuning of ideas to specific historical contexts so to make, potentially, these ideas relevant for such circumstances. However, the link with the masses is too thin: the ideological production of the intellectual needs reaching its intended public. Further sophistication and abstraction - two likely outcomes of ideological elaboration - do not necessarily lead that way: quite the contrary, they may be harmful for spreading a given ideology.

Indeed, the subalterns need new ideas to launch successfully into a counter hegemonic venture (in line with the oppositional character of ideology Gerring pointed out). These new ideas may congeal into an ideology and offer new worldviews envisioning the necessity, desirability and opportunity for change. Organic intellectuals are at the hub of this ideological

¹⁰⁷ Olsaretti, 2014, p. 373, discussing Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Q10 §31.

production. Yet, this production needs also relate more clearly and directly to popular common sense so to engender social and political mobilization.

Systematization

Systematization refers not to the crafting and manufacturing of ideologies on the basis of existing ideational constructs. Systematization is the tuning of ideologies and popular common sense. It indicates what intellectuals' ideological production does in the attempt to connect to the scattered, fragmented and often apolitical common sense of the subaltern. This production re-organizes the incoherent worldview of the masses within the coordinates of a social theory. In other words, it is the philosophy of the intellectuals that seeks to inform the cognition of the subalterns, offering a more focused and persuasive narrative of social reality.

Systematization is therefore a crucial step in understanding how ideology can unleash the mobilization potential embedded within popular common sense. The discourse which articulates the subaltern's common sense makes sense of reality in a way not immediately conducive to mobilization. Systematization instead puts beliefs, values, desires, grievances and hopes of would-be followers within the architecture of a proper political ideology: it explains reasons and causes; assigns guilt and merit; and calls for restraint or action. It allows for an intelligible narrative functional to mobilization, capable of reconstructing, while not subverting, the subalterns' worldview: it works with, and does not try to do away with, common sense, as I argued above. In a nutshell, systematization is the re-articulation of pre-existing meanings to offer sharper cognitive coordinates to understand reality. This is thus a novel reality, but only to an extent: it is related to the subalterns' understanding, and it cannot divorce from it completely.

The literature on framing talked extensively of ‘alignment’ to account for the resonance of a particular frame. I expressed my dissatisfaction with that approach.¹⁰⁸ By proposing this mechanism, I intend to ground the impact of ideological factors in a larger social theoretical apparatus. Systematization relies upon the notion of organic and popular intellectuals in the way Gramsci adumbrated: such connection between ideological production and mobilization necessitates the intellectual to be connected to a social group as the class-bound approach suggests - social movements’ leaders skillful and strategic deployment of frames just won’t do. Learning, socialization, shared life experience and discourses: they all make it possible for the intellectual to be ‘organic’ to the social group she wants to address. Ideologies and their acceptance on the part of the subaltern speak of these as not mere consumers of frames, but as thinkers - philosophers, as Gramsci would have it: “People are viewed as developing belief systems from a combination of reflecting on and interpreting their own experiences and learning ideas and idea systems from others. They are thinkers and interpreters.”¹⁰⁹ Gillan echoes: “to begin with an assumption that ideological production is removed from ‘the masses’ must surely be mistaken in any endeavour that seeks to understand the use of ideas within social movements.” With the idea of systematization, I want precisely to “identify the development of the political ideas that motivate movement action yet remain firmly embedded in the praxis of the grassroots.”¹¹⁰

Systematization, more directly than diffusion and elaboration, speaks of the dialectical relation between the two heuristic categories - intellectuals and masses - that I have been using thus far. In a Gramscian framework, they are located on the same continuum, and they differ in

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 2, section “Framing Theory and the Study of Mobilization and Contention.”

¹⁰⁹ Oliver and Johnston, 2000, p. 51.

¹¹⁰ Gillan, Kevin. “Understanding meaning in movements: A hermeneutic approach to frames and ideologies.” *Social Movement Studies* 7.3 (2008): 247-263, p. 258.

degree yet not in kind: “[t]he intellectuals-masses dialectic [...] is necessary for groups of intellectuals to be able to express new developments that the masses live through but are unable to articulate.”¹¹¹

The intellectuals-masses dialectic relation mirrors the one between common sense and philosophy. As Gramsci argues, “[i]n the first use philosophy is a conception of the world and everyone possesses a conception of the world, even the subaltern classes through their common sense, since a rudimentary philosophy is contained in language and common sense.”¹¹² Common sense contains within itself philosophy. In the same way, ideology emerges from and is contained within discourse, without being properly articulated there. Again Gramsci explains mobilization in terms of philosophy of praxis:

“in working practically in the making of history one also works in [the making of] ‘implicit’ philosophy, which will be ‘explicit’ in so far as some philosophers [i.e., organic intellectuals] will elaborate it [into a] coherent [whole], raising questions of knowledge which sooner or later will find, besides the ‘practical’ form of their solution, also the theoretical form at the hands of specialists, after having immediately found the disingenuous form of popular common sense at the hands of the practical agents of historical change.”¹¹³

It is precisely such ‘disingenuous form of popular common sense’ that the mechanism of systematization seeks to systematize. Eyerman, in his work on intellectuals, similarly asserts that, “the intellectual tends to unite discourses that have been fragmented, expanding roles that have

¹¹¹ Olsaretti, 2016, p. 15.

¹¹² Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Q11§12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Q10 §31.

been specialized and, in this process, standing as a personal example against the force of the drift of societal change.”¹¹⁴

Final considerations on mechanisms

Eyerman and Jamison have already stated how social and political movements are, fundamentally, cognitive efforts to construct reality.¹¹⁵ Speaking of mechanisms as cognitive events, I sought to reconcile this view with DOC language and its authors’ ultimate acceptance of this position: mechanisms are shifts in perceptions, and thus allow configuring a social reality that actors themselves may change. Again, I urge not to read this as unbridled voluntarism, where agents (individuals or collectivities) may configure whatever reality they like and thus transform that as they please. Structural constraints, represented by other actors’ conflicting plans, material capabilities, and historical legacies, cannot be simply ignored, much less radically subverted. The old struggle between agency and structure is never resolved in favor of the former or the latter: rather, it is about how the two interact. In this sense, novel cognition (interpretation, understanding) of social reality may open up possibilities for contention: by empowering actors’ self-perception, by depicting rivals as sworn enemies, by outlying chances (or even the inevitability) of victory in face of all odds.¹¹⁶

I offer a few last caveats about the proposed mechanisms. First, in DOC original formulations, the sequencing is important to establish causality. While I am not aiming to establish neo-positivist causal connections, I would claim there is a logic in the sequence I presented here: intellectuals’ works first make ideas available to their own community and to a

¹¹⁴ Eyerman, 1994, p. x.

¹¹⁵ Eyerman and Jamison, 1994. See also Casas-Cortes et al., 2008.

¹¹⁶ This point has been masterfully illustrated by Kurzman. See Kurzman, Charles. “Organizational opportunity and social movement mobilization: a comparative analysis of four religious movements.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 3.1 (1998): 23-49.

certain public (*diffusion*); upon these ideas, they craft novel insights (*elaboration*); and then these ideational constructs affect the target group by reorganizing subaltern's understanding of social reality (*systematization*). These mechanisms congeal in a process of social appropriation where, in the case of contemporary Salafism, a specific understanding of religious tradition characterizes these Islamist movements.

Second, nowhere have I claimed there is a perfect, un-mediated and non-filtered reception process of the intellectuals' work on the part of their followers. The subalterns always maintain their agency. The three mechanisms and the process I propose describe how ideological productions may impact and influence mobilization. They do not comment on how, subsequently, a specific ideology may be received and applied to ever changing historical circumstances.¹¹⁷ As it is sometimes said, once a book is written, only its authorship is set, not its message or reception.

Third, I would reiterate how I consider mechanisms and processes as heuristic devices to sort out and make intelligible a very messy world. They are not 'discoveries' in any positivistic way - they are not something 'out there' that exist independently of our theoretical constructions.

Conclusion

In transitioning to the empirical part of my work, I will deal with momentous historical events and powerful societal forces. Social movements are part of such forces. They are prominent actors especially in moments of change, and they can be both consequences and causes of those moments. In these instances, change may intervene as a profound alteration of the status quo. Eyerman and Alexander speak of 'cultural trauma,' a cognitive displacement and

¹¹⁷ I will elaborate on this point in Chapters 5 and 6. For instance, self-proclaimed followers of leading Salafi scholars Maqdisi and Albani professed more extreme and uncompromising views than their mentors, eventually at times clashing with them.

dislocation which can be “understood as a meaning struggle, where individual and collective actors attempt to define a situation by imposing a particular interpretation on it.” What is the intellectuals’ job in all this? “Intellectuals play a central role in this discursive process, they are important actors in articulating what happened, who was responsible, who were the victims and what is to be done .”¹¹⁸ This meaning struggle is a complex episode that evolves during the course of interactive and dialogic processes among activists, rivals, target audiences, and the larger context in which they all operate.

In order to map parts of this struggle over meaning, I sought to inscribe my analysis within Gramscian social theory. It allows inserting the figure of the intellectual within a wider structure, and pondering over the impact of her actions within such structure. Admittedly, I outlined Gramsci’s social theory as to serve my needs and purposes. Starting from his conception of the human being, I quickly transitioned to the ‘philosophy of praxis’ and his theory of the intellectual. I then discussed these propositions in light of the intellectual’s relation with the subaltern and the implications for hegemony and counter-hegemony.

As this juncture, I introduced the concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘discourse’ highlighting the parallels with the Gramscian terms ‘philosophy’ and ‘common sense.’ This move allowed inserting the concept of ideology in wider social theory and focus on the role of intellectuals in its dissemination and production. Indeed, while “rationalist analyses implicitly bracket the substance of fundamentalist political thought as irrelevant to properly scientific explanations,”¹¹⁹ I deem instead important to delve into such political thought to understand political phenomena, as in the case of political Islam. Ideology in fact, “functions [...] as both a constraint on and a

¹¹⁸ Eyerman, Ron. “Performing Opposition or How Social Movements Move.” *Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics and Rituals*, ed. by Alexander, Jeffrey C., Bernhard Giesen and Jason Mast, Cambridge, 2006, p. 456.

¹¹⁹ Euben, Roxanne L. *Enemy in the mirror: Islamic fundamentalism and the limits of modern rationalism: a work of comparative political theory*. Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 23.

resource for constructing and making sense of the so-called ‘imaginary’.”¹²⁰ In the case of Salafis, the process I labeled as social appropriation of tradition seeks to capture the contours and fabric of such system of thought; in considering Salafi scholars and thinkers as Gramscian intellectuals and ideologues, I can gauge their social and political impact in episodes of mobilization. More specifically, I offered three mechanisms – diffusion, elaboration and systematization – that compound in the process of social appropriation of tradition.

The relation between Salafis’ understanding of tradition¹²¹ and their social, historical and economic context is a matter of engagement, debate, dispute and discussion. There is nothing preordained about what Salafi scholars and their followers will do in light of such understanding of tradition: in fact,

“[i]ntellectual traditions provide models, not recipes for action in concrete historical contexts.

Aspects of these traditions have a transcendent character in that they are grounded in longstanding ideals, rooted religious and philosophical, as well as political, systems of thoughts. However, even these ‘transcendent’ aspects must be applied in real contexts, and their reconstruction is necessarily contextual.”¹²²

The Salafi scholar, as an Islamist intellectual, is “part of an historical process in which human actors reinvent cultural traditions in different contexts.”¹²³ While we cannot foretell where such re-invention - rather, such appropriation - of tradition will head to, I have argued we can tease out which role the scholars’ intellectual production play in the course of social and political mobilization.

¹²⁰ Snow, David, and Scott Byrd. “Ideology, framing processes, and Islamic terrorist movements.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12.2 (2007): 119-136, p. 122.

¹²¹ I will discuss this more at length in the following Chapter.

¹²² Eyerman, 1994, p. 17.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

Chapter 4 - An Introduction to Salafism and the Jordanian Context

Salafism and Jordan: Two Histories

The theoretical claims I advanced in Chapter 3 want to explain in which ways prominent scholars act as organic, popular intellectuals and impact social and political mobilization. I made these claims referring primarily to the existing body of theoretical knowledge about mobilization, intellectuals, and Islamism. But while I hinted at my empirical areas of investigation, I discussed neither Salafism nor the Jordanian context in any detail. I here intend to provide the basis for the analysis of ‘Jordanian Salafism’ which I carry out over the next two chapters.

In the previous chapter, I insisted on how the mechanisms I proposed are fundamentally cognitive ones. At the same time, I stressed how this contention meant not to discard either structural (if cognitive suggests ‘agent-centered’) or material (if cognitive suggests ‘ideational’) considerations, but rather to include them all in a coherent - and hopefully persuasive - theoretical account. This chapter serves primarily two purposes. First, it highlights which structural (both ideational and material) conditions the Salafi groups - Quietist and Jihadi alike - were confronted by. Second, it provides the conceptual coordinates to make sense of how they experienced and understood such conditions - that is to say, the discourse underpinning their active cognitive effort. In other words, to claim that *diffusion*, *elaboration* and *systematization* are cognitive mechanisms it only begs the question: cognition of what, and how? The mechanisms had to deal with a specific social, economic and especially political configuration,¹ the Jordanian state. As the ultimate site of power, the Salafi movements had primarily to

¹ Theoretically, I think about this configuration as the Gramscian ‘historical bloc.’ See chapter 3, section “Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony.”

confront its presence, practices, ideology - in short, its hegemonic project – to craft in turn their own. They had to relate to such project, albeit, of course, with much different attitudes, approaches and strategies. How they did so depended on their specific outlook, congealed into an ideology, emerging in the context of a vast and complex transnational - even global - Islamic trend we now label Salafism. In the hub of such process, as I contend, we find Salafi scholars and thinkers posing as the ideologues of this political project.

With these considerations in mind, the discussion proceeds as follows: first, I will present Salafism, discussing its intellectual history, its relation to the modern history of the Middle East and the Muslim world, and then outlining a political geography of its current discourse. There, I connect Salafism foundational principles to the process of social appropriation of tradition I outlined in Chapter 3. Subsequently, I shall provide an outline of the historical trajectory of the Kingdom of Jordan. My narrative will concentrate more specifically on the years after 1989 and the momentous changes occurring afterwards.²

Salafism: a Philological Note on a Disputed Term

Salafism³ as a noun emerged only relatively recently within Islam, around a hundred years ago. However, the concept harks back much further in Islamic history. Etymologically, it stems from the socio-religious paradigm of the ‘pious ancestors,’ or ‘*as-salaf as-salih.*’ This expression refers to the early days of the Muslim community, where its members are held as noble believers displaying particular piety and devotion at both the individual and the

² In 1989 a series of major events took place which majorly impacted Jordan: the end of the Cold War, the withdraw of USSR troops from Afghanistan, and, more locally, the escalation of the Palestinian Intifada and the inauguration of the ‘reformist’ program of King Hussein. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 will further contribute to this rapidly evolving international scenario. I discuss more in details these events below in the historical sections.

³ I adopt the English noun for the sake of expediency and readability in lieu of the original Arabic noun, *salafiyah*. I will use however Arabic terms for the majority of the concepts relating to Salafism as they have no good equivalent in English.

community level.⁴ Adherence to the reputed theological beliefs of that era had been customarily described as ‘*madhhab as-salaf*,’ which we may render as ‘the doctrine of the ancestors.’⁵

However, within these loose coordinates, over the course of the XX century the idea associated with the *madhhab as-salaf* and later on with Salafism assumed vastly different meanings, at times at odds with one another. As a consequence, the implications (either at the theological, legal, social or political level) derived from the religious-historical referent of the ‘pious ancestors’ resulted often at variance with one another. Self-described Salafis and especially historians of Salafism⁶ were amongst the culprits for this state of affairs, where the term Salafism was attributed even to incompatible movements and currents. It is important to shed light on how we ought to understand ‘Salafism’ since I deal only with one such meaning: in this study, Salafism stands for a specific modern and contemporary Sunni global religious trend.

This premise is necessary in that the literature on this trend, for the most part, has ignored historical idiosyncrasies of the term to favor, instead, supposed commonalities, *traits d’union* and family resemblances *à la* Wittgenstein. In other words, the Salafi label has been applied rather carelessly and unwarrantedly to theological positions, movements, communities and individuals that had little, if anything, in common. In fact, students and proponents of Salafism alike have ended up summoning the paradigm of the *salaf* for whoever made reference to such

⁴ The confines of the period of the pious ancestors are not well defined. Most works I have encountered speak of the first three generations (‘*jil’*) of Muslim starting with the companions (‘*ansar’*) of the Prophet, then their followers (‘*tab’iyyun al-ansar’*) and last the followers of the followers (‘*atba’ at-tab’iyyun’*). Assuming generations of 25 years, this would end at the turn on the VII century CE, that is 75 years after the *hijrah* in 622 CE. Some Salafis and Wahhabis (see below) extend this period to include the work of the theologian and jurist Ibn Hanbal, who died in 855 CE or 233 AH. See Haykel, Bernard. “The Nature of Salafi Thought and Actions,” in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam’s new religious movement*. Hurst & Co, 2014 [2009].

⁵ A note on the term *madhhab*: a proper translation is difficult, meaning at times ‘school,’ ‘method,’ or ‘approach.’ Here, for instance, it is best rendered as ‘paradigm.’ Later on, I will deploy the term in reference to the main canonical school of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam, which are customarily referred to as *madhhab* .

⁶ Lauzière, Henri. *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century*. Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 3.

paradigm, caring little about the way it was invoked or if a clearly defined genealogy with the *madhhab as-salaf* could be detected.

The problem is twofold. First, in reconstructing the discourse of political Islam at large and Salafism in particular, the term has been stretched so much that it has become a catch-all label for intellectual currents and historical phenomena that display profoundly different features.⁷ Second, methodologically, there is hardly any utility in retroactively imposing a label without the backing of a solid genealogical inquiry. This sloppy operation is in fact the product of a philological fallacy that merely perpetuates a gross misconception about what Salafism has meant and represented in different phases and locales of Islamic history.

Most significant is the depiction of the late XIX and early XX century reformers Jalal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1848-1905) as Salafis. In order to distinguish them from current Salafis, they are usually described as ‘modernist’ or ‘reformist’ Salafis, engaged in an attempt to ‘modernize Islam.’⁸ This expression indicated their attempt to reconcile western modernity and Islamic principles, without rejecting the former because of its alien origin. But which traits of the *madhhab as-salaf* were they espousing? As Lauzière shows with a careful philological reconstruction, “these reformers believed that the pious ancestors, however defined, exemplified the full potential of Islam. Yet none of them ever took the conceptual step of claiming that their brand of balanced reform was called *Salafiyah* or that the proponents of this reform were called Salafis.”⁹

⁷ See for this problem in the social sciences more in general Sartori, Giovanni. "Concept misformation in comparative politics." *American political science review* 64.04 (1970): 1033-1053.

⁸ Virtually every work I have explored about either political Islam or Salafism attributed the label Salafi to Afghani, ‘Abduh and, as I will show, to Rida, albeit in his case this attribution was more pertinent, if only slightly so. Also Jordanian scholars whom I interviewed and talked to maintained this position, always prefacing their comments and answers about contemporary Salafism with this supposed ‘reformist’ branch. Also Hourani, in one of the best and most reputed studies on the subject, falls into the same mistake. See Hourani, Albert. *Arabic thought in the liberal age 1798-1939*. Cambridge University Press, 1962.

⁹ Lauzière, 2015, p. 42.

This misattribution of the term ‘Salafi’ to Muslim reformers who never claimed to be Salafis is due, according to Lauzière, to the French orientalist scholar Louis Massignon (1883-1962). As he delved into the work of Afghani, ‘Abduh and subsequently their disciple Rashid Rida (1865-1935), Massignon noted the reference to the *madhhab as-salaf* but “failed to make that distinction and mistook a Sunni theological marker for a general label referring to a reform movement.”¹⁰ This theological marker had existed since the medieval period, and Sunni scholars applied it quite consistently to indicate traditional Hanbali theology.¹¹ Within the Islamic discursive space of the XIX century, this was still the case. The problem is that Massignon was not using the term *salaf* drawing on this indigenous Islamic tradition. Rather, he re-configured the term altogether, creating a new category to define a non-Hanbali, non-traditional modernist intellectual movement. While Afghani and ‘Abduh were scripturalist, suggesting a direct reliance on the holy texts of Islam to defy a cumbersome and ossified tradition, they shared none of the other attributes and leanings of contemporary Salafism. They did not adopt a literalist approach to the holy texts, and stood for the opposite of an anti-modernist stance. As Lauzière demonstrates, “Massignon’s conclusions were untenable. He never produced any empirical evidence that an Islamic movement called *Salafiyah* had existed in the late nineteenth century, and no one has yet been able to substantiate this assertion. To be sure, al-Afghani and Abduh did not claim that label for themselves.”¹²

What did happen however was that Massignon’s misguided description was taken up by some Muslim scholars and intellectuals, in a blatant case of ‘orientalism in reverse.’¹³ This move nonetheless sowed the seeds for the later development of modern day Salafism, as Massignon’s

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 41.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 31. See below for more on Hanbalism.

¹² Ibid, p. 39.

¹³ See chapter 2, section “Mobilizing Islam.” On the concept of ‘orientalism in reverse,’ see Al-Azm, Sadiq Jalal. “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse.” *Khamsin*, 8 (1981): 5-26.

study assumed an authoritative status on the subject. This process was not linear, as it proceeded in fits and starts.¹⁴

Rashid Rida, a student of Afghani and ‘Abduh and arguably the most prominent Islamic intellectual of the early XX century, read Massignon, and also on these bases he was eventually to provide some of the intellectual foundations for what we now know as Salafism. The most important change Rida contributed to,¹⁵ later taken up by his aid and disciple Tariq ad-Din Al-Hilali (1893-1997), was to add a legal dimension to the paradigm of the pious ancestors. As I have mentioned above, the paradigm indicated a theological marker referring to Hanbalism, one of the four main Islamic jurisprudential schools (*madhahib al-fiqh*, sg. *madhhab*).¹⁶ In this context, the Salafi paradigm (also ‘*al-madhhab as-salafiyy*’) stood for what Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855) believed to be the theological positions of the early Muslim community. Rida instead began to use it to describe an approach to Islam. As I argue below, this move was pivotal. Current Salafism will gradually define an epistemological stance grounding ontological propositions about the essence of Islam.

On the basis of this approach, Rida now added legal dispensations on top of theological beliefs. Similarly to his teachers Afghani and ‘Abduh in their contestation of tradition (and hence of the four legal *madhahib*), Rida subscribed to scripturalism and espoused a nativist bent; unlike them, however, he did not share the same modernist leanings, or at least he abandoned them over time:¹⁷ Rida transitioned from ‘modernizing Islam’ to ‘Islamizing modernity,’ a major trait

¹⁴ It resembled Moaddel’s ‘episodic discourse’ in its development, where he argues forcefully against any correspondence theory between material and ideational. See Moaddel, Mansoor. *Islamic modernism, nationalism, and fundamentalism: episode and discourse*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹⁵ The most important venue for Rida’s intellectual works and efforts was the weekly and then monthly *Al-Manar* or ‘The Lighthouse,’ which he published from 1898 until his death in 1935.

¹⁶ See fn. 5. The four schools are Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi’i and Hanbali, from the name of their founders.

¹⁷ Rida indeed started off as a committed Islamic modernist like his mentors, and a devotee of the principles of the Islamic unity. He was to grow however progressively disillusioned with western modernity as the interwar period

featuring current political Islam and especially Islamism. We can already notice the uneasy stance of modern Salafism was developing in relation to the four *madhahib*: while being rooted, theologically, in one of them (the Hanbali *madhhab*), it was prone to reject them all on the basis of an unmediated scripturalism. A wholehearted and explicit rejection of the Islamic jurisprudential tradition would only occur over time and with the ideologization of Salafism which I discuss below. Once again, this operation would differ from Afghani and ‘Abduh’s rejection of the same tradition, as their effort espoused a modernist spirit and was predicated upon a different (pluralist) epistemological approach.

At this juncture (in the late 1920s), political Islam was stepping out of elitist intellectual circles. With the Muslim Brotherhood of Hasan al-Banna (1905-1949), political Islam was coming onto the stage of mass politics.¹⁸ Over the course of the following decades, Salafism would emerge mostly overshadowed by the Brotherhood, at times also in opposition to the kind of political Islam it represented. Therefore, the subsequent conceptual developments of Salafism are rooted both in the internal debates of its emerging discursive field, and in the historical conditions of the Muslim world at large, especially the issues of colonization, independence and search for authenticity.¹⁹

signaled for the Islamic world at large and the Arab world in particular an even deeper intrusion of and subservience towards European powers.

¹⁸ The literature on the Muslim Brotherhood is enormous. For two great works on the subject, see Lia, Brynjar. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: the rise of an Islamic mass movement 1928-1942*. Ithaca Press, 1999 and Mitchell, Richard Paul. *The society of the Muslim Brothers*. Oxford University Press, [1968] 1993.

¹⁹ See for example on the issues of modernity, nativism and Islam in another Islamic context (Iran): Mirsepassi, Ali. *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*. Cambridge University Press, 2000 and Boroujerdi, Mehrzad. *The Iranian Intellectuals and the West: the Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, Syracuse University Press, 1996.

The History Behind the Concept: Salafism as an Emerging Category

The modern construction of Salafism consisted basically in taking up a medieval (Hanbali) theological creed and making it into a new religious orientation, progressively broadening its reach beyond such original theological confines. This orientation started in fact to refer “to individuals who dealt with legal matters unencumbered by the canons of the traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence.”²⁰ The theology had not fundamentally changed though, and it still claimed adherence to the Hanbali *madhhab*. As just mentioned, this move was inherently problematic - claiming to defy established Islamic tradition on the one hand, yet remaining rooted in a specific branch of such tradition on the other. This problem, primarily a philosophical or even intellectual one, was to be compounded by a political conundrum: Hanbalism is the theological backbone of Wahhabism, the dominating religious discourse of Saudi Arabia.

Salafism and Wahhabism

Understanding the chief coordinates of Wahhabism remains crucial to make sense of the emergence and trajectory of modern day Salafism, especially but not only in its militant variant. While the two phenomena appeared at first independently from one another, they eventually converged: intellectually in the first half of the XX century; and then also politically in the second, especially from the 1960s. We can consider this later development as a product of both religious (theological and jurisprudential) affinities as well as political convenience. Salafism and Wahhabism, to be sure, have never been synonymous; but they stand for kin trends in the contemporary Islamist universe. Therefore, historically and conceptually it would be hard to make sense of one without referring to the other. Let us examine their relationship.

²⁰ Lauzière, 2015, p. 96.

Wahhabism was first a puritan reformist²¹ movement founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) in the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula. It espoused a strict observance of Hanbali theology and jurisprudence. Al-Wahhab's alliance with tribal chieftain Muhammad ibn Saud (1765-1803) eventually led to the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932,²² where Ibn Saud's heirs would rule as monarchs and Wahhabi *'ulama* would discipline religious and societal mores.²³ Wahhabism has been in this sense a fundamental part of the hegemonic project of the Saudi dynasty. Wahhabi *'ulama* have granted the ruling family religious legitimacy as guardians of Islamic holy places and defenders of Islamic principles. In exchange, the *'ulama* have received state protection, financial rewards, ample leverage in intervening in the Saudi social sphere.²⁴

The puritan worldview and practice of Wahhabism seemed to mirror the purist approach to Islam that Salafism started to exemplify. Similarly, Wahhabism called for a return to the origins of 'true' Islam. The Wahhabi call was enforced and sustained by the sword of the Al-Saud family, which relied on the puritanical doctrine to further its project of creating a state: the Wahhabi *'ulama* conferred upon the territories under the Al-Saud family the title of '*dawlah al-tawhid*,' or 'state of monotheistic unity.' In this emphasis on strict monotheism, and the attendant exclusivist claim to it, we can detect a fundamental trait that Wahhabism shares with Salafism. Al-Wahhab's teachings espoused an accusatory tone towards other (i.e., non-Wahhabi) Muslims, who apparently were in denial of Islam's monotheism. Inherent in this discourse is therefore the

²¹ To define Wahhabism as 'reformist' remains a disputable as characterization, given the rather uncompromising, anti-modernist and often violent attitudes it has shown throughout its various incarnations. Algar contends as well that Wahhabism had no connections to coterminous truly reformist Islamic movements. See Algar, Hamid. *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*. Islamic Publications International, 2002, p. 4.

²² The alliance produced three different Saudi polities, lasting from 1744 to 1818, from 1842 to 1891, and finally the current state in 1932. See for more details Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge University Press, 2010 and Lacroix, Stéphane, and George Holoch. *Awakening Islam*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

²³ Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Contesting the Saudi state: Islamic voices from a new generation*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. See in particular Chapter 1.

²⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter 1 and Introduction.

possibility of excluding other self-professed Muslims from the abode of the *ummah*, a practice known as ‘*takfir*’ or ‘excommunication.’²⁵ Wahhabism would charge non-Wahhabis of ‘*shirkīyat*,’ or ‘associationism,’ that is the pairing of god with other objects of worship.²⁶

We can argue then that Wahhabism is in open polemic and confrontation not only with an intruding western modernization, as one may expect; but also, or even more so, with the beliefs and practices of other Muslims too, considered either misguided or outright heretical.²⁷ Salafism would often manifest an identical position on this issue too, the result of a cross-pollination between the two religious movements.

Yet we can notice that Salafism and Wahhabism, precisely due to these very elements they have in common, stand in a tense relation. First, Salafism was readier to condemn also Hanbalism in its rejection of the four traditional *madhāhib*, thus cutting one of Wahhabism Gordian knots: in other words, Salafism started to outdo Wahhabism in its quest for doctrinal purity and accepting the logical consequences of such move.²⁸ Second, Wahhabism was wedded to the fortunes of the Al-Saud family. Religion could then never claim exclusive monopoly of the state discourse, as non-religious (technocratic, economic, security) issues were undisputedly in the hands of the Saudi political and bureaucratic apparatus. While in effect separating the religious domain (in the hands of the ‘*ulama*) and the political one (in the hands of the Saudi court), the official rhetoric of Saudi Arabia kept claiming it represented the country of

²⁵ Algar, 2002, p. 2.

²⁶ I will elaborate more on this below, in particular the concept of *bid’a*. I would like to report though a quite humorous and dry remark by Algar, 2002, in reference to the issue of associationism: “The term *al-shirkīyat* is probably the sole contribution made by Wahhabism to the technical vocabulary of Islam,” p. 11, fn. 9.

²⁷ Meijer, Roel. “Introduction,” in *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*, ed. by idem. Hurst & Co, [2009], 2014, p. 8. See also Algar, 2002, p. 1. Wahhabism is used as an epithet in much of the Muslim world, usually with a disparaging tone as an overly stern, formalistic and backwater movement. Wahhabis tend in fact to refer to themselves as ‘*muwāhhidun*’ or ‘*ahl al-tawhīd*,’ (‘monotheistic unitarians’ or ‘the people of the monotheistic unity’) again signaling their strict and uniquely qualified adherence to Islamic monotheism in relation to the rest of the *ummah*, thus potentially composed of ‘*mushrikun*,’ or ‘associationists’.

²⁸ I will explore this more in details when talking about sheikh Al-Albani in chapter 5.

monotheism, ‘*dawlah at-tawhid*:’²⁹ yet how could it heed to and represent god’s *tawhid* if the polity itself was split between a mundane and a religious domain?³⁰

Salafism and political power

It is precisely in the relation with political power, understood here as Gramsci’s political society,³¹ that Salafism has manifested some of its most peculiar and enduring traits. In the years of its incubation (from the 1940s till the 1970s), Salafism was developing in a world where some Islamic thinkers and intellectuals³² were proposing to view Islam as ‘religion and world’ (*‘din wa dunya’*), or ‘religion and state’ (*‘din wa dawlah’*); furthermore, it was confronting a kin movement in terms of theology, Wahhabism, which had found a solution to the problem of religion and politics in the framework of the Saudi state. Salafism had thus to face the same question: what about politics and power?³³

This puzzle was all the more pressing as the struggle for independence and the era of post-colonialism were not dominated by religion-inspired discourses and ideologies: nationalism, socialism, liberalism, democracy, communism (and combinations thereof, such as the Ba’th party) shaped the ideological landscape until the early 1970s, often informing a markedly secular and even anti-religious discourse (as for instance in Iran or Turkey). The progressive demise of these political projects left room for political Islam to step in and become, in certain contexts,

²⁹ Al-Rasheed, 2006, pp. 10-11.

³⁰ This issue will represent a crucial point in the eyes of the Salafi movement later on, as we will see in particular chapter 6.

³¹ For Gramsci, ‘political society’ stands for state institutions, agencies, the judiciary, the police, and so on. For a discussion of the concept, see Chapter 3, section “Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony.”

³² Notably, Sayyid Qutb, Ruollah Khomeini, and Abu ‘Ala al-Mawdudi, probably the most influential Islamist thinkers in the XX century.

³³ Meijer, 2014, pp. 15-19.

Islamism, a full-fledged ideological project which launched its energies, grievances and hopes in the political arena.³⁴

In those days, given its still amorphous and ill-defined character, Salafism did not manifest a clear, and much less a unified, position on the issue of colonization and independence. It obviously called to end the state of subservience of the Muslim community from Western powers, but there was no political program comparable to other Islamist movements. Some Salafis did opt for a more openly political, either nationalist or pan-Islamic, stance;³⁵ but they soon lost ground to more politically-savvy movements, be they secular or Islamist.³⁶ Others maintained and developed instead a suspicious, distant and rejectionist stance *vis à vis* politics, insofar, again, as we think of politics as state institutions and attendant practices and dispositions.

However, even these less politicized Salafis were not willing to concede Islam would not represent a complete, comprehensive system of thoughts and practice as other Islamic movements (chiefly the Muslim Brotherhood and its spin-offs) were contending. Their move in order to bypass politics (unlike other versions of political Islam, which embraced it) and still claim Islam could be such system was to produce new understandings in the developing Salafi discourse. Scholars such as Hilali and Mustafa Hilmi (b. 1932) contributed decisively to this operation.³⁷ However, the refinement and expansion of the term entailed two somewhat contradictory pulls. The effort to make the template of the pious forefathers into a clearer and sharper referent limited its reach; while the broadening of the Salafi discursive field, embracing more and more domains of personal and social life, muddled precisely its theoretical consistency.

³⁴ See the literature on this macro-historical development in Chapter 2, section “Mobilizing Islam.”

³⁵ This was the case especially with Moroccan Salafism which manifested nationalist or pan-Islamic positions, without ever radicalizing as other currents within the movement. See Lauzière, 2015, Chapter 3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25.

³⁷ See *ibid*, especially chapters 5 and 6, for a detailed account of this process.

At any rate, the aggregate result was the forgoing of the previous merely theological expressions ‘*madhhab as-salaf*’ and ‘*madhhab salafiyy*’ and the introduction of the term Salafism³⁸ itself. Following the steps of the initial intuitions of Rida, legal, social and cultural dispensations could be inserted together with and on par with theological ones. Salafism, in other words, could embrace much wider domains. It could then adumbrate, as fellow Islamist trends and movements, to deal with specific political and social concerns, albeit this possibility remained only latent until towards the late 1980s. Yet, the inherent tension (even contradictions) of this move surfaced when Salafism ideals were to confront social reality, ultimately making more manifest the ambivalence between Salafism and politics.

This was not an immediate concern in entering the political arena. In fact, other Islamic activists and movements bore most of the brunt of state repression all across the Muslim world. In this phase of conceptual refining and broadening, the Salafi trend chose not to openly engage state power and focus instead on what they perceived as issues of doctrinal orthodoxy and orthopraxis within Islam - topics they accused fellow Islamic activists of disregarding.³⁹ It is in this sense that Salafism developed marked ‘purist’ features, emphasizing the preeminence of theological, jurisprudential and behavioral dispositions over political and institutional concerns. Their hands full with Islamist fierce opposition to their rule, Arab regimes could seemingly ignore a trend that seemed oriented towards doctrinal orthodoxy and behavioral orthopraxis. In this way, Salafis initial retreat from open political confrontation with various regimes in the Muslim world in general and in the Arab world in particular proved to be a far-sighted move to avoid crackdowns, imprisonment and repression. This state of affairs would last until the ambivalence of Salafism about politics was to resurface under new historical circumstances:

³⁸ In Arabic, *Salafiyyah*, a term that was adopted only in the second half of the XX century by Islamic activist, again espousing the fallacy of Massignon’s work.

³⁹ In this very similar, again, to Wahhabism. See Algar, 2002, p. 45.

namely, the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan war and Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (as I discuss below in the case of Jordan). Salafism, up until then dominated by a purist and doctrinal ethos, produced explicitly political ideologies, one of which we know now as Jihadism.⁴⁰

Again, as a religious discursive field, Salafism features a multiplicity of elements that can be conducive to a variety of choices and consequent political manifestations, ranging from outward political quiescence to violent revolutionary intents.⁴¹ In his groundbreaking study on the subject, Wiktorowicz pointed out how “Salafis are united by a common religious creed, which provides principles and a method for applying religious beliefs to contemporary issues and problems;” however, “divisions have emerged as a result of the inherently subjective nature of applying religion to new issues and problems.”⁴² Wiktorowicz is of course right here. But I want also to claim that the very fabric of Salafi discourse – and not so much, or not only, the application of such principles to social reality – enables the articulation of political positions so different and at variance with one another.

⁴⁰ I do not deal in this study with what Wiktorowicz, in his foundational tri-partition of Salafism, called ‘Politicos,’ (alongside the Quietist and the Jihadi Salafis). Politicos are another manifestation of the ideological politicization of Salafism. They first represented a movement within Saudi Wahhabism, known as ‘*Sahwah*’ or ‘Awakening.’ Major figures behind it were Saudi ‘*ulama*’ Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah. They combined Wahhabism with a stern and relentless critique of the incumbent Saudi regime in the aftermath the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990, when Saudi supreme *mufti* Ibn Bin Baz (d. 1999) notoriously justified the presence of foreign, non-Muslim troops (i.e., US Marines) on the Saudi soil, home of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. Their criticism of the regime, while unprecedented in scope and bluntness, never translated however in its outright dismissal, or to a call for violent overthrow (as Jihadis would instead maintain). The *Sahwah* trend then spread into other countries in the region, including Jordan. The *Sahwah* is both a Wahhabi and a Salafi movement: not only they attribute themselves such markers, but their critique of the Saudi regime is predicated on tackling the fundamental alliance between ‘*ulama*’ and the state with a Salafi rationale – namely, that the Saudi state was not living up to its claims of embodying the ‘*dawlah at-tawhid*.’ See Wiktorowicz, Quintan. “Anatomy of the Salafi movement.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29.3 (2006): 207-239. See also Fandy, Mamoun. *Saudi Arabia and the politics of dissent*. Macmillan, 2001, and Al-Rasheed, 2007, chapter 2.

⁴¹ See fn. 52 in Chapter 3.

⁴² Wiktorowicz, 2006, pp. 207-208.

Salafism: the Geography of a Discursive Field

I have introduced above two important developments. First, I noticed the conceptual refinement of Salafism in its chief creedal coordinates, which was supposed to shield it from the vagaries and contingencies of politics. Second, I mentioned the broadening of its domains, which was meant to encompass both the mundane and the religious. As a religious phenomenon, Salafism has sought to uncover unalterable truths which belong to (or descend from) the hereafter. In this way, they would be untainted and unhinged by mundane and earthly dispositions. Yet, such truths configure also a normative template to read and evaluate the mundane and the earthly.⁴³ Hence, as Wiktorowicz suggested, Salafi core tenets could not but offer different possibilities for the evaluation of social and political - hence not strictly doctrinal - matters.⁴⁴ Relatedly, the very definition of domains - the political and the religious, the public and the private, state and society - defies easy boundary setting. Such definition in fact is still much contested today within Salafi discourse.⁴⁵ It is a source of heated debates, fierce oppositions, and at times open hostility amongst Salafis themselves.⁴⁶ Let us then examine what are the contours and coordinates informing such disputes.

Salafi epistemology and method

First and foremost, as I stated before, Salafism represents an epistemological claim about the correct approach to Islam. This claim is an exclusivist one: Salafism does not admit epistemological pluralism.⁴⁷ Other forms of Islam as historically concrete ways of belief and practice are either dismissed as fallacious (the four main jurisprudential schools, as we have

⁴³ See Chapter 2, section "Religion, Ideas and Political Contention."

⁴⁴ Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 206.

⁴⁵ The same can be said for any other systematic attempt (liberal, conservative, progressive, etc) to set those boundaries. On this topic, see Asad, Talal. *Formation of the Secular*, Stanford University Press, 2003.

⁴⁶ In virtually every interview I carried out for the drafting of this study, Salafis would refer to opposite currents in less than amicable ways, pointing out either to logical inconsistency, opportunism, lack of courage, hypocrisy, and so forth.

⁴⁷ Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 207.

seen)⁴⁸ or condemned as blatant heresies (for example, Sufism, Shi'ism, and versions of 'liberal' Islam).

This epistemological approach shows a kin relation and affinity to Hanbalism (Ibn Hanbal is indeed one of the very few authors to be counted consistently in Salafis' references),⁴⁹ which underpins Salafism as an archeological enterprise to rediscover the Islamic pristine, uncontaminated creed and attendant praxis, exemplified by the experience of the pious ancestors. There are no other ways to do this but a strict adherence to the texts. Salafism seeks to rid interpretation (*ijtihad*)⁵⁰ and exegesis (*tafsir*) of Islamic foundational scriptures - the *Qur'an* and the *Ahadith* - from subjective, personal and therefore contextual readings.⁵¹ Truth cannot be dependent on context.

In this sense, Salafis refer to their approach as 'ilmīyy' or 'scientific,'⁵² unhinged, that is, by context. They claim their scripturalist and literalist method avoids biases, distortions and misrepresentations. It offers what Islam is really about, its true essence that is, harkening all the way back to a time where the *ummah* had received purely and directly the message of god. By virtue of this epistemological approach, there is an effort, as Roy suggested,⁵³ to conjure up a reified Islam, objective and unhindered by either history or location.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ See fn. 20 and below.

⁴⁹ Haykel, 2014.

⁵⁰ In this sense, *ijtihad* is fundamentally different from Khomeini's understanding for example. In his case, *ijtihad* was a method employed by the learned jurist to innovate upon and legislate from the Qur'anic precepts and the *Sunnah*. Thus, it not admitted, but sought innovation, while still bounded the judgment of the jurist. See Martin, Vanessa. *Creating an Islamic state: Khomeini and the making of a new Iran*. IB Tauris, 2003.

⁵¹ Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 207.

⁵² This was pointed out to me during a conversation at the Al-Albani Center for Methodological Research in Amman, on 6/28/2015. The center is the main institution for Salafi research and teaching in the country. The same terms were used by other Salafis as well, although 'scientific' and 'ilmīyy' are not completely overlapping or interchangeable – 'ilmīyy' is also used not to characterize the purist or quietist Salafis as opposed to politicos or jihadis.

⁵³ Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The search for a new ummah*. Columbia University Press, 2004. For a similar point, see Al-Rasheed, Madawi. "The Local and the Global in Saudi Salafi Discourse," in Meijer, 2014.

⁵⁴ This conceptualization of religion stands at the opposite with Asad's, see Asad, Talal. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford University Press, 2003. See also Meijer, 2014, p. 13.

In its search for objectivity and ahistoricity, the Salafi method is scientific in ways that may resonate with an empiricist and rationalist oriented understanding of the term. The commonalities are limited to this though. Salafi scientism parts ways decisively with empiricism and rationalism: whenever a conflict arises between literalism on the one hand and empirics and rationality on the other, the former trumps the latter. For Salafis, autonomous rationality represents an effort to infer beyond the literal word of god and venture into unlawful personal exegesis.⁵⁵ The consequences of this epistemology are important. As Haykel argues, "[t]he claims to greater certainty of God's law through a hyper-textual methodology are a trademark of the Salafis. Implicit in this claim is that to deny Salafi view is to deny the probative value of the texts of revelation."⁵⁶

It was Mustafa Hilmi that in the 1970s elaborated on the Salafi approach with a crucial lexical innovation. He introduced the idea of a '*manhaj salafiyy*,' or 'salafi method.'⁵⁷ The adoption of term '*manhaj*' has two main implications. First, it indicates Salafism specific epistemological approach which signals its uniquely qualified access to Islam. Second, it will permit launching Salafism as an ideological project beyond the confines of theology and doctrine. As a method, as opposed to a series of theological claims, Salafism was not confined anymore in terms of its potential reach: "Hilmi reframed Salafism as a comprehensive way of

⁵⁵ An example about the features of god will clarify. What shall we understand when the *Qur'an* mentions the word '*yad*,' hand, in reference to god's hand? A symbolic interpretation (for example, *yad* standing for god's power or might) cannot be admitted, as it would contravene the literal reading of the text which speaks clearly of a hand. Yet, given god non-human and transcendent nature, anthropomorphism is ruled out too, as god cannot be associated or compared to humans (as hanafi readings would have it instead). Both symbolism and anthropomorphism are viewed as undue attempts on the part of human reason at interpreting the text beyond its literal meaning. The error lies precisely in applying human rationality upon the revealed divine text. Hence, for Salafis, god has hands, but they are not like human hands, they are something we cannot describe beyond the confines of the scriptures themselves. For an opposite position in early Muslim history, we may consider the Mutazilites, now gone. The Mutazilites performed exactly the same operation, only in reverse: god cannot contravene rationality. It follows that its text cannot either, and hence rationality defines the boundaries of the text. See Haykel, 2014, p. 38 and footnotes therein.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 37. Jihadi Salafis will take this a step further, where the denunciation of Salafi principle could be ground for *takfir* and armed *jihad*.

⁵⁷ Lauzière, 2015, p. 225.

thinking, a blueprint for action, and an Islamic civilizational worldview.”⁵⁸ Hilmi sought in this way to enfranchise the constituting Salafi trend from both secular politics and rival Islamist movements. He not only saw “Islam as a sociopolitical system (*nizam*), as Islamists did, but also sought to identify the method (*manhaj*) by which Muslim scholars arrived at the truth about this system and about its implementation.”⁵⁹ This epistemological methodology revealed then three core tenets around which the Salafi discourse is centered.

Three core tenets

The first principle is a strict understanding of and adherence to *tawhid*.⁶⁰ The second is the reliance on the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* as the only legitimate religious sources. Third, the rejection of any unlawful innovation, or *bid’a* (pl. *bida’*).⁶¹ Most scholars, including Wiktorowicz and Haykel, consider the principle of *tawhid* as the prime cornerstone for Salafis. However, I would also suggest how these three tenets sustain and shore each other up. Taken in isolation from one another, or outside the Salafi epistemic method, they would not be able to characterize Salafism as a defined and unique phenomenon within Islam.

Salafis articulate *tawhid* along three main axis: oneness of lordship (*tawhid al-rububiyyah*); oneness of worship (*tawhid al-‘ibadah*, at times indicated also as oneness of godship, *tawhid al-uluhiyyah*); and oneness of names and attributes (*tawhid al-asma’ wa-l-sifat*).⁶² Trespassing on any of these forms of *tawhid* may be ground for accusations of unbelief

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 202.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 218.

⁶⁰ It is just out of expediency that we may translate this as ‘monotheism,’ in that *tawhid* carries additional connotations that are not properly captured by the English word. I will discuss this point below more at length.

⁶¹ This word comes from the root form for ‘creation’ or ‘creativity’ – as, for example, in art. While I am not in general inclined to infer meaning from literalism or strict etymology, it is interesting to note how the choice of the term *bid’a* signals the rejection of any human endeavor in adding to god’s word.

⁶² Oneness of lordship indicates that god alone is creator and lord, possessing powers which cannot be of any other being. Claiming that other beings (for example attributing godly features to Muhammad, Ali, Jesus or Moses) may share such powers is an example of violating *tawhid al-rububiyyah*. Oneness of worship commands that only god can be made object of veneration and prayer. Seeking intercession (*shafa’a*) or exalting a person to reach god (*tawassul*) are example of violating *tawhid al-‘ibadah*. Oneness of the names and attributes requires not to engage in

and exclusion from the Muslim community.⁶³ *Tawhid* is not in fact only a theological marker. It translates into social and behavioral dispensations, in line with the attempt to make Salafism into a comprehensive approach to life (individual as well as collective) similar to other Islamist formulations.

In Salafism, *tawhid* becomes a theological *and* legal principle which makes reference to the community of the pious ancestors. The paradigm of the *salafs* portrays a perfectly unified community, mirroring and heeding to god's *tawhid*: Islam is one in the hereafter and then necessarily in the here and now. That archetypal community represented the oneness of god through and in its people. Hence, infringing on such unity would be tantamount to infringing on god's intent and message for mankind. Insofar as god's message is a legal one that regulates the life of the community, *tawhid* has become in this way a legal principle.

Here lies the stern rejection of epistemic pluralism, conducive to different 'truths' – and thus to different ways to be Muslim. It is an untenable proposition for Salafism: relativism breaks god mandated *tawhid*, inevitably causing '*fitna*,' 'discord' within the community. To preserve unity, reliance on the revelation as articulated in those early days is essential. This proposition leads to the other two principles underpinning Salafism. Only the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* were guiding the early Muslim community. Therefore, they represent the only legitimate religious texts if one desires to reconstruct Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxis. The collections of the *ahadith*, in particular, "are unconditionally authoritative when it comes to the elaboration of teachings and opinions."⁶⁴ As an attendant corollary, Salafis maintain that their literal and scripturalist approach renders Islam simpler, more straightforward and accessible. It does so by

metaphorical investigation of the features and characteristics of god as presented in the *Qur'an*; see fn. 55 for an example. Haykel, 2014, pp. 38-9 and fn. 14. Algar, 2002, p. 35.

⁶³ Different Salafis may however derive different implications when it comes to deal with an act of unbelief. See following chapters for a discussion of the differences between Quietist and Jihadi Salafis.

⁶⁴ Haykel, 2014, p. 36. As we will see in the following chapter, the fame and reputation of Al-Albani, amongst the most important Salafi scholars, is due largely to his work on the *ahadith*.

removing all the unnecessary historical accretions that proliferated out of non-scripturalist, non-literal (i.e., non-scientific and hence non-Salafi) approaches to Islam. Therefore, Salafis see no need to venture into other legal methods (such as other common jurisprudential expedients, namely *qiyas* or *ijma'*)⁶⁵ different from a literal reliance on the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* - a mistake of which the main Sunni jurisprudential schools are found guilty, let alone Shi'is or Sufis.

In fact, “[w]hile Salafism’s claim to be a methodology is simple and seemingly non-polemical, it seeks in practice the deconstruction of virtually the totality of this conventional system of Islamic identification.”⁶⁶ This deconstruction process results in a wholehearted and complete rejection of what Salafis regard as innovation: in other words, the principle of *bid'a* maintains that whatever has accrued and deposited over the original texts of the revelation, and consequently over the pristine and pure experience of the pious ancestors, is unlawful and harmful. *Bid'a* is defined as, “an innovated matter not followed by the Companions of the Followers [i.e., the *salaf*] and not part of that which a legal proof (*dalil shar'i*) necessitates.” Consequently, “upholding the Sunna involves the suppression of *bid'a*.”⁶⁷ Once again, the juxtaposition with Wahhabism,⁶⁸ equally adverse to *bid'a*, is useful. For Al-Wahhab, *bid'a* carried, as for the Salafis, a purely negative connotation: it was “whatever

⁶⁵ *Qiyas* indicates jurisprudential reasoning by analogy. *Ijma'* indicates the consensus reached by the community on a given issue. The validity of *ijma'* is corroborated according to many by a *hadith* in which Muhammad said, “My community will never agree on error.” This is among the most established *ahadith*. See on this topic http://www.sunnah.org/fiqh/ijma.htm#ROLE_OF_IJMA

⁶⁶ Mneinmeh, Hassan. “The Spring of a New Political Salafism?” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 12 (2001): 21-36, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Al-Jurjani, Al-Sharif. *Kitab al-Ta'rifat*, Kostantiniyye, [1983] 1992, cited in Algar, 2002, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Major figures we have encountered thus far, in particular Rida and Hilali, spent considerable time in the Arabian Peninsula, Hilali being appointed to prominent academic posts there. Rashid Rida was much responsible for publicizing Wahhabism outside the confines of the Arabian Peninsula (see David Commins, David. *Islamic Reform: Politics and Change in Late Ottoman Syria*. Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 129-131) and connect it with initial Salafi tendencies. See Algar, 2002, pp. 47-48. Yet only from the 1960s and 1970s Wahhabism and Salafiyya seem to converge more decisively with the work of Hilali and Hilmi, whose efforts were supported by the new found Saudi largesse based on petro-dollar, as well as favored by the political contingencies in the Arab world with the decline of secularist ideologies.

religious practice or concept had come into being after the third century of the Islamic era.”⁶⁹ As a consequence, given also emphasis on direct interpretation of texts, “Salafis enjoy a relatively shallow and limited hierarchy of scholarly authorities.”⁷⁰ Only a handful of authors are considered faithful to the original model of Islam, and thus held as important guardians of the faith. We have already discussed Ibn Hanbal and Abd al-Wahhab’s impact on modern Salafism. The medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) shaped profoundly Salafi understanding of power and authority.⁷¹ Few others past personalities are mentioned in the Salafi pantheon.

These principles form the basis of what Salafis usually refer to as ‘*’aqidah,*’ or ‘*creed.*’ However, this *’aqidah* is more akin to a discursive field than an coherent and explicitly political ideology. As I observed in the previous chapter, a discursive field provides elements and coordinates upon which to found and craft an ideology. Again, this is a two-way street: the construction of such ideology does not answer only to exogenous and contextual imperatives: it is not, in other words, a mere epiphenomenon. Nor can ideational items shape context and non-discursive elements in every way they please. As Wiktorowicz succinctly states,

“[b]ecause Salafis share the same creed, they would likely issue similar fatwas if they also shared the same interpretation of context. The selected analogy to apply to a contemporary problem is entirely dependent on how one understands the problem itself.

⁶⁹ Algar, 2002, p. 35. Algar’s reference to the third century of the Islamic era reveals the contested boundaries of the experience of the *salaf* among and across Wahhabis and Salafis alike. Wahhabis, who recognize their debt to Ibn Hanbal more readily than the Salafis, would so include his own time (Ibn Hanbal died in 855 CE, in the third century after Muhammad’s exodus or *hijra* from Mecca in 622 CE). Algar drily comments that in principle, this period includes also the other three jurisprudential schools, which are however examples of *bid’a* for both movements.

⁷⁰ Haykel, 2014, p. 36.

⁷¹ Ibn Taymiyya’s influence is enormous, and in the following chapters I will deal with his intellectual legacy – in interviews with Salafi scholars or academic researchers on the topic, his name was frequently mentioned .

Different interpretations make different jurisprudential principles operative. The converse is also true: similar interpretations make similar jurisprudential principles operative.”⁷²

Salafism as Social Appropriation of Tradition

The Islamic theological, legal and jurisprudential *corpus* that developed over the centuries is usually referred to as ‘*taqlid*.’ To indicate Islamic philosophical, artistic and scientific legacy, ‘*turath*’ is more common. Both terms represent that Islamic tradition – something transmitted from the past – which Salafism dismisses as unlawful *bid’a*: hence the condemnation of what commonly is regarded as Islamic legal, devotional and social practices, and then philosophy, art, literature, architecture, not to mention non-Islamic analogues.⁷³

Salafis’ purist attitude is bent on jettisoning whatever deemed liable to compromise the reception of the true message of Islam. Their intellectual effort aims, at one time, to deconstruct the historically diverse manifestations of Islam *and* (re)constructing the contours of a paradigm embedded in the Islamic tradition at large too. All Muslims regard the early days of the *ummah* as a cherished time. The vast majority, of course, does not draw the same implications from that experience as Salafism does; much less, they make it into a discourse that may be deployed to sustain social and political mobilization.⁷⁴

It is in this sense therefore that Salafism appropriates tradition. Salafis construct a discourse upon the experience of *as-salaf as-salih* as a foundational and hallowed narrative to

⁷² Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 216.

⁷³ We find nowadays innumerable examples of Salafi groups such as ISIS or Al-Qaeda destroying monuments and archeological relics, Islamic or non-Islamic. It should be recalled that the Ikhwan, the zealots Wahhabi troops of [Ibn Saud, destroyed the tomb of the Prophet in Madina as they considered its worship a sign of *bida*’. Interestingly, iconoclastic fervor seems to transcend the confine of Salafi or Wahhabi ideology: Afghani Taliban, hailing from Deobandi schools of the Hanafi tradition, infamously engaged in similar acts of wanton destruction of archeological sites, as with the statues of Buddah in Bamyan.

⁷⁴ Meijer and Wiktorowicz insist on the complexity of the process leading from Salafi discourse to mobilization. “Salafism does, however, provide certain concepts and practices that can be transformed into political tools.”

ponder over and relate to society and politics. Upon this discourse, they may then establish clear guidelines for political action – i.e., an ideology.

Does it make sense to ask how valid is their archeological endeavor? How genuine or truthful is this operation? We should bear in mind that, just like all traditions, also the time of the pious ancestors is an “invented tradition” the way Hobsbawm puts it.⁷⁵ He argued: “[i]nsofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situation.”⁷⁶ Lauzière, in discussing Salafi discourse, echoes Hobsbawm: “Salafism is a much more complex and multifaceted concept than the doctrine of the forefathers of the medieval period. The exhaustive and systematic way in which contemporary purist Salafis now define it—as a comprehensive approach to Islam covering every aspect of the religious experience—is also characteristic of twentieth-century ideologies.”⁷⁷

These considerations spell trouble for the Salafi edifice: their own narrative about the pious ancestors becomes a product of present contingencies (of modernity, we might even say). It emerges as an invented tradition – or to use Salafi parlance, as *bid'a*. Not only that: this very discourse on a tradition so defined and appropriated by Salafis would rest on par with the three pillars of Salafism as another of its essential core elements. And like any discourse, it is

⁷⁵ See Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by idem, Cambridge University Press, [1983] 2012.

⁷⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric. “Introduction: Inventing Tradition,” in *ibid*, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Lauzière, 2015, p. 24.

everything but pure, pristine, and unsoiled by contemporary contextual elements.⁷⁸ Rather, as a dialogical approach suggests, it relates and is inscribed in those elements.⁷⁹

The process whereby this discourse has come to affect society and politics is the result of complex interactions. Historical context, individuals and communities operating in that context, the fabric of the discourse itself: all has contributed to the ideologization of Salafism, a process “whereby Muslim scholars recast purist Salafism as a totalizing system [...]. From being a theological doctrine and an approach to Islamic law, Salafism became a worldview that encompassed the whole of existence, from knowledge to practice, from morality to etiquette, and even from religion to politics.”⁸⁰

The challenge is for us to explain how this occurred; and in particular, to see the role of Salafi scholars in it. Before doing that, we need to outline the contours of the specific context in which Salafi discourse manifested. The rest of the chapter is devoted to this goal.

Jordan, a Country that Should Not Be

Salafism is a global religious trend: it varies in its specific manifestations - the ways individuals and communities act upon its founding principles. Examining these manifestations by considering only Salafism ideational coordinates is a rather useless enterprise. It would result in an essentialist picture of Salafism, explaining its politics via a direct reference to its tenets.⁸¹ Instead, Salafism interacts, in its various ideological articulations, with an environment

⁷⁸ I would like to thank Prof. Muhammad al-Khair Eiedat for pointing this out to me. Again Hobsbawm stresses “[t]he use of ancient material to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes. A large store of such materials is accumulated in the past of any society, and an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communication is always available.” Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 6.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 3 for Steinberg’s dialogical approach to cognition, section “Ideology and Discourse, Philosophy and Common Sense.”

⁸⁰ Lauzière, 2015, p. 201.

⁸¹ See Mamdani, Mahmoud. *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Three Leaves Publishing, 2005, p. 22.

characterized by possibilities and constraints, both ideational and material.⁸² It is in this sense that we need to draw the contours of the Jordanian context. In this environment, different incarnations of Salafism grew and developed, and their features cannot be understood in isolation from such context.

What kind of landscape has Jordan presented to Salafism? Jordan is usually portrayed as an island of stability, especially looking at the troubled vicissitudes of virtually all its neighbors. Yet this may be deceiving. More appropriately, as Mansfield poignantly remarks, Jordan is a mystery: given that it is a small, poor, weak country; created by the British, with no historical precedents, with no natural resources; ridden with national identity issues, surrounded by bigger and threatening states; bordering with Israel, hosting a multitude of refugees; and governed by a foreign⁸³ and largely pro-western dynasty - then the surprise is not so much its stability, but rather its very survival and existence!⁸⁴ With a hint of sarcasm, these points sum up the challenges that have confronted Jordan throughout its history.

The Creation of Jordan

To the east, Jordan⁸⁵ sits at the edges of Syrian Desert, bordering Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The river Jordan, the Dead Sea and Wadi ‘Araba mark its western borders with Palestine.⁸⁶ In the south, a short coastline of some 20 miles provides its only access to open sea through the Gulf of Aqaba. To the north sits the long border with Syria. The creation of Jordan was almost an afterthought in the scrambling of Arab lands following World War I.⁸⁷ Crossed by nomadic

⁸² For a discussion on structure as enabling and limiting at the same time, see Chapter 3, fn. 5.

⁸³ As we will see shortly, the ruling dynasty of Jordan comes from the Hijaz, a region now in western Saudi Arabia.

⁸⁴ Mansfield, Peter. *The Arabs*. Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 161-182.

⁸⁵ For a brief overview of its pre-modern history, see Milton-Edwards, Beverly and Peter Hinchcliffe. *Jordan: a Hashemite Legacy*. Routledge, 2009, pp. 11-14.

⁸⁶ Comprising Israel and the Occupied Territories of the West Bank.

⁸⁷ To emphasize the artificiality of these borders, an apocryphal anecdote suggests that the deep, bizarre wedge of Saudi Arabia north-eastern border intruding into Jordan was the result of ‘Churchill’s hiccup:’ the future Prime

tribes, with few permanent settlements,⁸⁸ with no natural resources and dominated by vast expanses of desert, it is no surprise that Great Britain and France focused their attention on places such as Palestine, Syria and Iraq.⁸⁹

The Great Arab Revolt, sponsored by Britain against the Ottomans and led by the Hashemites of Mecca,⁹⁰ was not enough in the eyes of the European powers to let the Arab dynasty establish its coveted Arab kingdom. The French expelled Sharif Hussein's son Faysal from Damascus in 1920 after he had tried to be recognized as king of Syria. His elder brother Abdallah, fearing the family's ambitions under threat, marched northwards from the Hijaz to lend support to his brother Faysal's loyalists. As he stopped short of the Syrian border, the French pressed the British to rein in the Hashemites' claims to Syria (and their opposition to the overall Sykes-Picot agreement).

London thus put Faysal on the newly created Iraqi throne, and Abdallah's presence in the territory south of Syria was then taken as a *fait accompli*, and then named 'Transjordan.' Both Iraq and Transjordan (together with Palestine, Lebanon and Syria) were set during the San Remo Conference of 1920 as mandates under the auspices of the newly established League of Nations. This arrangement could do little to quell the ambitions of Abdallah. He felt the tiny and

Minister, then Minister of War, would be drawing the new borders of former Ottoman lands on a small paper towel as a hiccup shook his hand, resulting in the irregular border demarcation. The episode is probably false, but its significance remains exactly because it is widely believed to be true, insisting on Jordan territorial configuration utter artificiality. Conversation with Dr. Elena Corbett, Amman, 9/10/2014.

⁸⁸ After Aqaba and Ma'an were taken by Abdallah in 1925, the population may have reached 300,000. Milton-Edwards et al, 2009, p. 20.

⁸⁹ The Ottomans tended to disregard this region too, see *ibid*, p. 14 and Lawless, Robert. "History of Jordan," in *The Middle East and North Africa 1998*. Europa's Regional Surveys of the World, Europa Publications, 1998, p. 629. The only important infrastructure was the Damascus-Mecca railroad, built to take pilgrims down to the Hijaz region in western Arabia. The railroad crosses Jordan north-south, although only a few sections are still in use and only for freight trains.

⁹⁰ The Great Arab Revolt was agreed upon by Sharif Hussein of Mecca, the Hashemite guardian of the holy places before the Saudi conquest, and Sir McMahon, British vice-regent in Egypt. The revolt was going to represent one of the major narratives to shore up the pan-Arab claims of the family. See Milton-Edwards et al., 2009, pp. 17-18.

unpopulated land the British had granted him could not support his plans of a greater Arab kingdom centered around Syria and Palestine.

In May 1923 Britain formalized the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan, as “an ‘independent constitutional state’ under the rule of Amir (Prince) Abdullah with British tutelage.”⁹¹ British sponsorship would entail White Hall providing up to a third of the annual budget of the Emirate (some 150,000£ in the mid-thirties); and, importantly, the staffing of the Arab Legion, an elite military corps led by British officials.⁹²

A constant in the history of Jordan, regional events were to shake the country at its very foundations. The Zionist movement, the Balfour Declaration and the struggle over the future of the mandate of Palestine between Arabs and Jews were to have major repercussions virtually on every aspect of the country. In March 1946 Great Britain formally granted independence to Abdallah’s possession, who upgraded it from emirate to kingdom and changed its name into Jordan. Soon afterwards, in November 1947, the UN voted for a partition of Palestine between Arabs and Jews. The Arabs refusal to comply with the resolution sparked the first Arab-Jewish (later Arab-Israeli) war. The events that followed brought to the establishment, in May 1948, of the state of Israel; the exodus of some 750,000 Arab Palestinians from what is now referred as ‘Israel proper;’ and the Jordanian conquest of the Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem and its holy sites.⁹³

The annexation (made official in 1950) of such large portion of territory on the part of Abdallah’s troops (thanks in particular his Arab Legion) contravened explicitly the Arab

⁹¹ Lawless, 1998, p. 630.

⁹² The Arab legion grew from 1300 in the early 1920s to 7200 by 1948.

⁹³ The literature on these pivotal events, of which this brief account cannot do justice, is immense and highly debated. For a detailed account, see Morris, Benny. *Righteous Victims. A History of the Arab-Zionist Conflict*. Vintage, 2001.

League's⁹⁴ provision which called for a Palestinian state all over the mandate land, and certainly not a Jordanian rule over parts of such territory. But again, Abdallah's ambitions had led him, on the one hand, to assume the role of protector of the Palestinians;⁹⁵ and on the other, to strike deals with the Jewish Agency even before the establishment of the state of Israel,⁹⁶ thus breaking from the ranks of Arab solidarity. This choice cost him his life as he was killed by a young Palestinian in 1951 in front of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

Nation Building and State Building

Abdallah's grandson Hussein was injured too in that attack. After the brief reign of Abdallah's son Talal,⁹⁷ in 1952 the seventeen year old ascended to the throne. Abdallah's sudden death left his young heir dealing with momentous challenges of nation building and state building.

Nation building and the issue of identity

Abdallah's emirate lacked any historical precedent. Its lands did not overlap with Ottoman administrative boundaries, defined clusters of social and economic relations, even less with clear and specific local identities. Yet, the soon-to-be nation-state configuration begged the question: Who is a Jordanian? Commanding the loyalty of citizens required crafting a viable national identity on the part of the Hashemite dynasty. Two were the main problems. First, the Hashemites themselves were foreign to Jordan. It was no surprise therefore that they espoused strong pan-Arab leanings, in line as well with the ambitions of the family and the general mood

⁹⁴ The Arab League was created in March 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Transjordan and Yemen. It now comprises 22 Arab speaking countries.

⁹⁵ Massad, Joseph. *Colonial Effects: The making of national identity in Jordan*. Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 226-7.

⁹⁶ See Shlaim, Avi. *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist movement and the partition of Palestine*. Clarendon Press, 1988. Morris agrees in his account with Shlaim's position.

⁹⁷ Talal bin Abdallah ruled for slightly more than a year, and abdicated due to health reasons, probably schizophrenia.

prevailing in the Arab world in the wake of World War II.⁹⁸ Second, the influx of Palestinian refugees after the ‘*Nakbah*’⁹⁹ of 1948-9 and the annexation of the West Bank meant that the regime had to accommodate another, emerging and thus rival identity - the Palestinian one.

The relevance of this challenge is readily visible by the numbers. Between 1948 and 1949, some 360,000 refugees entered the West Bank, and 110,000 refugees entered Jordan proper, soon to be referred to as the East Bank. Prior to the exodus, the West Bank had some 425,000 people, and Jordan’s population was 375,000. This meant that the population of the West Bank increased to 785,000 and in the East Bank to 485,000. The population of Jordan, in total, rose to 1,270,000, an almost 300% basically overnight increase.¹⁰⁰ As a result, close to 65% of the Jordanian population was actually Palestinian.¹⁰¹

Over time, this situation will not change: rather, two subsequent mass migrations of Palestinians into Jordan (after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war¹⁰² and the Kuwait war of 1990-1991¹⁰³) only strengthened the Palestinian character of Jordan, especially in the urban areas.¹⁰⁴ How to accommodate the challenges posed by such demography and attendant identity issues in an overall national framework? The Hashemites could never permit the emergence of an alternative Palestinian identity independent from a (trans)Jordanian one. The main drive was thus to

⁹⁸ Students of Jordan such as Moaddel and Massad remarked the differences between the Hashemite pan-Arab project and, for example, Nasser’s: the Hashemite proposed always a traditional, not progressive, brand of pan-Arabism, and always holding their dynasty as its center of gravity.

⁹⁹ The ‘disaster’ resulting for the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular from the creation of the state of Israel.

¹⁰⁰ Massad, 2012, p. 233.

¹⁰¹ This calculation takes into account all the West Bank Palestinians as well as all registered Palestinian refugees in the East Bank.

¹⁰² Some 300,000 left the now Israeli occupied West Bank. Of those, some 245,000 fled to Jordan. Massad, 2012, p. 235.

¹⁰³ See below for details on the impact on Jordan of the Kuwait war.

¹⁰⁴ Amman for example is overwhelmingly a Palestinian city. As purely anecdotal evidence, I have ridden cabs for nearly two years in Amman on a daily basis, and I may recall only a couple of drivers identifying themselves as East Bank Jordanians.

subsume, under the banner of Arabism, Palestinian identity within the Jordanian one, so to make it politically irrelevant. As Massad notes,

“[w]hereas Arab nationalism is the discourse deployed to “unify” Jordan and Palestine, it is Transjordanian nationalism, not Arab nationalism, that must define the new “unified” and expanded entity [including, that is, also the Palestinian element] ... [t]his was not an unintended outcome of the absorption of a stateless territory and people by an existing state, but rather an intended policy of Jordanization and de-Palestinization.”¹⁰⁵

In other words, an exclusivist definition of nationality (not coterminous, it must be noted, with citizenship, granted to the majority of the Palestinian refugees) was to define the relation between the East Bank, Transjordanian element - now fully backing the Hijazi Hashemite dynasty - and the Palestinian one. For King Hussein any claim to a non-Jordanian Palestinian identity was an anathema. It represented a direct threat to its regime legitimacy and viability, predicated on a Hashemite, Arab and (trans)Jordanian nationalist discourse. Some of the contradictory features of state discourse were then coming to the fore, as we shall discuss below.

The greatest threat to the regime survival came in fact from the attempt of the Palestinians to enfranchise themselves from Jordan’s master narratives of nationalism and attendant political dominance. The formation of the PLO in 1964, followed by the formation of various guerrilla groups,¹⁰⁶ represented the embodiment of a distinct - that is, non-Jordanian - Palestinian identity. The PLO and affiliated militant formations started carrying out operations against Israel from Jordanian territory, developing into a ‘state within a state.’ It was then only a matter of time before the regime took action. King Hussein’s army erased an autonomous

¹⁰⁵ Massad, 2012, p. 226.

¹⁰⁶ Such as the notorious *feda'iyyn*, ‘those who sacrifice themselves.’

Palestinian political presence in the country in the course of a civil war known as ‘Black September’¹⁰⁷ in 1970.

The regime won the military confrontation. However, it could not claim any more to be the main - let alone the sole - legitimate representative of the Palestinians as it had been doing via its discourse of unity between East and West Bank, Jordanians and Palestinians. In 1974, the Arab League recognized that role belonged to Yasser Arafat’s PLO. That eventually led King Hussein to sever the links with the Israeli occupied West Bank¹⁰⁸ in July 1988. He acknowledged how decades of occupation and the Palestinian ‘*Intifadah*’¹⁰⁹ had fundamentally compromised any possibility of recovery of what up until then he had claimed as Jordanian territory.

State building

The threat of the Palestinian question to regime viability and stability was most serious yet by no means the only one. During the 1950s, domestically, radical progressive groups, such as Nasserists, Ba’thists and Communists, conspired against the regime. The failed coup of 1957 prompted King Hussein to suspend the brief parliamentary interlude under liberal Prime Minister Suleiman Nabulsi¹¹⁰ and to establish a *de facto* monarchical autocracy: elections would not be held until 1989; political parties were banned;¹¹¹ the security apparatus, the notorious *mukhabarat* (GID, General Intelligence Directorate), strengthened; last, martial law was proclaimed after the catastrophic 1967 war against Israel. These developments made, in a way,

¹⁰⁷ This label of course is used by Palestinians and not by East Bank Jordanians, let alone by the regime. In the museum of national history in Amman, there is not a single reference to those events.

¹⁰⁸ Israel took over the West Bank and East Jerusalem in June 1967 (together with Gaza and the Golan Heights), and has been enforced a military occupation there ever since.

¹⁰⁹ The *Intifadah*, ‘shake off,’ was a popular Palestinian revolt which erupted in the Occupied Territories in December 1987, lasting until the Oslo Accords of 1993.

¹¹⁰ Russell, Lucas E. *Institutions and the Politics of Survival in Jordan: Domestic responses to external challenges, 1988-2001*. SUNY Press, 2012, pp. 18-20.

¹¹¹ The Muslim Brotherhood will be somewhat of an exception, see below.

the regime similar to its neighbors. However, at no point in time was Jordan a police state like Syria or Iraq.¹¹² Repression of dissent has never been that fierce, criticism was tolerated (except for the most sensitive issues, such as the legitimacy of the monarchy or the Palestinian question), a relatively independent press and associations continued to exist.

What have been the pillars of regime survival? Strategies adopted in the early days of the kingdom shaped its political structure and relations with society. We can list three in particular, before analyzing the overarching state discourse in the next section.

First, the monarchy was able to leverage on societal and national cleavages to its advantage. The Arab Legion and the army more in general became a bulwark of the regime. In these institutions, East Bank Jordanians - i.e., non-Palestinians - were overrepresented, especially in the upper echelons. Hailing primarily from a rural and tribal background, the regime secured Transjordanians' allegiance by two other means: preferential channels in accessing state bureaucracy as civil servants or attain state employment as teachers, doctors, managers;¹¹³ and allocations of public lands to tribal leaders and prominent East Banker families, creating a landowning class thus tied to the regime.¹¹⁴

The exclusivist nationalist project described above served as the ideological bedrock upon which the Hashemites built such societal alliances. This did not imply that Jordanian of Palestinian origins (also from the West Bank) could not access high governmental posts, economic prestige or undertake a successful career in the army. However, their representation in

¹¹² Milton-Edwards et al., 2009, p. 54.

¹¹³ Today this situation is less marked, but it still holds true that most private business is indeed in the hands of Palestinian Jordanians.

¹¹⁴ Moaddel, Mansoor. "Religion and the state: the singularity of the Jordanian religious experience." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15.4 (2002): 527-568, p. 535.

these sectors has not been in par with their demographic or economic clout, nor could they leverage on their descent and affiliation to obtain such posts more easily.¹¹⁵

Second, the authoritarian turn after 1957 emptied formal political institutions of much of their power. As in other cases in the Arab and postcolonial world at large, state centralization and expansion led to illiberal systems of governance. The 1952 constitution defines a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature ('*majlis an-nawab*').¹¹⁶ The lower chamber of deputies is to be elected by broad male suffrage (women will be excluded until 1989); the upper house or Senate is appointed by the king.¹¹⁷ The chambers may force the resignation of individual ministers or entire cabinets with a vote of no-confidence; their assent is necessary for passing bills; they both can amend laws. However, such liberal features are countered by the powers of the king, which may trump the prerogatives of the legislature. He chooses the prime minister, the head of the security services, and he is commander in chief of the armed forces. He may dismiss the government as well as the parliament. Indeed, even after the liberalization starting in 1989¹¹⁸ the parliament was still considered by many a mere rubber stamp of the executive.

As a result, the most important locus of power in the kingdom has been the royal court or *diwan*. Royal family members, representatives of the most important tribes, top ranking officers of the army, notables: they came to constitute a coterie that enjoys disproportionate influence in running the affairs of the country. Its efficacy resides also in the *diwan* capacity to function as a

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 531.

¹¹⁶ There have been some amendments in the course of the years, especially to the electoral law, but two features seem to remain constant. First, there is extensive gerrymandering of the electoral colleges in order to favor the rural and southern areas of the country. The votes-to-seats ratio is markedly lower in these areas, known for their support of the monarchy and East Bank Jordanian character. Conversely, urban and densely populated areas such as Amman and Zarqa, home to the majority of the Palestinian Jordanians, spot a much higher votes-to-seats ratio, hence downplaying their effective demographic weight in the Parliament. Second, the tight control over the formation of parties tends to favor independent candidates, resulting in a fragmented, and therefore weaker, Parliament *vis à vis* the executive.

¹¹⁷ The size of both chambers has expanded over time, reaching now 130 seats for the House of Deputies and 75 for the Senate.

¹¹⁸ See below for details on the liberalization process.

conduit between the site of power (the king and his more immediate aides) and the population at large. The relative limited size of Jordan's population and the widespread system of personal patronage and links (often relying on tribal affiliation), known as *wastah*, permits to bring popular grievances, requests and complains up to the rooms of the royal palace, bypassing, that is, the emasculated formal political institutions.¹¹⁹ This state of affairs is both cause and result of the stultified development of political parties in the kingdom, even after 1989. This solution, predicated on informal political institutions, granted Hussein immense popularity amongst Jordanians at large, also in light of his personal charisma.¹²⁰

Third, Jordan was able to secure western support, namely the UK and then US patronage. This trend witnessed ebb and flow: as a small country, Jordan could not ignore the anti-Western sentiments that cyclically would invest the region.¹²¹ Yet, the country never truly experienced a *volte face* in its international relations, securing western diplomatic, military and financial backing.¹²² Many commentators (FN - Russell, Moaddel 2002b, Robins 2004) describe in fact Jordan as a rentier state: its historical role as a western ally, reliable much more than other, more volatile countries, and its pivotal role in the Israeli-Palestinian issue granted such steady - and vital - flow of external funds.

State discourse, civil society, religion

¹¹⁹ Milton-Edwards et al., 2009, p. 52.

¹²⁰ There is plenty of popular anecdotes about King Hussein's deep relation with his people. For example, in 1989, he went down in the streets of Karak to talk directly to protesters; or he was known to ride Amman cabs and to get a sense of people's mood and problems. His funeral did attract large crowds of seemingly genuinely distraught Jordanians.

¹²¹ For example, Gamal Abdul-Nasir pressured King Hussein to join the fateful 1967 confrontation with Israel: the monarch could not refuse as the rising tide of pan-Arabism left him little choice. A similar situation occurred in 1955 with the refusal to join the British backed Baghdad pact. I will discuss below this issue more in details in the context of the Kuwaiti war.

¹²² Jordan is now the third recipient of US foreign aid, at roughly 1.5bn per year. See <http://beta.foreignassistance.gov/explore/country/Jordan>

What is then the overarching discursive framework of the regime? Moaddel speaks of Jordan as a case of “authoritarian pluralism.”¹²³ Jordan has always been relatively liberal by regional standards: in this sense, the regime espoused a number of different, malleable and at times contradictory discourses “connected to different apparatuses of the state.” What united these discourses is the “institution of the monarchy. The state ideology reflected elements of Arab nationalism, Islamic conservatism, tribalism, pre-Islamic glorification, and Western modernism. Because of this very diversity, the state appeared differently to different segments of the Jordanian population.”¹²⁴ These discourses undergirded the Hashemites’ bid to hegemony (or at least to recognized authority and legitimacy). Mere exercise of force through the apparatuses of the political society is no ground for such bid. The regime sought via these discourses to establish a relation with the Jordanian civil society at large for securing its allegiance and if not consent. Under the Hashemites we can then speak of a specific set of relations between societal groups tied within practices, norms and values congealing into a ‘historical bloc.’ This only seemingly precarious arrangement of forces has granted, thus far, Jordan’s survival and relative stability.

In this context, the pluralism of state discourses is puzzling if we consider the cases of neighboring countries such as Egypt, Syria or Iraq. A comparison with Jordan is illustrative. In those regimes, ruling elites (Nasserists and their heirs, the Ba’th party) put forth an exclusivist political discourse. Moaddel proposes the concept of “ideological state,” where “its discourses, symbolic order, and rituals permeate the administrative structure of the government. [...] To support the regime would mean support its entire body, and criticizing the regime implies

¹²³ Moaddel, Mansour. *Jordanian Exceptionalism*. Palgrave, 2002, pp. 27-65.

¹²⁴ Moaddel, 2002a, p. 530.

questioning its very essence and identity.”¹²⁵ This monolithic ideological and discursive apparatus was then mirrored by a set of practices of extreme political repression, rejection of dissent, and further state intrusion into the sphere of civil society.¹²⁶

Importantly, all these regimes, reflecting a common trend in the postcolonial Muslim world, “attempted to undermine the influence of the religious institutions in their societies.”¹²⁷ Religious elites represented a traditional¹²⁸ social group generally opposed to the rise of fiercely modernists and secular elites. Such elites “promoted their own discourses as substitutes for religion.” As a consequence, “[r]eligion thus became politicized as the conservative Islamic establishment resisted the loss of their traditional social functions and the modern intellectuals sought in the religious institutional field a cultural resource to formulate their discourse in oppositional relations to the ideology of the state.”¹²⁹ The compounded result was thus twofold. First is the creation of rigid and exclusivist autocracies which could not accommodate political pluralism in any form. Second is the rise of militant Islamism as one of the discursive fields for opposition in relation specifically to aggressive secularization policies.¹³⁰

The ruling elite in Jordan undertook instead a different strategy. The regime remained (and remains) authoritarian; yet, it is not tied to an exclusivist and all-encompassing ideology. State discourse never produced an ‘ideological state,’ nor was it monolithic in defining the contours of the polity. Different sectors of civil society could find a niche within state discourse,

¹²⁵ Moaddel, 2002b, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁶ This state of affairs reached paroxysm in Saddam’s Iraq, where membership in a party other than the Ba’th was ground for death sentence. See Makiya, Kanan. *Republic of fear: the politics of modern Iraq*. University of California Press, [1989] 1998.

¹²⁷ Moaddel, 2002b, p. 151.

¹²⁸ Traditional also in the sense in which Gramsci uses the term when talking about intellectuals. See Chapter 3, section “Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony.”

¹²⁹ Moaddel, 2002b, pp 151-2.

¹³⁰ Dabashi proposes a similar thesis to account for the rise of militant Islamism. Even though he insists more on the reaction against colonialism, he depicts similar traits of the Islamist response to it. See Dabashi, Hamid. *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire*, Routledge, 2008.

express accordingly their interests, and permeate several state apparatuses.¹³¹ This power arrangement has guaranteed less confrontational and relatively more open dealings between political and civil society, in that the latter, in its various components and groups, could find different channels to articulate its demands. The red lines within this discursive system, as we have seen, have been the Palestinian issue and the institution of the monarchy. However, even here accommodation - and not outright rejection - was the first option. The Palestinians, for example, were granted citizenship and included in the body politic as long as they did not question the power arrangements under the monarchy and the credibility of its unification project – as when they did, in 1970, the state response was indeed coercive and uncompromising. The king, on his part, paid lip service to popular pressure by firing unpopular ministers, shared the street - literally - with his subjects in times of turmoil to talk to them personally,¹³² and in general resorted more to paternalism as opposed to iron fist.¹³³

In this context, amongst the claims put forth by the Hashemites to shore up their legitimacy, was the articulation of a religious discourse. This claim is rooted into the family's lineage - believed to be descending directly from the Prophet - and its historic role as guardian of the holy places.¹³⁴ Therefore, no comparable attempt at secularization of the country, or attendant relentless attacks and incorporations of religious institutions, could be carried out in Jordan as in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, or even Iran under the Shah.¹³⁵ This strategy played into the hands of the

¹³¹ Moaddel, 2002b, p. 23.

¹³² See fn. 120.

¹³³ The legacy of this way of conducting politics seems to persist. Tellingly, in the context of the Arab Spring, police forces handed orange juice and waters to protestors, preventing the demonstrations to escalate. Numerous people I talked to who participated in those manifestations referred to regime authorities as “so clever” in de-escalating popular pressures for real changes.

¹³⁴ While the Hashemite lost Mecca and Medina and then Jerusalem in 1967, agreements with Israel allow them to keep the title of guardians of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque. While this concession is mostly pro-forma, posters of King Abdallah II may be found in the premises of Jerusalem Old City.

¹³⁵ Lately, this may be changing though. At the time of writing in August 2016, there were news of the state extending control on each and every mosque in the country, while previously some were left free from its supervision. Local journalists were suggesting to me this could be a reaction (an ill-guided one, to their mind) to the

widespread sense of religiosity espoused by groups (especially the tribes and the Bedouins) who form the social bedrock of the regime.¹³⁶ Therefore, “[t]he state's non-secularist orientation, its accommodationist approach toward religion, and favorable policies towards diverse groups and classes - notably merchants and landowners - also strengthened the Hashemite-religion alliance.”¹³⁷

The state and the Muslim Brotherhood

Nothing epitomizes this alliance more clearly than the vicissitudes of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country. The ban of political parties from 1957 to 1989 did shut down the political arm of the Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front; yet, under the martial law the Brotherhood was allowed to continue operating as a charitable entity, evolving into a powerful civil society organization and enjoying widespread social popularity. Not espousing an aggressive secularist policy, on the contrary inserting religious elements in the very state discourse, the regime did not offer an easy ideational target for the Brotherhood to fight against.¹³⁸ Nor did the regime engage in episodes of wanton repression, strategies often associated with radicalization of the opposition.¹³⁹ It must be remembered that the Jordan Brotherhood was a direct and contiguous emanation of the Egyptian motherboard, which did engage in more open and militant confrontations with Egyptian regime, over the course of time producing violent and radical spin offs.¹⁴⁰

threat of the Islamic State. See Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *The management of Islamic activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and state power in Jordan*. SUNY Press, 2001.

¹³⁶ Interview with officials from the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Amman, 11/26/2015.

¹³⁷ Moaddel, 2002b, 23.

¹³⁸ For the concept of ‘ideational target,’ see Moaddel, Mansoor, 2005.

¹³⁹ See Hafez, Mohammed. *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and resistance in the Islamic world*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ See Kepel, Gilles. *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh*. University of California Press, 1985.

If that was not the case in Jordan we must conclude that state discourse and its attendant practices shaped a different social and political landscape for the Jordanian branch of the Brotherhood.¹⁴¹ The different behavior of the MB in Jordan does not teach us much about the democratic leanings and possibilities - or lack thereof - of the ideological apparatus of the movement; rather, it teaches us how this apparatus must be considered at all times in relation to its historical referents – according to a dialogical model as I have been arguing thus far.

In fact, the Brotherhood was certainly not in favor of Jordan's close relations with the West, or the conciliatory attitude towards Israel. However, the regime left little further rationale for any kind of uncompromising opposition. Social classes that historically in the Middle East backed religious institutions, namely landowners and the merchants, were a relatively late development in Jordan and, as we noticed, depending on the regime for their social status and relative affluence. Last, in the formative years right after independence, a common threat - both to the monarchy and to religious actors - came from the same quarters of radical, secular, leftist groups. This situation laid the foundations for a marriage of convenience perhaps, but a successful one nonetheless for both parties.¹⁴²

Realignment: Political and Economic Shifts at the End of the Century

This configuration of power relations underpinned Jordan's vaunted stability all the way to the period under examination in this study. However, while Jordan did not undergo any true societal or political revolution, from 1989 and through the mid-1990s a number of important developments occurred in the country, shaking some of its very foundations. The aggregate outcome of such developments resulted also in the opening of new discursive spaces and

¹⁴¹ See also Sahliyah, Emile. "The State and the Islamic Movement in Jordan." *Journal of Church and State*, 47.1 (Winter 2005): 110-111, on this point.

¹⁴² In the 1950s, the MB through its political arm, the IAF, entered often in the cabinet holding the education, social affairs and commerce portfolios. Sahliyah, 2005, p. 113; Moaddel, 2002a, p. 526.

practices, including the rise to prominence of Salafism in the life of the country. We may consider these developments under three intersecting domains: economy, international politics, and domestic politics.

Economy: from oil bonanza to Structural Adjustment Programs

Jordan is almost completely bereft of oil. However, oil has made its way into Jordan's economy via expatriates' remittances and discounted oil supply agreements with states in the Gulf. Via these two ways, the oil bonanza of the 1970s directly impacted the politics of the country, as it "generated aid flows from the oil-exporting countries and large earnings from expatriate workers in the Gulf. It led to economic prosperity for the country and served to attenuate political discontent."¹⁴³

The effects of the oil boom were vast. A rapid process resembling similar paths of modernization invested Jordan. The GNP increased six fold between 1973 and 1983 and economic growth spotted Chinese-like rates in double figures.¹⁴⁴ Life quickly changed for many Jordanians as healthcare and education spread, infrastructures improved and expanded, job opportunities emerged. The population doubled between 1970 and 1990, and tripled by 2000.¹⁴⁵ Urbanization followed suit¹⁴⁶ together with social differentiation, higher literacy rates, and the formation of a sizeable middle class.¹⁴⁷

However, this transformation hid basic structural issues. In fact, it is not erroneous to speak of Jordan as a rentier state. Its lifeline has been tied to external rents of various nature and

¹⁴³ Rath, Kathrin. "The Process of Democratization in Jordan." *Middle Eastern Studies*, 30.3 (Jul., 1994): 530-557, p. 535.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 537.

¹⁴⁵ From 1.6m to 3.2 to 4.8. Sahliyeh, 2005, p. 116.

¹⁴⁶ From 52% in 1970, to 68% in 1990, to 74% in 2000. Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Moaddel, 2002a, p. 535.

not quite to domestic economic development.¹⁴⁸ Rentierism engenders an ephemeral and uneven modernization process. The expatriates' remittances sustained the rise in government revenues at the core of such process. By 1983 some 350,000 Jordanians, or over 40% of the workforce, was working abroad - almost entirely in the oil rich Gulf states - contributing to an increase in remittances from 15 million USD in 1973 to nearly 1 billion a decade after. Furthermore, Arab oil producing countries - in the 1970s and 1980s, especially Iraq; nowadays, Saudi Arabia - have provided fuel below market prices for decades. Last, geography too undergirded another venue for rent: fellow Arab states held Jordan as one of the 'frontier states' in the fight against Israel, granting in 1978 a yearly net payment of 1.25 billion to Amman's treasury.¹⁴⁹

Rentierism permitted public expenditures and provisions to burgeon, leading to the hypertrophic state apparatus typical of the region.¹⁵⁰ State expenditures increased from 140 million USD in 1973 to over 700 in 1985.¹⁵¹ Key industries were nationalized (especially in the phosphate and potassium industries, the only relatively abundant natural resources of Jordan), and the state financed the expansion of education and health systems mentioned above, paid for food subsidies and agricultural investments; state employment mushroomed, hiring thousands in a swelling bureaucracy and an ever larger military, security and police apparatuses.¹⁵²

This process could be sustained only insofar as oil prices remained high and allowed financing public debt. There was no comparable, sustained economic development behind the veneer of rentier economy: the domestic market remained small, the industrial base extremely limited, agriculture constrained by geography (in particular water scarcity), and taxation of the

¹⁴⁸ See Luciani, Giacomo. "Economic Foundations of Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Arab World in Comparative Perspective." *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 10.4 (1988): 457-475.

¹⁴⁹ Rath, 1994, p. 537.

¹⁵⁰ Ayubi, Nazih. *Overstating the Arab State*. Routledge, 1995. Anderson, Lisa. "The State in the Middle East and North Africa," *Comparative Politics* 20.1 (1987): pp. 1-18.

¹⁵¹ Rath, 1994, p. 537.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 538. By the mid-1980s close to half the workforce worked for the state in some capacity.

population limited and ineffective. With the crisis of oil markets of the mid-1980s, debt financing became increasingly difficult.

The bubble was to burst: the external flow of rent dwindled significantly as remittances from expatriates fell from 2.3 in 1981 to 1.5 billion in 1987. Many started to go back to Jordan as job opportunities in the Gulf became scarcer. The 'frontier states' saw Arab commitments subjected too to the vagaries of the oil markets: grants started falling short of the promised amount, when at all. Official unemployment thus reached 12%, probably climbing even higher in reality. The GDP decreased by 3.5% between 1987 and spotted a 0% growth rate the following year. The Jordanian Dinar (JD) lost 45% of its value against the Dollar.

Yet the regime was reluctant to cut down significantly public expenditures. They had secured at least the acquiescence of the more disgruntled groups within the country (especially poor, recently urbanized Palestinians). Furthermore, they had cemented the corporatist pact between the regime and its traditional allies (the East Bank tribes, the army, and the landowning class). Hence, cutting social expenditures likely meant ominous consequences for the regime.

But by the late 1980s the public debt-to-GDP ratio was 2:1, the amount of debt itself at 8.4 USD billion:¹⁵³ a clearly untenable situation, compounded by the long war that Iraq, Jordan's first economic partner, waged against Iran which further crippled the economy of the region. King Hussein saw no other option but to ask for the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to access public debt relief via international loans. In a standard procedure applied to similar situations in Third World countries since the at least the early 1980s,¹⁵⁴ the IMF demanded Jordan to implement thorough economic reforms in exchange for financial help.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 539.

¹⁵⁴ See Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and its Discontents*. Norton, 2002.

These reforms, known as “Structural Adjustment Programs” or SAP, called essentially for three macro-economic measures. First, reining in state budget and proceed to cut public expenditures in order to control inflation and currency fluctuation. Second, removing obstacles to capital flows, international trade and foreign investments so to acquire hard currency to pay off the debt and access international credit anew. Third, initiating a sweeping privatization of industries, financial assets and public services. This last policy aimed at increasing the overall efficiency of the economic system by letting the “free market” operate unburned and untamed by state intervention, deemed inherently harmful and contributing, precisely, to budgetary issues.¹⁵⁵

The implementation of IMF measures in April 1989 brought an immediate spike in fuel and food prices, ranging from 10 to 30%, as subsidies were cut. The price of other goods, such as soda beverages and cigarettes, widely consumed in the kingdom especially by the poor, doubled. The government then restricted access to public employment, freezing scheduled hirings; major development projects were cancelled. The austerity policies of the SAP, as the regime feared, sparked violent protests.

Political liberalization or stultified democratization?

What the regime had not foreseen was that such protests emerged first and most virulently in southern cities considered its strongholds. In the impoverished centers of Tafileh, Karak and Ma’an, populated mostly by East Bankers, the welfare of the population was tied more closely than elsewhere to government provisions and subsidies. The protests turned violent, with clashes between police forces and demonstrators that left 8 people dead, over 50 injured, and a four day curfew in Karak. These riots were much more alarming for the regime in that they

¹⁵⁵ See Ryan, Curtis R. "Peace, Bread and Riots: Jordan and the International Monetary Fund." *Middle East Policy* 6.2 (1998): 54-68.

signaled that its very core constituencies were ready to defect from the pact that had ensured regime survival and social and political stability up to that point.¹⁵⁶

It is in this context that the regime embarked on a liberalization process which ended the ban on parties, called off the martial law and announced new elections, the first since the mid-1950s. Much has been written about the reasons behind King Hussein's move, as well as the significance for the perspectives of true democratization both in Jordan and in the Middle East of Arab world more in general.¹⁵⁷ Most commentators have now abandoned the more optimistic assessments of the early 1990s, when Jordan seemed poised to join Huntington's "Third Wave."¹⁵⁸ Instead, Jordan became a textbook case of 'defensive democratization:' the resumption of parliamentary life, the liberalization of party politics, the more liberal climate for newspapers and the press in general represented, "a series of pre-emptive measures designed to maintain elite privilege in Jordan while limiting the appeal of more fundamental political change."¹⁵⁹ In this sense, "defensive democratization, even in the absence of democratizing social pressure, is a state strategy to maintain the dominant political order in the face of severe state fiscal crisis."¹⁶⁰

The regime did in fact survive, while the true intent, extent and direction of such policies became clearer during the 1990s and in the early 2000s. Democratization and opening of the system could go as far as they did not dent the fundamental power structure holding the country together and the elites' interests behind them. Yet the vagaries of international politics were to

¹⁵⁶ Robinson, Glenn. "Defensive Democratization in Jordan." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30.3 (Aug., 1998): 387-410, p. 391.

¹⁵⁷ Ryan, Curtis R, and Jillian Schwedler. "Return to democratization or new hybrid regime?: The 2003 Elections in Jordan." *Middle East Policy* 11.2 (2004):138-151. Ryan, Curtis R. *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002. Ryan, Curtis R. "Elections and parliamentary democratization in Jordan." *Democratization* 5.4 (1998): 176-196.

¹⁵⁸ Huntington, Samuel P. *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

¹⁵⁹ Robinson 1998, p. 388.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

shock Jordan as it was right in the midst of these domestic upheavals, economic reforms and political changes.

International and regional developments

Three major regional developments occurred in a span of merely five years within the context of the end of the Cold War. Such sweeping transition to a new phase of world politics earmarked the end of the Afghan war (1989), the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait (1990-91), and the peace process between Israel and the Arabs (1991-94). Connected while not directly related to one another, all these events had in different ways deep and multifaceted repercussions on the Jordanian domestic scenario.

The Afghan war had attracted thousands of young, disgruntled and restless Arabs to the ranks of the resistance against the Soviet invasion, including people in Jordan. In the downtrodden refugee camps and surrounding impoverished areas the lack of jobs and ensuing social exclusion bred feelings of marginalization.¹⁶¹ These conditions were contributing factors pushing many to join the *jihad* in Afghanistan against godless Communism, a decision that the government at the time did not discourage - an easy way to empty the reservoir of unemployed, troublesome individuals (while contributing, however marginally, to the fight against the communists, a policy the US looked upon with favor). Exact numbers are not readily available, but perhaps as many as 50,000 Arab nationals fought in Afghanistan, amongst whom a few thousands Jordanians.

With the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in February 1989, most so-called *mujahiddin* returned home. They brought back with them years of hardening battlefield experiences, often times informed, worryingly for the regime, by the precepts of Jihadi Salafism. Their alienation from the mainstream Jordanian social and cultural environment had widened during such stint

¹⁶¹ Interview with Hassan Abu Hanieh, Amman, 11/26/2015.

abroad; some felt reluctant resuming their past meager existences after the exhilarating experience in Afghanistan.¹⁶² Furthermore, these jihadi inspired cohorts moved back into the kingdom right at the time of both economic hardship and political reform. It could prove an explosive mix.¹⁶³

Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. King Hussein witnessed the widespread popular support for Saddam Hussein's action, perceived by many Jordanians (and Arabs at large too) as a defiant anti-imperialist and proud Arab move. Also mindful of the importance of the economic and diplomatic ties with Iraq, he chose not to join the international coalition which for the first time featured the US and the USSR fighting together, epitomizing the "New World Order" announced by George H. W. Bush. All major Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria, partook in the effort against Saddam - either militarily, logistically or diplomatically. Jordan's declared neutrality did not condone the invasion, but it fell short of outright condemnation, leaving traditional allies dumbfounded.¹⁶⁴ King Hussein called for an improbable - or rather utterly unrealistic - solution to the crisis via the Arab League. The Arab states response was to cut substantially financial aid to Jordan, further crippling its economy.

In substance, King Hussein opted for appeasing an already rattled Jordanian population, reeling from the SAP measures and who had just been offered larger venues for expressing claims and grievances: if that was to upset traditional partners, *in primis* the US, so be it. Foreign policy making was thus deeply connected with domestic considerations: "if the king had adopted a pro-Western position during the Gulf crisis, this could seriously have challenged the process of

¹⁶² See for example Napoleoni, Loretta. *Insurgent Iraq: Zarqawi and the New Generation*. Seven Story Press, 2005.

¹⁶³ I will discuss this dynamics more in details in chapter 6.

¹⁶⁴ Milton-Edwards et al., 2009, pp. 233-4.

democratization. A pro-Western stance would have contrasted sharply with popular attitudes and would have created friction between the leadership and the people.”¹⁶⁵

The gamble paid off in terms of dodging new, massive protests, instead boosting the king’s popularity. This move appeared all the more necessary considering another, related development concerning the Kuwait war. Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, was the only Arab leader to stand openly with Saddam. When the fighting ended in March 1991, Kuwait retaliated by expelling some 300,000 Palestinians residing in the emirate.¹⁶⁶ Most of these people made their way to Jordan, as holders of the kingdom passport, and in any case unwelcomed in other Arab states. This migration was the third major wave hitting the country since its foundation, after 1948-9 and 1967.

The reconciliation with the US and the Arab world - only a matter of time - had a steep price tag to it. From an economic standpoint, first the war destruction and then the draconian sanctions imposed on Iraq all but deprived Jordan of one of its major trading partners¹⁶⁷ right at the time of the IMF measures largely predicated precisely on trade and export. Thus the need for western support became all the more pressing. Yet this support was made conditional on Jordan joining the US sponsored peace process between Israel and the Arabs. Up until then, only Egypt had formally recognized the state of Israel, in 1978. Now, the unbaiting Palestinian *Intifadah* and the new post-Cold War order were poised to provide the right juncture to open up multilateral negotiations. In October 1991, the Madrid Conference seemed to herald the beginning of a new

¹⁶⁵ Rath, 1994, p. 551.

¹⁶⁶ Milton-Edwards et al., 2009, p. 107. These workers were responsible for 1 billion a year in remittances.

¹⁶⁷ The blockade on Iraq was severe for Jordan also a hub for Iraqi goods: these were in fact prohibited passing through the port of Aqaba, as they had been doing throughout the Iraq-Iraq war. Ibid, p. 112.

era in the international relations of the Middle East via addressing the Gordian knot of the Palestinian question.¹⁶⁸

King Hussein, according to some sources, had already begun entertaining the idea of a settlement with Israel in 1985.¹⁶⁹ Relinquishing Jordan's claim on the West Bank in July 1988 lends support to this thesis. But the acceptance of a limited Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza only hinted at a comprehensive settlement with Israel, a much bolder step King Hussein could not quite make yet. The opportunity for such step arose when the peace process stalled in Madrid. The PLO leadership exiled in Tunis started secret dealings with the Israelis, resulting in the Declaration of Principles (DOP) and the Oslo Accords of 1993.

This move finally permitted King Hussein to make his bid for a separate peace with Israel. He could do so without incurring in the wrath of fellow Arab states as the Palestinians themselves first had struck a deal.¹⁷⁰ The domestic front was a different story though. As we have discussed earlier, the national composition of Jordan makes a peace treaty with Israel extremely complex. Basically, most of the population of the kingdom resides there precisely due to the establishment of Israel and then the 1967 war. Popular feelings were dead set against the deal.¹⁷¹

Yet, King Hussein's maneuvering proved once more deft in walking that fine line between domestic and foreign pressures. Having secured popular consensus via the liberalization process and the stand in the Kuwaiti war, he needed to think about the economic recovery, which pivoted on the peace with Israel: "[b]alanced against the loss of the Iraqi market, the knock-on effect of sanctions and the decline in aid from the Gulf states, the anticipated economic spin-off

¹⁶⁸ For the details of the peace process, Madrid and the following conferences, see Morris, 2001, pp. 611-652.

¹⁶⁹ Milton-Edwards et al., 2009, p. 111.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 112. The Syrians too seemed on the verge of reaching a deal as well, see also Morris, 2001 on this point.

¹⁷¹ This is still easily observable today. Jordanians at large manifest open hostility towards Israel as well as dealing with it, as I noticed during my field research witnessing demonstrations against a projected gas field pipe running from Israel to Jordan.

from peace with Israel must have been very alluring.”¹⁷² In October 1994, Jordan and Israel signed the Wadi Araba treaty.

After the DOP, and with multilateral talks still proceeding between Israel and the Arab states, the popular reaction to the treaty was of displeasure and opposition - vented especially by the Muslim Brothers in the parliamentary circles - but it did not endanger widespread and large protests. The regime much vaunted economic benefits as well as the perspective of an imminent creation of a Palestinian state seemed to have offset deeply rooted feelings of resentment and hostility towards the idea of the peace with Israel.

Conclusion - a New Stage

With a new budgetary and fiscal crisis in 1996 new popular protests swept the country. As Ryan observes, “[t]he regime and its opposition clearly have different views of Jordan's needs. But the 1996 riots were symptomatic of anger and resentment over far more than the price of bread. It is difficult, in fact, to overestimate the depth of disillusionment within Jordan regarding the economy, the political liberalization process, and peace with Israel.”¹⁷³ However, by this time the process of ‘defensive democratization’ allowed the regime to contain and repress malcontent without further overtures. The democratization process, according to many scholars, has stalled despite regular elections, the ascension to the throne of then young and ‘moderate’ Abdallah II, and the continuous pledges on the regime to further ‘reform’ and ‘democratize’ the country.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Milton- Edwards, 2009, p. 112.

¹⁷³ Ryan 1998, p. 64.

¹⁷⁴ See Schwedler and Ryan, 2004.

In this context, after that is the 1989 realignment I have outlined thus far, I should like to put forth two considerations to better understand and locate the specific manifestations and activities of Salafism within the country and then beyond.

First, political sociologists attribute to ‘change’ a pivotal role in engendering social and political movements. This proposition may at times suggest an endogenous logic and does not clearly specify what ‘change’ actually should consist of. However, as I have maintained in stressing the importance of cognition, ‘change’ is what people make of it. Hence the importance of ideologues and thinkers as they engage in shaping and crafting cognition and understandings. At the same time, from a less theoretical and more historical standpoint, I hope I showed how the years after 1989 were indeed tumultuous ones on economic, political and demographic grounds. Change, in layman’s terms, did occur and was significant.

Second, such events pushed the regime to adapt and modify. Much could be said in the way of ‘everything needs to change so that everything remains the same’ à la *The Leopard*. Yet the regime’s tactical opening to - and then forestalling of - democratization and liberalization could not be simply micromanaged. As political society and civil society are always arenas for struggle, strategies to impose specific political projects are bound to elicit contestation and resistance, whose particular modality will depend on a host of different factors. In the context of the 1990s and early 2000s Jordan, Salafism at large, in its different incarnations, will emerge and stand for such an oppositional and alternative political project to the regime.

The following two chapters explore what role Salafi preachers, ideologues and thinkers played in crafting this project, acting as Gramscian popular and organic intellectuals.

Chapter 5 - Leaving Politics is Political: Quietist Salafism and Al-Albani's 'Purification and Education' Project

Introduction

During a conversation with Hassan Abu Hanieh,¹ I pointed out to him: "You haven't written as much about the Quietist Salafis as opposed to the Jihadis." "Of course," he quipped, "they are not as interesting...they don't do much."² Addressing the politics of an avowedly 'apolitical' movement may in fact sound a contradictory proposition - even an oxymoron. Indeed, Quietist Salafis earn their label because they vacate the typical loci of political action: organizing pressure groups, parties, lobbies and other formal associations; participating in electoral competition; manifesting explicitly oppositional or favorable attitudes towards the incumbent regime; taking part in public demonstrations, campaigns, protests, or other recognized repertoires of contention; and last but not least, engaging in violence.

Yet again, their 'apolitical' stance may be so only if one takes their claims at face value. Implications for power relations may be less overt and visible, yet still present, significant, and consequential. By adopting an understanding of politics predicated on Gramsci's social theory³ we can make sense of Quietist Salafis' 'apolitical politics.' Their alleged avoidance of politics is only a temporary and tactical abeyance from what they consider 'modern' political society,⁴ prioritizing instead engagement within civil society: their hegemonic bid is spelled out in the

¹ Hassan Abu Hanieh is a foremost Jordanian expert on Salafism and himself, at one time, amongst the intellectual founders of Jihadi Salafism. See Abu Rumman, Muhammad. *I Am A Salafi. A Study of The Actual And Imagined Identities of Salafis*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014, pp. 202-213.

² Conversation with Hassan Abu Hanieh, Dar al-Jasmin, Amman, 5/13/2015.

³ See Chapter 3, in particular section "Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony."

⁴ I am utilizing this term as Gramsci understood it: the state apparatus, its attendant practices of coercion and response to those, and routine procedures such as elections, state bureaucratic activities, administration and policies. See Chapter 3, section "Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony."

latter domain rather than the former. In such realm of politics, power is contested and transformed according to practices different from the overt and direct confrontation typical of political society, which is instead the favorite domain of Jihadi Salafism. In other words, by priming civil society, what Quietist Salafis do is hardly apolitical. Moreover, as Tarrow suggested, “[s]ome movements are profoundly apolitical, and focus on their internal lives or those of their members. But even such movements...encounter authorities in conflictual ways, because it is these authorities who are responsible for law and order and for setting the norms for society.”⁵

There is no way to circumvent the fact that the norms, rules and practices the modern state upholds are at odds with Salafism: in confronting and relating to this institution, Quietist Salafis espouse an ideology whose chief coordinates are similar to - at times hardly distinguishable at all from - Jihadi Salafism. We ought not to juxtapose these two branches as political versus apolitical, even less so as radical versus moderate: Salafism, as the foundational discourse I outlined in Chapter 4, is never moderate in its approach to Islam. Neither are the implications it draws from and builds upon the Islamic discursive field.

Experts on Salafism with whom I talked differed in many regards over the assessments of this phenomenon. However, they all agreed that the main difference between Quietist and Jihadi Salafis lies not in creed, values or ideology: it lies in a strategic choice pertaining to the most appropriate means to establish an Islamic polity (however blurry its contours).⁶ The choice lies between clashing headlong with state power or avoiding direct confrontation with it: as Gramsci would put it, whether to wage a war of movement or a war of position.

⁵ Tarrow, Sidney G. *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press, [1998] 2011, p. 3.

⁶ Conversations with Marwan Shehadeh, Dar al-Jasmin, Amman, 4/8/2015; Hassan Abu Hanieh, Dar al-Jasmin, Amman, 5/13/2015; and Ibrahim Gharaibeh, Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, 11/23/2015.

Muhammad Nasir ad-Din Al-Albani (1914-1999) chose a war of position. His impact on the definition and development of current Salafism is widely recognized and immediately apparent: author of hundreds of publications, his sermons and lectures recorded in countless tapes and now podcasts, he groomed dozens of disciples, and attracted thousands of followers. Research centers have been named after him, and his name is still widely cited and referred in online fora almost twenty years after his death. ‘Albanism’ is sometimes used to indicate his school of thought and the intellectual legacy his pupils have been fighting over. In light of these considerations, we can understand his influence and role as an intellectual by looking at how he utilized the latent political elements inscribed into the Salafi discourse for spurring social and political mobilization: a social appropriation of tradition, articulated along the mechanisms of *diffusion, elaboration and systematization*.

Life of Al-Albani

The life of Al-Albani is fairly well documented, including a variety of hagiographies available online.⁷ Born in Albania (as his name reveals) right after the independence of the country from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, he hailed from a poor family of watchmakers.⁸ Shortly afterwards his father, a conservative and devout Muslim, chose to move the family to Syria, resenting the marked westernization and secularization of his native country. They resettled in Damascus, soon to be ruled by the French in the framework of the mandate from the League of Nations.

⁷ See for example www.islamway.com/bindex.php?section=scholarinfo&scholar_id=47

⁸ Al-Albani will continue repairing watches throughout his life alongside his activities as preacher and scholar.

Al-Albani displayed from a very young age a keen interest in religious studies, influenced by his pious family and later on, as a teenager, by the intellectual climate of the Syrian capital.⁹ It seems in fact that his interest in the study of the *ahadith*, for which he will become a recognized authority in the Muslim world at large, developed so early, and so rigorously, that his father tried to dissuade him to spend so much time, as a child, in such occupation. Allegedly, his father feared also his son slowly drifting away from the family hanafi *madhhab*,¹⁰ a cause of distress and tension between the two.¹¹

Al-Albani was first under the tutelage of Sheikh Sayyed al-Burhani, a local hanafi scholar specialized in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Soon enough, he came into contact with Rashid Rida's *Al-Manar* publication, possibly the most influential Islamist newsletter of the day, containing *in nuce* some of the elements that will contribute to the emergence of Salafism in the second half of the century.¹²

In the Syrian capital, Al-Albani would spend his spare time in *Al-Maktabah Al-Dhahiriyyah*, a library containing thousands of religious texts and manuscripts, to the extent that he was provided a private study room by the library administration.¹³ His work and research on *ahadith* gained him already a certain fame and following. He was never to attain any formal degree in Islamic studies or related subjects. However, this would not represent an impediment for him in that authority in Salafi circles is based mostly on peer recognition as opposed to

⁹ Al-Albani admits this much in a series of autobiographical notes. Haddi, Essam Mousa. *The life of Sheikh Albani: In his own words*, 2011, pp. 6-8, available at <https://shaikhalbaani.wordpress.com/>

¹⁰ See *Nubdah Mukhtasirah 'an as-Sirah adh-Dhahiriyyah li-Fadilah ash-Sheikh Muhammad Nasr ad-Din Bin Al-Hajj Noah Al-Albani Rahmatullah Ta'ali*, [A summary of the biography for the virtue of Sheikh Muhammad Nasr ad-Din Bin Al-Hajj Noah Al-Albani May the Mercy of God Come to Him], available at <http://saaid.net/Warathah/1/albani.htm>, accessed 10/2/2016. For the concept of *madhhab*, see Chapter 4, section "Salafism: a philological note on a disputed term."

¹¹ Olidort, Jacob. "The Politics of 'Quietist' Salafism." *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, Analysis Paper No. 18, February 2015, p. 8.

¹² For a discussion on Rida see Chapter 4, section "Salafism: a philological note on a disputed term."

¹³ Haadi, 2011, p. 5.

formal titles.¹⁴ Al-Albani's encyclopedic knowledge and the rigorous methodology he was developing (configuring the Salafi *manhaj* described in the previous chapter) indeed sufficed to build his reputation as one of the most prominent young scholars of the day.

Around 1945, alongside his work as watchmaker and his own passion for studying and research, he was asked to deliver lectures on a variety of topics concerning his approach to Islam,¹⁵ in particular in relation to the life of the Prophet, the Sunnah, the collections of *ahadith*, and the works of classic thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Abdul-Wahhab. While these meetings were never official and always held in private houses, established 'ulama, sufis and hanafi scholars became increasingly suspicious over Al-Albani's positions, accusing him of Wahhabi leanings.¹⁶ Other prominent sheikhs (such as Abd Al-Fateh al-Imam, head of the Young Muslims Society in Syria) defended him, eventually making it possible for Al-Albani to be hired at the Department of Religious Studies and *Shari'ah* at the University of Damascus in 1955.

By that time, Al-Albani started travelling regularly across Syria; soon afterwards, he was invited to lecture in Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. His fame then spread outside the Arab world, and Indian 'ulama in Benares offered him the direction of the *Ahadith* Department at the local Islamic university. This event is of particular significance, since, as we are going to see below, these scholars represented the neo-*Ahl al-Hadith* movement, a revivalist Islamic current which would largely shape Al-Albani's approach to Islam and consequent ideological outlook.

¹⁴ The case of Ali Al-Halabi is similar. Reputedly one of the most prominent Salafi scholars in Jordan, yet he holds no degree, unlike some of his fellow preachers. See Abu Rumman, Muhammad and Hassan Abu Hanieh. *The 'Islamic Solution' in Jordan: Islamists, the State and the Venture of Democracy and Security*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013, p. 317, for a list of prominent Salafi sheikhs in Jordan. Younger generations seem however to be drifting away from this system, as titles and degrees feature more and more prominently amongst important credentials for scholars.

¹⁵ Olidort, 2015, p. 9

¹⁶ Haadi, 2011, p. 9. See also *Nubdah Mukhtasirah*, where it specifically mentions Al-Albani was accused of '*wahhabi dal'* [wahhabi stray]. As noticed in Chapter 4, 'Wahhabi' may indeed be used by Wahhabi opponents as a derogatory label.

The break out of hostilities between Pakistan and India will force Al-Albani to turn down the offer.

In Syria matters were not easier. At the height of Pan-Arabism, a radical wing of the Ba'th party pushed for the unification of the country with Egypt.¹⁷ In such climate, the position of Islamic scholars such as Al-Albani was becoming increasingly precarious. Saudi Arabia, in its confrontation with Nasserism and its regional allies, represented a safe haven for all sorts of persecuted Islamists.¹⁸ Al-Albani was thus offered a post at the newly established University of Medina in 1960, thanks to the good offices of Abdul Aziz bin Baz, then vice-dean of the institute and future great *mufti* of the kingdom between 1993 and 1999. However, his stint in Medina will end soon, in 1963: Al-Albani, notwithstanding his powerful sponsor, clashed with both the increasingly influential Muslim Brotherhood community hosted in the kingdom¹⁹ as well as the Wahhabi establishment. Of particular theoretical significance is this last confrontation: Al-Albani's rigorous *manhaj* was exposing the inherent contradictions of Wahhabism, whereby an

¹⁷ The ill-fated union which took the name of United Arab Republic was arguably both the apotheosis and the most glaring failure at institutionalizing Pan-Arab aspirations. The union will last only three years (1958-1961), in this brief time escalating the political and ideological confrontation in the Arab world between the radical or progressive camp (Egypt, Syria, Algeria, from 1958 also Iraq) and the moderate or conservative states (Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, the Gulf). See Kerr, Malcolm H. *The Arab cold war, 1958-1964: a study of ideology in politics*. Oxford University Press, 1965.

¹⁸ Lacroix, Stephan. "Between revolution and apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*. Hurst & Co, [2009] 2014, p. 62. It is worth mention how this policy was particularly welcoming towards the Muslim Brotherhood, which after the short honeymoon at the onset of Nasser's rule (1952-1956), became the most important political opposition force in the country. The repression of the regime was fearsome. Amongst the most prominent personalities who reached Saudi Arabia from Egypt in those days was Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Saiyd, arguably the most influential radical Islamist thinker of the XX century together with Ruollah Khomeini in Iran and Abu 'Ala al-Mawdudi in Pakistan. For a discussion on the influence of Qutb and Mawududi on Jihadi Salafism, see Chapter 6, section "*Al-Wala'a wa al-Bara'*: Loyalty and Disavowal setting the boundaries of the Islamic polity."

¹⁹ See fn. 18 for the Muslim Brotherhood presence in Saudi Arabia. As we will see, the relation between the Brotherhood and most Salafi currents has been strain and tense to this very day, as confirmed to me during interviews with both Salafis and *Ikhwan* in Jordan. Conversations with director of *Jama'a al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*, Amman, 6/16/2015 (name not recorded upon request); Salafi scholar at Al-Albani Center for Methodology and Research, 6/28/2016 (name not recorded upon request); Ibrahim al-Sukkari, Muslim Brotherhood leader, Amman, 7/15/2015.

avowedly claim to the return at the origins as Islam was in reality configuring a prone imitation (*'taqlid'*) and reliance of the Hanbali *madhhab*.²⁰

Upon his return to Syria, he was put again under government surveillance. He was in fact arrested twice, in 1967 after the Six Day War and then again in 1969, when he was detained for 8 months. He was accused to be the head of a subversive group, although this was never proved. It is more likely that, during the 1970s, with the decline of Pan-Arabism and the rise of Islamism, the Ba'thist regime in Syria would look upon Islamists of any kind with much concern,²¹ especially if popular like Al-Albani. Put under house arrest in the late 1970s, he then resolved to leave the country for good. After a short stint in war-ravaged Lebanon, he settled in Jordan in 1981, where he will spend the rest of his days until 1999.

Al-Albani enjoyed somewhat better circumstances under the Hashemites as opposed to the Ba'th, since the Jordanian regime was more lenient in letting him articulate his religious message, albeit within certain limits.²² he had to give lessons in private locations, as he was forbidden to preach publicly or offer Friday sermons. These prohibitions notwithstanding, "his followers and students progressively and continuously grew in number. By the 1990s, his followers had grown to such a point that they actually competed in size, number and influence with the largest Islamist movement in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood."²³ Once again, in light of this fact, the 'apolitical stance' of Al-Albani and his adepts needs to be investigated and

²⁰ For a discussion on this point, see Chapter 4, section "The history behind the concept: Salafism as an emerging category." As Lacroix (2014, p. 66) notices: "Wahhabism's original paradox...made these *'ulama* ill-armed to defend themselves on the intellectual level, all the more so as al-Albani's creed (*'aqidah*) was irreproachably Wahhabi."

²¹ We shall remember how the escalation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood will lead to a period of open confrontation in the late 1970s, with the Ba'th finally crushing the Brotherhood in Hamah in 1982 with a death toll of some 30,000.

²² See Moaddel, Mansoor. "Religion and the state: the singularity of the Jordanian religious experience." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15.4 (2002): 527-568, p. 535.

²³ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 262.

explained rather than taken at face value. In Jordan, Al-Albani will finally elaborate his approach to Islam, becoming the most influential representative of the Quietist Salafi current.²⁴

At-Tafsiyah wa at-Tarbiyah: Purification and Education as the Cornerstones of a Political Regeneration

“My entire purpose in this life, following obedience to God’s commands and laws, is familiarizing Muslims through lessons, lectures and books about the correct [understanding of] the life of the Prophet, from all perspectives and to the best of my abilities.”²⁵ As these lines make clear, Al-Albani considered himself first and foremost a scholar and a preacher. Nevertheless, a program with evident political implications emerges from his writings and lecturing. As Al-Albani pondered over his goals, the ways to achieve them, and his role in society, he outlined an “ideological vision”²⁶ which became more consistent and articulated during the latter part of his life in Jordan.

This vision is consistent with the definition of ideology I proposed in Chapter 3.²⁷ Al-Albani conjures up a normative social theory that is relatively stable and coherent; it is opposed to other ideological constructs (in his case, state secularism and other rival Islamist projects, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Jihadi Salafism); and last, this construct delineates criteria for membership in a proposed polity.²⁸ I refer to this project as ‘*At-Tafsiyyah wa at-Tarbiyyah*,’ ‘Purification and Education,’ by the title of one of Al-Albani’s most well-known and important

²⁴ As I have discussed, in the literature other recurring labels for this movement are ‘Traditionalist’ or ‘Scientific’ Salafism. See chapter 4, “Salafism: the geography of a discursive field.”

²⁵ Al-Albani, Muhammad Nasir ad-Din. *Bidayat al-sul ila tafdil al-rasul* [The Beginnings of Reaching the Details of the Prophet], p. 7, quoted in ‘Abd al-Aziz bin Muhammad al-Sadhan, *al-Imam al-Albani: Durus wa-mawaqif wa-‘ibar* [Imam al-Albani: Lessons and Sessions and Expressions], Dar al-Tawhid, 2008, p. 253–4.

²⁶ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 280.

²⁷ See Chapter 3, section “Ideology and Discourse, Philosophy and Common Sense.”

²⁸ See Hanson, Stephen. *Post-Imperial Democracies: Ideology and Party Formation in Third Republic France, Weimar Germany, and Post-Soviet Russia*. Cambridge, 2010, p. xix.

essays.²⁹ Prominent Salafi scholars who studied under Al-Albani, such as ‘Ali al-Halabi, consider *at-Tafsiyyah wa at-Tarbiyyah* the core of his message and use the same expression to refer to it.³⁰

Where does this project stem from? Al-Albani’s subscribed early in his formative years to the *Ahl al-Hadith* perspective,³¹ a jurisprudential approach that emerged between the second and third century of the Islamic era. This perspective would undergo a revival in the Indian subcontinent starting from the mid-XIX century, precisely the neo-*Ahl al-Hadith* movement that offered Al-Albani a post in Benares.³² For Al-Albani, the (neo-) *Ahl al-Hadith* correctly recognized the importance of the *ahadith*, which provide “answers to problems with no solutions in the Qur’an without calling on human reason.”³³ Hence, beyond the indisputable word of the *Qur’an*, the *Ahl al-Hadith* approach sets the *ahadith* and their study (‘*ilm al-hadith*’) as the cornerstone of religious disciplines. As Lacroix argues, this move makes *fiqh* a mere appendix to the study of the *ahadith* (‘*fiqh al-hadith*’): the sheltering of ‘*ilm al-hadith*’ from human reason must be total, so that “the critique of the *matn* (content) must be strictly formal, i.e. linguistic or grammatical. Only the *sanad* (chain of transmission of hadith) may be truly called into question,

²⁹ Al-Albani, Muhammad Nasir ad-Din. *At-tafsiyyah wa at-tarbiyyah wa hajjah al-muslimin ilahima* [Purification and Education and the need of those for the Muslims] Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah, Amman, 2000.

³⁰ Al-Halabi, ‘Ali. *The Life of Shaykh al-Albani as an Example of at-Tasfiyah wa-t-Tarbiyah*. Recorded lecture, 2000, available at [http://islamiclectures.us/audio/AH/AH%20-%20The%20Life%20of%20Shaykh%20al-Albani%20as%20an%20Example%20of%20Tasfiyah%20wa't-Tarbiyah%20\(13th%20QSS%20-%201999\).mp3](http://islamiclectures.us/audio/AH/AH%20-%20The%20Life%20of%20Shaykh%20al-Albani%20as%20an%20Example%20of%20Tasfiyah%20wa't-Tarbiyah%20(13th%20QSS%20-%201999).mp3)

³¹ Haadi, 2010, p. 16. Al-Albani reportedly said, “I hope from Allaah, the One free of all defects and the Most High, that I have been given the ability [*tawfiq*] to follow that way [i.e., the *Ahl al-Hadith*], and to show it, or even part of it, to the Muslims in a practical way.”

³² The medieval *Ahl al-Hadith* stood opposed to the *Ahl al-Ra’y*. These two views represented a theological and jurisprudential confrontation. The latter approach suggested the deployment of opinion and reason to evaluate legal matters. In modern times, it was adopted by Rida’s *Al-Manar*, once more attesting how improper is labeling ‘Salafism’ the Islamic reform movement of those days as well as Rida’s own intellectual journey. Al-Albani was to abandon his initial adherence to Rida’s ideas, which were trying to frame a modernist Islamic revival. The inherent tensions in such project will spur the emergence of many different currents, of which Al-Albani Salafism is an important example. See Lacroix, 2013, p. 64.

³³ Ibid.

and it is therefore by studying the *sanad* that the authenticity of a hadith can be determined.”³⁴ It is precisely by engaging in this careful philological reconstruction of the *sanad* that Al-Albani gained his fame. He relegated reason and human interpretation to a subsidiary role, at best, in the quest for reaching an unadulterated understanding of Islam.³⁵

At this juncture we may locate the uncompromising rejection of any innovation - *bid'a* – characterizing Salafism, since it would make the recovery of such pristine Islam impossible. Bar the removal of any unlawful and harming *bid'a*, true, proper Islam is not within reach: “since we all know that our religion [*din*] has been wounded by many attempts to change its truths [*muhawat kathirah li-taghrir haqa'iq*], and some of those attempts managed to attain such change and falsification [*at-taghrir wa at-tahrif*], known to many people, but other are not aware of it, while they think to be still within the religion.”³⁶ As this passage shows, Al-Albani did not see these changes and falsifications as a mere scholarly issue: Muslims were not aware of practicing a deviant cult. Insofar as Islam is a comprehensive way of life, it followed that socially, morally and spiritually the very survival of the *ummah* is at stake: “[w]e need to investigate the reasons which led the Muslims to this state of terrible disgrace [*al-halah al-muzriyah al-siy'iah*], and a situation of humiliating disgrace [*al-wad'a al-mahin al-muzriy*], and the secret lies in their arrival in this decadent humiliation as we have to investigate the treatments

³⁴ Ibid. For the issue of *sanad*, the issue adjudication of the chain of transmission of the *ahadith* from the Prophet, see Mejer, Roel. “Politicising al-jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl: Rabī’ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī and the transnational battle for religious authority,” in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh and Joas Wagemakers, eds. *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam*. Brill, 2011.

³⁵ For Wiktorowicz this relegation of rationality, critical analysis and intellectual questioning is one of the prime features of Salafism as a whole. See Wiktorowicz, Quintan. “Anatomy of the Salafi movement.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29.3 (2006).

³⁶ Al-Albani, 2000, p. 12.

and the medicaments [*al- 'alaj wa al-duwa*'], so that we may survive [*li-natamakkan min al-najah*] from this misery and decadence."³⁷

'Purification and Education' was thus the remedy Al-Albani proposed to cure the ills of the Islamic community. In his view, it is an all-encompassing instrument, capable of subsuming the entirety of Islam: creed ('*aqida*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), exegesis (*tafsir*), historiography (*tarikh*) and norms of behaviour (or 'enjoy the good and forbid the evil,' *al- 'amr bi-l-ma 'ruf wa-n-nahy 'an al- munkar*).³⁸ Purification would entail the purging of beliefs and practices that are not explicitly indicated in the *Qur'an* and in the *Sunnah*: "we want to advise [*nasahu*] all Muslims, especially those dealing with *fiqh*, for them to understand what lies in the deviation [*'ala fahm ma waq'a fih al-inhiraf*]...and for returning to the rulings [*bi-l-rujwu' al-tahkim*] of the *ayah* of the *Qur'an*."³⁹ The implication ensuing from a rigorous adherence to these propositions in terms of *madhhab* is the cutting of the Gordian knot: "if there is a sound *hadith*, then that is my *madhhab* [*idha sahh hadith fahuwa madhhabiyy*]."⁴⁰ It is in this way that Al-Albani takes both the (neo-) *Ahl al-Hadith* and Wahhabism to their logical and most radical conclusion: the rejection of the Islamic tradition as passed on through the centuries, and the attempt to re-configure in its stead a supposedly unadulterated and ahistorical one. As Lauzière argues, "Al-Albani set the bar higher than other scholars: not everyone who claimed to be a Salafi or abided by the main tenets of the Salafi creed was worthy of that name."⁴¹

We may think of 'Purification and Education' as articulated along four main points. First, it is a philosophy which acts upon the epistemological move I described in chapter 4, going back

³⁷ Ibid, p. 6. It is worth mentioning how this tone reminds of the opening of Sayyed Qutb's *Milestones*, where "mankind stands on the brink of a precipice."

³⁸ Excerpts from 'Ali Al-Halabi, 2000.

³⁹ Al-Albani, 2000, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 16. See also pp. 14-16 for a critique of the four schools.

⁴¹ Lauzière, p. 224. As a matter of fact, Al-Albani's uncompromising stance on the Islamic tradition (including therefore also Hanbalism) was amongst the chief reasons for his falling off with the Wahhabi '*ulama* in Saudi Arabia as noted above, see Lacroix, 2013, pp. 62-64.

to the “methodology of the pious ancestors.”⁴² Second, on this basis it then advances a call (*da'wah*) for living in accordance with the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah as outlined* according to such methodology (the Salafi *manhaj*). This call is direct and active form of civil engagement predicated on educating those unaware or unfamiliar with ‘true’ Islam. In this sense, Al-Albani’s *da'wa* fits neatly Gramsci’s idea of a ‘war of position,’ an educational and ideological battle fought for the moral and intellectual regeneration of society.

Third, it is a warning not to associate with - and in case, to purify oneself from - any modern practice and ideology (the much resented *bid'a*). The reach of this proposition is indeed vast, as it disqualifies not only what Salafis hold as western modern ideas (liberalism, capitalism, socialism, democracy, feminism, and the likes), but also any perilous and destructive contamination with western modern political institutions such as state bureaucracies and agencies, parties, syndicates, lobbies, or any such form of political association.⁴³ The aversion to the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, is articulated precisely on their lack of ‘education’ in religious matters and their adoption of foreign, modern instrument of political association.⁴⁴ Here, ‘Purification and Education’ manifests its rejectionist and rival bent towards other ideology, as suggested above. Relatedly, it seeks to re-configure politics according to Al-Albani’s famous *fatwa* where he says, “leaving politics is political [*min al-siyasa tark al-siyasa*]”:⁴⁵ “[p]olitics, according to Al-Albani, is already embedded in the Islam, and decreed as

⁴² Haadi, 2010, p. 31. I use here the term ‘philosophy’ in the Gramscian sense, a more coherent and reasoned construction of one’s own worldview connected to her life experience and built out of the ‘common sense.’ See Chapter 3, section “Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony.”

⁴³ Olidort, 2015, p. 16. See also Shaqra, Mohammad Ibrahim. “*La Difa ‘aan ‘an al Salafiya, bal Difa ‘aan ‘Anha*” [Not in Defense of the Salafiya but Rather Defending It], without a publisher, 2002, p. 3.

⁴⁴ The Muslim Brotherhood not only founded parties which run for elections, but it is also conspicuously present in professional trade unions and syndicates. See Zahid, Mohammed, and Michael Medley. “Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Sudan.” *Review of African political economy* 33.110 (2006): 693-708.

⁴⁵ Lacroix, 2013, p. 69.

such by Islamic *Sharia*.”⁴⁶ Again, the alleged ‘apolitical’ stance of Quietist Salafis is such only insofar as we consider the political as the realm of modern (mostly formal and official) political institutions. The moment we adumbrate a larger field of politics, then also this branch of Salafism is indisputably involved in the game for altering existing power relations. Taking ‘Purification and Education’ as a philosophy in the Gramscian sense⁴⁷ entails pondering over the unity of thought and action, where life is inescapably imbued in politics.

This point is epitomized by ‘Purification and Education’ fourth and last point: ultimately, it is “[s]triving to revive an Islamic way of life, establishing an Islamic society implementing the law of Allah on earth.”⁴⁸ It is a political project where,

“there is only ‘one path’ to bringing about a revival and renaissance in the Muslim world, in its modern reality; and, only ‘one path’ to the resumption of the Islamic way of life; and, only ‘one path’ to achieving the ultimate aim of establishing the Islamic state (the Caliphate). Therefore, the *manhaj* of ‘purification and education’ soon became the cornerstone for the ideological construct and framework upon which Jordanian Conservative Salafism was founded.”⁴⁹

Hence, the Islamic state is not something that will emerge out of the voluntarist and direct effort toward that goal: there is no ‘war of movement’ in this project. Instead, it will be a necessary and inevitable outcome of the purification and education the *ummah* shall go through. As Al-Albani himself stated in endearing terms, “[b]uild an Islamic state in your hearts, and it shall be built for you on your land.”⁵⁰ Indeed, “[r]ather than a submissive call to political

⁴⁶ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 269.

⁴⁷ See fn. 43.

⁴⁸ Haadi, 2010, p. 31.

⁴⁹ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 282.

⁵⁰ Al-Albani, 2000, p. 35.

restraint, ‘purification and education’ was in fact intended as the foundation for building an Islamic state and society.”⁵¹

The Need for an Architect: the Role of Al-Albani as Organic Intellectual

“If you want to build a house, you need an architect.”⁵² this quote epitomizes the most common attitude I gathered during various conversations with Muslims attending seminars run by Salafi sheikhs or around Friday prayers. They all made explicit reference at the knowledge, expertise and wisdom these Islamic scholars embodied for them. Seminar attendees would refer to Islamic tenets themselves, and had no qualms in articulating their views on the correct approach to Islam and its practice. However, they tended often times to defer to the sheikh’s knowledge when I prodded them to clarify or elaborate on their stance. I perceived what seemed to be genuine respect, deference and admiration towards the preacher. A prominent sheikh at the Al-Albani Center confirmed these views: “The majority people have an understanding [of Islam] that is popular and general [*sha’abiyy wa ‘amm*]. Salafis’ understanding is scientific [*ilmiyy*]. Unfortunately, sermons in popular religion are not scientific but emotional and passionate. Salafism is more systematic, organized, and grounds everything in sources of Islam: this is what appeals to people, they see proofs [*dalil*].”⁵³

Direct engagement in politics does not seem to feature as a motive for adhering to Traditional or Quietist Salafism. Rather, the certainty provided by an avowedly non-partisan (i.e., non-politically affiliated with groups or parties) approach steeped into a rigorous study of Islam confers the devotee a sense of safety and certainty (“Salafism is a trustworthy [*amin*]

⁵¹ Olidort, 2015, p. 16

⁵² Exchange with Salafi seminar attendee, Hujjaj Mosque, Rusayfa, 5/20/2016.

⁵³ Conversation with a Salafi scholar, see fn. 19.

ideology.”)⁵⁴ The three mechanisms I proposed⁵⁵ configure the specific role Salafi scholars’ intellectual effort plays in this dynamic eventually leading to the emergence of a social movement.

Diffusion

“No, Sheikh Al-Albani did not found Salafism in Jordan. Salafism was here, already.”⁵⁶

The sheikh at the Islamic research center named after Al-Albani himself left me quite dumbfounded: in fact, according to any other source I consulted, as well as during interviews with local experts,⁵⁷ Al-Albani is regarded as the founder of Salafism in Jordan. My interviewee conceded however that, “Sheikh Al-Albani deepened and spread”⁵⁸ Salafism in the country: possibly an attempt to square the circle by downplaying the ‘alien’ nature of Salafism in the Jordanian context and acknowledging at one time the reputation of Al-Albani as the father of this Islamic current in the country.

In fact, before he settled in Amman in 1980, the country had had only limited, if at all, exposure to Salafi precepts and tenets: there was no Salafi trend, let alone movement, worthy of the name. It is precisely in this situation that we notice Al-Albani’s pivotal role, as an intellectual, in introducing and spreading in Jordan new sets of ideas, concepts and interpretations - what I have referred to as Salafi *manhaj*. The mechanism *diffusion*⁵⁹ captures and describes how Al-Albani’s scholarly effort and production contributed to the birth of Salafism in Jordan.

⁵⁴ Ibid. The sheikh used the expression ‘*wajah nathariyyah*’ when indicating the comprehensive system of thought of Salafism. In my note, I recorded both the original Arabic and my immediate translation as ‘ideology,’ as it seemed the most appropriate translation in the context of this speech.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 3, section “Contention and Mechanisms.”

⁵⁶ Conversation with a Salafi scholar, see fn. 19.

⁵⁷ Conversations with Marwan Shehadeh and Hassan Abu Hanieh, see fn. 6.

⁵⁸ Conversation with a Salafi scholar, see fn 19.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 3, section “Contention and Mechanisms.”

Al-Albani represented in fact the main conduit for the introduction of Salafi precepts in an era when other means to get exposure to Salafism were much more limited than today's: no internet or social media, mass communication under tight government control (and no pan-Arab channels of the likes of Al-'Arabiyyah or Al-Jazeera yet on the horizon), limited, if any, distribution of Salafi texts.

As an intellectual, Al-Albani operated within a network of peers, religious scholars and preachers, to whom he had access precisely by virtue of belonging to such 'critical community.'⁶⁰ As a hub in a network he could then introduce the Jordanian public to Salafism. His formation prior to coming to Jordan featured interactions and contacts with different milieus, scholarly circles, and religious leaders. In Damascus, he was first exposed to Rida's *Al-Manar* and the anti-French and anti-colonial climate of mandate Syria; he engaged in his early studies the Hanafi *madhhab*, debating and confronting the damascene '*ulama*, eventually parting ways with them as we have seen. In his correspondence with the Islamic University at Benares, he gained a more subtle and sophisticated appreciation of the neo-*Ahl al-Hadith* movement, whose rigorous, if rigid, revivalist spirit was to have such a profound impact on his understanding of *fiqh* and development of a proper Salafi *manhaj*. In Medina, under the sponsorship of Sheikh Bin Baz and acquainted with the upper echelons of Wahhabi scholars, he further refined his *manhaj* by taking in the contributions - as well as what he perceived as the misgivings - of Wahhabism and its relation to Hanbalism.

These experiences enabled Al-Albani and his scholarship to represent a major venue for the transmission - however filtered by its own sensibilities and proclivities - of ideas and concepts formulated in locales (intellectually and geographically) other than Jordan, whose cultural and religious scene had yet to be exposed to or contaminated by Salafism. The

⁶⁰ See fn. 99, Chapter 3.

possibility of deploying within the Jordanian context the cognitive lenses of a specific Islamic *manhaj* thus represents an important legacy of Al-Albani's work, which made available such ideas within a discursive field that, while Islamic, was not acquainted with Salafism unique traits.

Elaboration

As I suggested in Chapter 3, diffusion helps us assessing to whom the intellectual is in debt when it comes to his scholarship and intellectual production. For Al-Albani, the neo-*Ahl al-Hadith* approach and Saudi Wahhabism represent his main references. Elaboration tells us the extent of the debt. Elaboration is the creative effort representing the intellectual's own contribution to an existing or emerging discursive field.

In this sense, Al-Albani did not create or invent Salafism: as I have shown, its gestation cannot be attributed to any one individual, being instead the product of an idiosyncratic and complex intellectual history.⁶¹ Yet, Al-Albani decisively participated in such history. He built upon some of the elements he saw inscribed within the emerging 'scientific' - *'ilmiyy* - discursive space of Salafism. He then further developed such discourse by both specifying its methodology (rejecting any exercise of unwarranted *tafsir* and *taqlid*) and then extending its reach (venturing outside the domain of jurisprudence).⁶²

Al-Albani's contribution occurred first on the basis of his acquaintance with the neo-*Ahl al-Hadith* school. I have mentioned how the reliance on the *ahadith* to cover any matter not directly and explicitly dealt with by the *Qur'an* intended to bypass the interference of human reason, sentiments, preferences: "the *ahl-hadith*-based Qur'anic exegesis/*manhaj* (*tafsir*) is characterized by an unflinching epistemological addiction to hadith-based and hadith constrained

⁶¹ See Chapter 4, section "The history behind the concept: Salafism as an emerging category."

⁶² For a discussion of parallel developments in Salafism at large, see Chapter 4, section "Salafism: the geography of a discursive field."

bodies of knowledge and is known as *tafsir bi-l-ma'thur* or the traditionalist, hadith-based exegesis.”⁶³ Duderija contends this approach has profound implications in terms of understanding of the *Sunnah*: “[t]he concept of Sunna according to the NTS school of thought is that defined by the muhaddithun (i.e. people who were involved in compilation, recording, transmission and criticism of hadith, and some of the jurists, the fuqaha) as those statements (*qawl*), actions (*fi'l*) and tacit approvals (*taqrir*) found in the authentic hadith collections.”⁶⁴

Given these developments, Al-Albani’s focus and expertise on the *ahadith* made his reflections and pronouncements a reconfiguration of the *Sunnah* itself. Al-Albani’s careful study of the *sanad* resulted in *ahadith*-based *Sunnah*,⁶⁵ probably his most enduring scholarly legacy. The Salafi method - *manhaj* - whereby he compiled his *ahadith* collections may very well be rigid; yet perhaps precisely because of this it was perceived at the same time as firm, stable and reliable (“*amin*” as I was often told in various conversations with Salafis), accounting to a degree for the fame Al-Albani’s work would acquire even beyond Salafi circles.

His distinctive *manhaj* and the collections of the *ahadith* he so compiled are the basis upon which he established and then elaborated his social-religious project I discussed. While it signals the debts contracted by Al-Albani in his intellectual journey,⁶⁶ this work remains firmly

⁶³ Duderija, Adis. “Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur’an-Sunna Hermeneutics and Its Interpretational Implications.” *Religion Compass* 5/7 (2011): 314–325, p. 316. Italics as in the original.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 317. Duderija indicates as ‘Neo-Traditionalist Salafis’ (NTS) what I refer to through my study as Quietist Salafis. Italics as in the original.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 315. It is worth quoting Duderija at length to clarify how the *Sunnah* of Al-Albani and like-minded Salafis is fundamentally different from folk, popular understandings (I am using the word ‘folk’ as in the Gramscian sense of ‘folklore’, beliefs and practices forming the substratum of common sense): “[d]uring the first three centuries the concept of Sunna was conceptualized in terms of recognized Islamic religious norms and accepted standards of conduct derived from the religious and ethical principles introduced by the Prophet. It was a rather ambiguous, general, not-systematically defined action-behavioural practice of the early Muslim community predominantly formulated, preserved and transmitted either orally or in actu [in acting, *ndr*]. This concept of Sunna, furthermore, was independent of any written recording and existed in a hermeneutically symbiotic relationship with the Qur’an [...]. I refer to this as hadith-independent concept of Sunna.”

⁶⁶ It is worth noticing how ideas advocating the separation from society of vanguardist groups to prepare a spiritual and political renovation of society seem to cut across cultures and contexts. For example, Mustafa Shoukri in Egypt and his group *Al-Hijra wa al-Tawhid* retreated in a remote region in Upper Egypt whence to launch a campaign of

his own distinct and direct contribution to the Salafist discursive field. Salafism is clearly a purist and puritanical discourse, bent essentially to spur a revival of Islam via the rediscovery and true adoption, on the part of the Muslim community, of the unsurpassed example of the pious ancestor. Yet, there is no comparable previous effort to instruct actual and potential followers of the Salafi *manhaj* which displays the relative coherence, cogency, and rival attitude of Al-Albani's manifesto:

“Thus, after cleansing [*tafsiyah*] the religion of these issues and after clarifying [*idah*] what it is that need be initiated and what it is that must be sustained, we must educate and cultivate a new generation [*la budda min al-tarbiyah al-nash' al-jadid*] based on this proper and sound knowledge [*al-'ilm al-sahih*]. This education and cultivation is what shall reap, for us, an uncontaminated Islamic society [*al-mujtama' al-islamiy al-safiy*]; and, consequently, establish, for us, the state of Islam [*wa bi-at-taliy taqimu lana dawlah al-Islam*]. Without these two conditions [*muqaddimat*, also ‘introductions’ or ‘premises’], ‘sound knowledge’ and ‘proper education’ based on this sound knowledge, it is my belief that it will be impossible for the Islamic project to succeed [*yastahil an yaqumu qa'imah al-Islam*], or for Islamic rule [*hukm*] or the Islamic state to come about.”⁶⁷

Wahhabi scholars remained anchored to the Hanbali *madhhab* and the attendant subservience to the Saudi authority, already therefore considered a proper Islamic state.⁶⁸ The neo-*Ahl al-Hadith* did not build upon the methodological stance they shared with Al-Albani something akin - in its social and political reach - to the idea of ‘Purification and Education.’

Islamic rebirth for the country. Mao-Tse Tung and the Chinese Communist Party framed the ‘Long March’ in similar terms (albeit, of course, with different references). See also Della Porta, Donatella. *Social movements, political violence, and the state: A comparative analysis of Italy and Germany*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁶⁷ Al-Albani, 2000, p. 30.

⁶⁸ See chapter 4, section “The history behind the concept: Salafism as an emerging category.”

In this effort to conjure up guidelines for the revival of the proper Muslim, it is inevitable to transcend the confines of the personal and individual and venture into the social - given, as shown above, the abysmal conditions of the state of the *ummah*: “there is no way for salvation for the Muslims from the colonization, humiliation and ignominy that has afflicted them, there is no benefit in the Islamic groups and political sects – except by clinging to the authentic *Sunnah* upon the methodology of the Pious Predecessors, may Allaah [sic] be pleased with them all.”⁶⁹ Again, despite the avowedly ‘apolitical’ posturing, Al-Albani produces a call to social action that already contains *in nuce* the elements and traits for direct political engagement - as we are going to see shortly and in the next chapter. All things considered, ‘Purification and Education’ is Al-Albani’s most enduring and original contribution, enabling the transition from theological and jurisprudential dispositions into social and (possibly) political ones.

Systematization

The intellectuals’ ideological production comes to bear over the scattered and fragmented common sense of the subaltern: systematization rearranges such inchoate discursive formation and endows it with more coherence.⁷⁰ The subalterns engage in a cognitive re-assessment of (social) reality in light of the insights and orientation the ideology provides. This is not tantamount to claiming ideology shapes totally and inescapably the subaltern’s cognition. Rather, systematization works with and rearranges some of the elements embedded in the subaltern’s common sense.

Put otherwise, systematization accounts for how Al-Albani’s intellectual effort has not remained confined in the pages of his writings. Such effort could articulate in a meaningful and compelling way some of the scattered and unrelated elements making up a specific subaltern

⁶⁹ Haddi, 2010, p. 35.

⁷⁰ In Chapter 3, section “Contention and Mechanisms,” I defined systematization as “the tuning of ideologies and popular common sense.”

discursive formation. With ‘Purification and Education,’ Al-Albani’s work ultimately provided a narrative for potential and actual followers: within this narrative, they could find cues, reasons and explanations to make sense of their own experience and perception of social and political reality.

The ‘organicity’ of Al-Albani’s production - as an intellectual capable to relate to a certain social and cultural milieu - is manifest as ‘Purification and Education’ depicts a world where Islam itself is in peril. This danger does not spell ominous only at the individual and spiritual level, but also at the communal and social one. The corruption of Islam is due to the forsaking of *tawhid*, the introduction of *bid’a*, the adoption of references different from and rival to the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah*. Al-Albani does not contemplate any explicit reference to specific political and historical events, or to concrete social and economic conditions; however, the heyday of his popularity in Jordan came not surprisingly during the 1990s, the last part of his life coinciding with the tumultuous events that shook the country.⁷¹ Al-Albani’s pessimistic views over the fortunes of the Muslim world were already established (as Lacroix shows reporting on a lecture Al-Albani gave in Saudi Arabia in 1977);⁷² yet in Jordan they could then feed into the despair and discomfort so widespread in sections of society more directly hit by the harsh economic realities of the late 1980s,⁷³ the consequences of the aftermath of the Kuwaiti war, and the peace with Israel. While especially the latter two episodes are more immediately connected to the emergence of Jihadi Salafism, it is the case the Al-Albani laid the foundations for Salafism in Jordan, regardless of the specific branch.

⁷¹ See Chapter 4, section “Realignment: political and economic shifts at the end of the century.”

⁷² Al-Albani lecture reported in Lacroix, 2013, p. 69: “By *tafsiyah* I mean the purification of Islam of everything that is foreign to it and corrupts it. To that end the Sunnah must be purged from all the forged (*mawdu’*) and weak (*da’if*) hadith that it contains, so that the Qur'an may be interpreted in light of this authenticated Sunna and the notions and concepts passed down from our pious ancestors. *Tarbiyah* consists in instilling into our youth this authentic Islamic creed (*‘aqida*) drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunna.”

⁷³ See fn. 71.

In his ideological production, Al-Albani rearranges a discursive field - a formation of popular common sense - whereby the intended audience makes sense of such events and dynamics. The specific coordinates of 'Purification and Education,' insisting on spiritual renovation, acceptance and deepening of (Salafi) Islam, separation from alien and corrupting practices, sounded appealing to three main constituents, showing the social reach of Salafi discourse.⁷⁴

First, most disenfranchised sectors of Jordanian society - urban poor in Amman and Zarqa, or in impoverished southern cities such as Ma'an and Tafilah - could find in Al-Albani's Salafism a venue to connect their religious devotion with a more satisfactory and fulfilling explanation of their predicaments.⁷⁵ Al-Albani's work rearranges here what we may refer to as popular or folk Islam. How far is this form of Islam from Al-Albani's Salafism? Far enough for most people not to embrace it and for some devout Muslims to openly disparage it,⁷⁶ yet close enough for most to understand its spirit, and for some to actually adhere to it. Put differently, Salafism and popular forms of Islam widespread in Jordan are hardly equivalent.⁷⁷ Salafism entails embracing practices,⁷⁸ attitudes and beliefs⁷⁹ quite peculiar - when not outright

⁷⁴ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 315.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 272: "The majority of the followers and constituents of Salafism came from the working classes and from the more impoverished and economically, politically and socially marginalized communities in the country. The majority of them were also of Palestinian origin, as the spread of Salafism was concentrated in the more wretched Palestinian refugee camps, slums and outskirts of cities – particularly the city of al-Zarqa, which, until this day, remains the main hub of Salafism in Jordan."

⁷⁶ Conversation with Ibrahim Gharaibeh, see fn. 6; I base this observation on repeated interactions with Jordanians of different stripes.

⁷⁷ See fn 6. Conversation with Prof. Muhammad al-Khair Eiedat, Jordan University, Amman, 5/26/2015.

⁷⁸ Such practices include a specific dress code meant to replicate the attire of 7th century AD Muslims (long robe, skullcap, ankles exposed, sandals - when weather allows - long trimmed beard without prominent moustache). Also, Salafis are not allowed to smoke (much less of course using drugs of any kind). As a personal reflection I did not venture properly investigating, given that the rate of cigarettes or water pipes (*arghileh*) smoking is even to the casual observer so undeniably high and widespread in Jordan, one may wonder the costs of foregoing such habit. This cost can be calculated not only in terms of physical addiction, but also of social mingling and recreation, as smoking is a social more than an individual activity. One may indeed speculate about Salafism creating also group boundaries by means of enforcing this ban on tobacco on his members and closing one of the main venues for socialization outside the Salafi community.

unacceptable⁸⁰ - to the average Jordanian. Yet again, the reference to the pious ancestor, the idea of a pure and uncontaminated Islam, the reliance on the canonical holy texts, a general aversion to perceived ‘western’ corrupting practices (alcohol consumption, mingling of sexes, subversion of traditional social roles),⁸¹ the general aversion for Shi’ism and, last but not least, the proximity with Wahhabi Saudi Arabia make the transition possible, if certainly not automatic.

Second, it is not only the poor and the disenfranchised who adhere to Salafism. Quite importantly, the firm and secure structure Salafism provides may be very appealing to educated, pious believers, who subscribe to its ‘scientific’ - *‘ilmīy* - pretension. Some adepts chose to follow this path precisely in light of its purported further sophistication in understanding Islam: Abu Rumman explains, speaking of a Salafi, that “his social background helps to explain his proclivity for Salafism: he was raised in a family that appreciates knowledge, literature, and culture, and they apply this knowledge in their daily lives.”⁸² This proclivity may account also for adepts hailing from those less cultured milieus mentioned above. Salafism alleged firmer grip on religious tenets may entice precisely because it offers the possibility of bridging a perceived educational gap: “[a]lthough the Tafila Salafis tend to have only a modest education (high school diplomas, with one or two exceptions) they are interested in furthering their religious education.”⁸³

An excerpt from a conversation with two Salafis may illustrate these last two points:

⁷⁹ Salafis for example tend to reject tombs veneration and *at-tasawwul* (asking for god’s intercession), both quite common practices in Jordan.

⁸⁰ Pious Jordanians may embrace liberal principles, especially if from middle class or upper class background. Also, sources outside *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* tend to be regarded as valuable and valid. On the contrary, for Salafis, as Abu Rumman points out, “their commitment to the teachings of Islam is firm, even if such teachings contradict Jordanian tradition and social mores,” 2014, p. 88.

⁸¹ In various impromptu conversations with ordinary Jordanians, ideas of patriarchy and attendant social roles for men and women were argued at times forcefully. While an analysis of this situation is beyond the purposes of my study, it seems plausible to claim that subversion of such roles is cause of much anxiety in large parts of the Jordanian public.

⁸² Abu Rumman, 2014, p 98.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 91.

“Was it difficult to embrace Salafism? Did it require major changes to your view of Islam?”

“Salafism supports the unity of god [*yushajji ’u at-tawhid*] and the five prayers and the holy *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, PBUH. I believed all that before adhering to Salafism: now my basis is more solid, and my faith stronger [*imaniyy ’aquwa*]”

“A lot of people here are good Muslims, but they don’t understand how our Salafi path is the sound one [*tariqatuna al-salafiyah hiya al-sahiyah*]. I tell them: why don’t you come and listen to our imam [the Salafi preacher who had just given the sermon] and understand the message of our call [*risalah da ’watina*]?”⁸⁴

Third and last, Al-Albani’s Quietist Salafism attracted also individuals with previous direct and active political engagement. In particular, Palestinians-Jordanians, at one point involved in the (mostly secular) politics of anti-occupation and liberation movements, turned to Quietist Salafism.⁸⁵ It offered a way out of the seemingly hopeless politics of conventional forms of activism. The rejection of political parties (either secular or Islamist), the insistence on the futility of activism especially when divorced of religious inner renovation or oblivious of sound doctrinal background, a message of purpose and meaning to be found in a space thus conveniently separated from conventional politics.⁸⁶ Salafism could confront and re-direct a multifaceted sense of resentment and disillusion into the inner world of religion.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Conversation, Mosque al-Hujjaj, see fn. 52

⁸⁵ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 226.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 318: “Why are these young Jordanian-Palestinians leaving their prominent political cause (Palestine) and join the ranks of an ‘apolitical’ movement? Osama Shehadeh, who is close to the Conservative Salafist trend, explains in answering this question by noting that the idea of distancing oneself from politics is perhaps what attracts these young men most. Many of them are depressed and frustrated with the political situation, which they feel they are unable to change or affect in any way,...Instead, they have found an alternative and a way of thinking that makes them feel they can become agents of change, far from the emptiness and futility of the vicious cycle of political work.”

⁸⁷ See for the same contention Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The search for a new ummah*. Columbia University Press, 2004.

Al-Albani's vision could insert these disparate sets of grievances originating in different milieus and out of diverse experiences according to a singular logic⁸⁸ that was poised to enhance coherence. In this sense, systematization shall not engender further alienation from the intellectual 'high culture'⁸⁹ on the part of the masses. The opposite is true. The organic intellectual offers more coherent ways to understand current predicaments by intervening in and relying on the masses' common sense inventory.

Quietist Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition

The three mechanisms of diffusion, elaboration and systematization compound into the process of social appropriation of tradition. As discussed in Chapter 3,⁹⁰ this process intends to capture both the traits Salafism shares as a social movement with similar phenomena as well as its defining and specific traits. In the case of Quietist Salafism of the Al-Albani variant, this process seeks to redefine group identity along the coordinates provided by the template of the 'pious ancestors.' The rediscovery via *tarbiyah*-education of such exemplary religious tradition and the attendant socialization occur via study groups, seminars, lectures, *Qur'an* recitation gatherings, and Friday prayers.⁹¹ In this way, what may often start as a quest for personal renovation ultimately results in an episode of social mobilization, where doctrinal orthodoxy and behavioral orthopraxis are deeply intertwined, enhancing community building, boundaries setting and, crucially, collective claim making. In the words of Al-Albani,

⁸⁸ I take cues here from Dabashi's contention regarding Islamism in general as a 'singular site of resistance' See Dabashi, Hamid. *Theology of discontent: The ideological foundations of the Islamic revolution in Iran*. NYU Press, 1993.

⁸⁹ See chapter 3, section "Ideology and Discourse, Philosophy and Common Sense."

⁹⁰ Chapter 3, section "Mobilizing the Past: Social Appropriation of Tradition."

⁹¹ For details about the features of Quietist Salafis' mobilization, see Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *The management of Islamic activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and state power in Jordan*. SUNY Press, 2001, pp. 128-144.

“There is a great conflict taking place between all the Islamic movements that exist in this field today – this field of reform – all of whom are involved in the efforts being made to resurrect the Islamic way of life, and to bring about a return to an Islamic life, and to reestablish an Islamic state. It is with great regret that I say that these different groups are in a very sharp disagreement over the starting point of reform. We disagree with all the other Islamic groups on this point. We see that one must simultaneously commence with purification and education. But to begin with political matters...! Those who busy themselves with politics will find their faith and creed in desolate ruin.”⁹²

This refusal of dealing with conventional politics results in Salafis engaging in a form of social mobilization espousing particular features: it seems to stand in between ‘classic’ social movement formations⁹³ and what Asef Bayat called “social non-movements.”⁹⁴ Quietist Salafism appears lacking structure, central organization, defined and specific guidelines for political action, and clear leadership roles. Yet the social and political import of Salafis mobilization is evident if we consider their form of engagement a Gramscian war of position carried out within civil society: in its trenches⁹⁵ they endeavor to spread via *da’wah* their core values, principled beliefs and authoritative meanings, seeking a renovation of Muslims first as individuals and then as a community.

The contours of this kind of mobilization are rather distinctive of Quietist Salafism and allow the movement to purport an accommodationist stance *vis à vis* the state: as I have

⁹² Al-Albani, Mohammad Nasir ad-Din. “*Al-Tariq al-Rashid Nahwou al-Kayan al-Islami* [The Guided Path towards Building the Islamic Entity], Al-Maktaba al-Islamiyya, 1999, pp. 378-379.

⁹³ See chapter 2, section “Evolution of the Field: a Bird’s Eye View.”

⁹⁴ See Bayat, Asef. *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press, 2013. These actors embody the “shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people” and engage in social activism to bring about social and political change through their “fragmented but similar activities,” p. 15. They are characterized as “non-movements,” moreover, because they lack formal leadership and organizational structures.

⁹⁵ Expression used by Gramsci, who speaks of ‘trenches and embankments’ making up the fabric of civil society. For an exhaustive commentary about the relation between civil society and political power, see Thomas, Peter. *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Brill, 2009.

contended throughout, this non-militant, non-confrontationist stance in relation to state institutions shall not obscure the ultimate political nature of the movement. In fact, their strategy cannot - and their foundational texts certainly do not - disguise a bid for the ultimate reconstitution of the caliphate (evidently incompatible with the current Jordanian regime, as we will see below).

It has proven difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy how many people regard themselves as Salafis in Jordan. During my research, I was given figures ranging from as few as 5,000 to as many as 100,000 adherents (over a population, refugees excluded, that amounts perhaps to some 6.5 millions).⁹⁶ Again, especially when talking about Quietist Salafis, there are two issues: first, there is no roster of people belonging or affiliated with this current, in conformity with the rejection of all organizations that may configure as ‘modern’ (i.e., *bid’a*) institutions. Second and consequently, the definition itself of who is a Salafi is not straightforward, being in many cases a matter of degrees and self-ascription. An educated guess may suggest some 30,000 recognized Salafis of all stripes, the overwhelming majority Quietist. However, more significant than sheer numbers, is the following assessment from Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, probably the two outmost experts on the topic:

“[t]he general social mood in the country [...], today, is more conservative, religious and closer to Salafism, which has spread and proliferated for both domestic and external reasons – the most important of these being the proximity of Saudi Arabia and the success experience in the spread of the Salafist da‘wa, which enjoys much support and access to various channels and tools. Today, this form of religious jurisprudence and this religious vision have come to dominate Jordan’s mass, popular social culture.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Conversation with Shehadeh, Abu Hanieh. See fn. 6.

⁹⁷ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 49.

The seemingly deep religious character of Jordanian society meets indeed the eye of even the less attentive onlooker. As observed in the previous chapters, Jordan underwent, like many other countries in the region and beyond, a marked religious revival from the 1980s.⁹⁸ Salafism represents one manifestation of this trend, building and proliferating upon such general and widespread sense of piety within the country.⁹⁹ It is worth remembering how the religious discourse of the masses, steeped in common sense, is at one time ostensibly apolitical and latently political.¹⁰⁰ The process of social appropriation accounts for how such potential is unlocked: it makes religious discourse into a more coherent ideological project, which advances alternative dispensations about how power relations are (to be) arranged.

The role of Salafi preachers such as Al-Albani and those who took over his mantle (‘Ali al-Halabi and Salim al-Hilali most importantly)¹⁰¹ is of particular relevance in the case of Quietist Salafism. Precisely because of its lack of a proper, official hierarchical structure and corresponding structured organization, the reputation and recognized authority of the scholars is paramount to give shape and consistency to an otherwise all too amorphous movement. Meijer may overstate the point a bit when he says, “only the Salafī movement is a movement of the

⁹⁸ This observation would merit of course a much larger and deeper discussion. I would like to point out that, in various conversations with journalists and researchers as well as in impromptu encounters with many Jordanians, the religious revival has indeed occurred, just like in much of the rest of the Middle East. Outward symbols of piety, for example women’s veiling, are much present in both the rural and urban social landscape of the country in a way that is markedly different from, say, the 1950s or 1960s. I would like to thank Prof. Muhammad al-Gharaibeh, Tamer Khorma, Sharif Tbileh and Miriam Abu Samra for sharing with me their observations and insights on the matter.

⁹⁹ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 246: “The nature of Conservative Salafist’s thought is characterized by a strategy of direct engagement with its surrounding and prevailing socio-religious culture.”

¹⁰⁰ Consonant with Gramsci’s understanding of common sense, also Williams, Rhys H. “Religion as political resource: Culture or ideology?.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1996): 368-378. and Smith, Christian, ed. *Disruptive religion: The force of faith in social movement activism*. Routledge, [1996] 2014,. This is all the more so, one may argue, when considering the religious common sense. Religion is already a Janus-faced construct that supports potentially both acceptance of the status quo and subversive attitudes. From this perspective, the politicization of religion in the modern day - defiantly challenging secularization theory - appears less of an expected outcome and more like a possible - even probable - outcome of the features of the religious discourse itself.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of the disputes emerging within the movement at Al-Albani’s death, see Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, pp. 270-2.

'ulamā'. Only they have the correct knowledge (*'ilm*) of the texts."¹⁰² Yet, as the recognized repositories of Islamic knowledge, the scholars provide that fundamental service through their ideological effort to make the movement a “cognitive territory,” as suggested by Eyerman and Jamison, the only way in which a social movement truly defines itself within society.¹⁰³ As finally argue Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh,

“[i]ndeed, their lessons and studies in the Islamic faith and creed, jurisprudence, and Hadith actually “ideologize” knowledge – or, transform learning into “ideological knowledge” where the focus is concentrated on what distinguishes the Salafist creed and jurisprudence from other Islamic groups, sects and movements. And, this “ideological knowledge” cultivates a dialectic tendency and confrontational logic in the current’s individuals.”¹⁰⁴

That the state should be the primary target of Quietist Salafism is not immediately apparent; yet, it remains the ultimate horizon of their thinking precisely when performing the subtle and strategic ‘retreat from politics’ - a position that the Jordanian regime considers with much circumspection behind the official posturing.

Quietist Salafis and the State: Ambiguity and Latent Confrontation

The war of position waged by Quietist Salafis may in fact be a peaceful war for the hearts and minds of Muslims, but a war nonetheless. As it finally aims at radically reconfiguring the political structure of the country, it is apparent to all - and to the Jordanian regime first and foremost - that this strategy configures ultimately a counter-hegemonic project.

¹⁰² Meijer 2011, p. 378. Al-Albani (2000) fundamentally concurs with this observation as he mentions the role of *'ulama* and people of *fiqh* in rectifying correctly the deviations – *bid'a* which are harming the *ummah* (pp. 13 and following).

¹⁰³ See Chapter 2, fn. 85.

¹⁰⁴ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 316.

As illustrated by Wiktorowicz,¹⁰⁵ the regime in Jordan utilizes a number of technologies to stymie oppositional voices emerging from the religious discursive space. These technologies manifest in various fashions (the presence of only state-controlled mosques, the control of Friday sermons scripts, the suspension, removal or even imprisonment of non-compliant imams and preachers, the establishment of regime-sponsored Islamic organizations and *ad hoc* religious ministries):¹⁰⁶ the control over the religious field is a prime concern for the regime as it deploys a specific articulation of Islamic discourse to legitimize its rule. A number of Middle Eastern and Muslim majority states do the same,¹⁰⁷ yet the Hashemites are particularly vested in grounding their legitimacy in Islamic references:¹⁰⁸ former guardians of Mecca and Medina, they claim direct descent from Prophet Muhammad, they are recognized as the protectors of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock compound in Jerusalem. The application of *shari'ah*, while limited to matters of personal status, is much referred to in public discourse and speeches.

The Hashemite regime tries in this way to monopolize the religious discourse. It fosters a de-politicized, conservative, ritualistic and non-confrontational Islam: “Jordan spends hundreds of million on religious courts and religious education. The state is going literally beyond its prerogatives so to affirm its legitimacy.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, this move is part of that multifaceted discursive repertoire the regime has deployed: a peculiar case of “authoritarian pluralism,” as

¹⁰⁵ Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *The management of Islamic activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and state power in Jordan*. SUNY Press, 2001, pp. 45-88.

¹⁰⁶ See Jordan Ministry of *Awqaf*, <http://www.awqaf.gov.jo/>. Conversation with Rami Wreikat, Deputy Ministry for Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Political Development, Amman, 26/11/2015.

¹⁰⁷ Wiktorowicz, 2001, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 4, section “Nation Building and State Building.”

¹⁰⁹ Conversation with Prof. al-Gharaibeh, see fn. 6.

Moaddel argued,¹¹⁰ capable of articulating democratic features with illiberal practices, conservative social mores and strong ties to the West.¹¹¹

In this context, Quietist Salafis insert their alternative Islamic discourse in the interstices of the regime discourse. The red lines - what can be said and what cannot - are not clearly drawn, with the exception of the institution of the monarchy and the monarch himself known to be beyond reproach. By negotiating while never assaulting such boundaries, Quietist Salafis can claim to stand for an alternative, yet non-confrontational, version of Islam in relation to the state official discourse. In the end, the following holds true: Al-Albani's vision of spiritual change and reforms, "would eventually lead to the required end of establishing an Islamic state [...]; this inevitable evolution, towards this "ultimate end", did not require a confrontation with the prevailing authorities in the meantime. It also did not require any questioning of the legitimacy of the current authorities – as the ultimate aim would take place, with time, despite the current state of affairs."¹¹²

State officials have chosen to second this position, publicly recognizing the compatibility of Salafism, at least in its non-militant branch,¹¹³ with the institutions and religious discourse of the kingdom. Various political activists - representing religious and secular groups - described this move on the part of the regime as a blatant example of divide and rule: while allowing the

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 4, fn. 124.

¹¹¹ Prof. al-Gharaibeh provided a similar yet alternative description of the Jordanian regime: "Paternal Authoritarianism [*Sultawiah Abawiah*]," where the king would stand at the head of a power structure resembling a large tribe and adjudicate amongst disputes relying on a traditional-Weberian type of authority. Importantly, the leader would try and avert as much as possible overt confrontations with members of the tribe, seeking for accommodations and compromise and resort to repression only as a last resort. See fn. 6.

¹¹² Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 280. Of interest in this regard is Al-Albani's discussion on the issue of *takfir* – akin to the Christian concept of 'excommunication' - a major religious-jurisprudential justification for declaring Muslim rulers infidels and spur revolt against their rule. Al-Albani produces an elaborate theory severely limiting the extent of legitimate *takfir*, making virtually impossible the excommunication of incumbent rulers. See "Ruling By Other Than What Allaah Has Revealed," published 10/3/2000, available at <http://www.spubs.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=MNJ05&articleID=MNJ050008&articlePages=1>

¹¹³ This include also *Jam'a al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*, the 'Politico' Salafi organization that operates in Jordan, with which I do not deal in my study. For a brief discussion of Politico Salafism, see chapter 4, fn. 40

Quietist to operate, it would simultaneously draining potential support for the Muslim Brotherhood and permit a Salafi option for those individuals who may be tempted to join the more militant and violent Jihadi formations.¹¹⁴

Yet, the security perspective ultimately dominates the approach of the state institutions - in particular the *mukhabarat* - in dealing with Salafis of any color.¹¹⁵ This fact belies the awareness on both sides - state institutions and Quietist Salafis - of the sort of ‘marriage of convenience’ stipulated in light of temporarily converging and overlapping interests, and despite the evident incompatibility, in the long run, of the Hashemite rule with the Quietist Salafis’ counter-hegemonic project.

Lost in translation? Ideologues’ Unintended Consequences: Al-Albani and *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM)

What I have submitted about the ways in which intellectuals as (religious) ideologues impact social and political mobilization has avoided any deterministic claim. Trying to assess how a certain ideology plays out in a socio-historical domain does not mean that the reception – and thus the consequences – of such ideology will be the same at all times, in all places; nor does it imply that different understandings of the same ideological construct cannot be possible. Whoever reads the work of an intellectual has leeway to interpret it. It can draw his or her own conclusions. Such readings may have not been foreseen by the intellectual or even be at odds with her avowed intent.

In the case of Al-Albani, a brief discussion on his influence in Saudi Arabia may illustrate these observations. As Lacroix argues, “[e]ven though Al-Albani taught for only a

¹¹⁴ Conversations with Muslim Brotherhood leader (name not recorded upon request), Sahab neighborhood, Amman, 6/26/2015; al-Sukkari, see fn. 19; Omar and Muhammad al-Harasees, HIRAK Movement, Amman, 4/27/2015; Ali al-Sandik, independent member of Majlis an-Nuab (parliament), Amman, 4/26/2015.

¹¹⁵ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, pp. 290-98.

relatively short time in Saudi Arabia [...] his ideas had a very strong impact there [...] he encouraged a vast revival of interest in studying the hadith and its authenticity.”¹¹⁶ The most immediate manifestation of such impact was the emergence of *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* or JSM (“the Salafi Group which Commands Right and Forbids Wrong”).

The JSM represented a peculiar manifestation of Saudi Islamism. It was related with both the official Wahhabi discourse and the oppositional stance of the *Sahwah*.¹¹⁷ However, it espoused unique traits. The JSM took inspiration from Al-Albani’s neo- *Ahl al-Hadith* approach and the Salafi *manhaj* he was developing.¹¹⁸ It was characterized by literalism, social conservatism, “a strong focus on ritual practices, a declared disdain for politics, and yet an active rejection of the state and its institutions.”¹¹⁹ While we can clearly read Al-Albani’s footprints when it comes to literalism, social mores and avoidance of politics, an active rejection of the latter is not part of his call. Even less in line with Al-Albani’s thinking is the way in which the JSM will articulate such ‘active rejection:’ it did not configure a militant Islamist stance.¹²⁰ Instead, it stood for a messianic project. It did not intend to upset existing – mundane – power relations, nor was it looking for a revolution against the house of Sa’ud. Rather, the JSM sought to hasten the advent of the *Mahdi*,¹²¹ according to their reading of the scriptures an undertaking more propitious at the beginning of an Islamic century (based on the *hijrah* calendar).¹²²

¹¹⁶ Lacroix, 2013, p. 67.

¹¹⁷ See for more information on this point Chapter 4, fn. 40.

¹¹⁸ Hegghammer, Thomas, and Stéphane Lacroix. "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman Al-[Ain] Utaybi Revisited." *International journal of middle east Studies* 39.01 (2007): 103-122. “The most important foreign ideological influence on the JSM came not from Egyptian extremist groups but from al-Albani’s ahl al-hadith school of thought,” p. 114.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 104.

¹²⁰ Akin, that is to say, to Jihadi Salafists, to some strains of the Muslim Brotherhood, or again elsewhere to Khomeinist Shi’is.

¹²¹ The *Mahdi* can be loosely considered as the equivalent of the Christian Messiah, his coming signaling the end of times.

¹²² Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2007, p. 112.

This messianic vision was behind the most notorious operation carried out by a radical offshoot of the JSM led by Juhayman al-‘Utaybi. On November 20, 1979, together with some 300 followers, Al-‘Utaybi stormed the holy compound in Mecca, taking several hostages. They were not looking for a revolution against the house of Sa’ud: “[t]heir aim was to have al-Qahtani [a follower of ‘Utaybi] consecrated as the Mahdi between the black stone corner of the Ka’ba and Ibrahim’s station of prayer (al-maqam) as tradition requires.”¹²³ Saudi authorities, with the assistance of French and Pakistani special forces, broke the siege after two weeks.¹²⁴

We may juxtapose the kind of mobilization that Al-Albani’s work influenced in Jordan and in Saudi Arabia. In the former, his disciples regarded his teachings as fundamentally devotional and pietistic. Direct action could and should be avoided, or at the very least postponed. In the Saudi Kingdom, some of his admirers added a messianic element to his teachings, resulting in a call for immediate – and clamorous – action. This decision clearly violates Al-Albani’s intended message. We notice a failure to mobilize would-be adherents along the lines his works suggested. Considering the mechanisms I proposed, we can postulate where this failure may have occurred. Al-Albani’s ideological stance, while quite defined by the late 1970s, was not yet as sophisticated as it would become during his stay in Jordan; nor such stance could speak to different environments (Jordan *vis à vis* Saudi Arabia) and elicit the same responses on the target audience. In other words, we witness primarily a lack of proper elaboration of his ideology; and subsequently incapacity to systematize adequately the common sense of JSM members via such ideology – some of his followers ultimately choosing instead ‘Utaybi’s ‘messianic’ version of Salafism.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The operation led to an unspecified number of casualties from among the JSM members, the police forces, and the hostages. JSM members arrested in Mecca and soon afterwards in other Saudi cities were swiftly tried and 68 of them sentenced to death on January 9, 1980.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined how the works and pronouncements of Al-Albani shaped and informed the Quietist branch of Salafism. Al-Albani remains a pivotal figure to understand how specific sets of ideas emerged and developed, congealing into an ideational construct which espouses the traits of an ideology. On the basis of this ideology, Al-Albani successfully mobilized followers via the process of social appropriation of tradition, making an exclusivist claim to an uncontaminated and true Islam. In Al-Albani's view, this appropriation entailed the re-definition of the Muslim in the modern era, first as an individual and then as a group. Purifying oneself from soiled and un-Islamic (or improperly Islamic) society and politics could be achieved by education, understood as rote learning of the *Sunnah* and the *Qur'an*. The results have been noteworthy in terms of both social following, cultural impact, and – last but not least – political import.

Yet, Al-Albani's Quietist Salafism cannot steer clear from a number of issues. First, let us consider internal intellectual consistency: what is ultimately Quietist Salafism's understanding of politics? How do they intend to square the circle between an ideological movement that purports to encompass the totality of the existence and yet with the same determination shuns away from a proper and explicit engagement with the political? How can it reconcile this position with a call to the caliphate, furthermore rather amorphous in its contours?

Second, Salafism's call for exclusive access to Islam fostered much resistance in non-Salafi Muslims (needless to say, constituting the overwhelming majority). If appropriating tradition was meant to secure a common, shared and firm understanding of Islam, it generated instead exactly the opposite. As Meijer elaborates, “[f]or although [Quietist Salafism] pretends to be apolitical or even anti-political and is against internal strife (*fitna*) within the *umma*, which

supposedly results from politics and machinations, the movement itself uses instruments of power to obtain hegemony in the transnational Islamic movement and ultimately becomes itself a political movement, provoking resistance and ultimately fostering internal strife.”¹²⁵

In this sense we can read Abu Hanieh and Abu Rumman’s contention: “[c]onservative [i.e. Quietist] Salafism has yet to convince the Jordanian masses with its political discourse.”¹²⁶ In fact, this observation highlights some of the difficulties Salafism as an ideology encounters in systematizing and thus successfully relating to wider strata of society. I am not here submitting it cannot become a mass movement: in many ways it already is. Rather, it points at the changing nature of any such discursive formation, which at all times emerges within and relates to specific historic circumstances which call for new, different, and varying assessments – regardless of the ahistorical posturing of Salafism. In many ways, as we are going to see in the next chapter, the rise of Jihadi Salafism bears evidence to this claim.

¹²⁵ Meijer, 2011, p. 376.

¹²⁶ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 249.

Chapter 6 – Relentless Confrontation: Jihadi Salafism and Al-Maqdisi’s

‘Loyalty and Disavowal’ Call

Introduction

Jihadi Salafism hails from the same intellectual history of Quietist Salafism. As the literature on this topic indicates, there is a clear consensus regarding the common origin of the two branches.¹ In fact, both chronologically and intellectually, Jihadi Salafism represents a more recent development emerging out of a wider Salafi discourse. The often fierce polemic infuriating between the Quietist and Jihadi currents² centers around the interpretation of specific historical circumstances, the choice to be made in light of these considerations, and relatively more nuanced topics (for example, the issue of excommunication or *takfir*) enabling or restraining specific courses of action. But the fundamental tenets of Salafism are not a matter of debate.³

To further illustrate this contention, I will present the figure and work of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (1959-). His relation with Al-Albani’s intellectual endeavor transcends the confines of the Hashemite kingdom, where they both spent the most significant parts of their lives. The episode of the JSM described in the previous chapter⁴ connects the two scholars,

¹ Wiktorowicz, Quintan. “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29.3 (2006): 207-239.

² See for example Al-Muharij, Anwar. *Munathmat Hibr al-Ummah li-l-Khawarij* [Debate of the Ink of the Ummah towards the Khawarij (‘Out-goers’)], Al-Albani Center for Methodology and Research, Amman, 2015. This small pamphlet published by the Al-Albani Center accuses Jihadi Salafis (especially ISIS, see fn. 12 below) of being modern ‘Khawarij,’ a heretical Muslim sect active in the first days of Islam. The Khawarij were known for their intransigency over doctrinal matters, which led them eventually to consider the rest of the Muslim *ummah* as infidels and thus alienating their fellow believers.

³ See for a discussion on these tenets Chapter 4, section “Salafism: the geography of a discursive field.”

⁴ See Chapter 5, section “Lost in Translation?”

insofar as Al-Maqdisi took inspiration from Al-'Utaybi⁵ as to be considered by some his intellectual heir;⁶ and Al-Albani, as we have seen, profoundly influenced the JSM in the first place. The rise of Al-Maqdisi as a prominent Jihadi ideologue occurred when Al-Albani had long established himself as the one of the most respected authorities within Salafism. The younger and up and coming scholar was to encounter Al-Albani's work and legacy given their far reaching impact on the foundational coordinates of Salafism.

At the same time, they were to read the highly volatile political and social climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s⁷ in vastly different fashions. Al-Albani campaigned for a devotional and 'apolitical' stance. Al-Maqdisi was instead at helm of the first true and significant surge in Islamist militancy in Jordan:⁸ intellectually, by further elaborating upon Salafi tenets at large so to justify violent confrontation with the existing regimes in the Arab world; operationally, by founding the first Jihadi Salafi group in the country, *Bay'at al-Imam*.⁹ Together with him and his closest acolytes, the entire Jihadi Salafi movement in Jordan mushroomed.

The attention of this chapter on *Bay'at al-Imam* may seem unwarranted: the group met a swift demise and operational failures. Why insist on it? Let us consider the cognitive nature of social movements:¹⁰ they are creators of meaning, enterprises to interpret, understand and then

⁵ Wagemakers, Joas. *A quietist jihadi: the ideology and influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 35-7.

⁶ Hegghammer, Thomas, and Stéphane Lacroix. "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman Al-[Ain] Utaybi Revisited." *International journal of middle east Studies* 39.01 (2007): 103-122, p. 115.

⁷ See Chapter 4, section "Realignment: political and economic shifts at the end of the century."

⁸ Milton-Edwards, Beverly. "The Islamic Movement In Jordan," in Sidahmed, Abdel Salam, and Anoushiravan Ehteshami. *Islamic fundamentalism*. Westview Press, 1996.

⁹ Wagemakers, Joas. "A Terrorist Organization that Never Was: The Jordanian "Bay'at al-Imam" Group," *The Middle East Journal*, 68:1 (Winter 2014): 59-75. The name of the group can be rendered as 'Pledge of Allegiance to the Leader', although this last term does not capture the religious dimension attributed to such leadership. At any rate, the members of the group and Al-Maqdisi in particular refused that label. They refer to themselves as "*Muwahidun*," or 'Those of the Monotheistic Unity.' See Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, "*Kashf al-Litham 'anman Wusifu bi Bay'at al-Imam*" [Unmasking those Described as 'Bay'at al-Imam' group], available at <http://www.tawhed.wsr?idtwiam56>. See below for more information on the group.

¹⁰ Eyerman, Ron, and Andrew Jamison. *Social movements: A cognitive approach*. Penn State Press, 1991, and Chapter 2, section "Dynamics of Contention, Cognition and Meaning Making."

act. In this sense, one cannot underestimate the impact of Al-Maqdisi's *Bay'at al-Imam* in Jordan: it represented "a milestone in bringing the Jihadi Salafist *da'wa* out into the public fore. The movement had, indeed, developed from small, disjointed groups scattered throughout the kingdom into a single, unified ideological movement. Even if many times it lacked a common organizational framework, it had a unified intellectual and spiritual leadership."¹¹ Moreover, *Bay'at al-Imam* is one of most influential incubators for later incarnations of the same cognitive coordinates. Much more ominous embodiments of Jihadi Salafism, namely Zarqawi's *Tawhid wa al-Jihad/Al-Qa'idah fi Bilad al-Rafidayin* and its successor Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL, a.k.a. ISIS, a.k.a. *Da'esh* in its Arabic acronym), or again *Jabhat al-Nusra/Fatah ash-Sham*,¹² found their origin in this early Jihadi experiment. Testament to this is the fact that Al-Maqdisi's pivotal role in furthering Islamist armed militancy was then recognized in a US Army report dating 2006, where he was deemed as the most influential thinker within the Jihadi Salafi universe.¹³

¹¹ Abu Rumman, Muhammad and Hassan Abu Hanieh. *The 'Islamic Solution' in Jordan: Islamists, the State and the Venture of Democracy and Security*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013, p. 331.

¹² Al-Zarqawi's group changed name after pledging allegiance to Osama Bin Laden's *Al-Qa'idah* on 10/17/2004. It then became its franchise formation in Iraq during the most violent years following the US invasion and occupation of the country (2004-2008). The Islamic State (*Al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi al-'Iraq wa ash-Sham*) emerged out of the remnants of Zarqawi's group after the collapse of central authority in Syria and parts of Iraq in 2014. See Abu Rumman, Muhammad, and Hassan Abu Hanieh. *Ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah: al-'Azmah as-Sunnah wa as-Sira' 'ala al-Jihadiyah al-'Alamiyah*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015. Referred in English as either ISIL or ISIS, these different acronyms stand for alternative ways to indicate Syria (the current nation-state, *As-Suryah*, hence ISIS; or the classic denomination of the region as Levant, hence ISIL, spanning across Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan). These differences are not mere semantics, according to an Iraqi diplomat I met. He maintained they stand for two visions harbored within the Islamic State: one anchored in its Ba'thist elements, who basically accept the current geographical coordinates of Syria; and the more explicit Islamists current, that rejects in principle to refer to the region with the names from the mandate system. Last, *Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl ash-Sham* [The Front of Support for the People of the Levant] is the *Al-Qai'dha* franchise in Syria similarly fighting against the regime of Bashar al-Asad. It changed name on 7/28/2016 becoming *Fatah ash-Sham* [The Victory of the Levant], apparently signaling a break from *Al-Qa'idah* motherboard. See <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/jabhat-al-nusra-sever-al-qaeda-focus-local-syria.html>.

¹³ McCants, William, and Jarret Brachman, eds. *Militant Ideologies Atlas*. Center for Combating Terrorism, United States Military Academy, 2006, p. 6, available at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Atlas-ExecutiveReport.pdf>

Interestingly, the foremost expert on Al-Maqdisi, Joas Wagemakers, describes him as a ‘quietist jihadi,’¹⁴ contesting Wiktorowicz’s famous tripartition of Salafism amongst Quietists, Politicos and Jihadis.¹⁵ Al-Maqdisi indeed never manifested, at a personal level, the extreme militant and violent propensity that is supposedly the trademark of Jihadi Salafism. Wagemakers does present a good case for amending Wiktorowicz’s typology, or at least to recognize its grey areas. Yet, for the purpose of the present study, it is Al-Maqdisi’s work and production that is primarily under scrutiny in connection with its political impact. And Al-Maqdisi’s ideology clearly outlines a confrontational and militant stance in relation to incumbent regimes in the Arab and Muslim world. In this sense, much of the political ambiguity and brinkmanship of Quietist Salafism is promptly foregone. Al-Maqdisi’s ideology and attendant political project call for a ‘war of movement.’

Life of Al-Maqdisi

Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi¹⁶ was born ‘Isam Tahir al-Barqawi in 1959 in Nablus, the Palestinian city at that time under the control of Jordan.¹⁷ From a middle class family, his father decided to leave the West Bank in 1963 and move to Kuwait. The Gulf country was in fact a major destination for the uprooted Palestinian diaspora.¹⁸ Over there, his father would find a position in the Ministry of Health, granting a relatively well-off upbringing to the young ‘Isam. In matters of faith, Al-Maqdisi’s family was not particularly religious, but their son would manifest early on in his teens a conspicuous interest in the study of Islam. His parents wanted

¹⁴ Wagemakers, 2012.

¹⁵ Wiktorowicz, 2006, and also see Chapter 4, section, fn. 40

¹⁶ The name ‘al-Maqdisi’ may refer to his relation with Jerusalem, in Arabic *Al-Quds*, although his family did not hail from that city.

¹⁷ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the Jordanian history, especially sections “The creation of Jordan” and “Nation building and state building.”

¹⁸ There are some 400,000 Palestinians in Kuwait, of which 350,000 are Jordanians (see fn. 10 in Wagemakers, 2012).

him however to pursue a scientific career, and at first Al-Maqdisi complied. In the early 1980s, he headed to Mosul, Iraq, to enroll at the local university and study biology. However, he soon felt out of place: religion kept drawing more interest; and he resented the overly secular climate of the Iraqi university, with mixed classes and no gender separation, making apparent his already socially conservative views on that matter.

Therefore, in 1982, he elected to leave and go to Medina, where he expected to find opportunities to deepen himself in religious studies. Lacking the means to pay for his tuition fees, Al-Maqdisi could not enroll at the Islamic University, but he was granted the possibilities to use its facilities - such as the rich library - by the university administrators.

At this time, Al-Maqdisi did not pay particular attention to the vibrant political scene in Kuwait, where his family was still living: dominated by the PLO, Palestinian politics in Kuwait were ostensibly nationalistic and bereft of significant religious flavor. Instead, the Saudi environment proved to be much more stimulating for his intellectual development. He came into contact with the writings of Al-'Utaybi, Saiyd Qutb and his brother Muhammad;¹⁹ there he met his first mentor, Muhammad Surur. A Muslim Brother in Syria, he had fled the country after the bloody confrontation with the Ba'thist regime ending in the Hamah massacre of 1982.²⁰ Surur himself was to drift away from the Brotherhood and embrace Salafism while in the Saudi Kingdom, thus exposing his protégé to its principles. It also very likely (although not confirmed) that Al-Maqdisi met Al-Albani in one of his lectures in Medina, thanks to Al-Albani's connection with Bin Baz who would sponsor occasional trips south of the Jordanian border for his old acquaintance.

¹⁹ Muhammad Qutb had left Egypt after the crackdown on Islamists carried out by Nasser in the late 1960s, in the context of which his more famous brother was to be executed in 1966. He moved like many other radical Islamists to Saudi Arabia, where he was appointed to a number of academic and teaching positions. See Kepel, Gilles. *The War for the Muslim Minds*, Belknap Press, 2006, for a discussion of Egyptian Islamists migrating to Saudi Arabia.

²⁰ See fn. 21, Chapter 5, for more details.

Al-Maqdisi was hardly enthralled by the Islamic life under the Saudi regime: his first major works²¹ represented a relentless attack on the Islamic credentials and discourse put forth by the Saudi regime.²² The main coordinates of Al-Maqdisi's ideology were in fact already noticeable: the rejection of the 'Islamic' character of a regime where legislation is not purely founded upon *shari'ah*; thereby the relegation of the rulers outside the abode of Islam by means of *takfir*; and the necessity of direct rectification of this state of affairs by means of *jihad*.²³

Shortly after the compilation of these treaties²⁴ he returned briefly to Kuwait, only to head to Afghanistan, at the time in the midst of the confrontation with the USSR, which had invaded the country in 1979. Much has been written²⁵ about the Afghan theatre as a pivotal stage for the radicalization of an entire generation of Islamists and, in particular, the emergence of the so-called 'Arab-Afghans.' In this context, Al-Maqdisi manifested traits that will characterize his political persona for the years to come: his participation in the actual fighting would be extremely limited, as he preferred to devote himself to *da'wah* ('calling' or 'proselytizing'), preaching and theorizing Jihadi Salafism. While his avoidance of the battleground will come to haunt his reputation amongst some Islamist circles,²⁶ his intellectual work will instead firmly put him in the pantheon of Salafi Jihadi theorists, especially after to the publication of the works he

²¹ See in particular what is considered his manifesto: Al-Maqdisi, Abu Muhammad. *Millat Ibrahim wa-Da'wat al-Anbiya' wa-l-Mursalin wa-Asalib al-Tughat fi Tamyu'aha wa-Sarf as-Du'at 'anha* [The Religion of Abraham] and the Calling of Prophets and Messengers and the Methods of the Transgressive Rulers in Dissolving it and Turning the Callers Away from It], available at www.tawhed.ws/t, 1984; see also *Al-Kawashif al-Jaliyya fi al-Kufr al-Dawla al-Sa'udiyya* [Obvious Proofs of Unbelief in the Country of Saudi Arabia], available at www.tawhed.ws/t, 1989.

²² See Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Contesting the Saudi state: Islamic voices from a new generation*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, in particular Chapter 1.

²³ See below for a discussion on *takfir* and *jihad*.

²⁴ The publication of *Al-Kawashif* in particular, where Al-Maqdisi is attacking the Saudi regime, will occur only later in Peshawar, Pakistan, thus explaining why he did not incur in the wrath of Saudi authorities back then.

²⁵ Two widely cited works are Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Belknap Press, 2003 and Wright, Lawrence. *The looming tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11*. Alfred a Knopf Incorporated, 2006.

²⁶ Wagemakers, Joas. "Reclaiming Scholarly Authority: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Critique of Jihadi Practices." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34.7 (2011): 523-539.

wrote while in Medina.²⁷ It remains unsure what kind of ties Al-Maqdisi enjoyed with the emerging leadership and cadres of *Al-Qa'idah*. Most likely they were not deep, although he knew personally both Abdullah Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

As the war was drawing near the end, a young and disgruntled Jordanian would arrive in Peshawar, frustrated by the lack of fighting opportunities with the departure of the last Soviet troops: Ahmad Fadil al-Nazal al-Khalayl, better known with his *nome de guerre* of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. The encounter between the two men,²⁸ despite or perhaps precisely because their profoundly different personalities (reflexive, placid and bookish Al-Maqdisi; thuggish, violent and uneducated Al-Zarqawi), would prove momentous. With the end of the Afghan experience and the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam's Iraq began a sort 'repatriation' of the Arab-Afghans to their countries: for Al-Maqdisi and Al-Zarqawi this meant Jordan. It was at this juncture that they would found together *Bay'at al-Imam*. Once the organization was dismantled, the Jordanian authorities sentenced the two to fifteen years in prison in 1994. A highly productive period for Al-Maqdisi, he took advantage of the time behind bars to cement his reputation as a leading jihadi ideologue, smuggling his writings to the outside world.

With the death of King Hussein, a royal pardon granted amnesty to various inmates, including members of *Bay'at al-Imam*. While Al-Maqdisi chose to remain in Jordan, Al-Zarqawi - whose relation with his intellectual mentor had soured during the years in jail - left and went

²⁷ See fn. 23.

²⁸ In the words of Al-Maqdisi: "I met with Abu Mus'ab for the first time in Peshawar... Then, when he returned from Afghanistan, he visited me at my home, eager for the triumph of the calling to God and for *al-Tawhid*. Abu Walid was the one who gave him my contacts in Jordan, and who advised him to call me if he wanted to work for the sake of God's religion in Jordan... So, we cooperated together in this capacity. I arranged lessons to be conducted in all parts of the country. We began to publish and distribute some of my literature amongst the people; and, young men began to flock towards this *da'wa*, and began to exchange its books and articles." Al-Maqdisi, Abu Mohammad. "*Al-Zarqawi: Munasara wa Munasaha*" [Al-Zarqawi: Advocacy and Advise]; available at www.tawhed.ws/r?u=dtwiam56, 2004.

first to Afghanistan and then to Iraqi Kurdistan.²⁹ While they were not to see each other again, and despite a personal fall-out,³⁰ Zarqawi will never renege on Al-Maqdisi's teachings, rather grounding his future actions in the justifications and rationales provided by his erstwhile guide.

On his part, Al-Maqdisi would regularly enter and exit Jordanian prisons on various charges (despite being exonerated in every case) for his alleged relations with groups such as *Al-Qa'idah* and its regional franchises (in particular Zarqawi's *Al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*)³¹ and, more recently, the Islamic State. Release from prison is usually granted upon Al-Maqdisi's acceptance to speak against those groups and restrain from pronouncements about politics in every other domain; incarceration occurs when the government deems such stipulations violated. Now approaching his sixties, Al-Maqdisi has become a widely recognized public figure in Jordan beyond Islamist circles, security apparatchik and academic researchers.

***Al-Wala'a wa al-Bara'*: Loyalty and Disavowal Setting the Boundaries of the Islamic Polity**

“We believe that it is obligatory to rebel against the leaders of unbelief [*imāms al-kufr*] from the disbelieving rulers that are emplaced over the necks of the Muslims. We believe that they have apostated from the religion [*dīn*] due to their replacement of the *shari'ah* and legislation of Allāh, and seeking judgment in the tyrants [*tawaghīt*]³² of the East and the West and allying with the enemies of Allāh and having enmity towards His religion and His allies.”³³

Al-Maqdisi's message is one of rebellion against the incumbent rulers (the tyrants [*tawaghīt*]) and their regimes. The label 'jihadi' attributed to his branch of Salafism refers to the

²⁹ Brisard, Jean-Charles, and Damien Martinez. *Zarqawi: the new face of Al-Qaeda*. Polity, 2005.

³⁰ See Al-Maqdisi, 2004.

³¹ See Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 343.

³² Also 'idols,' (sg. *taghut*) or anything worshipped other than god; see *ibid*, 383.

³³ Al-Maqdisi, Abu Muhammad. *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna* [This is Our Creed], available at www.tawhed.ws/t, 1997, p. 66.

way in which rebellion and change shall come about: an active and direct engagement with politics by means of *jihad*,³⁴ which for Al-Maqdisi may configure as both violent operations and preaching activities - *da'wah*.³⁵ While relying on the same Salafi principles,³⁶ he would develop a confrontational and revolutionary doctrinal practice³⁷ at odds with Al-Albani's regarding the preferred ways to relate to the political domain and means to establish an Islamic state.

In this sense, his most lasting ideological contribution is the principle of “*al-wala' wa al-bara'*” or ‘loyalty and disavowal.’³⁸ Indeed, while Al-Maqdisi's production is vast and still growing at the time of writing,³⁹ it has maintained however remarkable consistency around this concept. At the most fundamental level, ‘loyalty and disavowal’ indicates to whom the pious (true) Muslim should give his allegiance and from whom he should disassociate: loyalty - *al-wala'* - to god only; and disavowal - *al-bara'* - from beliefs and practices which would lead astray from the proper worship of god. Al-Maqdisi defines it as, “loyalty [*ikhlas*] to the worship of god alone in every meaning that the word worship encompasses [*bi-kull ma tahwihi kalimat al-'ibada min ma'anin*] and the disavowal [*al-bara'*] of polytheism and its people.”⁴⁰

³⁴ The term *jihad* – entered now even in Western vocabulary – indicates ‘effort’ or ‘struggle’ in Arabic. In the context of Islam, this effort stands primarily for self-improvement in the path of god (the ‘greater’ *jihad*). Under specific circumstances, this effort may configure also a political and military one when the *ummah* is deemed under attack (the ‘lesser’ *jihad*). While the first type of *jihad* is incumbent upon every Muslims, the second type requires only part of the community to engage in it. The literature on the concept of *jihad* is extremely voluminous. See for an introduction Firestone, Reuven. *Jihad: the origin of holy war in Islam*. Oxford University Press, 1999; Bonner, Michael. *Jihad in Islamic history: doctrines and practice*. Princeton University Press, 2008.

³⁵ Al-Maqdisi, 1997: “[w]e believe that *da'wah*, action and expending efforts for the purpose of replacing them is obligatory upon the Muslims every one according to his capability,” p. 66.

³⁶ In his foundational piece, Wiktorowicz, 2006, refers to that as ‘*aqidah*’ or ‘creed.’

³⁷ Wiktorowicz, 2006, refers to this as *manhaj*, a term I already used indicating the specific Salafi epistemological approach - and not a specific strategic outlook. In order to avoid confusion, I will not therefore utilize this term to describe Jihadi Salafis’ praxis, the domain where their difference with the Quietist is so evidently and significantly in evidence.

³⁸ Wagemakers, 2012, p. 166.

³⁹ Al-Maqdisi has founded and managed the largest web database containing all the major Jihadi Salafi works, www.tawhed.ws/t. Translations from the original Arabic are usually provided in a number of other languages, including English, French, Russian, German, Spanish, Urdu and Farsi. The website is often unavailable or unreachable, and it may change address, creating no small difficulties for the researcher.

⁴⁰ Al-Maqdisi, 1984, pp. 13-14. In the same vein, he further specifies, “[a]nd from what is opposite to the disavowal from the *shirk* and its people, there is also the allegiance to the religion of Allāh and to His supporters,” *ibid*, p. 43.

Al-Maqdisi anchors ‘loyalty and disavowal’ to the main theological pillars of Salafism, in particular *tawhid* (god’s monotheistic unity). *Tawhid* is defined along unity of worship, attributes and lordship.⁴¹ Given this understanding of *tawhid*, Al-Maqdisi does not confine Islam to the realm of private or personal domain or to a shared cultural discourse. The all-encompassing traits of *tawhid* make Islam also into political dispensations pertaining to power relations. He then focuses on the relation between the unity of worship (*tawhid al-’ibadah*) and modern political systems, in particular the legislative process. If, he argues, *tawhid* mandates the worship of god alone; and if Islam represents a comprehensive system of belief and practice;⁴² then worshipping anything not mandated by Islam is tantamount to violating the principle of *tawhid*, and hence an act of unbelief (*kufir*). The legislative process, producing man-made laws which cannot be found in the holy texts of Islam, is thus deemed not only incompatible with true Islam, but also fundamentally opposed to it:

“know that your Islam and your *tawhid* will not be perfected and the meaning of ‘there is no god but god’ will not be realized and that you will not find your way to Paradise until you disbelieve and disavow every idol, the most important which is this: the modern idol that most people follow, pay and worship with the worship of legislation.”⁴³

From this passage we may evince two key considerations. First, whoever is in charge of drafting man-made laws is a *taghut*, as he implements binding dispositions other than the *shari’ah*. The result is worshipping something other than god. Consciously doing so - knowing

⁴¹ See Chapter 4, section Salafism: the geography of a discursive field.

⁴² Al-Maqdisi, 1984, p. 37: “So it is *Tawhid* in belief and in actions; both at the same time, as *Sūrat Al-Ikhlās* is evidence for the beliefs from it, and *Sūrat Al-Kāfirūn* is evidence for the actions.”

⁴³ Al-Maqdisi, Abu Muhammad. *Kash al-Niqab ‘an Shari’at al-Ghab* [Unveiling the Law of the Jungle], available at www.tawheed.ws/t, 1988, p. 16. See also, *Al-Dimuqratiyah Din* [Democracy is a Religion], available at www.tawhed.ws/t, n.d.

the will and rules of god yet ignoring and contravening them⁴⁴ - would place the legislator outside the abode of Islam [*dar al-Islam*]. He then cannot anymore command obedience. This operation, “*takfir*” (‘to declare someone an infidel [*kafir*, pl. *kuffar*]’)⁴⁵ sentences self-ascribed Muslims in the abode of unbelief [*dar al-kufr*], thus putting him on par with non-Muslims. *Takfir* is a concept of paramount importance in the ideology of Jihadi Salafism. It is a tool that permits clearly separating and discriminating between in-group and out-group, drawing those community boundaries representing an essential feature of any ideology.⁴⁶ Ultimately, *takfir* enables singling out enemies.

Second and relatedly, disavowal from the *tawaghit* and the *kuffar* must be accompanied by a perfected commitment - i.e., loyalty - to one’s profession of faith.⁴⁷ By virtue of this operation, Al-Maqdisi comes to question how one can declare himself or herself Muslim when both loyalty and disavowal have not been performed along these lines.

At this juncture, Al-Maqdisi’s thinking becomes more markedly political. The principle of ‘loyalty and disavowal’ implies a call to abandon and reject modern institutions and their ideological foundations. They are example of ‘associationism’ [*shirk*]⁴⁸ in that they contravene the absolute unity - transcendent and preeminent - of god and its rulings. For Al-Maqdisi, modern political institutions stand for competing belief systems with their attendant religious-

⁴⁴ Al-Maqdisi, 1997, pp. 26-30.

⁴⁵ *Takfir* may be loosely juxtaposed to the Christian notion of ‘excommunication.’

⁴⁶ See Hanson, Stephen E. *Post-imperial democracies: ideology and party formation in third republic France, Weimar Germany, and post-Soviet Russia*. Cambridge University Press, 2010; Wagemakers, 2012, p. 149. In the way Al-Maqdisi deploys it, *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* enhances group solidarity and homogeneity, and create distinction with those outside the group, separating right from wrong.

⁴⁷ The *shahadah*, the fundamental act of faith signaling acceptance and embrace of Islam: ‘there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is its messenger [*la lah illa allah wa muhammad rasul allah*].’ Al-Maqdisi’s words, “disbelieving in all of the *tawāghīt* is obligatory upon every Muslim by (the virtue of) half of the testimony (*shahādah*) of Islām,” 1997, p. 53.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of *shirk* and *shirkīyat*, see Chapter 4, section “The history behind the concept: Salafism as an emerging category.”

political implications.⁴⁹ In other words, parliaments, parties, ministries, bureaucracies and so forth represent unwarranted and perilous *bid'a* soiling the Islamic *ummah*.

Therefore, modern political institutions are instances of both apostasy (violating *tawhid*) and tyranny (resulting from the violation of *tawhid*). And, unlike what the Quietists would maintain, this state of affairs should not be tolerated. Al-Maqdisi calls for open enmity against those who in his view betray Islam:

“The basis [*asl*] of the religion of Islam and its basis [*qa'idah*] lie in two matters. The first: the command to worship Allāh alone with no partners associated with Him and the encouragement upon this with the allegiance based upon it and the declaration of disbelief [*takfīr*] of whoever leaves it. The second: the warning against associationism [*shirk*] in the worship of Allāh and being stern in that and having enmity based upon that and the declaration of disbelief of whoever commits it. And this was the *Tawhīd* that the Messengers called to.”⁵⁰

Who shall be specifically the object of disavowal (*bara'*), enmity and last confrontation? Al-Maqdisi tries to define carefully who the *tawaghit* are. As we mentioned, he considers those legislating - kings, presidents, ministers, MPs - as the prime culprit: “Verily, we are free from you and from your constitutions and your laws of *shirk* and your government of *kufr*. We have rejected you, and it has become openly seen between us and you, hostility and hatred forever, until you return to Allāh and submit and follow His law alone.”⁵¹ He also adds to his list who he refers to as ‘helpers of the idols/tyrants’ [*ansar al-tawaghit*], those who assist sustaining and

⁴⁹ See Gentile, Emilio. "Political religion: a concept and its critics—a critical survey." *Totalitarian movements and political religions* 6.1 (2005): 19-32. Again, alternative truths cannot be present in the Salafi discourse bereft, as it is, of any room for pluralism.

⁵⁰ Al-Maqdisi, 1984, p. 35.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 64.

perpetuating the incumbent political order: the coercive apparatus (the police, the army, the security services) and the judiciary (attorneys, judges):⁵²

“And included in this also, is the warning of entering into their allegiance and from entering into their obedience and feeling relieved or protected by them and going into their transports and increasing their ranks by being employed in that which assists them upon their falsehood and affirms their governments and preserves or implements their false laws, such as the army and the police and the intelligence services and other than that.”⁵³

Al-Maqdisi, crucially, does not include people working for the state in various other capacities (such as civil servants, public employees, professional consultants, etc...).⁵⁴ His attention, as he singles out his enemies, is on political society and those who upheld, in that realm of power relations, the existing regime. It is against them he launches his *jihad* in a clear example of ‘war of movement.’ While he mentions preaching activities (*daw’ah*) and personal restraint (only if compared with other Jihadi leaders) when it comes to engagement with violence, this considerations cannot disguise that for Al-Maqdisi there can be no reform of the incumbent tyrannical regimes. The main locus of power is the state apparatus. Rejection and confrontation by *jihad* are the means to alter the status quo. Therefore, from a Gramscian perspective Al-Maqdisi’s focus on ‘war of movement’ cannot articulate a properly counter-hegemonic project: it is not within the trenches of the civil society that the battle will be won, but with a direct strike to the Winter Palace of the Hashemite regime.

⁵² Wagemakers, 2012, p. 91.

⁵³ Al-Maqdisi, 1984, p. 64.

⁵⁴ Wagemakers, 2012, p. 94.

The Most Influential Jihadi Ideologue: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's

Revolutionary Praxis

I argued in the previous chapter how we can account for the role Salafi sheikhs play within traditional Salafism by looking at the work and impact of Nasir ad-Din al-Albani. Salafis scholars like him provide cognitive coordinates, anchored in a vision of a cherished and ideal past, to sustain an amorphous social movement featuring a distinct communal identity. The movement manifests a peculiar 'apolitical' stance in relation to the social and political *status quo*. The scholars' recognized knowledge and expertise in a cogent (Islamic) orthodoxy and orthopraxis underpin this process.

Jihadi Salafis do also regard religious knowledge and expertise as important and recognized; yet these qualities are valuable insofar as Salafism supports a program of revolutionary political change - in ways that Quietists would find unacceptable.⁵⁵ Jihadi Salafism offers an ideology articulating a combative and antagonistic praxis.⁵⁶ In this sense, Wiktorowicz argues that, "whether someone in the community becomes a jihadi depends on the resonance of the contextual analysis made by jihadi scholars and entrepreneurs."⁵⁷ Al-Maqdisi, amongst others, was to be at the forefront of this contextual analysis. The cognitive coordinates the scholar provides may foster a confrontational and revolutionary attitude *vis à vis* the existing *status quo*.

Diffusion

⁵⁵ In response to my question as to the strategy adopted by the Jihadis, a Quietist scholar said: "what have they obtained? Nothing - only to be incarcerated and spread a false image of Islam." Conversation with a Salafi scholar at Al-Albani Center for Methodology and Research, 6/28/2016 (name not recorded upon request).

⁵⁶ Abu Rumman contends Jihadism offers a suitable outlet for some specific psychological profiles, characterized by tendencies for rebellion, alienation from society, and desire of self-affirmation. Abu Rumman, 2014, p 235.

⁵⁷ Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 208.

Al-Maqdisi's intellectual parable represents a further development of Salafism, building upon but steering away from the trend Al-Albani embodied. As noticed above, the two scholars may have crossed path in Saudi Arabia; at any rate, the younger Al-Maqdisi surely engaged the works of older, reputed scholars such as Al-Albani and Bin Baz. And just like for Al-Albani, his period of study in Saudi Arabia was to be crucial. He delved into Hanbalism, acquainting himself with classic thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Wahhabism, acknowledging the influence over his religious views of the scholars of *al-Da'wah al-Najdiyyah*.⁵⁸ Furthermore, as Al-Albani cut the Gordian knot of the troubled (or even contradictory) relation between Wahhabism and Salafism⁵⁹ from a methodological and theological perspective, Al-Maqdisi more resolutely did the same from a political perspective. He pointed at the inconsistencies between the politics of the House of Sa'ud and their averred religious discourse. In this sense, the experience of the JSM and Juhayman al-'Utaybi made a lasting impression on the young Al-Maqdisi. The siege of Mecca would represent a powerful instance of Salafi-inspired religious mobilization, with the caveats discussed previously.⁶⁰

However, it is when moving to Afghanistan that Al-Maqdisi truly immersed himself in a thriving environment of jihadi thinkers. He came into contact with Abdullah Azzam's⁶¹ radical branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the repository of Saiyid Qutb's revolutionary ideology. Al-

⁵⁸ *Al-Da'wah al-Najdiyyah* refers to the religious school founded by Muhammad al-Wahhab. The Najd is a region in northern Saudi Arabia, where the Wahhabi movement first originated. See Lahoud, Nelly. "In Search of Philosopher-Jihadis: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Jihadi Philosophy." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10.2 (2009): 205-220, p. 205. In particular, Al-Maqdisi got acquainted with the Wahhabi tradition through *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah*, a collection of volumes of major Wahhabi writings. As Al-Maqdisi himself explains: "In the small library, there was an old book. [...] It was called *Al-Durar al-Saniyya fi l-Ajwibat al-Najdiyya*. And I saw this book for the very first time then. I was still a youngster. I took the book and I opened it...I read and I read and I read! It was my first time and I read a very large part of the book! It offered tools! It connected the fatwas of the Najdi imams with the period that we live in!" reported in Wagemakers, 2012, p. 36.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 5, section "*At-Tafsiyah wa at-Tarbiyah*: Purification and Education as the cornerstones of a political regeneration."

⁶⁰ See Chapter 5, section "Lost in Translation?"

⁶¹ See Riedel, Bruce. *9/11 Spiritual Father*, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-911-attacks-spiritual-father>, 2011.

Maqdisi proceeded then to insert this revolutionary posture into his Salafi framework, in ways not dissimilar from fellow Jihadi Salafi theorists Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Qatada al-Falastini⁶² and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.⁶³

When he settled in Jordan in the early 1990s, Al-Maqdisi carried all these different intellectual experiences, representing a shared inventory for most Afghan Arabs. What set him apart, as he sought to spread such notions across the Hashemite Kingdom, was precisely the role he could perform as an intellectual. He belonged to a critical community,⁶⁴ posing as a hub in the wider network of Jihadi leaders and scholars. He had contacts and relations, means to spread the ideas he had come in touch with: for example, fellow Jordanian Jihadi thinker Abu Qatada, then based in London, started publishing Al-Maqdisi's writings and recorded speeches in his magazine *al-Minhaj*: "[i]t was through this publication that members of al-Qa'ida became familiar with al-Maqdisi's teachings."⁶⁵ Especially after the publication of *Millat Ibrahim*⁶⁶ and *Al-Kawashij*⁶⁷ and later *Al-Dimuqratiyah Din*,⁶⁸ his reputation within Salafi circles grew considerably,⁶⁹ as did the circulation of the Salafi discourse he had come in touch with and developed while in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Jordan.⁷⁰

After his arrest following the case of *Bay'at al-Imam*, Al-Maqdisi redoubled, as we have seen, his intellectual efforts. He wrote a text clarifying his position for would-be adherents (as

⁶² See Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 328, fn 478.

⁶³ Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's best known work is the 1600-page book *Da'wat al-muqawamah al-islamiyyah al-'alamiyyah* [The Global Islamic Resistance Call, the English version is available at https://archive.org/stream/TheGlobalIslamicResistanceCall/The_Global_Islamic_Resistance_Call_-_Chapter_8_sections_5_to_7_LIST_OF_TARGETS_djvu.txt] which appeared on the Internet in December 2004 or January 2005. He is reputedly behind the attacks in Madrid on 3/11/2004 and London on 7/7/2005.

⁶⁴ See Rochon, Chapter 2, fn. 91.

⁶⁵ Lahoud, 2009, p. 207.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 209: "Millat Ibrahim merits special attention. Al-Maqdisi considers it to be the first important book he authored, reflecting what he believes to be the influences of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and the school of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab on his intellectual trajectory."

⁶⁷ Both, as mentioned, only in 1989 when he reached Afghanistan.

⁶⁸ While the exact publication date is unknown, it was written by Al-Maqdisi while in prison.

⁶⁹ Wagemakers, 2012, pp. 109-113.

⁷⁰ See Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, pp. 325-330.

the title evidently suggests: *Hadhihi 'Aqidahtuna*, 'This is Our Creed'); and ran a journal while behind bars, explaining “[w]e also produced a magazine called “Review of the Monotheistic Unity” [*Majallat At-Tawheed*]. The brothers used to write its articles and make copies of it to distribute to the prisoners around the jail.”⁷¹ Such articles were then often smuggled outside the prison. As Jihadi Salafi expert Marwan Shahadah pointed out to me: “Why is Al-Maqdisi so important? He brought into the country Ibn Taymiyah and Abdul Wahhab. Sure, there were some people who knew them before Al-Maqdisi. But his value and reputation as a scholar made the difference. You read Al-Maqdisi and you know his knowledge is based on [the knowledge of] those scholars. He got us to know them.”⁷²

Elaboration

Al-Maqdisi’s intellectual production and activity was crucial in developing and building upon the authors he was introducing to the Jordanian context. His effort is most clearly in evidence as he strove to accommodate within an Islamic (Salafi) framework a revolutionary political program.

In discussing *al-wala’ wa al-bara’*, his most enduring intellectual legacy, we must notice how this expression can be found in the *Qur’an*;⁷³ in the writings of Ibn Taymiyah and Muhammad al-Wahhab,⁷⁴ and more recently, in Juhayman al-’Utaybi.⁷⁵ However, Al-Maqdisi’s deployment of the concept is unprecedented. He makes ‘loyalty and disavowal’ into a political instrument, not merely a theological and devotional notion. In this regard, Al-’Utaybi had already added political flavor to it, but he had not claimed that *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* entailed

⁷¹ Al-Maqdisi, 1197, p. 9.

⁷² Conversation with Marwan Shahadah, Amman, April 13, 2015.

⁷³ See for example *Surah Ali Imran*, 3:28; *Surah An-Nisa* 4:76; *Surah al-Baqarah* 2:193.

⁷⁴ Wagemakers, 2012, p. 149.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 166 and p. 168. The case of Al-’Utaybi, given the proximity and direct influence on Al-Maqdisi, is quite important. The ideas of Al-’Utaybi about *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* indicated that worshipping of man-made laws was an act of *shirk* – associationism. Yet, it is only with Al-Maqdisi that such worshipping becomes *wala’*, granting loyalty altogether to others and thus performing *bara’* toward god.

considerations about violations of the *shari'ah* and attendant practices of *takfir* (Al-'Utaybi, as we saw, did not go as far as calling for the disavowal of the Saudi monarchy). Al-Maqdisi instead believed that, “a legislative dimension was implied in or can at least be justifiably deduced from Wahhabi writings on *al-wala' wa al-bara'* and the qur'anic verses that deal with this concept,” and then went on to introduce “an entirely new connection [between *al-wala' wa al-bara'* and *takfir*] that he nevertheless tries to ground in Islamic and especially Wahhabi tradition.”⁷⁶ We can readily see the reason behind such attempt: referring to authors outside the hallowed circle of scholars Salafis deem legitimate, or without firm reliance to the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*, would result in unlawful – and unacceptable - innovation (*bid'a*).

If Al-Maqdisi's work on *al-wala' wa al-bara'* is in any case rooted in the discursive literature of Salafism, we must also consider how he drew from and elaborated upon concepts widely adopted by Islamists of other stripes too. In this sense, the influence of Saiyd Qutb⁷⁷ and, indirectly, Abu 'Ala al-Mawdudi,⁷⁸ is evident by Al-Maqdisi's adoption of the notion of *hakimiyah* and *jahiliyah* (which, for example, are not discussed by Al-Albani). The former, a

⁷⁶ Wagemakers, 2012, p. 171. This seems to be particularly the case for *Millat Ibrahim*, replete with references to Ibn Taymiyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Muhammad Al-Wahhab, with expressions such as, “The *Imām*, the *Shaykh*, Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Wahhāb, may Allāh, the Most High, be merciful to him, said...” Ibn Taymiyah is reputedly the first scholar who made *al-wala' wa al-bara'* an integral component of Sunni Islam. See Wagemakers, 2012, p. 149.

⁷⁷ In the various works from Al-Maqdisi that I consulted, I could not find explicit reference to Qutb. Yet Abdullāh Azzam, as we have seen, was amongst the most revered leaders in the Arab-Afghan camp: a staunch Qutbist, he often met with Al-Maqdisi in Peshawar. Qutb's ideas clearly reflect in Al-Maqdisi's view and writings. The limited accepted references in Salafism may go far to explain this explicit neglect, as I have contended above. Furthermore, Qutb's known affiliation with the Brotherhood, with which the Salafi movement at large maintain strain relations at best, may explain this neglect. At any rate, his influential ideas travelled far from the mainstream Brotherhood's position and his personal reputation - sentenced to death by Nasser - in unquestionable. Saiyd Qutb was a prolific writer. Two works regarded as deeply influential for the development of revolutionary Islamism are *In the Shadow of the Qur'an* and *Milestones*.

⁷⁸ Similarly to Qutb, Al-Maqdisi never mentions the Pakistani journalist and intellectual, widely regarded amongst the most influential thinkers of contemporary Islamism. There is no analogous figure as Azzam who could account for Al-Maqdisi's direct exposure to Mawdudi's thinking. In this sense, one may notice the mechanism of *diffusion* at play here via the works of Qutb, who took up Mawdudi's concept of *hakimiyah* and popularized within Arab Islamist circles, as well as the Arabic translations of Mawdudi's works, originally published in Urdu. Amongst his vast production, the most known work is *Mafhim al-Qur'an*, “The Understanding of the *Qur'an*.” I would like to thank Prof. Jeevan Deol for pointing out to me the importance of translations of works across different Muslim contexts for the transmission and diffusion of ideas.

term not to be found in the *Qur'an* and Mawdudi's single most important contribution, indicates the absolute sovereignty of god also in worldly matters. The latter is Qutb's own elaboration of a classic notion indicating mankind pre-Islamic state of 'ignorance' when not yet aware of Allah's message through the Prophet. For Qutb, a condition of (neo-) *jahiliyah* is endemic to the contemporary Muslim world making it Islamic only at face value and therefore on par with *dar al-kufr*. The two concepts work together: a state of modern *jahiliyah* makes it impossible to uphold the rule⁷⁹ and sovereignty of god. Al-Maqdisi's focus on the legislative process, as noted above, specifies how the principle of *hakimiyah* is violated: by enforcing man-made laws, which not merely (or not only) by virtue of their content are bound to infringing upon god's *hukm* and therefore *tawhid*, but precisely because of the process that produces and makes them binding.⁸⁰

Al-Maqdisi does not supinely adopt Qutb's ideas about *hakimiyah* and *jahiliyah*; rather, he specifies the contours and features of both. Qutb regarded the entire society as a *jahiliy* ('ignorant' or better 'affected by *jahiliyah*') polity, placing everyone living in nominally Muslim countries outside the abode of Islam. In other words, Qutb would perform *takfir* on the entire body politic. Consequently, the call for *jihad* extended against the incumbent system of power as a whole 'integral state.'⁸¹ Al-Maqdisi concentrates instead on the figure of the *tawaghit*. He tries to single out who is responsible for this state of affairs. As discussed, his take on politics leads him to zero in on state institutions (the political society) and pay less attention to civil society, which he does not recognize explicitly as a locus of power (or, at least, it is of lesser importance: he does preach for *daw'ah* activities which would necessarily target such domain, yet only complementing the more militant and violent Jihadi operations).

⁷⁹ 'Hukm', from the same root as *hakimiyah*.

⁸⁰ See Wagemakers, 2012, pp. 63, 66.

⁸¹ See Chapter 3, section "Gramscian Intellectuals: a Philosophy of Praxis, Subalterns and Hegemony" for Gramsci's notion of 'integral state').

What Al-Maqdisi's ideology loses in reach and breadth (not declaring *kafir* the entire body politic), it gains in clarity and specificity. When it comes to *hakimiyah*, he anchors his position to the concept of *taghut*. While already present in the Islamist discourse and political vocabulary, Al-Maqdisi however takes it "to a step further in the literature of Jihadi Salafism by his extensive use of this notion in his discourse:"⁸² *taghut* straddles, from a more religious meaning - idol - towards a more decisively political notion - tyrant. This accusation ultimately ties together *tawhid*, *shari'ah*, *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* and lays the foundation for a political rebellion against the incumbent tyrannical regime: "al-Maqdisi considers disavowing state constitutions and statutory laws as *kufir* as part of the requirements of *al-tawhid*."⁸³

Systematization

Al-Maqdisi arrived in Jordan in 1991. He was not alone, as we have seen: the Arab-Afghans were making their way back home (alongside with Al-Maqdisi, also Al-Zarqawi and Abu Qatada were soon reunited in Amman), a generation forged by the battle against the Soviets. For the Arab-Afghans, *jihad* had been a lived and real combat experience, profoundly shaping a worldview where Islam assumed radical militant contours.

To compound matters further, Jordan was facing three momentous challenges: the impact of the IMF financial and economic measures; a series of democratizing reforms; and the looming peace negotiations with Israel, resulting in the treaty of 1994.⁸⁴ It is not easy to separate neatly the effects of these events in relation to the emergence in the country of various Islamist

⁸² Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 384.

⁸³ Ibid, 375.

⁸⁴ However qualified, as Robinson argues with the idea of 'defensive democratization.' Robinson, Glenn E. "Defensive democratization in Jordan." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30.03 (1998): 387-410); (for an extensive treatment of these issues, see chapter 4, section "Realignment: political and economic shifts at the end of the century."

formations and Jihadi Salafism in particular.⁸⁵ The relevance of strained socio-economic conditions is undeniable, as they have been the background for the emergence of confrontational Islamist groups in the modern Muslim world at large.⁸⁶ In this sense, the draconian Structural Adjustment Program measures adversely impacted the livelihood of many Jordanians, especially as they followed and resulted from the poor economic performance of the 1980s. Widespread discontent had already been simmering, as the popular (mostly East Bankers) protest of 1989 showed clearly. The move of the monarchy to quell the unrest was precisely to inaugurate a hesitant, but nevertheless significant, opening up of the political system. The regime boasted in its official discourse terms such as democracy, rule of law, elections, and representative institutions.

It is therefore in this context that we need to situate Al-Maqdisi's message. Unlike Al-Albani and Quietist Salafis in general, whose references to current social and political events are less prominent and relevant, for Jihadi Salafis they feature instead at the forefront of their concerns. Particularly receptive ears could be found in the community of the Arab-Afghans, many of whom had already been exposed to Jihadism and were therefore prone to embrace a specific (Salafi) configuration of *jihad*.⁸⁷

In this sense, Al-Maqdisi attempted to provide precisely that specific configuration: a cognitive framework that would articulate the sense of frustration (linked to the economic conditions), resentment (due to the perspectives of a peace across the Jordan river), and

⁸⁵ Milton-Edwards, 1996. See Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 321, for list of names of groups active in Jordan in the early 1990s.

⁸⁶ See chapter 2, section "Mobilizing Islam, or Why We're Here," in particular paragraph dealing with Marxist-like accounts.

⁸⁷ Wagemakers, 2012, pp. 183-191.

skepticism (concerning the democratizing measures in relation to the authoritarian nature of the Hashemite regime)⁸⁸ permeating society across different strata.

Al-Maqdisi, given his attention on the political system (i.e., the Gramscian political society) and specifically on the legislative process, was particularly adamant in condemning the regime for its democratic overtures. Introducing *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, he says, "I wrote "Unveiling the Falsehood in the Provisions of the Constitution". This book scrutinizes the Jordanian Constitution and debunks its contradiction to the Law of Allah, the Most High. It exposes the explicit Kufir and corruption found in the Legislative Councils with evidence from Sacred Texts and the intellect. We offered this book to a number of parliamentarians who visited the jail."⁸⁹ Al-Maqdisi seems fully conscious of his role as guide of the Jihadi movement: "Some of the brothers who recently embraced this Da'wah were inevitably making few mistakes due to their enthusiasm or hastiness and extravagance, which usually disappear by seeking knowledge⁹⁰ I anticipated these events by writing a number of essays which expose the reality of our Da'wah and presents it in its glittering face that pleases Allah."⁹¹ He concludes by declaring: "I have presented proofs that necessitate the overthrowing of Kafir rulers, the breaking away and revolting against them, and the fighting against them till they are replaced. The proofs of these are numerous in the Book and the Sunnah, as well as the clear and explicit sayings of the scholars of this Ummah."⁹² In his prison years, after the debacle of *Bay'at al-Imam*, he would insist and further clarify the same points in *Al-Dimuqratiyah Din*.

⁸⁸ This thesis is in particular sustained by Hafez. See Hafez, Mohammed M. *Why Muslims rebel: Repression and resistance in the Islamic world*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

⁸⁹ See Al-Maqdisi, 1997, p. 9, where he makes reference to his time in jail between 1994 and 1999. Italics and capitalization as in the English translation of the text.

⁹⁰ It is evident here how Al-Maqdisi, similarly to the Quietists, places much emphasis on knowledge and scholarship, the major trait that had Wagemaker refer to him as a 'Quietist Jihadi' and one of the main differences eventually leading to the rift with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 8. Italics and capitalization as in the English translation of the text.

⁹² Ibid, p. 17. Italics as in the English translation of the text.

Al-Maqdisi's manifesto and most important work, *Millat Ibrahim*, already contained all the elements to grant religious legitimacy, ideological coherence and clear guidelines to steer and direct the fragmented resentment affecting sections of the Jordanian populace. The incumbent *taghut* and hence *kuffar* regimes are to blame. As Lahoud explains, "[t]he overall tone of the book is characterised by an assault, along doctrinal lines, on existing temporal authorities, be they institutions or prominent figures, who present themselves as legitimate religious or political leaders."⁹³ Al-Maqdisi was thus to articulate a vague and undefined opposition to the *status quo* along precise lines, and indicate a correct praxis according to such contours: "Allāh has made every Muslim responsible to hate the disbelievers (*Kuffār*) and made it compulsory (*Fardh*) upon him to take of them as enemies, as well as taking them as enemies and declaring their disbelief (*Takfīr*), and having disavowal (*Barā'ah*) from them, even if they are their fathers or their sons or their brothers."⁹⁴ Ultimately, "Jihad is a religious duty that is permissible and cannot be arrested or abolished till the Day of Judgment."⁹⁵

If Al-Maqdisi thus targeted the political system - with its man-made laws and democratizing traits - as a whole, he also tapped into sentiments of deep felt anti-Zionism and opposition to the peace process with Israel: "This 'peace' process is in reality not a temporary legal accord similar to what used to be held between Muslims and their enemies in the past due to a necessity. Rather, they are agreements and accords of brotherhood, friendship and truly permanent affiliation with the Kuffar."⁹⁶ This aversion to Israel was already present, again, in *Millat Ibrahim*. Espousing anti-Semitic traits, Al-Maqdisi links a rapprochement with Israel with *al-wala' wa al-bara'*, hence making such course of action tantamount to an attack to Islam itself:

⁹³ Lahoud, 2009, p. 209.

⁹⁴ Al-Maqdisi, 1984, p. 70.

⁹⁵ Al-Maqdisi, 1997, p. 17. Italics as in the English translation of the text.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 15. Italics as in the English translation of the text.

“[a]nd with what could I refute with the people who desire the establishment of the *Khilāfah*, while they cannot even differentiate between the expression, “The children of Ibrāhīm”, which the *Tawāghīt* use nowadays to appease the Jews and enter into peace conferences with them; an expression which is intended to annihilate the ties of faith (*Īmān*) and dissolve the very foundation of the religion and shake the basis of “Allegiance and Disavowal” (*Al-Walā’ Wal-Barā’*).”⁹⁷

As we are going to see below, the state was to play into the hands of Al-Maqdisi as he labored to mobilize would-be Jihadis by systematizing and giving coherence to their worldview. In particular, tough policies on the part of the state (towards secularist and leftist movements, as well as more ‘moderate’ Islamist formations) were shortsighted: “This “siege on the (Islamist) moderates” actually worked to reinforce and strengthen the arguments and discourse of the “radical Islamists”. Indeed, it led certain individuals to seek underground and subversive channels to express their frustrations, ideas, and visions within a discourse that disavowed the state and the constitution, rejected democracy and took a harsh posture with regard to the socio-economic reality – many were ready, at times, to take up arms and use force in an attempt to change this reality.”⁹⁸

Jihadi Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition

The three mechanisms described above compound in a process of social appropriation of tradition.⁹⁹ This process accounts for how the scholar’s intellectual production unlocks the political potential of religious discourse. However, unlike their ‘apolitical’ counterpart, in the case of Jihadis the social appropriation of tradition manifests an explicit political re-articulation

⁹⁷ Al-Maqdisi, 1984, p. 29.

⁹⁸ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 402.

⁹⁹ For the definition and discussion about social appropriation of tradition, see Chapter 3, section “Mobilizing the Past: Social Appropriation of Tradition.”

of group purpose and identity. Harking back to a hallowed and cherished tradition - the paradigm of the pious ancestors - calls here for an immediate and direct engagement with politics.

Consequently, if for the Quietists the social appropriation of tradition entailed the emergence of a movement akin to a social non-movement,¹⁰⁰ for the Jihadis it would manifest in the formation of a vanguardist, cell-based and underground mobilization of vastly different import. Given their understanding of social reality - dominated, as we have seen, by a concern about political society and less importance being attributed to civil society - Jihadi Salafism will inform accordingly its type of mobilization, resulting in a movement apt to fight a ‘war of movement:’ transformation of society shall not come about via (internal and individual) purification and education, but as a forceful act on the part of a (politically) committed vanguard.¹⁰¹

In the Jihadi discourse such vanguard is referred to as “*al-ta’ifah al-mansourah*” or the ‘victorious sect:’ “the sect that represents the champions of this religion in every era.”¹⁰² Jihadis see themselves as such trans-historical agent, epitomizing their - alleged - fundamental *raison d’etre*: bringing back, here and now, the rule of god on earth (*hakimiyah*) as it was in the age of the pious ancestors. As Al-Maqdisi and like-minded Salafi thinkers have maintained, what stands in the way of this project is first and foremost the modern state in its different specific incarnations across the Muslim *ummah*.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 5, section “Quietist Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition.” See also therein fn. 94 for the idea of ‘social non-movement.’

¹⁰¹ As Abu Rumman observes, “the Jihadi Salafi personality is sharp in discourse, politics and social behavior. It views religion in absolute terms, and views confronting deviation within society and the state as integral to religious commitment. In other words, it is in constant conflict with the surrounding environment. It confronts the social environment that is not committed to the perfectly Islamic state envisioned by Jihadi Salafism.” Abu Rumman, 2014, p. 236.

¹⁰² Al-Maqdisi, 1997, p. 63. See also for more details on *al-ta’ifah al-mansourah* in Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 388.

¹⁰³ I would like to point out a degree of inconsistency in this stance. Jihadi Salafis’ understanding of politics is decisively modern, all the more so as *hakimiyah* itself, let alone the implications Jihadis draw from it in terms of specific arrangements of power relations, has no historical basis in the early community of Islam. See for a poignant critique of the very concept of ‘Islamic State’ Hallaq, Wael B. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and*

The idea of a committed vanguard in charge of shaping politics - and ultimately history - is not exclusive, of course, of militant Islamists. It is easy to see similarities especially with modern left wing movements.¹⁰⁴ In the Jihadi discourse, the ‘victorious sect’ is a political-religious concept which translates and embodies, at the level of praxis, what Jihadi ideology (as exemplified, in this study, by Al-Maqdisi’s foundational concept of *al-wala’ wa al-bara’*) has conjured up at the ideational level - more precisely, with Gramsci, at the philosophical level.

For al-Maqdisi, the task of the vanguard is clear: make the historical conform to the ideological by means of such praxis informed by *jihad*. This primacy of praxis within Jihadi Salafism is evident when juxtaposed to the approach of the Quietists. Their avowed retreat from the social and the political does not entail a specific concern on an outward behavioral commitment: Quietist Salafis behavioral coordinates, however strict,¹⁰⁵ are reflection of an inner, personal renewal which maintains primacy over outward behavior. Conformity to the orthodoxy will bring about, as a consequence, orthopraxis. For Jihadi Salafis, it is primarily the engagement with the orthopraxis that signals and brings about doctrinal orthodoxy: therefore, praxis as *jihad* cannot but occupy the very center of their worldview.¹⁰⁶

Modernity's Moral Predicament. Columbia University Press, 2014. and An-Naim, Abdullahi Ahmed. *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'ah*. Harvard University Press, 2008.

¹⁰⁴ The idea of a committed vanguard group in charge and capable of steering the course of history is best exemplified by Lenin’s theory about the state, revolution, and ideology (which he uses more in classic Marxist understanding of ‘misapprehension of social reality.’ See Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich, and Todd Chretien. *State and revolution*. Haymarket Books, 2015. Meijer talks of the concept of *tatbiq*, ‘planning,’ when it comes to Jihadi Salafis’ strategy to change reality. *Tatbiq* ends up “producing a Salafist activist concept of praxis that is comparable to Leninism,” Meijer, Roel. “Introduction,” in idem, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*. Hurst & Co, 2014 [2009], p. 24. Again, these considerations suggest how politics for Jihadi Salafis is deeply rooted in modernity.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 5, fn 77, 78, 79.

¹⁰⁶ And for Al-Maqdisi, orthodoxy alone will not do (in this sense clearly parting ways with the Quietists). In this passage against a pure theoretical and non-practical understand of *tawhid*, he states, “[a]nd some of those who assume, may assume that this *Millah* [i.e., religion] of Ibrāhīm could be implemented in our time (merely) by studying the *Tawhīd* and knowing its three categories and knowing its types by way of theoretical knowledge alone, while remaining silent concerning the people of falsehood and not declaring and openly demonstrating the disavowal [i.e., *bara’*] from their falsehood,” 1984, p. 38. Italics and capitalization as in the English translation of the text.

Consequently, it is not so much the ultimate success of the project that is to show its inherent validity; the actions undertaken in name of that project in conformity with a certain view of history and reality are the prime benchmark to assess its worth. Actions are not judged in relation to results: this is what renders the ideology of Jihadi Salafism so reckless (especially in its current manifestations, see fn. Above about Daesh) in its refutation of instrumental rationality (FN - I would like to thank Prof. Muhammad Khair Eiedat for pointing this out to me. See fn.). Praxis itself as the embodiment of the unadulterated and pristine Islam of the pious ancestors: in this sense, the historical necessity of the return of the Caliphate is less located into a utopian future, but rather within an a-historical past that can be rescued here and now by means of praxis - *jihad*. The a-historical nature of this past is exemplified by the absence of reference to “grandeur of civilization achievements...There is no lineage of kings, no people’s history. History here is also not simply the dead past but a past vitalized by deaths; war is its motor force.”¹⁰⁷

In this context, Al-Maqdisi was to make apparent and convey the political import inherent in this worldview. As Shahadah poignantly told me, “Al-Maqdisi translated Ibn Taymiyah, Abdul-Wahhab and *as-salaf as-salih*. Not in the sense of mere language [*fa mish bi-tariqah al-tarjamah al-lughawiyah al-basitah*], but by connecting ancient texts with present circumstances [*awda’a haliyah*].”¹⁰⁸ Al-Maqdisi offered a rendition of Islamic tradition not only functional, but conducive to a radical and violent politicization. The entire historical and intellectual trajectory of Islam appears to be, in his ideological apparatus, a history of betrayal of a hallowed and otherwise perfect tradition. The re-appropriation of such tradition intends to

¹⁰⁷ Bhatt, Chetan. "The virtues of violence: the Salafi-Jihadi political universe." *Theory, Culture & Society* 31.1 (2014): 25-48, p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Conversation with Marwan Shahadah, see fn. 72. I would like to thank him for pointing this out to me.

rectify history gone awry.¹⁰⁹ What primarily stands in the way of such vision, in Al-Maqdisi's understanding of social reality, is the modern state - as manifested in the power relations of political society: its fundamental institutions, practices, and, ultimately, philosophy. It is therefore against this state that he seeks to fight his 'war of movement' and spur political mobilization.

As Bhatt argues, within the ideological coordinates of Jihadi Salafism, "[t]here are only two authentic agents of history in this universe, the 'scholar' and the 'martyr.'" ¹¹⁰ Abdullah Azzam himself was to concur: "the 'map of Islamic history' is coloured with two lines from the black ink of the scholar and the red blood of the martyr."¹¹¹ For Jordan, the black ink was to be Al-Maqdisi, and the red blood Al-Zarqawi.

Jihadi Salafis and the State: Rejection and Adjustment between the 'Ink of the Scholar' and the 'Blood of the Martyr'

The trajectory of militant Jihadi Salafism in Jordan presents a movement, if compared to neighboring countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq or Syria, far less capable of sustaining a serious security threat to the state and its citizens. Yet, the Jordanian theatre has represented a major stage for Jihadism: in the Levantine country were sown seeds later contributing in important ways to the surge and development of global Jihadism. Indeed, as this form of militant

¹⁰⁹ In this sense, the systematic destruction of historical relics and by current Salafī groups such as ISIS answers precisely to this logic. The erasing of competing and thus politically challenging traditions is grounded their understanding of *bid'a*. This destruction exemplifies once more how the universe of the Salafis is bereft of any conception of pluralism.

¹¹⁰ Bhatt, 2014, p. 32.

¹¹¹ It is worth reporting the full citation here: "More beautiful than this is when the hand of the scholar which expends the ink and moves the pen is the same as the hand that expends his blood and moves the nations," Azzam, Abdullah Yusuf. *Martyrs: The Building Block of Nations*, available at <http://english.religion.info/2002/02/01/document-martyrs-the-building-blocks-of-nations/>, publication date n.d. Al-Maqdisi himself reasons along similar lines, highlighting once again the political responsibility of scholars: "what we suffer from today is the ignorance of the sons of the Muslims and the concealment of the truth from them, along with the added falsehood and the uncertainty of the stance concerning allegiance and disavowal (*Al-Walā' wal-Barā'*). Furthermore, this resulted from the silence and the concealing of this truth by the scholars (*'ulama*) and the callers (*du'at*)," 1984, p. 71. Italics and capitalization as in the English translation of the text.

Islamism rejects - more neatly than other Islamist movements¹¹² - the very concept of nation state, it is to be expected that its various and yet connected manifestations would span and travel across state borders.¹¹³

As I have discussed, the Jordanian state has put forth a diverse set of discourses in order to be able to appeal to a variety of actors and groups.¹¹⁴ In this pluralist – albeit never truly open - discursive space Quietist Salafism could find its niche. The Quietists’ ambiguous yet nominally amicable relation with state power has made them a preferred target for the Jihadis’ reprimands. In the words of Al-Maqdisi, “[t]he enemies of Allah acknowledge any organisation or group as long as it is based on the Irjaa’i belief¹¹⁵ as they used to ask some of our arrested brothers: "Why don't you seek your learning at Ali Al-Halabee [sic] Abu Shaqrah or Al-Albanee [sic] and others? You forsake these Sheikhs for a terrorist?"”¹¹⁶ While the Quietist Salafis have sought to insert their stance and ideology within the interstices of the regime discourse, the Jihadi Salafis have steadily opposed such discourse.

Thus, Jihadis’ ideological rejection of Jordan’s ‘authoritarian pluralism’ entailed the contestation of the regime claims to legitimacy. In particular, Jihadis contest vehemently the

¹¹² For example, a degree of nationalism features prominently in groups like Hamas in Palestine or Hezbollah in Lebanon.

¹¹³ The very biographies of Al-Albani and Al-Maqdisi I briefly sketched attest to this contention: while they came to prominence in Jordan, their lives spanned through a number of countries in the region and beyond.

¹¹⁴ See chapter 4, section “Nation building and state building.” Also, see Moaddel, Mansoor. "Religion and the state: the singularity of the Jordanian religious experience." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15.4 (2002): 527-568.

¹¹⁵ Al-Maqdisi makes reference to the *Murji'ah*, an early Muslim school of thought whose followers believed that god only can assess the belonging of a Muslim to the *ummah*: sins or acts contrary to the *shari'ah* could never be therefore the basis for *takfir*. In this sense, the *Murji'ah* excluded the possibility of declaring any Muslim a *kafir*, a position clearly at odds with the Jihadis’. The *Murji'ah* as a school of thought disappeared around the second century of the Islamic era. As in this case, Jihadis use it now as a derogatory label against those who, like the Quietists, refuse to extend *takfir* towards people deserving excommunication. For Al-Albani position on *takfir*, see Chapter 5, fn. 112. For a discussion of the opposing views on *takfir* between the two Salafi branches, see Wiktorowicz, 2006 and Wagemakers, 2011.

¹¹⁶ Al-Maqdisi, 1997, p. 6.

Hashemites' rule religious credentials.¹¹⁷ In this specific discursive field, the end result is a competition between two rival and mutually exclusive religious discourses.¹¹⁸ The regime proposes a 'liberal' and 'moderate' version of Islam, compatible with both its alleged democratic (or democratizing) nature and accepted international norms of human, political and civil rights, citizenship, gender equality, and so forth (despite the actual conditions on the ground on all these accounts).¹¹⁹ On their part, the Jihadis consider the regime *kafir*, combating the Hashemites in the same religious discursive field upon which the monarchs instead try to justify their rule. The Jihadi challenge is, in this sense, radical: it contests the very roots of the regime claim to authority, legitimacy and, ultimately, hegemony over the body politic. For the Jihadis no accommodation is ever possible - at the most, only tactical retreats or strategic re-assessments. The ideological construct put forth by Jihadi thinkers such as Al-Maqdisi leaves no room for compromise.

As mentioned, the first embodiment of this position was *Bay'at al-Imam*. The group gathered around Al-Maqdisi and Al-Zarqawi after their arrival in Jordan in the early 1990s.¹²⁰ The members of the group called themselves *Jama'a al-Muwahidin*, 'The Group of the Monotheistic Unity.'¹²¹ There are somewhat conflicting accounts in terms of the social and educational background of those who joined: mostly poor, uneducated and disenfranchised youngsters of both Palestinian and East Bank descent (some of them Afghan Arabs too)

¹¹⁷ See Chapter 4, section "Nation building and state building."

¹¹⁸ I would like to thank Tamer Khorma for useful comments and insights about this point.

¹¹⁹ As simple anecdotal evidence, this may be a significant episode: during the march in Paris in January 2015 in solidarity with the victims of the attack to the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, King Abdallah and Queen Rania features prominently in the front stage. Next to French President François Holland and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, they stood as the 'moderate Islam' as opposed to the extremism and violence of Jihadis.

¹²⁰ I was not able to find more precise information regarding the date; indeed, it seems that the group did not have an 'official' date of founding, but emerged as such over a period of a few months.

¹²¹ The press labeled the trial surrounding the group 'the case of *Bay'at al-Imam*' because one of defendants had written a treatise by that title. The document was seized by the police at the moment of the arrests and leaked out to the press, which promptly adopted it despite the members of the group always refusing such label. Wagemakers, 2014, p. 64.

according to Wagemakers;¹²² relatively middle class and educated according to Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh.¹²³ In any case, the role of Al-Maqdisi is not under dispute. He was already quite known in Islamist circles, his works already been published: he conferred ideological consistency to an amorphous movement that was emerging out of widespread resentment and dissatisfaction, providing the necessary coordinates to envision a full-fledged political project.¹²⁴

Bay'at al-Imam would never become what Al-Maqdisi's ambitious ideas - and Al-Zarqawi's more brazen inclinations - had envisioned: a vanguard of the 'victorious sect.' As its network was expanding beyond Amman, setting up potential cells across the country, the group had yet to carry out any meaningful operation. Some of its members decided to take action, calling for a retaliation mission in Israel after Baruch Goldstein, an American-Israeli right wing extremist, went on a shooting rampage in Hebron, West Bank, on February 25, 1994.¹²⁵ Al-Maqdisi was to give reluctantly his consent with a *fatwa*, since he would have preferred to concentrate efforts on Jordan.¹²⁶ The group started thus planning an attack against Israel (with which Jordan was about to normalize relations), collecting a number of weapons Al-Maqdisi had smuggled from Kuwait.¹²⁷ The police however got word of the plan and arrested the core 16 members of the organization, including Al-Maqdisi and Al-Zarqawi.¹²⁸ They were sentenced to 15 years in prison.

The prison years, as I have already observed, were of great importance for the future developments of Jihadism. These developments were ideological, organizational and at last

¹²² Ibid, p. 62.

¹²³ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 400.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 356.

¹²⁵ Goldstein killed 29 Palestinians who were praying in the Ibrahimi Mosque and wounding 125 others. Goldstein will be lynched by the survivors on the spot.

¹²⁶ Wagemakers, 2014, p. 66.

¹²⁷ Including rifles, hand grenades and dynamite.

¹²⁸ Brisard and Martinez, 2005, p. 38.

operational. Al-Maqdisi's stature as a prominent ideologue only increased after the verdict,¹²⁹ thanks also to his defiant attitude during the trial, when he refused to recognize the authority of the court. He did not stop writing, and if anything his position hardened behind bars.¹³⁰

However, during this time, Al-Maqdisi's learned, scholarly and deliberate persona found it hard to compete for the leadership of the movement with the uncouth and uneducated, but more determined and resolute Al-Zarqawi. The younger pupil had none of the intellectual sophistication of his mentor. His charisma depended instead on a thuggish and violent character that well suited the prison environment.¹³¹ Soon, erstwhile friends and comrades Al-Maqdisi and Al-Zarqawi started drifting apart.¹³² On the one hand, Al-Maqdisi was focused on refining his theoretical and intellectual position. Looking for ways to contrast and combat the Hashemite regime, he became more and more persuaded to concentrate on *da'wah* as a proper way of carrying out *jihad* in the Jordanian context. This more 'moderate' attitude, as noticed a feature of Al-Maqdisi's personality, could hardly disguise the implications one could draw from his works.

On the other hand, Al-Zarqawi was seeking for the next battlefield after the missed opportunity in Afghanistan and the collapse of *Bay'at al-Imam*.¹³³ He was bent on leaving Jordan

¹²⁹ Conversation with Marwan Shahadah, see fn. 72. Shahadah went as far as to say, "They made a huge mistake by condemning him with scant evidence of violent activities. At that time, he had not done anything against the regime. Actually, he was planning to attack Israel. You can see how people here reacted to that," making reference to the widespread animosity to Israel in the country.

¹³⁰ Not unlike the intellectual trajectory of Saiyd Qutb, writing his most famous work - *Milestones* - while incarcerated by Nasir.

¹³¹ Anecdotes of Al-Zarqawi's behavior and deeds behind bars are replete with acts of open defiance towards the guards, brawls with fellow inmates at the slightest provocation, readiness to defend members affiliated with *Bay'at al-Imam* or willing to join. At any rate, this did not prevent him from learning the *Qur'an* by heart while in cell. See Brisard and Martinez, 2005, pp. 42-51.

¹³² The literature on the fallout between the two men is large. See Brooke, Steven. "The Preacher and the Jihadi," in Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani and Eric Brown, eds., *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology Vol. 3*, Hudson Institute, 2006, pp. 52-66; Kazimi, Nibras. "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," in Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani, and Eric Brown, eds., *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology Vol. 2*, Hudson Institute, 2005, pp. 59-73.20; Napoleoni, Loretta. *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation*, Seven Stories Press, 2005, p. 63. Abu Rumman, Muhammad. *Al-Maqdisi wa al-Zarqawi al-Khilaf laysa 'ala al-Afkar Faqat* [Al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi: The Conflict is Not About Ideas Only]; available at <http://www.alasr.ws/index.cfm?method=home.con&contentID=5958>, 2004.

¹³³ Brisard and Martinez, 2005, pp. 55-62.

as soon as possible and taking the ideas of Al-Maqdisi to what he deemed their logical conclusions: a violent and relentless confrontation with any *kafir* regime, wherever opportunity might arise.¹³⁴

Upon their release in 1999, the project of *Bay'at al-Imam* was over, victim of the divergences between the intellectual leader of the movement, Al-Maqdisi, and the operational one, Al-Zarqawi. The former was under tight security surveillance. As mentioned before, this is the situation Al-Maqdisi confronts to this very day. He has thus and refrained from exposing himself too much (notwithstanding frequent periods of detention). Instead, “Al-Zarqawi was busy organizing groups of local and foreign individuals to carry out militant operations.”¹³⁵ The result of this lack of coordination between the two leaders made the Jihadi movement in Jordan “foggy, gelatinous [...] [S]ome of its members were organized, others were tied to and loyal to al-Zarqawi, while still others were satisfied to work in the field of *da'wa*, advocating the Jihadi Salafist discourse and mobilizing society towards this ideology.”¹³⁶

This situation persists to an extent to this very day. As it was not easy to gauge the amount of individuals regarding themselves as ‘Salafis’ in the case of the Quietist branch,¹³⁷ this difficulty is compounded when it comes to Jihadis. In principle, it would be easier to do the math, insofar as Jihadism tends to operate via cells and close-knit formations, and thus differing from the amorphous Quietist movement. Yet, this is only partially true. If it was possible, for example, to imprison and condemn the central elements of *Bay'at al-Imam*, that leaves us with very little clue as to whom was affiliated with the larger network the movement was building;

¹³⁴ Al-Zarqawi was in this sense a global jihadi fighter, severing any attachment he may have had with Jordan. His embrace of *Al-Qai'dah* during his last years in Iraq was no doubt smooth from this point of view, Bin Laden's organization being the paramount example of a de-territorialized, global and Jihadi identity. See *ibid*, p. 93.

¹³⁵ Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 344.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*.

¹³⁷ See Chapter 5, section “Quietist Salafis and the Social Appropriation of Tradition.”

much less who embraces the fundamental tenets and worldview of Jihadism. Last but not least, official government statistics and data on this point are not made available. Therefore, it is primarily an exercise in educated guessing to say that there may have been a couple of hundreds Jihadis as the movement appeared in Jordan in the early 1990s. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, it has mushroomed to some 1,000 or even 2,000 individuals.¹³⁸ At the time of writing, with the Middle East experiencing one of its most severe political crisis ever, it has been estimated that at least 3,000 Jordanians joined ISIS since 2014, with an estimated 400 or 500 fighters been killed.¹³⁹ The number of sympathizers is arguably much larger.¹⁴⁰ In other words, Jihadism seems to be on the rise, a much stronger and more threatening phenomenon than it once was.

In this context, the state response has been fundamentally based upon a security approach:¹⁴¹ “[t]he Jordanian state strategy in confronting the rise of the Jihadi Salafist movement over the last 15 years is a narrative replete with crackdowns, arrests and prosecutions, as well as constant surveillance of the group, its members and their activities.”¹⁴² This security strategy is predicated upon the capacity to closely monitor, infiltrate and ultimately disband Jihadi groups: “[i]ndeed, it is not a strategy that pays attention to or gives enough consideration

¹³⁸ Conversations with Hassan Abu Hanieh, Amman, 11/25/2015 and Marwan Shahadah, see fn. 72.

¹³⁹ See <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/jordan/2016-02-17/isis-meets-its-match>. While affiliation to ISIS may be debated as an index to measure the reach of Jihadi Salafism within any given country, it nonetheless provides a reasonable scale of magnitude of the phenomenon. Moreover, adherence to other Jihadi groups, such as *Al-Nusra/Fatah ash-Sham*, that are known to recruit heavily in Jordan as well, may even conflate these figures. See fn. 140.

¹⁴⁰ During my field research in Jordan, there were frequent accounts of large groups gathering after the Friday prayers in southern cities like Ma’an and expressing their support for ISIS. The security services were evidently monitoring these manifestations, while refraining from opening a dangerous open confrontation with the demonstrators. The scenario changed quite drastically after the ordeal of Mu’azh al-Kasasbah, see below. See also <https://newrepublic.com/article/119909/islamic-state-isis-support-jordan-worrying-poll>

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, the regime seems to frame the Salafi movement with the same lenses regardless of their averred political stance: the Quietists too, in fact, are considered primarily a security issue: “the womb of “Traditional Salafism” is quite prone to incubating and giving birth to groups that later transform into Jihadi Salafists, due to the natural “fluidity” between the various Salafist movements.” Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 411. See also Chapter 5, section “Quietist Salafis and the state.”

¹⁴² Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2013, p. 409.

to “preventive” measures – or, in other words, curtailing the various conditions, causes, and environmental factors that have helped catalyze its rise and nurture its activities.”¹⁴³

This approach has granted Jordan, as noted at the beginning, a degree of stability and safety rather unique for regional standards. Yet, the main breach in the security system was to come by no other than Al-Zarqawi himself with the 2005 Amman hotels bombing. If the ink of the ‘scholar’ Al-Maqqadi and blood of the ‘martyr’ Al-Zarqawi thus parted ways, yet, just like Abdullah Azzam’s metaphor suggests, the symbiotic link connecting ideology and praxis, thought and action, was not to be as easily severed.

Lost in Translation? Al-Maqqadi and the Surge of Violent Jihadism

Al-Zarqawi left Jordan heading first to Afghanistan and then, through Iran, he reached Iraqi Kurdistan prior to the US led invasion of the country in March 2003.¹⁴⁴ There, he set up a number of training camps, becoming involved with the local Islamist movement. As the US proceeded to dismantle the institutions of the Iraqi state, Al-Zarqawi launched a relentless campaign against whomever he deemed a *kafir*. His group changed name a few times (from *Ansar al-Islam* to *Tawhid wa al-Jihad* - a clear reminder to *Jama’at al-Tawhid* - and then *Al-Qa’idah fi Bilad al-Rafidayin* in 2004),¹⁴⁵ yet it maintained the same utterly exclusivist outlook. Al-Zarqawi became by 2005 the leader of the Islamist Sunni opposition not only to the US forces, but also to the reconstituted Iraqi regime under Ayad Allawi first and then Ibrahim al-Ja’fari, the other Iraqi political formations (whether secular or Islamist), the entire Shi’a community (which makes up between 55 to 60% of the Iraqi population), and anyone

¹⁴³ Ibid. See the text of the law against terrorism on the Jordanian Ministry of Interior website, available at <http://www.moi.gov.jo>; also refer to the text of the law against preaching or advocating terrorism on the Jordanian Legal Code website, available at http://www.lob.gov.jo/ui/laws/search_no.jsp?no=7&year=1986

¹⁴⁴ See Brisard and Martinez, 2005, pp. 106-121.

¹⁴⁵ See fn. 121.

collaborating, directly or indirectly, with all of the above. He accompanied this uncompromising stance with practices so gruesome and horrifying (basically inaugurating the decapitation of hostages and the subsequent release of the video), embracing violence so recklessly, that even the leadership of *Al-Qai'dah* itself (not known for calls to restrain to its affiliates, as Al-Zarqawi had become) requested him not to indulge in such tactics,¹⁴⁶ as they were alienating wider and wider strata of the Iraqi population - not to mention Muslim world public opinion.

Al-Zarqawi's violence was to strike Jordan on November 14, 2005 with the notorious bombings of major hotel complexes in Amman. The attacks killed 60 people, mostly attendees at a wedding party, and wounded hundreds. This operation represents to this very day the most severe breach in security in the kingdom, and contributed to making Al-Zarqawi amongst the most wanted men on the planet.¹⁴⁷

Al-Zarqawi was to be killed in a US airstrike on June 7, 2006, at the height of the civil war that his groups sought to ignite between the Sunni and Shi'a communities.¹⁴⁸ However, his legacy survives to this very day. The notorious Islamic State is but the last incarnation of Jihadi Salafi ideology, adopting more firmly the violent practices of Al-Zarqawi's *Al-Qa'idah fi Bilad al-Rafidayin* as a staple element of its repertoire of contention,¹⁴⁹ what makes Jihadi Salafism the global threat we know nowadays is its willingness to exercise *takfir* on anyone not deemed part

¹⁴⁶ Brisard and Martinez, 2005, p. 147; see also www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/iraq/2014-09-10/state-confusion

¹⁴⁷ The repercussions in the country in terms of popularity for *Al-Qa'idah fi Bilad al-Rafidayin* and Al-Zarqawi in particular were disastrous. By killing civilians attending a wedding, it seemed utterly implausible, as Al-Zarqawi kept claiming, that such action was directed against the Hashemite regime and that the hotel had been a hangout for Israeli spies. Capturing the mood of the country, an angry Jordanian said, "if he [Al-Zarqawi] has a problem with the king, why does he not go bombing the royal palace?" reported in International Crisis Group. *Jordan's 9/11 - Dealing with Jihadi Islamists*, Middle East Report N°47 – 23 November 2005, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Zarqawi sought to ignite communal strife by bombing a Shi'a mosque in the holy city of Samarra in northern Iraq, on 2/22/2006. The sectarian warfare can be said to have begun in earnest after such wanton provocation.

¹⁴⁹ The literature on ISIS is vastly growing at the time of writing. See Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2015; see also McCants, William. *The ISIS apocalypse: The history, strategy, and doomsday vision of the Islamic State*. Macmillan, 2015; and Fromson, James, and Steven Simon. "ISIS: the dubious paradise of apocalypse now." *Survival* 57.3 (2015): 7-56. A degree of controversy was raised by Graeme Wood, where he submitted an essentialist analysis of the ISIS phenomenon. His piece went on to become the most read article in the history of the *Atlantic*, eliciting a variety of responses. Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS really wants." *The Atlantic* 315.2 (2015): 78-94.

of the *ummah*, justifying - even requesting - an attack against such individuals or groups, and act consequently.¹⁵⁰

Insofar as we can trace the ideology of the Islamic State to the work of Al-Maqdisi - and I claim this operation to be totally warranted - we may ask ourselves to what extent the Jordanian scholar's intellectual production has been either misused, misinterpreted, or correctly understood. I contend that just as Al-Albani's teaching could provide logic and justification for envisioning the siege of Mecca - despite his open opposition to such operations - in the same way Al-Maqdisi's works, especially his theorization of *bara'* and *takfir*, has partaken in engendering outcomes not foreseen - and most likely not desired - by their author.

There is indeed evidence of Al-Maqdisi's displeasure, if not open opposition, to a wanton use of *takfir* and relative deployment of violence.¹⁵¹ Such opposition, as his inclination to consider *da'wah* a valuable - if not a more effective in some circumstances - tactic to carry out *jihad*, could not prevent his readers and acolytes at any rate to read his works otherwise. In addition, some inconsistencies of his ideological apparatus left room for such alternative readings beyond, possibly, the intent of the author. For example, we have seen how Al-Maqdisi goes at length to place limits on *takfir* while at the same time insisting on a sweeping and encompassing *bara'*. These two propositions are hardly reconcilable. Al-Maqdisi's nuances and details which he is at pain to explain can be easily misinterpreted and expanded to include

¹⁵⁰ The similarities in this sense across Jihadi movements persist regardless of the significant divergences in terms of strategies and priorities. As Abu Hanieh pointed out to me, *Al-Qa'idah* may be in fact characterized as a '*nikaiyah*' (revenge) movement, seeking retribution to perceived injustices perpetrated against the *ummah*; while ISIS is a '*tamkin*' (establishing) organization, looking for a land where to build, here and now, the Caliphate. Conversation with Hassan Abu Hanieh, Dar al-Jasmin, Amman, 5/13/2015.

¹⁵¹ See for example Al-Maqdisi, Abu Muhammad. *Ar-Risalah al-Thalathiniyah fi al-Tahdir min al-Ghuluw fi al-Takfir* [The Thirtieth Letter Warning from the Excesses in Excommunication], 1998/9, available at www.tawhed.ws/t. This is a more elaborate treatise written specifically to discourage excesses (*ghuluw*) in resorting to *takfir*. The letter Al-Maqdisi addressed to Al-Zarqawi to temper his excesses in Iraq answers to the same logic. See also Lahoud, 2009, p. 214, on this point.

everyone opposed or even neutral¹⁵² to his proposed vanguardist project. Whether Al-Maqdisi wished or not, in his works, to inspire movements such as ISIS can never be ascertained for sure. What can be more readily assessed is the potential inscribed in Al-Maqdisi's writings, which definitely contained elements to inspire, shape and justify such developments.

Last, it is interesting to pay attention to a significant episode which involved Al-Maqdisi and the leadership of ISIS. After the Islamist group captured Jordanian fighter jet pilot Mu'azh al-Kasasbah in December 2014, the Jordanian authorities tried to secure his release by having Al-Maqdisi (at the time in prison and promptly freed) negotiate with his fellow Islamists. Nobody knew that, at the time of such negotiations, ISIS had already executed Al-Kasasbah.¹⁵³ At any rate, the intervention of Al-Maqdisi¹⁵⁴ on behalf of the '*kafir*' Jordanian regime to secure the life of a member of its armed forces could not but elicit intense polemics within the Islamist community, its sympathizers and the larger public.

Al-Maqdisi deemed contrary to his views the action of the Islamic State. The Islamist fighters in Syria and Iraq, who shunned his appeals to 'moderation',¹⁵⁵ made manifest how, indeed, intellectuals and scholars can only have impact under certain conditions: first and foremost, their organic relationship and consequent possibility to shape and inform the worldviews of their followers and audience. Far removed from the battlefield,¹⁵⁶ Al-Maqdisi's new pronouncements could not rival his old ones, produced in the context of militant opposition to the Saudi and Jordanian regimes. The Islamic State could, in fact, readily relate to such earlier works of Al-Maqdisi to inform, justify and sustain its politics.

¹⁵² See Wagemakers 2012, pp. 90-93.

¹⁵³ A particularly brutal execution, the prisoner burnt alive in an iron cage. The video was released by Al-Jazeera on February 3, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Maqdisi explains his own version of the story at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPBgEW5xXVU>

¹⁵⁵ This is a term (*mu'tadil*) that Al-Maqdisi actually used during the TV interview reported above. He was indeed trying to differentiate between the 'moderate' Jihadi Salafis such as himself - as rational and reasonable - and the reckless and extremist ISIS types - with whom no dialogue seemed, at last, possible.

¹⁵⁶ See Wagemakers, 2011.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I offered an analysis of the work and impact of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, one of the most important Jihadi theoreticians. His political project, pivoted around the concept of ‘loyalty and disavowal’ or *al-wala’ wa al-bara’*, transforms Salafi theological notions – first and foremost *tawhid* - into tools for political mobilization. Unlike their Quietist counterparts, Jihadi scholars such as Al-Maqdisi make no mystery of their political proclivities. They put forward a political project that does not seek accommodations within the coordinates of the Jordanian regime official discourse. Their aim is precisely to explicitly refute and fight such discourse. Hence, the process of social appropriation of tradition becomes in the Jihadi case an uncompromising call for rebellion and revolution.

There are three main and connected observations on this point. First, much more so than the Quietist, Jihadi Salafism espouses the traits of a modern social movement. Not only in its mode of operation - small vanguardist cells - Jihadism showcases its modern traits; but especially, as Meijer points out, given that the, “embrace of chaos and dissent, so abhorrent to Albani [sic] and others, but characteristic as an expression of transition and rebirth, is taken for granted and even welcomed as a means of cleansing and creating a *tabula rasa*.”¹⁵⁷ In this sense, the engagement - at the intellectual and practical level - with a thoroughly modern institutions as the state makes the call for tradition and authenticity the Jihadis put forward as contradictory as hollow. Their project, based on a forceful recreation of the Caliphate by means of a ‘war of movement,’ has in fact no clear historical roots and referents, given their wanton destruction of everything Islamic - including its philosophical, historical, political and social legacy - not conforming to their discourse about the pious ancestors. Consequently, it is intellectually poor even in Al-Maqdisi, a sophisticated and prolific scholar. In Jihadism, the contours of such future

¹⁵⁷ Meijer, 2014, p. 24.

polity are grounded in a past, a tradition merely discursive and detached from the histories of the people it should like to appeal to. Al-Maqdisi's Caliphate or Islamic state ends up being much less defined as opposed to the various rationales and justifications he provides to fight the *kafir* regimes of the Arab and Muslim world.

Second and relatedly, I maintained how this ultimate poverty of the political thinking of Jihadi Salafism is manifest when considering the primacy of praxis, evident by looking at Jihadi groups trajectory, discourse and ideology. It is not so much the realization of the Islamic state that will prove Salafis correct: it is the very engagement in activities *ultimately* and *potentially* conducive to such polity that justifies *jihad*. Whence Jihadism righteousness in both ideology and practice, its sense of historical necessity, its excesses in violence: in this sense, Lahoud correctly observes how, "Al-Maqdisi's vision may not end up precipitating the formation of a new type of totalitarian regime, but like other absolutist oppositional ideologies it could easily serve to facilitate the destabilisation of various existing regimes."¹⁵⁸

Finally, if Al-Maqdisi has resented the development of Jihadism into a movement characterized by brutality, violence and fear, he has little room for complaint: rather than a misunderstanding of his works on the part of his readership and followers, the more recent and ominous manifestation of Jihadism since the early days of *Bay'at al-Imam* have hardly betrayed the spirit of his message.

¹⁵⁸ Lahoud, 2009, p. 217.

Conclusion

Making Contention

All too often episodes of contention are reified, and no proper attention is devoted to agency. Structural factors, be them material (socio-economic conditions, regime type, technology, geography, and so on) or ideational (culture as a system of signifiers and meanings, prevailing values and orientations, patterns of social relations, and so on) tend to crowd the theoretical landscape. Provide the correct recipe - widespread grievances of some sort, the means to act upon them, a set of overlapping social cleavages and a powerful narrative - and one can explain the appearance of social mobilization and political contention. Let us be clear: there are very good reasons for doing so! Structural features are inescapable for offering any meaningful account of macro episodes of contention. Yet, we must combine and relate such accounts to the role of agents and actors: again, it is worth reminding ourselves, with Skocpol, how revolutions do not merely come, but they are made.¹ We can frame the same idea in a language dear to International Relations theorists: agency and structure are co-constitutive, and we cannot reduce one to the other.

It is with these broad considerations in mind that I carried out the present research. I tried to evince the role of scholars within contentious politics by looking at their intellectual production: what was it about their works and pronouncements that made them into ‘popular intellectuals,’ ideologues capable of influencing, spurring and sustaining episodes of social and political mobilization? The challenge was not merely theoretical, in that my main empirical focus was located in the Arab Middle East and it dealt with Islamist politics. Therefore, I have tried to

¹ See Chapter 2, fn. 42.

heed to Kurzman’s warning about the perils of Orientalism:² on the one hand, steering clear from simply superimposing ‘western’ theories onto ‘non-western’ experiences; on the other hand, not suggesting irreducible differences between them. I hope my theoretical effort, which takes cues from western scholarship and it is informed by a non-western episode of social and political mobilization, may walk such fine line. Indeed, the fast growing literature on this topic (mobilization in non-Western settings) confirms that there is both the possibility as well as the space to take on this challenge.

In the case of Jordanian Islamist thinkers, the production of Nasir ad-Din al-Albani, representing Quietist Salafism, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, representing Jihadi Salafism, provided the puzzles and material to elaborate my theoretical account. In this concluding chapter, I wish to summarize my main findings: both in regards to our theoretical understanding of contentious politics; and in regards to Salafism, briefly discussing its impact on the politics of the Middle East and beyond.

Three Mechanisms and the Social Appropriation of Tradition

In my research, I asked not *why* certain episodes of social and political mobilization happen. I was interested in explaining *how* they occur. In particular, I sought to understand the role of intellectuals and thinkers within such episodes. To put it otherwise, I have not inquired about the presence or absence of certain conditions or variables. Instead, I tried to single out mechanisms I posit to be present in the fabric of social reality; and I proposed how they may be at work in instances of mobilization.³

² See Chapter 1, fn. 35.

³ Chapter 3, section “Contention and Mechanisms.”

I relied on the insights about mechanisms and contention of Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam;⁴ and then on the work of Kurzman, in particular his contention that all mechanisms are, fundamentally, cognitive ones.⁵ Following this intellectual trajectory, I proposed to consider mechanisms as heuristic devices that help us understand the role of scholars' and intellectuals' production in episodes of contention. I have proposed three mechanisms: *diffusion*, the spreading of ideas connecting different intellectual locales; *elaboration*, the production of novel insights on top of the existing ideological repertoire; and last, *systematization*, the reconfiguration of the common sense understanding of the audience. These mechanisms are never 'necessarily' activated given some 'objective' circumstances. Rather, they are contingent upon wider structural conditions, be them economic, social, cultural. To put it differently, they do not work independently from the broader social context.

As Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam suggested, mechanisms may compound into a process, if and when activated. In our case, they compound in the process of social appropriation, whereby the aims and purposes of a group are re-defined in order to sustain social and political contention. The intellectual production of the scholars under examination entailed a re-definition of the community of believers: it provided the cognitive coordinates (articulated in what I referred to as an 'ideology,' see section below) by which it was possible to put forth a political project bent on altering existing power relations.

In discussing a process of social appropriation in the context of contemporary Salafism, I qualified it as the process of social appropriation *of tradition*. I contended that the specific content of Salafism as a political project features prominently this cognitive dimension: an exemplary discursive tradition - the community of the early days of Islam - functions as a

⁴ McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁵ Kurzman, Charles. "The Post-Structural Consensus in Social Movements Theory." *Rethinking social movements: Structure, meaning, and emotion*. Eds. Jeff Goodwin, and James M. Jasper. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

template for mobilization. It is against this template that Salafis scholars seek to understand reality, diagnose its ills, and call for mobilization, the ultimate goal being the (supposed) re-establishment of the original Islamic polity.

Gramsci, Organic Intellectuals and Salafis' Political Projects

I have grounded these theoretical claims in a wider social theory, namely the Marxist approach heralded by Antonio Gramsci.⁶ It provides a map of social and political relations wherein we may locate a specific actor - the organic intellectual - and connect her activity to other, different domains of society: the economic realm, class configuration, political structure, its institution, patterns of social relations and reproduction, and then dominant or hegemonic discursive constructs, common sense, and practices. In this complex web, organic intellectuals operate exploiting its opportunities and confronting its constraints. Their primary function is to endow the social class they hail from with identity, moral guidance and purpose. They are central, for Gramsci, for understanding hegemony (as well of course for potential configurations of counter-hegemony). What the intellectual production of the organic intellectuals can do is to propose or advance alternative - contentious - propositions *vis à vis* the existing dominant or hegemonic power relations. These propositions manifest as an ideology: a relatively stable and coherent political project that seeks to alter such power relations. In a nutshell, I hold ideology as social theory plus normativity: it answers the questions, "What is society? What ought we to change, and how?"

Ideology is the product of the laboring of the intellectuals under examination; and the mechanisms I discussed above illustrate how ideology works in shaping the perception of social

⁶ Gramsci, Antonio and Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers, 1971.

reality - and thus positing the possibilities to change it - on the part of (potential) adherents and followers. It is in this sense that organic intellectuals may be considered as ideologues or 'popular intellectuals.'

Ideologues' efforts to inform the cognition of social reality (in the ways I posited above with the three mechanisms) are both enabled and limited by structural circumstances. Hence, to speak of possibility to shape worldviews, and thereby spur and sustain a social and political movement, it is not to speak of necessity. For example, Salafi preaching may be particularly effective after an intense economic crisis; or during a period of acute social and cultural stress: in the case of Jordan, think about the economic measures implemented in 1989, or the relocation of thousands of Jordanians-Palestinians in the Kingdom following the Kuwaiti war of 1990-91, or again the shock of the peace with Israel in 1994. Salafi scholars had no say in the occurrence of any of those events. Yet, they could capitalize on them by providing an ideology relating to the common sense and worldview of those whom they sought to address. Nor speaking of possibility is tantamount to claiming ideologues can control how their message may be received and understood: Al-'Utaybi's siege of Mecca flies in the face of Al-Albani's call of restraint from politics; Al-Maqdisi may complain about ISIS application of his pronouncements, and meet only indifference when not scorned.

In any case, both Al-Albani and Al-Maqdisi proposed alternative readings of social and political reality. These readings - ideologies - are not innocuous, or inert, precisely due to the position of these actors in a wider social structure and the function they may perform within it. In fact, they called for alternative power arrangements, and met success – however qualified - in doing so: Salafism is a phenomenon to be reckoned with on the part of the Hashemite regime. And its political project is never solely confined to the small Levantine kingdom.

Quietist and Jihadi Salafism: Final Considerations on Their Politics

When I began in earnest my field research in Jordan, the movement known as ISIS, ISIL or *Da'esh* had just made its shocking appearance: after storming eastern Syria and taking control of Raqqah, it rose to international prominence when it conquered Mosul, Iraq's third largest city, in June 2014. A year later, it controlled an expanse as vast as England, and it seemed poised to keep wreaking havoc not only in the region at large, but also outside it. ISIS, like its kin *Al-Qa'idah* in its different local franchises, may outlast its current incarnations. Let me explain what I mean by this.

As I delved more into the tenets, principles and, ultimately and more importantly, ideologies of Salafism, I could trace how the likes of ISIS and *Al-Qa'idah* are part and parcel of a specific way of looking at the relation between religion and politics. I am extremely reluctant to subscribe to any essentialist view purporting Islam as a militant religion, much less a necessarily violent one. Yet, it is possible for Islam - like for most other ideational constructs, and surely for those constructs we nowadays consider 'religions' - to evolve and eventually espouse a specific understanding of its tenets: namely, in our case, Salafism. And Salafism, unlike Islam at large, features a discourse with much more precise coordinates: epistemological, theological, moral, social and, at last, political. In other words, Salafism can easily become an ideology.

In light of these considerations, when looking at current events, armed jihadi Salafism may not represent in the long run the most relevant threat to stability, democracy and progressive politics. The all too violent means often adopted by the likes of *Al-Qa'idah* and ISIS tend to alienate vast segments of the Muslim population in the region; their military prowess can be crushed by much more powerful states; their resort to terrorism only goes to show how it is

indeed the weapon of the weak. Regardless of the fear these acts inspire in western and eastern publics alike, terrorism has never lent to regime change or whole revolution bar the presence of significant inroads within society.

What about the Quietists? To answer this question, let me go back to the war of position versus war of movement that Gramsci outlined. Jihadis wage the latter in the ways we know. Yet Quietist Salafis' war of position may represent a much bigger problem than their overtly violent counterparts: making societal inroads is indeed the core of their strategy. They have deeper roots in wider sectors of society.⁷ Refutation of progressive politics runs for them just as deeply as for the Jihadis. Quietist Salafis are in this sense radical, while not armed. They may represent a formidable trench in the war of position for the progressive change in the Muslim world, a force that cannot be confronted with merely security measures (as I argued in Chapter 5). In other words, Quietist Salafis may truly engage in a wholesome counter-hegemonic project unlike their Jihadi counterpart, and thus result all the more efficacious (or menacing, depending on one's politics) in fostering social and political change.

At the same time, while it is plausible to think about defeating Jihadi Salafism with security measures in its current and various embodiments, there is no guarantee of vanquishing the ideas - the ideologies, as I have contended - that underpin and structure those incarnations. Let me use a line from a movie to get my point across (as Slavoj Zizek would like to do): in *V for Vendetta*'s final showdown, the masked hero is being repeatedly shot and yet keeps on fighting. Answering to his assailant's puzzlement, he hisses, "beneath this mask there is more than flesh: beneath this mask there is an idea, and ideas are bulletproof." While we would cheer for V's

⁷ As an official in the Ministry of Political Development told me, "the problem with this country is that there are 6000 mosques and 30 libraries!" A fertile ground, I would contend, for a movement like Salafism.

political project (the destruction of a fascist dictatorship in a dystopian England), we rightfully cringe at the Jihadi one: but, from a theoretical standpoint, V's line works perfectly for both.

Yet we could nevertheless ask: is Salafism, regardless of its specific and current manifestations, capable of evolving into a viable political project? This question tackles Roy's thesis of the 'failure of political Islam.'⁸ From a Gramscian perspective, this is hardly possible: "Religion and the common sense cannot constitute an intellectual order because they cannot be reduced to a unity and coherence even in individual consciousness not to speak of the collective consciousness: they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence "freely" because this reduction could only happen in an authoritarian way, as in fact has happened in the past in a limited fashion."⁹ Hence, any political philosophy grounded in religion can never be the seed for truly progressive and emancipatory politics. It only unravels into one or another form of authoritarianism.

Suspending for the sake of argument the evaluation of such proposition, I would like to keep pursuing this line of thought and recall the Salafi understanding of 'tradition' that I proposed in this study. We may notice here how modern Salafism rejects one of modernity discourse main drives: the future as the place for the realization of mankind. For such discourse, progress, prosperity, development can and ought to be reached by casting away the burden of the past, exemplified by a cumbersome tradition, to craft a new polity whose template may or may not be defined, but which nonetheless has never existed before. The teleological drive of the main narratives of modernity is future bent. Salafism epitomizes the contradictions embedded in modernity, as it is a product of modernity at the same time as it is a reaction to it. Salafism's future is already defined: it is a rediscovered and reclaimed past. The blueprint for the future is

⁸ Roy, Olivier. *L'échec de l'Islam politique*. Esprit, 1992.

⁹ Gramsci et al., 1971, pp. 325-6.

not strictly an eschatology, in that Salafis claim it did exist historically. All the same, Salafism ends up stultifying modernity: their a-historical reliance and nostalgia for a (discursive) tradition leads them to what Shaygan calls the “worship of beginnings,”¹⁰ which treats modernity as if it is a conspiracy - thus impeding any reasoned and fruitful engagement with it.

A Future Project with Other ‘*Cattivi Maestri*’

How far can my claims travel? Producing a theory with the broadest application possible - the Holy Grail of ‘generalization’ - was not my intent. At the same time, I did not wish to provide a purely ideographic account. Again, here I refer to the fine line that Kurzman talks about, and I return to the point I made before: social appropriation juxtaposed to social appropriation *of tradition*. With this, I sought to square the circle between an undue generalization because culturally, historically and contingency blind; and a hypersensitive account of the specific experiences of the cases at hand, unwarrantedly locating them in a place beyond the pale of comparison with other episodes of mobilization. There are similarities, in that we are dealing with episodes of social and political mobilization in the language of mechanism and process; yet, this is not tantamount to negate the idiosyncrasies of any given episode, and the peculiar ways in which its politics manifest.

However, in order to better assess the viability of my theory - or in which ways it may need to be modified - I plan to explore other important episodes of mobilization and contention. In this sense, the role of scholars and thinkers’ production would still feature at the center of my analysis and would orient my research.

In fact, one such episode of contention spurred my initial curiosity about the role of intellectuals in mobilization, an episode much closer to my own experience and culture: on April

¹⁰ Shaygan, Darius. *Les Illusions de l’Identité*. Editions du Felin, 1992.

7, 1979, Toni Negri, then professor of political science at the University of Padova, was to appear as a defendant, along many others, in a public trial regarding left-wing armed radicalism. Between the 1970s and the early 1980s, Italy knew a period of deep political volatility, with the formation of extreme groups both on the right and on the left. For the latter, organizations such as *Autonomia Proletaria* (Proletarian Autonomy), *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), *Lotta Continua* (Relentless Struggle) and, of course, the notorious *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) dotted the landscape, making those days known in Italian history as '*Gli Anni di Piombo*' (The Years of Lead). Public attorney Pietro Calogero held Negri, a radical leftist thinker to this day, responsible for the contentious actions (armed struggle, terrorism, together with episodes of mass civil disobedience and resistance to the authorities) those various organizations carried out making explicit reference to his ideas. Bent on getting rid of the liberal-democratic order, Negri had become the intellectual referent of an entire area of so-called 'antagonism.' At the same time, he never personally engaged in any act of violence, nor, for that matter, absolved or condoned such acts when perpetrated by others.

The jury sentenced him to twelve years in prison. After many legal and political vicissitudes (including taking refuge in France for some fifteen years), he was finally released in 2003. In the meantime, he had become an internationally renowned political thinker in the context of the anti-globalization movement. Together with Michael Hardt, he has authored three volumes, *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth* which are regarded as a no-global manifesto.

His figure is still controversial: hailed as a '*cattivo maestro*' (bad teacher) by vast sectors of Italian intelligentsia and public opinion, Negri's relation with left wing extremism, contention and armed struggle is matter of endless debates. I hope the reader will not have missed the parallels with the object of my analysis throughout these pages: Negri, more like Al-Maqdisi in

his penchant for a 'war of movement' than Al-Albani's more cautious attitude, would represent an interesting and compelling case to compare and juxtapose movements so different, and yet to similar, and improve our understanding of ideas and contention, intellectuals and mobilization.

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<http://www.sunnah.org/fiqh/ijma.htm#ROLE OF IJMA>

<http://salafway.maktoobblog.com>

www.salafipublications.com

Sheikh Nasir al-Din al-Albani website: <http://www.alalbany.net>

The Imam al-Albani Center website: <http://www.albani-center.com>

Sheikh Mohammad Mousa Nasr website: <http://www.m-alnaser.com>

Sheikh Mashhoor Hassan Salman website, <http://www.mashhoor.net>

Salafi forum, <http://www.kulalsalafiyeen.com/vb/>

Sheikh Salim al-Hilali website, <http://www.islam-future.com>

Ali al-Halabi website, <http://alhalaby.com/play.php?catsmktba=1342>
<http://alhalaby.com/>

Newspapers and dailies

Al-Ghad

Ad-Dostour

The Jordan Times

Interviews

Note to the interviews: many of my interviewees preferred, upon offer, not to have their name recorded. Thus, in the following list, names appearing in italics are fake ones I used during the interviews in agreement with the interviewee.

Abu Adanan, Mosque al-Hujjaj, Rusayfah, 5/22/2015

Abu Ahmad, Amman, Sahab, 6/13/2015

Abu Salih al-Faransiy, Mosque al-Hujjaj, Rusayfah, 5/29/2015

Abu Sharif, Mosque al-Hujjaj, Rusayfah, 5/22/2015

Ali al-Sandik, Majlis an-Nawab, Amman, 4/23/2015

Ghali, Mosque al-Hujjaj, Rusayfah, 5/22/2015

Hassan Abu Hanieh, Amman, 5/13/2015 and 11/25/2015

Ibrahim al-‘Ajoulouni, Amman, 11/26/2015

Ibrahim al-Sukkari, Amman, 7/15/2015

Isham Al-Tamimi, Amman, 11/25/2015

Mahmoud Sheikh al-Zaid, Amman, 6/16/2015

Marwan Shahadah, Amman, 4/8/2015 and 6/3/2015

Dr. Mohammad al-Gharaibah, University of Jordan, Amman, 11/23/2015

Dr. Mohammad al-Khair Eiedat, University of Jordan, 5/26/2015

Omar and Muhammad Al-Harasees, Amman, 4/27/2015

Rami Wreikat, Ministry for Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Amman, 11/26/2015

Salim bin Muhammad, Mosque al-Hujjaj, Rusayfah, 5/29/2015

Sheikh Abu Sakhr, Sahab, 6/26/2015

Sheikh Abu Yusuf, Albani Center for Methodological Research, Amman, 6/28/2015

Tareq, Mosque al-Hujjaj, Rusayfah, 5/29/2015

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Education

- 2017 Ph.D. Political Science, Syracuse University
Fields: Comparative Politics, International Relations
- 2007 M.A. Near and Middle Eastern Studies, SOAS, University of London, UK
Thesis: “Saddam Hussein Ba’athi Rule: A Case of Totalitarianism? State and Society in Iraq, 1979-1990”
- 2005 M.A. African and Asian Studies, University of Pavia, Italy
Thesis: “Religione e Politica nella Società Iranica: Dai Teologi di Stato allo Stato dei Teologi [Religion and Politics in the Iranian Society: From the State’s Theologians to the State of Theologians].” - *Regione Toscana MA Thesis Award, Florence, Italy*
- 2003 B.A. Social Sciences, University of Pavia, Italy – *magna cum laude*

Research Interests and Specializations

Middle East Politics, Political Islam and Religious Radicalism, International Relations Theory, Contentious Politics, Postcolonial Theory.

Dissertation Project

Dissertation Title: “Contentious Politics in the Arab Middle East: Jordanian Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition”. In which ways do Islamist ideologues affect the trajectory of political and social mobilization through their ideological work? In this project, I analyze how Islamist ideologues impacted Salafi movements in Jordan between 1988 and 2005. The first case deals with ‘Quietist’ Salafis, who engage mostly in preaching, proselytizing and provision of social services. They refrain from direct political activities or overt confrontation with state authorities. The second movement is ‘Jihadi’ Salafism. It espouses a confrontational, radical and violent stance *vis à vis* state power. Jordanian Jihadi-Salafism has been the precursor of groups

such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Islamic State (ISIS). I contend that Salafi Islamist ideologues impact political and social mobilization through three main mechanisms: diffusion, elaboration and systematization. Together, they compound into a process I call the ‘social appropriation of tradition.’ This research clarifies in important ways how Islamist ideologues contribute to processes of social mobilization and radicalization by adapting and articulating a shared religious tradition.

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, Dr. Gavan Duffy, Dr. Hossein Bashiriyeh, Dr. Mark Rupert, Dr. L.H.M. Ling

Publications and Manuscripts

“Questione Libanese, Forze di Pace in Medio Oriente e l’Impegno dell’Italia [The Lebanese Issue: Peace Forces in the Middle East and the Contribution of Italy],” *Il Politico*, University of Pavia, Vol. I, January 2010. With Giuseppe Lissi.

“Interviewing Salafis,” in *Doing Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges*, ed. by F. Cavatorta and J. Clark, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

“Discourse and Policy Change: United States and Tibetan Resistance in the Cold War,” with Sinan Chu, manuscript under review at *Journal of Cold War Studies*.

“Politicizing Salafi Discourse,” manuscript under review at *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*.

Teaching Experience - Instructor

Maxwell School, Syracuse University
Global Community, Academic Year 2012-2013

Department of Political Science, Syracuse University
Middle East Politics, Summer Session I, 2013

Center for International Exchange and Education, Amman Study Center
Politics of Development, Academic Year 2016-2017
International Politics of the Middle East, Academic Year 2016-2017, Summer Session I and II, 2017
Jordan: A Case Study, Academic Year 2014-2015
Seminar on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, Academic Year 2014-2015, Summer Session I and II, 2015

Sijal Institute for Arabic Language and Culture, Amman

Seminar on Postcolonial Theory and International Relations, Summer Session 2017

Teaching Experience – Teaching Assistant

Department of Religion, Syracuse University

Discovering Islam (on line), Academic Year 2015-2016

Department of Political Science, Syracuse University

Middle East Politics, Fall 2009, Fall 2011, Spring 2014

Introduction to International Relations, Spring 2010, 2012, Fall 2013

Politics of Iran, Fall 2010

Political Conflict, Spring 2011

Department of Political Science, University of Pavia

Contemporary and Modern History, Academic Year 2003-2004

Selected Conference Presentations

“Critical Discourse Analysis between Postcolonial Theory and Foreign Policy Making,” Western Political Science Association Conference, Vancouver, April 2017.

“The Logic of Othering: Dynamic Constructions of Tibet and China in US Foreign Policy Discourse”, Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, April 2013; and International Studies Association, New Orleans, February 2015. With Sinan Chu.

“Contentious Politics in the Arab Middle East: Islamism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition”, Association for the Study of Middle East and Africa Conference, Washington DC, November 1, 2014.

Grants and Awards

2016 International Institute of Islamic Thought Research Grant

2015 Roscoe Martin Dissertation Research Grant

2014 Association for the Study of Middle East and Africa Research Grant

2014 Summer Research Grant, Middle Eastern Studies Program, SU

2014 Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs Research Grant, SU

2013 Travel Grant, Eisenhower Library

2013 Maxwell School Summer Fellowship, SU

2012 Maxwell School Summer Fellowship, SU

2011 Maxwell School Summer Fellowship, SU

- 2010 Summer Research Grant – Department of Political Science, SU
2004 BA Best Student Award, University of Pavia
2004 Summer Language Training Scholarship, University of Pavia

Lectures and Invited Talks

Selected Lectures at Syracuse University

- “Hezbollah between Lebanon and Iran”, PSC 340 – Politics of Iran (November 3, 2014)
“Globalization, Culture and Identity”, MAX 132 – Global Community (October 18, 2012)
“Lebanon: A House of Many Mansions”, PSC 344 – Middle East Politics (November 18, 2011)
“Iraq: Politics, Security, Democratization?”, PSC 344 – Middle East Politics (April 7, 2014; November 8, 2011), and PSC 300 – Security in the Middle East (February 2, 2011)
“Politics and Islam”, PSC 344 – Middle East Politics (February 6, 2014; September 27, 2011; November 5, 2009)
“Islam: sects, doctrines and its Middle Eastern geography”, PRL 602 - Introduction to Public Diplomacy and Communications (September 6, 2011, September 5, 2012, February 23, 2016)

Invited Talks

- “Islam and Islamism,” (April 24, 2016) United Church, Fayetteville, NY.
“Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem? The Rise of Salafism in the Middle East,” 2015 Leaders of Democracy Fellows Alumni Conference, Istanbul (December 3, 2015)
“Fahm Badil li-l-Mujtama’ al-Madaniy: at-Taghrir wa al-Muqawamah fi Antonio Gramsci [Alternative Understanding of Civil Society: Change and Resistance in Antonio Gramsci],” 2015 Leaders of Democracy Fellows Alumni Conference, Istanbul (December 5, 2015), and Sijal Institute for Arabic Language and Culture, Amman (November 7, 2016)
“The War in Syria: Regional Scenarios and US involvement” (October 25, 2015), United Church, Fayetteville, NY.
“A Gramscian Read of Modernization: An Alternative Discourse on Development” (March 1, 2015), Center for International Exchange and Education, Amman, Jordan.
“Political Islam: The Challenge of Modernity” (October 6, 2012 and September 30, 2015),
“Islam: Approaching a System of Meanings” (September 19, 2012), The New School for Social Research, New York City, NY.
“History and Politics of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” (April 25, 2011), Central New York Council for the Social Studies, Chittenango, NY.

“Islamismo come Fenomeno Moderno [Islamism as a Modern Phenomenon]” (March 23, 2009), Rotary Club, Lodi, Italy.

Academic and Departmental Service

Discussant

“States and Parties in Contemporary Africa”, Political Science Research Workshop, Maxwell School, Syracuse University (October 18, 2011)

“The Dynamics of Islamist Radicalization and De-Radicalization: A Cross-Regional Analysis”, Political Science Research Workshop, Maxwell School, Syracuse University (February 18, 2011)

Graduate Studies Committee (2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Academic Years)

Graduate Studies Admission Committee (2010-2011 Academic Year)

Reviewer

Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies (February 2016 -)

Journal on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society (November 2016 -)

Professional Development

Future Professoriate Program (FPP), Syracuse University (2011-12 Academic Year). Organized incoming departmental graduate students’ orientation program and professional development seminars, in particular regarding qualifying exams preparation, teaching assistant’s role and duties, addressing international students’ concerns and needs.

Institute for Qualitative and Multimethod Research (IQMR), Syracuse University (Summer 2014). During this two week intensive methods training workshop, I focused on discourse analysis, ethnography, and process tracing.

Non-Academic Positions

Middle East Contributor, Quadrante Futuro, Centro Einaudi, Torino, Italy (January 2016 – present). I provide monthly reports on the political economy of the Middle East in the context of regional and global developments (<http://www.quadrantefuturo.it/>)

Educational Project Coordinator, Scuola Media Francesca Cabrini, Sant’Angelo Lodigiano, Italy (October 2008 – May 2009). I coordinated a teaching project for socially disadvantaged teenagers in junior high school. I covered basic history, geography and English.

Intern, Italian Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya (January-April 2006). I provided daily press review, back office work, and assisting diplomats.

Language Skills and Training

Languages

Native Italian, Advanced Arabic, Advanced French, Basic Spanish.

Arabic Language Training

- Level B Certificate – Institute des Langues Vivantes, Tunis, Tunisia (July 2004)
- Intermediate Arabic Certificate - Higher Language Institute, Damascus University, Syria, (October 2007 - March 2008)
- Upper level I – Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon (June - August 2010)
- Advanced level – American Centre, Fes, Morocco (June - July 2011)
- Media Arabic – MALIC Center, Amman (September-December 2014)

References

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